

## **The Heavenly Minded Christian in His Earthly Calling**

**Fifth Sunday after Trinity, 1865**

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**(Translated by E. Myers)**

May God grant you grace and peace by the knowledge of God and Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.  
In our Savior, dearly beloved brothers and sisters!

According to God's Word the principal difference between a true Christian and a non-Christian or a false Christian is not so much a difference in outward works, but rather the heavenly mind which all true Christians have. We see this from the exhortations to Christians and the descriptions and confessions of true Christians found in God's Word.

Thus Christ Himself exhorts his Christians: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." (Matthew 6:33) Once when a man wanted to follow Christ but first wished to bury his father, Christ told him, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their dead" (Matthew 8:22). Paul likewise exhorts Christians, "Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col. 3:2), and in another place, "Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind." (Romans 12:2). Likewise Peter tells Christians, "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul." (I Peter 2:11). And finally St. John, too, exhorts them: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." (I John 2:15).

To this agree, as we said, the descriptions and confessions of true Christians contained in God's Word. For example, here is how Christ describes His Christians: "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." (John 17:16).

The same principle is expressed by Paul as follows: "Our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ." (Philippians 3:20). "The world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." (Gal. 6:14). "Here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come." (Hebrews 13:14).

Thus we see that true Christians are they who are still in the world in body, but whose spirit, heart, soul and mind are in heaven. They have already died to this world. They look upon this life on earth merely as a journey through a strange country to heaven, their true homeland and country. Their thoughts, wishes and desires are directed toward blessed eternity. Everywhere they see God's finger and His secret providence, work and rule. They judge everything they experience and all that happens in church and civil affairs according to its relation to their own salvation and the salvation of the whole world. They require no special struggle within themselves to withdraw and separate from the world and its vanity. On the contrary, they have lost their taste for these things. Therefore, whenever they are drawn into the world against their will, they are ill at ease, and whenever they are again distracted and amused by this world they soon are painfully homesick. They feel, as David says, like a child weaned from his mother. (Psalm 131:2). As Asaph says, their joy is to cling to God and to trust in the Lord God, to declare all His works. Their happiest fellowship is their fellowship with God in prayer, and with their believing brethren in holy conversation and lovely spiritual songs. (Ephesians 5:19). Hearing,

reading and studying God's Word is to them not a burden but a joy, as eating and drinking is to the hungry and thirsty. They do not avoid the thought of death but rather love to meditate on it. "As a servant earnestly desireth the shadow, and as an hireling looketh for the reward of his work" (Job 7:2), so their soul yearns for the end of this earthly life.

Well now, my friends, are not true Christians, then, quite useless in this life and in this world? Since their mind is directed toward heavenly things only, will they not necessarily be negligent and unfaithful in their earthly calling?

Many would like to think so, and many enemies of Christianity such as Emperor Julian the Apostate actually raised this objection against Christianity. Surely, they said, this could not be the true religion, since it renders people incapable of promoting the welfare of the world in temporal and secular matters. But that is not true. For the difference between an earthly minded, worldly man and a heavenly-minded Christian does not consist in outward works, but only in the inner attitude, as told in the beautiful song:

*The Christian's inward life is shining  
Although on the outside burnt by the sun,  
The gifts which to them heaven's Lord is assigning,  
known to none others, but themselves alone.  
In all else they're Adam's children by nature  
And bear like all others the image of earth;  
Their flesh and their sins are their plague and torture,  
For their bodies' needs they are toiling from birth,  
Yet in waking and sleeping, laughing and weeping,  
To their Lord alone they surrender for keeping,  
Forsaking, despising this world and its mirth.*

Therefore heavenly minded Christians not only are not unfaithful in their earthly calling, but rather they alone show true faithfulness. This we see from Peter's example in today's text. Therefore let us study his example and choose it as our subject for meditation today.

Scripture text: Luke 5:1-11. *And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret, And saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets. And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship. Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught. And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net. And when they had this done, they enclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake. And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships so that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord. For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken. And so was also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men. And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him.*

In this Gospel text, glorious above others, we are told of a miracle which, had Christ performed none other but this one only, would suffice to refute unbelief and prove irrefutably that Christ could not possibly have been a mere man, but truly must have been the almighty Son of God He claimed to be. For no one can do such a miracle unless God be with him and therefore all he says is divine, irrefutable truth. However, today we want to direct our attention mainly to Peter with whom Christ was dealing. On the basis of Peter's example let me now present to you

## **THE HEAVENLY MINDED CHRISTIAN IN HIS EARTHLY CALLING.**

I will show you

1. How he Fulfills his Earthly Calling, and
2. How one Becomes Such a Christian.

Lord Jesus, You have said, "He that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much." (Luke 16:10). Thus You testify to us that You want to know from our conduct in our earthly calling whether we receive the heavenly calling. Oh help us that we would not turn away as You are now facing us with the mirror of Your word. If Your word condemns us, oh preserve us lest we acquit ourselves! For this is Your very will, that we should judge ourselves so You will not have to condemn us. It is Your will that we should deplore our misery here so we might rejoice in eternity. We should humble ourselves here so we might be exalted there. We should weep here in order to laugh there. Therefore make now Your word a savor of life to each of us. Make it medicine for the sick, strength for the weak, and a seal for the strong. Hear us, oh Jesus, for the sake of Your holy, saving name. Amen.

### **[1. How the Heavenly Minded Christian Fulfills his Earthly Calling]**

My friends, the first fact we notice in our text about Peter is his exceeding diligence in his earthly calling. At that time he had already been converted to Christ for almost a year, but since Christ had not yet called him into the office of preaching, he not only had remained in his calling as a fisherman to which his father Jonah, also a fisherman, had dedicated him as a child. He rather proved himself all the more zealous in his earthly calling after his conversion. According to our text, Christ therefore not only found him busily washing his nets, but he could also say to Christ of himself and his companions: "Master, we have toiled all the night." And now, when Christ bids him on the following day to sail out and let down his nets in the deep, he does not beg off because he had already worked through the night and now needs rest. Instead, he again obeys the call for renewed labor without delay.

Learn from this that a converted Christian reveals his heavenly mind, not by despising and neglecting his earthly calling, nor by replacing work by prayer and the study of God's Word, nor by going from house to house trying to convert others. Much less will he be idle and live on the benevolence of others, or even by usury or all kinds of speculations earn his money and goods in order to live on the labors of others without laboring himself. No, his heavenly mind is revealed by the very fact that he is all the more diligent in his earthly calling. At times he may allow himself relaxation, but not because of laziness or love of pleasures. He only relaxes in order to be more efficient and alert in new labors. Time has now become most precious to him. Every hour which he spends idly without cause he now regards as a great loss, and begs God to forgive him this sin.

When a heavenly minded Christian is employed by others, his employer can rely on him. Not only is there no better churchgoer than a heavenly minded Christian, but there is also no better servant or maid, in short, no more diligent, conscientious and faithful worker than such a

Christian. The more heavenly minded he is, the less he is ashamed of the humblest earthly task, right down to the washing of filthy fishing nets.

Moreover, my friends, we are not only told in our text that converted Peter worked diligently, but also the reason for his diligence. When Christ commanded him to set sail for high seas in broad daylight and then let down his net, this was completely contrary to his reason and experience. For as an experienced fisherman he knew that in order to fish successfully in the deep sea one must fish during the night and near the shores. But what did he do? He said: "Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing; nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net." Here we may see the heart and mind with which Peter generally was accustomed to work. For he worked so diligently because he knew it to be God's word and will, or solely in obedience to and trust in God.

Here is the other characteristic displayed by heavenly minded Christians in their earthly calling. It consists in this, that the heavenly minded Christian works because God has so ordered it, and because in his work he hopes for the help, blessing and increase given by God. As to diligence, non-Christians often resemble Christians or even surpass them. But as to the foundation and cause of their work, there is as much difference between earthly minded people and heavenly minded Christians as between heaven and earth.

When an earthly minded man works diligently, it is either from a natural pleasure in work, or out of necessity, or to become rich and honored by his work, or relying upon his diligence and cleverness. A heavenly minded Christian, however, works because God said: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread" (Gen 3:19) and "Thou shalt eat the labor of thine hands." (Psalm 128:2). A heavenly minded Christian also finds natural pleasure in work, and thereby earns his daily bread. But this is not the real reason for his work. Much less does he work in order to become rich or honored. Rather he works because God has ordained that everyone should eat his own bread and do something which is useful to his neighbor.

Earthly minded people always choose that calling where they find the least trouble and the highest pay. In our time, and especially in this country, many prefer to be merchants because they think that thus they can most easily acquire great wealth, "get rich quick," and become "big shots." But a heavenly minded Christian chooses that calling where he believes himself to be most useful to the world according to his gifts and inclinations. If he is a merchant, then in this calling as in any other he considers himself but a servant of his neighbor, and thus makes his earthly calling a holy worship of God. Therefore he is most interested in trading in merchandise truly needed by his neighbor, rather than in that which brings him the highest profit. But while he wishes to serve only God and his neighbor in his work, he expects it to be prosperous and blessed only by God. He carries on his calling in faith. If he earns much by his work he does not take credit for it himself but ascribes it only to God's goodness. He therefore does not become proud. But if like Peter he must toil all the night in vain, he does not despair or change his calling. Rather he deems this a divine test of his faith, love, hope and patience, and continues in the faith.

We must admire yet one more quality in Peter described in our text. He had toiled all night, caught nothing, only wearied himself and ruined his nets, and thus suffered only harm. Then Jesus comes, requests the use of his ship for a pulpit, and for this purpose to row it a little distance from the shore. Now Peter does not think: I have already lost so much time and cannot possibly let myself be disturbed in my work now. I must make up for the labor lost. No! Immediately he lays aside his nets, obeys Christ's request and devoutly listens to His sermon. And when he has taken a miraculous catch of fish at Christ's word, and Christ now tells him,

"From henceforth thou shalt catch men," thus calling him to preach the gospel, Peter does not hesitate a moment. Immediately he leaves all behind. From now on he follows Christ and remains His servant to his bloody martyr's death.

Behold here the third sign of a heavenly minded Christian in his earthly calling! It is this, that no matter how faithful a Christian is in his earthly calling, he will not neglect his heavenly calling but always prefer the latter to the former. Earthly minded people place their heavenly calling below their earthly calling. When admonished to be zealous in prayer, in public and home services, and in matters pertaining to God's kingdom, they often use their earthly calling to excuse themselves, quoting the proverb: "Serving one's master is above church service." But heavenly minded Christians reverse this, obeying the rule that serving God is above serving one's master. Therefore such Christians will not even accept any earthly calling, without compelling need, in which their service to God is hindered, and which endangers their souls. Should they unintentionally become involved in it, they will try to rid themselves of it even at material loss to themselves. They will not practice anything, even if they could thereby acquire all the treasures of the world, for which they cannot invoke God's blessing every morning, saying "Lord, at thy word I will let down my net." They further think that much as my calling is necessary, work and care for my soul is infinitely more important. They think that there must be time for hearing and meditating upon the word of God and for prayer. They think that if God would let me become sick I would have to let my work and my earnings go. Therefore, why should I not do this joyfully and willingly for the sake of God and my soul? If they must suffer harm in earthly things in order to hear and ponder God's word, they do not consider this any loss, but rather a gain. They reason that first of all they are Christians and members of Christ's Church. Only then they are head of a home and a citizen of this world. First the soul, then the body. First life beyond and eternity, then life on earth and time. First salvation in the world to come, then my progress in this world. Thus when a heavenly minded Christian can be sure that God is calling him into the teaching or preaching ministry, like Peter he will forsake the most profitable earthly calling, the most brilliant position, without first consulting with flesh and blood. Joyfully he will become a poor, despised worker in Christ's vineyard.

## **[2. How one Becomes a Heavenly Minded Christian]**

But, my friends, where can one find such heavenly minded Christians? Alas! Their number is all too small. Countless multitudes call themselves Christians. Yet they are not diligent and faithful in their earthly calling at all, or not for the right reason, or neglect their heavenly calling for the sake of their earthly calling. And yet only heavenly minded Christians are true Christians, and only they are on the way to heaven! Therefore let me now show you how we can become such heavenly minded Christians.

We are not told of Peter's conversation in our text. Nevertheless we are told clearly enough how he became the heavenly minded Christian he was. For we hear that, when he had made a miraculous rich catch of fish, contrary to all his expectation and the course of nature, by the almighty power of Christ, he trembled with terror, "fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

These words give us the key to the mystery of the heavenly mind which Peter obviously had. His heavenly mind was obviously founded on Peter's having come to a living, deep knowledge of his natural sinfulness and worthlessness, and of the great grace and mercy of Christ. Ever since Peter had come to this knowledge, he no longer cared for this world but only for his soul. Since then all earthly affairs were mere trifles to him. Heavenly things mattered most. Since then he was as afraid of every sin as of hell itself. In his heart dwelt the passionate yearning to live completely

to his God who had forgiven him so much. Since then he had no greater wish than never again to lose God's grace. In short, since then he was a heavenly minded Christian.

And, friends, this and none other is the way in which alone every other man can become a heavenly minded Christian, too.

For if by God's grace a man notices that he is still earthly minded and therefore could never please God or be saved in this condition, and if he therefore desires to become a heavenly minded Christian, it does not profit him at all to resolve ever so firmly to lay aside all earthly inclinations and to become heavenly minded. Good intentions are as useless in this endeavor as they are to a dead man wishing to make himself alive, or to a blind man in making himself see, or to a lame man in making himself walk. Nor is it enough for a person to ask God for a heavenly mind. For this fruit to grow on the tree of a human heart requires the radical change and improvement of the entire tree. It requires a different sap, a different nature, a different essence. But this miraculous change does not take place in a person until he learns to fall at Jesus' feet with Peter, and to cry out from the depth of his heart: "I am a sinful man."

Dear hearer, if you want to become a heavenly minded Christian as Peter, you must not only read and hear God's word diligently, but also above all seek to know from it how great a sinner you are. You must learn how gracious and merciful Christ is toward you. But to learn this it is not enough for you to read God's word superficially. Search it with the passionate desire for enlightened eyes of understanding, and with the constant prayer: Oh Lord Jesus, do open my eyes that I might know myself and Thee aright. And you must be in dead earnest. In your heart you must say, as did Jacob, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." (Gen 32:26).

If a person truly means this, God will answer his prayer, will give him a heart which is keenly aware of, saddened, and broken by its sinfulness, and the blessed certainty that Jesus, the Savior of sinners, is also his Savior. And oh, how blessed is the man who really and truly experiences this. For once this has come to pass, this man is also rid of the bondage of his natural, earthly mind, and a truly heavenly mind enters his soul.

Such a man no longer covets earthly things, for his delight in vanities has passed away. His soul thirsts for heavenly things, for in the grace of Jesus God has already given him a foretaste of eternal life. But to him who enjoys this foretaste all sweetness of worldly vanity is as bitter as gall and he flees from it, while wretched worldly hearts flit like butterflies from one flower of joy to another until bitter death ends forever their fleeting, brief joys.

Oh, beloved friends, be not deceived! Remember that those who once were Christians can deceive themselves the most easily. For they still know how to behave, speak, act and live like Christians outwardly. Remember, however, that Christ says the kingdom of God does not come with outward observation. Paul writes that it does not consist of mere words but in power, that is, in righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. Therefore, a person can do or omit everything true Christians do and omit. He can be diligent in God's word and prayer and live in great retirement from the world, and yet not be a true Christian. For as said before, outward behavior, Christian speech, work, walk, in short, nothing outward makes one a Christian. Only he is a true Christian who has a new heavenly mind with which he not only goes to church but which he also applies in his earthly calling. His treasure, Christ, is in heaven. Therefore his heart is there also.

May God then grant each one of us such a heavenly mind and some day through the grace of Jesus the glory of heaven itself. Amen.