

# HOW FAITH COMES

*“And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on Him for the saying of the woman who testified, He told me all that I ever did. So when the Samaritans were come unto Him, they sought Him that He would tarry with them: and He abode there two days. And many more believed because of His own word; and said unto the woman, Now we believe not because of your saying: for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is, indeed, the Christ, the Savior of the world.”*

*John 4:39-42*

WHEREVER faith exists, it is the gift of God. It is a plant that never sprang up spontaneously from the soil of corrupt human nature. Whether it is little faith or great faith, it is equally of Divine origin, and wherever it is found—whether in the child of pious parents who was brought up with the utmost care, or in one who has lived all the former part of his life in the vilest sin—it is equally and alike the fruit of the Spirit and the effect of God’s Grace. From this fact I gather great encouragement because, if it needs Divine power to implant faith in the heart that looks more favorable, it needs no more to implant and preserve it in the soul that appears most unprepared to receive it. Casting our eyes over the whole map of Palestine, we might have said that Samaria was probably as unlikely a place as any in the entire country in which we might expect to find followers of the Lord Jesus, for, at the very threshold of Christ’s announcing Himself, there would be found this prejudice, that the Samaritans would not believe in a Jew.

They would not even listen to a Jew, for, while the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans, the Samaritans reciprocated the feeling and had no dealings with the Jews. Yet it was among the Samaritans, the members of the mongrel faith into which Judaism had deteriorated, that Christ was to find a large number of His followers! My Brothers, you will be wise to go, first, to those places where there seems to be least likelihood of conversions. You will often find that God judges not as man judges—“Man looks on the outward appearance”—but God, who reads the hearts of men, can see a certain readiness where we reckon that there is the most unreadiness! The Lord knows that the soil where the Seed of the Kingdom is sown may be in the best condition for fruitfulness even when we fancy that it cannot possibly yield us any return for our labor. If faith is the work of God—a supernatural thing—as it certainly is, what have you and I to do with judging according to natural appearances?

You may go and speak, my Brother, feeble as you feel yourself to be, for the Seed owes very little, indeed, to the hand that sows it. And you may go, my Brother or my Sister, and scatter this precious Seed upon what you may regard as waste soil, but the Seed owes very little, after all, to the soil! God can make it spring up like a root out of a dry ground and, as of old He brought water out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock, so can He bring a harvest to His Glory where everything seems utterly barren. If it is God’s work, let us have no doubts, much less any despondencies, concerning it, but let us continue to put ourselves into His hands that He may use us anywhere that He pleases, for we know not where He will most glorify His name through our feeble instrumentality.

I am going to talk about faith—faith as it came to these Samaritans. And we shall notice, first, faith’s annunciation—faith’s Nazareth—for, according to the text, it grows and takes higher ground as it develops. “Now we believe, not because of your saying: for we have heard Him ourselves.” I give these names to my three divisions in order to assist your memories.

1. First, then, I call your attention to FAITH’S ANNUNCIATION. Here we have it, in the 42nd verse—“we believe.”

Genuine faith may, through timidity, be hidden for a little while, or, possibly, the love of carnal ease may lead some to conceal their faith in Christ. But it is of the very nature of faith that it should make its appearance known and felt. As Christ had what our Church of England friends call His Epiphany, when He was manifested to men, so faith, though it may, for a while, be swaddled and laid in a manger, and kept in a stable, must have its coming out—it must have its manifestation and men must see it! Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea managed, for three years or so, to conceal their faith to a great degree. Every now and then the light would burn a hole through the bushel, for they could not quite hide the fire that was within them, but when Jesus died, then the thoughts of many hearts were revealed and both these men stood out in the clear light of day as His avowed disciples. They could not help it! The occasion had come when their faith must be manifested and they must, by their actions, say, “Now we believe.” Our Lord has always put, side by side with the faith that saves, the duty of confession of that faith. His own words are, “He that believes and is baptized shall be saved.” And Paul, guided by the Holy Spirit, wrote, “If you shall confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and shall believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved. For with the heart man believes unto righteousness and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” Christ loves not a tongue-tied faith—He would not have Faith dumb, but would have her speak to the glorifying of her Lord on whom she depends! So these Samaritans, when they had come to believe in Jesus, must confess their faith and they did so by saying, “Now we believe.”

Possibly, dear Friends, they felt some little difficulty—I suppose that it was but little in their case—in saying, “Now we believe,” because they had previously undergone a period of doubt. Evidently these people did not receive the woman’s testimony, although others had done so. They listened to it and were sufficiently moved by it to go out and see the Teacher of whom she spoke, but they were not brought to faith by it. Perhaps they even battled with her and raised questions—I will not say quibbles—but, at last, to her great joy, they said to her, “‘Now we believe.’ We have got out of all the muddle and confusion in which we were. We have left the darkness, the doubt and the difficulty. And ‘now we believe.’”

Are there any of you, dear Friends, who have been amusing yourselves for years with the notion that you were infidels? Have you tried to make up, in your own minds, a sort of belief that you were “agnostics”? I think that is the favorite word for those who are proud of being known as nothings. Have you tried to bolster up in your mind the idea that you were something very amazing in the form of a skeptical person—all the while, I doubt not, believing a great deal more than you liked to admit—believing and trembling at the same time? But have you played that foolish game out and have you now truly trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ as your own Savior? If so, then do not be ashamed to say, “Now I believe.” You may have to eat your own words—well, then, eat them! You may have to be very humble when you meet your old friends—well, then, be humble—there will be no harm to you in that! And, perhaps, they will bring against you some of your own arguments. Well, it will serve you right if they do and, besides, it will give you the pleasure of breaking those arguments in pieces and, perhaps, of winning your friends for Christ, for you have seen those fallacies broken in your own case and you may be the means, in the hand of God, of breaking the bow and cutting the spear in sunder in the case of those who have been your fellow doubters!

Do not be ashamed of confessing your past folly. I think a man who says, “I was wrong,” really says, in effect, “I am a little wiser, today, than I was yesterday.” But he who never admits that he has made a mistake and who claims that he has always been in the right, has evidently never made much growth in knowledge of himself. So, do not be ashamed to say, “Now I believe,” though that confession may have been preceded by many a doubt.

And do not hesitate to say it to the person who has, up to now, been baffled by you. I expect the tears were in that poor woman’s eyes when she said to the men, “You remember what sort of person I used to be, and you see the change that has been worked in me. You know that I always spoke straight out what I believed, and this blessed Man, who read my very soul, is the Christ! I know He is. Then, why do you not believe what I say about Him?” I should not wonder if she pleaded very hard with them, and prayed, and entreated them to believe her testimony. And now, at last, when they did believe, it was due to her that they should cheer her heart by saying, “Now

we believe." And, even though they had to add, "not because of your saying," that qualification would not grieve her. "Oh," she would say, "so long as you believe, I do not mind how you came into that happy condition! I would have been glad if God had used my saying to bring you to faith, but, inasmuch as He blessed the saying of the great Preacher, the Lord and Master, Himself, I am the more glad on that account, for He will have all the glory of it and, so long as you do but believe, you give gladness to my heart."

There are some of you, dear Friends, to whom I have preached in vain for a long while and God knows that when I have been laid aside, I have often felt a holy joy in my heart at the thought that the man who has been preaching for me will be blessed by God to some who have never been converted under my ministry. Sometimes, when I have longed to be fishing for souls, but could not even stand and, therefore, had to lie at home in pain, it has been my hope that some other fisherman would throw the fly better than I might have done, and that you would take the bait from him, though you have often refused it from me. And when you come forward to join the Church, and say to me, as many have done, "Sir, we believe, but it was through Fullerton and Smith's mission," or, "it was through the teaching in the Sunday school," or, "it was through the agency of someone who spoke to us in the aisle," I am sure that I have been just as glad and happy as if you had told me that it was by my own personal testimony that you had found the Lord. Glad, indeed, am I to be the instrument of saving souls, but still, if you are saved, the instrumentality by which that blessed result is reached is, after all, a very small matter! But, when you do really believe in our Lord Jesus Christ, take care that you tell us, for we have wept over you and prayed for you. And when you are converted, it seems but a fair and honest recompense that you should say to the individual whom God has honored to be your spiritual parent, "Now we believe." By doing so, you will strengthen and encourage him to go on with his work more earnestly than before! Perhaps you will even stave off a heartbreak and make the Christian sower fill his hands the fuller and scatter the seed more deftly because he knows that he has not labored in vain, nor spent his strength for nothing!

In this annunciation of faith, I want you to observe, also, that it was very speedy. The Lord Jesus Christ was only in that place for two days, so that those who said, "Now we believe," must have testified very speedily after they believed. I do not think that it is the duty of people to wait several months before they come forward and confess Christ—it may sometimes be the wisdom of the officers and members of the Church to say to some persons, "We would like to see a little of your life, that we may judge by your fruit, before we receive you into fellowship." It may even be their duty to say that, and to keep them waiting outside the Church for a while to test their genuineness, but it is not the duty of the candidate, himself. His business is, as speedily as may be convenient after he has believed in Jesus, to confess his faith and to seek to be baptized and added to the Church. You do not find Paul waiting several months, after he was converted, before he was baptized. You see, in Scripture, no trace of what our old people in the country used to practice, namely, "summering and wintering" converts, to see what they were like before they permitted them to make a confession of their faith in Jesus. No, no—if you have believed in Him, come along with you!

The next step is to say so, and to say it as quickly as you can, "Now we believe." If tonight you are brought to faith in Jesus Christ, I would say to you, find some Christian Brother and tell him at once that you have believed in Jesus. When this precious child of the Spirit of God, namely, Faith, is born, let it be known to the King's house that it has come! In Heaven they make such blessed tidings known for, "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repents." Though it is but the initial stage of faith, hold not the glad news back from the Church of God, but let it be speedily proclaimed, "Now we believe." What a joyous moment it is when any can say, "Now we believe!" It is the end of suspense—it is the end of the kingdom of darkness, it is the end of fear, it is the end of despair—it is the dawn of hope, it is the dawn of Heaven! Oh, what a world of meaning there is in those three words! What glory is opened up to the poor tearful eye by faith! What sights are visible when we can say, "Now we believe!"

O my dear Hearers, can you all say, "Now we believe"? If you can do so, truthfully, you can say a greater thing than Cicero or Demosthenes, with all their eloquence, ever uttered! Have you been seekers for months and years? Have you been tempest-tossed and driven up and down upon the

sea of doubt? May you now cast your anchor overboard into the depths of Jehovah's love and when you find that it holds, may you cry out, with ecstasy, "Now we believe!" There, then, is the annunciation of faith.

II. Now, very briefly, I want you to look, in the second place, on FAITH'S NATIVITY. How does faith come into men's hearts?

According to the plain teaching of Scripture, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." But faith is not always created in the human heart by the same form of instrumentality. It is always the fruit of the Spirit of God but it comes in different ways. Some of these Samaritans believed because of the saying of the woman and, I suppose that in the Christian Church, a very large number derive their faith through the power of God's Spirit, from the personal witness of others who have been converted. Now look, dear Friends, all of you, at this woman, and be encouraged to use your personal testimony for Christ! She was the spiritual mother of many a Samaritan believer, yet she was a woman of bad character. An ill savor was about her name—everybody in Sychar must have looked upon her as a dangerous person of fickle love and of foul ways—and yet, after she had found Christ, she did not hesitate to tell her neighbors about Him—and God did not refuse to bless her testimony! I believe that there are thousands of persons whom no man would ordain, but who are ordained of God, for all that—and there are many whom we would say that the Church could not employ, whom the great Head of the Church employs, and employs grandly, too! What if you have been converted from great sin? Be careful and watchful that you sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto you, but let not shame with regard to the past make you ashamed to confess the Christ of the present, and to acknowledge that He has worked a great work upon you! Here was a poor fallen woman and yet, after her conversion, she became a missionary of Christ to the city of Sychar! She was, altogether, quite an unofficial person. She does not appear to have been called a sister of mercy, or to have put on any peculiar garb, but she ran straightway to the people with whom she had lived and, perhaps, to the very men with whom she had sinned! She went to tell the story that Christ had come to her and had given to her that Living Water, of which, if a man shall drink, he shall never thirst again! Well, Believer, if no man sends you, go all the same, for God sends you! Perhaps no man has laid his hands upon you, but of what use is the laying on of hands? Full often I fear it is only empty hands—so, if no man has laid his hands on you, go without the laying on of hands, in the name of Him who has laid His pierced hands upon you and said to you, "Fear not, for I am with you: be not dismayed, for I am your God: I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, yes, I will uphold you with the right hand of My righteousness."

If you ask, "What shall my message be?" let your message be your own personal testimony—what you have, yourself, seen, heard, tasted, handled and felt of the good Word of God. I do not suppose that this woman arranged her discourse under three heads, or that she had an introduction and a conclusion and all that, but she just went to the men of the city and said, "Come see a Man who told me all things that I ever did—is not this the Christ?" That was her little sermon and as often as she repeated it over and over again, she spoke out and bore her personal testimony—and so she brought the men of Sychar to Christ. "Go home," said Christ to one whom He had healed, "go home to your friends and tell them how great things the Lord has done for you, and has had compassion on you." It is amazing how attractive a personal narrative is! If you begin to explain to some people the doctrines of the Gospel, your audience will diminish one by one. But tell them your own experience of the power of Christ and they will listen as listened the wedding guest when "the ancient mariner" laid his hand upon him, detained him and told him that strange legend of the sea! You will have attentive hearers when you speak about your own dealings with Christ, the wonders that Christ has worked in you and for you, and of which you can testify because they are your own experience! That is, in many a case, the nativity of faith. The mother tells her child, the husband tells his wife, the brother tells his sister and, more often, still, the sister tells her brother. One man communicates it to his co-workers—a gentleman speaks of it in the drawing room to those of his own class—and so faith is born in other hearts as the result of the personal testimony of Believers!

But, dear Friends, there are some persons who do not seem as if they would ever be converted by that means. Personal testimony evidently fails with them as it did with some of these Samaritans.

What, then, remains? Why, it will suffice if personal testimony leads the way and excites attention to the subject! Then, if the man is wise, he asks for time and thought—and our Lord Jesus is always ready to attend to those who are anxious about spiritual matters, but are not quick to believe. Two days did He remain in Sychar and those unbelievers who were candid sat at His feet and heard Him through the two days. Now, what did Jesus preach during those two days? Turn to your New Testaments and find the sermon. Even though you look very carefully, you will not discover it, for it is not there! And it is a very curious thing that when the woman preached, we have notes of her sermon, but when Christ preached, we are not told what He said. Very remarkable is it that, frequently, we have those discourses of Christ which did not convert anybody and we have not those discourses which did convert people! Why is that? I suppose that the Holy Spirit gives us the discourses which were rejected in order to let us see that there was no fault in the sermon, but that the fault was in the people. But as for those that were received, He simply tells us the result and does not state the particular form of the discourse. I would infinitely rather preach sermons that win souls and are then forgotten, than go on preaching and having my discourses printed from week to week, and hear of no results! Happily, I have not to choose either alternative, but these people who were not persuaded to believe by the witness of the woman, were converted through hearing Christ, Himself.

“Well,” says one, “but we cannot personally come to Christ right now.” No, I know that you cannot, but you can do what is very much like it. I recommend every man who finds faith to be a difficult thing, to carefully read through the four Gospels, asking the Holy Spirit to enable him to believe what is recorded and revealed there. I usually find that the greatest doubters are the people who do not read the Bible. Holy Scripture has within itself a mighty convincing power—and when men lie soaking in it, it soon penetrates into their very souls! A man says, “I cannot believe,” and yet he does not read or hear about the very thing that is to be believed! He keeps out of the way of it and yet says, “I cannot believe it.” If there is something in the newspaper today, about which you felt compelled to say, “Other people seem to believe it, but, somehow, I am unable to do so—I would be very glad to believe it, but I cannot”—what would you do? You would read the statement again! You would refer to any other account that would be likely to confirm it. You would candidly examine the whole affair to see whether it was true or not. Yet how few—how very, very few have thus come to Holy Scripture, itself, and virtually listened to Jesus, Himself, and then have gone away and still said, “We do not believe.” Unless they are really given up to hardness of heart, the result, in every case, seems to be that when they search the Scriptures, and seek to know what Christ did and said, they are soon subdued by His sweet power and are found sitting at His feet, believing in His name! If anybody has not done this and yet remains an unbeliever, I charge his unbelief upon himself as his own fault and sin. If I will not examine the evidence, I am to blame if I do not believe the Truth of God!

Do you ask, “What evidence shall I examine?” I say again, examine the documents themselves! Let Christ speak for Himself. “Had I not better read a, ‘Life of Christ?’” Listen, there is no, “Life of Christ,” extant but the one written by the four Evangelists. All the attempts that have been made at lives of Christ, whatever value they may have, are not biographies of Christ! They are somebody’s idea of what He may have been. We need no other, “Life of Christ,” than the fourfold one given to us in the Gospels! Those Inspired Evangelists have told us all we ought to wish to know. And if you read those Books—not men’s books which have been written upon those Books—I believe that through the blessing of God the Holy Spirit, you will yet be able to say, with these Samaritans, “Now we believe.” God grant that it may be so! It is in this way that faith is often born. Holy Scripture is the Bethlehem of faith! There is this blessed Child brought forth and happy are they who take it, and nurse it, that it may grow.

III. This is our last point, FAITH’S UPBRINGING, or, as I called it, “faith’s Nazareth.”

It is possible that there were some of the Samaritans who believed and who, when they said to the woman, “Now we believe, not because of your saying, for we have heard Him ourselves,” meant that they did, at first, believe because of the woman’s saying, but, after a while, they outgrew that first stage of faith and they came to believe in Jesus still more strongly because they had heard Him themselves.

This was a higher form of faith. The beginnings of faith are as a spider's web. It would be difficult to say how little a thing faith may be at first. I doubt not that many believe the Bible because they were always taught by their parents that it is the Word of God—although they have never thoroughly examined that question for themselves. Some have believed the Truth of God, at first, because their minister preached it. Well, I would not discourage even that form of faith, for it may be like a very tiny thread which may be fastened to a string—and the string may be tied to a rope and the rope be attached to a cable—and, at last, the shipwrecked mariner may thus be saved from drowning! Anything that links men to Christ may, nevertheless, be overruled of God to their salvation. When that woman said, concerning our Lord, "If I may but touch His clothes, I shall be made whole," I fear that there was some superstition in the notion, but, nevertheless, Christ overlooked that and, seeing the real faith that lay hidden underneath, took care that it should live. Do not discourage anything that tends towards faith in Christ, but it is a grand thing when men grow, by God's Grace, till they can say, "Now I do not believe simply because of what my dear mother taught me. I do not believe merely because of what my minister preached. I do not believe because of any human being at all, but I believe because I have heard Christ for myself, I have had personal dealings with Him and, now, 'I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.'"

The faith that sprang from Christ's own testimony would also be much more vivid faith. The other day there was a meeting held to protest against the barbarities indicted on our Jewish brethren. All the speakers spoke very strongly, but if any one of you had seen what has been done and had come fresh from the deeds of blood, I guarantee that you would have spoken very intensely, indeed. Your indignation would have flamed fiercely if you had seen the homes of the people burned down and men murdered and women ravished, for the sight of the cruelties and abominations would have affected you far more than merely hearing about them! So, when Faith gets to deal with Christ for herself—when she sees sin forgiven—when she feels the weight taken from her troubles—when she realizes the great possessions of joy which Christ has given to her—to her, herself—then she becomes much more vivid and truly living than the faith that rests simply upon the testimony of others!

And, Beloved, as our faith becomes more vivid, so, also, it becomes more independent. We need more independent Christian people in the present day! I hope that we are growing a race of them, here, and I pray that we may grow far more of them. I have seen young people and, for all that matter, old people, too, behave excellently and seem to be admirable Christians while they have lived here in the midst of other warm-hearted Believers. But they have gone down into the country to live and it has been very grievous to see how cold-hearted they have become—how some of them have even, at last, forsaken the assemblies of God's House and, if they have not utterly turned aside, yet they have been very different from their former selves! Beloved, if you have seen Christ and are truly one with Him, you will live with Him when all Christian association is withdrawn! Look at many of the houses in our London streets. If a giant were to pull one of them out of the middle of the row, they would all come tumbling down! They only stand because they lean on one another. But Christians should be detached houses—no, semi-detached—for they must be attached to Christ—but they ought to stand alone, apart from men, because of their living faith in Him!

This kind of faith has grown beyond that which was at first exercised and it has become broader. If you will kindly look at the chapter, you will notice that all the woman could tell the men was this, "Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did—is not this the Christ?" But these men had learned more than that, for they had listened to Jesus Himself! They wondered, at first, that He, being a Jew, should care for them. But, by-and-by, it darted into their mind that He had not come to be the Savior of Jews, alone, so they said, "We have heard Him, ourselves, and know that this is, indeed, the Christ, the Savior of the world." Oh, that was grand, broad faith, when they saw that this Christ was not the Jews' Christ alone, but the Christ of the Samaritans—the Christ of the Gentiles, too—the Savior of sinners all over the world! May your faith and mine, dear Friends, grow broad! May we believe for others! May we hope for others! May we expect to see God's salvation extending even unto the ends of the earth and, moved by this faith, may we be stirred up to go out and find the lost sheep, that we may bring them to the Great Shepherd, that He may fold them in safety by His tender care! Let us be so much with Christ that we may catch His spirit, and that our faith may grow exceedingly, and our love to all the saints be increased!

The Lord give His blessing, for Jesus' sake! Amen.