

Robert Murray M'Cheyne:

THE CONVERSION OF A SOUL IS BY far the most remarkable event in the history of the world, although many of you do not care about it. It is the object that attracts the eyes of the holy angels to the spot where it takes place. It is the object which the Father's eye rests upon with tenderness and delight. This work in the soul is what brings greater glory to the Father, Son and Spirit, than all the other works of God. It is far more wonderful than all the works of art. There is nothing that can equal it. Ah! brethren, if you think little of it, or laugh at it, how little have you of the mind of God!

Conversion may be looked at from different points. The world can notice conversion. They see a young man, perhaps, who was careless like themselves, taking to his closet. They observe a change in his speech. They see a change in his company, and they say it's a whim. There is another view of it which God's children take. They see a soul cast out into the open field to the loathing of its person, and they see Jesus, the glorious Redeemer, stooping down and binding up its wounds. They see a sister, a brother born for eternity. A third view of conversion is as a victory of Christ over the devil—'Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?'

The world is a great battlefield. 'I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed, it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel' (Genesis 3:15). Satan has the world bound in strong fetters. The whole world lies in the wicked one - lies in his arms, sung to sleep with his lullaby. But there is a great One gone forth, sitting on a white horse, and having on his head many crowns, and ever and anon he is cutting the strong chains with which sinners are bound, and saying, as he does so, to Satan, 'Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?'

I desire, dear friends, by the help of the Holy Spirit, to show you two things from these words:

That Satan resists every conversion;

That Christ is the advocate of those he saves.

Satan resists every conversion.

'And he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him' (verse 1). There is no doubt but that this passage describes a vision which Zechariah saw, and that Joshua represents Jerusalem. Accordingly, Zechariah saw Joshua as a sinner awakened, and coming and standing before the LORD; but he saw another standing at his right hand to resist him; not an angel of light, but an angel of darkness.

Now, brethren, this describes the case of every awakened and converted soul. When God convinces a soul of sin, he brings him to stand before him—then Satan comes to resist him. Before conversion, the devil tries to keep you secure, he cries out Peace, peace. He fills you with high notions about yourself. He fills you with pride, and with high notions about your knowledge— that you know your catechism— that you are acquainted with the doctrines of the Bible. Or he binds you with silken fetters to some unlawful attachment— to some one who is going down the broad way, and he makes you to hate the gospel. Or he brings you under the faithful preaching of the gospel, and makes you content to sit and hear it, and even delight in hearing it, thereby making you imagine you are Christ's when you know him not. But the moment Christ comes and awakens you, then comes Satan to resist you. The resistance of Satan is twofold.

He resists you at the bar of God.

In ancient courts of justice the accuser stood at the right hand of the judge, and brought against the accused all his crimes. So is it with Satan. You will see this in Revelation 12: 10: 'Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.' The same you will see alluded to in Psalm 109:6: 'Set thou a wicked man over him, and let Satan stand at his right hand.' So that you will observe, from the first moment that a spark of grace is put into your heart, Satan stands at the bar of God to accuse you. And what does he accuse you of First, he accuses you of sin. He says, 'That soul is the vilest in the world. Yea, there is none like it.' Or sometimes he accuses you of unbelief: 'That soul has denied thee.' Or sometimes he accuses you of going back after you had been awakened: 'That soul was awakened and has gone back; even after you visited that soul, it went back.'

He resists you at the bar of conscience.

He says to the sinner, 'How can you come, you are too vile?— you are the chief of sinners, there is none like

you.' Or sometimes he says, 'It is too late; you might have been saved had you come sooner. You might have been saved had you come in youth. Or you might have been saved had you come when you were awakened, but now it is of no use to try, it is too late.' Or sometimes he takes another plan. When you are awakened and stand before the angel, he stirs up corruption within you; even when you are upon your knees he stirs up corruption in order to shut your eye from seeing the mercy seat. He stirs up the sin that is in your heart. He makes you to see its vileness in order to keep you away from Christ.

Learn two lessons from this.

It is a solemn thing to be under conviction of sin. It is true, you are seeking Christ, but it is also true that Satan is ready to resist you. Do not think you are safe because you have got a sight of your sins. It is not every awakened sinner that is a saved man. And if it is a solemn thing to be awakened, what must be the danger of those of you who are not awakened, who are not seeking Christ, who are asleep over hell! You are in greater danger this day than ever you were, for you are now asleep. You are nearer hell now than ever. You may have sought pardon once, but now you have given over seeking it, and every hour is bringing you nearer hell.

Those of you who are under real conviction remember that it is only Satan that resists you. God does not resist you. Christ does not resist you. The Holy Ghost does not resist you. Remember, whoever says your sins are too many to be forgiven, it is not God, it is not Christ. It is Satan. Christ invites you to come to him. The Holy Spirit invites you, and all the friends of Christ invite you. Do not be driven back.

Christ is the advocate of those he saves.

'And the LORD said unto Satan, The LORD rebuke thee, O Satan; even the LORD that hath chosen Jerusalem, rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire? (verse 2). 'If any man sin we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous'(1 John 2:1). Christ is the advocate of every one he saves, and not only is he an advocate after conversion, but before, and throughout conversion. He answers Satan's objections. There are two arguments here by which he answers Satan.

The first is the free election of God. Jerusalem was the chief city in the world for wickedness. They had sinned against light, against love, against long-suffering mercy Yet Christ chose it. He might say, 'Grant that it is the chief for wickedness, yet God hath chosen it. Grant that that soul is the chief of sinners, yet the LORD is sovereign. "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion"(Romans 9:15).' This is the argument of Christ. Is it not strange that the very argument which troubles souls is the one which Christ uses as the reason why you should be saved? Let Satan say, you have sinned against light, against conviction, against love; still, 'the LORD that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee; is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?' This shuts Satan's mouth - this is an argument which he cannot answer.

The second argument Christ employs is, the brand is already plucked out of the fire. Christ here says, 'Whatever that sinner may have been, he is now plucked out of the fire.' And thus all Satan's arguments are urged in vain.

All unconverted souls are in the fire. You are in the fire for two reasons:

You are condemned to the fire. 'He that believeth not is condemned already' (John 3:18). There is as it were a great pile of wood on which you are placed, and it is set on fire. The fire indeed has not yet reached you, though soon it will.

Your hell is already begun. Just as the children of God have their heaven begun, so you have got your hell begun. You have burning lusts, and burning passions raging within you — these are the beginnings of hell. But ah! brethren, those of you who have been brought to Christ are brands plucked out of the fire. Observe that Christ plucks the brands out of the fire, and grafts them into the living vine, that they may be made to glorify God by bearing fruit. You will be made to glorify God in one of two ways: either by bearing fruit, or by being cast, soul and body, into hell. 'The LORD hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil' (Proverbs 16:4). Oh! brethren, which do you choose? O brands in the fire! will you not cry to be plucked out of the fire? And if Christ do it, will he not have the answer to make to Satan? 'The LORD rebuke thee, O Satan: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?'

In conclusion, I would say that this congregation may be divided into two parts; those who are brands over the fire, and those who have been plucked out of the fire. O brands in the fire! will you not cry to be plucked out of the fire? When he is plucking brands out of the fire beside you, will you not say, 'LORD, pluck me out of the

Conversion

fire?' Amen.