

# A Shout, a Cry, or a Song

by C. William Fisher

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*The Church today lacks the shout of mastery, the cry of burdened hearts, and is filled with the noise of 'singing' due to a lack of focus on its primary task of winning souls to Christ.*

**Scripture:** Exodus 32:15, 2 Chronicles 7:14, Matthew 28:19, Acts 2:41, 1 Corinthians 1:18, Philippians 3:7, James 5:16, Revelation 3:17

**Topics:** "Church Revival", "Soul Winning"

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## Description

C. William Fisher preaches about the importance of the Church focusing on its primary duty of winning souls to Christ. Drawing parallels from the story of Moses and the golden calf, Fisher highlights how the Church today lacks the shout of mastery, the cry of burdened hearts, and is filled with the noise of 'singing' - distractions from the essential task of soul-winning. He emphasizes the need to smash the 'golden calves' of financial security, Sunday-school statistics, altar numbers, and nonessential activities that divert attention from the core mission of the Church.

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## Transcript

"And Moses turned, and went down from the mount, and the two tables of the testimony were in his hand: the tables were written on both their sides; on the one side and on the other were they written.

"And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tables.

"And when Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said unto Moses, There is a noise of war in the camp.

"And he said, It is not the voice of them that shout for mastery, neither is it the voice of them that cry for being overcome: but the noise of them that sing do I hear.

"And it came to pass, as soon as he came nigh unto the camp, that he saw the calf, and the dancing: and Moses' anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount." -- Exodus 32:15-19

Moses had a rendezvous with God on the rugged summit of Mount Sinai. As the Children of Israel watched their great leader as he made his way up the mountain, they saw fire from heaven fall to the summit of the mount. Then they saw great clouds of black smoke swirling back towards the heavens, and they felt the old mount itself tremble and shake under the mighty impact and terrific weight of Deity.

When Moses was delayed in his coming back to them, the children of Israel grew restless and they demanded that Aaron give them gods to worship. Aaron, in one of the weakest moments of his entire career, commanded them to bring their golden earrings to him; and when they had done so, he melted the gold and fashioned a golden calf. Before the calf he built an altar, and the children of Israel rose up and sang and danced and said one to another, "These be thy gods, oh Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt."

When the interview was over, Moses started down the mountain and was met by Joshua. As the two men continued their way down the mountain, Joshua suddenly said, "Listen, Moses, it sounds like the noise of war in the camp." Moses cupped his hand to an ear, and a puzzled look swept across his face as he said, "It is not the voice of them that shout for mastery, neither is it the voice of them that cry for being overcome." And then a look of utter disappointment and disgust as he said, "It's just the noise of them that sing that I hear."

Then Moses, in the full fury of anger, lifted the two tablets upon which God himself had written, and hurled them to broken bits on the jagged rocks below. What had caused such wrath? Was it simply anger? No. It was simply the last full measure of loathsome disgust for a people that had been so faithless and so trifling in the one great trust that God had placed in their hands.

If Moses could stand at some vantage point and look upon the work of the Church today -- could listen to the weak little platitudes that come from the pulpits of the land, and the tepid little praises that come up from the pews of the land, and could witness that tragic shifting of emphasis from personal soul winning to the multitudinous social activities of the ordinary church of today -- real candor would compel him to say, "It is not the voice of them that shout for mastery, neither is it the voice of them that cry for being overcome ... it is just the noise of them that sing that I hear."

There has been that shifting of emphasis from actual soul winning to countless other activities, until the Church in many areas has become little more than just another social service center. And when any church becomes nothing more than that, it might as well close its doors and forget about the high business of real religion. God has already written "Ichabod" across the doors of that church, for the glory has definitely departed.

The Church has one primary task, one primary duty, one primary responsibility, and that is to win souls to Christ! Soul winning and soul winning alone must ever have first priority in the program of the Church!

If we believe soul winning to be the first task and fundamental responsibility of the Church, then we will readily realize that, regardless of what else the Church is doing and how well it is doing it, regardless of how else the Church is succeeding, if it fails in its first and central task then it is failing at the job -- and it is neither shouting, nor crying, but just singing.

## I. THE CHURCH OF TODAY LACKS THE SHOUT OF MASTERY

One of the most obvious facts of our day -- and it is just as tragic as it is obvious -- is that the Church of today is failing to meet the tremendous impact and challenge of this age.

Dr. Paul Hutchinson, editor of the Christian Century, after a world tour said: "The most casual survey of what is going on in the contemporary world will disclose new stirrings of interest in religion. To those who carefully examine this new stirring, however, a paradox immediately presents itself. At the very time when

man has new respect for the claims of spiritual interpretation of life, the institutional forms of religion are plagued by spreading weakness.

"Not for a hundred years," says Dr. Hutchinson, "has so much importance been granted the values championed by the churches or less authority conceded to the churches themselves. The paradox seems to be worldwide. A report adopted by the Church of England declared that Britain is a 'pagan nation.' When a survey was made in Tokyo concerning religious importance, an overwhelming majority of the capital's inhabitants answered that religion is indispensable -- but an equally overwhelming majority acknowledged that they never enter temples or shrines or churches. Similar answers would probably be obtained in almost any large city in the world except in Russia.

"Institutional religion," concludes Dr. Hutchinson, "has little influence over the masses and over contemporary social orders and agencies. Such is the universal paradox -- man under such terror of the future that he is turning with new openness of mind to a spiritual interpretation of life, while the churches are less and less able to command the active loyalty of the masses."

In his usual penetrating analysis, Canon Bernard Iddings Bell arrives at the same conclusion, and gives a similar indictment when he says, "The Christian church has today for the most part ceased to have any influence worth mentioning over human affairs, particularly on men who think and lead."

The church world meets in Amsterdam and makes high pronouncements. But the world rolls on with much the same hard, cynical attitude as was expressed by Stalin: "And how many divisions does the Pope have?"

A defeated world needs a victorious Church. A fearful world needs a courageous and triumphant Church. But the Church today is neither victorious nor triumphant -- it is just as fear-ridden and frustrated and perplexed and worried as the world around it.

Is there a shout of mastery coming from the churches in America? Some say yes. And to substantiate their claim they point to the fact that church membership in America is at its highest peak, both in numbers and in percentage of population. But as Dr. Trueblood says: "Christianity would have a much better chance in most communities if there were only twelve real Christians instead of the thousands of church members on the rolls."

Church membership in America has never been higher, and the influence and effectiveness of the Church have never been lower than at the present time. What real difference would it make if everyone in America belonged to some church -- if church membership didn't mean any more to the unchurched millions than it means to millions whose names are already on the rolls?

While it is true that there are over seventy-nine million church members in America, it is also true that less than half that number ever attend church with any semblance of regularity

whatsoever. It has become impossible for many churches to have prayer meetings or Sunday night services. There are thousands of churches in America that not only have not had a revival in years, but do not have enough spiritual fervor even to try to have one. Some churches that do bestir themselves for an evangelistic campaign find that in too many instances their campaign for souls degenerates into just another campaign for church members.

It is only when Zion "travails" that souls are born into the Kingdom. But the majority of churches today are not only unwilling to travail; they are not even vigorous enough to conceive the need for souls. Consequently their churches are never maternity wards -- they are just morgues.

While the churches in America are marking time, the devil is on the march. According to recent statistics there are over fifty million drinkers in America, and 6 per cent of them are confirmed alcoholics. There are more young women selling beer and liquor as bar maids in saloons and taverns and cafes and night clubs than are enrolled in all the colleges and universities in the United States. Over \$13,000,000,000 spent on liquor in the United States during 1948 -- or an average of ninety dollars for every man, woman, and child in America. In the same year, the American people smoked an average of seven cigarettes a day for every man, woman, and child in the United States. Add to all of this the infamous divorce rate and the climbing crime costs and the increasing godlessness and secularism of the American people, and then begin to contemplate the tragic failure of the churches in America.

Oh, in this day of confused sounds, clamoring voices, and shifting convictions, men and women desperately need to hear the note of certainty, the note of triumph, the note of mastery! But instead of hearing the blowing of the bugles and the beating of the drums for victorious advance, the men and women of this day, if they hear anything at all from the Church, hear nothing more than muted violins and clarinets. No shout of victory. No shout of mastery. No shout of triumph. Just the muffled, muted sounds of mournful singing!

## II. THE CHURCH TODAY LACKS THE CRY OF BURDENED HEARTS

It would seem that the challenging conditions confronting the Church today would literally compel Christians to their knees in prayer. But even more sad than the lack of the shout of mastery is the lack of the cry of the children of God. If there could be heard across America that cry of soul-agony over the lost, there would be more basis for hope that the Church would rise to meet the challenge of this crucial age.

One reason for the lack of the cry of God's people is that too many of God's people are sound asleep -- resting, relaxing, and slumbering! In the most crucial moment in the life of Jesus before He went to the cross, the three most trusted disciples were not interested or concerned enough to stay awake, and finally Jesus had to say to them, "Sleep on and take your rest."

In this most crucial hour in the life of the Church of Christ, Jesus is depending on His followers to be awake and busy at their first task. But instead of being awake and working, too many professed followers are sound asleep -- taking their rest, while the world goes to hell. There are some, of course, who attend church and go through the routines of their profession. But there are people in America who have been known to walk and talk in their sleep!

### Slumbering Saints

God's people everywhere are too drowsy! There are too many slumbering saints in every church! A spirit of rest and relaxation has settled down over many professing Christians like some mist or pall or smoke screen, until vast thousands of "good" church members are sound asleep.

One reason why so many of God's children are sleeping today is that they feel they have carried the burden long enough; they have supported the work long enough; they have shouldered the responsibility long enough; and now it is time for the burden to be carried by younger shoulders. They have retired from

active service. Yes, their names are still on the church roll. They still profess. They still attend. But they have really retired from active duty.

There is never a safe time in the Christian life to begin to take it easy or to rest or to feel that one has done enough. The only way anyone can coast for very long is downhill. Jesus did not say, "Occupy until you get tired," or, "Occupy until you think you have done enough." Jesus did say, "Occupy till I come."

Other Christians feel that, since night is upon us, we had better rest until things settle down to normalcy, and then we can begin to work and promote the Kingdom. But God never commanded His people to mark time. God did command His people to "go forward!" The fact that our day is dark and the blackness of night will soon be upon us should not cause us to rest or to slumber or to take it easy, but that very darkness should be the greatest impetus in the world for us to get down on our knees and begin to pay the price for the winning of souls to Christ.

Let us be done with singing, "O happy rest, sweet happy rest!" and begin singing, "We'll work till Jesus comes; we'll work till Jesus comes -- and then be gathered home."

### Contagion of Complacency

Another reason for the great number of slumbering saints is this: the contagion of complacency. It is only human to look at others and say: "Well, if he can profess so much and do so little for the church ... if she can stand and testify like that and do no more for God and the church than she does, I'm going to take it a little easier myself. I can't do it all." And finally that attitude catches on until there are today entire congregations slumbering and sleeping and resting and relaxing and taking it easy -- while the world, in their neighborhood, goes to hell!

Of course one of the most tragic aspects of being asleep is that we don't like to be awakened. It is so much easier to go through the religious routines, it is so much easier to keep faith with techniques of private devotions, than it is to fall on our knees and tarry until God pours His Spirit out upon us so that our complacency is shattered and we are compelled to go out and witness and win for Christ.

One can attend Sunday school and be complacent. One can attend the services of the church and be complacent. One can teach a Sunday-school class or serve on the church board and be

complacent. But no one can be complacent and win a soul to Christ. It takes a burdened soul to do that! But carrying burdens is hard work! It involves crying and agonizing and fasting.

### Marred by Mediocrity

Another reason for the lack of the cry of the children of God is that too many of God's children have at last become satisfied with mediocrity. They plan and pray and promote for the mediocre -- and they are not disappointed. If God should pour out His Spirit in a really supernatural way, they would be surprised -- and chagrined.

A district superintendent was asking one of his pastors about a recent revival. The pastor said that they had enjoyed a good revival. "How many prayed through?" asked the superintendent. "Oh," the pastor answered, "I think it was three or four." The superintendent raised up in his chair and said, "Man, you didn't have a revival at all -- you might have had a meeting, but you didn't have a revival!"

Oh, the tragedy of becoming satisfied with the ordinary -- when God is anxious and willing to pour out the extraordinary and the supernatural! We have a right to plan for and pray for and expect supernatural results. We're serving a supernatural God!

This world with its tensions and pressures and fears and sins desperately needs a Church that is moved and stirred and burdened. But the world will never hear the "cry" of the Church so long as the Church is sleeping or complacent or content.

### III. THE CHURCH TODAY IS FILLED WITH THE NOISE OF "SINGING"

With nothing to shout about, and not enough spiritual urgency to cry, it is only natural that the Church has fashioned beautiful golden calves -- to sing about! Golden calves can be so glittering -- and so blinding! Success in other tasks, regardless of how brilliant or how glorious, can never compensate for the failure in the first task -- that of winning men and women to Jesus Christ.

#### The Golden Calf of Financial Security

One golden calf that has been erected in the effort to hide the failure in winning souls is that golden calf of financial security. There are churches across America that made a real impact for God in their community when they were small and struggling. But now that God has blessed them in a far grander way than they ever thought possible, with more moneys flowing through the church treasuries than they ever imagined possible, they have folded their arms and taken the attitude, "We have now arrived." But when any individual or any church takes that attitude, it is absolutely impossible for God to use that individual or that church in carrying out His redemptive will.

God himself has a word to individuals and churches that have "arrived." He says, "Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

Great numbers of churches today are giving obeisance to the collection plate. Even in their reports, they smooth over their failure in winning men and women to Christ by reciting figures of the tremendous increase in finances flowing through the church treasuries. The guide showing a visitor to the Vatican the great wealth of the church smilingly said, "The church today doesn't have to say with Peter, 'Silver and gold have we none.'" "No," said the visitor, "and neither can the church today say to poor, crippled souls, 'Rise up and walk!'"

The Church is not an institution competing with other businesses on the basis of finance. The Church is a soul-saving institution! And when it becomes something else, it is no longer the Church that has Christ's blessings, and it is no longer the Church that can carry out His Great Commission!

Golden calves have even been known to emerge from burnt mortgages. Some churches when they had the tension and challenge of paying off their church debt had to pray and believe God, and thus there was power in all the phases of the church work. But now that the debt is paid off and the challenge is lifted, the church no longer prays as much, or believes as much -- or accomplishes as much!

Why do we pay and overpay budgets? Because of external pressure? Because of the competitive angle? No. We pay and overpay the budgets because of the vision of world need -- the cries of the countless millions who are still in heathen darkness pleading, "Come over and help us."

Why do we want churches and want them paid for? To provide a comfortable place for us to come and worship? To add to the church's prestige in the community? No. The reason we want them and want them for our own is that we might have a place, in our community, where broken and sin-weary souls might come and hear the gospel and where they can kneel and find Christ and go out with new hearts to live transformed, radiant Christian lives.

It doesn't matter how much money is passing through the church treasuries, or how much we pay or overpay our budgets, or how nice or how big our church building is -- if we fail to win men to Christ, we're failing at the job! We're failing Christ, and we're failing humanity! And we're not shouting, nor crying -- we're just "singing"!

#### The Golden Calf of Sunday-School Statistics

Another golden calf that has been erected in an effort to hide the failure in actually winning men is that golden calf of Sunday-school statistics. The first question usually asked concerning the church is this: "How many are you averaging in Sunday school?" A legitimate question, certainly. And, in a way, an indication of the promotional abilities of the church.

How many thousands today are giving obeisance to that glittering calf of Sunday-school statistics! Bowing down at the golden calf of numbers. Prostrating themselves before the shrine of the Sunday-school register. Worshipping statistics! How glittering that calf can be! How blinding it can be! How deceiving it can be!

Certainly we strive for great numbers in the Sunday school. But wait! Why do we want them? Why do we seek great numbers in our Sunday-school classes? To increase the prestige of the teacher or officer? To place higher up on the list in the district paper? To have something to talk about? The reason we want them is to win them! It does not take a burden to get people to come to Sunday school. Many outside pressures can do it. Awards, or competition, or prestige can get them there. But it does take a burden and a passion for souls to win them after they get there!

O teacher, the contests and the socials and the parties and the wiener roasts and the showers and the rallies are not ends in themselves. The objective, the purpose, and the reason for it all is that those pupils might be won to Christ. Only a great, overwhelming, all-consuming love for the souls of those pupils can give sustained romance to the Sunday-school task.

Regardless of how many hundreds we are averaging a Sunday in Sunday school, if we are not winning a consistent percentage of those scholars to Jesus Christ, we are failing God and we are cheating the pupils, and we are not shouting, nor crying -- we are just "singing"!

#### The Golden Calf of Numbers in the Altar

Another golden calf erected in the effort to hide the failure in actually winning men is the golden calf of great numbers in the altar. We can never have too many "seekers" in the altar. But we can easily have too many sentimentalists. One comes to the altar because of heart hunger; the other comes because of habit. One comes because he is convicted; the other comes because he is coaxed. One comes because he is burdened; the other comes because he is begged. One comes because he wants salvation; the other comes because he wants sympathy. God give us more seekers!

Why do we really want great numbers in the altar? Why do we want the altar "lined"? Because of the pressure of personal failure? Because we know that a revival should have seekers?

The reason we want them is to win them -- to Christ! They are not won when they kneel at the altar. They have just been reached. And there is a vast difference between reaching men and winning men. To be sure, souls must be reached to be won. But the motive and goal are not merely to reach them, but to win them. We should never be satisfied until our "contacts" become "conversions."

It does not take real burden or strong crying to reach men, but it does take real burden to pray and believe until the heart is melted and the soul begins to meet conditions and to look up with real faith, believing God for salvation. That is the reason why many will come down to the altar to pray with seekers, but few will tarry in real intercessory prayer until victory comes. They are concerned with the reaching, yes; but the winning is far too hard and demanding a work.

Regardless of how many we "reach," regardless of how many we have in our altars, if we are failing actually to "win" them to Christ in real experience, we are failing in our first task, and we are not shouting, nor crying -- we're just "singing."

#### The Golden Calf of the Nonessential

Still another golden calf erected to hide the failure in the first task of winning men is that golden calf of the nonessential. It is the devil's business to get the energies of the Church diverted from its first task. The devil is unconcerned about the Church's success in the secondaries. He is eternally and ruthlessly opposed to the Church's success in its first task -- that of winning men and women to Christ!

The devil is pleased when he can successfully divert the attention of Christians from the great task of winning men -- regardless of what their attention is focused upon. If he can sidetrack Christians on some tangent, get them out on some spur line, he is successfully defeating God's first purpose for His Church and God's great plan for redeeming men.

And yet many good, sincere Christians are today worshipping the golden calf of the nonessential. Their energies are not going out in fighting sin and the devil; their energies are being dissipated in the marginal skirmishes with "appearances." The golden calf of nonessential is not so glittering as the others, because it is fully clothed! -- but it is just as deadly to the cause of winning men and women to Christ.

Oh, if all real Christians would quit wasting their energies on the side issues and the marginal and the external and the nonessential, what an advance could be made against the devil and sin in the actual winning of men and women to Christ!

A young couple knelt at the altar and were gloriously converted. The mother of the young lady was a worshiper at the shrine of the nonessential. She discouraged the young couple and said if they really had prayed through they would do this and that, and she was so naggingly persistent that finally the young lady and her husband gave up and are now lost to God and the church. The mother has never been able to win her husband or any of her children to Christ -- she has been too busy worshipping the golden calf of the nonessential.

Regardless of what we put on, or what we put off -- if we're failing actually to win souls to Christ, then we're failing God and we're failing souls, and we're not shouting, nor crying -- we're just "singing"!

## Smash the Golden Calves

Oh, that today we might take these golden calves that are so glittering and so blinding and so deceiving and do with them exactly as Moses did with the golden calf of his day -- literally smash them! Destroy them! Obliterate them! Then quit our singing and fall on our knees and begin crying! If we will do that, it won't be long until we can really begin shouting! All genuine shouting must be preceded by genuine crying. Could that be one reason why there is so little real shouting today -- because there is so little real crying? One must earn one's right to shout!

In one of our campaigns in Portland, Oregon, there was a small, elderly woman who was heavily burdened for several of her loved ones -- one man in particular who was a backslider. The first Saturday of the meeting she felt that God wanted her to fast for this man's salvation. No one asked her to do it. She didn't pledge to do it. God told her to fast, so she started fasting.

She was past seventy years of age and very frail in body, and her family and friends urged her to stop fasting; but she went right on -- Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday. I felt myself that she should break her fast because she was so frail, but I said nothing. Thursday and Friday and Saturday she fasted, and the man had not knelt at the altar even one time. But that little Christian woman held on -- fasting and praying.

Finally, on Sunday morning, that man was in the service and when the altar call was given he was the first one to kneel. It wasn't long until he gloriously prayed through. Need I say that that little Christian woman shouted that Sunday morning? No one will ever forget the sight of her as she walked up and down in front of the altar with her handkerchief waving, her face aglow, and her heart pouring itself out in praise and gratitude to God for answered prayer. Yes, she shouted. But she had earned her right to shout.

We look back nineteen hundred years and defame Nero because he stood on his palace balconies -- fiddling while Rome burned. And yet we professing Christians of this twentieth century are standing on the balconies of our time -- merely singing -- while our world is on fire! O God! Drive us to our knees. May our eyes be wet with strong crying over the lost souls everywhere about us!

## God Still Lives

Throughout history, when God's people have humbled themselves and have begun to cry out to God from the weakness of their hearts, God has heard their cries and has answered by giving mighty deliverance and mastery and triumph.

When the children of Israel were a slave nation under the tyranny of Pharaoh, they began to cry unto God out of the weakness of their hearts; and God, in His great strength and power, heard their cries and gave them a mighty deliverance and the shout of victory.

When the children of Israel stood with the Red Sea in front of them and Pharaoh's armies in back of them, they fell down and cried to God; and God, in His vast power, brought them through the Red Sea victoriously -- so triumphantly that the shouts of victory could be heard even above the cries and cursings of Pharaoh's drowning armies.

When Gideon and his three hundred found themselves confronted with vast numbers of well-equipped and well-trained soldiers, they cried unto God for direction and help; and God, in His mighty power, heard their cries of weakness and gave them a military victory that still amazes and mystifies. The shouts of

victory from Gideon's three hundred could be heard above the agonized cries of the hundred and twenty thousand dying barbarians. Gideon's God still lives today!

When the hundred and twenty in the Upper Room prayed out of the weakness of their hearts -- confronted as they were by their pagan world and obstacles that seemed insurmountable -- God heard their cries of weakness and surrender and gave to them a power so real and so tremendous that they became "fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners." And the

shouts of their victory were heard even above the clatter and crash of their frenzied world. The God of Pentecost still lives today!

When Wesley and his small band were faced with ecclesiastical ridicule and howling mobs, and when defeat seemed inevitable, they cried out of the weakness of their hearts to God; and God, in His great power, heard their cries and gave to them such marvelous victory that they were able to stem the tide of ungodliness in their generation and become a mighty movement that for scores of years preached full salvation around the world.

When Dr. P. F. Bresee and those early pioneers who burned their way across this nation -- when they were gradually squeezed out of the larger fellowships and were forced to go out under the stars to preach their mighty truth -- they prayed out of the weakness of their hearts until God, in His might and power and strength, heard their cries and gave to them the shout of victory that is now reverberating in churches across the face of America and in twenty-three lands beyond the sea. Glory! Bresee's God still lives today!

And if God can find a few people today who will tear down their golden calves and quit their singing and fall upon their knees and cry out of their burdened souls, He will give glorious victory today! And the pagan, secular, materialistic, worldly people everywhere will again hear the shouts of victory from the children of God!

Let each one of us then be so fired with that sense of holy mission that we cry and pray and trust and witness and win so that in the days beyond, if Jesus tarries, men can say that our day of challenge and opportunity was not wasted in singing, but that we cried and prayed and tarried until the shout of mastery was again heard in the land.

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