

Some Features of Christ's Working

by George H. Morrison

Jesus' work is characterized by the magnitude of His aim compared with the meanness of His methods, untiring labor joined with unruffled calm, mission for all joined with a message for each, and seeming failure joined with signal triumph.

Scripture: Matthew 8:20, Matthew 26:6, Matthew 27:42, Mark 16:18, John 14:9, John 19:30

Topics: "Christian Living", "Godly Work"

Description

George H. Morrison preaches about the characteristics of the Christian gospel exemplified by Jesus as a worker, emphasizing the revolutionary concept of God as a toiling God. Jesus' work showcases the magnitude of His aim compared to the meanness of His methods, inspiring Christians to have lofty hopes while being content to work in humble ways. His untiring labor and unruffled calm serve as an example for every Christian toiler, highlighting the importance of balancing work and peace in a bustling world. Jesus' mission for all is coupled with a message for each, emphasizing the quality of impact over quantity. Lastly, Jesus' life reflects seeming failure turning into a signal triumph, teaching that God's definition of success often differs from worldly perspectives.

Transcript

IT IS CHARACTERISTIC OF the Christian gospel that its Savior should be a worker. In the old world, it was hardly an honorable thing to work. It was a thing for slaves, and serfs, and strangers, not for freeborn men. Hence work and greatness rarely went together, and nothing could be more alien to the genius of paganism than a toiling God. Jesus has changed all that. He has made it impossible for us to think of God as indolent. It was a revolution when Jesus taught "God loves." But it was hardly less revolutionary when He taught "God works."

And He not only taught it, He lived it too. Men saw in Christ a life of endless toil, and "he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9). Had Jesus lived and taught in the quiet groves of some academy, it would have made all the difference in the Christian view of work, and all the difference in the Christian view of God. But Jesus was a carpenter. And Jesus stooped to the very humblest tasks till He became the pattern and prince of workers. I want to look, then, at some features of His work tonight. For He has left us an example that we should follow in His steps.

His Purpose; His Methods

Looking back, then, upon the work of Jesus, what strikes me first is the magnitude of His aim compared with the meanness of His methods.

It is a great thing to command an army. It is a great thing to be the master of a fleet. It is a great thing to be a minister of state, and help to guide a people toward their national destiny. But the aims of general, and of admiral, and of statesman, great in themselves, seem almost insignificant when we compare them with the purposes of Jesus. He claims a universal sovereignty. He runs that sovereignty out into every sphere. His is to be the test in moral questions. He is to shape our law and mold our literature. He is the Lord of life. He is the king and conqueror of death. These are the purposes of Jesus, far more stupendous than man had ever dreamed of in his wildest moments. Will He not need stupendous methods if He is ever to achieve an aim like that?

And it is then the apparent meanness--the ordinariness--of His methods strikes us. Had He a pen of fire? He never wrote a line, save in the sand. Had He a voice of overmastering eloquence? He would not strive, nor cry, nor lift up His voice in the streets. Was there unlimited wealth at His command?--"The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head" (Matthew 8:20). Were His first followers men of influence--? "Simon and Andrew were casting a net into the sea, for they were fishers" (Matthew 4:18. Or would He use the sword like Mohammed?--"Put up thy sword into its place. He that taketh the sword shall perish by the sword" (Matthew 25:52). It seems impossible that in such ways Christ should achieve His purpose. It is the magnitude of His aim compared with the meanness of His methods that arrests me first.

It should be so with every Christian toiler. It is a simple lesson for every man and woman who seeks to serve in the true Christian spirit. Surrounded by the ordinary, he should be facing heavenwards. Poorly equipped in all things else, he should be mightily equipped in noble hope. If I am Christ's, I cannot measure possibilities by methods. My heaven is always greater than my grasp. If I am Christ's, I cherish the loftiest hope, and I am content to work for it in lowliest ways.

And it is there the difference comes in between a visionary and a Christian. A visionary dreams his dreams and builds his castles in the air. They are radiant and wonderful and golden and the light of heaven glitters on every minaret. And then, because he cannot realize them now, and cannot draw them in all their beauty down to earth, the visionary folds his hands, does nothing, and the vision goes. But the true Christian, with hopes as glorious as any visionary's, because they are the hopes of Jesus Christ, carries the glory of them into his common duty and into the crossbearing of the dreary day. And though the generations die, and the purposes of God take a thousand years to ripen, he serves and is content--Jesus shall reign where'er the sun Doth his successive journeys run.

Untiring Labor; Unruffled Calm

Once more, as I look back upon the work of Jesus, I find there untiring labor joined with unruffled calm.

There never was a ministry, whether of man or angel, so varied, so intense, or so sustained as was the public ministry of Jesus. He preaches in the synagogue at Nazareth. He preaches on the hill and on the sea. With infinite patience and unexhausted tenderness he trains the Twelve. And all that we know of Him is not a thousandth part of what He said and did. Charged with that mighty task, and with only three short years to work it out, shall we not find Christ anxious? And will we not light on hours of feverish unrest? There is no trace of that. With all its stir, no life is so restful as the life of Jesus. With all its incident and crowding of event, we are amazed at the supreme tranquillity of Christ. There is time for teaching and

there is time for healing. There is time for answering and time for prayer. Each hour is full of work and full of peace. No day hands on its debts to tomorrow. Jesus can cry, "It is finished" (John 19:30), at the close. Here for each worker is the supreme example of untiring labor and unruffled calm.

Let us remember that. It is the very lesson that we need today. There are two dangers that, in these bustling times, beset the busy man. One is that he be so immersed in multifarious business that all the lights of heaven are blotted out. The calm and quietness that are our heritage as Christians are put to flight in the unceasing round. Life lacks its unity, loses its central plan, becomes a race and not a stately progress, and slackens its grasp upon eternal things till we grow fretful in the constant pressure. Then men who looked to us, as followers of Jesus, for a lesson, find us as worried and anxious as themselves. That is the one extreme: it is the danger of the practical mind. But then there is the other: it is the mystic's danger. It is that, realizing the utter need of fellowship with God, a man should neglect the tasks that his time brings him, and should do nothing because there is so much to do. All mysticism tends to that. It is a recoil from an exaggerated service. It is the shutting of the ear to the more clamorous calls, so that we may hear more certainly the still small voice.

But all that is noblest in the mystic's temper, and all that is worthiest in the man of deeds, mingled and met in the service of our Lord. Here is the multitude of tasks. Here is the perfect calm. That is the very spirit we need to rebaptize our service of today. God in the life means an eternal purpose and work achieved on the line of an eternal purpose is work without friction and duty without fret. God in the life means everlasting love and to realize an everlasting love is to experience unutterable peace.

Mission for All; Message for Each

As I look back upon Christ's work, there is yet another feature of it that strikes me. I find in it a mission for all joined with a message for each.

Times without number we find Jesus surrounded by a multitude. Christ is the center of many crowds. Wherever He is, the crowd is sure to gather. And how He was stirred, and moved, and filled with compassion for the multitude, all readers of the gospel story know. Every chord of His human heart was set a-vibrating by a vast assembly. The common life of congregated thousands touched Him, true man, to all his heights and depths. He fed them, taught them. This was His parting charge, "Go ye into all the world and preach!" (Mark 16:18). Yet for all this the wide sweep of His mission--no teacher ever worked on so minute a scale as Jesus Christ. Did any crowd ever get deeper teaching than Nicodemus when he came alone? And was the woman of Samaria despised because companionless? How many sheep did the shepherd go to seek when the ninety and nine were in the fold? How many pieces of silver had gone lost? How many sons came home from the far country before the father brought out his robes and killed the calf? Christ did not work on the scale of a thousand, or on the scale of ten, but on the scale of one. Companionless men were born, and companionless they must be born again.

Brethren, we must remember that. We cannot afford, in these days, when all the tendency is toward the statistics of the crowd--we cannot afford to despise that great example. It is true, there is a stimulus in numbers. There is an indescribable sympathy that runs like an electric thrill through a great gathering; and heights of eloquence and song and prayer are sometimes reached where the crowd is, that never could have been reached in solitude. But for all that, all Christlike work is on the scale of one. Jesus insists on quality, not quantity. And when the books are opened and the strange story of the past is read, some voices that the world never heard, as of a mother or a friend, shall be found more like Christ's than others

that have thrilled thousands by their eloquence.

Pray over that sweet prayer of the Moravian liturgy: "From the desire of being great, good Lord, deliver us." A word may change a life. It did it for the Philippian jailer. A look may soften a hard heart. It did for Peter. To sanctify life's trifles, to redeem the opportunities for good the dullest day affords, never to go to rest without some secret effort to bring but a little happiness to some single heart--men who do this, unnoticed through the unnoticed years, grow Christlike; men who do this shall be amazed to waken yonder, and find that they are standing nearer God than preacher or than martyr, if preaching and if martyrdom were all.

Seeming Failure; Signal Triumph

Lastly, as I look back upon that life of Christ, I see another feature. I see in it seeming failure joined with signal triumph. If ever there was a life that seemed to have failed, it was the life of Jesus. For a time it had looked as if triumph had been coming. The people had been awakened. The national hope had begun to center round Him. A little encouragement, and they would have risen in enthusiasm for Messiah. But when Jesus went to His death, all that was changed. The people had deserted Him. His very disciples had forsaken Him and fled. His hopes were shattered, and His cause was lost. His kingdom had been a splendid dream, and Jesus had been the king of visionaries. Now it was over. The cross and the grave were the last act in the great tragedy. Jesus had bravely tried, and He had failed. Yes! so it seemed. Perhaps even to the nearest and the dearest so it seemed. God's hand had written failure over the work of Jesus.

When lo! on the third day, the gates of the grave are burst, and Jesus rises. And the Holy Spirit descends on the apostles, and they begin to preach. And the tidings are carried to the isles, and pierce the continents. And a dying world begins to breathe again: and hope comes back, and purity and honor, and pardon and a new power to live, and a new sense of God, and it all sprang from the very moment when they wagged their heads and said, "He save others, Himself He cannot save" (Matthew 27:42). Failure? not failure triumph! It was a seeming failure in the eyes of man, it was a signal triumph in the plans of God.

O heart so haunted by the sense of failure, remember that. O worker on whose best efforts, both to do and be, failure seems stamped tonight, remember that. If I have learned anything from the sacred story, it is this, that seeming failure is often true success. When John the Baptist lay in his gloomy prison, it must have seemed to him that he had failed. Yet even then, a voice that never erred was calling him the greatest born of women. When Paul lay bound in Rome, did no sense of failure visit him? Yet there, chained to the soldier, he penned these letters that run like the chariots of Christ. God is the judge of failure, and not you. Leave it to Him, and forward. Successes here are often failures yonder, and failures here are sometimes triumphs there.

One of our Scottish ministers and poets has a short piece he names "A Call to Failure"--

Have I no calls to failure,

Have I no blessings for loss,

Must not the way to the mission

Lie through the path to the Cross?

But one of our English ministers and poets has a short piece that is a call to triumph--

He always wins who sides with God,

No chance to him is lost.

And is the one false, and the other true?

Nay, both and true.

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