

Definiteness of Purpose in Christian Work

by J. Wilbur Chapman

J. Wilbur Chapman emphasizes the necessity of a focused and earnest approach to Christian work and witnessing to others about Christ.

Scripture: Luke 9:62, Luke 10:2, Luke 10:4, John 20:21, 2 Corinthians 5:20

Topics: "Christian Living", "Evangelism"

Description

J. Wilbur Chapman preaches on the urgency and definiteness of purpose in Christian work, emphasizing the importance of prioritizing devotion to Jesus above all else. He highlights the need for Christians to be visibly on the king's business, showing solemnity and earnestness in their faith, and to pray with unwavering focus on God's glory. Chapman stresses the impact of our testimonies on others' salvation, warning against hindering the conversion of friends through inconsistent living and failing to share the Gospel with those around us.

Transcript

TEXT: "Salute no man by the way."--Luke 10:4.

Luke is the only one of the Evangelists giving us the account of the sending out of the seventy. The others tell us that Christ called certain men unto him and commissioned them to tell his story; but in this instance after Jesus had said, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head," he calls the seventy and sends them forth prepared to endure any sacrifice or suffer any affliction if only they may do his will. And when he had said unto another, "Follow me," but he answered, "Suffer me first to go and bury my father," Jesus said unto him (Luke 9:60-62), "Let the dead bury their dead; but go thou and preach the kingdom of God. And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell which are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." From this expression of the Master we quite understand that no other service, however important it may seem to us, is to come between us and our devotion to him. And in the expression concerning the man having put his hand to the plow and looking back we have one of the strongest illustrations that Jesus ever used. He does not say that if any one puts his hand to the plow and turns back to some other form of service he is not fit for the Kingdom of God, but what he says is this: If any man has his hands to the plow and simply looks back he is not fit for the Kingdom; and this for two reasons:

First: Because no man could plow as he ought to unless he would keep his eyes straight ahead of him, and

Second: No man could plow if he has his mind fixed upon something else. Jesus wants his disciples to know that his work is the important work, that nothing can surpass it. Not only is it wrong for us to turn away from him to any other service but it is a sin even to take our eyes off of him to gaze upon anything else. Under such sharp teaching as this he sends forth the seventy.

Let it be noted, first, that he sent them forth two by two. Perhaps one was sent because he was strong in the opposite direction from his fellow laborer. Who knows but one could speak and the other could sing? Certainly one was the complement of the other. And they went forth with burning hearts to give the message of Jesus. That illustration in the New Testament where four men brought the sick man to Jesus is along the same line. Two men might have failed utterly, three men would have found it difficult service, for four men it was easy.

I once made my way into the office of a doctor to ask him to come to Christ. The meetings were in progress in the church and I thought he was interested. He received me kindly, but firmly declined even to talk of Christ and I left him, utterly discouraged. The next night the man gave his heart to Christ, and for this reason, I believe. We had made him in a little company of church officers a subject of prayer, and you cannot pray earnestly for one for any length of time without speaking to him concerning his soul's salvation. Without having had a conference four men determined to see the doctor, and they all called upon him within two hours of time. When the first came he laughed at him; when the second came his prominence in the business world at least commanded the doctor's respect; when the third came, having driven four miles in from the country, he began to be interested; and with the coming of the fourth there was awakened in him a deep conviction. He closed his office, went to his home and before the evening hour of service came had accepted Christ.

We have practically the same commission as the seventy. "As the Father hath sent me even so send I you," said Jesus to us. These conditions are as true to-day as in those days in the work of the seventy.

The harvest is great. There possibly never has been a time when more people are absenting themselves from the church than at the present time. These men and women are fit subjects for the Gospel. The seventy went as the messengers of peace, so may we go. There are troubled hearts all about us, there are those who are in despair, men and women who are saying, "Peace, peace," when there is no peace, while ours is the very message of peace. Jesus said to them, "Carry neither purse nor scrip nor shoes," for their dependence was upon him. So must it be to-day. Not upon method nor upon skill must we depend, nor upon the schemes of men, however successful they may have been in the past, but upon him. In those days the men were sick and troubled, in these days they are dead in sins and as his messengers we carry the message of love.

I

This expression of the text meant very much to the Oriental, for as a matter of fact the salutation of the Eastern people frequently took a half an hour of time, and sometimes an hour would be consumed. They touched their turbans, fell upon their knees, saluted one another with a holy kiss, talked together concerning their own interests. These things were a part of the salutation. Jesus says to the seventy, "Salute no man as you go." They were not bidden to be impolite--this is farthest from the spirit of the Christian--yet they were commissioned to be about the king's business and the king's business required

haste.

The idea of the text is that there must be definiteness of purpose in Christian work. When Elisha kept his eyes fixed upon Elijah there came to him as the result the mantle of Elijah and he was clothed with power. When Gehazi followed Elisha's command and as he went to the home of the Shunammite saluted no one he became the forerunner of life to the child. And when Paul said, "This one thing I do," and nothing could swerve him from his path of duty, he became the mightiest preacher in the world's history since Christ. But let it not be thought for a moment that we are advocating a gloomy religion; far from it.

I like the story of the little girl who went one day into her grandfather's room to ask him to read to her and found him asleep with his head upon the back of the chair, his Bible upon his knees and the sunlight coming through the window at the proper angle to cast about him a halo of glory, and she ran to her mother saying, "I have been in grandpa's room and I have seen God." If as a Christian the people of the world can have any thought other than this, that we at times at least remind them of Christ, something is wrong with our Christian experience.

There were two sides to the experience of Jesus. In one we see him at the wedding rejoicing with those that did rejoice, making wine out of water and contributing to the happiness of all those who were present. In the other instance we see him upon the mountain side and crying out, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem!" with an almost breaking heart.

When Charles G. Finney was in Utica there came down to see him a woman who was concerned for the town in which she lived. She returned to her home and through days and nights found it impossible either to eat or to sleep because she realized the lost condition of those about her. At last when she was so weak that she could not pray, she had rest only when those about her prayed for her. When Mr. Finney reached that town one of the greatest revivals in his history as an evangelist was the result.

I was one day engaged with other pastors in an eastern city in a Gospel campaign. The ministers were preaching in turn each day and when it came my time to preach I could find in all the audience scarcely one of my people. Up to that day the interest had been remarkable, but somehow from that day on, although people had been converted by the hundred, there was no perceptible spiritual impression. When the meetings had closed one of the prominent society leaders of my church came to explain to me why she was away from the service and she said, "I gave my afternoon reception and the people of our church were there." When I told her that I felt that as a result of that afternoon reception our own church had lost a blessing she seemed utterly amazed; and yet to this day I am firmly persuaded that hundreds of people might have come to Christ if we had not in that day grieved the Spirit.

II

The text means that those of us who are Christians shall show by our very faces that we are on the king's business and that it is solemn business.

One day a man knocked at the door of my study, was admitted, sat down on the couch in the room and began to sob. He did not need to tell me why he had come. I knew, but finally when he sobbed it out this was his message: "I have come to ask you to bury my wife, and to ask if you will not go with me to comfort the children, for they are heartbroken." I knew by the very look of his face that he had lost a loved one. Do you think for a moment that those who gaze at us would imagine that we had the least conviction that people away from Christ were lost? I am sure they would not.

The text also means that we shall be desperately in earnest. A father and his boy heard a minister preach a sermon on the judgment and as they went to their home the father said, "My boy, it was a great sermon and you must think about it." And the boy did. He made his way to his room and threw himself on his bed only to hear his father downstairs laughing and singing; and he said to himself, "It is not true, for if my father believed I was in danger of the judgment he could not laugh and he would not sing." That day was the turning point in the boy's life. He became a man of renown but never a believer in Jesus Christ as we accept him.

The text also indicates how we should pray, with an eye single to his glory but with a purpose that cannot be shaken. Pray as the Shunammite prayed, pray as the woman besought the unjust judge; such prayer brings victory.

III

Did you ever realize that you were standing in the way of the conversion of your friends? How about your living? If your testimony rings anything else than true to Christ you are a stumbling block in the way of some one.

How about your testimony? In the meetings to which I referred there came a young woman one day evidently greatly moved. First one pastor would speak to her and then another, and finally I was given the privilege. For a long time I could not understand her words for her sobs and then she said, "I am a Christian, a member of one of the churches in this movement. I have been engaged to a young man for the last three years. He was not a Christian. Three weeks ago he was taken ill and a week ago he died. In all the time that I knew him I never spoke to him about Christ. I do not know that he even knew that I was a Christian, and now," she said, with a heart which seemed to be literally crushed, "he has gone and I never warned him." And the text means that no one could come within the reach of our influence without having at least a suggestion made by ourselves to them that we are the followers of Christ and that we long to have them know him who means so much to us.

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