

Winning the Young

by J. Wilbur Chapman

Youth is the time to turn to Christ, and it is crucial to reach the young before they grow to manhood and the power of sin increases.

Scripture: Psalm 71:17, Psalm 127:3, Proverbs 1:8, Proverbs 22:6, Ecclesiastes 12:1, Matthew 19:14, 1 Corinthians 13:11, 1 Timothy 4:12, 2 Timothy 2:22

Topics: "Youth Ministry", "Evangelism"

Description

J. Wilbur Chapman preaches about the importance of reaching out to the youth to turn them to Christ, emphasizing that youth is the easiest time to accept Jesus before the grip of sin becomes stronger. He shares stories of individuals who found Christ in their youth and urges parents and teachers to influence young hearts. Chapman highlights the impact of personal work for the young, noting that many influential figures in the Church came to Christ at a young age. He stresses the urgency of guiding youth towards Christ before the allure of sin becomes overwhelming.

Transcript

"There is a lad here," John vi. 9. Jesus had just crossed over the sea of Galilee and, attracted by the miracles which he had wrought, great multitudes had followed after Him. In order that He might escape the throng, He went up into a mountain and there He sat with His disciples. When the Master saw the great company stretching out on every side of Him He said unto Philip, "Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat." Philip was so amazed at the crowd that he answered Him, "Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little." Then one of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said unto Him, "There is a lad here which hath five barley loaves and two small fishes." Then Jesus made the multitude sit down, and took the loaves and gave to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were seated, and likewise of the fishes as much as they would, and when they were filled, the fragments that remained filled twelve baskets.

The presence of this lad and the service which he rendered to Jesus, as well as the use which the Master made of him, all help us to teach our lesson. Youth is the time to turn to Christ. The wise man knew this when he said, "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth; while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh; when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them." Sin has not so strong a hold upon a life in the time of youth, therefore it is the easiest time to turn to Christ.

I once heard a man tell the story of his special work among outcast men and women, and when I asked him he told me how he himself was converted. He said that as a boy in London, he was left one day in charge of the private office. He said "I wanted to write a letter and I took the firm's note-paper; I used one of their envelopes, and when I wanted postage I opened the private drawer of the safe, the door of which was swinging open, and took out one postage stamp, and when I put this stamp upon my letter and dropped it into the post-box I felt as if I had dropped my character with it. That was the beginning, and the end was a prison cell, for I went from one form of thieving to another until I was obliged to pay the penalty. I found Christ while I was in prison, but I feel as if the mark of my early sin would never leave me. I would urge every boy to accept Christ," he said, "before the cords of sin bind him too securely."

When one reaches the age of eighteen he finds it extremely difficult to turn away from the sins that are mastering him, and when he passes beyond twenty years of age, the tide against him is extremely heavy. The critical time in the life of boys and girls is from twelve to twenty. If they do not accept Christ during these years, it is wellnigh impossible to win them. If this is true then we must make the most of the opportunities of influencing the youth whom God is ever bringing before us.

The Scripture used in connection with this feeding of the multitude is a good illustration. It is a lad who confronts us, and this is, as has been said, the favourable time for bringing Christian influence to bear upon him. There is a time in the life of every boy when it is comparatively easy to win him to Christ. Parents surely know this, and Sunday school teachers may easily discover it. "How did you come to Christ?" said a New York minister to a little boy. His reply was, "My Sunday school teacher took me last Sunday out into the park. She drew me away from the crowd and took her seat beside me. She asked me if I would become a Christian. I felt that I ought to do so, and because her invitation was so definite, and she seemed so interested, I told her I would do so, and because I am a Christian I went to join the Church."

Too much cannot be said in favour of reaching the young while they are in the days of their youth. Recently in an audience of 4500 people I found that at least 400 of the audience came to Christ under 10 years of age; between 10 and 12, 600; between 12 and 14, 600; between 14 and 16, about 1000; between 16 and 20, fully one half, and in the entire audience not more than 25 people came to Christ after they were 30 years of age. Five hundred ministers were in the same audience. The majority of them were converted before they were 16 years of age; 40 of them between 16 and 20; and only 15 out of the 500 ministers were converted after they were 20. This in itself is an unanswerable argument in favour of personal work for the young.

The lad is here now before us, but he will soon be gone. Boys quickly grow into manhood. As a rule religious influence weakens as they pass on, while the power of sin increases. Many young men would turn to Christ if they thought they could, but it seems to them that the attraction towards evil is almost, if not quite irresistible. I recently heard a Christian gentleman speaking before a great audience in London. He was telling of his going over the Alps in the care of a trusted guide. As they came to one of the most dangerous places in the journey his guide stopped him, and said, "Do you see those footprints off here to the right?" The gentleman said he did, plainly. "Do you notice," said the guide, "how they get farther and farther apart?" And when asked to give an explanation he said that a week before a young telegraph operator had attempted to cross the mountains without a guide, that just at the place where they were standing his hat blew off, and, without thinking, he reached out after it, lost his balance and started to fall. In trying to recover himself he started down the mountain to the right. The way was all covered with snow; when once he started he could not stop; farther and farther apart were his footprints until at last they were

lost on the edge of a great abyss. He had gone over to his death. It is thus that young men go to destruction. Because they do, we ought to be instant in season and out of season in seeking to arrest their downward progress.

When Jesus took the loaves and fishes in the possession of the lad and brought to bear upon them his own marvellous power, the results were great. No one realises what is being accomplished when he assists or influences a boy. I am wondering what that minister, who led Spurgeon to Christ, thinks of his work now that he sees it from the heavenly standpoint, and I have many times thought I should like to ask the business man who spoke to D.L. Moody about his soul, what estimate he puts upon the importance of the work he did that day. To win a boy to Christ may be to turn towards the Master one who may one day move the world for Christ.

A great number of Chinese young men have come from their native land to study in the educational institutions of the United States. Some of them have found Christ in these institutions, others have passed through their course of study and returned to their native land without a hope in the Saviour. What a marvellous work might have been accomplished if the Christian students in these educational institutions had set themselves to win these Chinese boys. The students in China are to have an increasing influence in the Government, and if the majority of them had been led to Christ, the whole Chinese Government might have been powerfully affected. Some years ago there came to the United States a little Chinese boy. He was sent to a New England educational institution, and made his home in the house of a very humble woman. She knew Christ and loved Him, and she recognised the presence of this little boy as presenting an opportunity for service. She treated him as if he were her own child. She mothered him and grew to love him. She taught him how to read the Bible and she told him the story of Jesus and His love. That little boy came to Christ. He passed through the educational institution, went back to China to exercise his strongest influence for righteousness, and has recently been entrusted with the commission of bringing to the United States a number of other Chinese boys, all of whom, it is said, he will place in institutions that are Christian. The poor woman in New England did not realise that when she led one boy to Christ that she was touching forty others. This is the fascination of Christian work.

Some of the noblest men and women the Church has ever known came to Christ in youth. Polycarp, Matthew Henry, Jonathan Edwards, the immortal Watts, John Hall, and a countless host of others who have served conspicuously in the advancement of the Kingdom of God, came to Christ before they were fifteen years of age, some of them coming as early as seven. The lad is here, it will be a pity if we allow him to grow to manhood without a hope in Christ all because we do not seek to win him.

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