

The Challenge Of Our Age

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(Selected from "No Uncertain Sound". Complete in 6 pages)

Scripture Lesson: Acts 15:24-26.

Text: *"Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."*—Acts 15:26.

Spiritual leadership is the need of the hour. Yet a modern soul winner, much used of God, has observed that "spiritual leadership is not won or established by promotion, but by many prayers, and tears, and confessions of sin, and heart-searchings and humblings before God, and self-surrender, and a courageous sacrifice of every idol, and a bold and deathless and uncompromising, uncomplaining embracing of the Cross, and an eternal, unfaltering looking unto Jesus crucified. . . . Spiritual leaders are not made by man, or by any combination of men. Neither conferences, nor synods, nor councils can make them, but only God." Nor even a school can do it, though through the years God's Bible School has turned out some of the best preachers and leaders in the Holiness Movement.

The Christianity of the present day is apt to languish for lack of spiritual heroism. France was defeated because of soft, easy living which took away the thrill of patriotism, sacrifice, and suffering for one's country. We are losing the thrill of being sensational Christians.

There is an old story of a professor in an American Theological College who, in his opening address to the freshmen, said: "Gentlemen, you need three things if you are to be successful—gifts, graces, and gumption. We can do nothing to help you as to the first; I believe God has given you gifts. We can by training and prayer help you to gain grace. But if you have not gumption, neither God nor man can help you, and I advise you not to continue your studies." If this is true of theological students, it is more true of those who go from school to be ministers of the Word and leaders in the church of Christ.

It is generally admitted that something is needed in many of our churches, over and above what we have. We must have something of a compelling nature that will command the attention of an unbelieving, critical, and scornful world.

The early church had it. A small, struggling band, they had no great cathedrals in which to worship, they had been driven out of the temple and the synagogues, they had no political prestige or standing in the cities; but something usually happened which broke up the ordinary routine of the city life, and caused people to turn aside and pay attention to matters quite contrary to their ordinary and accustomed program. These early Christians had gumption, zeal, enthusiasm. Their love for God was at white heat, and the Holy Ghost was the motivating power. They hazarded their lives, not for fame, honor, or fortune, *but for Christ*. "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church."

George Fox, the founder of the Society of Friends, was so strongly grounded in instructive truths and so full of the Holy Ghost who made him irresistible in his conflicts with the university graduates of his day, that Bancroft says: "They trembled and shook as he drew near; it was a dreadful thing to them when it was told them, 'The man in leathern breeches is come.'" We must keep the heart in our religion.

Dr. Lockyear said: "We have lost the thrill of Christian living. It is too drab and commonplace, uneventful, artificial, superficial, and matter-of-fact. We do not have the spirit of the men of the Old Testament, who jeopardized their lives upon the high places of the field, nor the passion of Barnabas and Paul of the New Testament, as they risked their lives for the sake of the name of the Lord Jesus. We are too cold and heartless and passionless. There is no sensation in being a Christian nowadays. We serve God too cheaply. We are not lured by the heroic and sacrificial life to which Jesus calls us. The average professing Christian has no more enthusiasm for Christ, nor willingness to do, and to dare, and to experience the thrill and fascination of serving Him absolutely and entirely than has a tomcat.

Plenty of frills, but no thrills; plenty of talk, but no dramatic action; religion in abundance, but it is not red enough with sacrificial blood." Dr. Masee says: "Something has happened that is widespread in extent and vital in character, so as to leave one with a sense of impending disaster to the present church organization. This is my diagnosis of the condition: "The majority of church members have lost—Their belief in, reverence for, and reading of the Bible; their consciousness of God; a definite experience of regeneration; any conscious sense of the guilt of sin; their desire for holiness; their belief in the reality of Hell; their vital testimony to a real experience of Christ; their separation from the world; their communion with God; their fellowship with the saints; their compassion for the lost; their vital interest in missions; their Gospel of redemption; their habit of and power in praying." Out of this has developed an attitude of spiritual indifference, a moral lethargy, from which it is almost impossible to arouse them; an attitude of defeat on the part of leaders of the church who display an inferiority complex which has robbed the preaching of its militant note of authority and power. How are the mighty fallen!"

A young atomic scientist some time ago was pushing some material with his pencil on his desk while others were watching. He had done it many times, but he missed this time. He got too close—a brilliant flash! He threw himself over the burning material, and thus saved the lives of the other men, but he died a slow death from radiation.

Men risk their lives for many causes: The soldier for victory and country, the sportsman for excitement, the explorer for gratification of curiosity, the Alpine climber for credit, the artist for fame, the sailor for the love of the sea, the scientist for knowledge, and some—just for a thrill.

So evidently we are in a day when there is no apparent lack of men and women who are willing to risk their lives in hazardous tasks, and attempt the impossible—to do and to dare and to die. For the sake of commerce, science, and worldly fame, for the sake of riches and honor, and sometimes, for cheap applause of a crowd seeking a thrill, there are those who are ready to risk life and limb in the performance of something spectacular. The world issues its call for volunteers to devote themselves to tasks involving hardship and danger, and there is an immediate rush to face the challenge.

But what about the call of Christ? Are there no thrills in serving Him? For two thousand years He has been sounding the trumpet, calling upon men and women to hazard their lives for His sake, to respond to His challenge, and to enter His soul-stirring service with its high endeavor and glorious achievements. There are dangers and difficulties to be overcome, and a glorious reward at the end; not merely worldly applause and passing fame, but a crown that will not fade away, and laurels that will last throughout eternity. He has been calling down through the centuries for those who are willing to become martyrs for His sake. He is ever seeking those who are willing to enter the warfare from which there is no discharge. All who enlist beneath

His banner need count the cost, for it is a call to sacrifice, to soul-throbbing experience. Scars, sobs, tears, sorrows, suffering, sacrifice, self-denial, etc., are wrapped up in true discipleship.

In the courtyard of the Roman prison they were grinding the axe to cut off Paul's head. About that time, Paul said, "Jailer, bring me some paper and a quill. I want to write my last will and testament." Is this what he wrote?

"Dear Timothy, I am having a terrible time. Nobody likes me. They all have it in for me. They don't even speak to me any more. They didn't elect me on the church board. I'm in jail, but I'm innocent. There isn't any justice in this world. I didn't do any harm at all, and here I am in jail. Timothy, if you follow in my footsteps, you will have all kinds of trouble; they will beat you, put you in jail, and probably kill you. They are about ready to kill me now. Nobody loves me. I'm in an awful fix."

No, no, the grand old apostle did not write that way. He said: "Timothy, preach the same Gospel I have preached. Don't compromise the truth. Endure affliction; do the work of an evangelist, be instant in season and out of season; preach the truth at all seasons. Be a good soldier, Timothy."

"I am ready to depart. There will be no opening of the jail this time. Rome is my last stop in the heavenly blueprint. I have finished my course. The next stop is Heaven. Good-bye to jails, bleeding, suffering, pain, shipwrecks, unkind treatment. I am turning my face toward the dawning of God's new day, in God's eternal city, where no sorrow or sighing or pain or suffering shall ever come. Good-bye, Timothy. I won't see you again until the Marriage Supper. Do the work of an evangelist."

In the call of Christ there is enough romance, sensation, and fascination to stir and satisfy the spirit of the most adventurous in the incomparable service of Christ. Think of this in regard to soul passion for the lost. Jesus said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"—Matt. 23:37. Do you not feel the thrill, the fascination, the sensation in that appeal? Do you not feel the suffering, the self-denial, the passion, the longing, the heartache? "Thrill" is a poor word to use, a cheap word, but you know what I mean by it. The world knows because it is thinking in this term.

Early Methodism knew how to agonize for the lost. That is why they had power to turn the world upside down. We have been busy organizing, but have lost the thrill of agnozing. One may protest that it is not necessary to exercise such travail over men and women in their sins, but the testimony of the Word and of those who have been mightily used of God is that souls are won only as Heaven is stormed. When Zion travails she brings forth.

In a great measure we have lost such passion, lost the thrill of such Christian living. We have become too cold, mechanical, and formal. Love is not burning on the altar of the heart. We have become so used to the thud of lost souls, as they march to a Christless eternity, that we forget the eternal misery, the terrible doom which awaits them. It was this burning love, this burning passion, that sent Paul and Barnabas out to hazard their lives. It was the thrill of Christian living, of sharing the Master's passion, which made them jeopardize their lives. Talk about thrills. What can compare with leading souls to Christ. I heard William Jennings Bryan hold eight thousand people in the spell of his unmatched eloquence. As we walked off the platform, I asked, "Mr. Bryan, what was the greatest thrill you ever had?" He put his big hand on my shoulder, and said, "It was not when I was nominated for the presidency of the Democratic Party three times; not when I spoke to

multitudes of men, nor when I sat in council with President Wilson and statesmen deciding international issues. The greatest thrill I ever had was when I sat in a hotel room in St. Louis and led a great politician to Christ." Friends, have you ever been instrumental in leading a soul to Christ?

Many young people of today are so occupied with sordid pleasures and amusements that wholesome, innocent amusement seems tame and uninteresting. "That's no fun!" they say. But is the church going to cater to that sort of perverted fun appetite? If we attempt it, we will not win the world, but the world will win us.

Adults sometimes remark, "Well, you can't expect young people to do nothing but just pray and read the Bible and go to church all the time!" What an unfortunate thing to say in the presence of young people, saved or unsaved. "*Just* pray and read the Bible." As though such religious activities were so tame and stale that live young people would die of boredom! As though praying, Bible reading, and church going were life's bitter medicine that had to be swallowed, so that we could do pleasanter things! According to the testimony of both young and old, there is more solid pleasure and joy, even for a young person, in spiritual activities, in communing with God, in divine public worship, in united service for souls than in all the purely social activities and sports in the world. Then let's tell young people the truth! We need some social fun, that's true. We need some outdoor play and exercise. But it's the terribly distorted emphasis, the devilish insinuation against the spiritual life, that needs rebuking.

"But it is not the spiritual young people we are thinking about!" says one; "it's the unsaved young people we are trying to attract." Attract to what—to our parties or to Christ? "But we want to attract them to our parties in order that we might attract them to Christ." It is possible for a party to be conducted and climaxed and followed up in a way that the attendant is attracted to Christ, but few are. Very few people have ever been won to Christ through a social program.

After all, the best way to attract is by showing our primary stock in trade. Does an automobile salesman display neckties in order to attract attention to his car? No, he displays the car. Who ever heard of a car dealer enticing the public into his place of business by so decorating the windows and doorways with dry goods that the customer wouldn't know he was selling cars until he got inside? The customer would consider himself deceived, and would resent it. No, the dealer washes the windows and arranges his gleaming new cars on the floor in such a way that the passer-by sees nothing else. "Sirs, we would see Jesus."

The joy of the Lord in our hearts, a glad testimony, fervent prayers, victorious, kindly, friendly, clean living, are our stock in trade. If that does not attract, then the church has no business to attract at all. More young people have been secretly disappointed in the church because it has displayed everything but vital religion than have been disappointed because spiritual exercises were made the dominant attraction, with the social functions kept casual and incidental. Our real problem is spiritual. What are we trying to achieve, basically, if not the establishment of young people in a satisfactory, stable, useful, experience with Christ? Is not our goal the solution of the problem of "chronic seekers," and hardened, worldly young people?

It may be that churches ought to provide moderately for the athletic and social life of its youth when these are not wholesomely and adequately provided for in the public schools and community functions; but that is not the primary function of the church. It would be well to remember the advice given by Horace Greeley when church officials had enumerated all the schemes and devices they had used to attract and hold people, and were at their wit's end to know what to try next. "Why not try religion?" he asked.

Instead of racking our brains for something new and clever in the way of entertainment, why not begin developing activities of positive Christian service? Why not begin challenging young people with the thrill and joy of witnessing, of helping the needy, of doing something for others? I realize that having a good time is the big subject in the minds of many adolescents; but how are they going to learn differently if a constructive program of service is not worked out in which older young people set the example?

One Sunday afternoon a group of young people was taken by their pastor to sing for shut-ins. In the group was a high school senior who had been lately converted. The church had been worrying about how to "hold" her. But this day, after visiting several homes, she said, "I've had more real joy in doing this than in anything I have ever done." That girl is a married woman now, and a faithful, skilled worker in the church, not just a religious butterfly. Many more young people would respond similarly if we gave them a chance.

David Brainerd, apostle to the Indians, wrote: "I cared not where or how I lived, or what hardships I went through, so that I could gain souls for Christ." There is not only a thrill in this, but there is a lasting reward. "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

Is there no challenge, no heroism, in being a courageous Christian?

Folks can yell themselves hoarse at a ball game, yet they are dumb when it comes to praying in prayer meeting or to speaking a word for Christ. Many are courageous so far as sport and business are concerned, but faint-hearted and miserably cowardly in regard to Christ's name and His cause.

We need a revival of heroism for Christ which will make men dare to do things for Him. It was not the persecution, the stones, the fire, the sword, etc., that made the saints of the past such heroes for Christ; but it was their spirituality and daring for God that brought the persecution and the stake. They hazarded their lives for Christ. Think of the thrill that must have come to Father Ripley and Bishop Latimer as they went to the stake. Bishop Latimer said: "Father Ripley, play the man today, and we will light a fire in England that will not go out."

Think of the heroism of the early Methodists. The Wesleys, Whitefield, Fletcher, Adam Clarke, Bramwell, etc., were assaulted with stones, sticks and dirt; they were rotten-egged, mobbed time and again; were called dogs, villians, rogues; were clubbed, had dogs set on them, and were arrested. Through a period of over half a century this group of men suffered for the sake of what they most firmly believed to be the Gospel of Christ. They were heroically courageous, and full of unselfish devotion; they counted nothing, not even life itself, as a sacrifice too great to offer if only they might preach the Gospel as their conscience dictated. Are we not serving God too cheaply today with our weak-kneed, cowardly, spineless attitude?

What we need is to recover the thrill to which this exalted life calls us, and to get back the old-time throb of these men who were so willing to surrender their lives for Christ. We need to get back that spirit, that passion, which made men of old risk their lives for Christ. The early disciples smiled their way through threats, rejoiced their way through stripes, sang their way through prisons, and triumphed their way through death. Multitudes watching them found themselves desiring what the disciples had.

How may we get back this spiritual passion this holy enthusiasm, this divine heroism? We must learn how to lose ourselves in the will of God, must fling reputation to the winds, must make ourselves a nuisance to the devil, must live nearer to the heroic Christ, must allow our lives to be swayed by the Victor of Calvary and

the empty tomb. There must be a great separation from the pleasures and pursuits of the world.

We must be baptized with the Holy Ghost. He gives not only cleansing but also His passion for the lost. C.T. Studd said: "The fiery baptism of the Holy Ghost will change soft, sleek Christians into hot, lively heroes for Christ, who will advance, fight, and die, but will not merely mark time."

The world still waits for Spirit-possessed souls for men and women who are willing to attempt the heroic for Christ's sake. The hour is late; we are living in the Saturday night of the world's history.

The eternal Sabbath is about to dawn. Will you respond to the clarion call for self-sacrifice, and place yourself with alacrity and gladness upon the altar of Christ, and allow the Holy Ghost to use you?

Young people, as you leave this school with your training, you can be just ordinary Christians and workmen for Christ, you can go along with the crowd of professors, or you can step out from that crowd and do things for Him. To do this means sacrifice, courage, daring. It means: To hold God's standard high when much of the church is clamoring to have it lowered; to speak out against existing evils when it would be to your advantage to keep silent in the church; to be strict in your life when it would be easier to be liberal; to do the will of God when all the world is opposed to the doing of it; to refuse to compromise when the policy of the Christian world is to go that way; to step into the breach when others refuse because of the burdens and annoyances entailed.

Don't be afraid to stand for the right, to stand for principles. Hold to principles when others are throwing them to the winds. By God's grace, you *can* meet the challenge of this age.



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