

THE POWER OF CHRIST

SERMONS BY TEXAS BAPTIST PASTORS

Compiled by

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SERMON ELEVEN

THE CHALLENGE OF CHRIST TO WIN THE LOST

By

Dr. Harold L. Fickett,

Pastor, First Baptist Church, Galveston, Texas

“Follow me and I will make you fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19).

“They that turn many to righteousness (shall shine) as the stars forever and ever” (Daniel 12:3).

A group of deacons were one night discussing equipment, property and finances, when the pastor said, “I want to bring you the good news that 394 of our members have pledged to try to win at least one soul for Christ and the church during this year.”

Quick as a flash, one of the deacons answered, “Brethren, we have been much concerned about equipment, property and finances, but if these do not culminate in the all-important work of winning the lost to Christ, we have wasted our time and our money.”

There was the gist of all organized work in that layman’s statement.

People are “Saved to Serve,” and surely they serve best as they answer the challenge of Christ to win the lost.

A study of the life of Christ, as it is recorded in the Gospels, will reveal the fact that his outstanding challenge to his followers was to win the lost. As a background for this message I would have you look briefly at three incidents taken from his life:

Four men were fishing on the Sea of Galilee one day, when Jesus came along and challenged them. It was not a challenge to make money, or to win fame and position, or even to be the pioneers in a great religious movement that should encircle the globe. But his challenge to them was, **“Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.”**

A little later on the opposite side of the Sea of Galilee, he met the raving maniac, who for years had inhabited the graveyard, and freed him from the hold of a legion of demons.

That man, out of the gratitude of his heart, begged for the privilege of going with Jesus. Instead of allowing his plea, Jesus challenged him, “**Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee. And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him; and all men did marvel**” (Mark 5:19-20).

The Cross was behind. The resurrection had been accomplished and, during forty days, had been proven to the last disciple. Jesus stood on Mt. Olivet. Only a few precious moments remained, ere he should be taken from their sight in the “Celestial Special.”

In his heart there was one final message, one resounding challenge. Much had happened since that eventful morning of the first challenge by the Sea of Galilee, when Jesus had said, “**Follow me.**” Indeed, those men had greatly changed. But the challenge was still the same. The passing of time had not, and still does not, in any way affect the challenge. Jesus spoke once more. “**Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature.**”

It was the Great Commission because it was the Great Challenge. Suddenly he departed to be at the right hand of God the Father. And as the disciples left the scene of that wonderful event, there still rang in their ears that challenge, “**Go!**”

We would in the name of the Captain of our salvation pass this challenge on to you, the great challenge of him concerning whom the hymn writer sang:

“He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never sound retreat;
He is sifting out the souls of men before His judgment seat.
O be swift, my soul, to answer Him! Be jubilant, my feet!
Our God is marching on.”

Permit me to discuss the challenge of Christ to win the lost under three headings:

I. The Challenge of Christ to Win the Lost is a Challenge to a Superlative Occupation—Fishers of Men

Those early disciples, by trade fishermen, knew boats, nets, seas and the winds. They knew fish and the markets. They had been trained from their youth in the trade of their forebears; they were fishermen. But Jesus, valuing human souls above the lilies of the field, above the sparrows of the air, above the swine beside Genesaret, yea, above the combined value of all the world was to take them from their lowly task as fishermen and make them “**Fishers of men.**” He valued that task, then a superlative occupation, and to this day it remains the same. I make this assertion for three reasons:

a. *It is a superlative occupation because of the eternal value of souls.*

As surely as we are here, eternal destinies hang in the balance as we deal in the all-important task of soul-winning.

We are told that the angels of heaven rejoice over one sinner that repents, so happy is heaven itself to welcome another into the eternal fold. It means that death is forever past, and that a soul for which Christ died has been clothed upon with eternal life.

We cannot calculate the value of a soul, for we cannot calculate what a never-ending Hell means, or what a never-ending Heaven means. It will take eternity to teach us the full value of a single soul.

When the polite and cultured City of Paris remonstrated with its favorite Christian Leader, Francis Xavier, because he meant to go alone and unarmed to a savage country, he nobly said: "If these lands had scented woods and mines of gold, Christians would find courage to go there, or would all the perils of the world prevent them. Now they are alarmed because there is nothing to be gained but the souls of men.

"Shall love be less hardy and less generous than avarice?

"You say they will destroy me with poison. It is an honor to which such a sinner as I am may not aspire.

"But this I dare say: That whatsoever form of torture or death awaits me, I am ready to suffer it 10,000 times over for the salvation of one single soul!"

Such was his estimate of the value of one soul. Certainly it ought to be ours.

b. It is a superlative occupation because of the need of the world.

The world today needs Christ. Lloyd George was right when he said, "It is Christ or chaos."

The councils of men have plainly failed. But there is balm in Gilead for the world's ills. That balm is Jesus the Christ.

I read with a great deal of interest some time ago the account of an outbreak of diphtheria in the north country and of the nation-wide concern for the people there. I dare say that we all followed the efforts of one after another to aid in rushing the life-saving anti-toxin to that stricken area. The admiration of an entire country was aroused because of the heroic efforts of that noble dog team. They reached the settlement in time to save the lives of a community. Greater is the remedy that we have for the world. That remedy is Jesus. But in the spirit of those who rushed the anti-toxin to a stricken community, we who know him, must take him to a sin-sick world.

Recently in my own city, a great preacher from the north stood before a luncheon club. Candidly he faced the problem of the world in its efforts to find a leader. Then as he reached the conclusion of his address, made before many unbelievers and those who scoffed at the religion of Christ, this humble servant of the Lord Jesus said, "I do not hesitate or tremble to mention the name of Him who can meet the needs of this world. He is the Son of Righteousness. His name is Jesus."

We have the message, and in answer to the challenge of Christ, we ought to go afield with him as the anti-toxin for the world's life. The poet was right when he sang:

“I know of lands that are sunk in shame,
Of hearts that faint and tire,
But I know a Name, a Name, a Name
That can set those lands on fire.”

Ours is the great business to make Him known to the world.

c. It is a superlative occupation because the adversary is putting on an unrelenting campaign to lure the people today from the paths of righteousness.

If there has ever been a battle against the world, the flesh and the devil, that battle is being waged today with renewed zeal. The leadership of the coming generation reposes in the young people. Satan is bidding for that leadership. On every hand may be seen such evidences that there need be no argument.

If the battle is to be won for our Lord Jesus, it must be won through the personal efforts of those who are saved and who are willing to come into close quarters with friends and associates and tell them of a Saviour, who gave His all for people that they might have the more abundant life. The battle must be won for Christ in close quarters.

The story is told of a young Roman soldier who received his first sword, and on his way to battle, went by home to tell his mother goodbye. While visiting with her he complained, “But the sword is too short.”

His mother, a loyal Roman woman, answered her son, in loving words, “If you add a step to it, it will be long enough.”

History records the fact that Rome enlarged her borders as her loyal citizens added a step to their short broad swords.

Into the hands of Christians has been placed the broad sword of salvation. It is ours to add a step to it, not in a warfare unto death, and conquest for territory; but in a warfare for the conquest of eternal souls unto life everlasting in answering the challenge of our Great Commander.

II. The Challenge of Christ to Win the Lost is a Challenge to Make an Adequate Preparation

“Follow me and I will make you . . .”

Any worthwhile task calls for adequate preparation. Jesus gave three years of intensive training to the Twelve. They spent those sacred years in earnest preparation to meet a great challenge. Today, to answer the challenge we, too, must make at least a fourfold preparation.

a. There must be the preparation of salvation.

I once knew of a life insurance company that demanded of its agents that they hold a policy in the company before they were allowed to go out and try to sell a policy to others. Their reasoning was sound. They believed that if a man himself was not well enough sold on the service to own a policy, he could hardly be able to sell it to others. The same principle applies to soul winning. I care not how fine the character of an individual may be, he cannot successfully win others until he himself has come to know Jesus Christ as a personal Saviour. Besides, the normal fruit of a Christian life ought to be another Christian.

I once heard of a splendid young man who was teaching a class of boys, but was himself unsaved. He complained that he did not seem to have much influence in leading his boys to make a decision for Christ. However, it was not long after that he was brought face to face with the necessity of confessing Christ himself first, that he made the great decision.

Then in a remarkably short time, he won all of his boys.

There must be conviction.

We must believe that, just as the Bible says, men are lost eternally without Jesus Christ. We are living in a day when this teaching is largely scoffed at by the world. But before we can answer the challenge of Christ to win the lost we must believe with all of our hearts that **“There is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.”** And we must believe that Jesus meant exactly what He said when He declared, **“I am the way, the truth and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me.”**

We must have definite Bible Conviction on the all-important matter of the salvation of the lost through Jesus only.

Then there must be the preparation of meditation. The world may laugh at the idea of prayer, but it is the one method of tapping the source of power in soul-winning. I point you to that early group, who, commissioned to preach the gospel to the world, went into a ten days' prayer meeting, and emerged in the triumph of power to witness the conversion in a single day of three thousand souls.

Paul, a man whose life challenges our admiration, was converted on the road to Damascus, and then commissioned to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. He did little more than give witness unto his salvation, until he spent several years in the loneliness of the desert in meditation and communion with God.

He then emerged to shake two continents and to shape the history of the world during the Christian era.

In answering the supreme challenge to win the lost, we need to tap the source of unlimited and infinite power through the God-given channels of prayer and meditation.

d. There must be the preparation of separation.

If there is anything we need today, it is separation from the world on the part of those who name the name of Christ, and who seek to win others to know Him as a Saviour. Too often we find saved people who try to live a double life. As a result they lose the respect of both the world and the Christians. A divided life is a powerless life.

They are a good deal like that man of whom I once heard. He lived in the border territory between the north and the South during the Civil War days. He had friends on both sides. He did not want to take a stand, and was in a dilemma as to what he should do. One night he figured it all out. He decided that he would get a coat of blue and trousers of gray. Then in the heat of battle one day he happened to get out in the sight of both armies. His strategy proved fatal, for the Confederates shot him in the coat, while the Yankees shot him in the trousers.

We must, if we would be Christians of power, answer the challenge with a stand that can never be doubted, and by our action tell the world that in Christ there is joy that knows no bounds.

A pastor was one day confronted by two young ladies, who were vexed at his request for separation on the part of his young people. They argued that he was almost alone in his desire for such. However, the pastor reasoned with them, showing the sacrifice of Christ for them, and, if living a life of separation meant sacrifice, they could do no less for Him, who gave His all.

They, after prayer, agreed that the pastor was correct. These two young women became powers for Christ. One of them became a missionary and blessed a whole region by her consecrated life. The other married. In time she fell the victim of the "white plague." After vainly seeking for health she came back to her home city, and, there in a great hospital, her sweet Christian spirit was so manifest that at her death the head nurse gave the testimony that every life that this woman touched came to know Jesus as a Saviour. Power may be ours to answer the challenge if we will only make the preparation of separation.

III. The Challenge of Christ to Win the Lost Is a Challenge to Receive Unbounded Remuneration

"They that turn many to righteousness (shall shine) as the stars forever and ever" (Daniel 12:3).

We turn to our second text. Here is God's precious promise of unbounded remuneration for soul winning.

Our Father is not unmindful of the greatness of the task of soul-winning. Hence, in His Book, methinks He has left the realm of the terrestrial for realms celestial to find a figure of speech to describe the glories that shall crown the efforts of those who answer the challenge of His Son. Not the finest gems are promised to those who win souls, for mere gems would be far too cheap. But something like unto the glorious constellations of the heavens shall be heaven's reward for soul winning.

What a contrast is here presented to the wages of sin, which is death.

Paul, incarcerated in a Roman prison, referred to the saints at Philippi as “**my joy and my crown.**” In the darkness of those dismal surroundings, the thought of the precious souls won at great personal cost to himself, set his heart to singing the wondrous “Prison Psalm,” the Book of Philippians.

The joyful remuneration of soul-winning can be told more forcibly by the use of two illustrations:

An older sister was preparing to go out for an evening of pleasure in the realms of the world; in her hair there had been placed one of those adornments which sparkled as though it were ablaze with hundreds of tiny suns. Her little sister looked at the thing of beauty admiringly. The older sister said in jest, “When you get big, father will not be able to find an ornament for your hair as beautiful as this.”

The young sister answered, “But I shall have one, far more beautiful.”

Much surprised, the older sister inquired, “How will that be?”

“Why,” said the younger sister, “my Sunday school teacher told me that if I would win souls for Christ I should have jewels in my crown as bright as the stars of heaven. That is even brighter than the one you have. And, sister, I am going to win souls for Christ.”

That big sister went her way, but the pleasure she sought was as elusive as the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Early she returned to her home, and to her room; not to rest, but to fight the battle of her soul. Through the long hours of the night the battle raged.

As the first rays of the light of dawn appeared above the horizon, light eternal broke into her own soul, and with it there came a joy that never before had she known. In the ecstasy of that experience, she stole to the room where her little sister was sleeping, and gathering the little one in her arms, she smothered her with the kisses of gratitude as she exclaimed for joy: “Sister, I have come to tell you that already you have won your first jewel for an eternal crown. Your first jewel is your own big sister.”

Who can describe the unbounded joys of soul-winning? No transit or surveyor’s chain can ever measure them!

May God help you to answer the challenge of Christ in such a way as to become the recipients of eternal blessings, which will grow sweeter as the years go by.

Last winter, in the cab of the locomotive that pulled one of our fastest night trains between Galveston and Dallas, it was my privilege to ride with an engineer who has come to be my friend.

During the ride of that night the engineer asked me if I knew Dr. A. W. Lamar, formerly pastor of the First Baptist Church of Galveston. I replied that I knew him, and that I was expecting him back again soon, and would see that my engineer friend met him.

Not long afterward, Dr. Lamar was in the city. I took him down to the station to meet this engineer friend of mine, for that morning he was bringing the train into Galveston. As the great locomotive came to a standstill, the engineer came down to where we stood. For the first time in forty years these two men met.

The reason my engineer friend wanted to see Dr. Lamar became apparent as I listened to his simple words of gratitude.

He said: "Dr. Lamar, you do not remember me. But back in about 1892 I attended the First Baptist Church here, when you were the pastor. That night you preached a sermon that went home to my heart. My life was changed that night.

"I chose the path of righteousness in those days when everything connected with the life I lived tended to draw me away from the course you outlined. My fellow trainmen tried by one way and another, by sarcasm, persecution and ridicule, to make me quit that path. But through the years I have stayed with my resolution of that night. My critics are gone! Blessings beyond the power to express have been mine.

"I owe a lasting debt of gratitude to you. And I had hoped, before either of us should leave this earth that I would have an opportunity to tell you in my simple way the appreciation that is in my heart. May God bless you."

My heart beat a bit faster. It seemed to almost pound in unison with the puffing of that locomotive, beside which we were standing. Once more they grasped hands, and said goodbye for the last time, for Dr. Lamar was then eighty-five years of age, had been preaching for sixty-seven years, and has since "gone home."

As we walked away, neither of us said much for a bit, and then Dr. Lamar said, "All the labor of sixty-seven years would have been more than repaid had this been the only trophy that I had to bring to my Lord. I know His '**Well done, thou good and faithful servant**' will greet me on yonder shore."

The joys far greater than tongue can tell will be the portion of those who answer the challenge of Christ to win the lost.

May we hear in our inmost hearts the yearning pleas of Christ as He says to each Christian:

WANTED—Hearts to love the masses,
Hearts to help Him seek the lost,
Hearts to help Him save all classes,
Hearts to help Him save the lost"

Dr. Harold Lord Fickett was born at Galveston, Tex., Aug. 4, 1889. Education, Baylor U., Columbia U. School of Mines & Engineering (B.S. and D.D.). Ordained, Aug. 26, 1924. Pastorates: Douglas, Ariz., 2 years; Mt. Washington Baptist Church, Kansas City, Mo., 1924-29; Galveston, Tex., May 12, 1929 to date.

First Baptist Church, Galveston, has 1625 members (resident) Since May 12, 1929, under Dr. Fickett's ministry, there have been 22153 additions. Total contributions have been \$229,000. Their record S. S. attendance is 2,092. Total value of their church property is \$150,000 and a new \$100,000 auditorium will be built soon (All statistics as of Dec. 15, 1937).

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