

HIS TOUCH HAS STILL ITS ANCIENT POWER

by

THOMAS B. REES

Printed @ August 1945

CHAPTER NINE -

WORKING WITH GOD

"I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye. Be not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding" (Psalm 32:8, 9)

A TREMENDOUS AMOUNT OF ENERGY is wasted in spiritual work because it is misdirected. Often without seeking the guidance of the HOLY SPIRIT we make our plans and then when we have everything cut and dried, we pray for GOD's blessing. Surely it would be far better first to wait on GOD, receive His instructions, then go forward assured of His blessing. His commands are His enablings.

One of the reasons why the early Christians were so much more effective than we are, was that their activities were directed by the HOLY SPIRIT. "As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate Me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them . . . so they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed" (Acts 13:2, 4).

I believe that this "Plan first, Pray afterwards" attitude is the result of a fundamentally wrong conception of the true nature of Christian service. This conception is reflected in such a phrase as "the work that I am doing for GOD." Contrast this language with that of the New Testament: "The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself; but the Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works" (John 14:10). And again, "We are labourers together with GOD" (I Corinthians 3:9).

My fellow Christians, let us not look upon ourselves as workers for GOD, but rather as workers together with GOD. Once get this slant on things and our service will soon be transformed, for we shall no longer rely upon human wisdom and energy, but upon the guidance and power of the HOLY SPIRIT.

The MASTER had this point in mind when He said, **"Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you"** (John 15:15).

The majority of us find this question of guidance no easy matter, for in it, perhaps more than in anything else, the chief difficulty is to avoid extremes.

The enthusiast, who without previous prayer founded a missionary society, and the student who prayed in vain at great length for guidance as to which tie he ought to wear, were both wrong!

The first because he used his human judgment apart from Divine Guidance, and the second because he sought Divine Guidance without using his common sense.

In the morning we pray that GOD will guide our footsteps safely through the day and we trust Him to do it. But when we cross the main road we wisely keep our eyes open.

When the Apostles sought guidance they prayed and came together to consider the matter; afterwards they tell us that the decision "**seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us**" (Acts 15:28).

Not often is the SPIRIT's guidance contrary to our God-given faculty of judgment, but it is clear that occasionally the problem is completely beyond our natural power.

Some pray for guidance who should be praying for a willing and obedient spirit. A gypsy stood at the cross-roads. Three times she threw the stick in the air, letting it fall to the ground.

"Why did you do that?" asked a passer-by.

"Because," replied the gypsy, "I want to know which is the right road for me to take. I go whichever way my stick points."

"But why throw the stick three times?"

"Because, not until the third time did it point in the direction I want to go."

How often have we prayed and searched our Bibles, not to discover GOD's will for us, but merely in the hope that GOD will endorse what we want to do.

Others pray for guidance who should be praying for grit - grit to continue the task that GOD has already given them. Maybe the discouraged missionary is praying for guidance to be sent home to do deputation work, while, at home, some other Christian is praying for guidance to the mission field, to avoid the irksome daily round and common task!

Personally I usually find that the Lord guides me unconsciously. I commit my way to Him at the beginning of the day, and I have often discovered later that a chance remark or odd incident are all part of His plan.

May I give two examples of what I mean?

At a meeting in London there was amongst my congregation a young man who had just concluded his school days at one of England's leading public schools. I had no previous knowledge of him, but a friend of his had been trying for many months to win him for CHRIST. Earlier that evening Cyril had called for his friend Martin to persuade him to come to the meeting.

"Martin," he said, "I want you to come with me to a meeting."

"I'm awfully sorry, old chap, I really can't. You see as a reward for having passed my exam, Father is standing me a cruise in the Mediterranean. I leave Victoria Station at ten to-morrow morning."

However, Cyril was persistent, and won the day. Martin accompanied him. At least, his body accompanied him, but his mind was far away on the blue waters where he was to spend the next ten days.

Early in my address I pointed out that to commit sin one did not have to be vicious, but that sin very often took a negative form. "**To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin**" (James 4:17). I illustrated this from the story of the prophet Jonah, showing how GOD had called his servant to preach to Nineveh, but he had turned his back on that great commission and chosen instead his own ease and comfort.

Then I said something which, even as I said it, struck me as irrelevant.

"Can't you see Jonah," I said, "going down the road, wearing his best clothes, brand new suitcase in hand, when a friend stops him: 'Hullo, Jonah, where are you going?'"

'Me? Oh, I'm off for a ten days' cruise on the Mediterranean.'"

Martin sat up with a start. Up to this moment he had been far away, but the words, "A ten days' cruise on the Mediterranean" brought him back with a jerk. "How does this man know about me?" he thought. "He's never heard of me!"

After that he listened to every word with rapt attention. His friend walked home with him afterwards, and before they parted that night Martin had accepted CHRIST as his SAVIOUR. He wrote from the Mediterranean to say, "Jonah's GOD is mine." He too learned that "**Salvation is of the Lord.**"

I was crossing the Atlantic on S.S. "Aquitania," and had prayed that I might be placed at a table where I could be of some service. I found myself beside an officer in the Merchant Navy, and two vivacious American girls, who had been "Doing Europe," and were having a "swell time," and making the very most of the last few days of their vacation.

I knew that ahead of me in the United States was a very heavy schedule, so I made the most of the leisure time which the Atlantic crossing afforded me for prayer and preparation.

Apart from meal times I did not have much opportunity of seeing my table companions. However, we got on splendidly when we met. After lunch each day we went up and had coffee in the lounge. About 2:30 the lights were turned down for the afternoon cinema performance.

"Well, I must be going for my walk round the deck," I said. "Mr. Rees, why don't you ever stay for the movies?"

"I'd rather walk round the deck," I replied.

"Don't you like movies?"

"No, they don't interest me."

It was the same in the evening when the dancing began. "Don't you like dancing, Mr. Rees?" they said.

"Can you dance?"

"Yes, I can, but I am not interested in dancing now."

They told me all about themselves, their homes, and future careers. They were most anxious to know what was my job in life. I kept them guessing, until one of them, Greta Herling I will call her, said, "I know, he's a finnan-seer." This sounded like a strange species of haddock, until it was translated to me as "financier" (if only they could have seen my bank balance!)

The days passed, and although I sought guidance, I was not led to speak to them directly concerning spiritual things. I suppose seeing me say grace for meals and attend Sunday service, they must have thought me a rather religious brand of "finnan-seer," but as I look back upon it now, I can see quite clearly that in the round of gaiety they were enjoying on that transatlantic liner, a word spoken then would not have been in season.

As we breakfasted on the last day, sailing into New York harbour, I hoped for an opportunity to speak a word for the MASTER, but in the rush and excitement of landing it was not to be. I could not help wondering if I had failed in my responsibility towards my travelling companions.

A few weeks later, in New York, Greta Herling was having her supper after returning from the office. The radio was on as usual, when suddenly Greta said, "I know that voice; be quiet everybody, listen. Why it's that finnan-seer who was on the 'Aquitania' with us. Mr. Rees was his name." She made her family listen quietly to the Gospel message I was privileged to give over the air.

She then wrote me a letter. "I understand now why you had no interest in the movies and the dancing on board ship. You had something better."

She went on to say how empty she felt life to be, and how much she wished she had something to satisfy her. I wrote back, telling her of the Lord JESUS who can save and satisfy, and explaining to her the way of salvation.

I have since heard from Greta that on receiving my letter she accepted CHRIST as her SAVIOUR.

During the weeks of pain that followed after David Livingstone's arm was torn by the teeth of the African lion, he must often have wondered why GOD permitted that sore trial. It was not until his death that the reason was revealed. When he died, his faithful followers buried his heart under a tree in Central Africa, and then, in spite of appalling difficulties, carried his body to the coast so that it could be brought to England.

When they at last arrived and told their story to the white men, their hearers refused to believe their tale, thinking it was only a trick to obtain money. At last one of the white men exclaimed: "If this is the body of Livingstone, there will be marks of the lion's teeth in his arm." And so today countless people receive inspiration as they stand at the great missionary's tomb in Westminster Abbey.

We must never fall into the error of thinking that we are only guided on the occasions when we can see the proof of it. It is my belief that one day we shall learn that in innumerable ways the Lord overruled the small incidents of our earthly lives.

Many helpful books have been written and countless sermons preached on this subject of guidance, but when all is said and done the key to the situation, as indeed in all things, is just living day by day in close touch with CHRIST.

This is illustrated clearly in the various groups of men who gathered round the Lord during His ministry.

They can be divided into five distinct classes.

First the multitude, then the disciples, the seventy preachers, the nine Apostles, and finally, Peter, James, and John.

The multitudes understood little or nothing of what they heard for "**All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake He not unto them.**" To the multitudes He did not even declare the meaning of His parable, He merely concluded by, "**He that hath ears to hear let him hear,**" or, in other words, "If you have a mind to understand, you will understand."

The disciples not only heard the parables but to them CHRIST gave the interpretation. They understood more because they were in closer touch. But very rarely did our Lord speak to them apart from parables.

The seventy whom the MASTER sent forth - and here the circle narrows again - to them He spoke without parables; moreover, He commissioned them to teach and preach in His Name.

The nine Apostles were more than disciples, more than preachers. As members of the inner circle they enjoyed the constant companionship of the Son of GOD, walking and talking, eating and sleeping in His holy presence. He had chosen them that they "**should be with Him.**"

But Peter, James, and John formed the innermost circle of the disciples. They enjoyed an intimacy with their Lord to which others were strangers. An intimacy in prayer: "**Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee.**"

- An intimacy in revelation - on the mountain top.

- An intimacy in beholding His wonder-working touch of power - in the room of Jairus' daughter.

These and other privileges were theirs because they lived in closest communion with Him Who said: **"I am the Vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without Me ye can do nothing"**; (John 15:5).

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: **"As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him: Rooted and built up in Him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving"** (Colossians 2:6, 7).

~ end of chapter 9 ~
