

## **A QUEST FOR SOULS**

Comprising all the Sermons Preached and Prayers  
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### **TWENTY**

#### **NOON SERVICE, JUNE 22, 1917**

##### **PRELIMINARY REMARKS.**

In a moment I am to read a brief passage from the Scriptures, but before reading I would take time to follow up the earnest word said by the brother pastor, about our turning to the best possible account these two or three remaining days appointed for the special meeting.

There are some occasions far more favorable than others for helping people religiously. Such an occasion is a series of meetings in which the way is made easy and natural for you to ask people to come with you to the public services; and then when you have gone that far, the way is easy and natural, more than it ordinarily is, for you to follow up your invitation with the right kind of conversation and questioning and testimony about personal religion.

We must never get away from the immeasurably important truth that the personal element is indispensable in our witnessing and working for CHRIST. There are lives all about us that would be changed, if a conversation of a half hour or less, of the right sort were had with them. There are Christians in the darkness - they scarcely know why, or they may know why - who would be immediately changed for the better, if a conversation were had with them, by the right person, in the right way, at the right time. And there are people all about us, pre-occupied, and the things eternal have little place in their thoughts. Oh, if they could be spoken with, if they could be approached, if they could be appealed to, it they could be conversed with in the right way! I pray you, my fellow Christians, all of you and each of you, one by one, turn to the best account these days for helping the people.

A meeting like this - indeed, every meeting - ought to be constructive; and what an inspiring thing it is, when scores and hundreds of Christians, coming to the mid-day service, and the vaster number to the evening service, go out through the day, and as best they can, speak for CHRIST personally to the people. In this mid-day service, the preacher has desired earnestly each day to bring some simple but vital word, that would help us as we face the battle of daily life. He has

desired to call us all back to the simplicities and vitalities of life.

This morning, I am to speak to you on an old, but remarkably important theme, namely: "How May We Know JESUS Better?" That theme is suggested by the Scripture which I now read to you. You are ready to hear with reverence, as I read from the third chapter of the Epistle to the Philippians:

**"But what things were gain to me those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ and be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus."**

### HOW MAY WE KNOW JESUS BETTER?

Text: "**That I may know Him.**" - Philippians 3: 10.

One little sentence in the midst of those several sentences, points the message for us to-day: "**That I may know Him.**"

Paul's deepest and most fervent longing evidently was to know JESUS better, just as it should be our deepest longing to know JESUS better every day we live, because the knowledge most of all desirable and necessary is the knowledge of GOD in CHRIST. CHRIST came down to the world to show us the Father. "**He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.**" JESUS stood among men and said in effect to them: "I am GOD uncovered. When you see me, you see the Father - you see GOD." Now, the knowledge most of all desirable and necessary is the knowledge of GOD revealed in CHRIST JESUS the Saviour. Such knowledge gives us a grip on the great spiritual realities, and we need to have such knowledge, even above all other knowledge.

How much, then, do we know about JESUS now?

To begin with, how much does each man and woman, listening to me here know about JESUS now? Just what is your conception of CHRIST JESUS? Is CHRIST real to you, as some other person is real to you - real to you like mother, or Father, or dearest earthly loved one? How real is CHRIST to you?

We are never to lose sight of the fact that CHRIST is a person. He is not a principle - He is a person. He thinks, He lives, He commands, He feels. He is a person. The theory that GOD is a principle is fundamentally incorrect. GOD is not a principle at all. GOD announces principles. He teaches principles. A great person, He is behind them.

Now, how real is CHRIST to us, to begin with? How much do we know about Him to-day? He is

not some inspiring memory. He is not some vague dream. He is not some empty abstraction. He is a person, to be trusted and loved and followed forever - real as mother, real as teacher, real as physician, real as the most gracious, devoted earthly friend - a person. CHRIST is that to men. How real is He to us? How real is CHRIST to you? How much do you know about Him right now? How much does your inner nature know about CHRIST?

Some years ago, I was preaching to one of the universities of several hundred men, for several days, and the next to the last morning had come, when the senior class of thirty, with one exception, waited on me in a body. One of the men was not there, but the twenty-nine said: "We have come to ask how long you will be here?" I said: "This morning and in the morning, and then I must be away for my home."

They said: "We have come to ask you to pray specially for one of our seniors. We are to be graduated in a few weeks. Our class of thirty men are all Christians, save this one man."

And they were generous in their tributes to him.

They said: "He has the brightest mind in all the class, the keenest intellect in all the group, but he is an unbeliever outright. He does not accept what you are saying. He does not accept what we profess. Oh," said they, "do your best for him.' He insists that he must have facts, if he ever is to become a Christian; he must have facts. He insists that he is a scientist and must have facts." They said: "Do your best for him."

I went up the stairway to the chapel auditorium, and changed my subject as I came up those steps. "This man must have facts. Very well, I will give him a great fact, and let him reckon with that." And so I came, a few minutes later, with the text: "**He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself.**" And I asked the men: "What will you do with the fact of Christian experience? Once I did not know anything about CHRIST, and once the less I heard of Him the better it suited me. But He crossed my path in the preaching of His Gospel, and I was arrested. I was made serious. I prayed. I surrendered to Him, though it was as dark as midnight - and my conscience knows that He has spoken peace to me. Now, what will you do with that fact? What will you do with the fact of Christian experience? Here is the fact. What will you do with it?"

You remember that incident, do you not, of Dr. James Simpson, the eminent scientist? He had been waited upon, one day, by a group of fellow scientists, who would pay the distinguished scientist their respects and honor, and one spoke for the rest, telling him of the tribute in which the world held him as a scientist, and then presently said to him: "Sir James, if you should name your greatest discovery of all that you have ever made, what would that discovery be?" And in one moment Sir James Simpson's eyes were filled with tears, and he said: "My greatest discovery, gentlemen, is that JESUS CHRIST has forgiven my sins and saved me." What will you do now with the fact of Christian experience?

So those students followed me down to the president's office, from day to day, where for two hours each day I conversed privately with the students. I had not reached the president's office more than a moment, until there was a knock on the outer door, and I opened it, and there stood the skeptic.

I offered him a chair, and he said: "No, I needn't sit down. I will be through in just a moment." And then he was generous enough to say to me: "I believe in you, or I would not be here at all. I think you are entirely candid and sincere, or I would not be here at all. Now," he said, "you will forget that you are a preacher, and forget that I am a senior to be graduated in a few weeks, and answer a question I am going to put to you."

"Very well, young man; I will answer it if I can," I said, "and I will be entirely frank. If I can, I will answer your question, and if I cannot, I will tell you so."

"All right," he said, "here is my question: Mr. Truett, is JESUS CHRIST real to you, by which I mean, does your heart know, your life know, your brain know, your inner self know, that He helps you? Yes or no, is He real to you like that?"

Now, that was challenging me with a proposition very real and candid and searching. It was the acid test. What would you have said?

**Well, I will tell you what I said, if you will not look on it as offensively personal. I laid my hand on his shoulder, and I said: "Young man, if the truth is in me, if I know what the truth is, if I am not utterly bedarkened and deceived about the truth and about life and about all things, then I declare to you that JESUS is more real in His help to me than is any other being in the world.**

**When every other being has failed me, He has not failed me. When I have been on the storm-swept sea, and there was no chart, nor guide, nor rudder, nor compass for my little boat, and when the wild winds and waves beat over me and drove that boat, I called to Him, and said, 'Thou alone canst help.' And He answered back: 'I will help. Put your trust in me and be unafraid.' The one thing, young man, that my heart does know is that JESUS helps me.**"

And then he turned on his heel, his face serious, and he said: "I will seek Him," and he left my room.

The next morning came on, and I stood to make the last address to the college men, and I finished and said: "Now the cab waits at the door for me. I must hurry to the train to get back to my home, but before I go, has another man tried JESUS, just honestly surrendered his case, doubts, darkness, fears, sins, difficulties, questions - all of it? Has he surrendered his case to CHRIST? Does another man say: 'I have done that?' Before I go I wish he would walk down the aisle and take my hand."

And the clever skeptic back yonder started toward me, and the men saw him, and they threw their hats to the ceiling, they were so moved, and then hundreds of them bowed at their pews and sobbed, for the carping skeptic was coming out of the darkness into the light. He just tried CHRIST. He just gave up to CHRIST.

Is CHRIST real to you? This morning I am to give you several suggestions about how we may make Him more real, and you will amplify them in your thought and heart as you go your ways. If we are to know JESUS better, then I come to say we must make much of His Book.

GOD's first gift to the world is His Son JESUS CHRIST.  
His second best gift to the world is the Bible. The Bible reveals JESUS.

Nature does not say a word about JESUS. Nature speaks the fact of the great GOD. The heavens declare His glory; the firmament showeth His handiwork; but nature nowhere says a word about His mercy and His forgiveness in CHRIST, the appointed Saviour. The Bible tells about JESUS. If you and I are to know about JESUS, the one mediator between GOD and us, then we must come to the Bible and search.

Oh, my friends, I pause a moment to make an appeal that we will treat right this Holy Book of GOD.

It is appalling how little very many strong and clever people know about the Bible. Chinese Gordon said, when he went down into the Sudan, taking with him his splendid library, that it was not long until he found out that he did not really need his library at all. He said he needed really only two books - first, the Bible, and then, next, the Bible concordance, that would enable him to find quickly any passage in the Bible that he needed to find. We want more and more to magnify this Bible.

Of old, GOD said: "**My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.**" We might say that today.

If men are rooted and grounded in their knowledge of the Bible, they will go out against any sin, against any foe, against any difficulty, and they will overcome, for the Bible is a signboard pointing us to CHRIST.

And again, I say if we are to know JESUS better, then we need to have a time in our lives for meditation. I wonder now if meditation is not practically a lost art in our lives. Who of us stops now to go into the quiet place, where, all alone, we will just meditate on the things of supreme worth? This injunction that we shall have a place and habit in our daily life to be alone for some minutes for meditation on the deep, high things, is a matter of profoundest concern, in these days of stress and hurry and rush and extravagance.

Oh, how important that every man and woman should find a quiet place in some nook to have daily meditation on the high things for the help of the soul!

The psalmist said: "**My meditation of Him shall be sweet.**" You remember how Ezekiel pictured those mystic creatures, with their mystic wings and mystic faces, and then the prophet went on to say: "**When they stood, they let down their wings.**" And all along everyone of us needs to let down the wings, and just wait on GOD. He himself says: "**Wait on the Lord, and He shall strengthen thine heart. Wait, I say, on the Lord.**"

And I am coming to say next, if we are to know JESUS better, then we must magnify the habit daily of secret prayer. Mind you, I said, secret prayer.

Now, isn't it just at that point that all of us are tempted sadly to fail? What if I pass the question

to this crowded auditorium floor this morning, life by life, person by person, and pause there at your heart and ask: "How much do you pray in secret, day by day?" What would your answer be? Isn't it just

at that point that most sadly we fail? The Bible says:

**"When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward Thee openly."**

I believe that Arnold of Rugby, that Master teacher of boys, was entirely right when he said that, no matter what a man's or woman's difficulty, or what the sin, or what the doubt, or what the struggle, or what the temptation, or what the barrier, if such man or woman would go into the secret place, and there bare the soul honestly in secret prayer to GOD, such man or woman would be brought out of the darkness and be given victory over the trial. I believe he is right.

- It was when Moses was alone with GOD, that GOD gave him the sight of that bush that burned, but was not consumed.

- It was when Isaiah was alone with GOD, that GOD gave him that three-fold vision of GOD, and of himself, and of his fellow humanity, that completely changed the young prophet's life.

- It was when Jacob was alone with GOD, yonder at Jabbok on a lonely night, that GOD made that man over, made him a prince, so that ever afterward Jacob prevailed with men, because he had power with GOD.

- It was when Paul was alone with GOD, that he was caught up into the third Heaven, and heard and saw what he could never tell.

- It was when John was alone with GOD, on the Isle of Patmos, that there were vouchsafed to him visions and revelations of the other world, some glimpses of which John gives us here in the book of Revelation.

- It was when Luther was alone with GOD, that he got visions of GOD and truth that he went out to speak, and so spoke them and wrote them, that he set tyrants to trembling and thrones to tottering, and brought in the mental and moral reformation of Germany and Europe and the world.

- It was when Bunyan was alone with GOD, that GOD gave him visions which he penned in a book - which book is an allegory unmatched, and forever, perhaps, to be matchless; a book probably next in importance to the Holy Word of GOD.

But I will come closer to you than to call your attention to these great worthies of whom I have spoken. Oh, it is when you and I, with our burden and battle, with our stress and difficulty, with our sin and temptation, make it a point to be alone with GOD, and bare ourselves before Him, telling Him: "**I cannot let Thee go except thou bless me**" - it is then we are given victory and made princes in His sight.

May I speak a word about my mother, now in that yonder land these last few years, the best Christian I ever saw? May I speak a word about her faith? I was reared in a large family, far out on the farm, and I remember that when Father and the older boys used to go to the farm, the least little fellow, about four, and myself, about six, too little to work, stayed behind, and many are the times I have seen my mother in the morning sobbing, and I have gone and said: "Mother, what makes you cry?" And she would say: "You are too little, my boy, to understand. Never mind. Don't worry about mother."

And when the breakfast was over, and all the little things were done about the house in the morning, mother has said to the two little boys: "Now, you stay here while mother goes aside to be alone a little while." And she would go away with face suffused with tears, and she would come back in a little while, and every time she would come back singing, with a smile on her face fairer than the morning.

And one morning I said to the little brother: "What do you guess happens to mother? She goes away crying, and she comes back singing. Let us see what it is."

We followed along quietly behind her, and she went there into the orchard, near the little country home, and we saw her and heard her. She was down on her face before GOD. I can remember until yet the surpassing pathos of her prayers. She said: "Lord JESUS, I never can rear this houseful of boys like they ought to be reared, without thy help. I will make shipwreck with them, without thy help. I cannot guide them, I cannot counsel them, I cannot be the mother that a woman ought to be to her children, without GOD's help. I will cleave to Thee. Teach me and help me, every hour."

I heard her like that, and then she came back, singing, every morning. And when I grew older, and when manhood was reached, and when I learned in my heart what it is to know JESUS, I knew the secret into which my mother entered. She was the greatest Christian I ever saw. It is when you and I tread the path of secret prayer that we find out about JESUS, and are given to enter into the secret of His presence.

And, again, if you and I are to know JESUS better, we must watch with uncompromising watchfulness against sin. The only thing that will hide the face of GOD from us is sin. He says: "**Your sins have separated between you and me.**" Sin is a veil through which JESUS cannot be seen. Sin is an insulator that cuts off the currents between GOD and us.

I say it reverently, GOD cannot afford to answer some people when they pray, because they keep hidden back in their hearts some wrong thing, some wedge of gold, some Babylonish garment, some evil thing. Recall what David said: "**If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.**" If you and I are to know JESUS better and better, then we must put away every evil thing. We must refuse to let any kind of sin have a dominant place anywhere in our lives.

I go on to say that if we are to know JESUS better, then we are to make much of companionship with the right kind of Christians. How much there is in that!

The longer I live, the more I am finding out the truth that life's companionships very largely make us or mar us in our earthly way.

The Bible tells us: "**He that walketh with wise men shall be wise,**" and it adds: "**But the companion of fools shall be destroyed.**" It tells us, "**Evil communications corrupt good manners.**"

There came a time in my life when doubt, deep, dark and terrible, settled down on me, as if it would clutch my throat to my utter doom. I need not now recite the why. Doubt and darkness

and trouble come from a thousand sources. I came to the place where all was dark as midnight, and a man several years my senior, both physically and religiously, seemed intuitively to know that I had come to a crisis in my spiritual life. And so one day he said to me: "If you have the time, I should like for us to go for a walk in the woods. I have something to say to you."

We went for a two hours' walk in the woods, and it marked an epoch in my life.

He told me how, years before, darkness and doubt had come to him, and his faith was well-nigh shattered, and then he told me what he did, and where he went, and he described my own case as he talked about his. He described my case better than I could describe it, and after that two hours' walk in the woods, wherein he did most of the talking, I came back, having passed an epoch in my life. Oh, tell somebody your Christian experience! And if you are in the darkness and must say: "I do not know whether I have one to tell," then go to somebody in whom you have confidence, and say to him or her: "What is CHRIST to you? Tell me what He is to you."

There was once an old shoemaker in my city, one of the most victorious saints I ever knew; and often, when darkness came to me, and when questions arose, I have closed my study door and gone down to his shoe-shop and said to him: "Tell me once again, I pray you, your Christian experience." And before he was through, sermons flew through my mind like a covey of birds. He knew GOD! He led me into the secret places, as he told me what GOD had done for him.

There is another very practical word to be said. If we are to know JESUS better, then we are to be busy for Him.

Will you heed that? Idleness explains a thousand doubts. The idle Christian is always in trouble. Satan always finds mischief for the idle hand. The idle brain is his workshop. The biggest sociological problem in this country, in the entire social order, is the problem of idleness. Out there in the realm of government, in the realm of business, the idler is the menacing problem. And when you come to religion, idleness is a terrible menace.

If you are idle, and darkness has come to you, and you cannot see your way religiously, just remember that your idleness may explain it all.

Even John the Baptist, who stood before Herod, the purple-robed ruler, and unquailingly called Herod to time for his wickedness and sin - even that brave spirit, when he was put in jail; and had a season of enforced inactivity, plaintively sent some of his men out yonder, where JESUS was, to ask JESUS the question: "**Art thou He that should come, or do we look for another?**" John the Baptist's heart became faint and fearful when he was inactive.

I am thinking now of a fine young fellow, a leader in both the world of business and the social world, who came for six Sunday nights in succession where I was preaching, and on the sixth Sunday night, confessed CHRIST, and took his place in the church. I never knew a more devoted, more valiant young man for CHRIST for a year, and then after a year, he began to drift. I missed him out of the prayer-meeting - and every Christian ought to go to prayer-meeting - and I missed him out of the Sunday school - and every Christian ought to go to the Sunday school - and I missed him out of the Sunday service, and I said to some of the young men: "What about him?"

They said: "We fear he is drifting."

I said: "Do your best to help him."

One Sunday morning, a little after that, I saw him in the audience, and he was much moved under the service we had, and I dismissed the people and went back into my study, and immediately there was a knock on my door, and in came this young man, and he said: "When is the next business meeting of our church?"

"Why," I said, "next Wednesday night."

He said: "Have my name taken off the church roll next Wednesday night."

I said: "Why? You must give a reason. That sort of thing must be done carefully and wisely. The Scriptures so teach. What reason shall we give when we say your name is to be expunged from the church roll?"

And he said: "Oh, I think I am not a Christian. I guess I am not, and the sermon this morning went like an arrow through me. I cannot be inconsistent, and stay in the church if I am not a Christian."

I said: "No, if a man is not a Christian, he ought not to be enrolled as a member in the church. It is a tragedy for an unsaved man to be a member in the church, just as it is a tragedy for a saved man not to be a church member."

He said: "Well, I guess you had better have my name taken off."

I said: "Listen a minute," and I reviewed those six Sunday nights when he came to the services, and then recalled that sixth Sunday night, when he came down the aisle confessing CHRIST, and then the next Sunday morning, when he took his place in the church, and that night, when with folded hands across his breast, he was buried with CHRIST in beautiful baptism, and then, as we left that baptismal stream, how he said to me, with his face moist with tears: "Oh, sir, I am going to live for CHRIST!"

And how, for a year thereafter, he was as regular at the church house as was the preacher, and then something bewitched him and caused him to drift away.

He was softly sobbing, as I reviewed all this.

He slowly said: "I have heard you, but I guess you had better have my name taken off."

I said: "Come back at seven o'clock, thirty minutes before the church service, this evening, and we will talk again about how to proceed; but won't you do me a favor this afternoon?"

He said: "Certainly; what is it?"

I said: "Take my Bible, or yours, and go across the city to old man So-and-so's room, and read

the Bible to him."

"What? Read the Bible after what I have said to you?"

"Certainly."

"What shall I read?"

"Read the twenty-third Psalm; read the eighth chapter of Romans; read the fourteenth chapter of John, and then if he has not had enough, read any of the Psalms, any of the one hundred and fifty, and come back at seven o'clock, and we will talk about your getting out of the church."

He went his way with a serious face, and I went my way to pray for him much.

And in the evening I was in my study, and five minutes before seven, there was a knock on the door, and in he came, laughing and crying, both at the same time, and he said: "Don't say a word to anybody about having my name taken from the church roll - not a word."

I said: "What has happened?"

"Oh," he said, "I went out to the old man's house, and I read the Bible to him, several chapters, and we laughed and cried, and he said to me, presently: 'Young man, won't you kneel down and pray for me, that I may be patient and trustful clear on to the end? I never get to hear anybody pray,' he said, 'but the pastor, and he is so busy he does not come often. Won't you pray for me?'"

And the young man said: "I got down and prayed, and the old man shouted."

And the young man said: "I think I shouted, too. Don't say a word to anybody about my leaving the church."

You see the lesson: Get busy! Keep busy for JESUS!

One more word, and we will go. If we are to know JESUS better, let us pay the price to know Him. Everything worth while costs. These business men and these professional men pay the price for their success.

Paul said: "I paid the price."

"What did you pay, Paul?"

**"I have suffered the loss of all things for Christ, and I count them but dung, that I may win Christ."**

Men and women, no matter what your experience, your battles, your doubts, your sins, your difficulties - no matter what, in the church or out - put CHRIST first, and days of the right hand of GOD and of Heaven on earth will come to you, and will grow brighter and happier even unto the perfect and eternal day.

## **THE CLOSING PRAYER.**

And now as we go, Lord JESUS, let every man and woman here feel out after GOD with all honesty, that thy will may be revealed to us and followed by us. And let every man and woman in this crowded throng, this mid-day hour, speak from the heart this high decision: "JESUS shall now be my Saviour and Master, by my choice, my quiet, intelligent and final choice. Other refuge there is none. Other helpers are all incompetent and insufficient. Here I am, a dying man or woman, fast passing through time into a land eternal, in which land I am forever to be conscious, for CHRIST there and with Him, or against Him and away from Him."

O spirit Divine, bind thou thus every man and woman here, to JESUS to-day and forever!

And now, as you go, may you go to follow Him until the day is done, and forever to do His will. For His great name's sake. Amen.

~ end of chapter 20 ~

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