

GOD'S WILL FOR OUR LIVES

"And I said, What shall I do, Lord?"

Acts 22:10.

It is always interesting to look at turning points and to study the forces which have determined the course of a great life. Here it was a question which changed the man's life and turned it into new channels.

Never was there a man who, up to that moment, felt less need of asking such a question as, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Never was there a man whose path was plainer before him; never a man more sure of his purpose and his goal in life, or more determined to reach it.

From his youth he had been devoted to the study and the maintenance of the religion of Israel. Born a Hebrew of the Hebrews, and of the straitest sect of the Pharisees, his gifts and his character early marked him for distinction. He was sent to Jerusalem to study the sacred law, and there he sat at the feet of Gamaliel. In the gospel of Christ he saw only a blasphemous assault on the faith of the fathers, and in Jesus one whom he considered an impostor. Everywhere he spoke and worked against the Christian disciples, and at the stoning of Stephen he held the garments of those who stoned that first martyr. Against all of the followers of Jesus he was exceedingly angry. Because of his zeal and energy he soon became the chief of the enemies of the early Christians.

Saul's attitude had been one of avowed antagonism. He was not one merely to reject Christ, but he set himself to stamp out everything associated with His name. He made havoc of the churches. With vindictive hatred he went from house to house, and dragged to prison both men and women. In the Sanhedrin he urged extreme and violent measures, and gave his vote for the death of all who were the followers of Christ. He persecuted the Christians even unto foreign cities. Armed with letters of authority and commissioned by the high priests he started for Damascus breathing out threatenings and slaughter.

On his way to Damascus he verily thought that he was rendering a great service to God. As he drew near the city, with the snow-covered Hermon looming up in the distance, suddenly a bright light shone from heaven; a light so bright that it blinded him, and the fierce persecutor fell helpless to the ground. As he lay trembling on the ground, out of the light there came a voice saying unto him, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" That question terminated his antipathy. The astonished Saul replied with sacred curiosity, "Who art thou, Lord?" Then the voice said, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." To this Saul answered, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

Saul had never been an irreligious man. He was thoroughly instructed in the law of the Lord, and had worshiped the God of his fathers from childhood. He believed profoundly in the Old Testament scriptures, and had been thoroughly instructed therein, and yet he had not been born again. Being an unsaved man, he was still an enemy of Christ.

No man in the world seemed so far removed from the possibility of conversion that day as Saul of Tarsus. And yet in a moment he was changed from a persecutor to a disciple. The Lord often does great things suddenly. Many have been apprehended by Christ when they were up to their necks in the activities of Satan.

Saul had been privileged to see at least one man who believed profoundly in Christ, and who had exemplified his belief in his own character and conduct. He had actually seen one man die for the faith that was in him. He had seen him die with a prayer on his lips that the sin of his murder might not be laid to the charge of those who had shed his blood. Perhaps no more worthy example of a Christian could be found, then, or in any subsequent age, than Stephen had been. Even though Saul had seen the first Christian martyr die for his faith, still he was not a Christian.

Saul had learned who Jesus was, and had recognized his voice from heaven as that of Christ. He acknowledged that Jesus was Lord, and so addressed Him.

I. A Personal Concern.

"What shall I do, Lord?" He was instructed to go into the city and there it should be told him what he should do. He did as he was told. A humble and otherwise unknown disciple was sent to him to instruct him more perfectly in the way of the Lord. Saul received Christ. Immediately he received his sight, and was baptized. Straightway he preached Christ in the synagogue, declaring that He was the Son of God.

"What shall I do, Lord?" The Lord's will for his life was a matter of personal concern with Saul. At that time, he was not interested in the Lord's will for the life of any other individual, but he was deeply concerned about it for his own life. He wanted divine direction concerning what he should do. He was ready and eager to accept God's will for his life. In order to do that he surrendered his self-guidance, his self-will, and his self-righteousness.

One is greatly impressed by the completeness of his personal surrender to the Lord. The entire strength of his nature, organized and disciplined against Christ, went immediately over to His control. It was a case of perfect abandonment. When he asked, "What shall I do, Lord?" he put his whole life at the disposal of Christ. He gave into the hands of Christ the steering-wheel and the engine control and stood by to obey orders. He made Christ Master of the ship. He hailed Christ Lord of his whole personality. He would take up whatever work Christ bade him do. Everything was flung into the melting-pot, to be run into the moulds and to be reshaped by Christ. He lifted self out of the seat of authority in his life, and substituted Christ instead. He was ready to go anywhere and to do anything the Lord wanted him to do. From that hour forward he was in the hands of the Master as clay in the hands of the potter.

This question of personal concern in our text brings before us:

1. The first and strongest instinct of a newborn soul, namely, action. Christianity must find expression in action, for genuine life produces activity. There is very little Christianity about a man if it is not making him do something for the Lord and for others.
2. One who made an absolute surrender of himself to the Lord. This question signaled his surrender to his Lord, which was instantaneous, clear, complete and final.
3. One who permitted the Lord to choose his life work for him. That was the only wise course he could have pursued. Likewise, it is the wise thing for us to do. You will notice that he here puts himself in the position of a soldier waiting for orders. He would not stir until he received the command of his officer. He stood quite ready to do it, but he wanted to know what the order might be. He was eager to please Him who had called. Right then and there, he was ready to become a bondsman of Christ.

We must never forget that God has a plan for every life. He has a pattern for every character. He has an ideal for every soul. Each life is going to be successful in proportion as it fulfills the plan God has for it. God's will is the biggest and best thing for any life. To ascertain His will for our lives is the greatest discovery we shall ever make. To know His will for our lives is the greatest privilege we shall have in this life. To follow His plan with unwavering fidelity, and to achieve His will for our lives are the greatest possibilities in our lives. It is indeed a wonderful thing for one to be able to say with Christ, "Not my will but Thine be done."

II. A Pertinent Consideration.

The question of our text, "What shall I do, Lord?" is indeed a very pertinent one for our consideration, as well as that of Saul. Nothing is more appropriate for our consideration than the question of what the Lord would have us do in our daily lives. It ought to be considered by:

1. The lost.
"What shall I do, Lord?" when my soul is rent and torn by a consciousness of guilt and sin? The correct answer is, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved."
2. The pardoned.
"What shall I do, Lord?" seeing Thou in Thy mercy hast redeemed and forgiven me? The answer is "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind." "Thou shalt glorify God in thy body and thy spirit." "Thou shalt go and work today in My vineyard."
3. The afflicted.
"What shall I do, Lord?" when tossed about and tempted. The answer is, "Thou shalt flee unto Me to hide thee." "I will strengthen thee."
4. The dying.
"What shall I do, Lord?" when my strength faileth; when my "earthly house of this tabernacle" is being dissolved; when I am summoned to appear before Thee? His answer is, "Thou shalt put thy trust in Me." "I will uphold thee with My victorious right hand."

We should consider God's will for our lives, and breathe the prayer of our text when we are burdened with sin, our way is uncertain, and we are seeking the blessedness of a higher life. When this question is asked earnestly one is never left without an answer.

III. A Practical Challenge.

This question, "What shall I do, Lord?" is a very practical one. The will of the Lord for us certainly can be discovered. Paul learned what it was in his case, not only when he asked for that information at his conversion, but also in his subsequent experiences. May we know God's will for our lives today? Yes. For that purpose we have the Word of God, the privilege of prayer, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

As we ask, "What shall I do, Lord?" it seems to me that he replies:

1. "I want you to be saved."
His grandest thought for you and me is salvation. That is what He wishes us to have and to enjoy. That salvation is offered to all through repentance and faith.
2. "I want you to be separated from the world."
"Who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father" (Galatians 1:4).
3. "I want you to be holy in life."
"For this is the will of God" (I Thessalonians 4:3).
4. "I want you to be thankful in everything."
"In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (I Thessalonians 5:18).
5. "I want you to be My friend."
"Ye are My friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you" (John 15:14).

6. "I want you to be My witness."

"Ye are My witnesses saith the Lord" (Isaiah 43:10). "Ye shall be witnesses unto me" (Acts 1:8). The task of the Christian is the revelation of Christ. This task is performed by words, by ways, by walks, and by works.

Our Lord wants us to trust Him, to follow Him, and to work for Him. And these things we ought to do gladly. To do His will should be our aim and effort. Nothing greater or more glorious could be desired, and I know of nothing that can bring as deep satisfaction. Life to me is not a question of being this or that, or of having this or that; it is simply a question of the will of God - knowing it, living it, and doing it.

And whatever work in life is chosen, and whatever calling a man follows in that calling he can honor God and do good to his fellowmen. For everyone of us there is a particular work to do. On the front of the house on the hilltop in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where Pittsburgh's famous astronomer and instrument maker, John Brashear, made his first telescopes is this inscription, which was not original with Brashear, but one which he liked to quote for the benefit of young men: "Somewhere beneath the stars is a work which you alone were meant to do. Never rest until you have found it." When you find yourself on a wrong path, and God has made plain His way and His will to you, then there is only one thing for you to do, and that is to take that way and to take it at once. Paul said that when he heard the Lord's voice, that he asked "What shall I do, Lord?" and upon receiving the answer, he was "not disobedient to the heavenly vision." There is only one thing to fear as you face the future, and that is not to do the will of God. Discover His will for your life and then do that will regardless of everything else.