

THE MAN WHO WAS WANTED
WHY BE A CHRISTIAN?

Acts 11:25-26

"And he went forth to Tarsus to seek for Saul." Acts 11:25.

Humanity is continually on a man-hunt. Men are always needed and wanted. There is a standing order, in each generation, for men of proved worth. Such leadership is always essential. The influence of good and intelligent people was never more needed. True progress cannot be made apart from contribution of such lives.

When Christian movement was young and serious problems were confronting it as well as opening of doors of opportunity, able leadership was sorely needed. In Antioch of Syria, Barnabas, faithful worker in cause of Christ, meditating upon kind of man who could assist in that critical hour, remembered the young man Saul. They had been associated in work at Jerusalem. Barnabas knew his qualifications; believed fitted for difficult task before them. So he went to lay on Saul's hand the needs and opportunities of the situation. He listened, accepted the challenge and went back with Barnabas. A new chapter was begun in the life of this marvelous man—a chapter full of heroic sacrifices, thrilling adventures, and unsurpassed achievements.

Why are some people in demand while others are not? What are the qualities of character that cause some persons to make a much-needed contribution to life of their generation and progress of race? What elements are in life of man who was wanted?

I. Preparation.

1. Physical.

Bodies are temples of souls. A strong body is needed. I do not mean to infer that one cannot win in life's struggle unless he is a perfect physical specimen. We are impressed by many who have blessed world who have had to struggle against physical handicap. Paul suffered much from afflictions; for a while he was attended by a physician. Paul's body was the instrument of his will. The world's benefactors faced life bearing marks of disease, physical defects, and weaknesses.

Herbert Spencer and Robert Louis Stevenson were able to work less than an hour per day because of physical suffering. Pasteur was paralyzed but he made discoveries that blessed mankind in the alleviation of suffering and the prevention of disease. Beethoven, composer, was so deaf he was unable to hear his greatest symphony. Milton was blind at forty-three, and out of darkness brought his matchless messages. The noble-hearted George Matheson lost his sight in his youth, but found unfailing light, and wrote:

"O light that follow'st all my way,
I yield my flick'ring torch to Thee;
My heart restores its borrowed ray,
That in Thy sunshine's glow its day
May brighter, fairer be."

Booker T. Washington, who rose from slavery to trusted leadership and gained the respect of a nation said, "Success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has overcome while trying to succeed."

2. Mental.

The man who was wanted had prepared mentally for life's challenge. Paul is acknowledged to be one of the most profound thinkers of all time. He was naturally gifted, but he developed through the years of rigid training. He cultivated the talents which God had given him. Each of the two men who wrote the most books in the Bible was highly trained. "Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds."

3. Spiritual.

The most far-reaching and revolutionary of all Paul's experiences was the one which befell him as he journeyed to Damascus. God convinced him that it was a mistake to set himself against God. He was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. From that hour he was a different man. His whole outlook on life was changed. There was harmony within where discord once ruled, and peace where conflicts had raged. Through his remaining years, all the experiences of hardships, physical privations, sufferings, disappointments, mighty responsibilities, and persecutions, strengthened and made nobler the soul of this man.

In preparation for life, the call that merits first consideration and fullest response is the voice of God.

II. Perception.

The man who was wanted perceived clearly the nature and needs of life. We often suffer because of our blindness to the issues of life. We sometimes persuade ourselves that facts do not exist because we do not want them to exist. The wise person perceives that there are laws which govern life, physically, mentally and spiritually.

We need to see clearly the issues involved in our living. We ought not to be ignorant of what we are. We are more than physical beings. In each individual there are two natures, the higher and the lower, and these are in ceaseless conflict. Only cowards and weaklings surrender to the call of lower nature. Someone said, "The greatest saints are always made of the same material as the greatest sinners." The difference is in attitude of two classes toward powers entrusted to them. Our instincts are to be controlled and directed upward and not given free rein that they may pull us downward. All our innate powers were given to us for a noble purpose.

III. Presentation.

The man who was wanted presented himself as his answer to the world's needs. He could not answer all calls, but he could answer some. He could not do all that needed to be done, but he could do his part. He never sought to evade or shirk when duty called him. We may have part, wherever we are and whatever we do, in lifting the world's burden and easing the world's pain. Beyond the making of a living we can serve our generation by the will of God.

Some thirty years ago a young man--Albert Schweitzer--read an article in a religious journal entitled, "The Needs of the Congo Mission." The writer pointed out the lack of men in that important mission field and how, as a result, the work was suffering. He appealed for workers in these words, "Men and women who can reply simply to the Master's call, 'Lord, I am coming,' those are the people the mission needs."

This message found a responsive chord in the heart of this brilliant young student who by his thirtieth year was the author of well-known books, a professor at Strasburg University, and an organist of the Bach Society of Paris. Young Schweitzer did a most unexpected thing. He turned from the organ and the professor's chair and entered a medical school. When he completed his training, he offered himself as a medical missionary to the natives of the dark continent. He followed in the steps of Him "who went about doing good." This is how one man made his answer to the world's needs.

The man who was wanted was prepared to answer the challenge of life, he perceived the nature and the needs of life, and he presented himself as his answer to the world's needs.

"And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch." Acts 11:26

Why be a Christian? In what specific ways does the Christian life beat all the rest? Just how is it superior to any other type of life? I want to suggest at least five points wherein the Christian life surpasses every other. These points will answer the question. Why be a Christian? Everyone should be a Christian because the Christian life is:

1. A hard life.

But some critic will say, "Do you mean that it is hard to live a Christian life?" I always thought Christianity was easy, that any one could be a Christian, almost without any difficulty whatever. I thought one just signed his name, accepted a creed, attended church occasionally, and uttered a prayer now and then. That was my conception of the Christian life. Harder? Will you tell me, then, what your religion is costing you? Take the past week, the past month, the past year--in what way has professing Christ made things harder for you?"

That is the challenge. We must admit there is some cause for it. For there is a type of character which turns to Christ's religion for shelter and comfort--and for nothing else. It is possible to worship Jesus without obeying Jesus--like the one who will attend dozens of religious meetings and yet be irritable at home. It is possible to sing,

"Jesus, the very thought of Thee
With sweetness fills my breast;
But sweeter far Thy face to see,
And in Thy presence rest."

without having once asked ourselves if there are not things in our lives and characters that His holy presence would burn to shreds. Don't sentimentalize religion. Don't make the name of Jesus of Nazareth sweet or sickly. Don't taint His strong religion with unreality. One day when Jesus was going down the street, a woman cried after Him, "Blessed be she who bore Thee, and the breast where Thy head lay!" But Jesus turned around at once, and rebuked the sentimental speech. He said, "Nay, say rather, blessed are they who hear the word of God, and do it."

A decadent religion may be easy; but the real Christian life is definitely harder than any other. Some of our Christian brethren in Europe today have been proving that: for bitter beyond words have been the sacrifices they have had to face through their brave refusal to acknowledge any King or Head of the Church but Jesus Christ.

But we do not need to go so far for examples. Every person who is taking Jesus seriously knows that this is a fact. It is sometimes very difficult to do the genuinely Christian thing. Take Him seriously, and you are in for the hardest life in the world.

Then someone says in astonishment, "That is a queer reason for recommending Christianity! A strange answer to the question, Why be a Christian? It is a first-rate reason for not being a Christian!" I wonder. Sometimes the very difficulty of a task is its most magnetic appeal. The fact that it is a hard life in itself makes it a challenging life.

2. A holy life.

The word "holy" is a word for which many people today have but little liking. Ask the average young person if he or she would care to be known as a "holy" person, and probably the reaction will be one of two things. Either he will laugh at you, or else he will be horrified at you. "Holy? No, thank you. Anything you like

but that!"

But wait a moment. The word in popular parlance may have lost caste; but it is worth while going behind it to its original meaning. What was that? Wholesome, healthy. Holiness means inward health. It means healthy instincts, healthy emotions, every part of life in a disciplined, balanced, wholesome condition. It means an integrated personality. Is not that the greatest need of thousands today--something to pull life together and integrate it, to deal drastically with the inward conflicts that damage spiritual health so seriously; something to eliminate the discords and dangerous complexes, and to bring everything into the harmony and unity of strong, clean, vigorous health, emotional and moral; something to make them holy?

And why was Jesus ever called the Great Physician, if not because He alone can produce this kind of vital health? He does that in two ways. He gives life a new purpose. And He fills life with new power. A purpose: that is, a sense of direction, the grip of a great ideal which gathers up all the soul's scattered, turbulent energies, focusing them on one thing--the Kingdom of God. And a power: a vitalizing, supernatural strength flooding a man's being, and sending him out like a conqueror to smash his most stubborn besetting sin. With that purpose and that power, Christ integrates a personality. In Christ, he is a whole man now. Emotional health, moral health, and spiritual health are all his. He is "holy."

3. A happy life.

The Christian life is the happiest life in the world. However, there are some who would question that statement. There are some Christians who, by the dreariness and apparent joylessness of their religion, its lack of spirit and radiance, are betraying the Master they are pledged to serve and giving Christ a bad name among men. To you I would say, "Don't judge Jesus, the King of joy, by these gloomy caricatures of Christianity. Try the real thing, make friends with Jesus. Listen to the music of His voice, answer His challenge, rise and follow Him, and you will find it the happiest life on earth. The Christian life is happier than any other.

4. A helpful life.

a. It pays in a business way.

Occasionally someone will remark, "Well, I notice that men of the world prosper more than Christians." But look at them and see how they turn out. It pays to be a Christian from every standpoint. It pays in dollars and cents; it pays in peace of soul; it pays in joy of living.

b. It pays in an ethical way.

It is right. We owe it to God to be Christians in view of what He has done for us. We owe it to our nation also. We owe it to our families. It is right.

c. It pays in a social way.

I am a Christian because the sweetest, dearest fellowship of this world comes to me through the church. Strong and noble are the ties that bind old soldiers together, uplifting and cheerful are the bonds of fraternal societies, but stronger and more noble are the ties which bind the children of God together. Well did the poet say,

"Blest be the tie that binds,
Our hearts in Christian love;
The fellowship of kindred minds,
Is like to that above."

I cannot understand how it is possible for a person to selfishly enjoy all of God's mercies and then reject the best of all God's gifts, even the Christ.

5. A hopeful life.

While every other life is bounded by this little world, Christianity has all the windows open towards immortality. It sweeps the horror of darkness from the soul and stands facing out towards eternity. There are some who would banish from our hearts every gleam of glory from the world beyond. They know not what they are doing. Take the eternal hope away, and you have no evangel left. "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable."

I thank Him for a salvation which gives me a better and happier life here and guarantees me a more perfect and glorious life hereafter.