

WHAT ARE YOU LIVING FOR?

"For to me to live is Christ" (Philippians 1:21).

A well-known minister on the West Coast was invited to address a group of college students in their fraternity house. At the commencement of the meeting he turned to the chairman and asked: "What are you living for?" The student replied: "I am going to be a pharmacist."

The minister said: "I understand that this is how you are going to earn your livelihood, but what are you living for?" The youth bowed his head for a moment, and, then, looking up with clear, true eyes, he said: "Sir, I am sorry, but I haven't thought that thing through." It was discovered that of the thirty students present only two had asked themselves this question. They all knew how they would earn their livelihood, but only two had discovered the central purpose of life.

We should keep clearly in mind the distinction between our livelihood and what we are living for. Jesus had a livelihood. He was a carpenter by trade, but that was not what he was living for. Andrew, Peter, James, and John had a livelihood. They were fishermen, but that was not what they were living for. Paul was a tentmaker, but that was not what he was living for.

How would these followers of Christ have answered the question asked of the young American student? How would Paul have answered it? Without an instant's hesitation he would have flashed back the answer: "For me to live is Christ. That is what I am living for."

This brave old Christian warrior began to reckon his life from the day when Christ laid his hand upon him on the road to Damascus. Straight through the center of Paul's life ran a line of demarcation. It has been suggested that he had his own calendar -- on one side of which was B. C., before he met Christ, on the other side, A. D., the year that followed his call to apostleship. On the one side was the old life with its tension and inner conflicts; its slavish keeping of the law. On the other side was the new man, the new life, and the encompassing love of Christ.

For Paul this line of demarcation went down to the very roots of his being. There had been a revolutionary inward transformation. He expressed it like this: "When any man comes to be in Christ, there is a new creation. What is old is gone -- the new has come."

Dante Gabriel Rossetti oftentimes pondered the miracle of spiritual rebirth. He made frequent sketches with pencil, oil, and water colors, trying to depict the wonder of it. Finally, the concept that was growing in his mind flowered forth in a pen-and-ink drawing entitled: "The Conversion of Mary Magdalene." The scene is laid in the street outside the house of Simon, the Pharisee. Mary, bedecked with flowers and accompanied by her lover and their boon companions, is passing down the street in careless pleasure. Suddenly through the open door she catches sight of the Master's face, and their eyes meet. The tender, searching eyes of Jesus penetrate beyond the woman that she is to the woman that she might yet become. In that instant her soul awakes.

The artist concentrates on two individuals: One is Mary Magdalene, with her profound contrition, and her proud resolve to enter into the new life she sees opening before her; the other is Christ, with an unforgettable look of tenderness and sorrow, of entreaty and redeeming love. Oblivious of the efforts of her companions to stop her and of the jeers of some of them, Mary begins to climb the steps to the open door of Simon's house. She sees only one face, the face of her Redeemer, and, leaving all, she goes to follow Him.

While in Boston, many tourists have gone to Trinity Church to look into the strong, and yet tender face of Phillips Brooks, the spiritual giant whose likeness has been preserved for us by a renowned sculptor.

There he stands at a pulpit with the open Bible before him, behind him stands Christ,

with His hand on Brooks's shoulder. One wonders how a Saint-Gaudens was inspired to create this noble work. Certainly it presents the truth regarding the great preacher.

In his memoirs is an intimate and revealing letter which he had written to a dear friend. It reads: "All experience comes to be but more and more the pressure of Christ's life upon ours. I cannot tell how personal this grows to me. He is here. He knows me and I know Him. It is no figure of speech; it is the realest thing in the world." Why should we wonder that the man who wrote these words made people feel, as they came into his presence, that they were very close to the Master? He, too, could say with Paul: "For me to live is Christ." The whole aim and influence of his life was Christ. His master passion was to bring men and women who knew not Christ to the place where they could behold him in his strength and kingliness. That is what he was living for.

If you are a person of normal mentality, even though you may be terribly handicapped physically, it can be said that your life is largely what you make it. If you are normal in every way, it can be affirmed indisputably that you have the power to determine what your life shall be.

If you do not find anything in life, invariably it is your own fault. Boredom and futility are the result not of where you are or of how much or how little you have, but of what you are. There is nothing hopeless about life at any time or in any place. Life, even under circumstances over which you do not have any control, is largely what you make it.

What life means to you is determined not so much by what life brings to you as by the attitude you bring to life, not so much by what happens to you as by the attitude you take toward what happens.

Circumstances and situations color life, but you have been given the power to choose what the color shall be.

Life is what you make it because living is at least ninety per cent attitude. Two people in the same situation will see entirely different things. What is opposition for one is opportunity for the other.

"Two men look through the selfsame bars;
One sees the mud, the other the stars."

What life means to you determines what you make of your life. As you think in your heart, so you are and so you will become. You live in the direction of your thoughts. Shakespeare's Macbeth saw life as

..... a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

In consequence, Macbeth became what he thought; he did not believe in anything and as a result lived and died for nothing. Life means what you choose to make it mean. Many people, like Macbeth, make it mean exactly zero, full of noise but amounting to nothing.

Greatness is in living not merely for the things which are here today and gone tomorrow, but for the things which are the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Look at the large number of successful men who are dying before their time. They do not so much hurry themselves as they worry themselves into an early grave. They go through each day in anxious haste, always looking forward to the day when they can take it easier and really have time for the things they would like to do. Frequently, the time

they look forward to, when they can enjoy life, never comes. When it does come, often they are too worn out or broken down to enjoy it. The average successful businessman is a person who was born in the country but now lives in the city, where he works like a demon so that he can retire and live again in the country.

Christ was describing many a man in our contemporary generation when He told of the man who hurriedly built barns and more barns. He couldn't build them fast enough to hasten that day when he could retire, sit back, take it easy, and enjoy himself. No sooner had he retired than he died. He killed himself getting ready to live. The time that he was always looking forward to never came; he never had the time, the money, or the security to do the things that he really wanted to do.

Accept the fact that the world occasionally can get along without you. When he was asked the secret of his ability to fall asleep like a child, Edwin Markham said, "Years ago I made up my mind that it was perfectly safe to turn the world over to God for eight or ten hours." Set up in your mind a standard of values so that you know what is really significant, important, and valuable. Christ righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33). Don't fill your life and load your back with things that don't amount to much.

If you would make the most of your life, discipline yourself daily to live up to the highest and best that you know. Life, which is the greatest of all arts, is like any other art. Beethoven spent unbelievable hours of labor upon a few bars of melody. To an admiring woman, who asked how she might learn his perfect artistry, Holman Hunt replied, "All you need to do, Madam, is to practice eight hours a day for forty years."

There was never a time in the history of the world when the truths that Christ taught and the kind of life that He lived were more desperately needed by the world. All who believe in His way of life and who seek to follow Him must dedicate themselves to the enterprises of His kingdom. Christians, it is true, are in a minority, but minorities have been used of God more frequently than majorities in bringing about tremendous spiritual advances. The influence of Christian personalities is out of all proportion to their number. For example, in China, before communism took over, only one person in every six thousand was a Christian, but in China's Who's Who every sixth name was the name of a Christian.

In the true Christian life we are always in search of something beyond. As Paul said, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:12-14).

There is ever a loftier height to be reached, a better pearl to be found, a richer inheritance to be possessed, a wider vision to be obtained, and a deeper experience to be enjoyed.

In ancient days a prince once sent a gift of great value to his future bride. On opening the parcel she was astonished to find an iron egg. Her first reaction was to be disgusted, but curiosity made her examine it, when all at once she unknowingly touched a secret spring which flew open, and there was a brass egg. Touching another spring, this opened and revealed a silver egg. Within that was a golden egg, and then still another spring flew back, and she found the real gift -- a necklace of pearls.

How like the Christian experience! If only we would "press on", we should find that the quest for the best was full of amazing surprises, and that our Lord has always some yet more wonderful and unexpected blessing in store for us.

When Paul wrote, "For to me to live is Christ," he meant for us to understand that Christ was the master passion of his life, because he believed with all his heart and soul that Christ and Christ alone had the answer to the world's needs. Wherever he looked in the past or the present, within or without, above or beneath, anywhere and everywhere he saw only Christ. He saw the power of Christ changing the world of the Roman Empire in which he lived, making men and women kindlier, more forgiving, more patient, more noble, more clean, more compassionate, and more loving. Christian love to him was the greatest force in the world. It is the only power that can heal the wounds of the world today..

For what are you living? Paul said: "For to me to live is Christ." Are you living for anything less noble than this? If Christ is not the object and purpose of your life, then for what are you living? Each of us was created in the image of God. Life for us is certain to end in failure unless it brings us into harmony with Him. Real life then means to be in perfect accord with God's plans and purposes for us. Compare it as you may, this is the noblest life of all. No course of life can possibly compare with the one who can say: "For to me to live is Christ, to reproduce Christ, to reflect His spirit, to carry out His purposes, and to follow as far as possible the pattern of His glorious life." Life from Christ, life in Christ, and life for Christ should result in a life more Christ-like. Have you received life from Christ? Are you living in Christ? Are you living for Christ? Can you truly say, "For to me to live is Christ?"

"Living for Jesus a life that is true,
Trying to please Him in all that I do;
Yielding allegiance, glad-hearted and free,
This is the pathway of blessing for me."