

CHRIST ... Who refused to take a short cut
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(MATTHEW 4:8-10)

The Lord Jesus Christ came into this world with a passion to win the lost. He had no illusions as to what this might mean, and even from the beginning contemplated His crucifixion. Yet in one sinister moment, Satan unfolded a plan to solve all the problems of evangelism. "Again, the devil . . . sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." In those vital moments the world seem to be spread as a map at the feet of the Saviour. He saw India, China, and Japan. He saw the jungle villages of central Africa; He saw the crowded cities of Western civilization; He saw the lonely islands of the sea, and realized that in all these places Satan would resist the eternal purposes of God. Bitter would be the conflict, long would be the campaign before the world could be won; and even then the victory would hardly be complete, for many souls would have passed into eternity. Against this background, Satan made his insidious offer.

Purity . . . the foundation of all true usefulness

We do well to consider that Christ never challenged Satan's ability to do as was suggested. The record given by Luke is even more pointed: "And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them, for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will give it. If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine" (4:6, 7). The temptation suggests that Satan offered to withdraw all his opposition. There would be no more surging passions; no more vice, wickedness, godlessness. The heart of Africa would be open and free from superstition; the underworld of the great cities would become clean overnight; and the entire world would be released from the thralldom of sin and brought back to God. "All this will I give thee, if -." From every human angle, the offer was most attractive; but the Lord Jesus refused. It therefore became clear that He considered the integrity of His own soul to be of more importance than the winning of the world. The end never justifies the means if the means destroy the sanctity of the soul. The evil one offers many attractive rewards, but his conditional if is always the prelude to disaster.

Preaching . . . the forerunner of all true blessedness

After His triumph, "Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee" (Luke 4:14). "And from that time began to preach and to say, Repent . . ." (Matt. 4:17). There can never be any substitute for preaching delivered in the power of the Holy Spirit. When the Church loses this dynamic; when the services become glorified entertainments; when the message is subservient to all the other details introduced to captivate the superficial section of the congregation, the Church is on the high road to suicide. "And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee . . . called Peter and Andrew . . . and he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (vv. 18-19). These men were only converts themselves, and yet already before them was the prospect of catching men as they had often caught fish. The Lord Jesus meant to train these converts so that as quickly as possible they too could go in search of kindred souls. Evangelism has been the greatest striking force in the history of the Church. A church without a pulpit becomes a hall!

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Power . . . the feature of all true godliness

" And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease among the people. And his fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them" (vv. 23, 24). And against all these remarkable statements, we must consider another promise. "And greater things than these shall ye do, because I go unto my Father " (John 14:12). It would seem that something has gone wrong with the Church. We may talk about opening the eyes of blind unbelief, of cleansing the moral leprosy from our great cities; but are these the final word in the fulfillment of Christ's promise? The power of the Church could be increased immeasurably if we resisted every attempt of Satan to impair the sanctity of our souls. Preaching is a great weapon; holiness is also a great weapon: But when these two are combined and used in the power of the divine Spirit, even the gates of hell cannot prevail against us.

The Most Beautiful Hands in the World

Dr. Don E. Falkenberg's sermon, The Wounds of Christ, must rank as one of the greatest utterances I have ever heard. Inspired by a medical doctor's observation, he gave close attention to the subject, and ascertained that " not only does the New Testament record the suffering of all types of flesh wounds by our Lord, but also that the Old Testament foretold each of these types." During his wonderful discourse he referred to Isaiah's writings: " And when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. . . . We hid as it were our faces from him. . . . His visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of man" (Isa. 53, and 52: 14). Then to illustrate this poignant truth, Dr. Falkenberg told a moving story.

" In an American town resided a widowed mother and her little son. The mother was very beautiful except for her hands, which were terribly scarred as from scalding or burning. As the little lad reached the age when he began to notice the contrast between individuals, he asked his mother, ' Mumsy, why are your hands so scarred? Why aren't they beautiful like Bobby's mother's hands?' When the mother felt the lad was old enough to understand, she answered his oft-repeated question. 'When you were very small, Billy, you were playing in the living room one day, and I was working in the kitchen. Suddenly I heard you scream, and I rushed in and found you had gotten too close. to the fireplace, and your clothes had caught on fire. I tore your burning clothes from your body before you were seriously burned, but my hands were deeply burned by the searing flames. That is why, Billy, I have such unlovely hands. That is why they are not beautiful.' Billy looked at those scarred hands for a moment, and then one little arm went round his mother's neck, and the other childish hand lifted one of her scarred hands to his lips for a kiss of tenderness, as he cried out in compassionate love, ' Mother, your hands aren't ugly; you have the most beautiful hands in all the world.' " Dr. Falkenberg adds, " In Christ's terribly marred face we find beauty as we realize He was wounded for our transgressions . . . with His stripes we are healed."

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Working like Billiho

The story of the Rev. E. Billiho provides a graphic illustration of the wisdom of avoiding short-cuts. Billiho, so we have been told, was a minister of the Established Church during that sombre period of British history when the shackles of a crippling tradition were hindering the march of progress. Unfortunately for his family, Billiho could not accept certain doctrines and practices of the Church, and soon his voice was raised against them. The ecclesiastical leaders becoming alarmed, threatened to deprive this renegade of his living; he was told to restrain his tongue, or suffer the consequences. This he could not do, and the day arrived when Billiho was defrocked and left without means to sustain his large family. His friends wondered what he would do, but were not left in doubt for very long. Billiho, with his own hands, set about the task of erecting his own church; and his ceaseless labours amazed even his closest friends. Many considered him to be foolish, for had he curbed his tongue, had he taken a short cut, he might have influenced his parishioners to accept quietly the things he believed. Billiho preferred to go the long way around, and within a short time became known as the man who never ceased labouring. Soon his new church was open, and the power of his ministry reached far and wide over the countryside of Britain. Few people seem to know that he bequeathed to posterity and the English language the household saying, "We must work like Billiho."

The hymn, Come, Thou fount of every blessing, was written by the Rev. R. Robinson, who was born in 1735. At the age of fourteen he was sent to London to learn the trade of hair dressing. When he became a Christian he commenced to study for the ministry, and eventually became well known as a hymn-writer. As he grew old, however, he began to lose his grasp of spiritual things, and to indulge in habits which did not adorn the Gospel. Years later, while travelling on a stage coach, he was engaged in conversation by a lady who, not knowing his identity, told him how she had been reading Robinson's hymn, Come, Thou fount of every blessing, and asked his opinion of its worth. The author endeavored in vain to change the topic of conversation, but finally, unable to control his emotion, cried out, "Madam, I am the poor, unhappy man who composed that hymn many years ago. I would give a thousand worlds, if I had them, to enjoy the feelings I had then." He had sold his birthright for a mess of pottage.

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