

can be balanced; that the scales can be adjusted; that the minus, negative needle of the compass can be set in its rightful place. It means that life now is worth living since there is someone to live it with and through and for! Forgiveness means that earth and heaven are now reconciled . . . that One has died for the many, that no one more needs to die for the sins of the world. A mystery? The greatest of all time, yet a fact that can be accepted by the simplest.

"I Have Overcome the World"

The third cheer sounds as though all the bugles are blowing: "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." One way you look at it, the life of Jesus seems like a tragic defeat; that is, if you look at it at the time of His saying this statement. His friends deserted Him: those whom He fed on the mountain had gone back to their small talk and petty grievances; all the bright talk of a kingdom coming in their day seemed vaguely remote. His own pastel optimism seemed to mire up in the morose preoccupation about dying, and toward the end He was treated as a common criminal.

Now, in what sense is that overcoming the world? Wherein does victory lie there? Who succeeded: Jesus or Pilate? Ah, take a look now: if for no other reason, let your hindsight point up the

easy answer. Jesus was no blind fate-ridden dreamer who walked into a Roman trap. His was the calm, deliberate conviction that life is conquered through suffering, through sacrificial dying. In the supreme act of giving Himself, He overcame the whole world. It is that simple; it is that complex.

But what injustice we do Him when we forget that while He was God, He was also man: man in the human sense of flesh and blood, subject to the same type of temptations that we are. If that is not the case, then victory He won and the muscles developed in the winning are of little help to us.

Overcoming the world means that He wrestled with all the senses, the bid of lust for the body, the bid of mammon for the soul, the bid of humanism for the mind: all these were very real and He fought them out and won! He came into the world with His eyes wide open, predestined to do nothing but to be free—and to die if He so chose to do so. Every major force that bids for man's allegiance entered the arena of His life and played it out to the end. Not dodging a one of them, He fought in the power of His God. He died the way He lived—like a man. Not even his fiercest enemies accused Him of one trace of cowardice. "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

UNIQUE WISDOM: SOUL WINNING

JANUARY 26, 1958

(Scripture: Matthew 28:16-20)

If, by some strange stroke of magic Jesus walked into your room right now, what would He say? or do? or think? What would be your reaction? Would you want to ask Him if certain loved ones go to heaven or what He had in mind for your life? If He had but a minute to stay and could say only one thing, no doubt it would sound like this:

"You go therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

At least, that is what He said just before He left. That we have largely ignored these words is beyond argument. What,

with paltry effort, crippling excuses, and selfish moods, we have gotten around only in part to fulfilling this divine command.

Luxury or Necessity

From the beginning let us face up to the searching question: Is Christ a luxury for a few instead of a necessity for all? Is He to be possessed by a select fraternity of the human race—someone to be known aesthetically and ecclesiastically—or is He the Savior of all mankind?

Well, part of that answer is rather obvious: yes, He is a luxury in a sense. Anyone who has known Him at all can rise to his feet and vow that certain luxuries inhere in that wondrous relationship. There are moral luxuries as a result of knowing Jesus: the luxury of being able to decipher immoral vice from moral virtue. One is better off financially if He is a Christian, if for no other reason than the fact that he has learned how to spend what he has in a right sense of value. He is better off mentally as a Christian. His new relationship has cut through the fat of mental rubbish and has come to the heart of the matter of thought. Spiritually, of course, one is better off. He no longer falls prostrate before the pagan altars of lust, passion, mammon, or self. In that sense, Christ is a luxury.

But is He a luxury for a mere few? Is He still considered a necessity for the world? Oh, it sounds like an elemental question, doesn't it? But in our elemental disobedience we have run roughshod over its responsibilities. The reason why the children of Israel were not permitted to gather enough manna for weeks in advance was that God wanted to teach them the value of daily dependence upon Him. Disobeying that prohibition, the manna would spoil.

Friends, we cannot so contain Christ; that is, we cannot get enough religion to last a lifetime by a few worship experiences. It cannot be stored, so to speak. The Jesus that we will not share with others is the Christ we cannot keep for ourselves. He is strangely elusive. Like

an ever-receding mirage, He escapes our eager grasp when we would hold Him in the grip of our own luxurious securities.

Consider the Ant

Little wonder the Bible commands "Go to the ant thou sluggard. Consider her ways and be wise." Why the ant? Right now, if you took a little bit of honey and placed it on your table and a single ant found it, after tasting it, (rather than staying there to consume it all for itself) it would leave the pile of sweetness, wind its way down the long journey until it found the hill of ants. By some strange sensory perception it would transmit not only the nature of its find but also the location. Then, in tandem, all the ants would be led by the finder to the source of sweetness for all. Now, the wisdom of the Biblical injunction, "Go to the ant . . . thou sluggard . . . consider her ways and be wise." Friends, that means that if you have discovered the sweetness of salvation, the real source of truth that makes men free: God's prime, choice gift to the world; if you know Christ in the personal encounter of salvation, then how in the name of all that is holy can you justify your gorging the sweetness alone? The other members of the human race are starving for the exact diet while we feast to our heart's content.

Any wonder the Bible calls us by that uncomplimentary epithet, "thou sluggard?" A sluggard is one who is slow in his mind. He does not learn easily, and when he does, he is equally slow to respond to his new-found knowledge. A sluggard just gropes along at will or whim or fancy. No, Jesus is not a luxury for a few; He is the urgent, timely, imperative necessity for all!

The best proof that one has been saved is whether or not he is sharing that experience with one who is unsaved. One never gets over the fact that he has come alive in God, and he wants to tell the world that fact the best way he can.

The Contemporary Picture

Look at our present attitude and response to these instructive words of Jesus

Do these commands still ring with a clarion certainty in our ears? I am afraid that they do not. Twenty centuries have modified, amended, and toned down their original forthrightness until the average Christian today knows nothing about the art of winning others to Christ and cares less. Why, this movement began as a telling affair. Those who rushed to the open tomb on invitation to "Come and see," were sent on their return journey by a two-word command, "Go tell." They told it with such light in their eyes, such awful pathos in their voices, such magnetizing enthusiasm of spirit that the whole world sat up and listened. What a contrast to our day that equates its religious devotion in mass assemblies, fine discourses on ethics, and the prim respectability that goes with religious niceties. Who would ever get the impression from us that we were fools for Christ's sake?

Nowadays such activity is regarded as the private domain of religious professionals. This business of winning the lost is regarded as a slightly off-beat key for preachers and a few other staff members of the churches. Oh, it is the prime job of any preacher, but it is also the major challenge for every layman.

Perhaps it would throw a little light on our predicament if we looked at some of the reasons why we do not try to win the unsaved. Actually, the prime reason for many is that they do not honestly believe that a person who dies without knowing Christ is lost. There is a type of mental assent to this time-endorsed truth, but deep inside there are more misgivings than real convictions. Yet, the clear word rings out: "The Soul that sinneth shall surely die."

Others claim they don't know how. This is an honest answer, but the lack of knowledge is a commentary on lack of care. One never knows how to do anything until he has enough interest to learn how. No professional skills are required to tell the good news. Anybody can tell it. Just like the little old lady who operated an elevator. To every group of people that she brought down from the top floors she would say, "Be sure your last trip is up."

While it is true that the appropriate time, place, speech, manner are all important, these should not be the hindering points from telling the news forthrightly.

Alternative to Obedience

Everyone should hear the alternative to obeying this command of going and telling the good news. Suppose we do not go and do not tell, then what is involved? Is this some mild suggestion of Jesus left for man's ignoring if he chooses? Not at all! The alternative is this: "His blood shall be required at thy hand." My, what a frightful anticipation: that God would require of us an accounting for those whom we refused to try to win. When God says for us to do something, He means just that. Too long have we argued back like impudent children as though our freedom involved equal authority with our God.

But let me close the message, not by re-charting the warning, but by re-endorsing the blessed privilege of gathering in a harvest of life for the creator of life.

That day the sun was shining brightly, but the Chinese farmer with cataracts on his eyes could not see much of the sunshine. Knocking on the door of the missionary doctor's clinic, he hoped for a restoration of his sight. After his turn on the operating table, his sight was restored. Then note what happened: back into the interior of China went the man with the new sight. Not many days later he stood once again at the clinic's door. When the doctor came to answer his knock, there he stood holding the end of a rope in one hand while forty-eight other blind Chinese held on to the rope . . . hoping to be healed.

Ah, that is the way it ought to be: those who have learned to see ought to be carrying a rope to guide the blind as they are led to the great Physician of life.