

THE POWER OF CHRIST

SERMONS BY TEXAS BAPTIST PASTORS

Compiled by

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SERMON TWO

AT THE CARPENTER'S BENCH

By

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“Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him” (Mark 6:3).

In a dramatic moment a great American exclaimed, “My father was a carpenter! My Saviour was a carpenter! My father was more than a carpenter! My Saviour was more than a carpenter!”

As this is being written, I hear the sound of the carpenter's hammers and the buzz of the carpenter's saws on a building being erected hard by the church. I remember as a child that I have seen my own father work at the carpenter's bench. To be a carpenter is honorable, but being a carpenter does not persuade the world to bestow its crowns of royalty. The success of Jesus cannot be attributed to His vocation, neither can it be said that He was crucified because He labored at that commonplace craft by which He helped to support Himself and family. But, for the inspired record the world never would have known that He who made the world, came into His own world, and spent many years at manual labor. Since revelation is never needlessly given, the fact that He was a carpenter bears significance.

As a workman, Jesus made plows for the fields; yokes for the oxen; chairs in which to sit; beds on which to sleep; tables upon which meals were served; and toys with which the children might play.

I have a notion that He was a master workman. I know He did good and honest work. I fancy that men came from far and near to have this young man of Nazareth make for them plows and yokes. To His shop women came to have their furniture made. They could always trust Him and the price He charged was right.

The significant thing about it all is that Jesus worked for a living. His family was poor. Work was a necessity. Jesus always meets necessity squarely. He was never known to shirk. I doubt if any able-bodied person has a right to live in this world without working.

His work may be mental, physical or spiritual, but the man who never works never contributes to the progress of human kind. Work, then, is more than admirable, it is fundamental.

I. At the Carpenter's Bench, Jesus Stood on Common Ground with Humanity's Masses

Moderate circumstances have always characterized the majority of the human race. Only a small minority has ever succeeded in beating the law of averages in the economic realm. We shall never come upon the day when it is unnecessary for man to work. There is a kind of finality in God's decree that man shall live by the sweat of his face. In that atmosphere men ever have lived and grown their characters. In that atmosphere Jesus lived.

In after days, in the great swing of His popularity, when people gathered about Him in multitudes, they never forgot that He once worked even as they now work. This memory opened many doors of opportunity to Him, which might have otherwise been forever closed. It is easy to imagine when news went about that He was coming into that section:

- Many a farmer would say, "That young teacher made the plow that I use. I must hear him speak."
- The ox-driver would say, "He made the yoke with which the oxen pull the burden and it is the best one I have ever seen. I must hear that young teacher's message."
- Old men would say, as they listened to His matchless words, "He made the chair in which I sit and rest at the evening time."
- Little children in the assembly would have tucked about their garments toys that had been fashioned and made by His hands.

Every article produced through the twenty or more years He spent in the carpenter's shop became a key to open the door to some heart, or some home, or some opportunity.

Only last summer as I preached in North Texas, where I had worked on a farm before I entered the ministry, a man drove thirty-five miles to hear the message. Before leaving home, he said, "I am going to hear that man preach. I used to pick cotton with him." Another came, saying, "We went to school together." Still another said, "We plowed together; we worked in the harvest together," just as men said in Jesus' day, "I want my children to see the man who made my plow."

How fitting it was then, that the founder of Christianity was a laborer. The hands that were nailed to the cross and that will one day gather the nations at the great judgment bar, were hands of honest toil; hands that knew what it meant to be tired and weary at the day's end. How fitting that Paul, the greatest missionary, was a manual laborer; and the hands that gripped the heart-strings of the gentiles were the hands that made tents in the city of Corinth.

Of one thing the people were sure—that Jesus understood their anxiety for daily bread. He knew how this anxiety could grip and waste human life. He knew its hammering blows upon their mental and physical natures.

It is little wonder that in the heart of His great ministry, He said, “Be not anxious for the morrow. Take no thought for your food and for your raiment; for your Heavenly Father that feeds the birds and clothes the lilies of the field will supply your needs according to His heavenly abundance.”

They were sure that when they came to the end of the day, tired and worn and hungry, Jesus understood. They knew that He had a fellow feeling for them as they would leave in the morning bearing a kit with its scanty lunch. He would be sympathetic with them as they would return, sweat-grimed and weary, at the close of the day; for He, Himself, many times had felt the same.

Is not this the background of His call to the weary masses at the seaside, when He said, “**Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest**”? Men will ever listen to him who has passed through their own experiences. Jesus had been limited to life’s bare necessities. Some days His body was tired to the point of exhaustion. By these experiences He had won the right to speak to the hearts of men in similar conditions.

If His work at the carpenter’s bench did not give Him the insight into the lives of the toiling masses, it did reveal that He understood their conflicting emotions, their daily burdens and their ever-present anxieties.

II. At the Carpenter’s Bench, Jesus United the Sacred and Secular Things of Life

Henceforth, all things became sacred. Before His coming there was a wall which separated spiritual life from secular life. This gave rise to many evils. A man’s daily life was something separate and apart from his religious life. When He put His hands to the hammer and the saw, He lifted daily duties into the realm of divine necessities.

For the first time it became evident in the world that the lowliest duty that was honest, purposeful and uplifting was divine. This was the death-knell of the priesthood who had put a wall between the sanctuary and the work-a-day world. The working man was separated from the worship of God.

Such a people stand at a distance from ministers and churches, feeling that their lot in life is but the drudgery of hard labor. They have imagined a lack of sympathy. They have not learned that Jesus erased this line of separation and put religion into every-day business. He made a man’s vocation and religion inseparable. Religion is necessary in the making of a plow.

- It operates in the kind of material that goes into the plow.
- It inspires honesty of workmanship.
- It tempers, seasons, purifies, and glorifies everything that we do with our hands.

The man who makes an honest plow is as honorable as the man who writes a poem or preaches a sermon. It is as religious for some men to dig a ditch or for some women to keep their homes, as it is for others to write a book or preach a sermon.

Not work, but bad workmanship is disgraceful. Jesus made it possible for every man to see his daily task as devoutly religious.

III. At the Carpenter's Bench, Jesus Demonstrated That Work Is a Means to a Noble End

We could imagine that we are standing beside Him at the shop as He makes a plow. He shapes the beam. He puts the foot on the plow and the handles in place, until at last the plow is finished. It is evident that He has not made this plow for the sake of the plow alone. He has made it for the farmer to turn over the soil to produce a harvest.

In its construction He has been mindful that the plow must be strong enough to meet the rocks in the soil, to break through the roots of the stumps, and cover successfully the weeds and rubbish.

We may fancy that we are standing beside Him as He makes a yoke. He shapes it carefully that it may be perfect in its fitting. He is thinking not so much of Himself. He is thinking of making the farmer's task easier, and the oxen's burden lighter. Perhaps He is thinking of that day, further on in His ministry, when He would say to the burdened people, "**My yoke is easy and my burden is light.**" It was the vision of the outcome that gave His work a meaning. It is never today's work that counts. It is tomorrow's result from today's work that bestows the crown.

One day a man driving along beside a farm in Georgia saw a man plowing the little, scrubby cotton. He was attracted by the farmer's smile. Pausing, he said, "Why are you smiling? Your cotton is small and unpromising."

The farmer said, "I am not thinking of this little, unpromising cotton. I am thinking of next fall, when I shall gather this cotton and haul it to the gin and sell it and buy shoes and clothes for my children and furniture for my home. That is what I am thinking about and that is why I am happy."

- When Jesus made a plow, He was thinking of the farmer that should use it.
- When Jesus made a yoke, He was thinking of the oxen that would wear it.
- When He was making a chair, He was thinking of those who would sit in it.
- When He was making the toys, He was thinking of the children who would play with them.

He never worked for accumulation's sake. He always had some great end in view. He realized that the accumulation of a fortune without a purpose was a waste of energy. He made it clear that that person's life is a failure whose labor does not live beyond the span of his own years.

IV. At the Carpenter's Bench, Jesus Revealed Many Things Concerning Human Nature

He revealed how much was hidden on the inside of things. As the rugged tree was brought into the workshop, before it was ever sawed into blocks or made into a plow, or a table, He saw the finished article.

- He saw in Simon Peter, the great preacher, while he was yet a rugged fisherman of Galilee.
- He saw in John, the beloved apostle, while he was yet a lad in the home.
- He saw in Paul, the great missionary, as he stood consenting to the death of Stephen.

He could discern as clearly what was hidden in the human heart as He could see that which was hidden in the heart of a tree.

He revealed that it takes work and time to transform a life. Days elapsed and much energy was exerted before the rough piece of timber became a useful product. It took time to change a tree into a plow.

It took patience and skill. In a single moment He restored sight to the blind, healing to the lame and life to the dead, but it took months and years to change men into disciples and apostles.

He revealed that the finest things must be made of the hardest wood.

Cedar was demanded for paneling the walls of the Temple. Other wood would have been easier to put in place, but it took the hard cedar to meet the demands.

He selected Simon Peter, middle-aged, rough, quick-tempered. He was hard timber, but Jesus needed a great heart. From this hard piece of wood He made a masterpiece.

He purposefully selected Paul, the hard, bitter persecutor of Christians, out of which He fashioned the world's greatest missionary. But this is not strange; for the best things are made of the hardest wood.

Perhaps the lad in your Sunday School class is a hard piece of timber, but some day the hard cedar of his life will adorn the temple of the Living God.

Finally the day came when they nailed the Carpenter to the cross, saying, "He is dead. He is gone." But, He arose on the third day to build again.

- He built the church that has defied the ages.
- He has built homes.
- He has built schools.
- He has built hospitals.
- He has built orphans' homes.
- He has built a Kingdom that is destined to consume the kingdoms of this world.

Build on, O Thou great, eternal Carpenter, and let us be thy lowly workmen!

Dr. Floyd Brantley Thorn was born at Mt Home, Ark., Aug. 13, 1895. Education, Baylor U. (A.B. and D.D.), Pastorates: Marlin, Tex., 1920-23; McAlester, Okla., 1923-26; Columbus Ave., Waco, Tex., 1926-32; Second Baptist Church, Houston, Tex., Aug. 1932 to date.

Second Baptist Church, Houston, has 2,500 members. Since Aug., 1932, under Dr. Thorn's ministry, there have been 1,700 additions. Total contributions have been \$300,00. Their record S. S. attendance is 2,100. Total value of all their church property is \$475,000 (All statistics as of Dec. 15, 1937).

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