

CRUCIFIED TO LIVE

“I am crucified . . . nevertheless I live”

by

S. Franklin Logsdon

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

PAUL AND THE MATTER OF MISSIONS

“The Holy Spirit said, ‘Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them’ (Acts 13:2)

One day Paul stood before the cold cynicism of Herod Agrippa II. He was apprehended for affirming that Jesus still lives. The Emperor entered the hearing chamber “**with great pomp**” for which all the Herods were noted, while the accused was brought in, by contrast, as a despicable creature in all the humility of forced subjection. The prisoner was granted the right to speak in his own defense. Then ensued that immortal rehearsal, in detail, of his glorious conversion to Christ. At the very height of his impassioned appeal, utterly impervious to regal scrutiny and legal operations, Paul firmly avowed, “**O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision.**”

Here is a clue to the Apostle’s unprecedented and unrivalled missionary zeal. A heavenly vision is prerequisite to a world vision.

- We must see Christ dying before we can see men dead.
- We must see Christ risen before we can see men rising.
- We must hear Christ calling before we can hear men crying.

Paul had a vision, yet even a vision was not sufficient. There must be obedience—an acceptance of the challenge and an unswerving devotion to the cause. In this respect Paul and Barnabas were the belated vanguard of a “**kingdom of priests**” (Exodus 19:6).

It was undoubtedly the design of the Lord God for His covenant people to engage in world-wide missionary endeavor, but their whole history has been sadly discolored with the darkness of disobedience. Jonah’s reluctance to go to the Gentile city of Nineveh is a mute testimony to this disturbing truth.

The seventy whom Jesus sent forth without purse or scrip or shoes soon lost their vision and reveled in secondary matters. Even Peter was slow to take the gospel to the nations; and when he did, his brethren in Judea took him to task, saying, “**Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised and didst eat with them.**”

Philip, by special commission of the Holy Spirit, rushed toward Gaza and won an Ethiopian to Christ; but we are forced to wait until the thirteenth chapter of Acts, to find a descendant of Jacob launching out on an earnest and extensive missionary venture. The effort Paul and Barnabas inaugurated has suffered in varying degrees during the intervening centuries; but, today, godly men and women are carrying the blood-stained banner of the cross to the remotest domains of mankind.

The Church at Antioch, strangely enough a Gentile city, furnished the two Jewish missionaries who became the pioneers of Christian missions. This Church was a veritable beehive of activity, and, while not cited in Scripture as a model for other assemblies to emulate, it is recorded as an encouragement to all. There was such spiritual health and wholesomeness there that the Holy Spirit looked upon it with the greatest of favour. Their emphasis was right to begin with for **“they ministered to the Lord.”** This left little room for petty selfishnesses or denominational pride.

They had **“prophets and teachers”** which afforded them every opportunity of becoming rooted and grounded in the Truth. Among their leaders were Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius, Manaen and Paul. This was a teaching Church, the kind which trains workers who sense the need of the fields and who respond to the call of the Spirit. That assembly which is willing to send and support its sons and daughters in the service may expect gracious visitations of the Holy Spirit with His gentle instruction, **“Separate them unto Me for the work whereunto I have called them.”**

This is the design of Truth.

In His high priestly prayer, the Lord Jesus Christ said to the Father, **“Sanctify them through Thy Truth; Thy Word is Truth.”** This is exactly what was transpiring at the Antioch Church. Two men were being set apart by the work of the Spirit and the teaching of the Word of Truth. One does not go very far into the Sacred Volume without an awareness that the challenge of the Scriptures comes with atomic force to sever one from all natural aspirations and secular ties. This accounts for the apparent reckless abandon which the willing **“called one”** evidences in leaving kindred and acquaintance and familiar scenes to sally forth to unseeded soil with the sweetest story ever told.

The missionary, of all the Lord’s servants, must know that the Word is **“quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart”** (Hebrews 4:12).

Discerning the thoughts and intents of the heart is descriptive of the practical effect of the Scriptures. Faithfully they are released from the dedicated lips of God’s spokesman. Through space they pass unseen, enter upon the auditory system and reach the heart. At once they go to work. They are particles of high potency. Despite the oftentimes deceptive outer appearance of a person, the challenge of Truth stirs up a violent struggle within. It questions the selfishness and pathetic unconcern for the lost and dying; it calls for a holy surrender.

The fields white unto harvest then loom so prominently on the horizon of that one's thoughts that all else becomes indistinct and distorted.

A compassion for the heathen never before known begins to develop. The heart beat is quickened. An issue is at hand. Excuses germinate in great numbers which is a diabolical stratagem of the Devil to frustrate the assignment from heavenly headquarters.

When the Lord of the Harvest moves upon a heart, Satan invariably counters. Then comes the necessity of choosing who the master of the life will be. This is one critical moment when the heavenly vision calls for heart obedience. It is the design of Truth to lead us into obedience to the divine commission.

This is the desire of Christ.

The prominent pedagogical procedure in Scripture is that of precept and example—the statement of principle propounded, then the illustration produced. This was the usual method in the teachings of Christ, and He, Himself, was frequently the example.

He urged upon men to do the will of God; then He prayed, **“Not as I will, but as Thou wilt.”** Pursuant to His resurrection, Jesus appeared suddenly to the ten disciples whose fear was soon allayed by his comforting salutation, **“Peace be unto you.”** **“Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord.”** In the midst of this joyful yet solemn and significant meeting, the Master said with evident and unquestioned authority, **“As my Father hath sent Me, even so send I you”** (John 20:21).

Jesus had already made it plain that He came not to be ministered unto but to minister; and, further, that the servant is no greater than his Lord. Those whom He had called were to minister to others. This was the means in the divine economy of propagating the good news of redemption. Christians are heralds of the gospel and should never hesitate to launch forth in faithful service. Paul was one of the few who readily realized this fact.

Now, how did the Father send Jesus? If this can be partly ascertained, then may we at least faintly know how we are sent. Jesus was sent in humbleness. **“He made himself of no reputation and took upon him the form of a servant . . . and humbled himself”** (Philippians 2:7, 8).

When the Holy Spirit separates one for a ministry, in this sense, He makes such an one to conform to the Lord. He separates one from his pride as Christ was separated from His glory and makes one humble. Paul said, **“God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world”** (Galatians 6:14).

The Saviour was sent to the ungrateful; so is the servant. Ezekiel was warned about the lack of appreciation which would meet him. He was told to expect bitter and offensive words as though he were being pricked with briars and thorns.

Those whom Jesus came to serve spoke blasphemous words against Him; those whom he came to save rent His garments, and spiked Him to a tree. He sends His servants into the same cruel world, saying, “**As the world hated Me, so will it hate you.**” Jesus was sent to be “**God’s faithful and True**” servant (Revelation 19:11). Before the dreadful scene at Calvary was enacted, He lifted His eyes toward heaven and affirmed, “**I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do**” (John 17:4).

He wants us to be faithful stewards, doing well the work He has committed to our trust. Paul had great joy in his final earthly moment when he was able, by the grace of God, to say, “**I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.**”

This is the demand of the field.

If there were no field of service, there would be no call for servants. If the need were not great, the demand would not be urgent; but there is a field and there is a need; there is also urgency. Jesus looked upon the world of lost men and women with great compassion “**because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.**”

He saw them as sheep fainting, faltering, forsaken and forgotten, broken, bleeding and bleating. Then He said to His disciples, “**The harvest truly is plenteous but the labourers are few**” (Matthew 9:37). The call of Barnabas and Saul by the Holy Spirit constituted the initial step in a great Christian missionary movement which has made marvellous advances throughout most of the earth.

The demand of the field makes no allowance for delay. Jesus urged, “**Say not ye there are yet four months, and then cometh the harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes and look on the fields, for they are white already unto harvest**” (John 4:35).

All that the field requires is an open eye and a seeing mind. If we have the mind of Christ, then we, too, shall have compassion. If we are obedient, we will go—go as He wills and where He leads.

One look was sufficient for Paul to say, “**I am debtor to the whole world.**” He had an open eye to see the perishing throngs, and a heart to pity. He was brought to tears because of their sad estate. Has the church of Jesus Christ become so blinded with the glitter of self-interest that it cannot see the whitened fields? Has its vision become so distorted that it cannot look with compassion upon the poor deluded folk who will miss heaven unless they learn of Christ the Door? The field strongly demands that we become separated unto the work of His calling.

This is the delight of the true servant.

No truth is more irrefutably established than the fact that a Christian never knows real joy until he has found the center of God’s will. All other soul enjoyment is either partial or utterly superficial. Jesus said, “**I delight to do Thy will, O God.**” Paul smiled at difficulties and hardships as he expressed his foremost desire, “**That I might finish my course with joy.**”

Wherever he went, he had the motivating assurance that he had been called by the Holy Ghost and his service for the Lord produced melody in his heart continually. Even at midnight, in a dark dungeon at Philippi, aching with bodily discomforts, he could sing.

Being in God's will guarantees results through the Spirit and results are always gratifying. Imagine Paul's delight as Lydia bowed at the foot of the cross and came out of heathen darkness, or as the jailer pleaded for deliverance from his fear.

Were not these compensating factors for any cost that might have been exacted? Such experiences were multiplied over and over. As a mother forgets the travail in the joy of seeing her babe, even so, Paul could forget the sorrows of maltreatment as he looked upon his children in the faith whom he had begotten unto the Lord. "**Ye are my crown and my rejoicing,**" he exulted. It was his pleasure always to minister to others.

The Shulamite once lamented, "**They made me the keeper of the vineyards, but mine own vineyard have I not kept**" (Song of Solomon 1:6). Later, there is an entirely different attitude. "**Let us get up early to the vineyards; let us see if the vine flourish**" (Song of Solomon 7:12).

The first reference is vividly illustrative of those who do only what they are forced to do, and that without joy, lamenting the fact that their own vineyard (interests) is being neglected—too many other responsibilities to do service for the Lord. In the latter reference, there is eagerness, expectation and rejoicing. The whole change in attitude was occasioned by the presence and companionship of the bridegroom, "**Come, my beloved, let US go forth into the field**" (Song of Solomon 7:11). Our bridegroom has said, "**Go . . . and lo, I am WITH YOU alway, even unto the end of the world** [consummation of the age]." In His company, there is blessing and joy.

This is the doing of the Spirit.

There are certain aspects in the development of church procedures which the Lord reserved exclusively for Himself.

An angel could be entrusted to inform Philip, the evangelist, to go toward Gaza; but the Holy Spirit must tell him when to make the contact with the Ethiopian (Acts 8:29).

When Paul would have gone from Galatia to Asia to preach the Word, he was "**forbidden of the Holy Ghost**" (Acts 16:6).

When he and his company would have gone from Mysia into Bithynia, "**The Spirit suffered them not.**"

As the Lord of the Harvest, He directs the traffic of servants. It is He Who gives the green or the red light. Paul may sow and Apollos may water, but God gives the increase. Yet, God must have human agency through which to work. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to place the labourers in the field.

The work of the Holy Spirit in marshalling forces is threefold.

First, He *calls*. This is the main significance in the statement, “**Separate Me Barnabas and Saul.**” He was calling these two men. It was a distinct summons which was understood both by the men themselves and by the church of which they were a part. There was no question, no hesitance, no misgivings. The call was not sought by Barnabas and Paul. It was clearly a divine call. God wanted them for a particular work at that particular time, and the great Administrator simply knocked at their heart’s door and delivered the commission. The whole church soon knew about it.

These two brethren were dearly beloved and greatly appreciated, but there was no lamentation. Spirit-filled people want always that God shall have His wonderful way.

The next step the Holy Spirit takes is a blessed assurance to the called one, for He *leads*.

Otherwise, how could men, even of the caliber of Barnabas and Paul, know each successive move? They could not; nor can we. The testimony of Peter is helpful in this connection. His journey toward a meeting place of Gentiles was without precedent, but he went. Why? “**The Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting**” (Acts 11:12).

“He leadeth me, O blessed thought,
O words with heavenly comfort fraught.”

I would like to know just where His holy plans for my life may take me, but I do not know; I need not know. It is enough just to know that He knows and that He leads. It was just such a confident attitude that made Paul the mighty servant he was.

Then, the Holy Spirit not only calls and leads, but He definitely *empowers*. Any task to which He calls man is too great for man. Any work into which He leads us is too demanding for our limited resources. How little practical importance we attach to the unqualified statement of our Lord, Who wisely counseled, “**Without Me ye can do nothing**” (John 15:5).

He put the treasure in an earthen vessel that the power may be of God. To accomplish His work the Holy Spirit requires sanctified vessels—clean channels through which His boundless power may be conducted. He even does the sanctifying. All we need to do is resign willingly to His blessed leadership.

This is the dread of Satan.

Every dedicated and trained worker the Holy Spirit calls from a church is a strong blow to the devil, and his strategy is to limit the number set forth. The success of his counter-measures is to be viewed with the greatest concern. His opposition can be summed up in three words; namely, hate, hurt and hinder.

- His hatred is the antithesis of God’s love;
- His hurting is the blighting effect he has upon believers’ obedience;
- His hindering is but the placing of hurdles in the servant’s course.

He strikes at the headwaters in order to pollute the stream. If schools and lesson material can be sabotaged, the churches plunged into compromise and the home standard lowered, he has effectively cut off the sadly needed help for the fields now white unto harvest. The Apostle knew from what source his opposition came.

“Wherefore, we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us” (I Thessalonians 2:18).

Many sincere and unsuspecting Christian people frown upon disloyalty to Christ but are themselves the recipients of Satanic bribes, and that is treason. Knowing what we do of his tactics, it is not at all hard to conceive that Satan would promote a courtship to prevent a missionary from reaching the field. God’s people are burdened with shackles and bent with a multiplicity of matters almost to the saturation point. Then it seems so legitimate to plead, “I haven’t time.”

God wants to be first in our lives. He wants us to be free to do His will. Any condition that keeps us from being available to do His bidding has been caused by enemy contravention. Any movement among the mulberry bushes which would indicate a revival or the volunteering of young folk for the field, immediately sends the serpent scurrying into a huddle with his devilish cohorts to adopt and apply some counter offensive. He dreads any work of the Spirit which strikes vitally at his plans of destruction.

It is the dream of angels.

“ . . . but unto us they did minister the things which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into” (I Peter 1:12).

The context from which this verse is taken is concerned about the salvation of souls (v. 9). Peter said the prophets predicted and the angels peer, but we, by the grace of God may preach it.

The picture is that of the holy angels looking over the parapet of heaven, peering into this matter of men bearing a heavenly message. They regarded only the cherubim and seraphim as being proper conveyors of such precious cargoes, but now it is men—men who once were enemies of God, formerly members of the family of Satan, so recently without hope and without God.

How could angels understand the work of the cross? Only those who were brought out of the pit and from the miry clay (Psalm 40:2) can enjoy the marvellous transforming value of the blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without spot and blemish.

Some of us may have a limited appreciation of the operations of the angels as they move in their orbit of divine planning, but we cherish the thought that God has vouchsafed to us, poor sinners saved by His matchless grace, a work of such transcendent importance that the angels in glory would gladly exchange positions with us if they could. They peer into our missionary activities with the greatest curiosity.

Oh, that we might learn, with Paul, and from him, something of the exalted blessing which is ours to be labourers together with the all-wise and infinite God. Surely, His service would no longer seem commonplace.

The honour would become overwhelming.

Just as the Holy Spirit called and commissioned Barnabas and Saul, even so He is calling to willing ones today, and commanding the churches to loose their cherished sons and daughters for world-wide assignments where angels cannot go!

“Give to God your gift, my brother;
He’ll not need to seek another,
You will do.
He will add His blessing to it;
Then the both of you will do it –
God and you.”

~ end of chapter 16 ~

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