

# Personal Responsibility for the Unsaved

An Address by Rev. CHARLES A. SYKES, B.D., delivered at the International Epworth League Convention in Denver

TO reclaim the fallen, to bring back the prodigal, to restore the wanderer, to rescue the unsaved, to bring all the world of human beings to the feet of Jesus, this is the task of the children of God *everywhere and always*. And it is ours, because it was first the task of our Saviour and King. In all evangelism, the pioneer and exemplar, the inspiring leader and peerless worker, was, and is, our imperial Divine Captain. He compressed into one sentence His whole subjective biography: "The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost." Luke, likewise, compressed into one sentence His whole objective history "He went about doing good." So that it is the King's business, not only as committed to us by the Lord Himself, and bearing the signature and seal of royal authority, but as the business which first of all, he himself undertook.

All intelligent zeal in this work kindles its enthusiasm, from the live coal brought from that celestial altar whereon the Lamb of God was offered in self-consuming devotion. Every disciple is called to be a co-worker with God the Father, a co-sufferer with God the Son, a co-witness with God the Holy Ghost in the great work of regenerating society and saving the world. Whatever other pursuit may claim our attention and endeavor, this is the one business of every disciple's life. This is his vocation; all the other things are but avocations. No other calling in life is legitimate if it does not further enable him to be "The Light of the World" and qualify him to act as the "salt of the earth." Until this truth and fact, this conception of life be acknowledged and felt, until this obligation and privilege become real and vivid, vital and vitalizing, there can be no adequate prosecution of this most colossal task ever presented to the mind of man. But on the other hand, let this conception of life, duty and responsibility take tenacious hold of every disciple, viz., I am called of God to bear the Cross after Christ, to follow the same business which He followed, "going about doing good, seeking and saving that which is lost!" Then let a holy affection, a passion for humanity, set this conception on fire with a flame of love, and before such a conviction, transfigured by such overpowering enthusiasm, the world's redemption and regeneration would advance as forest fires move, with the strides of a giant and the speed of a whirlwind, sweeping or melting all obstacles in its path, rapid and resistless as the march of God.

What the world needs to-day is not a new system of ethics or religion. It is simply a larger number of people who will make a steady effort to live up to the religion and ethics of the Lord Jesus Christ. This greatest of all wars has been going on for centuries. It is the ceaseless glorious conflict against the evil that is in the world. Every warrior who will enter that age-long battle, may find a place in the army, and win his spurs, and achieve honor, and obtain favor with the great Captain of the Host, if he will but do his best.

Jesus Christ said of Himself, "I am the Light of the world." Then He turned about and looking upon His disciples said, "Ye are the light of the world," "Ye are the salt of the land," not as cayenne pepper to sting the world, but as salt and light to preserve and save it. Then His disciples have that which distinguishes them from other men, as salt differs from the saltless, or as light from the dark; they possess a power of spreading through surrounding society that which distinguishes them, as the savor of salt will spread by contact, or the brilliance of a lamp by its elevation on its stand; and they have this power to savor and enlighten by virtue of their union of life and purpose with their Lord. And then He warns His disciples that if they fail in this, if the salt becomes saltless, when a social revolution comes a result of the processes of social corruption, men will cast out the unsalted Christianity and tread it under foot! And was not that what happened in the French Revolution? What did men care for the religion that failed to curb sensuality and pride and cruelty under the oppression of the old régime, the religion that had forgotten to deal bread to the hungry, to comfort the afflicted, to break every yoke and let the oppressed go free? What did they care for the religion that had done little or nothing to make men understand, and help, and love one another? Nothing. It was the first thing they threw

away in the madness of their revolt, and trampled under foot in the mire of their contempt.

We need a *real revival of religion*—the religion that has a glorious historic past of abounding successful achievement in all ranks and conditions of human society, a religion that has over and over again demonstrated its genius and power to meet and transform the needs of all people everywhere—the religion that has already founded the hospital, and the asylum, and the free school; that has broken the fetters of the slave, and lifted womanhood out of bondage and degradation; that has put the arm of protection around the helpless and innocence of childhood; that links the preaching of the Fatherhood of God with the practice of the brotherhood of man.

The duty and responsibility, now and forever, rests with the individual disciples of the Lord Jesus, "Whoever will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." And there is only one cross. The Word of God knows no plurality of crosses. Christ took up the cross. That to him meant *self-sacrifice for others' salvation*, and it means that, and only that, to every follower and disciple. To "bear the cross" after Him is to give up ourselves to a life, or, if need be, to a death, as He did for the sake of saving men.

Moses anticipated such oblivious self-offering when he plead, "and now if thou wilt forgive their sin; and, if not, blot me I pray thee, out of thy book, which thou hast written." The true interpretation of that sublime intercession of the great law-giver is not to be found in a determination to be identified with Israel in their rejection of God. But Moses was offering himself as a sacrifice for the sinning people with whom God was so justly incensed, "rather than not forgive them blot me out of thy book."

Paul long after and with greater light upon the glory of such Divine altruism, said, "I could wish myself accused for Christ for my brethren." That was "bearing the cross" and "being crucified with Christ" and entitled the great evangelist of the early nations to say, "from henceforth let no man trouble me for I bear in my body the stigmata of the Lord Jesus."

All the Prophets of God had this conception of life, and that is why their work was ultimately invincible. Not that they were a class by themselves, a sort of spiritual aristocracy apart from the masses; but rather realizing that they had visions of God righteousness and the coming kingdom, believing that they had messages from heaven for men, they sought to have others see what they saw, and hear what they heard. They felt the truth expressed by a modern poet-prophet:

"Earth's crammed with Heaven,  
And every common bush affame with God—  
Only he who sees takes off his shoes and worships;  
The rest sit round and pick blackberries."

This is the true missionary spirit, that in home or foreign lands, in the slums of the cities, and to save humanity.

By the instinct of the regenerative power working in the life of every disciple of Christ, which leads him out to pray and intercede for others; by the ties of affection and of blood and of kindred, by which God has "set the solitary in families" over the whole earth; by the constant and pledged co-operation and pleading of the Holy Spirit; by the encouragement and openings and beckonings of Divine Providence; by the beacon examples of all the flaming evangelists of all past time, and by the incomparable bliss and joy of soul-winning, ought we to realize our personal responsibility for the unsaved.

By the processes of destruction and decay and death at work in the world; by the value of human lives; by the very duties that lie in our path; ought we to rally to this call of duty.

In the words of the Golden Litany, "By the cold erib in which the Christ of our love didst lay; by thy flight into Egypt, and all the pain thou didst suffer there; by thy Holy Baptism and the glorious appearing of the Holy Trinity; by thy thirst, hunger, cold and heat, in this vale of misery; by