

POSITIVE SERVICE.

IN THE LORD'S VINEYARD DEMANDED FOR THE YEAR 1904.

CHRISTIANS CALLED TO ARMS.

Gospel Activities, Especially Those That Lie Nearest at Hand, Should Be Increased and Strengthened—Various Fields in Which the Believer May Work For Humanity—"Feed My Lambs," "Feed My Sheep."

Entered according to Act of Parliament of Canada, in the year 1903, by William Bailey, of Toronto, at the Dep't of Agriculture, Ottawa.

Los Angeles, Cal., Jan. 8.—In this sermon, preached here to-day to an audience representing many states of the Union, Pastor Talmage sounds a vigorous call for increased gospel activities in many fields during the New Year and especially among those that lie nearest at hand. The text is Matt. xx, 7, "Go ye also into the vineyard."

A prospective theme! It is especially appropriate for the first sermon of a new year. This is not a time to sound a requiem over the dead. It is a time when the gospel colors should be unfurled defiantly to the breeze and when an aggressive campaign should be planned for invading the strongholds of evil surrounded by satanic intrenchments. "Forward march!" should be the command all along the lines, not "Mark time!" not "Halt!" not "Fall back!" not "Be on guard for sentinel duty." We should have for the gospel ranks a grand charge and not a tattoo. There should be no willingness to sleep upon our arms in peace.

A negative policy will never capture this old world for Christ. It is well at times to preach the command, "Thou shalt not." The Christian is called to a life of positive, active service. On the first Sunday of a new year, when plans are being made for the next twelve months, I would remind you of that call. I would direct your attention to glorious opportunities for Christian usefulness within your reach, and I assure you that in availing yourselves of them you will not only benefit others, but will receive a blessing in your own soul. It is ever true that "they who water others shall themselves be watered."

There is work, unlimited work, tremendous, overpowering and vital work, to do among the Sunday schools of America. This gospel work is the more important because it must be done quickly or it will never be done at all. The verdant fields of childhood do not stay verdant long. Our own children seem to spring up under our very eye. It is but a short time since they were babies. Now they are boys and girls. Soon they will be grown men and women. We go back to visit the scenes of our childhood which we left only a few years ago, and we find that the companions of our youth are now grown up and married and have babies of their own. When Lord Lawrence, viceroy of India, was about to leave for Calcutta he burst into tears as he bid goodby to his youngest child. Turning aside from his family, he said to his wife: "I will never see my baby Bertie again. When I meet him once more he will have ceased to be a baby." Thus if you would work for Christ among the children you must hasten in your work.

Sunday school work offers an unlimited field for gospel effort. Many, many are the children among whom the earnest disciple can labor. The multitudes of pattering feet fairly fill the earth with music when these little throngs every morning start on their daily tramp to the public schools. In order to house them for educational purposes millions upon millions of dollars must be spent annually. No Christian disciple need be afraid of building upon another man's foundation when he goes to work for Christ among the little children.

"But," the church member says, "how am I to get a Sunday school class? How am I to work among the children? When I enter an ordinary Sunday school I find all the classes provided with teachers. Shall I try

to steal away the scholars from some other teacher?" Oh, no, my friend. No good is ever accomplished for Christ by theft. What you should do is to go out and get your own Sunday school class. There are scores and perhaps hundreds of little children living near you who may never have heard the name of Jesus uttered in prayer. Go after them whether they are dressed in rags or in silks. Go after them even though you must beg shoes for their feet and clothing for their backs. Go after them whether they may be in palace or in hut. Go after them and beg them to come. Go after them even if you have to bribe your way into their affections with candy and dolls and with social calls.

"But," you say again, "supposing I should do as you say. Supposing I should get my Sunday school class together; then what shall I teach? I am only a humble follower of Christ. I know practically nothing about the Bible." Well, my Christian friend, if you gather your children in Christ's name I have no fears about the spiritual results. The older I grow the more I believe that the most important requisite for effective work as a Sunday school teacher is a loving, consecrated heart. Intellectual ability is valuable in its place, and the better the teacher is equipped the better it is for the children. But the essential quality is love for Christ and for souls. Without that quality the most highly educated teacher is a cold, unimpressive personality. Icebergs may be very beautiful to look at, especially when reflecting the rays of the rising sun, but icebergs are cold shrines before which to bow and forbidding hearstones near which to build a family altar. Many intellectual brains are merely over-awing icebergs. They repel rather than attract; they frighten rather than soothe. The Sunday school teacher needs a warm, loving heart far more than he needs an intellectual brain. If as a consecrated gospel teacher you will week by week come to your classes glowing with Christian enthusiasm; if you will with that Christian enthusiasm study well over your Bible and your "Sunday School Lesson Helps," there will be no need of fearing about what you will say. You will not only lead your scholars to Christ, but in teaching them you will yourself come nearer and nearer to your Saviour.

Sunday school work is of the most vital importance. Among all the fields open for gospel labor I have purposely placed it first, because I believe it to be the most important of all. No one can fully estimate the future influence of the children who are now playing about our doors. We, in Christ's name, can place our hands upon the children. In Sunday school work we can say, "The children will be greater than all, because the children of to-day will be the men and the women of to-morrow." If you can save the cradles and the nurseries for Christ, you can save the world for Christ. I plead and beg of you, Christian disciples, to expend a great part of your gospel energies in working among the children.

Another gate stands wide open for practical gospel usefulness. This gate leads into a field aglow with ripened human grain, ready to be garnered. It is crowded with young people. But, though crowded with the young men and maidens, yet each passenger train moving into our large cities is emptying part of its load into this field as the freight trains daily disgorge their cattle and horses and sheep into the Chicago stock yards, and yet there is always room for more. Young men and maidens, like children, seem to be everywhere. Who will help save them? Church member, is not Christ calling you to go and labor among the stalwart pines of youth as well as to use the gospel ax among the gnarled and worm-eaten branches of sinful old age?

How is the Christian to go after the young people? Simply enough. He is to go after them with the same vigor as the agents of evil go after their prey. Here, for instance, is a young man who comes into a large city. He has no friends. Through an old acquaintance of his father he gets a position in your store. He has a small bedroom in a city boarding house. How is the Christian disciple to greet him? Is he to merely pass a "Good morning" or is he to go to that young man and open a conversation something like this: "Good morning! Are you a stranger in the city? Are you from a Christian home? Of course you

have no church connections as yet. Will you not come down to our church next Sunday morning? We have our Christian Endeavor social next Thursday night. I wish that I could introduce you to some of our young people. It is very easy to drift among bad associates in a large town like this. I want you to get among the good people. We have some fine young folks up at our church. I know that you will get a warm welcome. Perhaps you do not know the city well enough to find your way. Come with me to supper, and we will go together, or I will call at your room for you." How many young men, strangers in a large city, are there who would refuse an invitation to come among Christian people if thus accosted? The reason the young people do not come into church fellowship is because they are not personally invited to come. This invitation duty rests with the new convert as well as with the old.

"But," some aged church member says, "this invitation duty to the young folks may apply to others, but not to me. I am not fitted for work among the young. My hair is gray. My nerves are not steady. I have postponed coming to Christ until I have passed my two score and ten. It needs a young person to work for Christ among the young." No, my aged, gray haired friend; you are wrong. There is only one person more fitted to work among the young than a Christian young man or a young woman. That person is a Christian gray haired man or woman who is still blessed with a young heart. Aged Christian friend, great opportunities of gospel usefulness are open to you among the young folks if you will only go to them in the spirit of loving consecration. They are open if you will only go to the young folks in a plain, practical way in the name of Jesus Christ.

Another glorious field of Christian usefulness is to be found in missionary work. What do I mean by that? Christian labor among the cannibals of the south seas? Among the fur robed Eskimos, in their igloos, of the icy north? Among the tattooed Maoris of New Zealand and the half civilized natives of the Orient? Oh, yes, they are all included in that term, "missionary work." The divine command, "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost," has a world-wide significance. One of the first duties of a Christian is to work for the foreign missionary society of his church.

But in reference to missionary work I had in mind also another interpretation. I mean Christian labor among those who are living in your back alleys, Christian labor among the poor and the social outcasts. Christian labor, as a lady sometime ago expressed it to me in a beautiful letter. She wrote asking me if I knew of any crippled child who had no friends. She wanted to adopt that child. She well knew that the able-bodied children might ultimately be able to take care of themselves, but the crippled child never. Therefore she wanted to adopt a crippled child and care for the boy while she lived and leave money enough in her will to care for the child after she was dead. Ah, that is the true missionary spirit! To care for the cripples and the helpless—the moral and physical cripples. You can find them in the slums. You can hear them knocking at your door.

How can the Christian work in the slums? By giving at least one evening of each week if possible to work in one of the city's rescue missions. You have a good voice. Go to those meetings and sing. They need you. You know or should know how to pray. Go there and lead in prayer. If you can do no more you can at least give out a hymn book and smile a welcome. Go there and do that. How can you do missionary work in the back alley? Go and visit the poor homes that are only a stone's throw from your door. You will find there people who are silently yet nobly struggling for life. It was well said by a great Christian leader, "The deserving poor are those whom you have to seek and not those who seek you." Go in Christ's name and hunt the deserving poor—the halt, the lame, the blind.

Another glorious field for Christian activity is found in hospital work. It is found where Christ spent most of his earthly ministry—namely, among the sick. It is found in going through the wards filled with white coats and leaving here a flower and there a word of encouragement and yonder a prayer. It is found in the children's wards, where many little ones are cursed with a futile struggle for physical existence, cursed from the moment they were born. It is found in the old people's homes, where the aged and the physically infirm, sometimes petulantly, sometimes lovingly and longingly, are waiting for the last summons to join the silent majority beyond.

But though the hospitals are filled to overflowing, how few of us ever think of going there to carry a Christ's message of good cheer! When we think of genuine Christian work we are apt to look for that work far beyond the seas. We do not appreciate the opportunities that are at our very doors.

But there is still one more field of Christian activity to which I would direct your attention. That is to the side rooms where the after-meetings should be held in every Christian church immediately following the benediction of the Sunday night services. That is the place where the gospel net is drawn. That is the room in which after a week of prayer the sinners are given a direct invitation to join the church. There they are brought face to face with Jesus Christ and are urged to make a decision in reference to their soul's eternal destiny. That is the one place above all others where the Christian should expect to see the direct results of his spiritual labors. It is the one place toward which all his scholars and young people should converge and concentrate and find its gospel climax.

ars and young people should converge and concentrate and find its gospel climax.

The busiest and most intense Christian worker should be found in the Sunday night after-meeting. No sinner should be there to whom a church member would be unwilling to extend a gospel invitation and with whom he would feel a diffidence in talking about his Saviour, Jesus Christ. But the great stumbling block in the way of most new church members is this—they think as new members that they should take a back seat. They feel that older Christians, and not the new converts, should move up and down among the people. The inevitable result is when a Christian is willing to remain silent in the beginning of his religious life he is very apt to remain dumb all through his earthly Christian career.

Oh, that our new converts in our sacred Sunday night after-meetings would immediately begin to testify for Jesus! Testify as Paul testified on the day after his conversion. No sooner did the good Ananias open his blinded eyes then he immediately began to talk about Jesus, and him crucified. He immediately began to work for the conversion of souls until he was at last driven over the Damascus wall, and he had to flee the town by night. Oh, that our new converts in the sacred after-meetings on Sunday night would testify for Christ as did James Tissot with his brush immediately after his conversion! This noted French artist was once the idol of Parisian society. He made his first fame as a portrait painter of society women. But one day while studying the French society woman in an attitude of prayer in a Parisian cathedral he gave his heart to Christ. Immediately to his old friends Tissot became a changed man. He not only turned his back upon his old life, but that he might the more ably portray the scenes in the life of Christ he lived for many years in the Far East. The famous series of Christ's life in art is the result of Tissot's testimony. Church member, plead at once for Jesus. Plead at once wherever you go. Especially plead for him and work for him in the sacred after-meeting held immediately following the benediction of the Sunday night preaching service.

Thus the call to the Christian life is a bugle blast for work. The church pew is not meant for a bed of roses, where indolence and sloth can lie down for perpetual slumber. Consecrated church membership is a sacred affinity for intense missionary activity as well as for "gospel rest." A famous musician once said, "If I stop practicing upon the piano one day I will feel my deterioration, if two days the musical critics will feel it, if three the world at large in my promiscuous audiences will feel it." If the consecrated church member stops working for Christ one day he himself will feel his own spiritual deterioration, if two days his Christian friends will realize it, if three days the world at large will be the sufferer because of it. Faith's wings are movable. They must be kept working all the time. Now comes the practical determination for the Christian to settle—where are you specially fitted to go to work for Christ? Choose your spiritual occupations. From among the many fields of gospel opportunities choose them now.

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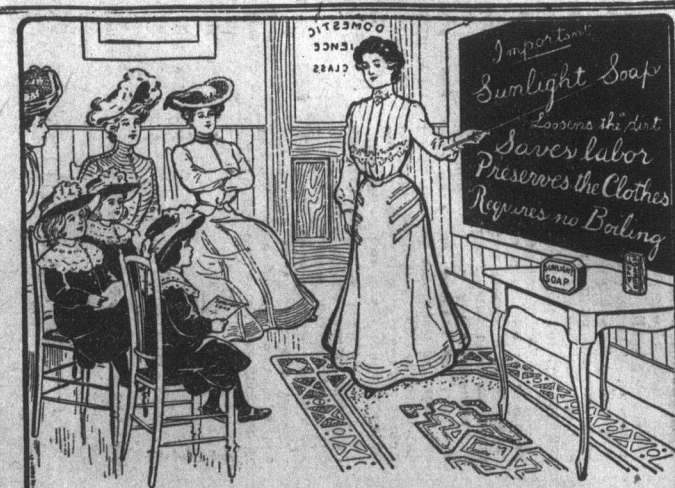
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