

TALMAGE SERMON

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Chicago, Nov. 16.—The duty of Christian laymen to present the gospel invitation to people who have not yet accepted it is enjoined in this sermon by Rev. Frank De Witt Talmage on the text Luke xiv, 23, "Go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in."

Christ was comparing the kingdom of heaven to a great banquet which God had prepared for his invited guests, who would not come. The Earl of Leicester made great preparations to receive Elizabeth, the "Virgin Queen of England," when she visited the castle halls of old Kenilworth. Not only was his banquet hall brilliant with many lights, but no sooner did the royal guest step upon the drawbridge which led into the castle than a raft, made as a floating island, came into view. Upon this floating island sat a beautiful woman. She was surrounded by her water nymphs. She came, as queen of the lake, to bend the knee in homage to the visiting queen. At night while the banquet went on the heavens were aflame with the illuminations of fireworks. "Such," wrote the clerk of Queen Elizabeth's council chamber, "was the blaze of burning darts, the gleam of stars coruscant, the streams and hail of fiery sparks, lightnings of wildfire and slight-shot of thunderbolts, with continuance terror and vehemency, that the heavens thundered, the waters surged and the earth shook, and for my part, hardy as I am, it made me vegeably afraid." But, though the queen lover made great and wonderful preparations to receive his royal guest in the gorgeous banquet hall of old Kenilworth, he made no such preparations as God had made in the parable to receive his heavenly guests, who would not come.

But, as the divinely invited guests would not come, then God practically said: "I will have my banquet hall filled notwithstanding. If the guests for whom the banquet was prepared will not come to me, then I will send out for those who will appreciate it. I will compel them to come in." So the Lord in the parable said to his servants, as Christ now says to us church members, "Go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in." The purpose of this discourse is to show how, as individual church members, we can become heavenly constrainters and present the gospel invitation: to sinful men and women whom we meet in our daily walks of life. It is to show how, by gospel consecrated work among individuals, we can change an empty church into a crowded sanctuary and by depleting the places of evil resort we can ultimately make a full heaven.

Mr. Moody's Plan.

When some one asked Mr. Moody: "How shall we reach the masses for Christ? How shall we give the gospel invitation to those sinners who are out in the highways and the hedges?" he bluntly answered his questioners, "Go after them." But how are we to go after them? First, as Christ's disciples, we should begin our personal work among individuals by presenting the gospel of Jesus to those who are closest to us. We should present Christ first to our fathers and mothers, to our husbands and wives and brothers and sisters and children, to our dear friends and to all who are bound to us by the ties of blood and love. We should do just the same as Andrew, the brother of Philip, did when he was converted. No sooner did he see the face of Christ than he practically said to himself: "Why, I must immediately go and hunt up my dear brother Philip. How happy I can make him! We have been side by side in all our joys and sorrows from the time we were born. He must share today in my new hope." It is upon this action of Andrew, who at once went and carried the gospel invitation to his brother, that the great "Brotherhood of Andrew and Philip" has been established.

But, though the eternal salvation of our unrepentant loved ones ought to be a perpetual cause of anxiety for us day in and day out, yet there are thousands and hundreds of thousands of church members who never think it obligatory for them to present the love of a living Christ to those who ought to be as dear to them as a Jonathan was to a David, a Damon to a Pythias or the memory of a murdered king of Denmark was to an avenging son. These church members are ready to invite those friends to their homes, but they are not willing to personally invite them to sit at the holiest of all tables—the table of the blessed communion. They are ready to talk with their friends upon politics or business, but they are not ready to discuss with them the greatest of all questions, "What shall it profit a man if he should gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" They are ready to sound the praises of their friends to their other friends, but they are not ready to sound forth to their earthly friends the praises of their Heavenly Father. They are always ready to introduce one earthly friend to another, but they are not anxious to make their earthly companions acquainted with that Divine Companion who is ever willing to

be our helper and guide along the troubled journey of life.

These church members are not ready to do as a Sunday school teacher did some years ago. She was the daughter of one of the wealthiest financiers in the world. Her teacher, who was a very intimate friend of my mother, told of the incident. Being converted, the young girl not only gave her heart to Christ, but she at once wanted those who were dearest to her to do the same. So, a few days before her public profession in the church, she came to her father and said, "Papa, I am going to join the church next Sunday, and I want you to come and see me." "No, daughter," answered the father, "I am ready to do anything for you, but I can't go to church. Your mother, you know, attends to that part of the family duties. Besides, Helen, I have a very important meeting next Sunday with one of our New York boards, and I cannot go to church." "Father," persisted the young girl, "you say you love me. I believe you do. If I was to be married next Sunday, you would be there, would you not? Well, father, I am going to a more important ceremony than any earthly marriage. I am going to give my troth to Jesus Christ. He is to be more to me than ever an earthly husband can be, and I want you to be there." The tears began to rain down the great financier's cheeks as he answered, "Yes, Helen, I will go." As a result of that invitation and that service the father gave his heart to God. He is today awaiting in heaven the advent of his Christian daughter, whose faithfulness led him to the foot of the cross. Oh, that you and I, as gospel evangelists, might be willing to begin our evangelistic work at home—begin by putting our arm in loving embrace about our dear friends whose affections mean so much to us and say: "Brother, sister, I cannot be truly happy unless you are happy with me in Christ. Will you come with me to meet my Saviour? Will you come now?"

Personal Evangelistic Work.

When John McLean, the famous associate justice of the supreme court of the United States, was converted many years ago, it was on a Sunday morning at church. On his way home he said to his wife: "Mary, we have neglected our duty to Christ too long. We shall at once set up a family altar and have family prayers as soon as we arrive home." "But, John," answered his wife, "we cannot do that at once. You have invited some prominent lawyers to dinner, and they will be waiting for us in the parlor now. Perhaps we might have family prayers in the back room, if you wish." "No," answered the famous lawyer, who is long since dead; "the first time I ask Jesus into my home I shall not sneak him in by the kitchen door. I shall ask him to enter my parlor." When Judge McLean entered the house, he immediately called the children together; then, after greeting his lawyer friends, he turned and said: "Gentlemen, I gave my heart to Christ this morning. It is a very important day in my life. I intend to start a family altar at once. I wish that you would join in family worship with me and my children and that my Christ might become your Christ. But if you are not willing to join we will be through with prayers in a little while, and then we will all go to dinner." As a result of that earnest plea not only did his family, but also his guests, kneel in prayer. One or two of those guests then and there gave their hearts to Christ. Would that we might all start our evangelistic work in our homes! Would that we all might obey the commandment of my text by first trying to bring our loved ones to know and to trust that Saviour whose love for the repentant sinner passeth all understanding!

But the gospel invitation ought to be given to the strangers who are within a Christian's gates as well as to the loved ones who have a right by the ties of blood to live there. It is nonsense for us to suppose that after we have gathered our fathers and mothers and wives and husbands and children and a very few dear personal friends into the gospel lifeboat we have a right to haul in the plank and cast off the hawsers and set sail for heaven, deeming our Christian responsibilities fulfilled. No. Emphatically no. The Christian's obligations are so far-reaching toward his fellow men that in the light of the gospel the poor traveler who was waylaid by thieves on the road to Jericho was just as much a brother to the good Samaritan as if he had been born in the same cradle, sung to sleep by the same lullaby and reared in the same homestead.

But, though the gospel teachings make the Jew and the gentile brothers, yet the average church member does not feel that he has any direct responsibility in presenting the gospel invitation to the stranger that is within his gates. After the minister has preached some Sunday a pertinent sermon upon this overwhelming text, "Go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in," this average church member accosts the pastor with words like the following: "Why, my dear pastor, you would not expect me to stand in the aisle of the church and ask the stranger to come into the after meeting, would you? I am a young girl. It would not be proper for a young lady to speak to strange men and women, even in a church, without an introduction." Or some young man would say: "Preacher, I am a church member, but I cannot do what you want me to do. You surely would not expect me, when I am riding along in a railroad train, to talk about Christ with every man who might sit down by my side and open a conversation with me? Why, such a course as that would naturally be very embarrassing to me as well as to the people with whom I talk." Yes, young man or young woman, whether it be embarrassing or no; whether you

have had an introduction or not to the people with whom you come into temporary contact, that is what I believe every true church member ought to do. I believe every Christian ought to be so anxious to save souls for Christ that, no matter in what position in life he may be placed, he ought never to allow any man, woman or child to come into contact with him in any way unless he tactfully improves that chance for speaking a word for his Divine Master.

Spread the Invitation.

Church members should present the gospel invitation to the men and women whom they chance to meet the more willingly because they would never dream of waiting for an introduction or of hesitating on account of embarrassment if they saw those same people threatened with any physical danger. Supposing, O Christian man, you were returning home late some night and you saw the flames playing about the curtains of the dining room in your neighbor's house. Would you hesitate for one instant about ringing that owner's doorbell because you had not a personal acquaintance with him? Would you first scurry round the town to hunt up some mutual acquaintance to give you that introduction? No! At the top of your lungs you would cry "Fire! Fire! Fire!" You would tell your companion who was by your side to run to the nearest fire alarm box and at once call the engines. And if the smoke was rolling up in great clouds and threatening to suffocate the inmates of that home you would with your cane smash the parlor windows and rush upstairs unannounced and awaken the drowsy sleepers. If necessary, you would help carry the children down into the street in your protecting arms. After you are ready to do all that to warn a stranger of an earthly danger, do you mean to tell me that unless you have been introduced you have no right to give to that same stranger the gospel invitation? I declare that your position is not tenable. I tell you that if you truly believe that an unrepentant sinner must die, then you should act toward the sinner who is in imminent danger of destruction in the same way in which you would act toward that man who is sleeping in bed when the fire demons are dancing along his hallways and playing hide and seek among the tapestries of his parlor.

Again, it is absolutely necessary in order to carry out the command of my text for the average church member to give the gospel invitation to his friends and to strangers when they are gathered inside the church walls as well as when they are scattered without, and it is also necessary for the church members to extend this invitation for a specified time and place. A general invitation to come to supper is, as a rule, worse than no invitation at all. When a person comes to me and gushingly says, "Oh, Mr. Talmage, I do wish you would come and visit us; come any time you can and stay as long as you please," I am sure of one fact—that person wants to be polite, but he does not want me to come. He did not set a date. But when a friend comes to me and says, "Mr. Talmage, will you and your wife take supper with us next Thursday night; we are poor folks, but we will give you the best we have?" I generally accept. Why? Because I think that man wants me to come. He set a time and a place where he wished to entertain me. So, when the minister of the Lord Jesus Christ preaches a sermon and gives a general invitation and says to the sinners, "Come to Christ," and then dismisses his audience with a benediction and goes home, as a rule, that sermon has amounted to but very little in its evangelistic results. But when the minister of the Lord Jesus Christ can go to his church members and say: "Brethren, we must gather in the sinners who are living around this church. We must go out into the highways and the hedges and compel them to come in. We will tonight as soon as the benediction has been pronounced have an after meeting. As members of this church we will distribute ourselves through the aisles and buttonhole every man, woman and child, so that no one shall leave the building without having a special invitation for this after meeting," there will be no disappointment in the spiritual results. Why? Because the church members themselves are asking their friends and the strangers to meet Jesus Christ in a specified place at a specified time. General invitations in reference to the gospel banquet as well as to an earthly home, as a rule, are worse than no invitations at all.

The Fault of the Pews.

So, today, I lay the blame for the lack of spiritual results in our churches far more upon the pews than I do upon the pulpits. God knows, I do not believe that our ministers are perfect men, but most of them are earnest men, intense men. They would do anything in their power to bring immortal souls to Christ. But the trouble is when the average minister of the gospel announces an after meeting, where sinners can be brought face to face with Christ, nine-tenths, aye, ninety-nine-hundredths, of all the church members will get up and put on their hats and go home. They will not only by their actions refuse to personally extend an invitation to the men and women who are sitting by their side, but they will absolutely refuse to go into the after meetings and talk with sinners who are trying to find Christ. This charge which I make against the church members I make not only against the laymen, but also against the church officers. I make it against the elders and the deacons and the trustees. I make it in the strength of the overwhelming fact that you derelict church members cannot find a great evangelistic preacher who is accomplishing any great good for Christ who is not backed up by a praying,

consecrated band of earnest church workers. Yet you can find today church after church in our land that is nothing more or less than a slaughter house for ministerial usefulness. Their pastors will win great spiritual successes before they come to them, and those pastors will win great spiritual successes after they leave them, but while they are in those spiritually dead churches the pastors will stumble about blinded and helpless, as did the mighty Samson, bound with fetters of brass, with his two eyes out, grinding about in the prison house of Gaza. Those evangelistic ministers are spiritually helpless in such churches because the people, the common church members, will not unite as a working force and personally present the gospel of Jesus Christ to the strangers who come among them. Instead of deriding and underestimating the power of the ministry, it is high time for some one to thunder a philippic against the indifference of the selfish church members who refuse to spiritually support the pulpit, as the pew always ought loyally to do.

The gospel invitation should be presented by the church members to their friends and to the strangers wherever they may be found, because the vast majority of sinners never enter the church at all. Therefore, if they do not have Christ presented to them on the street, in the office, in the railroad trains and even in the kitchen, they will never be invited at all. Mr. Beecher once powerfully said, "The longer I live the more confidence I have in those sermons preached where one man is a minister and one man is the congregation, where there is no question as to who is meant when the preacher says, 'Thou art the man!'" I believe Mr. Beecher was right when he made that statement, but I believe he was right even in a larger sense. The longer I live the more confidence I have in those sermons that are preached where one man is a minister and one man is a congregation, because such a gospel service can be held everywhere. It can use the mechanic's bench for a pulpit; it can have the ice-man's cart for a moving tabernacle; it can carry the Bread of Life to the sinner who would otherwise never be willing to receive that bread over the pulpit desk. Besides, the minister in such a case does not have to be an ordained theological student, but need be simply an earnest consecrated layman pleading for Christ with the sinner who is standing by his side in the village store.

Saving a Sinful World.

If all church members were to become earnest and consecrated evangelists, it would not take very long for this whole sinful world to see the sunrise burst of the millennial dawn. Surely it would not be too much to expect that one such evangelist as Mr. Beecher described should at least win one soul a year for Christ, yet Dr. William Morley Punshon, the great English Methodist, once made the startling statement: "If every disciple today were to call only one person to Christ each year and that one were to call one other, how swiftly the world would be wholly converted! There are today millions of true believers in the world. But if there were only 100 see how quickly the work would grow. In less than twenty-five years the world would be converted, for this would double the number of disciples each year." After such an impressive statement, will any one say that the gospel invitation, which can be given daily by the church members, would amount to but little in the salvation of a sinful world?

To show the importance of a Christian layman's work I cannot do better in closing this sermon than quote two illustrations from the personal experience of H. Clay Trumbull, the well known editor of the Sunday School Times. Mr. Trumbull's early life was spent in Stonington, Conn. There a great revival swept the town, and many of the companions of his youth joined the church, among whom was a young man who was one of his most intimate friends. For many years these two as boys and young men lived near each other, but his Christian friend never spoke to him about religion. After awhile they separated. Mr. Trumbull became an engineer in Hartford; his Christian friend went to Yale, but during his last year at college he sent a letter to his old chum pleading with him to become a Christian. That letter was the means of saving H. Clay Trumbull's soul. In his engine room, upon the receipt of it, he then and there gave his heart to God.

He immediately said to himself, "If the personal work of a layman can do so much in the salvation of an immortal soul, I will never make the mistake my friend made with me by postponing for so long a personal invitation to another." So, the same night on which he was converted, Mr. Trumbull went to one of his fellow workmen and told him he had been converted. He urged his friend also to accept Christ. This friend turned to him and said: "Trumbull, your words cut me to the heart. You little know how they rebuke me. I have long been a professed follower of Christ, and you have never suspected this, although we've been in close association in house and office for years. May God forgive me for my lack of faithfulness." A. e. may God today forgive us all, ministers and laymen alike, if we have shown the same negligence as these two young men who came into H. Clay Trumbull's life. May God teach us, one and all, the power of personal testimony for Christ. And may we one and all be willing to make the resolution D. L. Moody made a short time after his conversion—"I here and now promise that no day hereafter shall pass unless I have personally presented my Saviour to at least one immortal soul. So help me, Jesus, in my vow! Amen."

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