

LORD OF MY LIFE

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter on February 2, 1969 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee, and heard over radio station WLAC at 8:05 P.M.

Each of us has many life-goals and purposes. I am convinced that no single goal is higher or more important to those who make up this audience than the desire to grow spiritually. The deepest yearning of our hearts is to become more and more like Christ our Lord. We do not always remember this highest goal, because we live in a world which involves many pressures of many kinds. Spiritual growth is sometimes crowded out. Other lesser desires take precedence for a time. However, the deepest yearning of our hearts is the desire to grow into the kind of people that God would have us to be.

I am also convinced that we are at our best when we are worshipping. At no time in our lives are we more spiritual or more motivated toward our highest goal than in those moments when we are honoring God in worship. As we study his word, as we eat the Lord's Supper, as we give of our means, and as we pray we are at our spiritual best. This is also especially true when we sing. We stand on tip-toe, so to speak as we express our yearnings and announce our loyalties.

The Hymns We Sing

"Jesus calls us o'er the tumult of our life's wild restless sea. Day by day his sweet voice soundeth, saying 'Christian, follow me.' ... Jesus calls us from the worship of the vain world's golden store, from each idol that would keep us, saying, 'Christian love me more.' ... In our joys and in our sorrows, days of toil, and hours of ease, still he calls, in cares and pleasures, 'Christian, love me more than these.'"

"O, the bitter pain and sorrow that a time could ever be, when I proudly said to Jesus, 'All of self, and none of Thee.' ... Yet he found me, I beheld him bleeding on the accursed tree, and my wistful heart said faintly, 'Some of self, and some of Thee.' ... Day by day his tender mercy healing, helping, full and free, brought me lower while I whispered, 'Less of self, and more of Thee.' ... Higher than the highest heavens, deeper than the deepest sea, Lord, Thy love at last has conquered, 'None of self, and all of Thee.'"

"O to be like Thee! Blessed Redeemer. This is my constant longing and prayer. Gladly I'll forfeit all of earth's treasures, Jesus Thy perfect likeness to wear ... O to be like Thee! full of compassion, loving, forgiving, tender and kind, helping the helpless, cheering the fainting, seeking the wandering sinner to find ... O to be like Thee! lowly in spirit, holy and harmless, patient and brave, meekly enduring cruel reproaches, willing to suffer, others to save ... O to be like Thee! Lord, I am coming, now to receive the anointing divine. All that I am and have I am bringing. Lord from this moment all shall be Thine."

"Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee. Take my hands, and let them move at the impulse of Thy love ... Take my will and make it Thine. It shall be no longer mine. Take my heart, it is Thine own, it shall be Thy royal throne ... Take my love, my Lord, I pour at Thy feet its treasure-store. Take myself, and I will be ever, only, all for Thee."

"O Master, let me walk with Thee in lowly paths of service free. Tell me Thy secret, help me bear the strain of toil, the fret of care ... Help me the slow of heart to move by same clean, winning word of love. Teach me the wayward feet to stay, and guide them in the homeward way ... In hope that sends a shining ray far down the future's broadening way, in peace that only Thou canst give, with Thee, O Master, let me live."

"Thou, my everlasting portion, more than friend or life to me. All along my pilgrim journey, Savior, let me walk with Thee ... Not for ease nor worldly pleasure, nor for fame my prayer shall be. Gladly will I toil and suffer, only let me walk with Thee ... Lead me through the vale of shadows, bear me o'er life's fitful sea. Then the gate of life eternal, may I enter, Lord, with Thee."

"I am weak, but Thou art strong. Jesus keep me from all wrong. I'll be satisfied as long as I walk, O Lord, close to Thee ... In this world of toil and snares, if I falter, Lord, who cares? Who with me my burden shares? Let me walk, O Lord, close to Thee At the time my life is o'er, labor here will be no more. Take me to that peaceful shore, and I'll walk, O Lord, close to Thee ... Just a closer walk with Thee, grant it, Father, this my plea. Daily let it ever be, that I walk, dear Lord, close to Thee."

"Following Afar Off"

For many people, Christ is not very real and Christianity is not very meaningful. Their religion is a perfunctory, surface, casual kind of thing. It is only skin deep. It is largely habit. It is "what's expected." They follow the Lord but they follow him like Peter did in the long ago, "afar off."

Among these for whom Christianity is not very meaningful, there are those who became Christians largely out of fear. They confessed Christ as Lord and were baptized, but the motivation was essentially selfish. They did not wish to be lost, so they became Christians.

Through the years their Christianity has been little more than having become Christians and then eating the Lord's Supper with some degree of regularity. It has not meant a new way of life. It has not meant a higher set of values to live by, a life of service to one's fellowmen, and hours of meaningful worship to God. It has been largely negative and threadbare.

It was not Christ's intention that this should be the kind of religion which he came to establish. In the sermon on the mount he showed the primacy of the kingdom when he said, "Seek ye first his kingdom and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." (Matt. 6:33). An even stronger emphasis is found in Matt. 10:37-39, where he said, "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." In Matt. 16:24-25, he further said, "If any men would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever would save his life shall lose it: and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it."

Examples of Consecration

Saul of Tarsus, who had been a violent persecutor of Christians, ultimately came to be so devout a Christian that he wrote, "Howbeit what things were gain to me, these have I counted loss for Christ. Yea, verily, and I count all things to be lost for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but refuse, that I may gain Christ." (Phil. 3:7-8). At another time he wrote, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me: and that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." (Gal. 2:20). When Paul was converted, he was converted all the way.

Luke 5:1-11 tells the meaningful story of Christ's call to Peter and John. They had been fishing all night when Jesus came upon them one morning by the Sea of Galilee. Having caught nothing, they were mending their nets. Jesus preached briefly to those who were on the seaside from Peter's boat in the edge of the water. Then he asked Peter to "put out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught." Peter resisted, for they had worked all night and had caught no fish, but he did as the Lord requested. When a great catch of fish was enclosed in the nets, Peter realized that something miraculous was taking place. He fell down at Jesus' knees, and said, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Christ responded, "Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men." The paragraph ends with this remarkable sentence, "And when they had brought their boats to land, they left all, and followed him."

Peter might have said, "Lord, I would like to follow you, but you know I have a business to look after and I also have a house in Capernaum, where I have the responsibilities of supporting my wife and my wife's mother. I would like to follow you, but I simply cannot do so." Peter made no such speech, but followed the Lord, as he was requested to do.

In the Old Testament we are impressed with many examples of deep consecration, but with none are we more impressed than that of Daniel. At one crucial point in his young life, Darius the Persian king signed a decree naming the death penalty for anyone who worshipped someone other than Darius the king. Knowing this, Daniel carried out his faithful daily worship to Jehovah in the usual way. Dan. 6:10 reads, "And when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house (now his windows were opened in his chamber toward Jerusalem); and he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime." This is consecration on the deepest level. He laid his life on the line in his open worship of God.

In the long ago Moses faced a very difficult decision. On the one hand the riches, glamour, and pleasures of Egypt beckoned. On the other there were the Hebrews in their poverty and slavery. He it said to his eternal credit, "By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to share ill treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; accounting the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt: for he looked unto the recompense of reward." (Heb. 11:24-26). This, too, is dedication to God of the highest order.

We are also deeply impressed by the simple story of Enoch. Gen. 5:24 says simply, "Enoch walked with God, and he was not; for God took him." The picture is not filled out very fully in the scriptures, but it is evident that here was a man who was intimately associated with God, and God cared for him in a very special way.

Circumstances of Life

We earnestly desire to know how we of the twentieth century can grow spiritually. What are the factors that will help us to walk more closely with our Lord? We can see at least a part of the answer in some of the circumstances of life that bring men closer to God. For example, we have observed over the years that some men grow spiritually by their associations with others who are spiritually strong. Being around those who love the Lord and whose lives are centered in the Lord, they find that this becomes a part of their lives. We grow to be like those with whom we associate in our attitudes, our values, and our behavior. By association with those who are spiritually strong we find that we become spiritually strong.

Another of the circumstances of life that brings us closer to the Lord is unpleasant but sometimes meaningful sorrow or bereavement which comes into every life. Feeling our own inadequacy, we instinctively turn to God when a son or a daughter, a father or a mother, or a husband or a wife passes from us. The hurt of our hearts causes us to look upward to God for healing.

In a similar way, serious illness has often brought men closer to spiritual concern. As we realize that we may not live for long, we can see more clearly the transience of earthly things and we can feel more realistically the value of eternal spiritual matters. Illness is never welcome, but sometimes it is an avenue through which we develop spiritually.

Travel is still another means by which we sometime come to greater spiritual concern. Seeing the millions of olive skinned, dark, haired people of Tokyo leads a Christian to feel a deep yearning that Christ may be brought into the lives of these people. A visit to Korea, or China, or India, causes one to be concerned about the millions of hungry stomachs, naked backs, and poorly housed people. Their physical needs, coupled with their spiritual poverty, leads one to take a new look at America's luxury. This leads to a deeper spiritual concern and dedication to the needs of one's fellowmen. This also is spiritual growth.

Finally, ageing brings spiritual concern. As the hair grows gray or drops out altogether, as the eyes become dim, as the ears become dull, and as the legs become feeble, we are led to recognize our own temporary nature. As the end of life comes rapidly on we lift our thoughts to a life to come, and to the God who promised us an eternity with him. This, too, brings spiritual concern and growth.

Summary

As we yearn to grow spiritually, we stand on tip-toe when we sing the great hymns of the church. May it be that we shall come to be as spiritually concerned in all of life as we are when we sing. May all of our lives be as fine as when we worship.

“My God, my Father, though I stray far from home on life's rough way, O teach me from my heart to say, ‘Thy will be done!’ ... O dark my path and sad my lot, let me be still and murmur not, or breathe the prayer divinely taught, ‘Thy will be done!’ ... Renew my will from day to day. Blend it with Thine, and take away all that now makes it hard to say, ‘Thy will be done!’ ... Then when on earth I breathe no more the prayer oft mixed with tears before, I'll sing upon a happier shore, ‘Thy will be done!’”

“My Savior, as Thou wilt! O may Thy will be mine. Into Thy hand of love I would my all resign. Through sorrow and through joy, conduct me as Thine own, and help me still to say, ‘My Lord, Thy will be done.’ ... My Savior, as Thou wilt! All shall be well with me. Each changing future scene I gladly trust to Thee. Straight to my home above I travel calmly on, and sing, in life or death, ‘My Lord, Thy will be done.’”