

The King's Highway

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THE EANGELISTIC SPIRIT OF JOHN WESLEY

John Wesley has been referred to as churchman, itinerant preacher, theologian, Church-builder and reformer. We must bear in mind, however, that first of all, he was an evangelist. As an evidence of his evangelistic passion, we hear him cry out, "Church or no Church, we must attend to the work of saving souls." A glance through his journal, with reference to the texts he used in preaching, clearly reveals the fact that he constantly sounded the evangelistic note.

Using such texts as the following, he did the work of an evangelist and was indeed a herald of the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ: "He hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor." "Repent and believe the gospel." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." "I will heal their backslidings; I will love them freely." "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." "He was wounded for our transgressions; He was bruised for our iniquities." "What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

From these and similar texts—and the list might be greatly extended—he preached time and again, calling upon men to repent, and multitudes heard the Word and were saved.

The phrase, "a passion for souls," has lost much of its force with us, but it may be applied to Wesley with its full significance. It is no exaggeration to say that a yearning to save the lost dominated his whole life. We hear him cry out, "I must and will save as many souls as I can while I live."

Such an evangelistic passion caused him to look for conversions where others regarded the conditions as forbidding. He did not despair of seeing the drunkard converted even while he was intoxicated. He handed an intoxicated man a tract, "A Word to a Drunkard," and describes the incident as follows: "He looked at it, then at me, and said, 'A word—a word to a drunkard; that is, sir, I am wrong; I know I am wrong. Pray let me talk a little with you.' He held me by the hand for a full half hour, and I believe he got drunk no more. I beseech you, brethren, do not despise drunkards. 'Sinners of every sort,' said a venerable old clergyman, 'have I frequently known converted to God, but an habitual drunkard have I never known converted.' But I have known five hundred, perhaps five thousand."

Now, let us pause for a moment, and let that picture impress itself indelibly upon our minds. There stands John Wesley, a graduate of the world's leading university and one of the foremost scholars of his day, with the best English blood coursing through his veins, gentleman, scholar, minister—there he stands holding for a half-hour the hand of a drunkard and talking with him about the salvation of his soul!

We have the "bandit" with us today, but in Wesley's day they called him a "highwayman." On one occasion, Wesley was held up by a "highwayman," who demanded his money or his life. Under such circumstances, the average person would have been so agitated and unnerved that he would have thought of nothing but how to escape with his life. But Wesley was so absorbed with the desire to save the lost, and had such self-possession that, after giving up his money, he turned to the highwayman and said, "Let me speak one word to you. The time may come when you will regret the course of life in which you are now engaged. Remember this, 'The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin.'" No more was said, and they parted. Many years after, as Wesley was going out of a church in which he had preached, a stranger introduced himself and asked Wesley if he recalled being waylaid at such a time. He told him he recollected it. "I was that man," said the stranger, "and that single verse you quoted on that occasion was the means of a total change in my life and habits. I have long since been in the practice of attending the house of God and giving attention to His Word, and I trust that I am a Christian."

Those who use the pen to do evangelistic service have been called "knights of the golden pen." We need more of these "knights" among our Christian workers today, and it may help us to see how Wesley used letter-writing to call men to repent. His nephew, Charles Wesley, was a prodigy in music, and a very bright young man, but he was not a Christian. Here is the way Wesley addressed him:

"Dear Charles,—It has been much upon my mind today that I am still indebted to you. There is a debt of love which I should have paid before now. But I must not delay it any longer. I have long observed you with a curious eye, not as a musician, but as an immortal spirit that is come forth from God, the Father of spirits, and is returning to Him in a few moments. But have you well considered this? Methinks if you had, it would be ever uppermost in your thoughts. For what trifles in comparison of this are the shining baubles of the world!

"Wise is the man that labors to secure
The mighty, the important stake;
And by all methods strives to make
His passage safe, and his reception sure."

"God has favored you with many advantages. You have health and strength and a thousand outward blessings. And why should you not have all the inward blessings which God has prepared for those that love Him?

"You are good-humored, mild and harmless. But unless you are born again you cannot see the kingdom of God. But ask, and you shall receive; for it is nigh at hand!

"I am, dear Charles, your affectionate uncle."

This letter brought forth a gratifying response, and we wish we had space to give Wesley's second letter. But may we not learn

much from the first letter? It is simple, brief, to the point, and, withal direct from the heart.

The last entry in his journal refers to a sermon he preached on "One Thing is Needful," and he adds, "I hope many, even then, resolved to choose the better part." And last of all, with his dying breath he gave orders that a sermon which he had preached on "The Love of God to Fallen Man" should be scattered abroad and given to everybody. How well he lived up to his motto: "I must and will save as many souls as I can while I live."—Rev. H. H. Smith, in *The Christian Sun*.

THE CHURCH IN A WARRING WORLD

Rev. H. K. Sheets

Times of national stress always have their effect upon the Church. That effect is not always wholesome. While we were hoping that the depression years would bring a new reliance upon God, the world has become embroiled in another terrible war. Our country has not yet come to the position of actual conflict, yet we are feeling quite keenly the pressure of defense measures. Rapid changes are taking place in the thought and attitude of the life of the nation. We hope for the best, yet it appears that we are sooner or later to become actively involved.

War years are hard years for the Church. Great inroads are made upon her spiritual life and power; her treasuries are neglected; her most worthy enterprises suffer. She may sacrifice her virtue and honor in the hysteria of war profits. She may subordinate her message to play the role of a propaganda agent. She may consent to a regimentation of her life and work until she is robbed of her God-given prerogatives. She may forget the value of a soul. She may turn from her heroic tasks to softer living and to the interests of self alone. When the soul is neglected we always reap a fresh harvest of materialism. People want success more than they want holiness; they want gold more than they want God; they want to gain rather than give. Hearts grow hard and the poor are unnoticed. All forms of vice and wickedness tend to thrive.

We may well ponder the question, "What effect are the years just ahead going to have upon our congregations and our work? Will we be doing all that we should to win the lost? Will our Sunday schools continue to grow? Will there be a falling off at the prayer meeting? And how about our liberality in giving? If ever the Church has been needed she will be needed when the present conflict is over. She must preserve her faith, her life, and her power at any cost. The Church must survive. And Christ has promised that she shall survive—that "The gates of hell shall not prevail against her." Yes, our God is big enough for these years no matter what they bring, and if we can be aware of some of their dangers perhaps we shall be better able to avoid them.

Enid, Oklahoma.