

WORLDLY SAINTS

A MESSAGE TO THE CHURCH THAT IS NOT COUNTING THE COST

We are living with an epidemic of cheap grace in the Church. Flippant confession, shallow consecration, superficial surrender, discipleship that does not follow are just some of the sure signs. We revel in a Christianity that is costless! We need a generation of those that are willing to “count the cost” with wholehearted devotion to God. With absolute obedience to Christ. - Greg Gordon

CHEAP GRACE

Since the inception of the Church, the Gospel of Christ preached with the requirements of repentance and discipleship. Presently, the “High-Calling in Christ Jesus,” has never been offered at such a low level. Forgiveness without repentance, discipleship without obedience, salvation without sanctity, confession without consecration. Such terms as: Introspection, counting the cost, godly sorrow over sin, repentance from dead works, are all foreign to this church age of cheap grace. Dietrich Bonhoeffer states the problem with this startling phrase: “cheap grace means the justification of sin without the justification of the sinner.” This statement brings with it the gravity of the situation we find ourselves in. An unholy church is of no use to the world or to God.

Let us recognize, as Bonhoeffer did, that “cheap grace is the deadly enemy of the Church.” We are living with an epidemic of cheap grace in the Church. Flippant confession, shallow consecration, superficial surrender, and discipleship that does not follow are just some of the sure signs. This is a Christianity that is costless! We need a generation of those that are willing to “count the cost” with wholehearted devotion to God with absolute obedience to Christ. Duncan Campbell said: “A baptism of holiness, a demonstration of godly living is the crying need of our day.” But alas! today thousands of pulpits are pounding out the message upon their hearers “forgiven” yet without the exhortation “walk ye in it.” Most in the Church are utterly confused about the practical godliness, obedience, and good works which the scriptures mentions readily. The plain fact is that the Scripture speaks of those that are wicked and

righteous, ungodly and godly, sinners and saints. And the distinction of those groups are based solely on their actions; not their intellectual assent to truths about God. Christians are saved by faith but if that faith does not result in a changed life it is not saving faith but clearly shown in Scripture as the “faith of devils.” Bonhoeffer, echoing the worldly churches cry, said: “he must not strive against this indispensable grace. Therefore -let him live like the rest of the world!” God forbid! Christ did not die on the cross for a worldly Church or for worldly Saints but for a “glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.”

HOLY SINNERS

Holy Sinners! is the plea that is heard to cover up the prevalent sin and ungodliness in the Church. Christ does not come into our unregenerate, sickly, impure hearts as many contemporary theologians say. He gives us a new heart to dwell in wherein is found holiness and righteousness. Sinners saved by grace? Yes, surely that is our position from whence we have been saved. But now Saints *perfected by grace* should be our present day standing. Nowhere in the New Testament did the Apostle Paul call the Church sinners, but rather granted them the title “Saints.” A Holy Church is God’s blessing to the world; an unholy Church is God’s judgement upon the world. Christian obedience is not legalism but rather a suitable response to true grace and true religion that is from above. David Smithers speaks to the condition of the church steeped in cheap grace and a lack of holiness: “Many within the Church today feel as if they are drowning in a river of empty words and hollow promises. Demoralized by superficial religion, their hungry hearts are crying out: Where is the real Church, mighty in truth and power? There are many who can give us a moving definition of revival, but where are the men who can move the Church with a demonstration of revival? Proverbs 27:7 tells us that, “To the hungry even what is bitter tastes sweet.” Sadly, multitudes of hungry and disillusioned souls are seeking the bitter bread of a godliness that denies power, or a form of power that denies godliness. Oh, how we need the reality of revival, a revival that will restore the Church to Her former apostolic beauty of purity and power. Nothing less than this reality will prepare us to face a dying world and the coming King.”

In a day and age that needs desperately to see true Christianity and costly grace we must look back to those that have gone before us and see their examples. David Smithers gives us illustrations through these three men: Brainerd, Wesley, and Vassar, clear pictures of those that have “counted the cost”:

“David Brainerd consistently and fervently interceded for the lost souls of the American Indians. Often he would travail with such earnestness that when he rose from his knees he was covered in sweat and could hardly walk straight. Like the persistent widow in Luke 18, David Brainerd's prayers were finally answered. Entire camps of Indians were converted by the power of God as he proclaimed a message of repentance and grace. “Old men and women who had been drunken wretches for years, and little children not more than six or seven years of age appeared in distress for their souls. There was almost

universal praying and crying for mercy. Many could neither go nor stand.” The countless hours spent in prayer and fasting, his faithfulness in spite of physical weakness and having to endure the most terrible hardships, were now rewarded openly. The fire of the Lord fell. The remarkable thing was that all this happened at a time when he confessed that his hopes were at their very lowest. He had seriously entertained thoughts of giving up while on the very brink of glory and blessing. Brainerd now saw a remarkable change in the lives of the Indians. He recorded in his diary, "I know of no assembly of Christians where there seems to be so much of the presence of God, where brotherly love so much prevails." David Brainerd poured a lifetime of holy passion, prayer and preaching into four short years. He ministered from 1743-1747, dying of tuberculosis at the age of 29, "Brainerd once wrote in his diary, I longed to be a flame of fire continually glowing in the divine service and building up of Christ's kingdom to my last and dying breath." That prayer was abundantly answered.”

“John Wesley pleaded with men to repent and by faith make peace with God or suffer in an everlasting hell. People who had entertained false hopes of salvation had their religious masks torn away by his plain preaching. Wesley believed that those who failed to warn the sinner and backslider, themselves stood under the judgement of Christ. He was determined to declare the whole counsel of God, offering the love of God in Christ and giving warning of the dreadful consequences of rejecting the gospel. Wesley wrote, "Before I can preach love and grace, I must preach sin, law and judgement." Wesley, as well as the other early Methodist preachers, was both a bold advocate and a living example of sanctification. Wesley preached with unceasing zeal that complete holiness was the primary fruit of a vibrant faith in Christ. Counseling another minister, Wesley wrote, "...till you press believers to expect full salvation from sin, you must not look for any revival." If John Wesley were to make an anonymous visit to the Methodists of today, it is doubtful whether many of it's churches would welcome him. They would most likely resent his fervent zeal and enthusiasm. When he was eighty-three he made a note that he was regretful that he could not write more than fifteen hours a day without hurting his eyes. Wesley faithfully preached almost up to the very day he died. Truly his vigor and zeal in old age were the reward of his faithful stewardship of time. He seemed to consider every thought, word and deed in light of eternity. "Amid all his arduous labors, his innumerable engagements, his coming and going, Wesley lived a hidden life of intimacy with God. When worn out with overwork he often found new strength in answer to prayer." It was Wesley's strict habit to daily spend one hour in prayer in the morning, and then another hour in the evening. John Wesley shook the world by his preaching because he first shook heaven and hell with his praying. His preaching had a sense of eternal urgency because he had touched eternity on his knees.”

“John Vassar's prayer habits made him a man of great faith. "He did not believe simply in the God of ages ago. He believed in the God of today. He could not be persuaded that the wonder working Spirit finished His operations at Pentecost. He could not be convinced that the supernatural was no longer to be looked for. He would get a church or a schoolhouse open, and then invite people out. Almost invariably a revival would commence. Often God would triumph gloriously. Converts would be multiplied. There would be apostolic work because it was underlaid and pushed with apostolic faith.”

John Vassar's zeal and consecration were so intense that it often astonished and offended those who called themselves "Christians". "Despised, rebuffed, and persecuted he held right on meekly and joyfully, in his simple and faithful way with his little worn New Testament in hand and his single eye fixed on Jesus. Coldness and insults were nothing to him, save that they made him sad for other's sake. No harshness could quench the ardor of his affection." Uncle John Vassar's life displays for us the balance of zeal mixed with mercy and passion mixed with patience. Many within the modern Church have strayed, believing that they can choose between such things, pursuing one virtue while neglecting others. If our churches are to meet the needs at hand, we must, like John Vassar, first be lovers of Jesus given to constant prayer. Second, we must receive joyfully ALL that the Master has laid before us, absolute holiness and joy, purity and patient love. The Church must become one with Christ, balanced with both His goodness and severity."

UNBELIEVING BELIEVERS

We hold a belief that changes nothing, but claims everything. "If Christianity is to make any headway in the present time, it must be proved to be more than a theory", stated the late Hannah Whitall Smith. What can bring death to this pattern of unbelief in this generation? What can relieve us of our sickly condition? Unbelief has us captive in chains; the church is gagged and bound as risen Lazarus, it needs release in this final hour! We serve unbelief; our minds passive to its rule and reign over us. Can you hear Jesus saying "O ye of little faith." Faith is the enemy of unbelief. By the way we are living we show forth our unbelief unashamedly. "Help thou mine unbelief" needs to be our desperate cry. We are in captivity in our lukewarm, unbelieving, content, faithless age. And each age is marked by the testimony and witness of those that are righteous and serve God. Will God look through the annals of time and see our current generation as one that was characterized as "unbelieving?" God pleads with this generation in the words of the prophet Jeremiah: "O generation, see ye the word of the Lord." We need to come back to apostolic belief in the word of God and the working of God by the Spirit of God. This is an hour of urgency and the church as never been so complacent.

This is a crisis hour. Will you count the cost today? The Apostle Paul urgently pleaded with the Church two thousand years ago: "it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent..." If the night was "far spent" two thousand years ago, dear brethren, surely it is nearer than we can imagine. If we knew the time and the hour, if we were awakened to the nearness of the end of time, if we realized how time is being devoured from us, *then* we would repent. Christ reproved his followers of the nearness of the hour and time of visitation. Shall He have to repeat Himself again to this unbelieving generation of believers? Revival is not an option, it's our only hope. But with the way we are living we are saying that we are content to live without revival. Surely only a revival of religion will sweep away this heresy of cheap grace and lack of holiness in the Church.