

The Great Enlistment

International Sunday School Lesson For July 7 Is "Beginning the Christian Life"—John 1:35-51—Acts 16:13-34.

By WILLIAM T. ELLIS

As an electric storm clears the atmosphere, so this war is driving away many intellectual fogs and clouds and smoke waves and dust storms. There never was deeper or straighter thinking in the world than is now going on, despite the temptation to let prejudices control the mind. Never before were so many average men and women grappling with the basic considerations of religion. A characteristic of these days is that people drive straight to the heart of things. We are thinking in basic terms.

So when the question is newly raised, as it is in the present Sunday School Lesson, "What is Christianity, and what does it mean to become a Christian?" we do not expect an answer in the stereotyped theological phraseology of the churchmen. That sort of shop talk is now as dead as Chocow. The professional lingo of religion is now intolerable. Life's red realities have come too near to most of mankind for us to be any longer content with mere phrases, however well worn and venerable. We do not want the answers of the catechisms to the most living of questions. We want to hear, in the straight-tung speech of the world stripped for action, so plain and clear that it is understood by the fighting man, what it means to be a Christian.

As the Chaplains See It

Out of the trenches, especially through the medium of British and Canadian chaplains, is coming a new body of literature, freshly restating religion. Much of this writing is shockingly candid. I would not dare quote it in the average pulpit or ministers' meeting, for our people in the homeland do not yet understand. Nevertheless, the very fact that these clergymen have been so fearless in finding out and stating the present-day difficulties of Christianity is eloquent testimony to the truth that the Church is not really afraid of new light, however much the unknowing may sneer at her for so being. It is a chaplain who says: "It is awful to realize that when one stands up to preach Christ the soldier feels that you are defending a whole ruck of obsolete theories and antiquated muddles. It is all so much barbed wire through which one has to climb before one finds his heart."

This misconception of what Christianity really is recurs frequently in all interpretations of the mind of the soldiers. "They have not connected the truths with ordinary life. Life

is one thing, real, pressing, intensely important. The creed is another thing, very excellent in its way, deserving of a certain respect, but belonging to a different region, not concerned with, or at all bearing upon practical affairs.

Another chaplain says—and these quotations are taken from "The Church in the Furnace," by Church of England Chaplains—"It is startling, no doubt, and humiliating, to find out how very little hold traditional Christianity has upon men. It is not only their confounding ignorance of the elementary Christian facts—not one in ten, I should think, has a clear idea of what our religion is or implies or offers—but that they fall to see how it bears upon or helps them in our present circumstances. And very many have an honest feeling that it would be a positive handicap, so far as I am able to estimate, a Christian life, combined with a pagan creed. . . . One of the greatest difficulties we have to face out here is the superstition which prevails, chiefly with officers and N. C. O.'s, that if men begin to 'turn religious' they will at once begin to 'get the wind up.'"

From the Soldiers' Viewpoint

As if to support this structure upon a self-centered type of Christianity, another chaplain writes, "I have heard men praying in the line when I wished they would swear instead, because their prayers, which were purely selfish, expressed nothing but a broken will and the horror of death. It is a dreadful thing to see men whimpering out prayers for personal protection in a time of stress. The hard-bitten man beside him still unbroken and unbeaten, swearing through his teeth puts such a man to shame. . . . One cannot afford prayers for personal safety in times of stress; it is not what one ought to be thinking about. . . . That is the very essence of the Spirit of Christ: His job first, His neighbor and Himself last, and compared with the other two, nowhere." This parson drops into verse:

"It ain't as I thinks 'E'll keep me safe
While the other blokes goes down,
And it ain't as I wants to leave this earth
And wear an 'ero's crown:
It ain't for that as I says my prayers
When I goes to the attack;
But I pray that whatever comes my way
I may never turn my back.
I leaves the matter of life and death
To the Lord as knows what's best,
And I pray that I still may play the man
Whether I turns East or West.
I'd sooner that it were East, ye know,
To Blighty and my girl Sue,
I'd sooner be there, wi' the sun in 'er 'air
And the summer skies all blue,
But grant me God, to do my bit,
And then, if I must turn West,
I'll be unashamed whey my name is named,
And I'll find a soldier's rest."

Clearly, every teacher of religion has a responsibility to state the essentials of faith in unmistakable and simple terms. All the unreal phraseology of the pulpit, "the language of Canaan," as it has been called, and all the nebulousness of thinking, and the general tendency to substitute "lessons" for truth and facts, must give way under the pressure of the new day for genuineness and simplicity. We are bound to state Christianity in terms that anybody can grasp.

That is exactly what these two great passages from the New Testament do, if we let them have their own way and meaning. Becoming Christians means becoming disciples of Jesus. "Disciples were simply learners and followers. That is to say, the people who thought so much of Jesus that they gave up their own ways in order to go His way, and to be near Him, and to accept His method of looking at things, and to be patterned after Him, and to catch His spirit, gradually came to be called Christians. At first, the Jesus crowd were simply named followers of the Way. His way necessary than this. They did not have to pass a theological examination, or accept a system of theology. They merely joined Christ. The number of these grew so large, and the power of His multiplied life became so great, that it changed the whole world. . . . Now,adays, the Jesus way is in a life and death struggle with the heathen way. Of a sudden, civilization has realized that it has been called to enter upon the great quest. Wrapped up in the issues of this war are all the great social and economic and humanitarian issues that have lifted their lure before the eyes of forward looking men and women. When we erect the Jesus way before the world by our armies and our statecraft and our newer, nobler mind, we shall have established truly a way of life for earth's remotest and neediest inhabitant.

The Greatest Call of All

As our enlisted hosts of best young men have proved the lure and power of a sublime call to a sacrificial service, so we may yet see a response on never, nobler scale, to the great and virile call to walk the Jesus way, to keep company with Him and His friends, and to help carry on the Work He came to do. For becoming a Christian is no such small a thing as joining a church, with the obligation to attend a certain set of meetings and to abstain from specified practices, and to putter along, in a small-minded way, about a lot of petty interests and petty tasks. It means an enlistment, an entrance upon the knightliest of all undertakings, an offering up of life itself for the holiest of goals, a dedication of self to ends worth while.

Turning again to the meaty book already quoted, I find one chaplain saying, "At last, I believe, we know what Jesus stands for. Prophets and kings have desired to see the things which we see in our day, and have not seen them. We cannot placidly go back to conventional Christianity—the religion of respectability and anxious avoidance of small faults. No padre certainly, and probably no man, can find rest for his soul when the war is over in the religion of parochial activities. We must have a faith that is elemental, simple and majestic and compelling. I am quite prepared to see such large developments in the coming form of Christianity that the religion of our sons and grandsons would seem to be almost another faith if it were witnessed by our grandfathers."

Another chaplain plays on the same string: "Fundamentally, Christianity is a way of living ordinary life, and is not to begin with a mere matter either of abstinence or of attending church. A saved man, to Christ's thought, is a man living all day and every day in a certain way, the way of a disciple. He is not a man primarily concerned about his own soul. He is primarily concerned about serving Christ."

When the Big Chance Comes

Mothers and fathers on this side of the water are finding that the war is making a tremendous change in their sons who have been in service "over there." The great enlistment has made over their life. They are bigger, and yet simpler. They have become more cosmopolitan, yet more

devoted than ever to the things of home. An unwonted dignity, self-confidence and self-abnegation now marks them. The war has made new men of them.

Which is exactly what happens when one becomes a follower of Christ. It makes men and women over. It takes the Simons, who were merely some man's sons, and makes rock-characters out of them. Also it makes them warriors, sure of their flag. As Paul said to the demon-possessed maiden, "In the name of Jesus Christ, I order you out of her," so this Jesus-man finds himself called to exercise all sorts of evil spirits from the world. His is a vital gospel, attended by earthquaking experiences. All the vested interests that misuse mankind are to be fought by the fearless followers of the Hero whom a cross could not frighten.

There is nothing grovelling or self-contemptuous about Christianity. Recall how Paul and Silas withstood the unjust officials who had misused them. No man ever really becomes a Christian without taking on a new sense of dignity and manhood. This matter of keeping company with the strong Son of God, has lifted up the heads of countless slinking, despicable men. It makes a man out of the drunkard and the outcast. It takes the child of ease and selfishness, and makes him a gallant knight of the common weal, in that fellowship heroes are made. We rise to the height of our possibilities when we set ourselves alongside of the perfect Man, and try to rise to the measures of the fullness of His stature. Beginning the Christian life is merely beginning to go the way of Jesus, who to-day is anew leading the made-over world.

The ablest are they whom God has enabled.

The whole is only equal to the sum of its parts. The ability of Christian Endeavor is but the ability of the single member multiplied. The consecration of all Christian Endeavor can only be brought to pass by the consecration of the individual Endeavorer.

Better one Moses who is consecrated than a million rebellious Israelites.

The forces of wrong tremble every time a talented person comes out wholly for Christ.

If Joshua had not been the wise and able man that he was, his consecration would not have availed so greatly for the glory of God. Because he weighed as a man he also weighed mightily for God. Every strong man who enlists on the side of the Lord equals a legion of commonplace followers.

There is no failure for consecration. And there can be no success short of consecration. The numbers and overflowing enthusiasm and admirable organization of the Christian Endeavor movement are not enough to give it success. But with the spirit of humble consecration, all things are possible to it.

The finer the engine the more important the fire.

Paul's consecration probably did not exceed that of the other apostles. But his ability did, and therefore he was the greatest of the founders of our faith. In him we see a striking example of what God can do with an able man whose talents are consecrated.

Consecration is another way of spelling success. Until our abilities are made over to Christ they can bring only failure.

Special talents are dangerous. The genius is always beset by perils of which his untalented brother knows nothing. When a young person begins to succeed he needs the greatest wisdom to keep him from blunders and failures. Ability is never safe until it is consecrated to God. But when He is made king over a life its future is sure success.

NAVY RETURNS DRAFTED MAN

Scranton, Pa.—Frank M. Wymbs, twenty-eight, prominent in local society, must comply with the regulations of the draft law and enter the national army. After a fight of seven months to force Wymbs to go to Camp Meade, City draft board No. 5 comprised of Mayor E. B. Jermyn, former Sheriff Benjamin Phillips and Dr. J. C. Reifsnnyder, has succeeded in having the navy department discharge Wymbs as a volunteer and return the registrant to the board.

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Every Woman Casts Loving Glance at the Nestling Cuddled in its Bonnet.

It is a joy and comfort to know that those much talked of pains and other distresses that are said to proceed child-bearing may be avoided. No woman need fear discomfort if she will fortify herself with the well known and time-honored remedy, Mother's Friend.

This is a most grateful, penetrating, external application that at once softens and makes pliant the abdominal muscles and ligaments. By regular use the muscles remain strong, the uterus strong, labor is born and pain and danger at the crisis is consequently less.

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Write the Bradfield Regulator Co., "Mother's Friend," Atlanta, Ga., for their "Mother's Friend" so valuable to expectant mothers, and in the meantime obtain a bottle of Mother's Friend from the druggist today and justify yourself against pain and discomfort.

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Shirt Sale Begins Saturday—See Page 15

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