

GOD'S CALL

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What is the goal of a truly Christian life? I suppose there have been literally thousands of sermons preached, hundreds of books written, and scores of lives lived in an attempt to answer that question. Today we will do no harm by adding to the list of sermons preached on this topic. In fact it is essential to keep before us the perspective of the totality of our lives when considering the value and importance of our labors. Unless our jobs are understood in the context of the whole of Christian living, then they have little meaning. If on the other hand our labors are part and parcel of an attempt to live out the lifestyle of love and Christian service, then work takes on significance and meaning. On this labor day Sunday let us look again at God's call on our total lives in the hope of understanding afresh God's will for our labor in particular. The Lord be with you...

Well what is the goal, the purpose, of a genuinely Christian life? Obviously the goal of Christianity is to follow Christ and thus do the will of God. It sounds so simple and yet it is so demanding. To do the will of God requires radical submission and total dedication of ones being to God. Now those are easy words to say but extremely difficult words to live. To my knowledge only one man in all of history has fulfilled this challenge. If He were alive today our society would condemn Him. For if we look at His life from a strictly historical perspective, without any interpolations of faith, we discover that He was the illegitimate son of a Hebrew carpenter, or a Roman soldier, or possibly even an indiscreet salesman. To the best of our knowledge, He never held a regular job and His needs were cared for by receiving handouts from friends...in short He was a welfare recipient of the welfare system of His day. On top of these obvious minuses on His behalf, He was an agitator. While technically He did not break the law, He did advocate overwhelming reform and of sorts led a demonstration on Palm Sunday. Shortly He was put to death with the hope that the revolution He was leading would loose its impetus and go the way of all good revolutions.. quietly to the grave. Such a man was Jesus of Nazareth when viewed only from the narrow confines of historical fact. YET THIS MAN WAS THE SON OF GOD AND IS OUR MASTER. He is the Lord of life for He above all other men did the will of God.

How did He do it? Obviously not by simply accepting the status quo. Certainly not by getting rich quick. Definitely not by falling into the accepted pattern of His day. Rather Jesus did the will of God by first hearing, second responding to, and third fulfilling the mandate God placed upon His life.

First hearing...It occurs to me that one of the most difficult tasks today is the task of finding solitude. Invariably when attempting to be simply alone we discover that we are bombarded by noise. Dining quietly is a thing of the past as Muzac moves in. Recently I went away to a secluded lake only to hear the rumble of blasting in the distance. Solitude is a priveledge in these days of constant racket. Yet the art of undistracted listening is important to the Christian faith. Jesus needed moments to Himself and so early in the mornings He would go up into the hills by Himself. We who call ourselves followers of Christ must have moments alone also. We need to develop a style of solitude similar to His in which we take time to reflect, and brood, and collect our being. If I say nothing else to you on this Labor Day Sunday hear me at this point---in order to do the will of God we need to discover moments alone when we can listen for Him. Labor is vanity unless it is purposeful and for the Christian it is purposeful only in response to God's initiative. Listen before you labor.

Hearing the call of God demands a response. Notice that I have not labelled the kind of response necessary. Indeed ther is nothing that can be said about the kind of response a Christian will make except to say that if it is truly God's will that we are doing it will always embody love.

Beyond this no man can say what God's directive will demand. The important point is that one quality of the Christian life that is present in all genuine Christians is the quality of responsiveness. Do you remember the words of Martin Luther? At one point he said, "Sin bravely." His point was, and my point is, that not to respond is worse than to make the wrong response. If you have listened and have heard then you must respond.

Jesus knew the urgency of action in response to God's call. Immediately following the wilderness experience Jesus began to preach saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Can you hear the urgency of that statement? Not "...you should change your ways because sooner or later life will catch up with you." No. Jesus message had an urgency about it. It was a do or die now message. For Jesus was responding to the call of God for His life.

So it is that all Christians who have done their homework and listened to God's call embody a spirit of urgent response. Yesterday with its glory and pain, tomorrow with its promise and its mystery are not the priority. It is the now that counts. Christians who have heard the call of God, be they young or old or somewhere in between, are automatically members of the now generation...for they are responding with urgency to the call of God.

Fulfilling the will of God requires not only hearing God's grace. It is important to note that simply doing God's will is not enough. It is imperative that the motivating power of a Christian's life be acknowledged and praised. Obviously this means expressing gratitude and giving glory to God. There is no work worth doing that man can perform without God's assistance. That is a way of saying that any task truly worthy of a Christian's time and energy is worthy also of God's presence. If He is the foundation and strength of our existence then He should be consulted in any of our endeavors and praised for any of our successes. A Christian does not fulfill the will of God as much as he allows God to fulfill His will in and through the person. I have a strong suspicion that if Jesus were to appear here today He would talk to us not about what He did for God but rather what God did in and through Him. Praise and glory and fulfillment belong to the Lord. This was the style that Jesus employed and this is the high calling of every Christian. Have I made my point clearly? Fulfilling God's will is never a case of what you or I have done but rather a case of what God has done through us. Thus we can take no praise for His work, we can accept no thanks for His efforts, we can receive no glory for His activity. God as the source of our strength becomes the focus of our gratitude. In and through this praise and thanksgiving comes the fulfillment of God's will.

So we have come full circle. We began by stressing the importance of listening to God's call, continued by pointing to the resultant sense of urgent response to His call, and finally suggested that fulfillment of His call comes when the task is done and we lift our hearts in praise to Him for His essential assistance. To me this is the beginning, the continuation, and the end of every Christians job, every Christians profession, every Christians task, every Christians life--- for this is the will of God. First to listen to His call. Second to respond to His demand. And, finally, to give Him the praise. Amen.