

THE HEART OF OUR MESSAGE

“Listen, I tell you! Listen!! I am warning you. You will suffer eternally in hell.” The speaker was the blind tutor of the Sultan’s children. He had come from Raadh to Hassa so that the infidel doctor could operate on him. The result was good, and after a few days of acquaintance a real affection for the physician stirred within his fiercely fanatical heart. That thin, pinched, terribly earnest face I shall never forget. He was still weak and his voice soon filled with a great weariness, which was a curious combination of bitter contempt for the error to which we clung with such tenacity, and a loving concern for one whom he had come to esteem as a real friend.

Even if a missionary never did any thinking before, he is bound to spend some time in intense meditation after an experience of that sort. Is our message merely a similar plea with a different formula? Are we here to tell men that “There is no God but God, and Jesus Christ is the Son of God,” and threaten with hell those who stubbornly refuse to listen? No missionary would admit that this is a satisfactory definition of our purpose, but there remains the disquieting fear that much of our preaching has been of this sort. Testimony that God is one and that Jesus is the Son of God we have looked on as the foundation of our message, but the devils believe in God’s unity, and as appears in Christ’s dealings with them, they believe too that Jesus is the Son of God. Beliefs which we share with the demons of hell can scarcely be the heart of our message.

If the Apostle Paul could make one more missionary journey, this time to Moslem lands, he would have no difficulty in analyzing our problems here, and showing that such preaching is simply presenting to the Moslems a new law to take the place of their old one. A law has several elements, an underlying conception of God, and a creed upon whose acceptance His favor depends. It has rules of human behavior and rituals of worship. But "by works of law shall no flesh be justified in His sight," not even if it is a good and divine and perfect law. The Pharisees were devoted wholeheartedly to a divine law, and they crucified Christ. The heart of our message then cannot lie in philosophical conceptions of God, nor in a creed whose acceptance is supposed to please Him. It cannot lie in rituals, nor in ethical rules.

We have made some appalling mistakes at this point. Moslem mission fields everywhere are strewn with the wrecks of men who accepted the new law we offered and gave up their old one. They now believe in all sincerity that "There is no God but God, and Jesus Christ is the Son of God," and we baptized those men, and the storms of persecution and temptation uprooted them and broke their spirit, soul and body, and the last state of those men is worse than the first.

Without doubt the essence of our message can be defined and understood if we penetrate into the real meaning of faith, but that is not the easiest way to understand it. We are dealing with fundamentals here, or rather with the one fundamental on which hangs our entrance into eternal life. Many of us can see more clearly and further in the Gospel of John than elsewhere. There, effective faith, the faith which makes it possible for God to give us eternal life, is defined simply and luminously as a relationship to Jesus Christ, a relationship whose essential human element is complete surrender to Him.

Christ was willing that this surrender should take various forms. All He asked of the woman at the well was that she follow His simple teaching: "The hour

cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such doth the Father seek to be His worshippers." That seems a dangerously whittled down entrance requirement for the Kingdom of God, but in the face of Christ's own endorsement, who will dare to call it inadequate? He told the crowd in Jerusalem just before His crucifixion, that only those who fall into the earth and die can follow Him and be saved. It is a picture of supreme self-sacrifice for needy men. He healed the man born blind without adding a word of spiritual instruction, and the man's loyalty saved him. All that Christ appears to have asked from him was a willingness to break away entirely from his previous environment, and be utterly loyal to the new gleam, as faint as it was. Most illuminating of all perhaps is His statement to a crowd which He had fed the day before: "I am the bread of life . . . Whosoever eateth of this bread shall live forever." It is not demanded that we understand every aspect of Christ. Through all eternity we shall not fathom His unsearchable riches. But some crumb of the bread of life we must not merely look at, but eat; in some aspect we must not simply admire Christ, but surrender to Him absolutely. Life thereafter is centered in Him. Anything displeasing to Him is cast out.

We bring to men, Jesus Christ. He demands not comprehension, but surrender; not works of law, but faith. And that surrender to Christ, that faith, saves, not because of power inherent in it, but because God puts eternal life into the believer's heart, or better expressed, because Christ Himself abides thereafter within that man. Men belong to the eternal brotherhood, to the mystical body of Christ, not when they fulfil a Christian law by a correct view of the nature of Christ, but when they have surrendered to Christ, and He has taken up His abode in them. Then they are ready to be baptized.

We present every aspect of Christ which His grace has revealed to us. We preach Him, we converse about

Him, in the unconscious attitudes of our lives we hope to exhibit Him. We know that He is wise and we are foolish, that He is strong and we are weak, that He is spotless and we are soiled. We know that nothing short of a miracle can reveal Christ through us, and we have faith that He will perform even that miracle. We pray that some aspect of Christ which He is able to reveal through our lips or illustrate in our lives, may captivate the men around us, and command the surrender of their lives, so that they also can receive eternal life. Jesus Christ is the heart of our message, as He is its power, and His will be the glory of its eventual triumph.

Muscat, Arabia.

PAUL W. HARRISON.