

The Cost of Saving Souls

by Samuel Logan Brengle

The sermon discusses the profound cost and commitment required to effectively save souls, drawing on historical examples and biblical principles.

Scripture: Matthew 16:24

Topics: "Soul Winning", "Sacrifice for Christ"

Description

Samuel Logan Brengle emphasizes the profound cost of saving souls, illustrating that true soul-winning requires self-sacrifice and unwavering faith. He recounts the struggles of early evangelists like Paul and the Wesleys, who faced immense opposition yet persevered to ignite revivals. Brengle highlights that the journey to win souls often begins in humble settings, requiring a heart willing to die to self and embrace the mission of Christ. He encourages believers to seek purity of heart and wisdom through experience, asserting that the joy of winning souls is worth the sacrifice. Ultimately, he calls for a passionate commitment to the cause of Christ, urging that every believer can be a soul-winner if they prioritize this mission above all else.

Transcript

Some years ago a young woman-Officer wrote the Colonel in command of a Continental Territory telling him she meant to resign if she could not get souls saved. But she did not resign.

A pastor, famous for the revivals which swept his churches and moved the communities where he labored, was sent to a big church in New York city. As he walked into a gathering of ministers, he heard them whispering among themselves 'He will find New York different. It is the graveyard of revival reputations.' And right there he resolved and publicly declared that there should be a revival in his church or there would be a funeral in his parsonage.

Little faith sees the difficulties and often accepts defeat without a fight. Great faith sees God and fights manfully against all odds, and though the enemy apparently triumphs, wins moral and spiritual victory, as did Christ on Calvary, and as did the martyrs who perished in flame. What could be more complete to doubting hearts and the eyes of unbelief than the defeat of Christ on the cross, or of Cranmer and Ridley in the fire! And yet it was then that their victory over the enemy was supreme. The spirit of Jesus is the spirit of conquest.

When Paul, filled with passionate love for Christ, whom he had persecuted, and burning with eager desire to save men with the great Salvation that had reached him, went forth to evangelize the Roman Empire, the Jews everywhere confronted and hunted him with the same deadly hate and murderous opposition that he had once shown to the Jerusalem Christians; while every city he entered reeked with unmentionable vices and reveled in licentious idolatries. He had no completed Bible, no religious Press, no missionary organization behind him to ensure his support, and the very name of Christ was unknown, while Caesar was honored as a god.

The wealth, the learning, the philosophy, the political power, the religions, the vested interests of the world and the age-long habits, passions, and inflamed appetites of men were all opposed to him. Don Quixote's valorous attack on windmills did not appear more absurd than Paul's assault on the sin, the corruption, the entrenched evils of the world of his day with no other weapon than his personal testimony and the story of a crucified, resurrected Jewish peasant Carpenter, whom he heralded as the Son of God and the Saviour and Judge of the world, before whom all men, from the Emperor to the lowest slave, must some day appear to be judged for his deeds and be rewarded with eternal bliss or doomed to endless shame and woe. Paul died, but he won souls.

Immeasurable difficulties faced the Wesleys when they and Whitefield began their career that quickened Christendom. The clergy were, as a class, utterly unspiritual, given over to drinking, horse-racing, and fox-hunting with the gentry; the educated classes were, in large measure, skeptical and licentious, while the lower classes, in the cities, were only too often debased and drunken, and found their pleasures in cock-fighting and racing dogs on Sundays. But in the midst of these desolate and desperate conditions the Wesleys started the greatest revival that had been known since the Apostolic Age, and snatched souls by the myriads from the very jaws of Hell.

And amid conditions almost, if not equally, as dark and forbidding, the Founder of The Salvation Army began and carried on his work that has directly touched and won millions of souls and an even larger number indirectly, quickening the faith and lifting the spiritual level of the whole Christian world, and touching with soul-saving power and life-giving hope great heathen populations in many lands.

But none of these world-embracing, epoch-making revivals began in a large way. Paul usually made an address and gave his testimony in a synagogue -- a small meeting-place of the Jews -- until he was excluded, and then he went up some home or room that was opened to him. This was followed by house-to-house visitation, often after a day's work at tentmaking. The Wesleys began in the same humble way, and so did the Founder.

Great revivals among God's people and awakenings among the ungodly never begin in a great way. They begin as oak trees begin. There is nothing startling and spectacular about the beginning of an oak tree. In darkness, in loneliness, an acorn gives up its life, and the oak, at first only a tiny root and a tiny stem of green, is born out of the dissolution and death of the acorn. So revivals are born, so souls are won, so the Kingdom of God comes. Some one, no longer trying to save himself or to advance his own interests, dies -- dies to self, to the world, to the praise of men, to the ambition for promotion, for place, for power, and lives unto Christ, lives to save men, and the awakening of sinners comes; souls are born into the kingdom of God, they rally round their leader and in turn become soul-winners. 'Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone : but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit,' said Jesus. And so He 'endured the cross, despising the shame,' and died that He might win souls, save men, and 'bring many sons unto glory.'

'If any man serve Me, let him follow Me,' said Jesus. Let him lose his old life, his old ambitions, his old estimate of values for My sake, My cause, and the souls he would win and for whom I died. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.'

That is the way to become a soul-winner; that is the price that must be paid. The Master could find no easier way, and He can show no easier way to us. It is costly. But shall we wish to win eternal and infinite values cheaply? 'For the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross.' What joy? The joy of having the Father's approval and of saving souls from eternal death and of 'bringing many sons unto glory.' And shall we hope to share that joy by some cheap service that calls for no uttermost devotion, no whole burnt-offering, no final and complete sacrifice? Not otherwise has any man ever become a soul-winner. We may move upon the surface of men's lives, we may touch their emotions, we may lead them to easy, nonsacrificial religious exercises and activities, and think we are saving souls, but we do not really win them until we constrain them to follow us, as we follow Christ, through death -- death to sin, death to the flesh and the world, into newness of life unto Holiness.

This was Paul's way. 'I go bound in the Spirit not knowing what shall befall me save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus' (Acts xx. 22-24). It was not easy for Paul. He counted the cost. He paid the price. He turned neither to the right hand nor the left. He marched straight forward.

He was commissioned 'to open men's eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith ' in Christ. And he adds: 'I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision.' 'What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ, yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.'

It is as we thus count all things but loss and so win Christ that we are empowered to win souls. This is the standard we must set for ourselves, and to which we must woo and draw by the compulsion of love and faithful teaching and example our younger comrades.

The Psalmist, in his penitential prayer, cried to God for a clean heart and a right spirit, for the joy of Salvation, and the enabling of the Holy Spirit. 'Then,' said he, 'will I teach transgressors Thy ways: and sinners shall be converted unto Thee.' David felt that if he would effectively teach and convert sinners his heart must be pure, his spirit must be right. So then the cost of winning souls includes the price that must be paid for a pure heart. I must be clean, my spirit must be right, I must hold back no part of the price, I must bring all the tithes into God's storehouse, if I would be a soul winner.

'He that winneth souls is wise,' wrote Solomon. Then, if I would be a soul-winner, I must pay the price of wisdom. Wisdom cannot be bought with silver and gold. It cannot be passed on like an inheritance from father to son. It cannot be learned, as we learn mathematics or the sciences, in schools and colleges. It comes only through experience in following Christ.

Knowledge comes, but wisdom lingers, and he bears a laden breast, Full of sad experience, moving toward the stillness of his rest.

He who wants wisdom must not shrink from suffering. 'Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed, we intreat,' wrote Paul. Suffering did not daunt him. Abuse and neglect did not embitter him. When his converts were turned against him, he wrote: 'I will not be burdensome to you: for I seek not yours, but you. . . And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved. . . . We do all things, dearly beloved, for your edifying.' A man with that spirit is full of wisdom, the wisdom of God, the wisdom that is from above, which is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy,' and he wins souls. His life, his example, his spirit, his speech are compelling, and he wins and knits men to Christ.

The soul-winner must not despise the day of small things. It is better to speak to a small company and win a half-dozen of them to the Saviour, than to speak to a thousand and have no one saved or sanctified, though they all go away lauding the leader and exclaiming, 'Wasn't the Meeting grand!' Some years ago I went to a large city, where we owned a Hall seating nearly a thousand people, and where I thought we had a flourishing Corps. The Officer and his wife had unusual ability, but had become stale and spiritually lifeless. Where hundreds should have greeted me, fifty tired, listless people were present, twenty of whom were unkempt children. When I rose to give out the first song, there were three Song-Books among us, one of which was mine. The Officer ran off downstairs to pick up a few more books, and while we waited I was fiercely tempted to walk off the platform and leave the place, telling him I would not spend my strength helping a man with no more spirit and interest than he manifested. Then I looked at the people before me -- tired miners, poor and wearied wives, and little, unshepherded children -- peering at me with dull, quizzical eyes as though wondering whether I would club them or feed them, give them stones or bread for their hunger. And my heart was swept with a great wave of pity for them -- 'sheep without a shepherd.' And I set myself with full purpose of heart to bless and feed them, to save them, and in the next six days the big Hall was crowded and we rejoiced over ninety souls seeking the Saviour. The true soul-winner counts not his life dear unto himself. He gives himself desperately to his task, and there are times when, as Knox prayed, 'Give me Scotland, or I die,' so he sobs and cries, 'Give me souls, or I die.'

That New York pastor had a revival in the church. There was no funeral in the parsonage. Day and night he cried to God for souls. Every afternoon he was out visiting the people in their homes, their offices, their shops. He climbed so many stairways that he said if they had been piled one on the other they would have taken him well up toward the moon. For a month or more he devoted his mornings to study of the Bible, to reading the biographies of soul-winners, books on revivals, revival lectures and sermons, revival songs, and revival stories and anecdotes. He saturated his mind and heart with the very spirit of revivals. He looked into the grave, into Hell, into Heaven. He studied Calvary. He meditated on eternity. He stirred up his pity and compassion for the people. He cried to God for the Holy Ghost, for power, for faith, for wisdom, for fervor and joy and love. He waked up in the night and prayed and planned his campaign. He enlisted such members of his church as were spiritual to help him. When he won a man for Christ he enlisted him as a helper in the fight, and God swept the church with revival fire, and hundreds were won to Christ. Hallelujah! Oh, how unfailling is God. How ever present and ready to help is the Holy Ghost! How surely is Jesus present where men gather in His name!

That woman-Officer to whom I have referred did not resign. One night, as she closed the Meeting, she asked the Soldiers to remain with her for a short while. Then she opened her heart to them. She told them of her letter to the Colonel. She said she could not continue in the work unless she could see souls saved. Many drunkards were in the city. The streets were infested by them. Their homes were being ruined, their

wives neglected, and they were hastening to Hell because of the drink. Would not the comrades remain and spend an hour in prayer with her and for her, and for the Salvation of souls, and especially of the drunkards of the city? They stayed, and for an hour they prayed, and God heard and drew nigh, and Jesus was in the midst.

After the next public Meeting she again requested the Soldiers to remain, and again they prayed for an hour or more, and Jesus was there. And after every public Meeting for a week or ten days, or more, the Soldiers stayed with the Officer and prayed, and Jesus was in the midst. And then one night, somewhat to their surprise -- strange that we should be surprised at answered prayer -- the worst drunkard in the city, with several of his pals, came to the Meeting and was converted; then his whole family was won, and they all became Soldiers. In a brief time twelve drunkards were converted, and lo! that woman had a blessed revival on her hands, and not only were sinners converted, but an Officer was saved to The Army.

We may be sweet singers, eloquent and moving preachers, skillful organizers, masters of men and assemblies, wizards of finance, popular and commanding leaders, but if we are not soul-winners, if we do not make men and women see the meaning and winsomeness of Jesus, and hunger for His righteousness and purity, and bow to Him in full loyalty, then one thing, the chief thing for an Army Officer, we lack. And yet that one thing is within the reach of us all if we live for it, if we put it first, if we shrink not from the cost. We may be, we should be, Oh, we shall be at all cost, winners of souls!

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