

**JESUS MADE MEN BY HELPING
THEM REALIZE THEIR POTENTIAL**

In the first place, Jesus made men by helping them realize their potential.

The men that Jesus called to be his disciples were for the most part plain men. They were not from the ruling class, the wealthy class, or the educated class. They were solid citizens rather than brilliant leaders. And they were all so different. Some were fishermen; one was a tax collector. Some were strong and rugged; others were weak and luke-warm.

BUT JESUS APPEALED TO THESE MEN by holding before them a higher potential. To Simon and Andrew he said, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men". They were probably making a good living as fishermen. **BUT JESUS OFFERED THEM A GREATER INCENTIVE FOR THEIR LIVES.** He shifted the center of their attention from things to persons; from the material to the spiritual. How much more interesting and exciting to seek men than fish. It was their association with Jesus which lifted them from obscurity and made their names immortal. Almost anyone can make a living, but life was made for more than that.

This is the way of Jesus with us. It's not the usual that lifts us above the ordinary. It's the challenge of a bigger incentive that makes us grow and live. Robert Browning caught the idea in a line of poetry:

"Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp.....Or what's a heaven for..."

As we reach out after something ahead of us, we find our potential being realized. It brings out the best in us. It develops our unused powers and gives us a glimpse of our real possibilities. We never achieve our full potential in the service of self. God wants us for bigger things than fishing. And yet too many of us are content with mediocrity. We like to follow Jesus, but we want to do so at a safe distance. We are afraid to get too close. We might have to change our plans.

There's a story about a stingy farmer who persistently refused to attend any of John Wesley's meetings. One day he was induced to go. Wesley's first idea in the sermon was "Make all you can", and his delighted the farmer very much. The second point was "Save all you can", and this just about through the farmer into ecstasy, and he thought how foolish he had been to miss such great preaching. And then the third idea was introduced which was, "Give all you can". This, the farmer said, spoiled what would have been a good sermon!

Only as we give all we can in the way of time, talent, ability and energy to the challenge of some great cause, do we find something happening within us. Only as we turn the direction of our lives from self to service of others and to God, do we find our own potential being realized.

A young doctor talked with John Dewey just prior to the philosopher's 90th birthday. The doctor blurted out his low opinion of philosophy. "What's the use of all that stuff...where does it get you?". John Dewey replied, "The good of it is that you climb mountains". The doctor somewhat puzzled and unimpressed, said, "Climb mountains....and what's the use of that?" And Dewey replied with great insight:

"It helps you to see other mountains. You come down, climb the next mountain, and see still other mountains to climb. When you are no longer interested in climbing mountains to see other mountains to climb, then life for you, is over....."

✓ **WHY FOLLOW JESUS?** Because he challenges us with the upward reach. In his company, we find dissatisfaction with what we are. The cheap and the superficial lose their glitter. He wins us away from making a living to the higher goal of a creative and Christ-like personality. He lures us up one mountain of truth and faith and then another and another. Such incentives make men!

JESUS MADE MEN BY MAKING THEM WORKERS IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

In the second place, Jesus made men by making them workers in the Kingdom of God. JESUS would ask us the question: **WHAT ARE WE DOING WITH LIFE?**

Is it not true that the things we do determine what we are. Is it not true that the measure of our lives is found in the size of the things we live for?

Jesus took men of different backgrounds and made them workers in the Kingdom. In some cases, it meant a complete change of life. Take Matthew for instance. He was a tax collector. He was not a good prospect for discipleship. Tax collectors were despised by the Jews. They were employed by Rome, and were often the agents of graft and extortion. And yet Jesus picked Matthew. He recognized that Matthew was a man of ability. He knew that Matthew's life would be changed as he set his hands to the task of the kingdom. For his part, Matthew was probably sick at heart with the false basis on which his life was lived. He was glad for the opportunity to start a fresh, clean life.

This miracle of life-transformation has taken place many times in Christian history. Jesus appeals to all kinds of men. He calls to something deep within. He probes beneath the surface. The cynic, the materialist, the extortioner ~~and they are~~ reborn when they enter into the labors of the kingdom.

A young man belonging to a wealthy family of India went to London. He was anxious to be received by society, so he bought expensive clothes, studied the social graces, and plunged into a life of selfish frivolity. One day a British Bible salesman persuaded him to read the Old and New Testament. The young man was bored by the Old Testament, but something in the New Testament went straight to his heart. The words of Jesus delighted the young man from India. They produced a tremendous impact upon him which remained throughout his life. The young man renounced his former way of life and returned to India where he became the leader of the illiterate, the outcast, and the untouchable. In the years that followed this man virtually shook all of India and the British Empire to its foundation stones. The man was Mahatma Gandhi. He was captured by the life and message of Jesus. It changed him, and it changed a nation.

And then there was a sickly sceptical school teacher in Boston. He was so frail that he could hardly stoop to tie his shoes. Life held very little for him until he became a worker in the kingdom of God. His name was Phillips Brooks. He became a giant physically and spiritually when Jesus claimed him as a working disciple.

It's a long way from Gandhi to Phillips Brooks. But the power of Jesus to make ordinary men great knows no boundaries. If our world is to be saved for decency and freedom, then God must have strong, able and devoted men. The kingdom of God needs us, whoever we are and whatever we do. As we set our hands to the tasks of the kingdom, our insights are deepened, our vision lengthened, our understanding widened, and our strength increased. Jesus makes men by making them workers in the kingdom of God.

JESUS MADE MEN BY COMMANDING
THEIR PERSONAL DEVOTION TO HIM.

In the third place, Jesus made men by commanding their personal devotion to him.

When Jesus said, "Follow Me" he wasn't asking for an opinion or looking for an endorsement of an idea. He was requiring a commitment. The early disciples knew little of his teachings. They didn't stop to straighten out their ideas, or their beliefs. They didn't count the cost of discipleship. They were drawn to Jesus personally. And Jesus insisted on their complete devotion. On two occasions Jesus turned away those who had other matters to attend to before following or joining him. Remember his rather hard and demanding words to them:

"No man, having put his hand to the plough and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God....."

"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me!"

This self-denying, self-sacrificial element is at the center of all Christian discipleship.

When the Earl of Kent in Shakespeare's play KING LEAR came to offer his service to the king, he gave only one reason. "YOU HAVE THAT IN YOUR COUNTENANCE WHICH I WOULD FAIN CALL MASTER". "And WHAT'S THAT" asked the King. And the Earl replied, "AUTHORITY". And that is what we find in Jesus. Moral authority. Spiritual authority. This authority demands our very best, it demands our loyalty!

Our loyalty should not be to a creed, nor to an organization, nor to a minister, nor to any earthly leader. Our loyalty should not be to Wesley, Calvin, Aquinas, or Augustine. It should be to Jesus. The creeds are debatable, and the church may be faulty, and the minister may not suit all tastes. But Jesus is beyond criticism. When we give him our allegiance, our souls grow strong and daring.

There is something within all of us that responds to personality. It was not to Hitlerism that men responded, but to Hitler. During World War II young German soldiers going into battle and the hazards of sudden death would go with the cry of Heil Hitler on their lips. They had given themselves to him with utter abandon. Where he led, they followed. What he said, they did. With a like loyalty - but in a different spirit and for a different purpose, we should give ourselves to Jesus and his cause.

If you would know life at its best, then choose to follow Jesus. First the commitment - then the truth, the meaning, the reality, and the liberation. In an age of broad and easy tolerance we must realize we can never find the meaning of life until we first make some fundamental commitment. As we give ourselves to his cause, do we find our lives greatly enriched, and society transformed.

An imaginary conversation between Jesus and the angel Gabriel, after the ascension, describes Gabriel as asking the Master what plan he had made for completing his work on earth. Jesus answered: I asked Peter and James and John, and some more on earth to make it the business of their lives to tell others. And the others are to tell others, and the others still others, until every man has heard it and had his life transformed by it." Gabriel stood in meditation as though he saw a flaw in the Master's plan. He said, "Yes, Master....but suppose after a while Peter forgets, and

John loses some of his enthusiasm. And what if their successors in the 20th century get so busy or so timid that they do not have the courage or the time to work for you. What will you do then?

The voice of Jesus answered quietly and confidently, "I haven't made other plans. I'm counting on them."

LET US PRAY:

Our Father, we do feel the responsibility that is ours for carrying forward Thy work. At times we do become careless and occupied with less important things. Forgive us and help us to be more faithful that we may not disappoint Thy hopes. Keep us from becoming so tied up with other things that we forget our chief occupation is to live as Thy disciples. Amen