

GOD'S GREATEST PREACHER ... Conscience  
GOD'S GREATEST PREACHER ... Conscience (JOHN 8:9)

Someone has said that "Conscience is the whisper of God in the soul of man," and if that statement be true, it is the world's greatest preacher. Webster's Dictionary defines conscience as "the faculty, power or principle which decides on the lawfulness or unlawfulness of actions, with a compulsion to do right. It is the moral judgment which prohibits or opposes the violation of a previously recognized ethical principle." Millions of people know that conscience is the watchdog which refuses to remain silent in the presence of an intruder, the divinely installed equipment within the human brain which emits warnings when man is tempted; the siren which awakens a sleeper when the sanctity of his soul is being threatened. It is controlled by an unseen operator, who, whether we like it not, sounds an alarm which foolish people ignore.

The Pharisees... Who Realized Their Predicament (John 8:6-9)

"But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last." and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst."

The Pharisees were very smug, conceited and confident as they looked at Jesus. Their eyes reflected the hardness of their hearts; they were cynical. A woman of ill-fame had been pushed into the presence of the Lord, and her accusers were merciless when they said: "Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou?" Their strategy had been carefully planned – possibly by one of their legal advisers; it could not be defeated. If the Savior

130

said: "Stone her," they would have done so immediately knowing His command would contradict His teaching. If He refused to obey the law, they could arrest Him for contempt of the legal system.. Apparently their scheme was foolproof. They were cynical, haughty, hypocritical and callous. They could not have known the Divine Operator was about to ruin their carefully laid plan.

Maybe even the disciples smiled for the scene was strange. The Master's reply had shattered the pride of the accusers. Even the most important among them was suddenly disconcerted for that kneeling preacher had discovered their closely guarded secrets. He knew about things which, if made public, could create scandal. Fearing that at any moment Jesus might begin accusing individuals, the Pharisees commenced leaving the area. The eldest went first – they had lived longer than the others – and had more to hide! Had they thrown stones at the woman, the Teacher might have condemned them publicly, and that would have been disastrous. They frowned; their consciences were becoming troublesome.

Simon Peter... Who Reached the Porch (Mark 14:67-68)  
If one might be permitted to mix metaphors, it can be said

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that Peter was skating on thin ice, and was about to fall into hot water! Proud, indignant and very confident, the apostle had vehemently said he would never disown his Master. The idea that such a deed was possible was preposterous. He had never failed anyone, and would not begin with the Lord. Now he had wandered into enemy territory, and was fraternizing with enemies. He was a fish out of water!

The attack upon his integrity was sudden and devastating. Peter was dumbfounded. Memories flooded his mind, and anguish brought tears to his eyes. Then a voice began to whisper within his soul, and the agitated man failed to silence the accusations. Suddenly, he began to move toward the door, and within a few moments reached the porch where the breezes of the night began to cool his brow. The stars were shining in the darkened sky, and Peter trembled as he remembered his denial at the fire. There is reason to believe that his conscience urged

131

the troubled man to remain outside, but when he reentered the hail, his way of escape closed.

Why did he take that short but vital walk toward the porch? It could not have been a premeditated act. The lights of warning were beginning to glow within his soul; the grace of God was endeavoring to prevent a tragedy. The apostle never forgot that terrible occasion; he felt guilty for the rest of his life. The Lord always provides a way of escape for His people, but when men and women refuse to avail themselves of that kindness, increasing sorrow becomes inevitable.

Herod. . . Who Remembered the Past (Matthew 14:1-2)

"At that time Herod the tetrarch heard of the fame of Jesus, And said unto his servants, This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead; and therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him."

The king was frightened; his mind was in a turmoil; his confidence was shattered, and his future threatened. The murder of John the Baptist had left an indelible stain on the monarch's conscience, and Herod could not forget the birthday party when he had gazed upon the decapitated head of the prophet. He was afraid to close his eyes at night for he believed retribution to be inevitable. The slain preacher had risen from the dead to avenge what had been done in the palace. The monarch had made inquiries concerning Jesus of Nazareth, but what he had ascertained confirmed his greatest fear. A ghost was about to take his life; he was doomed! Herod thought of the unpardonable deed, and each hour deepened his misery. His conscience was exceedingly active; he had sinned against God and man; there could be no escape for such as he.

Dr. George Truett, the famous preacher, told of a man who said: "Dr. Truett, when you first came to town, I heard you preach every Sunday, and would have to hold on to my seat not to respond to your invitation. After the service I walked the streets for hours. I was miserable. I promised myself that I would respond the following Sunday, but when the invitation hymn was sung, I froze! I could not step out into the aisle. Dr. Truett, I know that you are a better preacher today than you

132

were then, but when I hear you preach, I no longer feel as I once did. Has something happened to me?"

When the preacher told his story, he said: "I did not have the heart to tell him there is a line unseen by men, and when it is

GOD'S GREATEST PREACHER ... Conscience

crossed, a thick barrier is formed, and you will never let Jesus in." Reproduced in part from The Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations, Paul Lee Tan, Assurance Publishers, Rockville, Maryland.

Judas... Who Regretted His Pact (Matthew 27:3-5)

"Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood., and he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and went and hanged himself."

The body of Judas hanging at the end of a rope was one of the most pathetic sights in history. Yet, it was not the rope which killed the traitor; he was dead before he died! The warning signals which had troubled him throughout the ministry of Jesus had disappeared. That pitiable man had thrown away his last chance to love and serve the Savior. His final disheveled appearance before the members of the Sanhedrin would never be forgotten. His face was torn by anguish; his cheeks were wet with tears; and the coins for which he sacrificed the Lord were thrown on the floor. He had sold his Leader for the price of a slave.

Did that desperate man reminisce before placing the rope around his neck? Did he recall the many times he had spoken with Jesus? It should never be forgotten that Judas was an ordained minister. Even he could not forget the day when Christ commissioned him to preach the Gospel, and endued him with "power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease" (Matt. 10:1).

The following months were filled with happiness as he traveled from place to place with his colleagues announcing the kingdom of God was at hand. When he became treasurer of the

133

party, his eyes shone with delight; Judas loved being important. Those were delightful days, but unfortunately growing pride and increasing ambition destroyed his soul.

It may never be known how often he ignored God's warnings. The traitor coveted the money placed in his care, but after he had stolen what he desired, he was probably elated. One mistake led to another, and finally the thief was confronted by his greatest temptation. He tried to console himself by believing Jesus had not lived up to expectation. The glittering kingdom about which so much had been said, was now a mirage. Judas began to compromise with the Lord's enemies, and that was the beginning of the end. "Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, And said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver" (Matt. 26:14-15). That was the reimbursement money given to a slave owner if another man's ox inadvertently injured his slave (Exod. 21:21-32).

Judas sacrificed his soul upon an altar of greed. To obtain the highest price possible for the betrayal, he ignored the warnings of the Almighty. Finally when he was beyond redemption he felt some remorse, but he had reached a point of no return and was friendless. Alone in his misery, he decided to commit suicide. "He went out, and it was night" (John 13:30). Even in eternity Judas will remember the dastardly deed which ruined his character, destroyed his hopes and damned his soul (Luke

16:19-31).

Paul... Who Resolved His Problem... (1 Tim. 1:15-16)  
Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit, for this cause I obtained mercy."

It was significant that Paul never forgot his earliest mistakes. Even when he was approaching the end of his career, he said: "I was a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious" (1 Tim. 1:13). When given the opportunity to defend himself before the governor at Caesarea, the apostle said: "And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence to-

134

ward God and toward men" (Acts 24:16). To the best of his ability Paul avoided displeasing the Lord, and endeavored to live a life beyond reproach. Yet, although he tried hard to forget the attacks against the early Christians, he failed in his efforts. When he frowned it became evident that his conscience was still active. This was apparent when he wrote to the Romans saying: "I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not; For what I would, I do not, but what I hate, that I do" (Rom. 7: 14-15).

God had pardoned Paul's earlier indiscretions, but the apostle had difficulty forgiving himself. That was one of his greatest problems. Nevertheless, he discovered a remedy for his ills, and found a way by which to escape the mental torment which could have interfered with his ministry. He said: "I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting" (1 Tim. 1:16). Paul's intensity of service revealed the secret of his continual enjoyment. He was determined to please the Lord even more than he had formerly grieved Him. Effective service for Christ helped to minimize the accusations of his conscience. Some people are content merely to express regret for their failure; others never rest until they have at least tried to pay their debt. Paul would have agreed with Dr. Oswald J. Smith who wrote:

There is joy in serving Jesus  
As I journey on my way:  
Joy that fills the heart with praises  
Every hour and every day.

135□

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