

Christ Seeks Not Yours, But You

by B.H. Carroll (1843-1914)

...for I seek not yours, but you... 2 Cor. 12:14

They first gave their own selves to the Lord. 2 Cor. 8:5

This theme is selected for an introduction to a protracted meeting. Its discussion is intended to show why it is our business to hold such a meeting what we seek to gain by the meeting, and to what end these objects are sought. First, why are we seeking? Second, whom do we seek? Third, to what end or object are these persons sought?

Paul says, "I seek not yours, but you." Why did Paul seek these people? What business was it of his? What authority had he in the premises? Under whose command did he go out and attempt to obtain the persons of people? The answer to these questions is in the fifth chapter of the Second Letter to the Corinthians and twentieth verse: "We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."

Why do we in a meeting seek the souls of the lost? In behalf of Christ, as though God, by us, were beseeching you. We base our actions upon no other ground than that we are under orders from our Master, who said to us, "Go ye and make disciples of all nations."

It is not because church-members may claim any jurisdiction over those who are outside nor because they affect peculiar sanctity. All men start from a common standpoint of alienation from God. By nature all are children of wrath. There is no difference in themselves. Wherein they differ, grace is the occasion.

In seeking others, saved men have no option. A charge is laid on them. A solemn obligation is imposed. A duty is placed by the special and direct and irrevocable command of God upon His people to seek the salvation of men. And we cannot ask you to do anything in our name, nor in our strength, nor to further any private or selfish ends of ours. We stand degraded in our own sight and worthy of your contempt if we come before you in any other attitude than this: In Christ's behalf, as ambassadors of Christ, as though God were beseeching you through us, we entreat that you be reconciled to God. Whenever the church of Jesus Christ plants itself firmly on that position and never turns away from it for one moment, it goes before the people in a manner to demand and to hold attention. God has a right at any time to the audience of His creatures. God has a right at any time to seek His people. And that is why we are seeking.

Now, let us pass to the next point. What is it we seek? If we make a mistake here, it is fatal. Paul says, "I seek not yours, but you." Just as sure as you church-members make the impression upon the minds of sinners that you are seeking what they have, that you are courting them that you are soliciting their attendance upon the service at your place of worship and manifesting an interest in their case because they may happen to be rich, or chance to occupy a high social position, or because their alignment with your particular congregation will give you social and financial strength in the community as compared with other congregations, just as sure as you make such impression on their minds, it is impossible for any right religious feeling to be excited in their hearts.

You must by all means come before them with this thought clearly in every word and deed upon your part: that you do not seek their money, their social position, that your mind is not on that, that you are giving no thought to it, that you are seeking them and not theirs, that you are seeking them as lost people, as not possessing in themselves anything that would recommend them to you or to God, that your object is the salvation of their souls and nothing beyond that. Until you can put it just that way, you may never expect to obtain a fair audience of outside people. It must be put this way: That before they can rightly do anything for the church, before they can rightly claim the Christian name, before a dollar of theirs or any social influence of theirs, can be regarded as worth a nickel in the sight of God, they must first give themselves to the Lord.

I am glad to see in this congregation a continual development of that thought; that you do not go to those who are not Christians to obtain the money with which to build your house of worship, or with which to pay your current expenses; that you intentionally and with fixed purpose absolutely leave them out of all of these things, insisting as a fundamental thing in Christianity that they first give themselves to the Lord. That must be regarded as the primary law of religion.

As long as a rich man can assume an attitude of patronage toward the Christian religion; as long as one who occupies a high social position can flatter herself with the thought that she is conferring some kind of a favor or obligation upon a congregation by her attendance, it is almost impossible to make an impression on that soul that will even start it in the direction of salvation. First, then, our seeking is in behalf of and by command of Christ.

Second, we seek you, not yours. Now, to what end? What object have we in view when we invite a sinner to come to Christ? That we make no mistake as to the end in view, let us hear the Word of God. I read from the second chapter and ninth verse of the First Letter of Peter: "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation a peculiar people." Some of the old-time people say that Christians should be peculiar, that is, odd in dress and manner. But that is not the meaning of the Word. You are to be a people for God's own possession. That is, His possession is to be exclusive, peculiar to God. There is to be no division of authority. "They first gave themselves to the Lord."

Now, when as a church we commence a protracted meeting, we must let it be understood in every song and prayer and sermon that the object that we have in view in seeking men is that they shall become God's own possession. The one sought must become the Lord's. God is to be his God, and he is to be God's child. On his brain and heart and hands and feet and in the secret chambers of his deathless spirit is to be written one name only, and is to be imprinted one image only, so that the image and superscription will tell to angels and to men that this is God's property. We do not ask you to give yours to us. We do not ask you to become our property. In seeking you we seek you not for any such purpose. But we ask you to submit yourself to God and to be unto God for a possession in body and soul and forever. That is the object of our service.

And being sought as a peculiar possession of God's, to what uses are you to be placed, being so given over and surrendered to God? Let us notice the next Scripture to show what we mean by it. You will find it in the eighth chapter of Hebrews, where is cited a promise from the thirty-first chapter of Jeremiah: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: not according to the

covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt ... for this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel... I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts; and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people." Notice, if you please, that in becoming God's own possession it is not meant in any external sense, as "the Jewish nation was God's people," for here is a contrast between God's ownership and the Jewish nation as a people and God's ownership of the people we seek for Him, and the distinction consists in this-that inside of the man, in the inner man, in his spirit, the law of God is to be put in his mind and written on the tables of his heart, and there is to be in the inward part a conformity to the nature and holiness of God.

You will see at once, then, in conducting a protracted meeting, that when we invite people to take an interest in it, or invite them to come out from the world and join the church, it cannot be that they are to unite with the church in any external way merely; that no church of Jesus Christ has any authority, has any command, to lead into its membership, by any rite or ceremony, an unconverted, unregenerated, and unsaved man, but that we are to seek them for God's people, in that God shall reign in their souls and dominate their secret thoughts. That is what we mean.

This is further evident by another Scripture, the twelfth chapter of Romans, where they are commanded by the Apostle Paul to be not conformed to this world but to be transformed in the renewing of their mind, and thus transformed, to present their bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God. In reality it is presented in the Scriptures: "Know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Ghost? For He dwelleth in you. Therefore yield not your members unto unrighteousness." Therefore, in asking any sinner to come to Christ, to come out from the ranks of the world and to take a position with the people of God, we ask him to come only in the sense that is presented in these Scriptures.

Let us take yet another Scripture. In the fourteenth chapter of Romans, commencing with the seventh verse, we have the following which I wish to read, so that you may get it clearly before you: "For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord's."

Many times that Scripture has been interpreted to refer to our influence over other men. By a deduction it may be so used, but it has a primary and almost exclusive reference to another thought, and that is that when one has been sought by the people of God to become God's own possession, to become God's possession inside, become God's possession by the transformation of his mind, that henceforward that man so belonging shall not live unto himself, but unto God, his owner, and that when he dies he shall not die unto himself, but unto God, his owner; that in every act of his life and in the hour of his death, never for one moment shall sight be lost of the supreme and fundamental thought that he is God's property. "The Lord knoweth them that are His." Upon His property He has set His seal, a seal man nor devil can break, and His property, purchased by the blood of the everlasting covenant, is to be used for His glory and to accomplish His purposes, and not the private wishes of the saved man. Thus in outline I have presented all that it was my purpose to say today as to the object of a protracted meeting.

Now let me apply the thoughts thus outlined, and then leave the case with you. Every one of you who is a member of this church, I take it, holds yourself ready, with some degree of consecration, to do what you can in this meeting. I would have you therefore definitely settle, by putting it upon an unshaking and unshakable foundation, what you mean; that you are not to speak for yourself; that you are not to speak in your name; that you are to speak in behalf of Christ; that your sole office consists in representing Him here upon this earth in His absence; that what He did upon the earth with tears and entreaties and persuasion in endeavoring to lead men to Christ, you, in His behalf, in His stead, are now to do. Your model, therefore, is the record concerning our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. What was His attitude toward sinners? What earnestness did He manifest? What zeal, what persistence? What sacrifices did He make? In what discrimination did He hold men's persons? Did He look to the riches of a man or to his poverty? Did He look to the position of a man, whether king or peasant, or did He look upon all men as fallen, lost men, who were to be sought with a love undying and unquenchable, and by that love attracted to salvation? Now, that is to be our position. We can stand on no other.

Moreover, I would have you do now as I have seen you do in times past, make no discrimination in going out among the people; consider the rich and the poor as just alike, as standing upon a common platform; that the cultured and the uncultured, those higher in social position and those who are the dregs of society, are just one with you; that no matter what moral taint a person has inherited or has incurred by personal disobedience; no matter how far any woman has fallen, as lost sinners you are to seek them all. In Christ's stead seek them for a possession of God. Seek them for the salvation of their souls.

Continuing the application, I charge that you never allow the lost ones to rest one single moment in the thought that they can do anything before they first give themselves to God. Drive them away from that position. Do not let them occupy it one moment. Say to them in word and in deed, "Not yours, not yours, not your money, not your position, not your patronage, but yourself; give yourself first to God. You make no start in religion at all until you do that thing. You cannot buy salvation; you may not say, 'I will give the half of my goods to feed the poor.' You may not say, 'I will help to endow a college.' You may not say, 'I will help to pay the preacher.' You may not say, 'I will help to build churches.' No, that position is sinking sand. Yourself, yourself, to God, or you are lost."

Hold him right there. Impale him on the point of self-surrender to God. Shoot it into his heart as a burning arrow. Transfix him with it as with a dart hurled from a strong hand, that in bringing himself he must bring himself to be renovated by the power of God; that there must be an internal, spiritual change; that there must be regeneration; that the power of the Holy Ghost must brood over the great deep of his inner nature and bring life where darkness and chaos ruled; that he must be transformed into the renewing of his mind before he becomes God's possession. Stand right there yourself and hold him there.

If he says, "I do not swear; in morals I am better than a great many people in the church; I am a good husband to my wife and a good father to my children; I am a good citizen; may I not present myself to the Lord to be His possession in that capacity?" do not let him rest in that position one moment. Say to him with a voice that never relaxes its pungency and emphasis, "You must be born from above, for not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but born of the Spirit of God, must be every child of God." If you would see a church that God will not bless, look at one that makes a breach in its walls where God made no gate, that over the

ruins of that demolished wall may be introduced into the precincts of God's sacred camp unregenerated men and women.

Indeed, brethren, we must stand squarely and firmly on these points: That he first give himself to the Lord for the Lord to make him over; that he give himself to the Lord henceforward not to live unto himself; henceforward not to die unto himself; to be God's own possession; that from the time he gives himself to the Lord, then the Lord must be King in his heart. When this King says, "Go," he must go; when He says "Stay," he must stay, and it is no concern of his what hazard attaches to the going or the staying. It is no concern of his what suffering is entailed upon him, staying or going. It is no concern of his what alienation of family or friends follows his going or his staying. That is God's business. Let him say, "I am living unto God, dying unto God," and the Lord will take care of the consequences that ensue from yielding absolutely to His will. That is the true conception of a conversion.

I told you before to pray only and fervently that the will of God might be done. Are you willing to go into a meeting that way? Are you willing to take hold of it with the end in view that any sinner in this town, without any thought as to whether he is worth one dollar or a million; without any thought as to whether he is cultured or uncultured; without any thought as to his social position, in the upper crust or in the mud sills; without any thought as to anything that he could confer upon the church or detract from it; that you will go out as an ambassador of Jesus Christ, beseeching them to be reconciled to God?

Then this must be our voice: "We seek you. Jesus told us to seek you. We seek you not for ourselves. We seek you that you may be God's property. We seek you that you may be a temple of God. We seek you that you may live unto God. We seek you that you may die unto God. We seek you not that good may come from you to us, but for your present and eternal good: your salvation in time and eternity, and above all, for God's glory."

Suffer yet a few words of exhortation. There be some here today who are not God's, not God's own possession. They have not God's Spirit in them. They have not God's seal upon them. God would not claim them if they were to die. And after their death, should the devil come to take possession of their bodies, God would not send the angel Michael to beat back the devil as He did from the body of His servant, Moses, saying, "That is Mine. Touch it not. O Satan, that body is Mine! The soul of Moses is Mine and the body of Moses is Mine. He lived unto Me. He died unto Me. Touch it not."

Sinner, if you were to die, what barrier could rise up between your cold, rigid body and Satan coming to fix his stamp upon it? By what right could anybody intervene when your spirit leaves the crumbling house it had discarded? By what right could a convoy of angels come down and bar the path of your lost soul in its downward flight to the pit? They could not do it because it is not God's, not God's own possession. No name of God on it; no seal of God's on it. Alienated from God, banished from God, you are of your father, the devil.

Remember the case of Judas! Jesus said, "He is a devil." And when he died it is said "that he fell from his office of an apostle that he might go to his own place." See how ownership governed here. He was in the office of an apostle, but not saved; not right inside; not transformed in the renewing of his mind; not an internal child of God, but occupying an external office. And the time came when Judas died and by his death fell; fell from his office that "he might go to his own place." That place down there had called him. Its chambers were prepared for him. They

waited for his coming. His home, his eternal home, had sent an appeal to Judas, "Come home, Judas. Come down here. Come quickly to thine own place." Did God intervene? Did any angel leave the court of heaven to put himself between that man and Satan? As he passed out of sight, the words ring like a knell, like the sad notes of a dirge, "Better for that man that he never had been born."

Remember Judas while I press the question-Are you God's? If not, I seek you. I seek you in behalf of Christ. I seek you in tears. I seek you for God, to be His possession; that you may live unto Him and die unto Him; to be claimed by Him when the harpies of the pit, with beak and talon, would rend you in your dying hour. I want on you God's seal that will frighten them away and say to Satan himself, "Stand back, thou accuser of the brethren! Take thy shadow off of their hearts. Take thy beak out of their souls. Take thy shadow away from their dying bed, and let the spirit go home to God, whose it is."

Sinner, I seek you, not yours; you, and you for Jesus. May I find you?