

THE MAN GOD WANTS

Dr. John Allan Lavender
Ezekiel 22:17, 30

For my text I turn to the haunting language of the ancient drama recorded in Ezekiel, chapter 22:17,30C

¶And the word of the Lord came unto me saying...(verse 30) I
sought for a man among them who should build up the wall and
stand in the breech before Me for the land, that I should not destroy
it; but I found none.®

On a much smaller scale, it was a time like our own.

A time of world change.

Of international upheaval.

Of political confusion.

Of moral cloudiness.

The little nation of Israel was faced with a bleak and barren future. Huge hunks of their manpower had been taken captive and carried away to a foreign land. Their dream city lay in ruins. Their sacred temple was destroyed.

As always, when the heel of oppression begins to grind hard, there were those who, for the sake of personal expediency, submitted to the evil of compromise. And, even as one bad apple will eventually spoil the lot, their evil influence like a creeping malignancy began to crawl down into every area of Hebrew life.

Their easy compromise and thoughtless conformity to the ways of their captives punched gigantic holes in the wall of resistance which God had built about them. As a nation, they lost

their sense of destiny. As individuals, they forsook the faith of their Father Abraham. Finally, their only chance for survival lay in the hope that God could find a manCa man who was big enough to stand in the breechCa man of such gigantic stature that he would know that, apart from God, they could do nothing. But we read:

AI sought for a man...but found none.®

The scene quickly changes. Centuries rapidly come and go. As our eyes gradually focus upon the generation in which we live, we see that another day of crisis is upon us.

Gone are the simplicities of the past.

The shape of the future no one knows.

Only one thing is sure:

the present and the future are exceedingly demanding.

As a nation, we have not been carried away captive by some foreign power, but we are in danger of being captured by the philosophy of personal security and peace of mind at any cost.

The tyranny of things threatens to grind us under its-heel. Through the gaping hole which materialism has punched into the wall of our resistance the flood tide of a soft religion offering comfort and success rolls in relentlessly.

Who will repair the wall against the oncoming tide? Who will stand in the breech for God? This morning He is looking for a man--and I use that word in the generic sense meaning *a human being*--He is looking for

A man who is big enough and broad enough and tall enough in
conviction, courage and commitment.

A man who is equal to *His* demands.

A man who will put the trumpet of
the gospel to his lips and sound a
battle cry to which all people will

rally.

What are the characteristics of AThe Man God Wants®? Well, one thing is certain: He will be no Superman. The world already has more of those than it can stand.

We have supermen who are capable of sending satellites into the atmosphere to encircle the earth. But God wants a manCnot a SupermanCa man who will fill the atmosphere with the missiles of love and faith and truth.

We have supermen with such a grasp of the power of nature that they can destroy life on this planet for the next million years. But God wants a manCnot a SupermanCa man who will learn to harness the powers of heaven so that people, created in the image of God who now bear the smirch of sin upon their souls, will be recreated in the image of His Son.

We have supermen who can harness the suspicion and hatred of the world and make them destroy. But God wants a manCnot a SupermanCwho will take understanding and good will and use them as a catalyst to bind all people everywhere together.

And God is not looking for His man among the lofty, but among the rank and file. As someone has said:

AThe heroes have done about all for the world they *can* do and now
nothing more will happen until the common people rise up to do
their common tasks.®

There can only be one Billy Graham. Only one Norman Vincent Peale. But there can, and must be, many dedicated parish preachers who, from their unknown pulpits, will proclaim a gospel for the searching heart. A gospel for the guy or gal on the street. The difficulty is that the number of such preachers is not large enough. Today, God is looking for a new recruit. He is searching for someone to enlarge that number. Not someone at the Summit, but someone from an ordinary

place. And today, my friend, He is looking at you.

WellCwhat is he likeC@This Man God Wants®? First of all, I think he will possess

The Stability of a Great Conviction.

AThe Man God Wants® must know what he believes, who he is, why he is here, where he=s going and how he plans to get there.

Perhaps some of you have heard of the epitaph which was carved on a headstone in a certain cemetery:

ARemember friend as you pass by,
As you are now, so once was I;
As I am now thus you must be,
So be prepared to follow me.®

Well, some character with a wry sense of humor came along and, in a scrawling hand, wrote below:

ATo follow you I=m not content
>Till I find out which way you went.®

I think the whole world is like that. People want a leader who knows where he stands and why. Only then will they have confidence enough to follow. And, AThe Man God Wants® must have a sense of destiny built upon the foundation of a Body of great convictions.

If you are going to be of any use to God and His world, you must get straight on who He is. You must see yourself in relationship to Him as His child and obedient servant.

You must build up a core of firm convictions about such critical matters as life and death, heaven and hell, sin and salvation. For it=s in the realm of moral and spiritual issues that the

battle in which we are engaged will be fought.

AThe Man God Wants® can bear no resemblance whatsoever to the French Revolutionist who said:

AThe mob is in the street. I must find out which way they are going, for I am their leader.®

There is no room in God=s army for such blind leaders of the blind.

You must remember that through Christ you have already ceased to be a creature of time and have become a creature of eternity. And, as a stranger here on earth, your job is not to conform to this world, but to change it.

That won=t be easy in this highly divergent, Ain your face,® confrontational time in which we live. Therefore: AThe Man God Wants® must also possess

The Strength of a Great Courage.

One of the tragic derivatives of the modern philosophy of Aintegration® and Aadjustment® and I say this as a student of psychology who is well aware of the necessity of resolving the unwhole tensions that would destroy us so we can, indeed, become integrated and wholeCone of the sad side effects of this new Apop psychology® is that it fosters a Chameleon Complex.

We begin to fall for everything and stand for nothing. We develop a wishbone instead of a backbone. We give feeble assent to the pressures of society instead of courageously standing up to them. We are so afraid of being called Asquare® or Aunsophisticated® we have learned to believe in everythingCa little bit!

A chaplain was counseling with a young man who found his life in ruins. The GI was defeated.

ABut Sir,® said the soldier, Ayou don=t seem to know about and understand the outside pressure. It is terrific!®

ATOutside pressure?@ said the chaplain. AOf course I understand the outside pressure. What I want to know is where are your inside braces?@

Well, ATThe Man God Wants@Cthe man through whom and with whom He is going to work to build a better worldCwill possess the inside braces of a great courage.

It will be courage born of a great conviction of that the gospels he preaches and the Christ she serves is relevant even though the norm of public morality falls low and millions of people do things, and go along with things, and become a part of things simply because everybody else is doing it. In the face of all that, ATThe Man God Wants@ will echo the words of Fulton J. Sheen who said:

ARight is right when nobody=s right and wrong is wrong when everybody=s wrong!@

What was it that gave those early disciples such iron clad courage in the face of staggering opposition?

What was it that fired their hearts and nerved their arms to action?

It was the conviction that once and for all the Kingdom of God had broken in on history. That once and for all the Word had become flesh. That once and for all the powers of darkness had been defeated.

As James Stewart said in one shining sentence:

AThey wasted no time exhorting their hearers with moral homiliesCor cajoling with novel ideologiesCor trying to build a church on the shifting foundations of a man-centered constitution.

«On Christ, the solid rock, I stand:

All other ground is sinking sand.=

That was their message!@

They confronted their listeners with something *which had been done* and *done by God forever!* One mighty act. Decisive. Final. Complete. They knew that while God's Great Deed stood towering over the wrecks of time, it was not imprisoned in the past. It was contemporaneous. Christ was alive!

¶Time was shot through with eternity and gleams of glory were continually piercing the darkness in which they lived.®

God was at work in the world! *Their* world! The world of everyday, human need.

Therefore, even though these men knew they were nothing more than earthen vessels Chaunted by a gnawing sense of their own inadequacy and insufficiency to the task to which they had been calledCthey were nevertheless sure that somehow, by the grace of God, they were

¶more than conquerors through Christ.®

That He who lived and died had risen again and was with them *always*, even as He had promised.

That=s what transformed those disciples from a motley group of quaking cowards into a marching legion of courageous conquerors. And that is the dynamic, infectious faith which must grip the soul of ¶The Man God Wants.®

Filling him with the strength of a great courage.

Setting him aflame with that fire which does not consume.

Sending him forth to combat the powers of darkness

knowing that he will win because, through the power of the living Christ, he cannot fail. And then, ¶The Man God Wants® will possess

The Serenity of a Great Calling.

It is one of the tragedies of our day that over 75 out of every 100 men are not in work for which they are naturally fitted. As a result, they are frustrated and unhappy. The lower 20% are continually changing jobs. Moving here and there. The upper 10% seek to compensate for their frustration with a driving urge to be successful and, in their frantic chase for the god of gold, they become blind to everyone and everything except themselves.

Now let it be understood that I understand the need for Christian lay people. But while we need teachers,

scientists,

farmers,

plumbers,

businessmen and

businesswomen,

who will do *whatever* they do to the glory of God, the supreme need of the hour is for more and better preachers. And frankly, there isn't any more fascinating occupation on earth.

Are you interested in the greatest challenge this side of heaven or hell? Try preaching.

Do you wish to make a worthwhile contribution to the thought of your day? Try preaching.

Are you interested in a life of contrast? Are you fascinated by people? Are you intrigued by the potentiality in all people? Try preaching.

Are you concerned for the lost, the broken-hearted, the downtrodden? Try preaching.

Oh, you'll have sleepless nights,

terrible temptation,

depressing failures,

disappointments undreamed of,

abuses heaped high

and moments so low you will feel forsaken by all, including God.

But, if you try preaching, you will also have

joys undreamed of,

A peace that the world cannot give,

praise undeserved

and the satisfaction

of being in the will of God^Cknowing with a sense of serenity^Cthat yours is a great calling. But

Before You Try Preaching, Try Praying.

Try yielding. God has too many problem preachers already. Make certain of your calling.

Make sure there is nothing else in all this world you can do and be truly happy.

For then, and only then when you are convinced you are ^AThe Man God Wants^Ctry preaching and preach as though life itself depends upon every word you speak. Because it does! Life abundant and eternal, for those to whom you are privileged to preach!

During the summer of 1951, we had the privilege of holding evangelistic services throughout Europe under the sponsorship of the Baptist World Alliance.

During our stay in Germany, I was scheduled to preach and Lucille to sing in each of the four revival tents the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society had given to the German Baptists for revival work.

One of our visits was to the little town of Buekeborg, which is located near the Western border. One of the interesting things about the religious life of Germany is that the farther West you go, the more Catholic becomes the country.

As we drove along the narrow, winding German roads, we saw more and more evidences of this. About every 2 miles we would notice a little Catholic shrine along the side of the road featuring a crucifix or statue of the Madonna standing with folded arms.

German peasants^Csome of them with only the barest minimum of clothing, some with shoes, some without^Cmade their way along the roadside to do obeisance before the shrines.

The more of this I saw, the greater became the burden of my heart. I wanted to stop the car and say:

^ALook! Salvation is not found in a wooden Christ

nailed on a wooden cross. You don't have to go on counting your beads hoping that somehow God will hear. For by grace are you saved through faith. @

The closer we got to Buekeborg, the more my heart was aflame with the message of God's love and grace.

When we arrived we drove around until we found the tent. Already the crowds had begun to gather tho- it was an hour or so before meeting time. We were introduced to the pastor and, through my wife who speaks a little colloquial German, just enough to ask directions and maybe order something to eat, I said,

AMay I meet the interpreter? I want to go over the message with him. @

The man looked at me with that blank stare of someone who does not understand. So I repeated my request to meet the interpreter so we could go over the message of the evening. He said,

AThe interpreter? We thought you spoke Deutsche. We have made no arrangements. There is no interpreter. @

By then the tent was full. When the service began a few moments later, I looked across a sea of faces numbering more than a thousand. The sides of the tent had been drawn up so that hundreds more, who were standing on the outside, could see. With great sadness in my heart, I had to haltingly dismiss the service and send them home because there was no interpreter.

That night I went to the little German Inn where we were staying and I couldn't sleep. As I tossed back and forth in the darkness, all I could see was that sea of over 1,000 facesCthe hungry look in their eyes reflecting the emptiness of their soulsCknowing that I had a message which would answer their need, but the message could not be heard because there was no interpreter. And then I thought of how often God must look out from His great heaven and see the groping

masses of humanity

struggling blindly in the dark,
seeking some light to guide them,
hungry for some word of hope,
craving for a song of deliverance from their sins.

Knowing that in Christ he had the answer.

Knowing that His Son had died that all people might live.

Knowing that in Jesus, He has spoken a word of reconciliation and yet,
how often, that word cannot be heard because he has no interpreter.

My friends, the one great task to which all of us have been called is to be an interpreters for Christ. Be you commoner or king,

rich or poor,
high or low,

there is a task which only you can do. A job which is distinctly your own. If you do not do it, my friend, it will not get done. The calling to which you have been called as AThe Man God Wants® is this:

Telling the world that God was in Christ reconciling the world
unto Himself.

AI sought for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand in the breech before Me for the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found none.®

Today God is seeking someone. Someone who is big enough and broad enough and tall enough in conviction, courage and calling. Someone, not from the summit, but from the ordinary places. Someone He can use to stand in the breech for Him.

Today He=s looking at you! How about it? Will you be AThe Man God Wants®? Will you be the

woman God wants@ You need only say

^Here am I Lord, send me...@

and the angels in heaven will join Him in saying

^I sought for a man...*and found one!*@