

THE PROBLEM OF SURVIVAL

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter on February 27, 1966 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee, and heard over radio station WLAC at 8:05 P.M.

If you should ask a military man for the key word of our age, more than likely he would say "survival." But suppose you should ask a nuclear scientist the same question. Undoubtedly, he would answer with the same word, "survival." These are men in specialized fields who have a particular vantage point from which to appraise our world. They are in a position to know more fully than most of us about the crisis in which the world finds itself today. However, the average citizen is also aware that life on earth as we know it hangs in the balances. Our newspapers and newsmagazines have often told us of the possibility of nuclear annihilation.

The preacher and other students of the Bible are also aware of the perils of our day. We see the same problems which our scientists and military men see, but, contrary to them, we have a strong conviction that survival depends primarily upon moral and spiritual values rather than upon material concerns. To put it another way, the hands of our day which are capable of triggering World War III with its all-out nuclear holocaust, must be guided by minds that are attuned to the teachings of the Prince of Peace. A godless nation, bent on conquest and destruction, must be led to change its course. This can be accomplished if its people can be taught the way of Christ.

Time was when science was regarded by intelligent, educated men as the savior of the world. We have lived long enough, however, to see the sickening perversions of some of science's greatest discoveries. Science has sometimes been made an ally of forces dedicated to destruction. Science is not the savior of the world, for science is merely a tool in the hands of men. It can be used for great, wonderful purposes or it can be used for terrible, destructive purposes.

In a similar fashion men have sought the solution to the world's ills in other directions which also have proved to be blind alleys. For example, we were told that when education became universal and free to all people that our problems would be solved. But, this has not proved to be so. They also told us that when men generally were well-fed, well-housed, and well-clothed that our problems would be over. This also has failed to materialize. Today, we have breath-taking advances in science, we have education from kindergarten through the university for everyone who wants it, and we have the highest standard of living in the history of the world--but we also have more problems. There is more crime, more vice, more alcoholism, more drug addiction, more immorality, more divorce, and more international tension, including more deadly world-wide wars.

There is but one Savior of the world. He was acknowledged on the mount of transfiguration by the voice of God, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him." A few moments later Peter, James and John lifted their eyes to look upon the Lord; they noticed that Moses and Elijah had vanished. Then the scripture says, with symbolic significance, "They saw no one, save Jesus only." (Matt. 17:5,8). The world has no Savior, save Jesus only.

It is our purpose in this study today to highlight four short, pithy statements uttered by the Lord. The last of these is a question, one of the most challenging questions of all time.

I. "The Words That I Have Spoken Unto You Are Spirit, and Are Life." (John 6:63).

Of the thousands of words which Jesus spoke, all of which are spirit and life, I would like to choose a single paragraph as a demonstration of how the teachings of Jesus have within them special spiritual power. In chapters 5, 6, and 7 of Matthew we find a record of Christ's "Sermon on the Mount," the greatest sermon ever preached. Consider the uplifting power of the first twelve verses of this sermon, which constitute what is known as the Beatitudes. "And seeing the multitudes, he went up into the mountain: and when he had sat down, his disciples came unto him: and he opened his mouth and taught them, saying ... " Notice the word "multitudes." Surrounding Jesus that day was a miniature world, a cross-section of humanity. There were the arrogant, the rich, the powerful, but there were also the sick, the poor, the weak, and the down-trodden. Jesus had a message for all of them. Someone has said, "The beatitudes offer eight ways to be happy--and all eight of them run contrary to man's ideas of happiness." Let us see.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." There are the humble people. This quality is the opposite of pride and haughtiness. Prov. 16:18 says, "Pride goeth before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall." Prov. 6:16-17 puts it this way, "There are six things which Jehovah hateth, yea, seven which are an abomination unto him: haughty eyes ... " As examples of the "poor in spirit" or the humble, I would mention the prodigal son after he came to himself in the pig pen in the far country. Still better, I would mention Christ washing the disciples' feet.

"Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted." These are those who feel godly sorrow, and mourn over their sinfulness. These also include the mistreated and down-trodden. Just here it is good to remember Paul's statement in Romans 12:19, "Avenge not yourselves, beloved, but give place unto the wrath of God: for it is written, Vengeance belongeth unto me; I will recompense, saith the Lord."

“Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.” It was Adolph Hitler, commenting upon Jesus’ teaching, who said, “Only a maniac would say the meek, would inherit the earth.” However, Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, and Khrushchev are gone, while the meek are still here.

“Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.” Men hunger for food and drink that is soon gone. It is those who have spiritual hunger who shall be filled with a food and drink that satisfies eternally.

“Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.” We get back what we give in life. The one who passes mean, critical judgment on others gets the same kind in return. On the other hand, love and mercy beget love and mercy.

“Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.” There is nothing so appealing as cleanness--a freshly fallen snow, or a glass of pure milk. In a few short years, our government officials inform us, pollution will have cut our supply of pure water to such an extent that rationing will become necessary. Even more disturbing is the pollution of the minds and hearts of our people. There is a veritable flood of filth pouring into the minds of both the young and the old of our day, which destroys the purity of heart that the Lord appreciates.

“Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the sons of God.” Peace breakers are everywhere. But for peacemakers in industry, in business, in society, in the home, and among the world leaders, there is a desperate need. Let us follow in the steps of our Lord who was the Prince of Peace.

Then the passage closes with the words, “Blessed are they that have been persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall reproach you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets that were before you.” (Matt. 5:1-12).

## II. “Thy Word Is Truth.” (John 17:17).

In the long ago the prophet Hosea described the sad plight of his people in these words, “Hear the word of Jehovah, ye children of Israel; for Jehovah hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth nor goodness, nor knowledge of God in the land. There is naught but swearing and breaking faith, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery; they break out, and blood toucheth blood.” It is alarming to realize that Hosea’s message describes the world in which we live today, as well as his own. The evils catalogued by Hosea are such as might appear in today’s newspaper, or in a report of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

The scriptures sometime picture man as being in bondage to sin, which is an unusually accurate figure of speech. Then Jesus says, “If ye abide in my word, then are ye truly my disciples; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (John 8:31-32). The scriptures also sometime picture man as being in darkness--spiritual darkness--another accurate figure of speech. Of Jesus the apostle John wrote, “In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in the darkness; and the darkness apprehended it not.” (John 1:4-5). And, “This is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil. For everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, and cometh not to the light, lest his works should be reproved. But he that doeth the truth cometh to the light, that his works may be made manifest, that they have been wrought in God.” (John 3:19-21). Christ’s truth frees men from the bondage of sin and brings light into a darkened world.

## III. “The Word That I Spake, the Same Shall Judge ... in the Last Day.” (John 12:48).

This has to do with survival in the ultimate sense. Picture the judgment scene. On that day every man must stand before God and give an account for his life. The far-off judgment was revealed to the apostle John, and on the lonely island of Patmos he wrote, “And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat upon it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne; and books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of the things which were written in the books, according to their works ... And if any was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire.” (Rev. 20:11, 12, 15).

Then, John presents a glowing picture of heaven. In this description are the words, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall dwell with them, and they shall be his peoples, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God: and he shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death shall be no more: neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, anymore; the first things are passed away ... He that overcometh shall inherit these things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.” There then follows this discordant note. “But for the fearful, and unbelieving, and abominable, and murderers, and fornicators, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, their part shall be in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death.” (Rev. 21:4-5, 7-3).

At this point it seems appropriate to turn back to the book of James and read these words of warning. “Wherefore putting away all filthiness and overflowing of wickedness, receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be ye doers

of the word, and not hearers only, deluding your own selves ... But he that looketh unto the perfect law, the law of liberty, and so continueth, being not a hearer that forgetteth but a doer that worketh, this man shall he blessed in his doing.” (James 21-22,25).

IV. “And If I Say Truth, Why Do Ye Not Believe Me.” (John 8:46).

The greatest tragedy of our world is that the words which Jesus spoke which contain the means by which man can receive salvation, have either been unheard, or unheeded by the masses of mankind. God’s grace has made salvation available to all men, but men must accept that salvation by obeying the simple conditions of pardon which the Lord has laid down in his word. The words of Jesus and those he taught his disciples to preach include these basic truths--by which men may survive: He is the Christ, the Son of the living God. (Matt. 16:16). He is the Savior of mankind. (Luke 2:11). He died that men might live forever. (I Cor. 15:20-21). He is the only way by which men may reach the Father--and heaven. (John 14:6). He insists that men believe, (John 8:24). He insists that men obey him, (II Thess. 1:8), that discipleship requires repentance, (Luke 13:3), that he be confessed as the Son of God (Matt. 10:32-33), that men be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38), and that all who come to him must live a life of stewardship whereby the name of God might be exalted and mankind blessed with the word of truth.(Luke 12:42-44).

Man in the 20th century stands on the brink of physical, moral and spiritual disaster. Time is running out. The gospel of Christ is the only hope for each of us individually and for our world. Apart from the gospel there is no place to hide. It is God’s plan for survival.