

ALL YE THAT PASS BY

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter on April 22, 1962 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee, and heard over radio station WLAC at 8:05 P.M.

In looking over the desolate, abandoned city of Jerusalem, the weeping prophet, Jeremiah, wrote the words, "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?" (Lam. 1:12). Similar words were spoken in connection with the crucifixion of Christ, for in the account as given in Matthew we read, "And they that passed by railed on him, wagging their heads." (Matt. 17:39). He had lived a third of a century among men, bringing to this world the greatest truths that it had ever seen, and then had been willing to go to the cross to save men from their sins. Yet he was rejected. It is hard for us to grasp how men who claimed to be religious could have perpetrated such a crime, and could have glorified in it as they did. They gloated over his death as they passed by railing on him.

We can almost hear Jesus, looking down from the cross, saying, "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?"

A little earlier he said, "Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killeth the prophets, and stoneth them that are sent unto her! how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" (Matt. 23:27). What a yearning there was in his great divine heart for the saving of men's souls and the bringing of this wonderful blessing into their lives! Yet they blindly passed him by. "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?"

Open Rejection of Jesus

There are two ways in which men pass Christ by. The first is suggested in that scene from the cross: They blindly railed on him, nodding their heads and, saying blasphemous words as they did so. The whole passage from which that sentence comes should be read: "And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, The place of a skull, they gave him wine to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted it, he would not drink. And when they had crucified him, they parted his garments among them, casting lots; and they sat and watched him there. And they set up over his head his accusation written. This is Jesus the king of the Jews. Then are there crucified with him two robbers, one on the right hand and one on the left. And they that passed by railed on him, wagging their heads, and saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself: if thou art the Son of God, come down from the cross. In like manner also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; himself he cannot save. He is the king of Israel; let him now come down from the cross and we will believe on him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he desireth him: for he said, I am the Son of God. And the robbers also that were crucified with him cast upon him the same reproach." (Matt. 27:33-44).

Down through the centuries there have been others who have blasphemed Jesus and rejected him by railing on him. There have been those who knowingly used his name in vain. There have been those who spoke of him disparagingly. But these have come to be minority in later generations. Most of us could not name a single person who rails on Christ and blasphemes his name. Most of us do not know anyone who actually rejects Jesus by railing on him. We know a great many people who are not Christians, we know a great many people who do not take time to serve him, but we do not know many who do not give him credit for being the greatest person who ever lived and teaching the greatest truth of all ages. Only one percent of the population of our nation admits to being atheistic. When it comes to rejecting Christ in this day and age, the open, violent method of rejecting him is pretty much out of style. It is largely past tense. So we come to the second way that men reject Jesus.

A Second More Popular Way

There are some who reject him by railing on him, but there are many more--and this is the central theme of this message--who reject him while actually going through the motions of honoring him. Ours is an age when it is popular to be a Christian. Ours is an age when it is popular to stand up and say "Christ is wonderful and I am a Christian." Ours is an age when the radio and television networks and others are making time available for preaching about Christ. Ours is an age when almost everybody is speaking well of Christ and almost everybody is giving allegiance to him.

Yet, somehow it is a shallow kind of thing in many instances. On this day called Easter, and in the month of December when Christmas comes everyone appears very religious. The churches are all crowded for a day. Many who haven't darkened the church door for months come out in their finery to say "Hail to Christ." The tragedy comes in their going home for the rest of the year thinking that they have proved their loyalty to Christ. A great multitude came out a few years ago to hear Billy Graham preach. It was the largest crowd in the history of the state of Tennessee. Shortly after that, because of the generous offer of the British Broadcasting Company, a great company of twenty million heard the same preacher speak about Christ. Think of the radio networks, the television channels, the newspapers and the magazines all over the world which are saying "Christ" and holding him up. Is all of this a genuine evidence of devotion to the Lord, or is it merely a surface concern? If I read the signs of our generation correctly, we are paying tribute to Christ in order to make our own way of living respectable and to salve our own consciences. I fail to find a great many of

those who name the name of Jesus going all the way with him. It is Christianity up to a point. It is Christianity in name but not in its entirety. It is synthetic Christianity. It does not go down and reach the bottom of one's life.

### Seeing sights or Passing Through

It can be compared to sightseers going to see the birthplace of a great man like Abraham Lincoln. The bus rolls up, the door opens, and out rush the people. They climb the steps and push each other aside in order to see. Someone says, "Isn't that a cute little chair?" Someone else says, "Well, isn't it an old place?" And they buy a few postcards, snap a few pictures, and then back into the bus they go. They are off with a roar. No one thought of what it means for a little boy to be born in the backwoods of Kentucky, and to rise by his own efforts until he stands in the White House. No one thought of his great contributions to the nation. Oh, yes, they visited his birthplace. They paid him the respect of coming to see where he was born. They all tell their friends, "Yes, we have been there and aren't there a lot of steps, and weren't those cute little log cabins in the gift shop?" But when it comes to the real significance of Lincoln's birthplace, they have missed it entirely. Recently, I saw a sign in Florida: "Are you seeing the sights or just passing through?" So many people pass through and never stop to see the sights.

I attended a funeral in Kentucky a few years ago. A man greatly respected because of his long service to the community had died. The funeral was held in his farm home and the whole community came. Some were able to get inside the house. Others of us stood in the yard. Then we went down to the little country graveyard for the burial. Even while the grave was being filled the people were visiting and talking with each other, and after the final prayer you would have thought it was a picnic. I could not help but think, "They came to pay tribute, or did they?"

### Real Christianity Makes a Difference

In our age, a great many thinking people are saying, "Why doesn't all this talk about Christianity mean less crime, less drinking, and less of all the sins that men commit?" As a nation, we are drinking more than ever before in history. There is more crime, more juvenile delinquency, more gambling, more profanity, more broken homes, and all the rest. Are we not salving our consciences and glossing over our sins, in a very polite way by saying, "We are Christians." We bow the knee to Christ and then very mildly practice his way of life.

Real Christianity reaches out and takes hold of a man. It changes his life. Watered down Christianity doesn't count. When we make it mild and placid and comfortable it becomes a synthetic product and it isn't the real thing.

Concerning the external religious acts of the people of his day Jesus said, "This people honoreth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching as their doctrine the precepts of men." (Matt. 15:8-9). They had largely rewritten the scriptures to make them fit their own tastes. Have we done the same?

Becoming a Christian is often held out as something easy, something so easy it doesn't cost much. I have even sometimes heard the invitation at the end of a sermon given in terms of "Come to Christ and be baptized, the water is warm." I have read signs on the road that say, "Go to church on Sunday, meet old friends and make new ones." What kind of reaction would Paul have had to that? Can you imagine him standing in the Areopagus in Athens and saying, "Come, be Christians, greet old friends and make new ones?" Rather, you hear him saying, "The times of ignorance therefore God overlooked; but now he commandeth men that they should all everywhere repent." (Acts 17:30). Coming to Christ means getting down on your knees, repenting of your sins, and giving yourself wholly to the Lord. There are not many takers for that kind of invitation.

### Getting on the Bandwagon

Christianity has become so mild and becoming a Christian so comfortable that everybody is doing it. The churches are all growing. The bandwagon is moving down the street and everyone is clamoring to climb aboard. The Christianity of our time doesn't quite square with the sacrifice and the real life-filling devotion that the Christians had in apostolic times. Giving the Lord an hour on Sunday morning doesn't compare with the description of Christianity that you find in the Bible.

It was to the kind of Christianity sometimes found in the 20th century that Jesus spoke when he spoke to the church at Laodicea: "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So because thou art lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spew thee out of my mouth." (Rev. 3:15.16). Stop and think about Christ dying on the cross and think of how foreign our way of life is to his sacrifice. "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?"

We do not rail on him, we do not wag our heads at him, but we do go our own way, unmindful of many of his precepts. Ours is a generation when Christianity has become almost unanimous, but it is a milder, more comfortable brand of Christianity.

### This Has Happened Before

In the early days of the church there were heavy persecutions. Peter paid with his life and so did Paul and so did most of the other apostles. There is that wonderful sentence which says, "And they left all and followed him." (Luke 5: 11). It does not sound like us, does it?" "They left all and followed him," until most of them earned a martyr's death. It does not sound like us, does it?

The apostles were mistreated wherever they went, but they bore it gladly because they were Christians. Christianity costs something, but that gave it the power to spread and the power to remake the world. Think of the apostle Paul and his sufferings, "Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day have I been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of rivers, in perils from my countrymen, in perils from the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren, in labor and travail, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness." (II Cor. 11:24-27). That does not sound like the Christianity of our age, for in our time Christianity often is just a mild something that we put on like a Sunday coat and take off when we go to work on Monday.

At first there was persecution in the early church, but the "blood of the martyrs proved to be the seed of the kingdom." Next, there came a period when the church was tolerated and persecution stopped. Finally, during the reign of Emperor Constantine, Christianity was made the official religion of the Roman Empire. Everybody who was anybody got on the bandwagon and became Christians, but it was a new and different Christianity--a far cry from the religion which Christ had given to men,

### We Have Forgotten the Cross

Ours is an age when Christianity is accepted by nearly everyone, but it is a changed Christianity. Often a man pays more when he becomes a member of a lodge, in time and study and in money, than he pays when he becomes a member of some church. But this is not Christianity. A great many people wear the name of Christ and profess to be living Christ's kind of life, but it is in name only. Real Christianity makes changes in the lives of men.

There must also be sacrifice. One time when Jesus was asked, "What is the greatest commandment of all?" he said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength." (Mark 12:30). That is Christianity. Another time he said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me, and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's shall find it." (Matt. 16:24-25). If it is real Christianity, there will be a cross and a sacrifice.

### Conclusion

As we close this lesson, we extend again the invitation of Christ, but do not accept it unless you mean to follow Christ with all your heart. Don't come unless you mean giving yourself, body and soul, present and future, the whole of you to the Lord. No synthetic Christianity. No Christianity up to a certain point. If you are ready to go all the way, come as we stand to sing the Lord's invitation.