

THE GLORY OF CHRIST

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter on September 20, 1970 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee, and heard over radio station WLAC at 8:05 P.M.

I want to speak today concerning "The Glory of Christ." I want to hold Christ up in such a way that each of us will feel his unique greatness and his unequalled majesty. This message is prompted by the hope that each of us may feel more deeply the greatness of our Lord. Yet, even as I announce this purpose to you, I fear that it will not be achieved.

There are several reasons why I fear that it will be difficult, perhaps impossible, to achieve the goal which I have in mind in speaking on so exalted a theme as "The Glory of Christ." First, we who live in the twentieth century often find that our ability to appreciate anything is somewhat jaded. We are worn out with spectaculars. Superlatives are used to describe almost everything, even things of only moderate value and importance. How, then, can we possibly see the real glory of Christ when lesser things have been described so lavishly? Then, too, there is the fact that we have so long been familiar with the facts of Christ's life. I shall be able to tell you nothing new, nothing that you have not already heard before. We have an adage, "Familiarity breeds contempt." While in this case it is certainly not contempt, the great familiarity that we have with the facts of Christ's life does often cause us to take him for granted. He has become commonplace. Also, there is my own inability to comprehend his true greatness and my own inadequacy in putting a description of his greatness in words. All of these factors lead me to confess apprehensions concerning the achieving of the goal of this message. Yet, I want to try. I also want to ask your help in making this message a meaningful one. Often the success of a message depends upon the listener.

Let's begin with the word glory. What exactly does the word glory mean? In the large *Random House Dictionary* which I have in my study, glory is defined as "exalted praise, honor, or distinction bestowed by common consent; adoring praise or worshipful thanksgiving; resplendent beauty or magnificence." Then these synonyms are suggested: "fame, eminence, renown, brilliance and effulgence." Now, with our goal in mind and with an understanding of the terms which we shall use, let us turn to the scriptures for a picture of the glory of Christ.

"We Beheld His Glory"

It was those who knew Christ best, his disciples, who testified concerning his glory. Other men have disclosed their weaknesses to those who were most familiar with them, but it was not so with Christ. Down through history many of those who have been known as great have not been considered great by those who knew them best--wives, children, and those who have worked under them. But with Christ, those who were closest to him saw his glory most clearly.

No one was closer to Christ than John, the beloved disciple. It was he who wrote, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that hath been made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men." Then a few verses later he continued, "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth." (John 1:1-4, 14). John was saying, in effect, that he and the other apostles, together with a large circle of disciples, had seen the divine Son of God as he lived in human form among men. John put it in very simple terms, "We beheld his glory."

At another time the apostle John said something quite similar. This is found in the beginning of his first short epistle: "That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld, and our hands handled, concerning the Word of Life, (and the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare unto you the life, the eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us); that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you also, that ye also may have fellowship with us; yea, and our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." (I John 1:1-3)

Turning back a few pages in the New Testament, we find a statement concerning Christ's glory from the pen of the apostle Peter. He wrote, "For we did not follow cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honor and glory, when there was borne such a voice to him by the Majestic Glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: and this voice we ourselves heard borne out of heaven, when we were with him in the holy mount." (II Peter 1: 16-18)

A third apostle, this time Matthew Levi, a collector of taxes, also referred to the same incident. His account begins, "And after six days Jesus taketh with him Peter, and James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart: and he was transfigured before them; and his face did shine as the sun, and his garments became white as the light. And behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elijah talking with him. And Peter answered, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: If thou wilt, I will make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah. While he was yet speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold, a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him. And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid." (Matthew 17:1-6)

Charles Spurgeon

One of history's most noted preachers was Charles Spurgeon, who preached in the London Tabernacle to throngs of people during the latter half of the last century. Born in 1834, Spurgeon died in 1892, at the age of fifty-eight. No Preacher of his time had a wider audience nor a greater impact upon his audience. In one of his sermons he spoke concerning the preeminence of Christ, basing his message upon a text found in Hebrews 1:1-6. A part of this passage reads, "God, having of old times spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the worlds; who being the effulgence of his glory and the very image of his substance, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had made purification of sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high ..." The phrase "who being the effulgence of his glory" has special significance for our present theme.

In this fine message, Spurgeon spoke of the glory of Christ under eight separate headings. He spoke first of "The glory of his words: 'Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away.' (Luke 21:33)." Spurgeon spoke next of "The glory of his enlightenment: '... I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life.' (John 8:2)." In the third place was "The glory of his salvation: 'I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth on me shall never die.' (John 11:25-26)." In the fourth place, Spurgeon spoke of "The glory of his relationship to God: 'This is my beloved Son ...' (Matthew 17:5)." Next as, "The glory of his sacrifice: 'Now the centurion, and they that were with him watching Jesus, when they saw the earthquake, and the things that were done, feared exceedingly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God.' (Matthew 27:54)." Mentioned next was, "The glory of his victory: 'Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen ...' (Luke 24:5-6)." Again, he mentioned "The glory of his gift: 'For the wages of sin is death; but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.' (Romans 6:23)." Finally, Spurgeon spoke of "The glory of Christ's pre-earthly existence: '... and now, Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.' (John 17:5)."

In this same message, Charles Spurgeon used a very fine method of showing the preeminence of Christ. For time's sake, I will mention only the broad outline of his message, leaving out the development of his various points. He began, "Just think for a moment how much interest clusters around the life of an old man ... But what is the life of an aged man? How brief it appears when compared with the life of the tree which shelters him ... But what is the life of the tree compared with the soil in which it grows? ... But what of the history of that soil compared with the marvelous history of the rock on which it rests, the cliff on which it lifts its head. What is the history of the cliff compared with the sea which rolls at its base? ... But what is the story of the sea, compared with the history of the heavens that are stretched like a curtain over that vast basin? ... But what is the history of the heavens compared with the history of the angels? ... But what is the history of the angels that excel in strength compared with the history of the Lord Jesus Christ? ... Oh, Christians, gather with reverence and mysterious awe around the throne of him who is your Great Redeemer. His name is called 'wonderful.' He existed before all things. 'By him were all things made; and without him was not anything made that hath been made.'"

When Jesus Was Born

There is a beautiful story in the early part of the gospel according to Luke, which we read during December and then often file away to await the passing of another year. This simple but wonderful story of the birth of Jesus needs to be read much more often, and its meaning for all humanity needs to be comprehended much more generally. Luke wrote simply, "And there were shepherds in the same country abiding in the field, keeping watch by night over their flock. And an angel of the Lord stood by them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Be not afraid; for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people: for there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. And this is the sign unto you: Ye shall find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men in whom he is well pleased." (Luke 2:8-14)

A few verses later we read of an elderly man in Jerusalem by the name of Simeon who spent his time at the temple waiting for the coming of the Lord. The scripture says, "And it had been revealed unto him by the Holy Spirit, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ." When Joseph and Mary brought the baby Jesus to the temple to fulfill the requirements of the law, Simeon saw him. It was then that Simeon said, "Now letest thou thy servant depart, Lord, according to thy word, in peace; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel." (Luke 2:26, 29-32). Simeon's statement has had wide effect through the centuries, not the least of which was its part in inspiring Julia Ward Howe's famous "Battle-Hymn of the Republic";

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of his terrible, swift sword;
His truth is marching on.

Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!
Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!
Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!
His truth is marching on.

Conclusion

To the Christians at Corinth Paul wrote, "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. Seeing it is God, that said, Light shall shine out of darkness, who shined in our hearts the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." (II Cor. 4:5-6). To Timothy, Paul wrote, "Keep the commandment without spot, without reproach, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ which in its own times he shall show, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, the Lord of lords; who only hath immortality, dwelling in light unapproachable; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honor and power eternal. Amen" (Timothy 6:14-16).

From the final book of the Bible, the book of Revelation, we quote, "Behold. he cometh with the clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they that pierced him: and all the tribes of the earth shall mourn over him ... Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the Living one; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forever, and I have the keys to death and of Hades." (Revelation 1:7, 17-18).

In the book of Jude, which comes just before the book of Revelation and near the very end of the scriptures, we find these words written by Jude, one of the younger half-brothers of Jesus, "Now unto him that is able to guard you from stumbling, and to set you before the presence of his glory without blemish in exceeding joy, to the only God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and power, before all times, and now, and for evermore." (Jude 21:25). Finally, I would read from the final chapter of the final book of the Bible. Just one line before this great volume of sixty-six books, 1189 chapters, and threequarters of a million words comes to an end, there are the words, "... Come, Lord Jesus." (Revelation 22:20). This was the desire of the early Christians. They used this expression often, using it almost as a sacred greeting when they met other Christians or departed from other Christians. It was inscribed in the catacombs elsewhere. It is the hope and desire of those who fully comprehend what it means be Christians, and ultimately to have a home in heaven with Christ the Lord.

However, I would mention that it is imperative before Christ comes that each of us come to Christ. It would be tragic indeed if Christ should come before any one of us should come to him. Our salvation depends upon our acceptance of Christ as Lord. May each of us respond to the Lord in the simple manner explained in the scriptures. Then may we look forward to the time when Jesus shall come in the cloud's to call the redeemed. May we, with this host of God's children, say, "Come, Lord Jesus."