

JESUS CHRIST, OUR REDEEMER

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter on October 29, 1961 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee, and heard over radio station WLAC at 8:05 P.M.

Several years ago a German youth startled his parents by saying, "Adolph Hitler has become so big, and Jesus Christ has become so small." If that boy is still living, how would he say it today? Throughout history various characters--generals, statesmen, inventors, writers, sports heroes, movie stars and others--have moved onto the center of the stage and for a brief moment and have captured the attention of the world. But men come and go while Jesus Christ remains forever. The writer of Hebrews correctly said, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, yea and forever." (Heb. 13:8).

Christ has had a greater influence upon mankind than any other person who ever lived. It was he who split history into B.C. and A.A. Even after more than sixty generations, more than 750 million people like to think of themselves as his disciples and willingly call themselves by his name--Christians. As Walter Russell Bowie said, "This man of Nazareth, hated, crucified, dishonored, has outlived all the mighty things that mocked him."

Some of his critics have tried to convince the world that he never really existed--that Christ is only a myth. But even the Jewish Talmud admits that Christ actually existed. Josephus, the Jewish historian, refers to him. Tacitus, the Roman historian, refers to Christ and the disposition that Pilate made of his case. Jesus was no myth; he was real. Born in Bethlehem, reared at Nazareth, he lived only one-third of a century and all of this in one tiny little corner of the earth, yet his life and his teachings have reached out into all time and space, to all people, to all places, to make him the central figure of history.

Old Testament Prophecies

Hundreds of Old Testament prophecies, many of which were hundreds of years old when Jesus was born, tell in great detail of his coming. Typical of these is the familiar and loved passage, Isaiah 7:14, "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." We find this passage in Matthew 1:23, "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel; which is being interpreted, God with us." This is the same idea that we find in the beginning sentence of the gospel according to John, "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." Then, down a few verses, in verse fourteen, "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 1:1-2, 14). Jesus Christ was truly the divine Son of God who came and lived among men.

The scriptures often refer to Jesus and use many different terms. For example, he is called: the way, the truth, the life, the door, the foundation, the chief cornerstone, the light of the world, the water of life, the bread of life, the bridegroom, the great physician. Notice that each one of these figures of speech is absolutely essential. You cannot have life without bread; you cannot have life without water; you cannot build a building without a foundation; you cannot enter a house without a door. Of course, there is no existence without life, and no real existence without truth. In every case Jesus is compared with something absolutely essential.

He Is Our Redeemer

The thing that stands out above all these things, however, is the fact that Jesus was our Redeemer. He was our Savior, and without his redemption, you and I would have no hope of an eternal life in heaven with God. On other Sunday evenings I have recently read with you Romans 3:10, 23. "There is none righteous, no not one ... All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." This is speaking of us. It is talking of all men who have lived on the earth. Then, further over in the New Testament, in I John, we find in verses eight and ten of the first chapter, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us ... If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."

We are sinners, and there is nothing that we can do to redeem ourselves. Hebrews 10:4 says, "It is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins." There is no sacrifice that man himself can offer--no payment that he can make to buy himself back, to redeem himself from the guilt and the penalty of sin. Christ came and bought our redemption; he paid the penalty; he redeemed us. We have such wonderful passages as John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life." Matthew 1:21 says, "She shall bring forth a son; and thou shalt call his name Jesus; for it is he that shall save his people from their sins." In Romans 5:8 we find, "God commendeth his own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

Somehow Isaiah 53:5 comes even closer home, "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." In the New Testament notice I John 1:7, where the apostle John says, "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from all sin." This reminds us of Colossians 1:27 where we read, "Christ in you, the hope of glory." The only hope that

we have of glory, or salvation or redemption is in Christ. What a tragedy it is that so many men who are in essential agreement with the Lord and his way of life never really become Christians, and therefore never really have his redemption, freedom from their sins.

Christ's Sacrifice For Us

For a little while let us go back and live again those last hours that Christ spent on the earth. He had been born in a manger, and then in early life he had fled to Egypt in order to survive. After a while he came back to live in Nazareth, a little town that most of us would consider unworthy as a place to live. He lived for a third of a century in what we would call abject poverty, in order to redeem mankind. During this time he owned no real property, during this time he had few of the many things that you and I consider absolute necessities of life. Yet he did it without complaining and even joyfully, because he was laying the foundation for the redemption of mankind. Finally, after the religious leaders of his day had become envious of him and had laid the plot to take his life, Jesus died on the cross giving us freedom from our sins.

Would you go back with me for a few moments to the night when Jesus was with his disciples in the upper room in Jerusalem, just twenty-four hours before he died on the cross. There he taught them those wonderful lessons that we read in John 13:17, and afterward he went out into the garden of Gethsemane in order to pray. Let us read a part of that prayer, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass away from me, nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." Then after he had prayed he came back to where he had left his disciples and said, "What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." He went away and prayed a second time, "O my Father, if this (the cup of suffering, the death on the cross) cannot pass away, except I drink it, thy will be done." A third time he prayed, and afterward he came back and found his disciples sleeping again. He said to them, "Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand and the Son of man is betrayed unto the hands of sinners." (Matt. 26:39-45).

Sure enough, a multitude carrying swords and staves, the rabble of the street who had been hired for the purpose, were already in the garden of Gethsemane to arrest him. Judas led the way and when he came he kissed Jesus as a mark of identification that this was the man whom they sought. Oh, the agony of the betrayal as well as the agony of the crucifixion! That same night they took Jesus in haste to Annas, who was the retired high priest, and then to Caiaphas, the official high priest. Then at early dawn they had him before the council or Sanhedrin. These were the very ones who wanted to crucify him. They were not a just tribunal, they gave him no hearing. They simply made official his condemnation.

Then in order to get the approval of the Roman governor, who had to endorse the death penalty, they sent him to Pilate. Pilate, after examining him and finding no fault in him, sent him to Herod who after a while sent him back to Pilate. Reading again from the word of God we hear Pilate say, "I having examined him before you, found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse him: no, nor yet Herod." (Luke 23:14-15). Then Pilate asked that he might release Jesus as his prisoner of the year, but the people were stirred by their priestly conspirators to call for Barabbas, a robber. The chief priests and the elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus. Weakly, Pilate gave in to their wishes and Jesus was taken out to Calvary, to the hill of Golgotha, and there he was crucified.

It is hard for us in the twentieth century--so immersed in our own affairs: rearing our families, buying our homes, earning a living, going, coming, entertaining ourselves--to realize the deep significance of Christ's death on the cross. Yet somehow, as we read these words from God's book, quietly and reverently, can we not feel the power of God's love manifest in Christ for the salvation of our souls?

On The Cross

There he is on the cross, and, as you and I, in imagination, stand somewhere back in the crowd, we hear him in the agony of dying say, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34). Then a little later, turning to the penitent thief who was crucified with him, he said, "Today shall thou be with me in Paradise." (Luke 23:43). A little later he looked down at the foot of the cross where he could see Mary, his mother, and, standing not far away, John, the beloved disciple. To her he said, "Woman, behold thy son!" and then to John, "Behold, thy mother!" (John 19:26-27). Still later, as death came on, he uttered the agonizing cry, "Eli, Eli, lama Sabachthani? that is, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46). I am sure that it must have seemed that God turned his back on Jesus as he died there for the sins of the world. Still later he said, "I thirst." (John 19:28). And then toward the very end he said, "It is finished." (John 19:30). The last words on the cross were, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." (Luke 23:46). Then Jesus died.

We also read, "Behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake; and the rocks were rent; and the tombs were opened; and many bodies of the saints that had fallen asleep were raised; and coming forth out of the tombs after his resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared unto many." (Matt. 27:51-53). A hardened Roman soldier, the centurion who had actually carried out the crucifixion command said, "Truly this was the Son of God." (Matt. 27:54). Jesus was real. Jesus died on a cross, died that you and I might be saved.

After being buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, and after having remained there at least a part of three days, guarded with a special guard that his enemies had placed around the tomb to make sure that no one should steal away his body and claim a resurrection falsely, on the first day of the week, early as it began to dawn, Jesus came forth from the tomb. This is not a claim but a reality. The first to see him was Mary Magdalene who had come to anoint his dead body. Then he appeared to the other women who had come for the same purpose. Later that day he appeared to two of the disciples on the way to the little town of Emmaeus. Then in the evening of that first day of the week, his resurrection day, the Sunday on which Christians still worship, he appeared to the ten apostles in an upper room in Jerusalem. Thomas was not with them. A week later he appeared to the eleven faithful apostles. A little later he appeared to seven of the apostles at the sea of Galilee, early one morning after they had been fishing through the night. He cooked for them a little breakfast on coals of fire that he had prepared at the water's edge. Still later he appeared to the eleven apostles on a mountain somewhere in Galilee. Finally, he appeared to the eleven apostles on the mount of Olives near Bethany and from there he was taken up into heaven never to set foot on this earth again.

He is in heaven reigning, preparing a place for those who will call upon his name and will obey him and live his kind of life. There were some other appearances, but these are the ones mentioned in the gospel narratives--eight of them in all. The disciples who had slipped away after the crucifixion, despondent, discouraged, were again heartened when they saw him and heard him speak. They went out and spent the rest of their lives testifying that they had seen him die on a cross, buried in a tomb and then alive again forevermore. Your faith and mine is a faith in things that have happened, faith in facts, and on these facts we base our confidence that Jesus was truly the Son of God--no mere man but the son of God, sent from heaven to tell us how to live and to pay the penalty for our sins.

The Tragedy

The tragedy of it all is that many a man who really loves the Lord and believes in him has never become a Christian. There are many in our world who have never heeded Christ's advice in Matthew 10:32-33, "Everyone therefore who shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before my Father who is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father who is in heaven." There are many people who have never confessed Jesus before men. Quietly, in the privacy of their own homes and in the everyday affairs of their lives, they believe him, but they have never really made it known. They have never stood up to be counted; they have never confessed him before men. It is in Romans 10:9-10 that we further read, "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thy heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved: for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." If you have never given public confession to the name of Christ, do so, and let your influence count on his side.

In the conclusion of the sermon on the mount, that greatest sermon ever preached, Jesus said the following, "Everyone therefore that heareth these words of mine, and doeth them, shall be likened unto a wise man, who built his house upon a rock: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon the rock. And everyone that heareth these words of mine, and doeth them not, shall he likened unto a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand: and the rain descended, and the floods, came, and the winds blew, and smote upon that house: and it fell: and great was the fall thereof." (Matt. 7:24-27). Notice, "everyone that heareth these words and doeth them" is the wise man who built his house upon the rock.

Have you heard the words of Christ--"Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matt. 11:28-30). Have you heard his words? Have you heeded his call? Have you confessed him before men? Have you repented of your sins, turned away from them to do them no more? Have you been buried with your Lord in baptism, putting on the new life that he promised? Oh, I pray that you have! But if you have not, there is yet time. Perhaps for some little time, but there is yet time. Believe in the Lord and obey his simple commandments.

Let me leave in your hearts as I close this brief message a passage in the final book of the Bible. It is one of the most beautiful pictures of Jesus and perhaps that is one of the reasons that the Lord saved it until the final book of the Bible. We find it in Revelation 3:20. Jesus is pictured in these words, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him and he with me." He does not care about the color of man's skin; he does not care how educated or uneducated. Christ died for all men. If you are not a Christian, will you not seek out some godly preacher of the gospel and let him assist you as you confess your faith, as you repent of your sins, as you are buried with your Lord in baptism? My prayer is that no one of us may be lost. Christ loved you, died for you, redeemed you. Accept the gift of his salvation by obeying his commandments.