

## WHAT CHRIST MEANS IN MY LIFE

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter on December 20, 1964 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee, and heard over radio station WLAC at 8:05 P.M.

During this season of the year when men are speaking and singing the name of Christ--and possibly thinking of Christ--more often than at any other season of the year, it seems to me an appropriate time for each of us to pause and to ask himself the question, "What does Christ really mean in my life?" We do not know exactly when Christ came, for the time of the year and even the year itself is uncertain. However, we do know that he came. This is the important thing--not when, or even where, but that he came. His coming was the most important event that ever occurred in our world. Divinity invaded earth. The word invaded is chosen with careful thought, for it was an invasion of enemy territory. Since through man's sin Satan had become the Prince of this world. Christ's coming to dwell among men happened only once in all the history of the world and this once was the most important event of all time.

The fifty-third chapter of Isaiah is a favorite of most Christians. In it the prophet Isaiah, some 750 years before the time, told of the coming of the Messiah and described vividly both his nature and his work. In the fifth verse of Isaiah 53, the prophet pictured our Lord in these terms, "But 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." Thomas Chalmers, the noted English preacher, had read this passage on many occasions and had pondered its great significance. After his death, friends who were examining his effects found in his often-used Bible that he had marked through the plural pronouns of this passage and had neatly written in the margin the singular pronouns, so that the passage read, "He was wounded for my transgressions, he was bruised for my iniquities; the chastisement of my peace was upon him; and with his stripes I am healed." It is this personal relationship to the Lord that I should like to suggest.

In no sense would I wish to minimize the fact that Christianity is universal in its scope and world-wide in its application to the lives of men. We do not have a vocabulary large enough to do justice to the magnitude of Christianity. No man can comprehend the wideness of God's love, as manifest through Christ for all mankind. However, all too often these grand dimensions of Christianity cause us to fail to feel the intimacy of our relationship to Christ. It is this personal, intimate relationship that I would emphasize upon this occasion. Borrowing a leaf from the life of Thomas Chalmers, as it were, I want to suggest what Christ means in my life in terms of intimate, personal relationships. As I explore the meaning of Christ's coming to the earth as it relates to my own life, may it be that each of you who listens, or reads, will apply these findings to your own life.

### I. Christ Has Forgiven My Sin

When I try to comprehend what Christ's coming to the earth means to me personally, I begin with the fact that he has removed the guilt of my sins. Although it has been more than thirty-five years, my coming to the Lord is still vivid in my mind. It was on an occasion like this--a Sunday morning hour of worship in the heart of winter. Even though I was not yet ten years of age, I had received enough instruction at my mother's knee, in regular Bible classes, and from the sermons which I had heard my father deliver, that I felt a need to become a Christian. Even then I had some comprehension of the fact that all men are sinners, as suggested in the writings of the apostle Paul to the Romans. In Roman. 3:23 he wrote, "There is none righteous, no, not one, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." I also had at least a beginning comprehension of the fact that Jesus came into the world to save man from his sins. Such passages as Matthew 1:20-21, suggest this idea. "Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And 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 I John 1:7, the apostle John added, "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." The author of the book of Hebrews suggested this blessing of Christ's coming to the earth in these words, "But we behold him who hath been made a little lower than the angels, even Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God he should taste of death for every man." (Heb. 2:9). Best known of all the statements concerning Christ redemptive power is that found in 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."

The reading of these and similar passages in the New Testament concerning Christ's purpose in coming to the earth, often takes me back to that winter morning more than thirty-five years ago when I obeyed the simple commandments of the Lord and received forgiveness of my sins. In the years since that date there have been other sins, sins of much greater magnitude because of the greater knowledge and responsibility, and these, too, the Lord has forgiven when there has been genuine penitence and prayer. When I think of Christ's humbling himself to come and dwell among men, it means most to me when I realize that it made possible the forgiveness of my sins.

### II. Christ Has Given Purpose and Plan to My Life

Modern man, in spite of his notable achievements and in spite of his numerous possessions, is often like a cork bobbing aimlessly on the bosom of the ocean. He is often like a leaf dancing constantly from the branch of a tree, yet going nowhere. He often leaves little more behind when his life is over than is left behind when one dips his finger into a glass of water and removes it again. For all his achievements and all his advancements modern man often leads a life devoid of real purpose and real meaning. For all who will let him, Christ changes this meaningless, purposeless manner of living into a rich, meaningful existence.

One feels the purposefulness of the life of the apostle Paul when he reads, "For which cause I suffer also these things; yet I am not ashamed; for I know him whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to guard that which I have committed unto him against that day." (II Tim. 1:12). Even clearer is his statement, "Brethren, I count not myself yet to have laid hold: but one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before, I press on toward the goal unto the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 3:13-14).

I often read with deep feeling the opening paragraph of the fifth chapter of Luke. Jesus had been preaching by the seashore, when at the end of his sermon he called to Peter, "Put out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught." Peter and his fellow-fishermen did so and soon their nets enclosed many fish. Immediately, Peter, perceiving that something more significant than fishing was taking place, fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." A moment later Jesus responded, "Fear not, from henceforth thou shalt catch men." The paragraph closes with the words, "They left all, and followed him." (Luke 5:1-11). From that day forward Peter's life had purpose and plan.

Not so dramatically, but in similar manner, our Lord has given purpose and plan to my life. By providing an explanation of my origin, an outline or plan for my life, and an explanation of the desired destiny, the Lord has given meaning to my existence that would not have been possible had he not come to the earth.

### III. Christ Has Given Me Peace of Mind

This is one of the most desired and yet most elusive achievements in the modern world. The promises of God constitute a foundation upon which a man may build a life which is free from fear and anxiety. This is not to say that our world is not a dangerous world, but it is to say that the promises of God enable man to face danger without being overcome by it. God's promises are an antidote for anxiety and fear.

For example, the great promise of Romans 8:28 has been a tremendous strength to countless thousands of Christians back through the centuries. The apostle Paul wrote, "And we know that to them that love God all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to his purpose." This passage does not say that all things are good, but rather that God will overrule and guide events in the life of a Christian so that they work together for good. The Christian has no promise that he will not become ill, that his loved ones will not die, that his material possessions will not be stolen or destroyed, but he does have the promise that whatever comes God will direct events so that they work together for his ultimate good. This is a great encouragement and strength in times of adversity.

During the spring of this year I went to my doctor for a regular physical check-up, and was told, after a series of tests, that I had a malignancy. At first, it was difficult to believe that it was true, then, it was difficult to adjust to the rather disturbing possibilities that lay ahead. During the period of waiting, the time of surgery, and the month-long period of recuperation, my family and I went through the "valley of the shadow of death." During this difficult period God's promises were of inestimable value. During this period of uncertainty about the future, there was never a time when I prayed that I might get well, or that I might live. Others prayed for my recovery, and I continue to be grateful for their prayers and their concern, however, my own personal prayers were that God's will might be done--whatever that will might be.

Of course, I wanted to live very much. Facing the possibility that I might not live more than a few months, I realized that there were primarily two reasons why I wanted to continue to live: (1) For my wife and my three boys, and (2) for my work's sake. For these two primary reasons, and for lesser reasons, I wanted to live, but I felt that God's knowledge of what was best was far better than mine. Hence, I prayed simply that his will might be done, knowing that he in his infinite wisdom and infinite love would make a better decision than I could make. In all of this time of uncertainty, it was a great comfort to know that all things work together for good to them that love the Lord. It is this peace of mind that enables the Christian to face the cares and difficulties of life without the disintegration of personality, without the fears and anxieties that often plague mankind.

Early in his ministry Jesus said, "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). In another much-loved passage Paul said, "In nothing be anxious; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts, in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 4:6-7).

### IV. Christ Is My Constant Companion

Recently a friend of mine told of a conversation which he had had with an elderly lady who could no longer attend church services. She was expressing her lament at not being able to assemble for worship in the Lord's house with those whom she had known and loved through the years. She spoke of a great loneliness in her life. In an almost casual way the preacher reminded her, "But you are never alone; Christ is always with you." A few days later the elderly lady called him to tell him how much this reminder had meant to her. Now, she no longer felt the loneliness that had bothered her so much. My friend closed the incident by saying, "I am determined to declare this truth with more personal conviction and with more earnestness in the days to come."

We are reminded that in the final chapter of the gospel according to Matthew, our Lord's farewell words to his disciples were, "And lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." In truth, our Lord is our constant companion. Waking or sleeping, at work or at play, early or late, Jesus is very near to each of us. It is a great comfort to know that at any hour of the day or night we may speak to the Lord the innermost thoughts and needs of our hearts. When temptation comes, when problems arise, when discouragement comes, as well as in the happier moments of life, the Lord is near at hand.

#### V. Christ Is Preparing My Eternal Home

Among the last things that Jesus said to his disciples was this, "Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again and will receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." (John 14:1-3). Revelation 21 describes in greater detail the home which the Lord is preparing for his followers.

When temptations threaten to overwhelm us or in periods of discouragement, it is a great help to think of our Lord as preparing a heavenly home for us. It gives us anew the realization that we are important, at times when we feel insignificant and worthless. When temptations come, it gives us new determination to live in such a way that we will some day have the privilege of sharing eternity with God. This, too, is one of the great blessings of being a Christian.

#### Conclusion

Finally, I must suggest that all of these blessings which I have applied to myself are yours with equal measure. Christ has forgiven your sins. Christ gives purpose and plan to your life. Christ gives you peace of mind. Christ is your constant companion. Christ is preparing your heavenly home. These promises are for all Christians of all times.

It must be said, however, that all these blessings are only for those that are in Christ. If you have not come to Christ, then, for you, Christ has not yet come. Accept him today, so that you may know the joys of being a Christian. Believe on the Lord with all your heart, turn away from the sins of the world, confess the name of Jesus before man and be buried with your Lord in baptism. The Lord will then add you to his family and you will have this great heritage of which we have spoken.