

## COME INTO MY HEART

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter on December 25, 1960 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee, and heard over radio station WLAC at 8:05 P.M.

The history of our world can best be told in terms of people. There have been great movements, noted battles, and the development of great institutions, but prominent in all of these activities there have been people. Marshall Foch, the great military leader of France, speaking of the well-known event in history said, "It was not an army that crossed the alps; it was Hannibal." I think he was right. It was a great moving force led by the great Hannibal.

Some years ago William James, the great New England psychologist, was asked a rather penetrating question, "What is spirituality?" After he had hesitated a moment he said, "I don't know that I can put into words exactly what spirituality is, but I can show it to you in a person, Phillip Brooks." In his brief answer he probably conveyed more meaning than many paragraphs could have conveyed in mere words.

### The Influence of People

The most powerful impact upon our world has been the impact that has come from the lives of people. There was a time when everyone believed that the sun revolved around the earth, then Copernicus came. There was a time when everyone believed that the earth was flat and that if you went far enough you would fall off, then Columbus and Magellan came. There was a time when there was no real scientific medicine, then Louis Pasteur came. There was a time when there was no really effective nursing of the sick, then Florence Nightingale came. There was a time when everybody either walked or rode a horse-drawn buggy, then Henry Ford came. There was a time when darkness settled over the whole world at dusk, then Thomas Edison came. Now our cities are magnificently lighted as any of you who have traveled by air at night are aware. Magnificent Christmas trees during the summer as well as the winter are these brilliantly lighted cities, made possible by the coming of a man. What I am saying is that back of almost anything that we do or anything that we see, there are some people and those people have had influences that have changed and modified our world.

You might want to put it to the test in your own life. What is the most powerful force in your experience? My guess is that you will say a mother, a father, a teacher, or perhaps an employer, or some friend. My guess is that that influence will be in terms of a person. Generally speaking it is a person that we tie to in times of stress and strain. That is why it means so much in times of illness for those we love and in whom we have confidence to come to see us. That is why it means so much when we are bereaved to have someone who loves us send us a telegram from a distance, or come by and talk with us. When we remember the story of the prodigal son in the Bible we remember that it was the pull of a father across the miles that led the boy to come to himself and brought him home. Oftentimes it has been a person that has kept someone else going straight when he had a tendency to go crooked. It has been a person who has kept someone from cracking up when the stresses and strains of life came.

### The Power of Persons

I did a little research and found some statements that I would like to share with you along the line of the power of persons. A. J. S. Behrends some years ago said, as he delivered a lecture, "We preach to persuade men, and the secret of persuasion is the impact of soul upon soul." William Frazier McDowell put it this way, "What one personality can do with another we have not begun to measure." The noted Henry Ward Beecher used these words, "It is historically true that Christianity did not in its beginning succeed by the force of its doctrines, but" notice this, "by the lives of its disciples." Then from Henry Van Dyke, "The world moves by personality. All the great currents of history have flowed from persons ... Truth is mighty and must prevail. But it never does prevail actually until it gets itself embodied, incarnated, in a personality."

All of this leads me to say that the coming of a great person was the most influential, most significant, event in the history of our world. God knew long before men discovered the fact that cold un-embodied ideas do not reach out and take hold of men with great power, but that great truths embodied in a person have an impact that can change the flow of history. As you look back in the broad sweep of the Old Testament you think of the great persons who lived. There was a Noah; there was a Moses; there was a David; and these great persons, embodying at least some of God's truth had an impact upon their fellowmen and those that followed them that can hardly be appreciated. I am sure you know that I am speaking about the greatest personality of all time--God in the flesh. The incarnation literally means that God came down and dwelt among men. It is the person of the divine Son of God that has had the greatest impact upon your life and mine, as well as the greatest influence upon history.

### Prophetic Announcements

I am sure that you are aware that his coming was foretold in prophecy. Even as much as 1500 years before he came, in the last book of Moses, there is a sentence, "Jehovah thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of these, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken." In Deut. 18:16, Moses was saying that God was going to raise up a person, a prophet, "to him ye shall

hearken.” Later, in that familiar prophetic book, the book of Isaiah, there were the words, “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name, Emmanuel.” (Isa. 7:14).

In the New Testament the inspired writer, Matthew, refers to this sentence from Isaiah, I read a few verses beginning in Matthew 1:20, “When he thought on these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, 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. Now all this is come to pass, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which is, being interpreted, God with us.”

### The Incarnation

In the opening chapter of Luke’s account of the life of Jesus there is another very wonderful passage which tells about the divinity of this child that is to come. “He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. And Mary said unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee; wherefore also the holy thing which is begotten shall be called the Son of God.” (Luke 1:32-35).

God knew that in order for his truth to take hold of the lives of people like us, he would have to demonstrate it in the life of a person. So these are prophecies announcing the coming of this divine person who would have the same physical urges that we have, the same need for food and clothing and shelter, the same desires of every kind, and be susceptible to the same temptations. The truth is, as you know, that he did come and that in his birth and in his life and in his death, he demonstrated for us what the Christian religion is.

One of the great sentences in the gospel of John is John 3:16, “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life.” Then in John’s first chapter there is another great sentence, from the standpoint of this message perhaps the most appropriate in the whole Bible, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we behold his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth.” (John 1:1,14). The greatest event in the history of our world was the coming of the Son of God to live among men in the flesh. And to show us how we ought to think, speak, and live in every detail of our lives. In the 14th chapter of John, the ninth verse finds Jesus saying, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.” So Jesus has revealed God to us.

### A Personal Relationship

One of the emphases that I would like to make in this brief message is that each of us needs a personal relationship with Christ. If our loyalty is to an institution, even if it is the divine institution, the church, it may not have the strength to pull us through the crises of life. A girl confronted with some serious temptation has a much better chance of weathering the storm if she has a close and intimate relationship with her Lord. If she feels, “I cannot do this, I cannot go back on my Lord,” she will find a great inner strength. Or a man, who has tried to give up the habit of drink only to find it almost overwhelming, has a much better chance of succeeding if in his mind there is a clear and vivid picture of his Lord, looking at him, wanting him to be strong. Or in times of severe illness when our world seems suddenly to break apart, if we have an intimate, close, personal relationship with Christ, we will find that it will carry us through. So I would like to emphasize that when God sent a person, a real human being, he did that which is beyond our power adequately to appreciate.

### Has Christ Come “For You”?

I would emphasize finally that Christ has not come for you unless you have taken him into your heart and life. There are a great many people who are talking about the coming of the Christ who have not let him have any real place in their hearts and lives, and, for them, in a practical sense, Christ has not come.

Years ago, one of my favorite teachers, Brother R. C. Bell, told a story of an old man who lived out in a shack on the edge of town. He was poor, to the point of being unable to buy the necessities of life. He eked out a living. One day a letter found its way to his shack. He could not read, so he just put it on a shelf and left it. After some interval of time, he struggled through his final days and died in his poverty. Someone, in clearing out his belongings, found the letter, opened it and found there the message that the old man had inherited a great amount of money--an amount of money that would have blessed his last years and given him the things that he had needed. But he never appropriated the gift. For him it was just as if he had never inherited it. For some men and some women, it is just as if Christ had never come, for they never come to him to obey his commandments, to live their lives in love for what he has done for them.

### A Word About This Season

It seems to me especially tragic at a time when people are talking about Christ, for us not to feel the impact of his coming. I have preached many a sermon, the gist of which was that Jesus was not born on December 25. That is true, but really that is not the message that I want to leave in the hearts of men in June, or January, or March, or December. The message that I want to leave is that Christ came, though we know not the day nor the month, nor even the year, and that his coming was the greatest event in the history of the world. That is what I want to say to you today.

There is a great deal in this season that is good and wholesome and fine. There are some other elements that have commercialized, sensualized, and debased the sacred story of Christ's coming. These are not good at all, but in it all the emphasis that I want to sound forth loud and clear is that Jesus came and that his coming has changed our world and made possible a change in the destiny of our souls.

### Into My Heart

There is a song that we sometimes sing,

Into my heart, into my heart,  
Come into my heart, Lord Jesus.  
Come in today, come in to stay,  
Come into my heart, Lord Jesus.

I close this lesson with that fervent appeal. Let Christ really come into your life to change your thinking, your living and your destiny, Would you be a Christian? Come and obey his commandments. Come today.