

A QUEST FOR SOULS

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A RELIGION THAT IS DIVINE

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THE OPENING PRAYER

Holy Father, deep is our gratitude to Thee for Thy goodness to us and ours. How wonderful it all seems! Yea, how wonderful it really is! We bless Thee for it. And now as we come apart at this midday hour for a brief service, we pray that we may have the touch of thy hand upon us all and each. We would wait here in Thy presence now just like we ought. We would be humble before Thee. We would be repentant on account of every evil way, and we would be cleansed from all unrighteousness. We would put our trust unreservedly in GOD. We would turn absolutely from every wrong course. We would have Thee speak to us what Thou wouldst have us to hear. We would know Thy will, and then we would do it by Thy guidance and help, whatever it costs, wherever it leads . . . Let there be in the service something that shall help us every one, and that shall make for the glory of Thy name. And to-day, and in the days just before us, may we make it our concern, as never before, to put first things first, to seek the kingdom of GOD and His righteousness, before all else. We ask this in the Master's name. Amen.

A RELIGION THAT IS DIVINE

Text: "**Christ the power of God.**" (I Corinthians 1:24).

A religion without a Divine Saviour is a religion incompetent and insufficient for a needy, sinning, suffering, dying humanity. No man has moral sources within himself sufficient to live the life that he ought to live. Systems of ethics and of morals, however beautiful and worthy, will not, and cannot, transform men and women who have the sense of sin in their lives - the sense of moral loss and lapse and failure.

A little while ago it was my privilege to speak some ten days to the students of one of the country's largest universities. One day I was waited upon by a group of Japanese students, who desired an interview concerning the relative claims of their country's religion and of our religion.

I shall never forget the interview. These Japanese were upper class men in the university. They ranged themselves, some thirty men, in a semi-circle about me, and then they began their questions.

How bright, how sharp, how searching, were their questions! And presently they reached the question that they came to ask. They said: "We follow Buddha, and you follow CHRIST. Wherein does CHRIST excel Buddha? Buddha teaches this and that," they said, "and CHRIST, whom you preach, teaches this and that. Wherein do the teachings of CHRIST excel the teachings of Buddha?"

Now, you can see that the issue was sharply joined. You know what I said, I take it. I said: "My fellow-men, Buddha does teach so and so, and standards that he sets up in many cases are beautiful. CHRIST teaches so and so. But CHRIST does more.

CHRIST proposes to put a power divine into the life that will yield itself to Him.

For illustration: Here are two trains of cars, and at the head of each is an engine.

CHRIST puts His power into that Christian engine, so that it can pull any train of cars, no matter how weighty.

Buddha does not talk about putting power into human life. Buddha does not talk about a strength superhuman and unrivaled and divine, which he will put into his followers. He simply holds up a standard out there.

CHRIST holds up a standard and says: 'Come to Me, with all your weakness and ignorance and sin; let me save and guide you, and I will help you in your life to realize that standard.' Christianity is the religion of a person, and that person is CHRIST, and CHRIST not only points us the way wherein we ought to walk, but He comes to us in our moral weakness and lapse and failure, and says to us: 'If you will honestly commit yourself to me, that I may guide you and Master you, I will help you to live the life you ought to live.' And, therefore, Christianity outdistances all systems of human religion, by as much as GOD outdistances a man."

It was good to see the response made by the students from afar to such appeal.

Five little words this morning make our text: "**Christ the power of God.**" They are found in the first chapter of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians.

Let me come at once to the heart of what I wish to say, by asking the question: How is CHRIST the power of GOD?

I answer, first of all, He is the power of GOD in His own person. Christianity stands or falls with the person of CHRIST. What Hougoumont was to Waterloo, CHRIST's person is to Christianity. There have been only three views about the person of CHRIST - one that He was bad, another that He was mad, and the other that He was what He everywhere represented Himself to be, namely, that He was GOD come in the flesh.

When He was here there were those who affirmed that He was bad. They affirmed that He was in league with Beelzebub, the prince of demons. They said: "He hath an evil spirit, and is not to be trusted."

And then there were those who affirmed that He was mad. They said: "**He is beside himself.**" They said: "He is crazy." And then there stands out the third estimate of Him - that He was not bad, and that He was not mad, but that He was and is what He everywhere represented Himself to be - GOD come in the flesh.

When JESUS became a man, He said in effect to men, wherever He went: "I am God manifest in the flesh. I am GOD uncovered; I am GOD foreshortened, so that a man with all his limitations by reason of ignorance and weakness and sin can find GOD." The cry of the race through the ages has been: "**We would see Jesus... Shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us.**" JESUS came among men and everywhere represented Himself as the possessor of the attributes and the perfections of Deity.

That JESUS was and is in His own person the power of GOD is attested by what He said, and by what He did, and by what He was and is. I am compelled intellectually to believe that CHRIST was more than any mere man, no matter from what angle I look at Him.

Will you look at His Words? They attest His deity, "**Never man spake like this man.**" I do not wonder that when Daniel Webster had finished the reading of the Sermon on the Mount, he rose up with pale face and trembling words, and said: "More than any mere man has spoken these words." Never man spake like this man. CHRIST's teachings concerning the great matters that pertain to life and conduct and man and sin and character and destiny are utterly revolutionary and transforming.

I am also compelled to believe that JESUS is more than any mere man when I look at His works, and one of His appeals to men is: "**Believe me, that I am in the Father, and the Father in me; or else believe me for the very works' sake.**" From the cradle to the grave there was in the life of JESUS the outflashes of His divine nature and power.

- When a little child yonder on His mother's heart the shepherds came to worship Him, and the magi came with their rich gifts to lay before Him.
- When He was a child of a dozen years, yonder He was in the temple, and the questions that He both asked and answered broke to pieces the superlative wisdom of those learned doctors and teachers assembled in that temple.
- When He began His public ministry, the winds and the waves obeyed Him, and sicknesses obeyed Him, and demons obeyed Him, and death obeyed Him.

Jean Paul Richter was right when He said that JESUS with His pierced hand had lifted empires off their hinges, and had turned the stream of centuries backwards in its channel. And Lecky, the astute philosopher, was right when he said that the three short years of JESUS' public ministry had done more to soften and regenerate mankind than all the disquisitions of all the philosophers, and all the exhortations of all the moralists since the world began.

I am also compelled to believe in CHRIST, that His own nature was divine, and that in Him was

the infinite power of GOD, when I look at His character. The standing challenge of JESUS to mankind is: "**Which of you convinceth me of sin?**" And the universal response to that challenge is stated in the language of Pilate: "**I find no fault in Him.**" Horace Bushnell was right when he said that the character of JESUS forbids all possible classification of Him with any and all other men.

Behold JESUS, this Friday morning, not **a** Son of man, but **the** Son of man, for all humanity was summed up in Him.

In all other men, goodness is but fragmentary and pitifully imperfect. In the character of JESUS, goodness is perfect and complete, and wanting nothing.

- If you would look for the highest example of meekness, you would not look to Moses, but to JESUS, who was unapproachably meek and lowly in heart.

- If you would look for the highest example of patience, you would not look to Job, but to JESUS, who when He was reviled, reviled not again.

- If you would look for the highest example of wisdom, you would not look to Solomon, but to JESUS, who spake as never man spake.

- If you would look for the highest example of zeal, you would not look to Paul, but to JESUS, about whom it has been written: "**The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.**"

- If you would look for the highest example of love, you would not look to John, who leaned on Jesus' bosom, but you would look to JESUS, who while we were yet sinners so loved us as to die for us.

Goodness in men, however wise and pure their character, is fragmentary and imperfect and incomplete. Goodness and perfection stand out in their entirety in the person of JESUS.

Men sometimes say to me that they cannot believe in miracles, and in every such case I ask them: "What will you do with Jesus of Nazareth?" He is the miracle of the ages. JESUS of Nazareth - what will you do with Him? He is the outstanding miracle of all the centuries. What will you do with JESUS?

Forever GOD, forever man,
My JESUS shall endure,
And fixed on Him my hope remains
Eternally secure.

It was said of Mozart that he brought angels down, and of Beethoven that he lifted mortals up. JESUS of Nazareth does both, and more. JESUS is GOD's way to man. JESUS is man's way to GOD. JESUS is the only true Jacob's ladder, by which a sinning man or woman, if he or she will leave sin behind, may mount up to be with GOD and to be like Him forever.

Yes, CHRIST is the power of GOD in His own person. I marvel that intellectually every man in the world is not compelled to bow before the person of CHRIST.

Nor is that all. CHRIST is the power of GOD in history. The standing marvel of the ages is CHRIST Himself, the Rock of Ages. An humble prophet of Nazareth has gone up and down the earth, and has more influence, more sway, than all the teachers that earth ever saw combined,

Hushed be the noise and the strife of the schools,
Volume and pamphlet, sermon and speech,
The lips of the wise and the prattle of fools,
Let the Son of man teach.

Who has the key to the future but He?
Who can unravel the knots of the skein?
We have groaned and have travailed and sought to be free,
We have travailed in vain.

Bewildered, dejected and prone to despair,
To Him, as at first, do we turn and beseech.
Our ears are all open, give heed to our prayer,
O Son of man, teach.

He is the incomparable teacher of all the ages, and beside Him earth's greatest teachers are as a tapering candle beside a great sun. CHRIST is the miracle of the centuries, and the church is His monument. The most glorious institution in all the earth is CHRIST's monument - His church.

It is the fairest among ten thousand, and an institution supremely lovely and worthy. And CHRIST's Gospel is the supreme instrument of human civilization.

There is not and cannot be any lasting civilization which excludes the teaching of CHRIST. You may have your systems of government, no matter how compact and militaristic and colossal; you may have your schemes of education, no matter how subtle and clever and adroit and scientific; but all systems human are doomed ultimately to go into the ditch, if the standards and teachings of CHRIST are flouted and disregarded. The Pan-European war is the demonstration of what I am saying on the most colossal scale in all human history.

And now I am coming to say the most important word of all to you, my brother men, my gentle sisters. CHRIST is the power of GOD in human experience. That is the vital word of all. Christianity employs always the scientific method of demonstration, that is, the method by experiment. Somebody once asked Mr. Coleridge if a man could prove the truth of Christianity, and Mr. Coleridge made the simple but complete reply: "Why, certainly. Let him try it."

CHRIST comes to mankind and confidently says to them: "Come and see. Come and try me. Come and test me. Put me to the extremest test. Come and test me and see for yourself, if I do not give you to know that I am the power of GOD in human life. Come and test me, and you shall sing thereafter, when your fellows ask you what has happened: '**Whereas I was blind, now I see.**' Come and try me."

I am thinking now of a young woman, unusually trained and cultured, bedarkened in her spiritual nature by the direst kind of skepticism.

She sought interview after interview with the preacher, and one day she said to him: "Sir, intellectually, I just cannot accept your preaching that CHRIST rose from the dead on the third day, as your Scriptures allege."

Presently, the preacher said to her: "Well, what do you think about CHRIST - waiving for a moment the fact of His resurrection - what do you think of Him?"

She said: "He is the fairest among ten thousand. He is the one altogether lovely. I cannot find any fault with Him. Everything about His words and about His works and about His character to the last degree appeals to me."

Then the minister went on to say: "If He be the Son of GOD Himself, the power of GOD in His own personality, if that be so, do you wish to know it?"

After a moment's pause, she said: "Assuredly, I do."

Then the minister said: "You go alone and tell Him that you are vexed by doubt and held back by questions, but that you wish light, and that you will yield yourself to Him, who has already won your most admiring appreciation; that you will yield yourself to Him, that He may teach you and help you and lead you in any way that He would have you go - just honestly yield yourself to Him. Try Him in that experimental way."

She came back the next day with her face radiant like the morning, and said to the preacher: "I cannot prove by outside proof, that JESUS rose from the dead, but my heart knows He is alive, for He has made me alive."

He is to be experimentally tested, my fellow-men. He is to be tested. Let me tell you, I see enough in one week, as do these honored brother ministers of mine about me, to shut us up to the conviction that CHRIST is the power of GOD. We see enough in one week in our dealings with men to be shut up to that unhesitating conviction.

To illustrate: One day there came to me the news that one of my fellow-workers had gone down in the awful maelstrom of business failure. Fine fellow, rising, battling nobly, but the tides had turned, and down he went, and I went out to his home with my heart in my throat, dreading to see him and his wife. As he met me at the door, he looked years older, but there was no trace of bitterness on his face or in his eye.

He said: "We are glad to see you. You have heard about it?"

I said: "Yes, I have heard, and I have come out to kneel beside you, and together we will talk to Him who is able to turn the very shadow of death into morning. No man is to despair or to worry or to mope because all his property is swept away in a brief day."

He said, speaking quickly: "Oh, no; we are not bitter about it at all. We did not sleep any last night. We got up several times in the night, and like two little children we knelt beside our bed, and we promised new devotion to the service of CHRIST. Oh, no, we have not a bitter thought at all."

And from that day to this, and that was years ago, never have I heard a note of bitterness or reproach escape their lips, and time and again they have said to me: "But for CHRIST consciously in our hearts we should have been submerged when that black Friday came."

And then, on another day, I was summoned when one of our citizens lay a-dying, one of the most gifted scientists I have known, and also one of the noblest Christians. The sun sank to the west, and the sands of his life were galloping to the close, and I sat there by him, in response to his invitation that I come for a final conference, and he said various and sundry things to me, as I held his hand.

I never shall forget one thing he said. It was this: "Oh, pastor, go on and preach CHRIST to men, and nothing else, for nothing else, sir, will suffice men who are in the grip of moral loss and failure and defeat. Men do not have moral resources within themselves to rise and climb. Sir, preach a divine Saviour to a lost world. Preach that only till the day of your death."

That last conversation we had I can never forget. And then, when he quit talking like that to me, he said: "I should like to speak to the children," and the children were brought in, and he had his word, beautiful and blessed, for every child. And then, as his wife held that thin hand and bent over him and kissed the noble forehead, he said to her, with his whispers, as life's sands hastened to the end:

"Mary, dear, you will know where to look for comfort and strength when I am gone."

She said: "Indeed, I will." Then he said: "Mary, dear, four different times you and I have marched behind the hearse to the cemetery, to put away out there, under the flowers, one child, two children, three children, four children, and we came back, and every turn of the carriage wheels whispered to us that the grace of GOD was sufficient.

Now, Mary, dear, when I shall go away, as I shall to-night, you will remember the Shepherd Psalm, and you will remember the fourteenth chapter of John, and you will remember always to call on CHRIST and be not afraid." And she kissed him, and said: "I will remember. **I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.**"

And then he quietly began the recitation of that Twenty-third Psalm, and when he reached that heavenly sentence:

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me," he whispered, and we caught it: "See, Mary, He is with me now," and then he was gone to the yonderland. You should have seen her and the children bear their grief without any murmur. GOD's grace was sufficient for them, and all the people knew it.

And then, on still another morning, my phone rang and one of our young business men said to me: "Be ready. I will be at the door for you with a cab in a dozen minutes. I need you much just now."

I was there at the door waiting when the cab drove up, and he jumped out of the cab, his face covered with tears and his agitation something pitiful, and I took his hand and said: "What on earth is it?" He said to me, with a plaintive sob, even with gasps of sobbing: "If you know how to pray, you must pray now, for our flaxen-haired little girl is at death's door, and the doctors give us no hope at all. Sir, if you know how to pray, you will ask GOD to spare her now."

I said: "My friend, I will pray for her, but not the way you suggest. I would not pray the way you suggest even about my own little children. I will ask GOD, if it can comport with His will, to spare your little girl, but if that be not His will, that He will fortify you and the little mother, and give you grace and strength to face it all."

And then he turned upon me wildly and said: "I suppose I could bear it if the little girl shall be taken, but the little girl's mother is an invalid, and it will kill her if the little girl is taken."

I said: "No, no, my friend; your wife is a joyful Christian. She has a secret you do not know anything about. She has a secret that will bear her up and fortify her in the cloudiest day that ever comes."

By this time we had reached the home, and we went in. The gentle wife was beside the crib, stroking the little forehead with its flaxen curls about it, talking to the child as the sands of its life hurried to the close, and then talking to GOD. And as we stood by her, the young father looked at me with a gasp and said: "Isn't my baby dying right now?" I said: "Yes, my friend; she is dying right now." And then he left the room, unable to face the rest. In a few moments more the little life was gone, and then after a few moments more the wife said to me: "Where is my husband?"

I said: "I will find him," and I went out behind the cottage, and found him wild in his grief, and when he heard my footfall he turned to me and said: "It is all over, isn't it?"

I said: "It is all over." And then, with a wail never to be forgotten, he said: "You will see it will finish my poor little invalid wife." I said: "Not at all, my friend. She has a secret you do not know anything about. She has a power within her above the flesh, superhuman, GOD's own power. You come now and see."

And we came on back, and at the door we paused, because she was kneeling by that baby again, and it seemed sacrilege to enter, as we heard her praying. She was thanking GOD for the little girl, even though she had had her only three or four years. She was telling the Master that she would always be a better woman, because He had given her the child.

She was saying that it was "better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all." And then she paused, and I said: "We will go in now, my friend," And as we entered, she came, the invalid that she was, toward us, and her face was radiant. There were tears upon it, but there were smiles deeper than the tears. She put her frail arms about the big shoulders of her husband, and said: "Poor, broken-hearted husband, mother is so sorry for you. Mother knows it is all right. Mother's heart is swept with peace. Little bits of Heaven have come down, my husband, to me. Mother is so sorry for you."

Then the big fellow turned to me with the cry: "If JESUS CHRIST can do that for my frail wife,

let me kneel beside my dead baby, and you tell CHRIST for me that I will give up to Him right now." Of course, CHRIST saved him then and there.

JESUS CHRIST can do that. He does do it. Hundreds here will so testify. He is the power of GOD in human life. Is He your power? GOD help you, if He is not! Oh, men, my brothers; oh, gentle women, my sisters, is JESUS CHRIST the power of your life? Is He your personal Saviour? Is He your Master, by your own glad assent and consent? Let Him be! I speak to you the sober truth this Friday morning, when I tell you that you may go and drink from every spring on the face of the earth, and you may try the aroma of every flower that earth can give, and you will come back desolate and dispirited and broken, without CHRIST. Earth cannot heal your malady. Earth cannot cure your hurt. Byron tried it, that brilliant, gifted Byron, and he penned this as the result:

My days are in the yellow leaf:
The flowers and fruits of love are gone;
The worm, the canker, and the grief
Are mine alone!

I read the confession the other day of one of the most prominent actresses to-day on the world's stage. Admirers found her after a brilliant performance, after her appearances had been often encored, and roars of applause had shaken the building - after it was all over, they found her sobbing like a broken-hearted child, and they said to her: "Why woman, you ought to be happy, unspeakably happy, even the happiest of women, because of such applause as your every appearance calls forth." But she answered: "Oh, my heart is broken. My heart longs for something better and surer than this."

And it does, because GOD hath set eternity in the human heart, and the things temporal, therefore, cannot meet the cry of the eternal.

Oh, where shall rest be found--
Rest for the weary soul?
'Twere vain the ocean depths to sound,
Or pierce to either pole.

The world can never give
The bliss for which we sigh;
'Tis not the whole of life to live,
Nor all of death to die.

Beyond this vale of tears
There is a life above,
Unmeasured by the flight of years;
And all that life is love.

There is a death, whose pang
Outlasts the fleeting breath;
Oh, what eternal horrors hang
Around the second death!

Lord God of truth and grace,
Teach us that death to shun,
Lest we be banished from thy face,
And evermore undone.

Are you willing for CHRIST to teach you? Are you willing for Him to be your Saviour? Are you willing for CHRIST to be your Saviour His way? He will never be otherwise. Are you willing for Him to be your Saviour His way, and that He may Master your life according to His will, which is infinite in wisdom and goodness? If you are, and will thus yield your life to Him, you shall know that CHRIST is the power of GOD in your own experience. Do you say, "Yes, to-day and now, I answer to CHRIST's call, yielding myself without reserve to Him, that He may have His way with me from this hour forward forever?" How we rejoice with you in your destiny-determining decision, and we leave you with Him, who will never leave nor forsake the soul that trusts Him.

THE CLOSING PRAYER

And now, as the people go, O Divine Saviour, let us every one go, songful in praises, definitely fixed in heart, inflexibly resolved in purpose, that we will cleave to CHRIST and cleave to Him only and forever. Let us see that we shall feed our souls on ashes if we feed on any other food in this universe apart from CHRIST. He is the bread which comes down from Heaven, which if a soul shall eat, such soul shall live, and live victoriously forevermore. Lord, at this noonday service we would gather up every life here present in our prayers, and by humble, united and submissive prayer, we would bind one another, and by grace divine be bound, about the feet of CHRIST forever. The Lord keep you all and each, until the day is done, and beyond, forever. Amen.

~ end of chapter 8 ~
