

THE SAVIOUR'S INVITATION

And Other Evangelistic Sermons

by

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SERMON THREE

CHRISTMAS AT EASTER

“And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you” (Matthew 28:5-7).

There are some who say we ought to discontinue Christmas and Easter. They maintain that these holidays have been devitalized, paganized, commercialized. They point out that bacchanalian orgies of overdressing, overdrinking, overeating have turned these two holidays into blasphemous caricatures of their original meaning and implication. We cannot agree with them. We must have Christmas and Easter. We need them for ourselves. We need them for Christ's sake. We need them for our children's sakes.

We need them for ourselves that we may stop in the mad rush after mundane essentials and nonessentials to meditate again upon the matchless story of the marvelous mercy and grace of God. We need the hushing of our minds, the heartening of our souls, the hope-filling of our lives to be found in the thought of God's great interest in the affairs and activities of a storm-tossed world.

We need these two holy days for our children that we may pass on to them the fundamentals, the verities, the eternal doctrines of our blessed faith. No amount of teaching and preaching can bring to bear upon a child's heart and mind the old, old story of Jesus, crucified, resurrected, enthroned, with half the effectiveness that a proper observation of these two universal days can give. Christmas and Easter are the heritage of the children of men, to be passed on with loving emphasis, tender regard, careful retelling, from generation to generation.

We need Christmas and Easter for Jesus' sake. It is then that He speaks to us most realistically, most definitely, most dynamically. The awe of the manger, the awfulness of the Cross, the awakening of the Resurrection come to us afresh and anew, stabilizing our faith, inspiring our service, assuring our triumph. Christmas and Easter are bound together with indissoluble bonds. One is impossible without the other. The humble manger precedes the hellish tree. The hateful tree augurs the holy tomb.

Had Christ not come in the flesh, had Christ not died on the tree, there would have been no glad Resurrection morning. At Christmas God gave His Son. At Easter God proved Him to be His Son.

It is not enough, however, to theorize about these things. It is not enough merely to think about them or to sing of them. It is not enough to build worship and ceremony around them. They must be known. They must be understood. They must be believed. They must be lived out. May we then, go back to that wondrous morning on which death met his Nemesis, on which the grave was robbed of its sting, on which the hope of a world rests.

The disciples were in a quandary, in fearful doubt, in heart-rending, soul-troubling uncertainty. The Old Testament had not prepared them for any such debacle. They had not understood the meaning of their Master's statements when He had warned them of His approaching dissolution. Jesus was dead—as dead as any other man whose heart the Grim Reaper had stopped. Their half-formed hopes, their bright dreams, their shining anticipations of a glorious kingdom of might and power were gone. They had seen Jesus die. They had seen Him taken from the Cross and buried, a lifeless corpse, in a borrowed tomb. They had seen the great stone seal its entrance. They had seen the Roman guards patrolling their beat in front of that stone. This was the end.

After an interminably mournful Sabbath, the women went to the cemetery in much the same fashion as men and women go to the cemetery today, to pay their respects to their beloved dead. There was no thought in their minds of the Resurrection. They did not come to see if Christ had risen. Their amazement was beyond telling when they found the stone rolled away, saw the angelic appearance, heard the message to be delivered to the apostles.

Let us study the message of this angel.

First, it speaks of the banishment of fear—*Fear not.*

Second, it imparts the inspiration of vision—*Come, see.*

Third, it gives us the commission of service—*Go quickly, and tell.*

The angel's message speaks of the banishment of the fear of sin, the presence of sin, the power of sin, the penalty of sin. Sin is still with us. It has crawled its slimy, corroding, corrupting, destroying path through the pages of history and the generations of men. Satan is still on the throne of this world. Temptation still besets us on every hand.

The power of sin is unquestionable and unanswerable. No amount of man's talent, thought, toil, or terms has been able to stem the tide, or stop the encroachments of the myrmidons of hell.

The penalty of sin is still hanging like the sword of Damocles over the heads of the children of men. The fires of the pit have never been banked. The decree of God has never been repealed. The wages of sin is death. The soul that sins dies.

Hell is still enlarging its borders to swallow up the unwary, the unfortunate, the unbelieving sinners.

Jesus came into the world to seek and to save these sinners. He came to save His people from their sins. He came to give His life a ransom for many. In the words of Paul, [He] “**was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification**” (Romans 4:25). The Resurrection proved to the disciples, and should prove to us, that sin is a defeated enemy, that Satan is a conquered foe.

The Resurrection is, then, the banishment of the fear of death. Death has been the black specter on the horizon of every human life. It is so inevitable, so unavoidable, so inescapable. It takes the young, and it reaps the old. It slays the bad, and it kills the good. It is so mysterious, so uncertain. The grave is so narrow, so cruel; the earth covering our bodies, so clammily heavy. By His Resurrection the Lord Jesus Christ proved that death was not the end of the story, but the beginning—a great, shining, joyous, victorious beginning for those who are in God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

When Jesus said to Martha, “**I am the resurrection, and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die**” (John 11:25, 26), it might have been the empty bombast of some mildly mad philosopher, or the vain vaporings of some vapid visionary. But when Christ tore the grave apart to rise from the dead, the Resurrection was a resounding amen to these wonderful words. Because of this, death becomes a relieving experience, a releasing experience, to those who have put their faith in the risen Son of God. Fear is gone. Hope and victory are on the throne.

The Resurrection is the banishment of the fear of the judgment. The Bible is specific. “**It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment**” (Hebrews 9:27). “**For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ**” (Romans 8:10). **There is no escape from this dread day, no exception, no excuse. So that every one of us shall give account of himself to God**” (Romans 14:12). Our sins, transgressions, Equities and failures are engraved in the archives of glory with a pen of iron in letters of flame. What are we to do? We have no merit to recommend us to the Judge of all the earth. We have no method of approach, of pleading. We have no means of satisfying the just judgment against us. Naked, helpless, hopeless, undone, we stand facing our destiny, our doom.

But, wait, rejoice, give God the grateful praise! Jesus came! Jesus died! Jesus arose! Jesus is on the intercessory throne, at the very right hand of God! We who are Christians, you who will this hour accept Christ as your Saviour, have an advocate, a counselor, a pleading barrister. The Word says so. “**We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world**” (I John 2:1, 2). The fear of the judgment vanishes; the dread of it is dissipated. The risen Christ, who first died for us, will now represent us, will now speak for us, will now defend us.

The Resurrection is the banishment of the fear of eternity. There is a life beyond the grave, an eternal life, unchangeable, fixed and immutable. Our minds and hearts tell us that there is a hell to shun and a heaven to enjoy. But how? How can we escape the torments of the damned? How can we earn, attain, obtain, retain the joys and bliss of the righteous? Philosophy is silenced. Science cannot help us. Art stands palsied before this eternal problem.

But, thank God, Jesus has an answer. Clear, plain, simple, courageous, inspiring, uplifting are His mighty words: **“Let not your heart be troubled: ye 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. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also”** (John 14:1-3).

The Resurrection forever sealed the truth of these tremendous words. God set His seal of approval on them in the open, empty cave. Easter is a proof, a presage, a promise of the resurrection unto life everlasting of every child of God. Easter is the title deed to the mansions in heaven. Easter is the eternal assurance that even our bodies shall rejoice in the Lord.

Thus the Resurrection banishes the fear of sin by revealing to us God’s acceptance of Christ’s atonement. It banishes the fear of death by lifting up before us the one who tasted death for every man, yet triumphed over this enemy. It banishes the fear of the judgment by giving us an Advocate with the Father. Finally, it banishes the fear of eternity by guaranteeing to us our own resurrection and the home eternal in the skies.

The angel’s message also imparts the inspiration of vision. We need that inspiration. We need that vision. Without vision we perish in the quagmire of dullness, in the morass of unreality. Come, see is the eternal cry of the angel to all the ages of men.

Come, see the divinity of Christ. Christ is **“declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead”** (Romans 1:4). The open tomb authenticates every claim of and concerning Jesus. In the Christmas story we read that the angel of the Lord had appeared to Joseph, 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 Ghost”** (Matthew 1:20). Joseph’s empty tomb proved the truth of the angel’s declaration. Mary had given birth to the virgin-born Son of God.

Come, see the truth of Christianity. **“Moreover, brethren, declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures”** (I Corinthians 15:1-3). Other systems of theology have been proposed for men. Other philosophies of religion have been proclaimed by men. Other panaceas for sin-sick souls have been pro-pounded to men. This was God’s theology, God’s religion, God’s revelation, God’s cure-all for human ills. The Christmas manger confirmed by Easter morning is proof positive that God has supplied a Saviour and provided a salvation.

Come, see the power of God. **“And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come”** (Ephesians 1:19-21).

In the Old Testament, when the Lord wanted to show a proof of this almighty power He pointed to the parting of the Red Sea. That mighty miracle was superseded by this conquest of death, by this sundering of the rigid walls of the grave on the Resurrection dawn.

No greater demonstration of the omnipotence of God has ever been witnessed than in the garden by Calvary's hill on that morning. Forever after men could confidently rely upon Him who proved His ability in such a tremendous fashion as this. "**Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us**" (Ephesians 3:20) becomes the ringing testimony of all those who have placed their all, by faith, in Him who raised Jesus from the dead.

Come, see the hope of man. "**But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death**" (I Corinthians 15:20-26).

- Here is the guarantee of our justification, the assurance of the forgiveness of our sins, the hope of the awakening of the dead, the promise of everlasting life in the mansions of the blessed.
- Here is a fact, a historic fact, an attested fact, a proved fact.
- Here is something to see, to understand, to believe, to build upon.
- Here is a way out of sin.
- Here is a door out of the grave.
- Here is an entrance into the grace of God.
- Here is a gateway into heaven.

Trials may beset us. Troubles may oppress us. Temptations may distress us. Here is the hand and the heart of God reaching out to us in the only begotten, the crucified, the resurrected Son of God. In the darkest hour, in the most dismal circumstances, in the most distressing conditions, here is the bright shining hope of God's love and care.

Let us also consider the commission of service—*Go quickly, and tell.*

The banishment of fear is Christ's part, leaving His home in heaven, coming down upon the earth, dying for our sins. The inspiration of vision is God's part, the raising of Christ from the dead. The commission of service is our part, the evangelization of a lost world.

- Here is a perishing world, men dying in sin, hopelessly enmeshed in the toils of Satan, powerless, hopeless, helpless.
- Here is Bethlehem's manger!
- Here is Calvary's Cross!
- Here is Joseph's empty tomb!

- Here is the Holy Spirit ready, willing, eager, anxious, able to empower witnesses to the souls of men.
- Here is the mighty, hope-giving, life-changing story of a risen Saviour.

Consciously, unconsciously, anxiously, listlessly, men are waiting to hear the glad good news. It is ours to proclaim it. It is incumbent upon us to carry on and out this glorious commission.

Tell it! Sing it! Shout it to the ends of the earth! Christ liveth forevermore! Tell the slave of sin that his shackles may be stricken off and shattered from his limbs. Tell the soul in sorrow that a Saviour has had pity on his desperate plight! Point the benighted heathen to the light of the world! Preach to the heartsick idolater the God who lives and breathes, who has power to answer his prayers, to accept his devotions, to recognize his sacrifices and to respond to his worship. Let the sound of it go throughout the earth.

Christmas at Easter makes us debtors to a ruined world. If we believe it, if we receive it, if we rejoice in it, let us, each of us, all of us, prove our gratitude, show our appreciation, display our thankfulness by going out to tell others what the risen Christ means to us.

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