

THE SAVIOUR'S INVITATION

And Other Evangelistic Sermons

by

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SERMON EIGHT

CHRIST'S GREATEST QUESTION

“While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The son of David. He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he his son? And no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions” (Matthew 22:41-44).

I am taking as my text this question: **“What think ye of Christ?”** It is a question you must face. I am sure you understand that when the Lord Jesus Christ asked it of the Pharisees He knew that they did not believe Him to be the Son of God. One more thing I want you to understand. I am not using this as an excuse or alibi. It is a historic fact. These Pharisees did not have the same proof, the same convincing, convicting certainties which face us, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. All they had was His word and the miracles they had seen Him perform. There were other great Jews who had performed miracles, had even raised the dead, for example, Elijah and Elisha. These Jews could not believe this Man from Nazareth was what He said He was—the Son of God. The Pharisees did not make the right decision. I say without the slightest hesitation, and I say it to the Jews as well as to the Gentiles, that the punishment, the chastisement, the weeping, the pain, the shame of my poor people will never cease until they turn to Jesus, admit their mistake, accept Him as the promised Messiah.

There is no question in all the Bible comparable in importance to this question. All the Bible is written to answer it. There is no problem in all the universe that comes within seeing distance of this problem. There is no quandary that God or man has ever propounded that carries the implications which this query carries. If your answer is right, everything else is right. If your answer is wrong, everything else is wrong. You may have the riches of Croesus, but if you decide against the Lord Jesus Christ, riches will avail you nothing. You may be so educated, so brilliant that your intelligence is beyond equal, but unless you have the right answer to this question your intellectual achievements will not take you to heaven or keep you out of torment. It is more important for you young people to come to a sane, sensible conclusion about this matter than about any of the other myriad decisions you will have to face until God calls you from life to death. I do not know how to present this question to you except by taking God's Word and pressing it upon your hearts.

Isaiah said, **“The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined . . . For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.”**

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder.” That is what Isaiah said about Jesus. But that is not the question.

The question is: **“What think ye of Christ?”**

Back yonder, in the long ago, Jesus turned to His disciples and asked, **“Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?”** They said, **“Some say that thou art John the Baptist; some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He said unto them, But whom say ye that I am?”** Peter cried out for all the ages, **“Thou art the Christ, the son of the living God.”** That is what Peter thought about Jesus. But that is not the question.

The question is: **“What think YE of Christ?”**

In Romans Paul said, **“Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.”** Paul also said, **“Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”** That is what Paul thought of Jesus. But that is not the question.

The question is: **“What think YE of Christ?”**

In Mark we read of this incident in the life of Jesus. **“And they came over unto the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gadarenes. And when he was come out of the ship, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no man could bind him, no, not with chains: because that he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces: neither could any man tame him. And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones. But when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped him, and cried with a loud voice, and said, “What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not. For he said unto him, Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit. And he asked him, What is thy name? And he answered, saying, My name is Legion: for we are many. And he besought him much that he would not send them away out of the country.”**

“Now there was there nigh unto the mountains a great herd of swine feeding. And all the devils besought him, saying, Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them. And forthwith Jesus gave them leave. And the unclean spirits went out, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea,” (they were about two thousand;) and were choked in the sea.” The demons proclaimed Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of God. But that is not the question.

The question is: **“What think YE of Christ?”**

John said, **“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. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men . . . And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth.”** John, who knew Jesus better than anyone else, said Jesus was the Son of God. But that is not the question.

The question is: **“What think YE of Christ?”**

If you were to ask me, “What do you think of Jesus?” I should say without the least hesitation, **“He is the Christ, the Son of the living God.”** I believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. But that is not the question.

The question is: **“What think YE of Christ?”**

The very importance of this problem, the very mention of it, the very responsibility of it, the eternal implications of it constrain each one of us to examine all the facts in the case.

First, what think ye of the character of this Man Jesus who is called Christ? What think ye of His personality? Of His life? Of His works?

He was born under a shadow, a bar sinister, in a Bethlehem manger. Some people to this day say He was the illegitimate child of Mary. He was reared in Nazareth, at the crossroads of the world’s highways, a wicked city. The town was filled with all sorts of evil, corruption, violence, illiteracy, irreligion. To this day if a Jew wants to insult another Jew he calls him a Galilean.

Christ was trained in a carpenter’s shop. He had no outstanding scholastic advantages. No college or seminary put its stamp of approval upon Him. At the age of thirty, out of mysterious unrecorded years, He appeared, an itinerant teacher, preaching a new Gospel. Like any other sinner, although He was without sin, He submitted himself to the baptism of John, apparently—apparently, I repeat—unto repentance.

The rich ignored Him. The educated ridiculed Him. The high and mighty had nothing to do with Him. There gathered about Him a tiny band of poor, humble, low-caste folk, some of whom were the offscourings of society. He seemed to prefer the company of these outcasts to the society of those more highly respected, of those who could offer Him much more.

Thieves, harlots and publicans composed His court. He went in and out among them, but was untainted, unsullied, unspotted, unstained. For nineteen hundred years His character has withstood the most rigid investigations of both friends and enemies. No man, no ten men, no ten thousand men have been so scrutinized as was and is this Nazarene. Today, almost two millenniums after His sojourn upon earth, no man can truthfully, honestly, honorably, convict Him of the slightest sin of omission or commission. He is more than ever the crystal-clear, the heaven-pure Christ of God.

Jew, Gentile, Buddhist, Mohammedan, Taoist, Shintoist, believer, unbeliever—all unite in one eternity-long paean of praise of the superlative Man Jesus. You, from the very depths of full hearts, join that mighty chorus. But you must do more than this. If He was all that artists, poets and philosophers say He was, He is either the only begotten Son of God or the world's chief liar.

He declared Himself to be the Son of God. If He is not the Son of God, He is the lowest, the most wicked, the vilest, the most heretical, the most blasphemous, the most impious character who ever breathed. But no one has ever accused Him of being a liar, of telling an untruth. I cannot understand, then, how any unbeliever, be he Jew or be he Gentile, can in one breath say He was the greatest among men, and with the next breath brand Him eternity's topmost impostor. Believe in the unapproachable probity of His character, and you must take the next step and cry, "**My Lord and my God.**"

The second question I want to ask you is: What think ye of His Cross? What think ye, not only of His character, but what think ye also of His Cross?

There are some things about his Cross which clamor for our attention. His Cross either proves Him to be the Son of God or declares Him to be the maddest of mad men.

*First of all it was a voluntary Cross. "**Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.**"*

There was once a great merchant vessel that had been shipwrecked. The sailors were forced out to sea in a lifeboat. Their supply of food and water was exhausted. The pangs of hunger and thirst assailed them. As not all could survive, they cast lots to see who would jump overboard and thus conserve the remaining supplies. To jump overboard was, of course, certain death. Two brothers were in that vessel, one single, one married. The married man was to jump overboard. Immediately the brother proposed an alternative. "You have a wife and babies," he said. "I am all alone. I'll take your place." Without waiting for an answer, the youth threw himself overboard, saving his brother's life.

That was voluntary, vicarious, substitutionary death. But these men were brothers. I am not belittling the heroism of the act, but they were bound by the ties of consanguinity. Besides, the suffering brother merely shortened his life by a few weeks, or months, or at most years. Eventually the brother would have had to die nevertheless. Jesus was immortal. We were not His brothers. We were not even His friends. We were His enemies, in open rebellion against Him. We utterly disregarded His claims.

Two miners in Kentucky were detailed to blast out some rock. They had a fuse and dynamite sticks. When they lit the fuse a bucket was supposed to carry both of them out of the mine. The dynamite was arranged. The fuse was lit. Both got into the bucket. Through some miscalculation only one man had been left at the top. He could not pull both out at once. One of the miners, a Christian, quickly jumped out of the bucket and pulled the rope as a signal. As his partner, who was not a Christian, went up, the one remaining behind cried to him, "I'm a Christian. If something happens to me, I'm all right." The explosion came before the bucket could be lowered again. Fortunately an overhanging ledge of rock saved the Christian's life. It was a heroic act, but the circumstances differed from those involved in Jesus' death. First, for the remaining miner there was a possibility of rescue. Second, it was merely a matter of anticipating a death that was inevitable. Jesus was born to die. He lived in the shadow of the Cross all His days. He voluntarily took upon Himself the form of a man that He might taste death for every man.

Over in Russia, a nobleman, his wife, his two children, and servant were riding a sleigh pulled by four horses. A pack of ravenous wolves pursued them. The nearest town was miles away. The driver loosed one of the horses. It slowed the murderous beasts as they tore it to pieces, but only for a brief respite. A second horse was loosed to divert the ravaging brutes, but in a short time the wolves came on. No other horse could be spared. The lights of the town appeared, but the wolves were gaining. The servant, turning to his master, released the reins into his hands. With a shouted farewell he jumped from the speeding sled and, drawing his axe from his belt, stood facing the oncoming horde. The fight was not long. The snow became crimson with his spurting blood, but the master, the mistress and the children were saved. The peasant had paid the last full measure of devotion. But he owed it. It was a matter of loyalty and allegiance. He was bound to his lord by a thousand bands of obedience and favors. It was not so with Jesus. He was not our servant, although He made Himself so. He owed us no debt of gratitude.

The Cross was not only a voluntary death; it was also a vicarious death.

We die for ourselves. We die for our country. But even then it is for ourselves, for ours, for our own. A mother sacrifices her life for her loved ones, but in this also, it is more or less for self; a father gives his life for the family, but here also the ties of blood are present. It was not so with Jesus. I bid you remember one more thing. When the brother jumped from the boat he became a hero. When the miner stayed behind he became a hero. When the servant gave his life for his master he became a hero.

When Jesus stretched Himself out on the tree, the bitterest pain involved was that He was crucified as a criminal. He became sin for us. Think of the agony, of the pain, of the torture, of the fearful shame in that bitter cry, "**My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?**" Dwell in awed sorrow on the eternal pathos of that poignant appeal, *Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?*

Not only was Jesus' death voluntary and vicarious, not only was the Cross voluntary and vicarious, but thank God, the Cross and the death on the Cross were victorious.

The Lord Jesus Christ did not remain in the grave. On the third day He rose again. The Cross was made a symbol of the greatest victory ever won over Satan.

The Cross, that implement of torture and shame, became a mighty weapon in the hands of God and of men to tear down the strongholds of sin. What think ye of Christ? What think ye of His character? What think ye of His voluntary, vicarious, victorious Cross?

Here is another question for your consideration. What think ye of Christ's conquests? His achievements?

Have you heard the story of the Zulu king who came to London and met Queen Victoria, "the White Mother," as the Africans called her? She carried him through the London streets, thrilling him with the display of her superlative treasures. Towards evening they returned to the throne room of the palace. The giant black stood before her, his hands on his spear. Through interpreters he asked her this question: "White Mother, when I go back to my people I will be afraid to tell them the things I have seen. They will not believe these marvels my eyes have beheld. If anybody had told me of them I also would have said they were impossible. I want to take back a message to my country. You are just a woman. Your people are just men, women and children, even as are my people. We have taller, stronger, perhaps even braver men than you have. We have more land. We are a large people. Tell me, what is the secret of your strength, of your power?"

Queen Victoria, taking her Bible from the small table beside her throne, rose to her feet. Holding the Book before the Zulu chieftain, she spoke. "This Book, O king, this Book contains in its pages the foundation, the secret, the key to the greatness, the wealth, the power of my people."

Oh, my friends, if only the United States—from the President to the tiniest, dirtiest newsboy—if only all of us would realize that the strength of our nation is Christ and the Bible, what a different story America would have to tell! The Bible is a Book of victory. The Christ is the Lord of victory. His mighty achievements have girdled the globe. His magnificent victories have changed the lives of men, the activities of homes, the affairs of nations, the course of a world.

The conquests of Christ throughout the earth are convincing proofs that He is the Son of God. Scan the pages of history with me. Go back into antiquity.

We think of a prince, reared in a king's court, surrounded by all the wealth, ease and luxuries of his time. One day he saw two men struggling, one man scourging another. In hot-tempered haste, snatching the biting lash from the aggressor's hand, he literally beat him to death. For that he had to flee, to give up his princely prerogatives, to hide himself in the desert. There Christ met him, broke him, melted him, molded him, filled him, thrilled him, made him one of the mightiest men this world has ever seen. His name is Moses.

There was another man, a fisherman, as unstable as the stormy waters of the sea in which he fished. He was the original backslider, uncertain, quick to speak and just as quick to repent. Lacking deep faith, venturesome, daring to a fault, he plumbed sin's depths one terrible, never-to-be-forgotten night. Christ met him, broke him, melted him, molded him, filled him, thrilled him, and Simon the denier became Peter the rock, the prince of the apostles.

There was another man, harsh, cruel, bitter, with all the hatred, narrowness and bigotry of a religious fanatic. He was a persecutor of the stamp of Torquemada, and had no patience towards any who dared to disagree with him. Murder was in his heart that day. Christ met him, broke him, melted him, molded him, filled him, thrilled him. Next to Jesus Himself there never lived so great a soul as Paul the apostle. He is the world's foremost demonstration of the divinity of Christ.

Centuries later there was a rowdy man, filthy of language, taking malicious joy in hurting other people, as far away from purity and virtue as sin can lead one. Christ met him, broke him, melted him, molded him, filled him, thrilled him. He became a Christian, a preacher, and faced unflinchingly the arrows of endless persecution. He was jailed for twelve long years. In his cell this Christ-possessed John Bunyan wrote *Pilgrim's Progress*, which is, next to the Bible, the sharpest sword at the throat of the Devil.

There was an alien man, of alien birth, of alien race, trained from childhood to disbelieve the New Testament, to deny Christ, to decry Christianity, without religion, without an ideal of service to his fellow men, with no concern for anything except his own personal welfare and prosperity. Christ met him, broke him, melted him, molded him, filled him, thrilled him, saved him, set his poor heart afire with love. Now he is preaching Christ. My own poor life is an answer to the question "**What think ye of Christ?**"

Every Christian, every man, woman and child who has bowed low in penitence, in faith, in confession at Calvary's Cross, would gladly, eagerly, joyously shout, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Now we come to our last thought. We have thought together about Christ's character, about Christ's Cross, about Christ's conquests. Now, my dearly beloved, tell me, nay, tell the angels, tell God, tell Christ, tell the Holy Spirit, tell heaven and earth and hell, what will you do with His claims?

He declares Himself to be the only Saviour.

We read, "**He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.**" He said, "**I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.**" What will you do with His claims as Saviour? You know you need a Saviour. You need forgiveness for your sins. Your transgressions must be blotted out. You must escape from hell and enter heaven. Jesus declares that He is the only way. He tells us that He is the resurrection and the life. You want to be raised from the dead. You want to be reunited with your loved ones in glory. You want to sing and rejoice with God forever. There is only one way. There is only one Name. There is only one hope. There is only one power. Christ is the way. Jesus is the Name. The Cross is the hope. The Resurrection is the power. For nineteen hundred years the claim of Christ as Saviour has brought men out of sin into salvation; out of darkness into light; out of death into life; out of despair into joy; out of defeat into victory.

What will you do with the authority, the ordination, the appointment of the Lord Jesus Christ as your Judge if you refuse Him as your Saviour, if, God forbid, you reject Him as your Saviour? What will you do with Him when you face Him in the judgment, at the resurrection, at the awful bar of God? Jesus said, **“For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son.”** To Jesus Christ has been delegated the awful responsibility of judging the sins and souls of men. Today, He offers Himself to you as your Saviour. Neglect Him, refuse Him, reject Him, and one day you will face Him in all the glory of His awesome majesty as your stern Judge and inexorable executioner. You will see your error. You will acknowledge your dreadful blunder. You will seek to undo your fearful mistake, but, alas, it will be eternally too late.

- Avoid Him as Saviour and you will face Him as prosecutor.
- Accept Him as Saviour and He will one day welcome you to your reward.

We are again face to face with the burning, inescapable, difference-making, destiny-deciding question: **“What think ye of Christ?”**

Do not evade the question. Do not postpone answering it. Listen to your heart. Let your soul give the reply.

- Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God?
- Do you believe that He died for your sins?
- Do you believe that God raised Him from the dead?
- Do you believe that He is at the right hand of God, interceding for you?
- Do you believe that He has the power, the love, the willingness to save you from your sins, to keep you in His grace, to use you in His service?

If you do, there is but one step for you to take. Acknowledge the claims of this Son of God. Accept His Cross. Let His mighty love conquer your heart. Let His wondrous grace transform your life.

You need Christ. Christ offers Himself to you this hour. You will never have a better opportunity, a more auspicious occasion. If your heart and mind echo the testimony of Peter, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God, let your life support the testimony of your soul. Say it, mean it, believe it, do it, for Jesus' sake.

~ end of sermon 6 ~

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