

THE POWER OF CHRIST

SERMONS BY TEXAS BAPTIST PASTORS

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SERMON ONE

THE POWER OF CHRIST

By

Dr. George W. Truett

“We preach Christ crucified”

(I Corinthians 1:23).

Preached by Dr. Truett, May 16, 1937, to an assemblage of perhaps 10,000, at the closing hour of the Southern Baptist Convention, meeting in New Orleans, La.

In recent years the world has been shaken to its foundations. In the aftermath of the most desolating war the world has known, there have been stupendous changes—governmental, economic, industrial, moral and religious. The instability of reconstruction continues in lands large and small. Class is arrayed against class. There has been a revival of the philosophy of terror and hate in every section around the globe. Misunderstandings have grown out of overwrought nerves. In a high-powered world, reminding us that we need help above ourselves.

The question is asked, “Have Christians an adequate remedy for the world—a remedy that is potential enough and dynamic enough to sound the depths of world needs?” A multitude can answer, “Yes, we do have a Gospel that is dynamic and potential enough to reach world needs.”

“I know of lands that are sunk in shame,
Of hearts that faint and tire;
But I know a Name, a Name, a Name,
That can set those lands on fire.”

There is only one Name that can do that. **“Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins.”** **“Neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved.”** Paul states in the Scripture I have read, the adequate Gospel for the whole world, **“We preach Christ and him crucified.”**

The question emerges, How is Christ the power of God unto salvation? A three-fold answer is suggested:

Christ is the power of God in His own Person
Christ is the power in His Gospel
Christ is the power of God in Human Experience

I

Christ is the power of God unto salvation in His own Person

Historic, apostolic, supernatural Christianity stands or falls with the Person of Christ. Fearlessly we take our stand and declare without hesitation that human nature did not and could not produce Christ. If He is man only, why could not the world produce His equal in these centuries? Christ is both God and man—God-man. Never did a hyphen mean as much as it does here. Christ is human as though He had not been divine; and He is divine as though He had not been human.

Here emerges the great doctrine of the incarnation of God in Christ. Paul wrote, “**He who was manifested in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, received up in glory.**” “**Never man spake as he spake.**”

No merely human creature could sustain the weight of His deity. Christ in His words assumed the attributes and perfections of deity. “**Before Abraham was I AM.**”

He affirmed His own Omnipotence, “**All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.**”

Christ affirms His Omniscience. He knows every secret of every heart.

He affirms His Omnipresence, “**Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.**” He is the only adequate Saviour and the rightful master of all men. He is the one judge before whom all the children of men will be assembled. What He said and did would be a sacrilege if He were not what He claimed Himself to be. His words attested His divine character.

Take that great word, “**Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and unto God the things that are God’s.**” When Christ uttered those words, there was presaged a larger day for men the world over. Out of that pronouncement came the great doctrines of religious liberty, and the separation of Church and State, Baptist people assert their allegiance to the principle of a free Church in a free State.

Again He said, “**I am the light of the world.**” Christ sheds light on all questions. There is no light apart from Him. He is the One who can adequately answer questions the world over—east, south, west and north. Some of the questions asked are, “What can we know of God? Does He care?” During the War when I was preaching Christ to the boys in France, they followed me to my sleeping quarters. Again and again they asked, “Does God care?”

Philip cried, **“Show us the Father and it sufficeth us.”** Christ answered, **“Have I been so long with you, and dost thou not know me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; how sayest thou, Show us the Father?”**

He was saying that when we see Him, when we come to Him with broken hopes, He gives us light in place of darkness; when we see Him, we see God. He is God translated into human flesh. When we see Him we see God.

“How can one with a sense of moral failure come into right relationship with God?” is another question that is asked. Jesus is the one Mediator between God and man. **“No one cometh unto the Father but by me. He that climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.”**

Another question is, “What are the proper relations between man and man?” The answer is found in the words, **“Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also unto them.”**

You remember the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Jesus was asked, **“Who is my neighbor?”** And His answer was, “Your neighbor is anybody who needs you.” Where in all the world there are human needs, you are to serve as a neighbor. To follow Christ means to make world citizens of every man wherever he may be.

Christ links men with Him in the program of spiritual emancipation.

Take the question, **“If a man die, shall he live again?”** Does death end all? Is the grave a blind alley? Plato and Socrates were baffled in the presence of death. Christ stands in the marketplace where there is suffering and death, where loved ones slip away, and says to us, **“I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live.”**

Christ is the answer to this big question concerning death. Who else could speak such words of assurance? Could Plato, or Socrates, or Marcus Aurelius, or Washington, or Gladstone?

No, all men are baffled and dumb in the face of such a question until Christ Himself answers fearlessly and frankly. His words attest His divine character. Take that statement, **“Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.”**

That would be a sacrilege on other lips. On the lips of Christ these Words were as honey from the rock of God. How congruous they were on the lips of Christ. Come unto me all men of every land, of every race, and type, and temperament, in the world. It took a divine Saviour to speak such words as those.

Look at the works of Christ. He said, **“Believe me for my work’s sake.”** Let us come to the unfailing test of judging a tree by its fruits. All through His earthly ministry there were out-flashings of deity in the works of Christ.

The shepherds by night came to salute Him as king, and the Magi worshiped Him with their gifts. The years hurried on and the lad of twelve went up to the Temple, the place of worship. He was plied with questions by the doctors of the law and His answers with superlative wisdom baffled them.

During the three short years of His public ministry, wherever He went He had only to speak and the winds obeyed Him and the storms quieted.

- Sickness fled from His ministry.
- Demons had to give up the bodies of men and flee from His presence.
- Death obeyed Christ as the frightened spaniel obeys his master.

Jean Paul Richter said that Jesus lifted empires off their hinges. Lecky said that the three short years of the public ministry of Jesus had done more to soften and regenerate mankind than all the disquisitions of the philosophers and of all the moralists since the world began.

Up and down the world I have found men who asked the baffling questions of life and found the answer in Jesus Christ.

I talked with thousands of university students in Calcutta, and in Shanghai, and in Japan. They asked, "Do you believe in the miracles as recorded in the Bible?" I answered, "I do." The chief miracle of all the ages is Christ Himself. What will you do with Him? They asked, "Do you believe the record of the Virgin Birth of Christ?" I answered unhesitatingly, "I do."

A frontier missionary was asked by a skeptic, "Surely you do not believe in the doctrine of the Virgin birth!"

"I do believe it," answered the missionary.

The skeptic said, "If the loveliest woman in the country were to declare that her son had God for his father, would you believe it?"

The humble missionary answered, "I would believe it if that son were Jesus; if he talked like Jesus; if he lived like Jesus; if he died like Jesus; if he arose from the dead like Jesus."

It is said of Mozart that he brought angels down and of Beethoven that he lifted mortals up. Jesus does both and more. He is Jacob's ladder between earth and heaven. Christ in His own Person is the lodestone of human hearts. Surely in His works, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.

II

**Not only is Christ the power of God in His own Person,
but He is the power of God in His own Gospel**

No wonder that Paul said in Romans 1:16, “**Christ is the power**—*the dunamis, the dynamite*—**of God.**” One will understand why certain false prophets have their inning, that play down high and holy things. One can understand why in pagan lands certain things are taught poor and unlearned humanity. Christ crosses the threshold of every life. The Gospel of Christ confronts every man with the declaration that if he would enter the Kingdom of God he must leave sin behind. Sin is contraband in the Kingdom of Heaven.

The message of the Gospel is, “**Except you repent ye shall all likewise perish.**”

There is room in heaven for every repentant, believing sinner. The Gospel of Jesus Christ cuts its way through all history. Idols fall in every land where this Gospel is preached and where it is accompanied by congruous living. In all lands, China, India, Japan, North America, Africa, Europe, His Gospel wherever preached and wherever accompanied by congruous living is the power of God unto salvation unto every one that believeth. The story of His supernatural birth, of His supernatural life, of His supernatural death, of His supernatural resurrection, touches the hearts of men and brings them in joyful submission to Him.

We need no new Gospel to win the world. Human nature is the same; sin is the same as it has been through all ages. The power of Christ’s Gospel is the same. “**And I if I be lifted up will draw all men unto me.**”

All around the world I have seen the uplifting power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Down in South India among the “untouchables,” where there are one hundred forty thousand Baptists who have followed Christ, I saw the power of Christ’s Gospel manifest. There in the churches, and schools, and hospitals, and mission stations, were men and women clothed in their right minds, giving glorious testimony to the saving power of Christ.

We don’t need a new Gospel—we need to proclaim the one we have. We hear the tragic story of unemployment, of poor wages, of intolerable living conditions. But the chief tragedy of the world is the tragedy of sin. Sin is the unbearable yoke on us.

Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no door of hope? The one agency that can lift civilization off the rocks is the Gospel of the divine, living, dying, risen, reigning Saviour—not diplomacy in legislation, nor treaties, and pacts, and covenants. The Gospel is the only power of God that will lift the world from the depths.

In Glasgow are found these immortal words: “Let Glasgow flourish by the preaching of the Gospel.” We would say, Let New Orleans, let Richmond, let Nashville, and Philadelphia, and New York, and London, and the British Empire, and America, and all lands, flourish by the preaching of Christ’s Gospel.

III

Christ is the power of God in His own Person and in His Gospel

He is also the power of God in Human experience. Paul wrote, “**According to my Gospel.**” The least Christian is saying, “**According to my Gospel.**” Each believer is telling in his life what Christ hath done for him, and is saying, “I have tried Christ; I have come to Him; I am living in His strength and power and peace; I know that He is helping me to live victoriously.”

Christ submitted Himself to the scientific test by experience: “**Come and see.**”

The final dictum of science and of philosophy is “**Come and see.**” Christ says to men in every land, “**Come and see**”—learn, not secondhand, but firsthand. When men submit to this test they can go their way and say, “**I know whom I have believed.**”

Oh, the grandeur of it when men come into the realm of experience! As I have preached in great colleges and universities I have talked with thousands of students.

I remember one such experience when, in the last afternoon of the meeting, conferences continued from three to four and on to five and six and seven o’clock—four hours. Finally, when I picked up my hat and Bible, and started across the campus to the auditorium, another young man said, “I beg your pardon. May I walk with you and tell you my story?”

He said, “My father, a great lawyer, is a skeptic, and my grandfather was a skeptic. I have planned to be a lawyer and follow in their steps. I came to hear your first sermon from a sense of curiosity. I was brought up to laugh at the preachers. I wanted to see your technique, to see if you could get your message across. In your first message I was convinced that you believe what you preach. I am troubled. I want to ask in all sincerity if you believe that Christ can save any man who comes to him.”

I answered, “I stake all on Him.”

“My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus; blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus; name”

Then he asked, “What must I do to find the way out of my distress?”

I replied, “Before I answer your question, I will ask you a question: Do you want to know in your own experience what I have preached as the one and only adequate hope and help for you?”

He put out his hand and said, “I do.”

Then I said, “Call on God.”

He said, “I have no God.”

I answered, “Then pray to God at least in your heart; say to Him, Oh, God, if there be a God, if you care for me I pledge Thee that I will follow Thee if Thou wilt reveal Thyself to me.”

I preached that last sermon, then caught my train home. Ten days later I received from him a letter that was a classic. He said in that letter, "I have found God and I have found Christ as my own personal Saviour. I would cross the continent to grip hands with any man who has had a happier experience than I. I know from my own experience that God is and that He reveals Himself in Christ."

My brother man, here is a challenge of the divine Saviour, a challenge to atheists, infidels everywhere.

"If any man willeth to do His will he shall know of the teaching whether it be of God."

I stake my life and soul for time and eternity on that challenge. We pastors see enough in one week to send us back with breaking hearts, enough to be convinced, more than ever, that Christ is the only hope for distressed men.

I saw one of my businessmen die. I had led him to Christ; I had buried him with Christ in beautiful baptism; I had seen him married to a lovely girl; his children had grown up; his business prospered. When I went into the room, he said, "I wanted to hear you pray again."

I said, "You will be better."

He said, "Yes, I will be better in the morning—I will be well in the morning."

He asked that his wife and three fine boys accept the will of God in this hour of separation. He asked his wife, "Do you accept the will of God?" She answered, "Yes, dear, I accept the will of God."

The three boys knelt and they likewise accepted the will of God as the father had desired. Soon he was gone, but the room seemed filled with a Presence. The wife said, "George is not here, but Somebody is here filling this room with peace and joy."

"Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me."

Men with broken fortunes, men with shattered hopes, may arise out of the ashes of their desolation and say with Job, **"Though he slay me, yet will I trust Him."**

I urge you, let us be sure of Christ. Other things do not matter much. Here is one infinite and important matter that matters everything. We are saved by Him, not by church, not by priest, not by preacher, not by form, or ritual, or ceremony. We are saved by a Person, and that Person is Christ, the Mediator between God and man.

Do you accept Him as Saviour? Do you bow to Him as Lord and Master?

George Washington Truett was born in Clay County, North Carolina, May 6, 1867. Education, Baylor University (A.B., D.D. and LL.D.). Ordained, 1890. Principal of Hiawasse, Ga. High School, 1887-89. Moved to Whitewright, Texas, 1890. Elected as financial secretary of Baylor University, Jan., 1891. Within 23 months raised \$92,000 for the institution (a large amount in those days). Pastor, East Waco Baptist Church, Waco, Texas, 1893-97, at a salary of \$400 a year, while yet a student in Baylor University. Began his work as pastor of the First Baptist Church, Dallas, the second Sunday in Sept., 1897. They had a membership of 715 when he became pastor. Today the membership of his church is 7,605 (the largest in the Southern Baptist Convention). During this period there have been 16,388 additions, under Dr. Truett's ministry at the First Baptist Church, 4,477 of this number coming by baptism.

The total contributions during the past 21 years by the church have been \$3,809,832.46. The total value of all church property is \$1,250,000. Their record Sunday school attendance (Mother's Day, 1926) was 5,039. He is the author of "*We Would See Jesus*," "*A Quest For Souls*," and "*Follow Thou Me*."

Preacher, Texas Baptist Convention sermon, 1916. Preacher, Southern Baptist Convention sermon, 1899. Preacher, Baptist World Alliance sermon in Stockholm, 1923. Preacher in camps in France and England during World War. President, Southern Baptist Convention, 1927-28-29. Elected President of Baptist World Alliance, for a five year term, August, 1934. Chief speaker, Spurgeon Centenary in London, 1934. Preacher, missionary sermon, Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland, 1934. Visited Egypt, Palestine, India, Burma, 1935-6 (All statistics as of Dec. 15, 1937).

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