

Christ Our Redeemer

The Ninth in a Series of Radio Addresses Broadcast on the Westminster Seminary Hour During the Fall of 1936

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LAST Sunday afternoon we began to speak of the second of the three offices which Christ executes as our Redeemer. The three offices are the offices of a prophet, of a priest, and of a king. Last Sunday afternoon we began to speak about Christ's office of a priest.

It became evident at the start that in dealing with Christ's office of a priest we are dealing with the heart of the gospel, because we are dealing with the cross of Christ. By His death, the Bible teaches, Christ made the one and all-sufficient sacrifice for sin. That is the great doctrine of the atonement. Nothing, from the point of view of the Bible, can possibly be more important for mankind than that.

Well, then, in thus exalting the priestly work of Christ, are we depreciating His prophetic work, with which we have been dealing in a number of the preceding talks in this series? That is very far from being the case, and before I go further I want to show you why it is far from being the case; I want to say a few words just now upon the relation between Christ's work as a priest, with which we are now going to deal, and Christ's work as a prophet, with which we have hitherto dealt.

I think I can present the relationship in the fewest possible words by just saying that in Christ's priestly work He died for us, and then in His prophetic work He tells us the story of how He died for us. In His priestly work He did the thing that forms the substance of the gospel, and then in His prophetic work He proclaims the gospel Himself to us. In His priestly work He did the thing that made it possible that there should be a gospel to preach, and then in His prophetic work He actually preaches the gospel to us in order that, through the receiving of the gospel, our souls may be saved.

How foolish, then, it is to say either that Christ's work as a priest or that his work as a prophet could possibly stand alone! No, they stand together. Without His work as a priest there would have been no gospel to preach, and without His work

as a prophet there would have been no preaching of the gospel. Thank God, Christ has done both! He died on the cross that there might be a gospel to preach, and then very sweetly has He brought the gospel Himself to those for whom He died.

Ignoring these simple facts, so plain in the Bible, modern unbelievers are in the habit of telling us that we ought not to be very much interested in the gospel *about* Jesus but ought instead to devote our attention to the gospel *of* Jesus. We need not be interested, they say, in the exact meaning of what Christ did when He died on the cross; we need not be much interested in the question of what is meant when we say we believe in the "deity" of Christ; we need not be much interested in the question of whether His body really came out of the tomb on the first Easter morning; we need not be much interested in the question of whether He will really in any literal sense come again.

People used to be interested in these questions, we are told. They used to set up theories of the atonement; they used to maintain, in particular, that on the cross Jesus died as a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice and reconcile us to God. They used to set up theories regarding the person of Christ; they used to maintain that Christ is God and man in two distinct natures and one person for ever. They used to insist also on one particular view of the resurrection; they used to maintain that on the third day the tomb became empty because the body of the Lord Jesus was raised. They used to insist also on the personal return of Christ; they used to maintain, as though it were very important indeed for our souls, that at the end of the present age we shall see our Saviour face to face.

These things, say the unbelievers about whom I am now speaking, constitute a gospel *about* Jesus. But, they say, we are no longer interested in that gospel *about* Jesus. Instead, we are interested in the gospel *of* Jesus; we are interested in the gospel that He Himself actually preached. We are interested in the way of living in which He walked and in which He

called on His followers to walk. We are interested, in other words, not in a gospel that sets Jesus forth, but in the gospel that He set forth, the gospel that He preached when He walked by the shores of the Sea of Galilee.

If, then, you ask the people who talk in this fashion what that gospel of Jesus, which they cherish in place of the gospel about Jesus, actually was, they will usually tell you, with more or less clearness, that it was a simple proclamation of the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, or a simple proclamation of a kingdom of God that is essentially just the realization of a high social ideal. Let us stop disputing about the meaning of the cross of Christ, they say; let us stop disputing about any other doctrinal questions; and, instead, let us just get up and obey Jesus' commands. That will honor Jesus more, they say, than all the theories of the atonement that have ever been proposed.

People who talk in this fashion seem to think that they are somehow glorifying Jesus more and are somehow getting closer to Him than was done by the people who used to proclaim the old gospel. Are we not getting closer to Christ, they say to themselves, if we preach His own gospel rather than merely a gospel about Him?

But a little reflection will show that that is far from being the case. I may preach the gospel *of* Spurgeon or the gospel *of* D. L. Moody or the gospel *of* Calvin—that is, I may preach the same gospel as that which they preached. But what blasphemy it would be to say that I preach a gospel about Spurgeon or a gospel about D. L. Moody or a gospel about Calvin or even a gospel about Paul! If I should do that, I should be putting these preachers into a position which belongs only to Christ. I may preach the gospel that they preach but I certainly do not preach a gospel that has them as its content. I may preach the gospel of Calvin or the gospel of Paul, but I do not preach Calvin and I do not preach Paul. I preach Christ alone, as they preach Christ alone.

It is from this unique place that these modern unbelievers are dethroning Christ when they say that they are not interested in the gospel about Christ and are only interested in the gospel of Christ. They are willing to admit that Jesus was an excellent teacher and example, and that we cannot do better than repeat His teaching and follow His example. But they have not the slightest inkling of the fact that He is the substance of the gospel. They have not the slightest inkling of the fact that the gospel consists in the good news of the way in which He saved us by His precious blood.

Well, then, in thus insisting, against these unbelievers, that the gospel is a gospel about Jesus, in thus insisting that it is a gospel that has Him as its substance, that proclaims Him, do we mean to say that it is not also a gospel that He Himself preached? We mean nothing of the kind. On the contrary we insist that it is the gospel that He Himself preached. Two winters ago, when we were treating the picture of Jesus in the gospels,* we showed how baseless is the contention of modern unbelief that Jesus kept His own person out of His gospel and merely asked people to lead the same kind of religious life as that which He Himself lived. We saw how pervasive was His presentation of His own person as the divine Saviour and the final Judge of all the earth. We saw how that presentation runs even through the Sermon on the Mount, to which modern unbelievers are wont particularly to appeal. We saw how utterly contrary to all our sources of historical information is this modern notion that Jesus was simply the founder of Christianity because He was the first Christian. We saw how all our sources of historical information represent Jesus as offering Himself to men as the object of their faith.

Do you not see, my friends, what the real state of the case is? It is not correct to say that we Christians proclaim the gospel of Jesus in distinction from a gospel about Jesus. It is equally incorrect to say that we preach a gospel about Jesus in distinction from the gospel of Jesus. The fact is that the gospel about Jesus and the gospel of Jesus are the same. The gospel that Jesus proclaimed was a gospel about Him. It was a gospel

that offered Him as Saviour. It was a gospel that told the good news of His saving work.

He proclaimed that gospel even during His earthly ministry. He offered Himself even then as Saviour. He pointed forward to His atoning death on the cross and to His glorious resurrection. Then, when He had died and risen again, when His redeeming work was done, He told the story of it through the apostles whom He had chosen and through the Holy Spirit whom He sent.

Let us get this thing perfectly straight. Let us not be afraid of repeating it. *Jesus is both the author and the substance of the gospel.* Jesus died for our sins on the cross. The story of His death and of the things that go with it is the gospel. It is the good news. But after Jesus had died and risen again, did He leave it to others to bring that good news to us? Not at all. He brought us the good news Himself.

That is what we mean by saying that when we study now the work of Jesus as a priest, we are not belittling or turning away from His work as a prophet. On the contrary we are just listening to what Jesus as a prophet so graciously tells us about Himself. As a prophet Jesus tells us the story of His priestly work. As a prophet He tells us about the way in which, as the one true priest, He offered Himself once for all as a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice and reconcile us to God, and He tells us about the way in which He is now continually making intercession for us.

Let us hear, then, what Jesus Himself tells us about His priestly work. Let us hear it as it is contained in the whole Bible from Genesis to Revelation.

A priest, we observed in the last talk, is a representative of men in the presence of God. He is a mediator between God and men. He obtains access for men unto God.

Do we need a priest, in that sense of the word? That is the first question. If we do not need a priest at all, then of course all this talk about the priestly work of Christ is without practical importance. If we, in our own right, already have access to God, then we have no need that Christ should enter for us within the veil.

A great many people today take exactly that view of the matter. We are, they say, already children of God, by virtue of the fact that we are

men; we already have free access to God. All that we need is to overcome our fear of God; all that we need is to have presented to us the great truth that God is our Father.

Jesus, they say, has presented that great truth to us, and for that we revere Him. He was the first man to make full use of the privilege which man has as man—the privilege of standing before God without fear, as a child stands before a loving father. Following Jesus we can make use of the same privilege. But that does not mean in the slightest that Jesus is a priest whose intermediation is necessary in order that we may approach God. On the contrary, the thing that Jesus discovered was just the comforting fact that no intermediation was necessary—neither His nor anyone else's. He led the way, and we follow. But we follow in our own right, and we could have led the way ourselves if only we had had the courage. Jesus merely encouraged us to make use of a privilege which was already ours.

That is the way of looking at the matter that dominates most of the nominally Christian churches of the present day. But it is radically contrary to the Bible, and it must be radically rejected by all those who believe the Bible to be truly the Word of God.

According to the Bible all mankind, since the fall, is under the just condemnation of God's law, subject to God's wrath and curse, utterly unable to do any good. All mankind, in other words, is lost in sin. Being lost in sin, men have no right of access unto God. On the contrary they are separated from God by a flaming sword. They are under the awful penalty of God's law, and if that penalty is treated as though it did not exist, God ceases to be God and evil has triumphed over good.

That, my friends, is the situation of fallen man. It is not presented to us just in one part of the Bible. It is presented to us in the whole Bible. From the first book of the Bible to the last, the Bible beats down men's pagan optimism; it opposes the central article of the pagan creed, which is the article: "I believe in man." It takes from us the last vestige of confidence that in ourselves we have any right of access unto God; it teaches us to fear the righteous God, and to stand in terror before the majesty of His offended law.

*See *The Christian Faith in the Modern World*, The Macmillan Company, 1936.

It teaches us, therefore, that if we are to have any access unto God, it can only be through a priest. The priest must be one of us, since He is to be our representative; but He must also be more than merely one of us. If He were merely one of us, He would have no more right of access unto God than we have. Like us He would be a sinner, subject to God's wrath and curse. But even if He were sinless, still if He were merely man He could not possibly bring us to God. Any sacrifice that He might offer for us, any punishment that He might endure for a time in our stead, would, if He were merely man, have at best only a finite value. It could not possibly be accepted instead of the eternal punishment which was the just penalty of the law upon our sin.

If we are to have truly a priest who can bring us to God, it can only be one who is both man and God—man that He might suffer in our stead, God that His suffering in our stead might have worth enough to satisfy the law's demands.

Such a priest, such a high priest, thank God, we have. It is Christ Jesus the Lord. He was, from all eternity, God. Through him the worlds were made. For one purpose did He humble Himself; for one purpose did He become man—that He might be our priest to reconcile us to God, that He might offer on the cross for us sinners a perfect sacrifice to fulfill the law's demands and wipe out the dread handwriting that was against us. Through Him and Him alone we come to God; through His constant intercession alone do we stand in God's presence. In our own right we deserve only to be cast out from God's presence and suffer to all eternity the just punishment of sin. In Him alone we enter without fear unto the throne of God—not God's children in our own right but made God's children through the precious blood of Christ.

What a joy it is to search the Scriptures ever anew to see what God has told us in His Word concerning that priestly work of Christ! It is folly indeed to the men of the world; no pursuit seems to them to be more futile. What time have we, they say, to engage in these theological subtleties? But to the sinner saved by grace how sweet a thing it is to contemplate the cross of Christ! How sweet a thing it is to follow the doctrine of the shed blood that runs like a red

cord through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation! How sweet a thing it is to trace the gradual unfolding of the promise from the time when sin first entered into the world! How sweet a thing it is to behold the fulfilling of the promise in those strangely simple narratives in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John! How sweet a thing it is to explore the divine explanation of the fulfillment in the epistles of Paul! How sweet a thing it is to follow the directions there given as the Spirit applies to us the benefits of what our Saviour did! How sweet a thing it is to contemplate the unity of the sacred Book as it finds its centre in the cross!

May that joy, my friends, be ours as we study the cross of Christ together on these Sunday afternoons! And as we have that joy, may we also have the joy of bringing others with us to the foot of the cross. May God grant that some who listen to these expositions of the Word, and who have not yet found Jesus as their Saviour, may find Him as He is presented to them in the Word of God!

Are you weary and heavy laden? Are you tired of a life of sin? Are you dissatisfied with the world's righteousness which is no righteousness in God's sight? Have you some dread vision of the majesty of God's offended law? Oh, then will you not come to Him who can give you rest? Will you not drink of the water of salvation? Will you not trust Him who died for you?

Ah, salvation is so near! To have it you do not need to ascend into the heights or descend into the abyss.

But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved (Rom. 10: 6-9).

May the Lord Jesus Christ, the risen Saviour, attend through His Spirit the message of His cross, that precious souls may be saved!

MACHEN LEAGUE TO HOLD OVERNIGHT CONFERENCE

AN OVERNIGHT conference, sponsored by the Machen League of Philadelphia Presbytery of The Orthodox Presbyterian Church, will be held Friday afternoon and all day Saturday, September 20th and 21st, at Camp Hilltop, a Y.M.C.A. camp about three miles from Downingtown, Pa.

The sessions, which will operate on standard time, will open with a dinner-meeting at 6 P.M. on Friday, at which time the Rev. Theodore J. Jansma of Baltimore, Md., will speak. This will be followed by a campfire meeting with songs and prayers and an address by Dr. Robert Strong of Willow Grove, Pa., on the theme of the conference: "For the Glory of God."

On Saturday morning the Rev. John P. Galbraith of Philadelphia will teach the Bible class. Three group discussions will follow: The first will be concerned with the membership of the Machen League and the problems of local societies; the second, with lesson material; and the third will be on the subject of the activities in which Machen Leagues are engaged both within and without the church.

One of the highlights of the conference will be the opportunity to meet and study under the Rev. R. Heber McIlwaine, Orthodox Presbyterian missionary to Japan who is now in this country on furlough. Mr. McIlwaine will conduct a class in missions. Other members of the faculty include the Rev. John P. Clelland of Wilmington, Del., and the Rev. James W. Price, the Rev. Charles G. Schaufele and the Rev. John H. Skilton, all of Philadelphia.

Saturday afternoon will be given over to recreation, for which there are excellent facilities at the camp. The officers of the Machen League feel that the conference will give young people an opportunity to enjoy an ideal Christian week-end.

The conference is open to all, and registration, with the fee of \$1.00, should be sent at once to Miss Thelma Ferrier, 2805 Jefferson Street, Wilmington, Del. No registrations can be received after September 14th. Total cost, including the registration fee, will be \$2.50.