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The Teaching of Jesus

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

By the REV. J. GRESHAM MACHEN, D.D., Litt.D.

IT WILL be remembered that we are now dealing with one of the three offices which Christ executes as our Redeemer—namely, Christ's office of a prophet.

That office is, as we observed just at the close of the last talk, very comprehensive indeed. It is not confined even to what Christ has said and done after He became man, but includes even what He said and did before that time. Even in Old Testament times Christ was not only the substance of the gospel but also the author of it. He sent the Holy Spirit upon the Old Testament prophets that they might testify beforehand of Him.

But, after all, it is the post-incarnation work of Christ as prophet of which we are most apt to think when we speak of Christ's prophetic office, and it is that post-incarnation work of which I want to talk to you this afternoon. I want to talk to you of that part of His work as a prophet which Christ our Redeemer carried on after He had become man.

In a majestic passage at the beginning of the Epistle to the Hebrews the coming of the Son of God is put as the climax of that long progress of revelation which has been carried on through the Old Testament prophets:

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son . . .

"In these last days God has spoken to us by His Son"—here this great epistle plainly has in mind that part of

Jesus' execution of the prophetic office that came after the incarnation.

At the start we observe that it may plainly be divided into two great divisions. In the first place there is that part of it which Christ accomplished by His own words and deeds during His earthly ministry, and in the second place there is that part of it which He has carried on after His ascension into heaven through the commission that He gave to His apostles and through the Holy Spirit whom He sent upon the apostles and upon the church.

I want you to examine now the former of these two divisions. I want you to examine that part of Christ's work as a prophet which He carried on during His earthly ministry.

It is customary to speak of that part of Christ's prophetic work as "the *teaching* of Jesus," and there is unquestionably a sense in which this designation is justified. Undoubtedly Jesus did appear to His contemporaries as a teacher, and often when they spoke to Him they addressed Him by that title. In the form of His discourses, in the way in which He impressed what He said upon the minds and hearts of His hearers, He used a truly pedagogic method. It is not surprising, therefore, to discover that in the Gospels the followers of Jesus are commonly called "disciples," which in the simplest sense of the word means "learners." Jesus certainly did appear, when He was on earth, in the position of a teacher surrounded by scholars in His school.

But even when He was most clearly a teacher He was also a prophet. In other cases teaching may be contrasted with prophecy, but not in the case of Jesus. Even when He spoke most quietly, even when He sought to impress upon the minds of His hearers, by patient repetition, the great, simple, fundamental truths regarding the Kingdom of God, He was speaking with a truly supernatural inspiration. He was speaking even then as the direct spokesman of God. He was speaking even then words which God the Father had given Him in supernatural fashion to speak. He was speaking, therefore, as a prophet in the high supernaturalistic sense of that word.

At this point we ought to notice the vast difference between Jesus on the one hand and all other prophets on the other. Other prophets spoke as prophets sometimes; Jesus spoke as prophet always. In the case of other prophets the gift of prophecy was bestowed only in temporary and partial fashion; in the case of Jesus it embraced His whole life upon earth.

Other prophets were to be heard at some times as being truly God's spokesmen; their words were at some times to be treated as being truly the Word of God. At other times they appeared just as fallible men, and their words at those other times were full of the errors that infest all ordinary human speech.

In the case of Jesus no such limitation prevailed. His words were not merely sometimes but always true. They were not merely sometimes but always to be received as the Word of God. In His case there is no distinction between words spoken in some private capacity and words spoken with prophetic inspiration. In His case, every word that was uttered was to be received as a message from God.

It is with that understanding that we approach the teaching of Jesus as it is recorded in the Gospels.

As we do so, we observe that two opposite errors have affected the treatment of the teaching of Jesus by modern men.

In the first place, there is the error of those who have regarded the teaching of Jesus as the sole basis of the Christian religion. We have transcended the Old Testament, they say; and we cannot agree with the doc-

trinal constructions of the New Testament epistles. But we are Christians because we have taken into our souls the blessed teaching of Jesus of Nazareth. We refuse to let any man interpret that teaching authoritatively for us. We refuse to let even the Apostle Paul do so. His epistles may be helpful here and there; even his doctrine of the cross of Christ may contain a kernel of truth for us if we can only translate it into the forms of thought proper to the age in which we are now living. But, after all, what we ought to do ever anew is to go back to the fountain-head. And the fountain-head is found in the teaching of Jesus Himself. We must return to that fountain-head ever anew for the refreshment of our souls, in order that we may not be dragged down to some lower plane of thinking and of living either by the antiquated legalism of the Old Testament or by the well-meant but mistaken theological interpretations of the Apostle Paul.

Such is a very common way of thinking today. It is one of the commonest forms in which the unbelief of our day manifests itself.

We pointed out one difficulty with it when we dealt two years ago with the subject of the inspiration of the Bible. It is refuted by that very teaching of Jesus to which it itself appeals. The plain fact is that Jesus believed in the full truthfulness of the Old Testament, and put that belief quite at the foundation of His teaching, so that if you reject the Old Testament you cannot possibly make good your

claim to be true to what Jesus said. Moreover, if Jesus looked back to the Old Testament, He also looked forward to the New. He appointed apostles and invested them with a truly supernatural authority, in virtue of which they gave the New Testament books to the church. Be perfectly clear about one thing, then: If you reject the authority of the Bible, you cannot possibly hold on to the authority of the teaching of Jesus. To reject one and try to hold on to the other involves a sheer contradiction in which a man cannot possibly rest.

In view of that fact, it is not surprising to find that those who profess to believe in the teaching of Jesus alone, as distinguished from the Bible, do not really believe in the teaching of Jesus as a whole. They believe some things that Jesus says and reject others. They pick and choose within the teaching of Jesus. In other words, it is not Jesus Himself who is their authority, but some criterion that they bring with them to the study of Jesus in order that they may determine what in the teaching of Jesus is true and what is false.

Thus the first thing that is wrong with this exclusive use of the teaching of Jesus, as over against the rest of the Bible, is that it is untrue to that which is rendered by the teaching of Jesus itself.

The other thing that is wrong with it is that it treats Jesus as being simply a teacher. There have been other great religious teachers, and their followers have been called by their names. So we are called Christians, say the men who have adopted the way of thinking that we are now dealing with, because we are the followers of Jesus. We have made Him our guide in the religious life. There are many divergent ways of thinking about God, and there are many divergent types of religious life; but we have chosen to think of God as Jesus thought of Him and we have chosen to live the type of religious life that Jesus lived. That is the reason why we can be called Christians. Jesus was the first Christian, and we are Christians because we are following in His footsteps and are guided by His directions.

Two years ago, in the series of talks which I was then giving, I pointed
(Please Turn to Page 10)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

July 10, 1940

The Teaching of Jesus	1
J. Gresham Machen	
The Plight of Modernism	3
Paul Woolley	
The Bible Doctrine of the Separated Life	4
Johannes G. Vos	
How Modernists Think of Jesus	5
Robert B. Brown	
The Westminster Church of Bend	6
Editorial	7
Prayer—Is It Necessary?	8
Burton L. Goddard	
The Christian Life	9
Oscar Holkeboer	
NEWS	12

tional institutions, such as Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Chicago and Northwestern, were founded under Christian auspices.

We are not even thinking of the progress of the gospel throughout the world and the growth of the Christian church. Without doubt the church has enjoyed phenomenal growth in the past century, although we rather suspect there has been a decline in membership in the past 25 years, due largely to a widespread falling away from the faith. The apparent progress of the church in the past generation may well be a hollow triumph for the church. All too many join the church these days as they would join some purely secular organization.

What we mean by Christian progress is the progress of the individual believer toward perfection. We mean sanctification. Paul says, "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." As the writer to the Hebrews puts it: "Let us lay aside every weight . . . and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher [perfecter] of our faith." It is the progress made by Christian in his effort to reach the Celestial City, as recorded in that splendid book, *Pilgrim's Progress*, by John Bunyan.

The Christian life is not static. We either progress or retrogress. Backsliding is a sin for which the Israelites suffered bitterly and which brings countless regrets to every child of God. "He that putteth his hand to the plow and looketh back is not fit for the kingdom of God." We are told to "remember Lot's wife." Why? Because she disobeyed God's express command; in fleeing from Sodom she looked back and for her disobedience was turned into a pillar of salt. No doubt she had not turned her back on the sins of Sodom.

The aim of the Christian's progress is the complete restoration of the image of God lost by sin. The believer desires to be like God in knowledge, righteousness and holiness. Christ is the express image of God and it should be our aim to be conformed to that image—to be Christlike. This means freedom from sin, not only from its guilt, but also from its pollution. This freedom from sin is accomplished in principle in regeneration, but is actually realized in sanctification. Regeneration is an act of God's grace. Sanctification is a

process which is the result of the believer's response to and coöperation with God's gracious activity. In this life of sanctification we are promised that "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." It is to this same life that Paul refers when he says, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

Every Christian would do well to take inventory of his own spiritual assets and liabilities and see if he has made any real progress in his Christian life. All of us must confess that we are far from the goal.

Letters From the Orient

FROM Mr. Richard Gaffin, Tsingtao, China, dated April 20, 1940:

The days have been flying by since I last wrote, with a full schedule every day either out in the country, or studying, or preparing for our services and preaching in the country or here on Chan Shan Road. The attendance at our Sunday morning service and Wednesday night service continues to hold up at around 25. Our Sunday school for children has suffered a bit because of some anti-foreign statements made by one of the teachers in the day school from which our Sunday school pupils come, but we shall continue as long as a goodly number attend.

As always our country work is the most gratifying, even if not always the most pleasant. The Mr. Liu I wrote about in my January letter has had a time of testing in his sick body and, though he has greatly improved in some ways, he is still far from well and now he has come to the place where, though he prays that he may be strong again, he knows that his only hope in Christ is for forgiveness of sins and eternal life. He told us last week that he knew now that his only hope was in his Lord and that there was no hope anywhere else. It was wonderful to hear this man who, less than a year ago, was without Christ and without hope say, with reference to Christ, "my Lord" in simple faith. There are others in this same village who are proving to be real believers. The Mr. Yiu I wrote of before has been a keen disappointment for he has been drawn back into his old life. We have tried unsuccessfully to see him several times since he has drifted, but last week we saw him again and preached the gospel to him again and urged him to come to our service every Thursday, which we hold in a nearby village. He is plainly convicted of his sin and that, of course, makes his case all the more urgent. He has promised to come and we shall pray that he shall soon know how to trust the Lord to give him the power to say

"no" to his evil companions. Since January 1st we have sold 214 Gospels and Acts and 19 Bibles, and have given out thousands of tracts, and have spent 26 days in the country. Since I last wrote we have added two new villages to our route and find many eager listeners. May the Holy Spirit open their hearts to believe and be saved before it is too late!

The Teaching of Jesus

(Concluded From Page 2)

out how erroneous is this way of looking at the matter. I pointed out in particular how untrue it is to the teaching of Jesus Himself. Jesus Himself presented Himself as far more than a teacher and example. He presented Himself as a Saviour. He presented Himself, not as one who came just to say something to men, but as one who came to do something for them. He presented Himself as one who came to give His life a ransom for many upon the cross.

But if that is so, it follows that the teaching of Jesus is not to be put as more necessary to the Christian than the teaching of the Holy Spirit through the apostles. If Jesus came to save us by something that He did—that is, by His death and resurrection—then naturally the full meaning of what He came to do would not be fully unfolded until the thing was actually done. That is the reason why the eighth chapter of Romans is just as precious to the Christian as is the teaching of Jesus in the Gospels. Jesus did proclaim beforehand the meaning of His death. It is a great error to say that He did not. Especially did He proclaim it in the institution of the Lord's Supper. But He left a great wealth of revelation about it to be brought afterwards through the apostles whom He chose. A man who depreciates the teaching of the apostles, ostensibly in the interests of the teaching of Jesus, is really degrading in terrible fashion the teaching of Jesus itself. He is degrading it by taking it out of its rightful place in the grand sweep of revelation contained in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. And if he is degrading the teaching of Jesus he is also degrading Jesus, the author of the teaching. He is degrading Him by regarding Him merely as a teacher. He is degrading Him by denying to Him His rightful place as Redeemer and Lord.

That error we must, if we are Christians, certainly avoid. We certainly cannot take the teaching of

Jesus out of its connection with the rest of the Bible, as though the teaching of Jesus exclusively could be our authority. To do so is to be untrue to the heart of the teaching of Jesus itself.

But there is also another error that we must avoid. If we must avoid attending to the teaching of Jesus to the neglect of the rest of the Word of God, we must also avoid relegating the teaching of Jesus, or any part of it, to a secondary place.

It may seem strange that any Christian men should have fallen into this latter error, but certainly some Christian men in our day seem to have fallen into it, and the reasoning by which they have fallen into it is fairly clear. Since Jesus, they have said to themselves, came into the world to die on the cross and rise again for the redemption of sinners, since those events of the death and resurrection were epoch-making events, does it not follow that what lies back of those events belongs to an era out of which we have now passed? Can we therefore take the words uttered before those epoch-making events, even the words of Jesus, as being intended directly for our guidance? Must we not regard them as belonging to a by-gone era, and must we not take, instead of them, for our direct guidance only the teaching of the epistles that were written after the redeeming work of Jesus had already been done?

With regard to that argument, it may be said, for one thing, that it runs directly counter to the example of the early Christian church. If one thing is clear to the historian it is that the words of Jesus were treasured by the early disciples, after Jesus' death and resurrection, because they provided direct and authoritative guidance for the church.

Modern skeptical historians have sometimes made wrong use of that observation. They have argued that, because the early church cited words of Jesus for a practical purpose—namely, for the purpose of settling disputes and providing comfort and giving guidance—therefore it was not citing those words with historical accuracy so that we cannot trust the record of Jesus' words which we find included by the early church in our Gospels. I cannot follow that reasoning at all. I cannot for the life of me see why, just because the early church had certain needs with regard to which it sought the guidance of Jesus,

therefore it must have put words into Jesus' mouth for the satisfaction of those needs instead of simply treasuring up the words that Jesus really uttered. But certainly those skeptical historians are right in holding that the early church did regard anything that it held to be a word of Jesus as possessing an immediate authority for the guidance of the church. That is clear in a number of ways. It is clear, for example, through what Paul says and implies about the authority of words of Jesus. From the very beginning the Christian church had, as the completely authoritative guide both of its doctrine and of its life, not merely the Old Testament Scriptures but also the teaching of Jesus.

If we now adopt a different attitude toward Jesus' words we are falling into a vagary of a very deadly kind indeed. In His words recorded in the Gospels, including, for example, the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is telling us—us of the present dispensation—what we must believe concerning God and also how we must live. If we hear His words and do not do them, we also, as well as those to whom Jesus spoke on that mountain in Galilee, are like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand. Only if we hear Jesus' words and do them now are we like the wise man who built his house upon the rock. Jesus' words in the Gospels are certainly intended for the immediate instruction and guidance of His church.

Well, we have been considering Jesus as exercising during His ministry on earth the office of a prophet. Certainly it is true that He spoke always during His earthly ministry as one who was spokesman for God. He was truly a prophet. It is very important that that should be observed.

But if it is important that that should be observed, it is still more important that something else should be observed. If it should be observed that Jesus was a prophet, it is even more important to observe that He was infinitely more than a prophet. The prophets spoke for God; Jesus was God Himself. No difference could possibly be greater than that.

That difference appears all through the Gospels. It appears all through Jesus' recorded words. It appears in the peculiar authority with which He spoke. The prophets said, when they came forward, "Thus saith the Lord"; but no prophet could say, "I say unto you," as Jesus said it in the Sermon

on the Mount. The deity of Christ appears also in direct utterances of Jesus, not only in the Gospel according to John but also in the Synoptic Gospels. Even where it is not made the subject of express exposition, it shines through. Everywhere Jesus is really presenting Himself not only as truly man but also as truly God.

The truth is that Jesus revealed God not only by what He said but also by what He was. The prophets had a message given them about God and from God. They spoke the truth about God. But Jesus was Himself God. He was God come in the flesh. No man hath seen God at any time. But Jesus revealed Him. Men saw Jesus. They saw Him with their eyes. And the one whom they saw was God. What a revelation was there, to be sure!

We too as we read the Gospels have a detailed picture of the life upon earth of one who was truly God. What a wonderful thing that is! How wonderful it is that God should have been pleased to reveal so much! But that revelation is not given us merely in order that we may know what we otherwise could not have known. It is given us in order that we may be saved.

What must we do to be saved? The Bible gives us the answer: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." But how shall we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ unless we know Him? How can we trust Him unless we know that He is trustworthy?

Well, the Bible answers these questions for us. It answers these questions for us by the account of Jesus which it gives in the Gospels. In His recorded words and in His recorded deeds, Jesus is presented as one who is indeed trustworthy. There is where the true uniqueness of the words of Jesus—even within the Bible—is found. The words of the apostles and prophets are true. They are inspired by the Holy Ghost. They are just as much part of God's Word as are the words of Jesus. They present things that are just as important for us to know. But the words of Jesus are unique because the speaker of the words was unique. By every recorded word of His and by every recorded deed, we have presented to us the one who is presented to us as the object of our faith. We are not asked in the Bible to believe in one about whom we know nothing. But we are asked to believe in one who is presented to us in the Gospels

in rich and glorious fullness as one who is worthy to be believed.

Ah, surely such an one can be trusted! If only He were here with us today, how gladly would we lay before Him all our troubles! How gladly would we trust Him when He offers to bring us to God!

Well, my friends, we have Him with us today. His prophetic work is not limited to what He said when He was on earth. After His redeeming work was done, through the cross and the resurrection, He continued to proclaim His gospel through the apostles whom He appointed and whose inspired writings we have in the New Testament. He continues to proclaim His gospel today by the Holy Spirit whom He has sent.

Christ is the substance of the gospel. The gospel sets Christ forth. It presents Christ as Saviour. It tells of His death upon the cross to redeem us from our sins. It tells of His glorious resurrection. It tells of the promise of His coming again.

But Christ is not only the substance of the gospel. He is also the proclaimer of the gospel. He does not leave it to others to offer Him as Saviour. No, He offers Himself. Whatever human instruments He uses, it is He who proclaims the good news of the salvation that He wrought for us at such infinite cost. Will you hear Him, my friends? Will you hear Him this afternoon when He offers Himself to you as the Saviour of your soul?

Orthodox Presbyterian Church News

Presbytery of New Jersey

FAITH CHURCH, *Pittsgrove*: Sixty people attended a Mother and Daughter Banquet, prepared and served by the men of the congregation on May 14th. The gathering was addressed by Miss Thora Jonassen, sister-in-law of the pastor, the Rev. Edward B. Cooper.

Grace Church, Westfield: A fellowship dinner was recently held, with more than 90 attending. Guest speakers were the Rev. Richard W. Gray and the Rev. Henry W. Coray, and the event was made a rallying point for the work of the denomination. . . . A score of members of Grace Church visit the Cremorne Mission in New York City once a

month to present a gospel service to the hundreds of homeless men who assemble there.

A rally was held in Arlington, N. J., on June 9th to increase interest in the work of The Orthodox Presbyterian Church and in the hope that a new local church may be started there. Approximately 55 persons attended and the Rev. Professor R. B. Kuiper preached on the text of John 3:16. Delegations were present from Orange and Westfield, N. J., and from Franklin Square, N. Y. As a result of the rally a Bible class has been started under the direction of the Rev. Richard W. Gray. Eleven persons from the community attended the first meeting. Regular meetings will be held each Tuesday evening.

Presbytery of Ohio

TRINITY CHURCH, *Cincinnati*: The congregation feels that the general assembly was a real blessing to its church life. At the communion service on June 9th, seven new members were received and on the following Sunday one covenant child was baptized.

Covenant Church, Indianapolis, Indiana: The congregation welcomed the Rev. Robert S. Marsden on June 2nd, and during the following week several of the members attended the assembly in Cincinnati. On June 9th the Rev. John H. Skilton was guest preacher.

Presbytery of New York and New England

ON MAY 23rd, Mr. Charles E. Stanton was ordained by the presbytery at Canaan, Maine. The occasion proved an unusual opportunity to reach many who ordinarily do not attend worship services. Approximately 175 persons were present and most of the families of the village were represented by at least one individual. The ordination sermon was delivered by Dr. William P. Green, and the Rev. Arthur Olson propounded the questions and gave the charge. . . . Mr. and Mrs. Stanton are rejoicing in the birth of a daughter on June 4th.

Presbytery of the Dakotas

FAITH CHURCH, *Lincoln, Nebraska*: A recent visit of the Rev. Henry W. Coray did much to stimulate interest in missionary endeavor. . . . Several members of the Machen

League attended the Bible Conference held at Arlington, S. D., during the week of June 17th. On Sunday, June 16th, the members of the Machen League and the pastor, the Rev. Thomas M. Cooper, distributed *The Home Evangel* to many homes in the community.

UNION SENTIMENT GROWS IN SOUTHERN ASSEMBLY

DURING the concluding three days of the 80th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States (southern), meeting in Chattanooga, Tennessee, a number of important decisions were reached.

On Monday, May 20th, consideration was given to the 15 overtures requesting a protest against President Roosevelt's appointment of Myron C. Taylor as his personal representative to the Vatican. The assembly unanimously approved a resolution declaring that this was neither the time nor the occasion to exercise its undoubted right of petition in regard to this appointment, and paused to pray for the President and for a war-torn world.

An overture from the Presbytery of North Alabama occasioned lengthy debate. The overture requested the assembly not to add to the Confession of Faith the proposed new chapters, one on the Holy Spirit and the other on the Love of God and Missions, and not to include "love" among the attributes of God enumerated in Question 4 of the Shorter Catechism. The Committee on Bills and Overtures recommended that the proposed addition to the confession be not approved, and that the *ad interim* committee on proposed revisions be discharged. It was argued that the denomination's indifference to the whole matter indicated the wisdom of such a move. Dr. J. B. Green, speaking for the *ad interim* committee, replied that 69 presbyteries had approved the proposed additions in whole or with only slight modifications, while only 11 had opposed their inclusion in the standards. The proposed additions were referred once more to the *ad interim* committee for further consideration.

The report of the Standing Committee on Evangelism, which declared that the results of the evangelistic