

REMEMBER JESUS CHRIST

"Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel." II Timothy 2:8.

Anything more simple than this statement could hardly be written; but as most of us know, the simplest things are often the most vital. Paul must have realized how easy it is for us to think more of ourselves and our needs than we do of Jesus Christ, hence this exhortation.

One of the deepest desires of a human heart is to be remembered, not forgotten. It cuts to the very depths of our being when we are forgotten by those whom we expect to keep us in mind and heart. No doubt the Lord Jesus had this in view when He promised the Holy Spirit as one who would bring to remembrance all things that He had told His disciples. It was also in His mind when He instituted the Lord's Supper and told them to "do this in remembrance of me."

Every day we should thank God for the possessions of memory. It is one of life's greatest calamities to lose the power of memory. While it is a great blessing in this life to be able to remember, when a person dies without Christ he will discover how his memory will be a curse to him.

The times in which we live demand that we adhere to the admonition of this text. We need to have our minds stirred up by way of remembrance.

When a young man goes out into the world to face the hazards of life, his devoted father will sometimes counsel him to keep certain things in mind. "Never forget," he will say to him, "that I love you and will stand by you." Or, "Never forget the home from which you come or the principles in which you have been brought up." A gracious memory planted in the mind will often hold us when discouragement sweeps over the spirit, or when some temptation threatens to carry us off our feet. It was with such an idea that Paul counseled young Timothy. He said, "Never forget Jesus Christ risen from the dead."

Christ is embedded in the world's history. Bushnell said, "It is easier to untwist all the beams of light in the sky and to separate and expunge one of the primary colors, than to get the character of Jesus, which is the true gospel, out of the world." History with Christ left out is like an astronomy with the stars omitted, like a geology with the rocks thrown away, like a botany with the flowers forgotten. Neither Gibbon, nor Green, nor Hume, nor Macaulay could write a history with Christ left out. All history before Bethlehem converged toward Him; all history since Calvary diverges from Him. History is His story. The names of historians may be forgotten, but the name that is above every name shines like a sun above the landscapes of the world.

Christ has power over nature. When the water "blushed into wine at His presence," when He walked over the sea as if it were solid pavement at His feet, when the waves crouched like whipped curs at His feet, when He withered the fig tree, He was simply filling the physical universe with Himself and asserting His superiority over it.

Jesus Christ cannot be forgotten while art remains art, for the greatest pictures of the artists are those of Christ.

Christ is the keynote of the world's enduring music. Beethoven, so deaf he could not even hear his own music, has ravished the ears of thousands with his symphonies, and makes Christ live in his "Mount of Olives." Bach, sometimes called the founder of German music, has given to the churches two hundred sacred cantatas and in his "Ascension" rooted Christ more deeply in the world's best music. Bach became blind just before his

death; and after his death and burial, they dug up his bones and scattered them to make way for a new road through the church yard. His widow was permitted to die a pauper. Posterity forgot the musician, but it cannot forget the Christ of whom he sang.

The literature that abides is filled with His name. Living literature is dynamic with the living Christ. He never wrote a book, but more than sixty thousand separate volumes have been written about Him, and His story is told in more than eight hundred languages and dialects of the world. If you were to take out of the libraries the books which have been inspired by His life and words and works, you would certainly have left many dust-covered shelves. It is the voice of Him, who spake as never man spake, that speaks in the literature of the world.

Jesus Christ is remembered in the political world. Kings have been exalted and dethroned, kingdoms established and uprooted, thrones abdicated, philosophies created, theologies initiated, reforms agitated, and the attitude of men toward it all has turned entirely on their attitude toward Jesus Christ.

Who is the Jesus Christ whom the text admonishes us to remember? That is the question all nations and all peoples have asked for more than nineteen hundred years, and still are asking. Numerous nations unite today in such a mighty chorus of interrogation about the character, the career, and the finality of Jesus Christ as has not been produced since the angelic chorus sang its peace song beneath the starlit skies of Bethlehem.

Jesus Christ is the world's most unforgettable character. To think of life without Him is to imagine salt without savor, or a circumference without a center. To some He may be a "back number," but to those who know Him best, He is the contemporary Christ, as up-to-date as today's problems, as modern as our present necessities, and as new as the most recent happenings of life.

The world cannot forget Christ. He is the central fact in our history, the turning point of time. His advent is the one event by which every man and every movement are dated. He is embedded in the world's history, regnant in the world's art, vocal in the world's music, eloquent in the world's literature, and vital to the world's life. If there is anything Christian in our civilization or anything progressive in our history, we owe it all to Christ. Whatever is best in our history, whatever is wisest in our learning, whatever is most up-lifting in our laws, and whatever is most lasting in our achievements, we owe to Him. We must not forget Him because of His matchless name, His saving grace, and His conquering power.

The text is basically an old minister's exhortation to a young preacher. The old man is in prison awaiting release in martyrdom. He greatly desires to see his young friend once more before he dies; but fearing that may not be granted, he writes him a farewell letter filled with loving admonition and fatherly advice. This letter is the last inspired word which appears from Paul's pen. It breathes fatherly affection, speaks with the wisdom of experience, and admonishes by the spirit of God.

The old man has divided his life--half in the service of Satan, half in the service of Christ. He was the type of man who gave himself unstintedly to any cause to which he lent his adherence. Unwittingly he had served Satan for more than thirty years of his life, but he had served him with passion and devotion. He had been consumed with a zeal, though it was not in accordance with knowledge. He had committed all his faculties to the service which he later realized was utterly abhorrent to God. Then there came the great Damascus experience in which he realized at once his need of Jesus and the character of his sins. Then he gave himself in a great surrender of faith and devotion of service to the Lord Jesus.

From that hour, the reversal of his life was complete. Now, as before, he gave all in an intensity of devotion to the new Master. He declares that he suffered the loss of all things for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, his Lord; that in perils and pains, in betrayals and ostracisms, in exiles and prisons, he had paid the penalty of a devotion to Christ which knew no limits save the limits of his capacity. He is well fitted then by experience to give counsel to a young man who stands, as did Timothy, at the threshold of life.

The very words of our text constitute a challenge to lift the soul by perseverance of faith above all that is sordid, sinful, and self-sufficient in life. He is the one person able to demonstrate to men the supreme glory of life touched with the heavenly quality by participation in the divine nature. It is altogether a fitting exhortation to a young man upon the threshold of life, facing as he does there the lure, the temptations, and the appeals of the world, to "remember Jesus Christ."

He is God, Creator of all things; He is the Creator and the recreator of men. He is the Giver of light and of life. He is God become flesh, clothing Himself in the body of man, bending beneath the burdens of men, harassed by the temptations of men, bound by the limitations of men, manifesting himself in the life experiences of men. So when Jesus walked through the world, humanity lifted up its head with a new sense of dignity, a new consciousness of God, and a new yearning after life.

I. Remember the Incarnate Christ.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God." "In the beginning!" Those words teach His eternity. "And the Word was with God!" Those words teach His equality. "And the Word was God!" Those words teach His deity. "He was in the beginning with God." Those words teach His pre-existence.

John 1:14 says, "And the Word became flesh, and tabernacled among us." He was not flesh back in creation days when the earth and seas were made. He was not flesh when the first ray of light shone, when the first fire burned, when the first river flowed, when the first bird sang, when the first flower bloomed, when the first rose opened wide its rubied heart, when the first lily bared its white bosom, or when the first wind blew. "For by Him were all things and by Him all things consist." (Colossians 1:15-17).

He who was loved of God before the foundation of the world accepted God's choice of Mary as the channel through which He, the pre-existent One, should become flesh and dwell among men. So one day in Bethlehem's manger, the virgin Mary, who had never known a man, went down into that mysterious realm of motherhood and came back pale and faint holding in her arms the child Jesus, the Son of God and the Saviour of men. His birth into our world, contrary to the natural laws of life, was a translation at the same time it was an incarnation. It was a transfer of His person from a previous condition of existence to this earthly one. Before the incarnation Jesus was God's instrument in creation. During incarnation Jesus was God's instrument in redemption. His incarnation meant that He was embodied in human flesh, demonstrated in human life, exemplified in human action, and crystalized in human form.

We will have no trouble with the doctrine of the incarnation when we think of: --

1. The character of God.

The incarnation was not an incident, or an accident, or an expedient, or a convenience. It was a divinely ordered event toward which God's whole creation moved. "He did not come sooner, because the time was not ready; he did not come later, because the time would be past." But when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman. God came to man in creation; He comes with man in the

incarnation. He is no longer the God over us, but the God with us. The Word that in the beginning was God, becomes God in form of flesh. The Infinite One who inhabits eternity now inhabits humanity. God is with us. Immanuel is His name.

2. The character of Christ.

The type of work He came to do could not be done by just any kind of man. A supernatural work requires a supernatural Being. Only the God-man could do God's work. He became sin without becoming a sinner. He could not be a Saviour and a sinner at the same time. He was "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." He has been the mightiest factor in our world's history, politically, socially, intellectually, morally, and spiritually.

3. The character of man.

Take man at his worst or take him at his best, and there is something wrong with man. And Jesus Christ entering human nature has changed it and transfigured it and glorified it. Only an incarnation could work the transformation He has wrought in human life.

Sin is rebellion and transgression and deception and negation and omission and confusion and separation. It trails its slimy path across the highways of the world and man slips and falls and wallows in it. It makes of Cain a murderer, of Jacob a trickster, of Abraham a liar, of David an adulterer, of Thomas a doubter, of Peter a denier, of Judas a betrayer.

Its flaming lust produces war; and war is the crucifixion of civilization, the prostitution of science, the tragedy of humanity. It withers the fair flowers of modesty and purity and chastity, and turns tranquil domesticity into a hell on earth. It undermines health, turns intellectuality into imbecility, and shuts the door of hope and heaven in a drunkard's face. Sin is separation from God, and only God incarnate can conquer it and bring the sinner home. Unless God comes into human flesh, all flesh slips and falls and rots away.

The character of God, the character of Christ, and the character of man make a three-fold demand for the incarnation. And the aged preacher admonishes his son in the gospel to remember the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

II. Remember the Dying Christ.

The Christ that clothed Himself in fashion as a man, became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. The incarnation brought dignity to man but disgrace to Christ. He was put to death like a common criminal and on a wooden cross uplifted to the vulgar gaze of men.

The preacher that remembers Jesus Christ cannot forget His death. He may yield to exhortations to "preach Christ" and convince himself that he is preaching Christ when he is preaching Christ as an ethical teacher, or a spiritual arbiter, or a winsome personality, or a gentle spirit. He does not preach Christ unless he preaches the death of Christ. He must preach Christ on the cross. "God's arm is revealed at the tomb, but His heart is revealed at the cross," and it is the heart of God that reveals the love of God.

On His cross the problem of human redemption was solved, the majesty of the law was vindicated, every question answered, every foe defeated, every fear quenched, every hope met, every longing fulfilled, every sorrow assuaged, and every promise kept.

III. Remember the Risen Christ.

There are many ways in which we can think of Christ. We can think of Him as a great teacher. He was a great teacher, greater than all others put together. "Never man spake like this man." We can think of Him as an example. He is this, and there is none to compare with Him. We can think of Him as dying for us on the cross. We shall ever do so. Yet this view of Him must not stand in isolation from the resurrection. We must think of Him as raised from the dead. The splendor of His earthly life and the agony of the cross fade in the glory of His risen life. It is this Risen One that we need at every point in our experiences, and especially when we come to cross the dark river at the last.

The winning theme of the first century was "Christ and the Resurrection," and the same theme will win in the twentieth century. A limp and lifeless man on the cross with a spear wound in his side and a thorn wound in his brow and a humanity wound in his heart may well bring upon himself the contempt of a mocking world; but if three days later he breaks through the doorway of a fast-closed tomb and is seen alive for forty days, and six weeks later three thousand recruits rally in one day to his invisible leadership, his hopeless cause becomes the hope of his followers and the challenge of the world. Christ lives, and that fact constitutes the glory of Christianity and fulfills the desires of all nations. In remembering Jesus Christ, we must remember that He is alive forevermore. "Never forget Christ risen from the dead."

Remember Christ where? Shall it be in church only, under the inspiration of stately services, sacred songs, and scriptural sermons? The fellowship of the sanctuary is truly a blessed thing. We gather where

"Heaven comes down our souls to greet,
And glory crowns the mercy seat."

But Christ is more than the Christ of the sanctuary. He is the Christ of the daily life. Remember Him in your business. Remember Him in your office. Remember Him in your home. Remember Him in your pleasures. When shall we remember Christ? In youth, in maturity, and in old age. He will not forsake you then. He will be waiting to receive you when the portals of the next world open to you.

"E'en down to old age all my people shall prove,
My sovereign, eternal, unchangeable love;
And when hoary hairs shall their temple adorn,
Like lambs they shall still in My bosom be borne."