

REMEMBER JESUS CHRIST

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

The test of greatness is whether the world is different because one has lived. Judged by this test Jesus Christ is the world's greatest character, for His coming has done more to change the world for good than any other or all others combined.

One of the deepest desires of the human heart is to be remembered, not forgotten. 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."

Jesus is not likely to be ignored -- except by His friends. He never travelled extensively, nor organized a revole, nor wrote a book. He never initiated a reform nor commanded an army, nor captained a ship, nor governed a commonwealth. His relatives thought He was a fool, and His enemies thought He was a politician. Herod thought He was the ghost of John the Baptist, and others thought He was the reincarnation of Elijah. He is the most misunderstood, the most misinterpreted, the most discussed man who has ever lived.

The world cannot forget Jesus Christ. He 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." Renan, who was denied the privileges of his professorship in the University of Paris on account of his infidelity, admits that "All history is incomprehensible without Him. He created the object and fixed the starting point of the future faith of humanity, and whatever may be the surprises of the future, Jesus will never be surpassed."

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. If Herodotus was the father of history, Jesus Christ is its theme. "In the beginning was the Word." All history before Bethlehem converges toward Him; all history since Calvary diverges from Him. Newell Dwight Hillis once said, "History is no mausoleum where dead men lie buried; it is a granary in which are stored the choicest spirits of all ages." It is more. It is a resummoning of the choicest spirits of all ages for a tardy recognition at the hands of those who without them can never be what they ought to be. And at the head of them stands Christ.

The world does not need to be exhorted to remember Christ. It cannot forget Him while it remembers history. History is His story. The names of historians may be forgotten--Thucydides and Xenophon and Caesae are mere blurs on the horizon of history -- but the name that is above every name shines like a sun above the landscapes of the world.

He is everywhere in nature. Christ is in nature and above it. When the water "blushed into wine at His presence," when He walked over the sea as if it were solid pavement under 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.

He is a poor astronomer who fails to locate the Star of Bethlehem; a poor biologist who

misses the Life; a poor geologist who overlooks the Rock of Ages; a poor horticulturist who is unfamiliar with the True Vine; a poor philanthropist who is unacquainted with Him who went about doing good; a poor zoologist who cannot lead the way to the Lion of the Tribe of Judah; a poor theologian who does not know that Christ is all and in all.

Jesus Christ cannot be forgotten while art remains art. The great pictures are pictures of Christ. The great artists -- Angelo, da Vinci, Durer, Raphael, Rubens, and Titian -- have gifted Christ with art immortality and glorified Christ in the world's best paintings. Bare indeed would be the walls of the world's art galleries without "The Annunciation," "The Transfiguration," "The Last Supper," "The Descent from the Cross," "The Resurrection," and "The Ascension."

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 into 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 churchyard. His widow was permitted to die a pauper. Posterity forgot the musician, but it cannot forget the Christ of whom he sang.

Handel, discouraged at his attempts to give opera in London, left London for Dublin, and while in Dublin wrote the sacred oratorio which is known round the world as the "Oratorio of the Messiah." Now audiences in England and America rise to their feet when "The Messiah" is sung just as they do for "God Save The King" and "The Star-Spangled Banner." Handel was a failure as a musician until he linked his name with the name that is above every name. The world cannot forget Jesus Christ until great city choirs stop singing the "Hallelujah Chorus."

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.

And to this interrogation, what is to be our answer? Shall we say as some little preachers in big cities are saying: "Jesus is the spirit of self-sacrifice redeeming us from selfishness." Or shall we say as some soft psychologists are saying: "Jesus was a

Palestinian idealist, with a soft touch of a woman, speaking always with the wooing note -- often with the cooing note -- and ever unwilling to hurt the feelings of anybody." Or shall we say with some half-baked religionists of our day: "Jesus was a tall, ethical teacher, like Confucius, a sweet harmless soul who taught gentleness and resignation like Buddha, or submission like Mohammed." Or shall we say, "Jesus was a good friend to the poor, the sick, the sorrowing, but He has nothing to do with modern business." Or shall we say, "Jesus was a mild-eyed fanatic dying for a mistaken cause." No, we shall say, "Jesus is the Son of God, Redeemer of man, the King of willing subjects, the Lord and Master of all believers, the true cosmopolitan of the ages."

This then is our first response to Paul's exhortation to remember Jesus Christ -- the world cannot forget Him. 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.

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 experience 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 Incarnation Of 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. Then it is not just poetry and rhetoric and fiction when we say: "When the Lord of power determined to forsake His royal chariot and to alight on this earth, He undressed himself first. He gave to the clouds His bow. He gave to the sky His azure mantle. He gave to the stars His jewels. He gave to the sun His brightness, and received instead of these the strange homespun clothes of one who had not where to lay His head." 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 fulness 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 threefold demand for the incarnation. And the aged preacher admonishes his son in the gospel to remember the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

II. Remember The Death Of 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 preached 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 Resurrection Of Christ.

All night long Friday night, all day long Saturday, and till early on Sunday morning, His body was in the tomb. The tomb was sealed and soldiers were placed there to guard it. They all thought He was dead forever. To them who watched, it was the last word, the final scene, a horror of disaster and defeat. But early on Sunday morning, when the angel of the Lord came down, the soldiers fell like dead men, the seal was broken, and the stone rolled away from the tomb. Jesus arose from the dead, laid the grave clothes aside, and walked out of the tomb a living Christ and Lord and King, triumphant over death and the grave. Herod could not kill Him, Satan could not seduce Him, death could not destroy Him, and the grave could not hold Him.

The incarnation sets forth the holiness of Christ and saves the incarnation from indignity; the crucifixion sets forth the love of Christ and saves Calvary from tragedy; the resurrection sets forth the power of Christ and saves Christianity from futility.

The winning theme of the first century was "Jesus and the Resurrection", and the same theme will win in the twentieth century. A limp and lifeless man on a cross, with spear-wound in side, and a thorn-wound in brow, and humanity-wound in 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 seel 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 forever more.

Remember Jesus Christ where? Shall it be in church only, under the inspiration of stately service and song? The fellowship of the sanctuary is truly a blessed things. We gather where

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

Our souls know the truth of the sone we sing:

"Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love;
The fellowship of kindred minds
Is like to that above.

Before our Father's throne,
We pour our ardent prayers;
Our fears, our hopes, our aims are one,
Our comforts and our cares.

We share our mutual woes,
Our mutual burdens bear;
And often for each other flows
The sympathizing tear.

When we asunder part,
It gives us inward pain;
But we shall still be joined in heart,
And hope to meet again."

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 home. Remember Him in your pleasures. When shall we remember Jesus Christ? In Youth, in maturity, and in old age. He will not forsake you then, but when the portals of the world to come open He will be waiting to receive you.

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