

"WHAT THINK YE OF CHRIST?"

Matthew 22:42

The ideal man has not yet been discovered. Humboldt, who traveled far, saw much and felt more, recorded in his diary this sentence, "The finest fruit earth holds up to its Maker is a man." It is here implied that this finest fruit is the ideal man. But Humboldt did not affirm that he had ever found this man. The ideal man has not yet been discovered among those who were mere men. No one of our noblest men was a spotless sun; no one reached sinless perfection. From all our loftiest specimens of manhood I turn dissatisfied to Jesus Christ, and in Him I find the ideal becomes actual, the dream real, and the hope fruition. He is the pearl and crown of humanity; He is the loftiest specimen of manhood the human race has ever seen; He is the fullest manifestation of divinity God has given the world; He is the effulgence of God's glory, and the very image of His substance.

The setting of our text is instructively suggestive. For some time in His discussion with the Pharisees, our Lord had been acting on the defensive. Both Sadducees and Pharisees had been asking Him questions. His answers put the Sadducees to silence, and their confusion greatly gratified the Pharisees. It is now their turn to experience similar confusion from the celerity and dexterity of His replies. Never was there so skilful a debater as Jesus Christ. He was masterful in His clarity of thought, simplicity of speech, and purity of motive.

In the case before us, He passes from the defensive to the offensive and He convicts Scribes and Pharisees of entertaining false views of the Messiah. They had disputed His claims as a spiritual Messiah, and He now shows the irreconcilable contradiction between their views of Him as a mere worldly Messiah, and the teaching of their own prophetic Scriptures. They were silenced and even stunned by His rapid, aggressive, and unanswerable attack. We are significantly told that "No man was able to answer Him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask Him any more questions."

"What think ye of Christ?" This is the broadest, deepest and loftiest question ever put to the human race. This is the question of all the ages. For more than 1900 years men have been reading, thinking, and talking about Christ. I suppose there is no one here who has not thought more or less about Christ. You have heard about Him, and read about Him, and heard men preach about Him. The question of our text is a proper one for one man to ask another. If I were to ask you what you think about some prominent man, you would already have your mind made up about him, and in most cases you would not hesitate to express your opinion. Then, why should not people make up their minds about the Lord Jesus Christ, and take their stand for or against Him? If you think well of Him, why not speak well of Him and enlist others on His side?

In this congregation there are no hearers unwilling to admit that Jesus Christ is at least a great historic character. They frankly admit that He was born at Bethlehem, brought up at Nazareth, and crucified at Jerusalem. They are entirely correct in the outward features of His earthly career, but they have comparatively little conception of the spiritual significance of His wonderful life and His vicarious death. Many fail to see that His was a unique life, and that it was lived on earth by Him, that it might be lived in some measure over again on earth by us. Until the historic Christ is translated into a personal Saviour and Master, controlling our acts, our words, and our thoughts by His matchless example, His unique personality, and His spiritual purity, there is for us no historic Christ worthy the name.

Dr. Geikie, in his "Life of Christ," calls attention to the fact that the Jews confess great admiration for the character and words of Jesus; that the Mohammedan world gives Him the high title of Messiah; that the myriad-minded Shakespeare paid Him lowly reverence, and that men like Galileo, Kepler, Bacon, Newton, and Milton set the name of Christ above every other name. He also reminds us that Jean Paul Richter tells us

that "the life of Christ concerns him who, being the holiest among the mighty, the mightiest among the holy, lifted with His pierced hands empires off their hinges, and turned the stream of centuries out of its channel, and still governs the ages." Spinoza, the great philosopher, and son of Portuguese Jews calls Christ the symbol of divine wisdom. Herder, the illustrious German thinker, broad scholar, and exquisite genius said: "Jesus Christ is in the noblest and most perfect sense the realized ideal of humanity."

Man is a thinking creature. Grand themes are presented for his meditation in government, in nature and in revelation. The expansion of an idea often produces a great life. Thoughts develop, determine, and declare character. They kindle desires, control conduct, and fix habits. They measure the man, settle the standing and determine the destiny of the individual. "What think ye of Christ?" is the all-important question to the human soul. Certainly the answer to it has tremendous influence upon our lives. What we think of Christ determines our living faith, our daily morals, and our eternal destiny. No more important or pressing question has ever been put to the mind, to the heart, and to the conscience of man.

There are some who never think of Christ at all. Many deem it unnecessary to have fixed thoughts about Him. To think of Christ is a personal duty. To think rightly about Christ is a matter of transcending importance. What do you think of the character of Christ? For more than nineteen centuries His character has withstood the most rigid investigations of both friends and enemies. No man can convict Him of the slightest sin of omission or commission. He is more than ever the crystal-clear and heaven-pure Christ. His death on the cross was voluntary, vicarious, and victorious. His mighty achievements have girdled the globe. His magnificent victories have changed the lives of men, the activities of homes, the affairs of nations and the course of this world.

"What think you of Christ is the test
To try both your state and your scheme;
You cannot be right in the rest
Unless you think rightly of Him.
As Jesus appears in your view,
As He is beloved or not;
So God is disposed to you,
And mercy or wrath is your lot."

Jesus wants us to accept Him as the supreme teacher, to think of Him as the revealer of God the Father, as the object of our faith, as the transformer of our lives, as the conqueror of sin and death.

I should like to ask you, "What think ye of Christ?" What do you think of Him as a teacher? He spake as never man spake. What do you think of Him as a preacher? He could hang truth upon anything. Yonder is a sower, a fox, a bird, and He gathered the truth around them so that you cannot see either one of them without thinking of what Jesus said. What do you think of Him as a physician? No case was ever brought to Him but what He was a match for it. He had but to speak the word, and disease fled before Him.

But these are not the points I wish to consider. Let us go to those who knew Christ, and ask what they thought of Him. If you want to find out what a man is nowadays, you inquire about Him from those who know him best. I do not wish to be partial; we will go to His enemies, and to His friends. We will ask them, "What think ye of Christ?" So we shall go:

I. To His Enemies.

I ask you to consider yourself in the jury-box while I call upon those who were the

enemies of Jesus to tell us what they think of Him. Among the witnesses, let us call upon:-----

1. The Pharisees.

We know how they hated Him. Hear what they say! "This Man receiveth sinners." What an argument to bring against Him! Why, it is the very thing that makes us love Him. It is the glory of the gospel. If He did not receive sinners what would become of us? In fact, this accusation is one of the greatest compliments that was ever paid Him. When He was hanging on the cross they said, "He saved others, but He could not save Himself and save us too." Yes, Pharisees you have told the truth for once in your lives.

2. Caiaphas.

"Caiaphas, you were chief priest when Christ was tried; you were president of the Sanhedrin; you were in the council-chamber when they found Him guilty; you yourself condemned Him. Tell us; what did the witnesses say? What testimony was brought against Him? On what grounds did you judge Him?" Caiaphas says, "He hath spoken blasphemy." Yes, all that they had against Him was that He was the Son of God.

3. Pilate.

Pilate, this One was brought before you; you examined Him; you talked with Him face to face; what do you think of Christ? Pilate said, "I find no fault in Him." Such is the testimony of the man who examined Him! A man rushed up to Pilate with a message. He tore it open and his face turned pale as he read, "Have thou nothing to do with this just man, for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of Him." It was the testimony of Pilate's wife concerning Christ.

4. Judas.

Judas, you knew the Master well; you sold Him for thirty pieces of silver; you betrayed Him with a kiss; you saw Him perform those miracles; you were with Him in Jerusalem. What do you think of Him? "I have betrayed innocent blood." Yes, those who were guilty of His death put their testimony on record that He was an innocent man.

5. The Centurion.

He was present at the crucifixion. He had charge of the Roman soldiers. He told them to make Him carry His cross; he had given orders for the nails to be driven into His feet and hands, and for the spear to be thrust into His side. Tell us, what do you think of Christ?" He cries, "Truly, this was the Son of God."

6. The Robber.

At first he railed upon Him and reviled Him. But then after thinking it over he said, "This Man hath done nothing amiss."

7. The Demons.

In Mark we have the unclean spirit saying, "Jesus, thou Son of the most high God." They believed and trembled.

II. To His Friends.

1. John the Baptist.

Let us call that prince of preachers, the forerunner. "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." This is what John the Baptist thought of Him. "I bear record that He is the Son of God." No wonder he drew all Jerusalem and Judea to him, because he preached Christ. And whenever men preach Christ, they are sure to have followers.

2. Peter.

Let us bring in Simon Peter, who was with Him on the mount of transfiguration, who was with Him the night He was betrayed. Tell us what you think of Christ. You denied Him once, saying with a curse that you did not know Him. He calls Him "both Lord and Christ." On the day of Pentecost he said, "God hath made that same Jesus both Lord and Christ." And tradition tells us that when they came to execute Peter he felt he was not worthy to die in the way His Master died, and he requested to be crucified with the head downward.

3. John.

He knew more about Christ than any other man. He had laid his head on the Saviour's bosom. He had heard the throbbing of that loving heart. Look into his gospel if you wish to know what he thought of Him. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God." John 1:1. Also he calls Him, "The bright and morning star."

4. Thomas.

You doubted Him, Thomas. You would not believe that He had risen, and you put your fingers into the wound in His side. What do you think of Him? Thomas says, "My Lord and my God."

5. Saul.

Saul was persecuting Christians, and was one of the worst enemies of the followers of Jesus. He had an interview with Him on the Damascus highway. A few years later we hear him say, "I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dross that I may win Christ."

6. Angels.

They saw Him in the bosom of the Father. They saw Him leave the throne and come down to the manger. Listen to their song on the plains of Bethlehem, "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."

7. God the Father.

When Jesus came up out of the water after being baptized by John, God the Father spoke and said, "This is my beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased." God the Father thinks well of the Son. And if God is well pleased with Him, so ought we to be. If the sinner and God are well pleased with Christ, then the sinner and God can meet. Will you not believe this last and best of all witnesses? Hear His call to "Come unto Him." Will you not think well of this Saviour? Will you not believe in Him? Will you not trust in Him with all your heart and mind? Will you not live for Him?