

THE WORLD'S CRY FOR CHRIST

"Sir, we would see Jesus." John 12:21.

Blind to beauty and deaf to music must be the one who can read unmoved the story of the visit of the Wise Men to the cradle of the infant Christ. From the east they came asking, "Where is He that is born King of the Jews?" They bowed before the baby in the cradle, offered their gold and frankincense and myrrh in worship, and then vanished from sight.

Now pass over all those years of love and ministry spent by the Son of God among men. They are nearly over now. He has come to the last week. He has His last tour over the hills of Judea and along the river Jordan and beside the Sea of Galilee. The clouds of hatred which had been gathering fast were about to break over His head. The disciples were appalled by the approaching storm, dazed and helpless in the presence of impending disaster.

The darker the night, the brighter the stars seemed to be. Through a rift in the clouds there shone for a moment a radiant star. A little company of Greeks crowded about Philip, that quiet but faithful disciple, and the leader of them said, "Sir, we would see Jesus." That was the light that flashed through the gloom.

The Magi came at the beginning of the life of Jesus, the Greeks came at the end. The Magi were the representatives of the East, the Greeks were the representatives of the West. To His cradle men came from the East, to His cross men came from the West. Kipling said,

"Oh, East is East and West is West,
And never the twain shall meet."

But they did meet and still meet in Jesus.

Who were these Greeks who came and found Philip, and expressed their desire to see Jesus? We do not know. They appeared out of the mists of obscurity, stood for a few minutes in the light of the gospel stage, and then disappeared into the mists again. That is all we know about them. But all the tides of time cannot drown the memory of them, for they are immortalized by the words, "We would see Jesus." They were not moved simply by curiosity to see the One with whose name the Jewish world was ringing, and about whom such strange stories were flying. If they had desired simply to look at Him, they would not have approached Philip with their request. With a reverent interest in Him about whom they had heard so much, they wanted to have a personal interview with Him. That is what we mean when we say we want to see somebody.

It is a little disappointing that we do not know what became of those Greek inquirers, or what impression was produced on them by seeing Jesus and talking with Him. It is significant, however, that the Greeks were the first, as a people, to embrace Christianity. It is to Grecian intellect and scholarship that we are indebted for the inestimable legacy of the Greek New Testament, and the noblest works of the early fathers of the church. We must not think of these inquirers as untutored and uncouth, but as men who were cultured, and whose outlook was wider than that of many who were accustomed to listen to the words of Jesus. They were thoughtful men who recognized their need of a Redeemer. They had an intense desire to know Him personally. Their cry, which is the cry of the world today, takes three forms: --

I. The Cry For A Moral Ideal.

In that ancient day there was going up from the hearts of men the earnest cry for a new and a nobler ideal. In that time there were two kinds of ideal men. There was the wise

man and the strong man. But both at times were disappointing. The wise man tended to be proud and cold, and the strong man tended to become selfish and tyrannical. Although they were often only dimly conscious of it, there was rising in men's hearts the craving for a new ideal, gentle, unselfish, holy, loving; and this craving met its answer and its satisfaction in Jesus Christ. He is the world's supreme moral ideal. Still in the twentieth century, as at the beginning of the first, the craving for a supreme moral ideal is one of the deepest cravings of human hearts. That cry is still going up today, and that craving finds its answer and its satisfaction in Christ and in Christ alone.

II. The Cry For A Mighty Saviour.

The Greek nation, and the Roman nation too, were at this time fast sinking into moral corruption. With all their culture they were going down into the gutter. The Greek religion was impotent. It did nothing. The desperate need of that world was one who would not only point men to moral heights, but help them to climb. How pathetically Plato voiced that need when he said: "We wait for someone, be he a God, or a God-inspired man, who will come and show us the right way and take away the darkness from our eyes." It was not only an ideal he wanted, but a dynamic to stir men to pursue the ideal; in other words, a mighty Saviour.

This was the need of the men of yesterday. It is the need of men today. It will be the need of men tomorrow. The need is as old as humanity itself. The sense of this need runs through all recorded history and antedates it. It belongs to every race and age and clime. It is as universal as the pressure of the atmosphere. It is the explanation of every idol ever formed, of every sacrifice ever offered, of every temple ever built, of every prayer ever breathed.

Here you have the world's cry for Christ. When Christ came into the world, He came not only as the world's moral ideal, but as its mighty Saviour. In the very name of "Jesus" was embodied this idea of saving power. "They shall call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins." And ever since He came into the world it is not only as a saint, but as Saviour; not only as prophet, but as priest; not only as ideal, but as dynamic to make the ideal real; not only as Rabbi, but as Redeemer, that men have looked to Christ.

In spite of all our culture and our civilization, one of the deepest cries of the human heart is still the cry for a mighty Saviour. The human race has not outgrown its need of a Redeemer. The heart of mankind needs Christ. This quest for Jesus is coming up unconsciously, it may be, out of the depths of necessity in human life. Men not only want to see, but to know and to understand Jesus. There is the desire to come close to Him and to have companionship with Him.

The request of those Greeks sprang from a felt need deep down in their hearts. They had learned that they needed something more than was offered to them by the heathen philosophies and religions; that these latter failed altogether to satisfy the cravings of their immortal souls.

It is for Jesus that the world is crying out today. Beneath all the apparent indifference to religious concerns; beneath all this absorbing bustle and excitement of our modern life; this cry rises up louder and louder as year after year passes by. The one far-reaching, deep-seated want of the present age is to behold Christ; to come into direct touch with Him; and to have fellowship with Him. This cry is not always clear and articulate but it frequently finds expression in a voiceless discontent and a restless craving which cannot put itself into words. In spite of the blatant materialism and the supposed indifference to religion on the part of the masses, there is a growing desire to see Jesus, to

know Him, and to know the power that He wields. Men want Him, the warm-hearted, compassionate Healer who walked the shores of Galilee, Him who brought comfort and cheer to the desolate and the bereaved, Him who spoke the word of pardon to the sin-laden soul and set it free to face the future with the feeling that there was one who believed in it. In Christ alone can every need be supplied, be it for salvation from the guilt and power of sin, comfort in hours of bitter disappointment and loss, and guidance in the maze of life's mysterious happenings. Men have been seeking for a long time now to find what they need apart from Christ, and they are beginning to learn how impossible it is to do so.

The great longing desire in the hearts of men all over the world is to hear about the Lord Jesus Christ. Many are sick and tired of hearing other things in Christian pulpits. They have time to read of these other things during the week. Throughout the week they talk over these social and political matters of current interest, but when they come to the Lord's house on the Lord's day, their hearts are burdened, their souls are athirst, and they want to hear the sweet music of the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Everywhere you find this sense of need of a mighty Saviour. Christ talked only a few minutes to a sinful woman at the well in Samaria and she left her waterpot and ran back to call a whole city to Him. And all because he had touched her at her point of deepest need, her need of a Saviour.

It is said of Martin Luther that he went to sleep one night sorely troubled by his sins. He dreamed he saw God's recording angel listing them, and they were so many and so great it seemed to him there could be no possible forgiveness. But while he shuddered in despair behold, a pierced hand wrote above them the words: "The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin." And as he gazed in wonder, the blood slowly trickled down until it completely washed away the record. And he awoke in the blessed consciousness that through Christ his sins had been forgiven and blotted out. And into his soul there came the peace which he had sought but had been unable to find anywhere else.

III. The Cry For An Immortal Hope.

The Greeks lived a life fuller and richer than that which has been lived by any other race. Their capacity for enjoyment, in body and soul, was keener, their senses finer, their passions more intense. And so they felt, with peculiar emphasis, the horror of decay and death. "Better," they said, "to be a slave among the living than a king among the dead."

But with all their love of life and fear of decrepitude and death, with all their need of consolation and hope, they had little prospect on the other side of the grave. The future life was to them but a phantom existence. The wisest of their philosophers could only conjecture that the souls of men would live beyond the grave, but they could give neither to themselves nor to others any satisfying assurance that it was so. As they looked forward to the future everything was uncertain and dark. They loved life, they delighted in its beauty and in its joy, but it made it the sadder that so soon life would be over. The future life was to them a night without a star, or a dark sea without any further shore. And all over the world it has ever been the same -- apart from Christ men never have had any sure and certain hope of a life to come.

But as men have come to see and know Jesus Christ, He has given them assurance of an immortal hope in unmistakable terms. "In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

All that is rich and rare and beautiful in thought and imagery is heaped together in bewildering magnificence to give us some faint inkling of the glories which lie beyond. What science cannot do, what philosophy cannot do and what culture cannot do, a simple faith in Christ and His gospel can do. It can give hope not only for the life which now is, but also for that which is to come.

Conclusion:

Here, then, is what men need most -- a moral ideal, a mighty Saviour, and an immortal hope. And when they feel that need they are saying, though it may be inarticulately, "We would see Jesus." Our supreme task as a church is to reveal Jesus Christ as the moral ideal, the mighty Saviour, and the immortal hope of mankind. There is only one quest that can satisfy. It is the quest for the Christ. In Him alone can our deepest needs be supplied.