

THE RELEVANCE OF CHRIST TO THE MODERN MAN

John 1:9-14

In his little book entitled "The Way" Alvin Rogness has a chapter on "Who Am I?" In a parable he describes man being sent by God to a little island in space, called the earth. God speaks to man and says, "I am sending you out to this little island. It will not all be joy there; you will run across many difficulties. "I've sent others out and many of them have become faithless and deny me. You, also, will be touched by this taint of sin; you will be tempted to rebellion. But, I want you to remember when you're on that island that I will be with you. Though you cannot see me, you can talk with me; and I will be near you. One great fear I have; that is that you will fall in love with the island. I want you to love the island because it is my possession, but do not love it as your home, for it is not your home. Your home is here in the Palace with me. One day I will send for you. I will call you. I will usher you up to an open gate, and I will reach out and lead you by the hand. Then you shall see me face to face and be with me forever. In the meantime, my peace I give you."

What is the modern man? The modern man is a paradox: he is great, but he is fallen. Of all of the living religions and the philosophies, Christianity alone assumes the greatness of man: that man was created in the image of God; that man was created of God; that he has a moral nature; and that he has the ability to invent, to imagine, and to discover. Man is God's highest creation, but man is fallen. Pascal once said that "Man is the glory and the shame of the universe."

Justin Martyr, who was beheaded in 166 A.D., was the first of the philosophical scholars and theologians among the post-Apostolic church fathers. He had sought for peace of mind and that which satisfies life in the ways that he was able; he was brilliantly able to follow all of the philosophies of his day seriously and earnestly. He had studied and practiced the philosophy of the Stoics; he had followed the Peripatetics, the Pythagoreans and the Platonists. In each of them he had found bits of satisfaction, but he had not found inner satisfaction and the final answer to life.

One day, while taking a walk along the seashore, as he was accustomed to do, he met a very old man who was a Christian, who was reading from one of the Old Testament prophets. After Justin had explained his search for truth, the aged Christian said, "Why don't you read the prophets of the Hebrew Old Testament? They're older than any of the philosophers which you have mentioned. As you read them you will find that they speak of One Who is to come, Jesus Christ the Messiah, Who has come." The old man went on to tell him about the Lord Jesus. Justin, the brilliant man, began to read the prophets in earnest. In due course God began to speak to him, and it wasn't long before Justin discovered that the One of Whom the prophets spoke was indeed Jesus Christ. Justin became a great defender of the faith. Before he was beheaded for his faith he said, "I am too little to say anything great of Him."

I appreciate the spirit which is revealed in his statement, but I do like to talk about Christ, even though I cannot praise and glorify Him like I wish that I might. In these moments I hope to lead you along a path that can bring you to the assurance that Jesus Christ is just as relevant today as He was in earlier days. I want to challenge you to do four things:

I. Look Back.

How can we arrest the attention of a modern person who will not yet read the Bible?

If he will listen to you at all, ask him to look back in history and see how the great values that the modern man enjoys are a direct result, or a by-product, of Christ and Christianity. Think of the churches for a moment. If you were to take them out of modern society, however weak they may be, what kind of a world would you have?

One day representatives of the British Admiralty came to a little village where a church had been located high on a bluff off the coast of England. The church had been destroyed after a terrible storm, and the little congregation was too poor to rebuild it. The Admiralty officials asked them, "What about that church that once stood there?" They related the sad story of what had happened to it. After they had listened to the sad story, the officers said, "We will pay for the construction of a new building, because we have that church on our charts. We sight that church through our instruments to determine our course." The churches do help people chart the right course for life. My church did that for me.

The great concept and system of public education have come from Christianity and Judaism. It was the churches that established our denominational schools, which did a tremendous work before we had public education in this country. It was the churches that brought education to Europe. It was the churches that protected the manuscripts of the Bible during the dark ages.

Take the matter of ethics. The English philosopher, John Locke, was once asked by William Molyneux to write a treatise on ethics. To that request, Locke replied, "The Gospels contain so perfect a system of ethics that reason may be excused from that inquiry, since we may find man's duty clearer and easier in revelation than in reason herself."

Government and jurisprudence and the constitutions of our nation and of many other nations are really based on the commandments of God and the teachings of Christ.

Humanitarianism, or the protecting and prolonging of life, has come basically from Christ and Christianity. The Greeks with all of their wisdom and culture still sacrificed children and let the weak die in order to prove who was able to face life.

Children's homes, hospitals, homes for the aged, and numerous other charitable institutions, though now many times supported by secular society, had their beginnings in Christian influence and through the support of the churches. The battles against vice, liquor, indecent literature, and many other bad things in our society have been initiated and carried on by Christian people.

Modern man needs to look back. When he does, he will discover that Christ has been relevant in every generation, and that He is also intensely relevant today. Without Christ and what He has brought to and done for society, we would be living in the darkest ages of all.

II. Look Around.

It is impossible to ignore the impact of any person of whom such great claims have been made and who has influenced mankind so greatly as is true of Jesus Christ.

Christ is the Son of God. He was miraculously conceived. He lived a perfect life. He went about doing good. History records the fact of the sacrifice which He made by giving His life on Calvary's cross. It also records the fact of His resurrection, His ascension and His intercession. The testimony of God was, "This is my beloved Son; hear ye him." His own claim was: "I am the way, the truth and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." He gives peace of mind. He said, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and you shall find rest unto your souls." These claims and the facts which support them convince the modern man that the claim of His initial deity, being conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, must also be true.

What have others said about Christ? His influence upon the multitudes cannot be ignored. The marvel of His teaching was spoken by those who were sent by the authorities to take Him captive and returned saying what millions have said since, "No man ever spake like this man." The impact of His death was made first upon an ungodly soldier, who said, "Truly this man must have been the Son of God."

Great men of all ages have supported this. At Marshfield, Massachusetts, there is a tombstone marking the burial place of Daniel Webster, on which the following quotation of Webster's appears: "Philosophical argument, especially that drawn from the vastness of the universe, in comparison with the apparent insignificance of this globe, has sometimes shaken my reason for the faith which is in me; but my heart has always assured and reassured me that the gospel of Jesus Christ must be divine reality. The Sermon on the Mount cannot be a mere human production. This belief enters into the very depth of my conscience. The whole history of man proves it."

Shortly before his death Napoleon said: "I die before my time, My body will be given back to the earth to be done with as men please, and to become the fruit of worms. Such will be the fate of him who has been called the Great Napoleon. What an abyss between my deep misery and the eternal Kingdom of Christ, which is proclaimed, loved and adored, and is extended over the whole earth."

The claims of Christ have been supported by nameless millions who have come out of their misery, out of their sin, out of their distress; and who have been introduced to Jesus Christ, have experienced the miracle of regeneration; and have found Christ to be an answer to life.

Dr. Linsicome, a teacher in a Free Methodist school, wrote a number of things about "The Incomparable Christ," and among them are the following:

"Jesus Christ was born in the meanest of circumstances, but the air above was filled with the hallelujahs of the heavenly host.

He had no cornfields or fisheries, but He could spread a table for five thousand and have bread and fish to spare.

His crucifixion was the crime of crimes, but, on God's side, no lower price than His infinite agony could have made possible our redemption. When He died few men

mourned, but a black crepe was hung over the sun. Though men trembled not for their sins, the earth beneath shook under the load. Nature honored Him; sinners alone rejected Him."

What thinking man can keep from exclaiming, "My Lord and my God!" Modern man, you must look around you. You cannot ignore the impact of Jesus Christ on the millions, great and small,

III. Look Within.

The modern man must remember as he looks within himself and into his society that the needs in himself and around him are great, and that man with all his ability has not been able to master these needs in his own limited strength, wisdom or will. The travesty of man seeking to cope with himself and his society is evidence that, if it is ever to be coped with, it must be done by someone greater than man individually or corporately.

That something is wrong with our day is obvious to everybody. The persistence of evil everywhere in the whole world is alarming; push it down one place and it crops up in several other places. All of the formulae for solving the social ills of the world have often brought forth only violence and death. The fact of your own conscience, the instability of modern man, the world's unrest and fear, the conditions of hate, suspicion and greed, and the horrors of war are certainly evidences of the need which man cannot meet himself.

The social and the political evils have defied all the progress that we have sought to make in education, in improving our environment, in giving man more leisure time, in raising his living standards by giving him more money, more places to go and faster vehicles with which to go there. Yet, man hasn't solved his fear of solitude or the ability to use it profitably.

Delinquency, crime, immorality, obscene literature, alcoholism, dope, divorce, broken homes — you name it — all these bad features mar our society despite man's greatness or progress. A staggering problem is mental illness. One bed in every five in the hospitals of our nation holds a patient in mental distress.

Dr. Karl Olsson has pointed out that "the modern American man is curious about the future. He has an innate optimism, a strange vehicle that will be his downfall. He believes in a lot of things. He has faith in penicillin and the possible cures for cancer. He is always encouraged when there is a little news item about something that will lead him out of his distress. He believes that if there is to be a blowup, we will be in charge; the American man is a kind of space cadet. But there will be a conclusion! It will be terminus or it will be telos; there are no alternatives. Terminus will be the end in judgment, but telos will be the fulfillment. It will either be death in judgment or it will be life measured by God."

IV. Look Up.

Modern man must not only look back to learn from history, look around to learn from society, look within to learn from himself, but he must also look up. If he is educated at all and sensitive in his mind and spirit, he knows by now that he must look somewhere else than to any or all of these. There remains but one admission:

the personal need of the modern man is Christ.

With all the attempts to rationalize and to win debates, there is still missing within man a peace that he needs and wants. He has a hope for the future that only Christ can satisfy. Life is more than the aggregate of things that man can gather around him. Life is a grand plan and purpose. Behind that life is a great personality -- God.

But man is a sinner. He has not acknowledged God; he has not done God's will; he has deliberately done wrong; he has failed in his own effort to reach fulfillment, has "come short of the glory of God," and of what God intended that he should be.

It is at this very point that Christ becomes most relevant all. Christ said, "I am the way, the truth and the life, no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." Paul said to the Philippian jailer, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Modern man, look up to Christ. To all who would hear Christ said, "He that heareth my words and believeth on him that sent me hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name."

Modern man, look up; and when you do, look with the eyes of faith. Having looked back upon the evidences and the proofs of history; having looked around and observed the impact of Christ upon so many people, great and small; having looked within self and seen how staggering are the needs which man, in all his wisdom, strength or will has not been able to meet successfully; look in the remaining direction for help: look to Christ.

Christ is not only relevant, He is essential. Modern man, Christ is relevant today and for eternity.