

"WHAT THINK YE OF CHRIST?"

Saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The son of David.
Matthew 22:42

There was a wide diversity of opinion about Christ when He was here in the flesh. When Christ asked His disciples, "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?", they replied, "Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets." That goes to prove that the people did not find it easy to make up their minds about Christ. The controversies which raged in church circles in the early centuries centered around what people thought about Christ.

On the day when our Lord asked the question, "What think ye of Christ?", He had Himself been asked three questions. Early that day the Pharisees, hoping to entrap Christ, came to Him with the question, "Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not?" After He had routed the Pharisees, the Sadducees came with the same purpose in mind. They did not believe in the resurrection or the future life, but concerning the woman who had been married to seven brethren they inquired, "In the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven?" Still later in the day, the Pharisees got one of their number, a lawyer, to ask Christ, "Which is the great commandment in the law?"

To each of these groups of His enemies Christ gave a truthful reply whereupon the Pharisees marvelled and the Sadducees were astonished at His answers. Then Christ asked the Pharisees, "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 against 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.

To think of Christ is a personal duty. It is a matter of transcendent importance. It determines one's character and conduct. What one thinks of Christ influences his life in every realm. Nothing but a right conception of Him will make the life what it ought to be. What a man is and what he does depend on what he thinks of Christ. Thinking stands to doing in the relation of cause to effect, or of the fountain to the stream. "As a man thinketh in his heart so is he."

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 amis."
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 bare-headed, bronze-browed, swift-footed fore-runner of Christ. His voice had the roar of a lion in it. There was the tremor of the earthquake in his tread. Apart from Christ, no man ever preached like this man. He was the prince of preachers. No wonder he drew the multitudes from Jerusalem and all Judea to the wilderness to hear his message, because he preached Christ. Any man who preaches Christ will always have some followers. John, you baptized Christ, what do you think of Him? This is what John the Baptist thought of Him: "Behold

the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." Is that all you have to say, John? "I bear record that he is the Son of God." Thus he testified to the power of Christ to remove sin, and also to the glorious deity of the Lord Jesus.

2. Peter.

Let us summon Simon Peter, who was once a confessor, then a denier, but afterward a penitent witness and an heroic martyr. Peter, you were with Him on the mount of transfiguration, as well as on the night when He was betrayed, tell us what you think of Christ. You denied Him one night, saying with a curse that you did not know Him, but tell us now what you think of Christ. "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." At Pentecost Peter 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?