

The Two Most Important Questions: Who art Thou, Lord? Lord, What Wilt Thou Have Me to do?

By Paris Reidhead*

As I bring you face to face with the two most important questions that a man has ever asked: If I were to offer to you as a theme this morning the most important question ever asked a man, I believe that many of you would understand the direction of my thinking, and would correctly answer. That question was given by our Lord, Jesus Christ, on one occasion to His disciples when, having first inquired, "Whom say men that I am?", they replied, "Some say Thou art John the Baptist; some say you are Elijah; some, Jeremiah, Isaiah, one of the prophets" (Mat. 16:13-14). Then the most important question that was ever asked a man, "Who say ye that I am?" (Mat. 16:15) And, without any hesitation, the answer came from the heart, and mind, and soul and spirit of Simon, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God" (Mat. 16:16). This was correct. This is the only correct answer. This is the answer that has saving difference. This is the answer that makes the difference between Heaven and Hell, life and death. For that babe that was born in Bethlehem, cradled in a manger, is none other than God, the eternal Son, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Again this same question was asked by our Lord to another company, "What think ye of Christ? Whose son is He?" (Mat. 22:42) But this company was not prepared to answer. The difference lay not in the facts, but in the response to that which preceded and followed the facts. For we discover that when the Wise Men came to Jerusalem and asked Herod, "Where He should be born who would be King of the Jews, the Pharisees responded, In Bethlehem, quoting the promise, and assuring the visitors that if He were come at all it would have to be in Bethlehem." (See Mat. 2:1-6) But they themselves did not care to go, for though they were looking for the coming of Messiah, they were not looking for Him to come as a babe and to be born in a stable and to be laid in a manger. They were not looking for this.

They had certain facts, but the predisposition of their hearts was such that they were not prepared for revelation. Our Lord Jesus said to Simon, "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee" (Mat. 16:17). This is not come from the teaching of the Rabbis. This has not come from your reading of the prophets, though the prophets clearly spoke of Christ and the rabbis clearly taught of Christ. But He said, "Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in Heaven. He has revealed it unto thee."

Now there are many people in our churches at Christmas season that have the facts, that have the information, that are acquainted with the historicity of Christ and the prophecies concerning Christ, and would want to be called as Christian, but the difference lies in the fact that they have been satisfied with information, and the predisposition of their hearts is such they never press through to revelation. And so all they have at Christmas season is the sentimental journey back through the centuries to follow in the familiar paths that have been marked by poetry and hymns. But they know nothing of the living Christ. They know the great I Was, the One who came and lived and died and ascended into heaven; they have some information concerning the great I Will Be, the One who will come to reign and establish His throne upon the earth; but they live in almost total oblivion, of the great I AM, neither seeing Him, nor hearing Him, nor feeling and sensing His presence. But it is the great I Am, the Lord Jesus Christ, that makes the difference between Christmas being a pagan festival or Christian, to simply go to the crèche, and see the doll lying in the straw is but one aspect. If this can be accompanied by the revelation of Jesus Christ in the heart, then it has saving and Christian significance.

But the question, Who Art Thou, cannot be answered alone by the theologians, nor can it be answered by the historian. It can only be answered by the one whose hunger for reality is such that he has been prepared to submit; and, by the disposition of his heart and mind, has been opened for the revelation that Jesus is the Christ.

Let me illustrate the difference between knowing Christ by common knowledge, by theology or by history, and knowing Him by experience. You will recall that there was a man in our Lord's day who was born in another city some distance away, and transportation being difficult and dangerous the journey was probably not made by this young man whose life paralleled our Lord's. I do not believe that he ever heard Him, that he ever saw Him, but he heard about Him. He was acquainted undoubtedly with the fact that in Galilee there was One who claimed to be the Messiah, who was healing the sick, even raising the dead, restoring strength to the cripples, and making them whole. I am confident that Saul while he resided in Tarsus framed opinions from the heresy, from the gossip, from the information that was carried by the caravans and the itinerant rabbis, that company of tradesmen that would have attended the ministry of our Lord. And this young man who was then probably the same age as the Lord undoubtedly had a reaction to information, just as the people that live in the building where you live, and in the city where you live all have information concerning Christ; this thing is not being done under a bushel, and it is not hidden.

I mentioned the other day when the Board of Managers meeting was on, crossing Times Square, with the raucous blaring we heard the PA system blare out, Oh Little Town of Bethlehem. And Dr. Tozer said, "I wonder if the author ever anticipated when he wrote it that it could have been played in such a setting as this." Well undoubtedly he did not, for it was written decades ago. But nevertheless the community around us, this city is aware of the fact that associated somehow with Christmas is the history, the tradition, the teaching, whether they accept it as so or not, that a virgin conceived because round yon Virgin, mother and child is the testimony of the song. They understand that Christians worship this babe, that died and was said to have been raised from the dead, and this is the feeling of the community. They are not sure. They understand that there are millions of people who do believe He is God, and who worship Him as God, and they associate Jesus Christ with the church in the community where they live. They associate it with the people that they see in the trade shop on the week days, going into that church on Sunday. They associate Jesus Christ, the tradition around His life, His birth, His Life, His death, with the people they know. And if you were to ask the average person in New York City about Jesus Christ, He would have formed his opinion on the ground of hearsay, something he has read in the subway, on the bulletin board, something he has seen in a department store, something that he has heard in a song that he has come to sing in school. He has a reaction to the historical Christ.

But remember that Saul of Tarsus had a reaction to the historical Christ. His reaction was one of antagonism. His reaction was one of resentment. So, I believe that this young man went to Jerusalem motivated by a deep seated resentment that anyone would claim to be the Messiah and would thus seek to substantiate these claims by these miracles, purported to be miracles which he undoubtedly explained away and said were nothing but frauds. So on all that he heard, all of the testimony that was given, all of the gossip that was relayed, all of the teachings that were supposed to have come from the lips of Christ. Everything that had fallen upon Saul of Tarsus had predisposed him to hate Christ, and to feel that Christ was a threat to the religious unity of Israel, and that the church was a threat to the national existence of Israel. And therefore he felt there could be no higher dedication of his life and energy than to exterminate the memory of Christ and the organization that He had founded, the church, and he gave himself to this end.

Now obviously Saul of Tarsus knew the teachings, and knew the claims, for his own testimony was, He pursued and persecuted Christians, he arrested Christians, he witnessed at their trials, he testified, refuting their claims from the Scripture that Jesus was the Christ. Now you understand that to do this he must be intimately acquainted with the strongest arguments that could be presented concerning Christ. There could be no casualness about this. This man was an expert. He knew the promises. He knew the prophecies. He knew the claims. Perhaps this very reason is why he was able to immediately begin to preach after he arrived in Damascus, because he had familiarized himself with all of this. But I submit to you that Scripture is not enough that testimony is not enough, that words are not enough, that miracles are not enough. There must be a personal revelation of Jesus as the Christ if there is to be devotion to Him. Now the weakness of Christianity around the world is that in the 2nd and 3rd generation people are qualified by common acceptance to call themselves Christian who have Christian parents and grandparents, Christian traditions, Christian ideas, Christian dogma, and Christian theology, who have never met Christ. And thus the world, looking at this expression of Christianity, equates Christ with you, and with each one who names the name of Christ. To them you are Christ. To the world, His church is Christ. To this community, Christ is here. We are the only Bible they read. We are the only God they know. We are the only Christ they observe. And if you would like to find out the impact that we

have made upon the community, I suggest that in the community round about you go and visit. If you would like to find out the impact you have made, you go to the ones that have lived on the same floor in your apartment building, the ones that have traded with you, the ones that have served you and worked for you, and then you will find out what they think of Christ, because what they think of Christ is what they think of you.

Now there was a blow that fell upon Saul of Tarsus, and I believe there is a blow that falls upon everyone, a blow that shatters these prejudices and ideas and attitudes. You know that for 35% of our New York community it is a mortal sin to come into this church, one that must be confessed, and with it must go the promise of no repetition. You understand that. You recognize that to others it is national treason to come to this church, and you recognize that for many there are deep seated antagonisms because of previous contact with Christianity and the church. The consequence of that is this, that today it is imperative that there be a revelation from God that shatters all of these firmly fixed attitudes and ideas, and dispositions, if people are to ever meet Christ. Now the simplest way to approach this is to say, "What we need to have this shattering affect is miracles." Now I recognize that Paul said that from Jerusalem to Elyricum he fully preached the Gospel through mighty signs and wonders by the power of the Spirit of God, and I realize the shattering effect of miracles, that the intervention of Christ does often break this crust and predispose the heart to a sensitive hearing of the truth. But I also remind you that there was no such display under Paul's ministry as under Christ, and it was those that observed most of His miracles who were most vociferous in calling for His death.

So we cannot say that this revelation begins merely with a supernatural event. It itself is supernatural. It itself is something that God does by His Own sovereign Grace and power: The awakening of a sinner, the piercing of his heart. Let me illustrate: You recall on one occasion Saul of Tarsus, drew a company of people, for I perceive from reading that he was probably the leader, and they called out the young man Stephen, a deacon, a man who had been attracting considerable attention by miracles that attended his preaching and his ministry. Stephen stood before them, and gave one of the most startling defenses that have ever been recorded. For this man, not schooled, not trained, having no opportunity for the kind of training that would have qualified him for such forensic display, stood before them, and I believe that this is a record of prophetic utterance, the Holy Ghost speaking through him, indicts Israel, going back to their history, synthesizing, drawing together as only a genius most intimately acquainted with the history could have done, but he did it by the enabling of the Holy Ghost. And it so enraged the hearers that they forgot all of the usual procedure to be followed in such a case. For you recall that they were calm enough when they met Christ to say, "It is forbidden for Israel to execute judgment by punishing with death." And so they turned the matter over the Pilate. But when they came to Stephen, the presence of God, and the wisdom with which he spake, and the power of his words was so devastating that they forgot all about this prohibition of Israel exercising capital punishment. This was reserved only to Rome. They drew him outside of the city, they picked up stones enroute, and when they came to the place they said was far enough away so that his cries could not be heard by the soldiers on the parapet, Saul stood there and held their garments lest they should be soiled by the dust, while he as a representative of Judaism who was charged authority consented to this lawless act of stoning to death one who had been guaranteed by Rome a measure of religious freedom.

And so here he stood, and the stones pelted the young man, one and then another. And they bruised him, and they hurt him, until skull bleeding, and scalp oozing blood, eyes blackened, nose broken, bones protruding, he fell to the ground, and should have expired there in weakness. And Saul of Tarsus is startled beyond words, for he shakes the stones from him, stands up, and in vigor and in clarity declares, "I see Jesus standing on the right hand of God" (Act. 7:55). Overwhelming. Overwhelming. And then he says, "Father, lay not this to their charge. They do not know what they are doing" (Act. 7:60). And he died. He died. Now I believe that this was the beginning blow of revelation, breaking through the crust, breaking through the prejudice, breaking through the antagonism, breaking through the opposition, and I do not believe that anyone ever knows Jesus Christ until this happens. Words are not enough. Theology is not enough. Doctrine is not enough. Tradition is not enough. Ritual is not enough. There must be that blow of God upon the heart that cracks, that opens the fissure of the adamant human spirit. Then a few days later on the road to Damascus there is the encircling presence of Christ, there is the light that shines from above, and Saul walking, treading on the road, falls though his staff might have supported him, but overwhelmed by this revelation he falls to the ground.

Now notice, Saul knew that the One who appeared, and he recognized it was One, that One who appeared was good, was of God, for he used the term which would be used of an angel, which would be used of Moses, someone of great authority, or would be properly used of God Himself. Now he knew that this was a supernatural event, for falling to the ground, lying there, blinded by the overwhelming revelation of this Person, he declares, "Lord." He does not know who it is, but he knows that He is to be revered. He knows that He is to be feared. He knows that He is to be listened to. And remember that he is a Pharisee that believes in the existence of angels and angelic visitation. "Lord, who art Thou?" All he needs to have is identification, for he knows that this is of God. Ignorant, he does not associate this One that has caused all this fear, this dread, this grief with the One with whom he is so familiar. "Lord, who art Thou?" The silence is broken, and from the light the voice speaks, "I am Jesus of Nazareth whom thou persecutest." Now the Lord. He has recognized Him as Divine, or a Divine messenger. He has realized that this is an encounter with God, and he hears the voice say, "I am Jesus." Just a few days before he had heard one dying, and in vigor, say, "I see Jesus." Now he sees Jesus (Act 9:3-5).

I believe that no one is truly Christian until they have had a revelation that the babe of Bethlehem, the man of the carpenter shop and the victim of the Cross is God, that He is God, not just some god, but He is God. Oh, it is one thing to say it, but it is another thing to have your heart cleaved by the revelation that the babe of the manger is God, and Jesus of Nazareth. Now retaining the same word, the same reverence, the same obedience, the same total capitulation, the same entire abandonment, his word is, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" You tell me that you are a Christian because you can quote Scripture. It is not good enough. It is not good enough. The devil can do that... You tell me that you are a Christian because you have made a decision. It is not good enough. It is not good enough. Judas made a decision, but he died damned. You tell me that you are a Christian, because you have observed ritual and tradition. It is not good enough. You tell me that you are a Christian because you have followed taboos, and have abstained from forbidden things. It is not good enough. I cannot believe that you have ever asked, "Lord, who art Thou" and heard the answer, I am Jesus, unless following that revelation you have asked the second most important question that ever fell from the lips of man, "Lord what wilt Thou have me to do?" He only knows Christ who has abandoned himself to Christ. He knows about Christ who has abandoned himself to the church, to activity, to tradition, to ritual, but he only knows Christ who has abandoned himself to Christ. "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" It is not asked once, and then answered and forgotten, but the evidence of the genuineness of the life is the fact that it is asked, and every day, and at every crossroads in every day, and at every interval in every day, at every point of decision. The next 35 years testify to the genuineness of the revelation of Christ in Saul. Referring to this day on the Damascus road, he said, "When it pleased God to reveal His Son in me." He did not say, "To me." Christ had been revealed to him when he was a young man, studying up in Tarsus by the caravan traders who had stopped in Galilee by the throngs, and eaten the bread that he had multiplied, and seen the dead raised. He had been revealed to Christ long before he was revealed in Christ. And Christ could be revealed to Paul, and Saul of Tarsus could be the utter, unreconcilable enemy of Christ because of the revelation to Him. And so you, by your rebellion, your treason, your selfishness, your unbelief, your murmuring, your complaint, can have the identification with Christ as name of Christian, and be an unswerving foe of Christ.

The only one who is the friend of Jesus Christ is the one who has had the revelation of Christ in him, and with that revelation there is one hallmark of genuineness that cannot be counterfeited. It is utter, irretrievable, absolute abandonment to the sovereignty of the Son in every area of the life. "Lord what wilt Thou have me to do?" It has no qualifications, has no limits, has no restrictions, has no bottom, has no sides, no top, no end, absolute. He only has had a revelation of Christ in Him who has asked and answered by a lifetime of obedience, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"

I ask you this morning, "What have you done about the two most important questions in all the world?" If you are not convinced in your heart that Jesus Christ is God, there is no reason why you should be chastised, or whipped, or disciplined, because you have not abandoned all to Him. No one can wisely abandon all that he has to an unknown person. No greater folly is observed by older people than to see young people marry without properly understanding each other, and properly preparing themselves for marriage. No one can abandon themselves to a person of whose character and nature they are not sure. And so, if you have not answered the question, "Who art Thou, Lord?", we do not indite you. But if you have answered the question to the satisfaction of your intellect and then you have not answered the second question by your obedience, you are indicted because you are as Saul of Tarsus, with information, a perpetual ceaseless, relentless enemy of Christ, for Christ

has suffered more from the hands of His friends, His professed friends, than He ever has from His enemies. He is the most devastating enemy of Christ whose intellect is convinced of theology, whose life is filled with ritual and tradition, and whose walk is marked by taboos, but who in his heart of hearts has not submitted to the sovereignty of God's Son. The most relentless enemy, because continuously, by life, by word, by deed, is seeking by every action and word, to exterminate the memory of Christ and the church He founded.

He only is part of the church, and he only is the friend of Christ, who having been convinced by revelation that Jesus Christ is God, has by utter abandonment looked into His face and done the only appropriate thing that one can do for God, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" — without strings, without qualifications, but an absolute abandonment and a lifetime of obedience to prove the genuineness of that encounter. Has it pleased God to reveal His Son in you? The answer is not by what you say. The answer is by your obedience daily, hourly, to His will, His word.

As you come to this Christmas, two questions you need/must ask as you gaze upon memory and tradition down the avenue of the past, "Who art Thou, Babe of Bethlehem? Who art Thou, Man of Nazareth? Who art Thou, Victim on the Cross?" And if in your heart of hearts there has been a revelation that Jesus Christ is God, the only thing that is appropriate then is, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" Not one, not here, not there, but always in everything, Anything less is a denial of Christ.

Shall we pray? Our Father, we seek ever that this season should be sacred. We seek ever that it should be filled with spiritual meaning, and with the erosion of reality because of the ceaseless flow of our day and culture we as Christians must face again these prime issues. And so we have to ask our hearts again this morning, "Who is this babe? Who art Thou, Lord?" And we must find, if there has ever been a revelation of Christ in us. And the evidence of this is if we have gladly asked, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" not to consider it, but to do it, to obey it. And so to that end, take these two questions, emblazon them upon our hearts, fix them, Lord, as burning, flaming letters upon the wall of memory, and let them continue with us through this season, and on through the days till our pilgrimage is finished. And teach us, Lord, that we never outlive our abandonment to the sovereignty of Thy Son. And only by this do we verify our testimony of belonging to Christ. Seal thus Thy Word to our hearts.

With our heads bowed and our eyes closed, there is business all of us must do today, and in these days. If there is any way that we can help this morning, or any other time, let us know. But make this Christmas one where all the issues are settled and He reigns supreme in your heart.

Let us stand for the benediction. Now may the God of peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the Blood of the everlasting covenant, make us perfect in every good work to do His will, working in us that which is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ our Lord, to Whom be the glory now and forever. Amen.

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