

GOD'S GOSPEL

Sermon preached before the Southern Baptist Convention, New Orleans, Louisiana, May 15, 1930, by Dr. Robert G. Lee, of Bellvue Baptist Church, Memphis, Tennessee.

Text: "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, . . . he was buried, 1 1 1 he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3-4).

As with a microscope we see worlds in water drops, as with spectograph we learn constituent elements of remotest astral bodies; as with telescope we view landscapes immeasurably distant, so, in this verse, we discover worlds of redemptive revelation--continents of truth compressed into a corner, firmaments of wisdom contracted to the compass of a tent. Infinity flung into a phrase. An ocean in a cup. Zephyr's whisper and thunder cloud's wrath in one voice. A volume in a line. An oratorio in a statement! A midnight sky blending with a firmament of glorified noon.

This verse, so vast no foot can visit all its shrines, so high no human mind can cling the altitudes of its affirmations, breathes the language of eternity. The chief substance of all promise and prophecy, comprehending in itself the world's salvation, holding hell's hostilities and heaven's friendships beneath its tranquil language, unfolding a drama which opens with a subtle tempter's foul incursion and closes with a resurrection garden, it is one of the stateliest cathedrals of the infallible, inerrant Word--a palace of truth resting on a pinnacle of expression. Words no more hold its superlative wonders than teacups hold oceans. The best we can say is as man's mean paint upon God's fair lilies. "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me" (Psa. 139:6). "It is as high as heaven; what can I do? Deeper than hell; what can I know?" (Job 11:8).

This text reveals the

Curse.--"Our sins!", back behind human ages it takes us into awful

infinite depths, to the most terrible fact in God's universe—the fact of sin, life's most dreadful and inexorable curse. Sin, so like a river, beginning in a quiet spring, ending in a tumultuous sea, reversed man's nature, destroyed the harmony of his powers, threw him, woefully deranged, miserable, lost, into interminable leagues of night—subverted the constitutional order of his nature, dismantled him of his nobility, brought him in unconditional surrender to diabolical power, caused him treacherously to give up the keys of the soul's citadel placed in his keeping.

Sin, the aggregation of all evils, black terror in existence before the Bible, deadly disease felt before the remedy was known, terrible riddle that perplexed human thought before the answer was proclaimed, entered the world! And Death—by sin (~~Rom.~~ 5:12). Soon graves in the earth. Abel dead. Sarah buried in Ephron. Rachel in Ephrath. Abraham laid to rest beside Sarah. Jacob gone. Joseph in a coffin. David in a tomb. Solomon in a shroud. Ever since the funeral journey has never ceased. Well-trodden the road to the grave—a hard path, without a flower in all its weary miles. Evidence this of sin.

Jesus, who found remedies for hunger, disease, madness, physical death, was "amazed and sore troubled" (Mark 14:33) by sin's dread power. Its weight fell upon him in soul and agony and bloody sweat. From its vast abyss he drew back with trembling as he faced the time when he was "made a curse" (Ga. 3:13), "made sin" (2 Cor. 5:21). Proving what? That ghastly great among life's factors—awful, universal, inescapable—this fact of sin. And if sin becomes an unaffrighting and undisturbing commonplace that never startles us into pain, our preaching becomes plaything. Behind all our phraseology, we must have the tremendous sense of the ruin of sin.

We cannot drown the stench of sin's carrion under flood tides of philosophical perfume. Sin, a fatal mischief of the heart, a seed big with future pain and grief, the quintessence of all horrors, the causative ele-

ment of all world suffering, is no whirlwind creating a slight disturbance, but a hot sirocco blasting all gardens. No light discord—a thunderbolt that shatters the organ into splinters, leaving it without shape or tone. No pen knife—a guillotine. No slight jerk of hiccoughs—the agonies of sciatica. No lame Mephibosheth—a diabolical Jezebel. No crude catapult—a bursting bomb. No cool rill—a perpetual lava rush scorching its way through green fields.

Foolish they who tone down sin—applying to it soft, extenuating words. Yet, quack doctors there are—theological, philosophical, literary, political—with their poultices, salves, liniments, dealing with sin as though it were an eruption of the skin—a scarlet rash, an affliction of pimples. Sin, an eternal cancer, manifest in discrowned faculties, in unworthy love, in sordid satisfactions, in callous selfishness, in brutalized spirits, is the curse of all curses—blighting earth's flowery vales with crime, darkening earth's seas with wrath, grouping earth's isles as lairs of lust, making many places in our cities deserts of hell!

From hell's seething oceans, sin burst upon this world in Eden's garden. A raging torrent it swept through the world until all neighborhoods from Adam until now fell its pollution. Running back to hell, sin is the world's widest, deepest, darkest, swiftest river. Perpetual desolation abounds wherever it goes. Into this river, many downward have plunged to perdition's dungeons where hell's infernal drums roll the eternal bass in hell's uproar, beating time to ceaseless groans of the lost, amid incessant, unmitigated, unquenchable torment. There, environed by ghastly horrors, maddened forever by a Babel of howling voices, the lost, lashed by the hot breath of hell's infernon, in a storm that knows no abatement, are burning continually, yet unconsumed,—forever wasting, yet enduring still, the "smoke of their torment ascending up

forever" (Rev. 14:11).

Our one chance is to see sin through God's eyes. Unless we are shocked by sin, we ineffectively preach the Gospel. To awaken a sense of sin is the first essential in all missionary, all evangelistic effort. And the saving of men from sin is the biggest enterprise on earth, for it was the only cause big enough to bring the Son of God from heaven to die on the cross. "Shall we charge the Son of God in whom are hid all the treasures of Divine wisdom with the unparalleled folly of coming from heaven to atone for innocent creatures, to reprieve persons uncondemned, to redeem a race of free men, to deliver from the curse a people not accursed, to hang by exquisitely dolorous wounds by his sacred hands on a tree more ingnomious than the gallows for honest men, to expire under the sense of the wrath of heaven that he might save from hell people in no danger of going to hell?"

Look upon him whom we have pierced! Our sins were the psalms that slapped him, the spit that shamed him, the fists that beat him, the scourge that cut him, the thorns that crowned him, the nails that transfixed him--our hard hearts the hammers that drove the nails. Surely his crucifixion, the work of the whole race, must shock us until we hate what caused him all that--until we look with horror upon our hands red with his blood--until every heart must mourn his death of fearsome horrors as its own cruel deed.

The text shows the--Christ.

The Christ--outstanding miracle of all ages, literature's loftiest ideal, philosophy's highest personality, criticism's supreme problem, theology's fundamental doctrine, spiritual religion's cardinal necessity. Jesus--personally, socially, politically, the supreme center of human interest, the standard of measurement, the scale of weights, the test of character for the whole moral universe. His name blossoms on

the pages of history like the flowers of a thousand summers in one banquet. His name sounds down the centuries like the music of all choirs, visible and invisible, poured forth in one anthem. His footsteps, like rain in drought, are seen in harvests of blessing along life's highways.

With no beating drums, no blowing clarions, he holds the flag of equality above palace and slave market. Though history--ancient, modern, contemporary--bears witness that governments oft ignore him, he stretches the Golden Rule above all statute books. Though self-exploiting demagogues, swayed by ulterior motives, find nothing desirable in his modest ministry, he strengthens forever the institutions of just government. Though in collision with the devotees of formalism, he has written "Blessed are the pure in heart" above doorways of vice and crime. Though the scribe, buried in precedents and legalism, though the Sadduces with his dogmatic negations, though the Greek with his wild mythologies, though the Oriental with his mystic speculations, though the Roman with his materialism, and the Priest with his self-righteous creeds abhorred him, he has bannered whole continents with love, has changed the climate of nations.

His waxing fame is the most striking fact of our day. Born among cattle, dying between thieves, the light that began as a taper has waxed into noonday. The voice that was a whisper became a thousand trumpets. In Christ the silence of God breaks into full voice. As the material world incarnates God's mind, Jesus incarnates God's heart. As no artist can frame a picture large enough to include the evening sunset, so no voice can compass, no pen include, the full statement of Christ's character. But what he was toward the child, the mother, the publican, the prodigal, the hypocrite, the harlot, toward sinner and disciple, that God is toward all men in all time. "God was in Christ" (2 Cor. 5:19). "He that hath seen the Father"

hath seen me" (John 14:9)

Goldwyn Smith said: "At the reformation Greece rose from the dead with the Greek New Testament in her hand." Meaning what? At the Reformation man began to reconsider Jesus; and the graves of moribund society gave up their dead. So today, if men want a genuine revival of spiritual religion with the fruits thereof, they have to see life with the eyes of Jesus and drink of his spirit--take the way of love they have seen in him and follow it to the Cross.

Jesus pre-existent.---By whom "were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him, and he is before all things, and by him all things consist (Co. 1:16-17). Jesus "having glory with the Father before the world was" (John 17:5); "loved by the Father before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24).

Jesus virgin born! When Mary, virgin by man never touched (Isa. 2:14), went down into the mysterious land of motherhood in Bethlehem's barn, she, the mother destined to know multiplied sorrows, came back holding in her arms the eternal Son of God! (Luke 1:35). And his every muscle was a pulley divinely swung, his every nerve divine handwriting, his every bone divine sculpture, his every heartthrob divine pulsation, his every breath holy whisper. God's thought, God's will, God's purpose swathed in mortality was he.

Christ's virgin birth, on which rests the credibility of Scripture and the sinlessness of Jesus, is the ^Alpha of our Christian faith. Accept that, all else rightly follows. But--accept the impious conclusions of modern skepticism that Jesus was earth born, not heaven born, then, with this bar-sinister stained across his birth hour, Christianity is falsehood,

civilization delusion, all history fathomless riddle, the whole story of Jesus assailable.

Jesus, Son of man, Son of God! As man, he got tired; as God he said "Come unto me.... I will give you rest." As man, he got hungry; as God he fed thousands with a lad's lunch. As man, he got thirsty; as God he gave living water. As man, he prayed; as God, he made, in praying, no confession of sin. As man, he slept; as God, he arose from sleep and stilled the raging tempest. As man, he accepted a village girl's invitation to her wedding; as God he there changed water into wine. As man, he got lonely; as God, he said "The Father hath not left me alone" (John 1:29). As man, he wept at Lazarus' grave; as God he raised Lazarus from the dead.

Jesus, teacher come from God! "Never man spake like this man" (John 7:46). Put the teachings of all philosophers alongside the teaching of Jesus. The difference? Their teaching is speculation; his, revelation. Their's inquiry; his, declaration. Their's, surmises; his, certainty. Their's groping, his, guidance. For boldness of conception, for grandeur of character, for sublimity of purpose, for originality of mind, for valiant propagandism his teaching, no exhausted specific, claims the sovereignty of the world. Amid all teachers, he burns like the sun amid lanterns. His teaching, leaping across conventional chasms, spurning all national boundaries, assaults all superficial teachings a summer suns attack frost. Teaching in paradoxes, superlatively ~~complicated~~. ~~Fortunately for Israel, Moses was a man of God~~ supreme is he! Lose life, find life. Hold by letting go. Win by losing. Multiply by dividing. Live by dying. As teacher, he dwells apart in his unrivalled genius-- a great palm in a desert of mediocrity.

Jesus, miracle worker! Blind men he gave sight, deaf men keen ears, dumb men, new tongues, crippled men new limbs. Crazy men he restored to reason.

Lepers he cleansed. Outcast women he lifted up. Devils he cast out.
 The sick he healed. Funeral processions, he broke up! Showing what?
 That in his own universe God is no prisoner. No law-limited God.
 But sovereign. No superannuated butler, having lost the keys to some
 doors in his own world-house. But Lord indeed. In all Christ was the
 life—God felt, the Word—God heard, the Light—God seen.

Jesus, the Light of the World! (John 8:12). A sunless solar system,
 a world solid darkness always, is the counterpart of a Christless world.
 Everywhere the fertilizing wonder of light's begetting power confronts
 us. But no sun—no life.

No Socrates, no youth of Athens aroused. No Columbus, no new world
 in prophetic possibility. No John Knox, no Scotland saved. No John
 Huss, no hope for Bohemia. No Gutenberg, no printing press to widen the
 blind alley of ignorance into endless highways of wisdom. No Luther, no
 corrupt church broken, rebuked. No Wycliff, no first light of the
 Reformation. No Cromwell, no Parliament dissolved. No Wesley, no spiritual
 rain in Europe's drought of years. No Charles Martel, the Mohammedan shadow
 crushes the world. No Puritan fathers, no free republic. No Washington,
 no victory after Valley Forge. So! No Jesus, no freedom of thought,
 no liberty of worship and conscience, no humanity of feeling for the
 unfortunate, no civic righteousness, no national integrity, no salvation
 from sin. The "life in him—the light of men" (John 1:4)* Taking Jesus
 from history is like taking matter out of physics, heat out of fire,
 fragrance out of flowers, numbers out of mathematics. Without Jesus,—
 the world's history is a diabolical joke, all liberty-compelling upheavals
 dead. With Jesus "the Roman Empire is without purpose, Athens without
 a mission, Egypt an accident, Judaism, with thousands of years of
 prophecy, the frightful mutterings of a race doomed to insanity."

Christ! The world over, architects strive to build cathedrals

worthy of him. Painters feel incompetent to create figures beautiful enough to adorn his sanctuary walls. A sense of inadequacy falls upon musicians who try to create music sweet enough for his hymns of praise. Sculptors nowhere can find marble white enough for his forehead. Orators, whose sentences are flights of gold arrows, express only a meagre measure of the honor due him. Writers, words dropping from their pens like golden pollen from stems of shaken lilies, feel the inadequacy of all words to set him forth in his beauty.

"No mortal can with him compare,
Among the sons of men,
Fairer is he than all the fair
Who fill the heavenly train."

Without him, the past—cruel enigma; the present—tormenting perplexity; the future—awful, inevitable catastrophe.

This text points to—

Calvary!—

"Christ died!"

Greatly above all mountains stands Calvary.

Great is Sinai, where, amid cloud and smoke, earthquake and fire, the law was given.

And Horeb where the bush, aflame with the glory of descendant deity, defied the laws of conflagration,

And Hor, where Aaron transferred his priestly robes to his son, and died.

And Pisgah from whose lofty height Moses saw the land which God "swore unto Abraham."

And Carmel where God answered Elijah's prayer with fire from heaven.

And Tabor in whose shadow the stars in their courses fought with Barak to overthrow Sisera.

And Moriah where Solomon dedicated the glorious temple.

And triple-peaked Hermon where Jesus was transfigured, his countenance

brighter than the sun, his garments whiter than snow.

And Olivet, where, the clouds his chariot, the winds his steeds,
he went back to God.

~~But~~ But above and beyond all mountains is Calvary--as river is beyond a
rill in reach, as a tree is beyond a twig in fruit bearing.

For there, ~~God~~ in bloody garments dressed, courted our love. There,
at the interlocking of the ages, Christ put away sin by the sacrifice
of himself, redeeming man from death unto life, cancelling man's debt
of judicial obligation by an equivalent--voluntarily passing under
death's dreadful shadow, though owing the law no debt. There God's
eternal attributes emptied their vials of burning wrath upon the sinless
Sacrifice in agony enough to make the earth shudder, the sun in darkness
hide, the spheres go wailing along their eternal circuits.

Irreproachable Christ's life. Matchless his teaching. Astonishing his
miracles. Marvelous example! But all of these would have availed nothing
for our salvation had they not found consummation in the Cross. Incidental
and collateral they to the one purpose for which he came--to die, that man
born once and born dead might be born again and born alive.

Not by his sinless life was Jesus man's substitute. Not by his
miracles did he honor the law, satisfy justice, meet the demands of divine
holiness. Nor by his teachings take away humanity's despairing woe and
God's judgment upon the human race. Nor by his beautiful example take
our place under the law, open a fountain for all uncleanness. Nor by his
character repair the insulted dignity of God's nature by a reparation
equal in merits to the character ~~and~~ ~~if~~ the insulted dignity itself.
Only by suffering the death which was expiatory with reference to God,
which was punishment with reference to man, did he adequately compensate
God's government by an equivalent for man's offence, offer a boundless
mercy in terms consistent with the integrity of the moral law. In death,
he paid our debt. "The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all "Isa. 53:6).

The Bible contains the saddest story of man—the story of his fall. The fullness of the sadness of man's fall we cannot know unless we fathom the bottomless pit, grope in the outer darkness, weep and wail in hell where race and foam forever the waves of quenchless fire. If there is no fall, no hell, there is no salvation to preach.

The saddest story of God is Calvary. Taking its rise in God's love, conceived in the councils of eternity, from age to age, receiving ever new fulfilment, Calvary's history goes. Calvary casts its shadow from Golgotha ~~through the foundation~~ to Pilate's court, where, with scourge, they seamed his quivering flesh until it started up in red scars. To Gethsemane's garden, where the roots of his divine emotion put forth their crimson tears. To the upper room, where he changed wine into the perpetual symbol of his blood. To the Jordan, where his burial in baptism forshadowed his death. To Nazareth, where by toil, he sanctified all labor. To Bethlehem, where "that glorious form wherewith he went at heaven's high counsel table to sit the midst of Tribal unity he laid aside." And from there, across four dumb centuries and beyond, the Cross throws its shadows and blessed radiance—to Solomon's temple! Over the victim, whether lamb, bullock, or dove, on the altar of the tabernacle. —Over the blood stained lintels of the Passover night, where the keynote of the Cross sounded forth in the depths of remote antiquity and foreshadowed a deliverance far greater. And beyond that to the withered garden where Despair pitched his pavilions upon the sterile and blasted fields of man's lost estate.

"And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15). That promise, dropped as a sun into man's sunless firmament, was the center, prospectively, of all those constellations which were to succeed each other in the darkness and illuminate that

long way unbroken from Eden to Calvary—the abyss of the world's greatest sorrow, the summit of the world's brightest hopes. And our text is a sublime paraphrase, of the Genesis verse, substituting language of fulfilment for the language of prediction. His death, prearranged, prophesied, pro-thought. As the mind was before mental philosophy, as stars were before the setting sun long before Columbus saw it, so the Cross, not an episode but an eternal mood in God's heart, not an incident of Christ's life, nor merely a moral spectacle to exhibit God's love, but a transaction grounded in deep necessity, was in heaven before it was on Calvary.

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Thus, the Cross, the supreme interpretation of God, we that the agony of ~~God~~ over human sin is eternal—a focus in time and space of that travail which God bears from the foundation of the world. "Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.... crucified and slain" (Acts 2:23). "Eternal life,... promised before the world began" (Titus 1:2). "We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, which God ordained before the world unto our glory" (1 Cor. 2:7).

We utterly despair of ever finding any words adequate to express so large a fact. But Christ's face was set toward Calvary before aught of creation from the womb of nothingness came. The centuries from Adam to Christ were crimson with the blood of innocent victims killed as types of the slain Lamb of God. The diversified, systematic sacrifices of the Jews, like finger posts along the highway of time, pointed worshippers to a sacrificial Saviour. Significant shadows of redemptive entity still ahead, adumbrations of a substance yet to come, by the blood of a thousand altars, those sacrifices, elemental, preparatory, preliminary, rudimental, introductory, pointed to Christ, the propellent center to which the faith of mankind before and since gravitated. There is a theology that counts such truth too vulgar to be attributed to divine ordinances, but to be viewed as belonging to the grosser mind

of man in his unrefined stages of development. But men label God and label the Bible a lie by believing anything contrary to the truth that the blood stream was ordained of God. Nowhere do we find hope, no road to victory over evil in the hearts of men, until we come to

.... "A green hill far⁹away,
Without a city wall
Where the dear Lord was crucified
Who died to save us all."

This is our Gospel—our only watch cry of spiritual triumphs in this day when everything for which apostles, martyrs, and reformers lived and died is being whittled away.

So we must proclaim the Cross—that which seemed to be Christ's shame, glorying in what seemed to be the hour of his collapse, emphasizing what seemed to be his defeat. Preach it, not submit it for subdued discussion in the academic grove—preach it, not with piping voice, but with trumpet tones. Not as epicures in philosophies, not as feeders of inflamed popular appetite for amusement, not as administrators of laughing gas for the painless extraction of sin, not as tasters dainty ~~lankums~~ of intellectual subtleties, not as experts in speculative cleverness dealing in the airy abstractions of an "up-to-date" Gospel, not as dealers in fine-spun metaphysical disquisitions. But with wooing urgency that lifts up the crucified Christ and warns men of the "wrath of God revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom. 1:18). Else our churches shall be lighthouses without light, wells without water, barren fig trees, sleeping watchmen, silent dumb trumpets, ~~and~~ witnesses, messengers without tidings, a comfort to infidels, a hot-bed for formalism, a joy to the devil, and an offence to God.

By his Cross, not by the disquisitions of philosophers and the

exhortations of moralists, regenerate health comes. The great salient is that Jesus died—died an initial death, as the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world—an official death, as the God-selected substitute—a judicial death, a judgment death for others—a sacrificial death, the just for the unjust (1 Peter 3:18). And with his dying, the colossal system of Judaism passed away; its bloody altars drifted into oblivion; its priestly vestments were fung aside. The ceremonial law, with its majestic rites and interposed barriers, was abrogated. Jesus took all these rites, types, symbols, to the Cross and nailed them there (Col. 2:14). They are remembered now only to interpret them in the light of Christ's redemption. They were redemption symbolized—the sacrifice offered by human hands. Himself is redemption realized—the Lamb slain.

Coming up from Edom with dyed garments, from Bozrah, glorious in his apparel (Isa. 63:1), traveling in the greatness of his strength, he retrod the way of man's retreat, opened the way to the tree of life, liquidated the bond of inexorable law, sheathed the sword of justice behind the blood-drenched Mercy Seat. Then God's perfections opened wide their arms repentant sinners to receive!

In all this we rejoice. For the fingers of prophecy point to Calvary; the incarnation was preparatory to Calvary; the transfiguration foreshadowed Calvary; Pentecost was the fruit of Calvary. And, as the rays of glory emanating from Christ find focus in Calvary, so, at Calvary, the history of human guilt culminates—the purposes of divine love become intelligible—the mysteries of prophecy are unraveled—the majesty of the law vindicated—the great problem of human redemption solved. At Calvary all human sorrows hide in his wounds! The hieroglyphics of the types find their key. Satan's armor is removed, the fires of the law extinguished, the penal claims of God against us exhausted, every righteous judgment of God

perfectly met, our condemnation lifted, the death of sin made certain, our death sentence revoked, the serpent's head bruised, the door of heaven opened, the fountain of salvation unsealed, the world stripped of its charms, the bitters of life sweetened, the shadows of death dispelled, the darkness of eternity irradiated!

The Cross, the true center and sanctuary of this fallen and broken world, is the only leverage mighty enough to roll off of crushed humanity the ponderous incubus which bondage to Satan has place upon humanity.

"Near the Cross! O Lamb of God,
Bring its scenes before me;
Let me walk from day to day,
With its shadows o'er us!"

We go not from a highway to a bypath when we speak now of the

Constraint

"For the love of Christ constraineth us....; he died for all, that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves but unto him who died for them, and rose again" (2 Cor. 5:14-15).

The Cross constraint can compass our necessities. Truth on the altar will more adequately triumph than truth in the controversial arena, on the billboard, or the adding machine. Subterfuges, stop-gap performances, argumentative appeals with subtle suggestions of self-pity, will fail. Run these roads how we will, we seek power and victory by ways that never lead to it. Under the constraint of the Cross which "bids us not stand nor sit but go," we shall avoid being "bound who should conquer, slaves who should be kings, hearing our one hope with an empty wonder, sadly contented with a show of things." Not only so. We shall be kept from a passive acquiescence in small attainments, from slothful timidity in daring, from careless indifference to great stretches of the unattained, from tepid supineness in the face of unscaled peaks that await the pilgrim feet of spiritual pioneers.

What urged early Christians along life's highway? What gave them joy in hardships, hazards, sufferings? What drove them toward mobbings, scourgings, prisons, unto death itself? The word "The love of Christ constraineth me" holds the secret. They found unflustered sufficiency in the Cross. So shall we. Duties God-sent, opportunities God-arranged, privileges heavenborn are ours. Therefore, heroism we must manifest--a heroism eclipsing that born of the bloody ministry of war. So, in words vivid as lightning, Jesus warns against the atrophy of heroism!

A vast Vanity-Fair is in our country, of artificial beauty parlors, jazz orchestras, comic strips, shrieking posters, night clubs, cocktail-crusaders, bathing reviews, bootleggers, flippant marathons, tom-tom dances, idle parties playing bridge, itching ears--folks giving ear to "raucous cheapjacks shouting lies"--jaded folks seeking thrills, dancing to the music of self-indulgence chasing short-lived butterflies of pleasure, pottering with chabby nothings. But how revoltingly cheap, this way of life looks as people remember Jesus on the Cross. By his Cross, he shows us how poor many things we count great, how shoddy our splendor, how tawdry our luxury, how worthless many things we boast of.

Fearsomely easy it is to take the Cross for granted, to be no different because of that tremendous fact. But there is no possibility of following Christ except by living the crucified life! The Cross stands between us and God's wrath--so that now the community between Jesus and sinners is real, the community of their debt on one side and his merit on the other. But let us not forget that the Cross should also stand between us and the great world system of sin and pleasure. We need to think in terms of the Cross, in all thing applying it as our standard, carrying it daily through life's multitudinous details, meeting our tasks in its spirit.

Today, men, slaves of wrong values, bound to the world's view of success, love the rewards, not the risks, of the Christian life. Orna-

mental Cross wearing is more popular than sacrificial cross bearing. But to follow Christ is to get his Cross so in our minds that it becomes the standard by which we judge everything, a watershed which shows through all we think and are and do, the solemn background before which our whole life is enacted.

Shall we extol the bleeding sacrifice of Calvary?—the martyrs whose blood stained the mouths of lions, the saints who went to the stake or dungeon, and then, when our turn comes to sacrifice, ask for others—act as though the symbols of our faith were silken slippers or downy chairs? Shall we sing of the crucifixion and preach a crucified Christ as pantomime? Shall we continue to exhibit weakness of modern Christianity in its deceptive views as to the cost of spiritual power? Shall we have no suggestion of the thorn crown or the nailprints about us? Shall we ~~have~~ be easy, untroubled, satisfied, facing the world's need and wreck? Do we know Christ in any real way if we remain unconcerned?—having not his sorrow for sin, his passion for souls? Challenged by the world's great need, holding in our hands limitless resources—what will we do? Has not Christ waited long enough for us to crown him Lord or all? To take from his brow scarred for us, the crown of thorns set there by scoffing men and place thereon the crown of the kingdom of the earth?

A Jewish Rabbi says: "The Jews have rejected Christ, and Christians have disgraced him." He charges that by our worldliness we misrepresent Christ's spiritual teachings, by our pride misrepresent his humility, by our lack of heroism and loyalty misrepresent his Cross!

Speak the Rabbi truth?

Robert Speer said: "After thirty years of leadership in missionary work it is my conclusion and conviction that the greatest missionary problem is just the failure of Christian people to live up to their professions."

Is Speer right?

Such things could never be true of us if we apply the principles of his Cross to our conduct--make its spirit regnant in politics, in business, in kingdom battles, in the tasks of God--test our convictions, our inheritance, by its tests--subdue every region of our lives to its imperial concern.

The only marks of victory Christ bears are the wounds of Calvary. Have we forgotten what a claim these scars constitute upon every life they have redeemed and their tenderly mighty appeal as they bid us share his crucifixion? Much it will mean if we can meet him, arm in arm with Paul, able to match Paul's statement, "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus,"--able to match Bunyan's testimony, "My marks and scars I carry with me to show I have fought his battles well."

Life and progress are inspirational--not mechanical. So--the necessity and value of the Cross, the dynamic of personal life. Today black snow falls! The fever of life's fierce heat burns the divine dew off the grass! Spiritual mercury falls low! Critical Phillistines of transcendent cleverness subject the warm wonder of Christianity to cool analysis! Faith's wings are clipped by reason's scissors. Fat deformities ask the world to substitute for Christianity's bread "a chunk of cloud bank buttered with the night wind." And our unregenerate humanity is set in the midst of palaces, art, philosophies, but remains a bedraggled beggar still, while many Christians are frostbitten in realms of luxury. So the cross is our superlative, our supreme, inspiration. As Baptists, in danger of making a show before the world, doing too little in demonstrating the power and the message of the Holy Spirit, our hope is the proclamation and practice of the Calvary Gospel.

In this unreconciled, alienated, dislocated, sin-troubled, world, cluttered up with conceits, things inchoate, things inordinate, multitudes from

all nations turn to us.

From Europe--peoples burdened, in the near shadow of a quadrennium of blood and tears and the nearer shadow of atheistic orgies.

From Mexico--peoples clouded by age-long superstition, halted at Guadalupe when they ought to go on to Calvary, our near neighbors in geography, needing to be our close brothers in Christ.

From the Phillipines--folks physically freed by Dewey's guns, intellectually freed by educational missionaries, some already freed from bondage to relics and friars because of the Gospel's liberating truth.

From Japan--agile seekers for world's trade and oriental rulership, perils if they get the coars power of our civilization without knowing its redeeming author, possibilities if their leadership of the yellow races comes itself under the leadership of the Lord, who being national is still universal.

From Korea--bearing the pathetic despair of their own nationality, and the curse of sin.

From Africa--black millions from the land where Livingston died, where heroes who dared and died valiantly left white tombstone to mark the highway over which Ethiopia stumbles with hands stretched out to God.

From China--their eyes on ancestral tombs until such time as they see Christ's Cross, yellow hordes if captured by the militaristic devil, golden throngs if marshalled by the Prince of Peace, who alone can be trusted with their awful power.

From India--her lines of cruel caste waiting for erasure by the pierced hand of the impartial Christ.

From all nations--multitudes unled and misled, knowing not our God, multitudes whose hearts within them are desolate.

Our commissions is "Go and disciple all nations." Our assurance is "I am with you." Knowing this, we must conceive a providence which encircles

the world. We must proclaim the vastness of the divine orbit, the tremendous sweep of the divine decrees. Our Southland, with its imperial advantages, resources, opportunities, has imperial responsibility. And that responsibility in these hours big with destiny, is for the world's lost millions. Nothing exempts us from this responsibility. Our circumstances do not offer soldiers of the Cross an easy parade ground, where we can loll and sing our lilting songs; they rather offer hard, broken fields which demand as heroic and chivalrous virtues as every clothed a child of God. May the Cross, therefore, claim us, haunt us, lay compulsion upon us. Behind paltry revenues, faril instruments, erring agents, the Cross workds with irresistible efficiency.

Having big conventions, brooding on blunders, mustering big numbers, having only abstract recognition of the claims of Jesus, will not suffice. But the ~~claims~~ of laying down our lives. Any cheaper process is doomed to failure. Facing our most compelling hours, our biggest opportunity, since Calvary, we wake to the challenge with vast plans, machinery, publicity, executive ability. But we must do more than maintain great organizations and project world-wide plans. Anything an asset--we must use. But our lives we must lay down. Else we shall limp on a lame old way. Nothing is won without sacrifice, nothing held without blood. Can we--will we?--lay down our lives? This, under God, will lift us from mediocrity to genuis, from provincialism, not a mere historial atetemant, we will ve lifted from pride to humility, from passion to poise, from selfishness to renunciation, from rolling marbles to removing mountains, from contentment with corners to conquest of continents.

So long as Southern Baptist have a passion for the salvation of sinners everywhere, there is little danger of our drifting into materialism, of frittering away our energies in "the ethical development of the world." But if we give up our position as an evangelistic storm center and court

riches, fashion, the friendships of self-elected scholars with bloodless gospels, the approval of religious bodies with spiritual latitudes wide as the Saharan desert and correspondingly dry, we err greatly. In these days of molluscos liberalism, of self-satisfied complacency, if we emphasize little the old familiar notes of Calvary, or hell, of sin, and take up the merely tender note of humanitarian philosophy, we sound our death knell, dig our graves, write our epitaph. At Christ's cross is the solution of our indebtedness problem, the sufficient stimulus for our lowered morale, the adequate replenishing for empty treasuries.

By prayer and heroic struggles our Southland has been consecrated beyond all power of priestly hands. Our fathers whose flame burned steadily in wildest winds, passed through perils, making fiery stakes, whipping posts, prison bars to blossom like Aaron's rod. Shall we, with such ancestry blessed, hand down our blood-bequeathed legacies reduced in quality and in quantity? Pigmies be where our fathers were giants in mind and conscience? Shall we make the superstructure less than the foundations they laid? Shall we let rot in ignoble anchorage the ships whose keels they laid and set with ribs of steel?

Our Baptist fathers, fearing not the wrath of man in the consciousness of God's presence, believing that all people have a right to approach God without any ecclesiastical or State interference, wrote history in blood before they wrote it in ink. Shall we write history in ink only?

As Baptists, we believe, as did our fathers, in the rights of the individual, not ecclesiastical rights; in personal faith, not proxy faith; in the priesthood of all believers, not the priesthood of a class; in free grace, not sacramental grace; in the direct approach to God, not the indirect; in believer's baptism, not infant baptism;

in the voluntary principle in religion; not the coercive. And we must, without apology, without fear, without ceasing, preach and practice our belief, carrying them out to the point of suffering. Down all highways, down all bypaths, we must shout the truth that in religion we have no priest but Christ, in sin no sacrifice but Calvary, in all things no authority but the Bible. Always—no confessional but the throne of Grace!

Believing all this, shall we claim fellowship with and give obedient ear to men who, bearing the university brand, claiming the authority of a self-elected scholarship, substitute a "Thus saith the mind of man" for a "thus saith the Lord"—men who see no virgin birth in Bethlehem, who read no deeper meaning in the Cross than a heroic martyrdom, who cannot find in Joseph's garden an empty tomb?

The world speaks in desperate need to us. Guilty we shall be of giving it a serpent for fish, if we point it not to Calvary. Our one hope, in all things, is to deal with the tragic terms of the Cross, whereby callous hearts warm in gratitude to him who came to earth, enduring the indifference which drove him to the manger and the malice which nailed him to the Cross.

But what hope have we if, singing "Onward Christian Soldiers," we go through perfunctory services, parroting prayers, yawning over watchmen, acting as excursionists on a pleasure expedition?

What hope have we if gracious ladies and cultured men thank us for our sermons but do not surrender their souls to the will of God?—open not their purses to the cause of Christ, while our institutions languish and our mission lines break?

What hope if, absorbed in the delights of scholarship, we let the fires to out on evangelistic altars?

Or—if, citizens of a civilization that makes ice in tropics, we know not how, by the Cross, to attack friged conventionalities with holy, spiritual impetuosity?

Or--if, adding telescopes to our eyes, we get in scientific fog banks and lose sight of Christ?

Of--if, adding radios to our ears, hearing whispers from all corners of the universe we have dull ears for the voice of him who soundeth forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat?

Of--if, adding the telephone to our tongues, talking across continents, we preach a cultural, not a crucified Christ?

Or--if, building big buildings, we forget that "other foundations can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 3:11).

Or--if, adding the auto to our feet we follow after Christ limpingly and complainingly, taking his name on in eash fashion with loud professions and feeble possessions?

When the Roman General Pompey, was warned against the danger of his return from Egypt to Italy, he said:

"It is a small matter that I should move forward and die, it is too great a matter that I should not take one step backward and live."

It was said of Napoleon: "He never lost sight of his way onward in the dazzle and uproar of present circumstances. " He was never blinded by the glare of victory or by the cloud of defeat.

So let it be sith us--in thought, in word, in deed.

As soldiers of the Cross, no right have we to take on step backward, to make today's encampment the place of permanent habitation. No victory have we won with which we have a right for a moment to be content. No defeat that ought to discourage us. No army of occupation we. An army of conquest.

At the Cross, standing therebeside the gift of his whole life for us, can we stand unmoved, hugging our lives close, withholding ourselves from the altar and, when the bugles of duty call, from the arena?

He died for all that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him who died for them and rose again."

"Rose again"!

That declares the

Complement

There came a day when the sun went down at noonday! And all said, "He's dead." The callous Roman soldiers, Poltroonic Pilate, the smug elders, whose hypocrisy he had condemned. The centurion who heard his last cry. The Sadducees, ignoring the supernatural, rejecting a divine hope to the travail of the ages. The crowd who wagged their jesting heads in his dying agony. The prating and precise Phariesses. Mary standing by the cross, the prophetic sword of Simeon piercing her heart! All said, "He's dead." His disciples, in despair, saw the fire of life fade from the eyes that had looked with compassion upon the multitudes. Disappointed in themselves, disappointed in him, they saw the hands once placed with healing upon diseased bodies, the feet once swift on errands of mercy, the mouth that had spoken as never man spake, go dead under the nails--the ears so keenly sensitized to cries of human need grow deaf in death. As the sun went down behind the skull-shaped hill, they all, stupefied with grief from which they could see no possible deliverance, said "He's dead"! Him who is to history's best character as light to darkness, as blessing to cursing, as heaven to earth, as holiness to sin, as life to death, they named a dead man. Joseph of Arimathe put in the tomb that body, stamped and scarred with the stigmata of the cross. Then in upper rooms, in dark retreats, in secret hiding places, on lonely road, his followers, in fear, said, "We hoped it was he who would have redeemed Israel." Hearing terrors very near in every sound, lurking foes in every shadow, they found their mental geography radically changed. A huge chasm gawned between them and their fonedst hope. The throne of their beloved had disappeared in a tomb. His kingdom had shurnk to the narrow dimensions of a grave.

His regal robes were now a shroud. His only crown--a crown of thorns.
 His only scepter--a weed. His only plaudits--taunts and spit.
 His only throne a blood-splotched cross, His only glory--shame.
 His only ^{inaugural} ~~inaugural~~ speech--a lonely cry! His only coronation companions--
 two thieves. His only reign--six hours torture on the bloody tree.
 His only coronation splendor--darkness that shrouded the world. His only
 king's cup--a sponge filled with vinegar and gall. They did not say that--
 they thought it.

Dead!

Dark, bleak, comfortless that night to their broken hearts. No star
 off hope in its black wastes. To them--dumb, stunned, bleeding under
 Golgotha's horrors--it was the last word, the final scene, a horror
 of disaster of defeat.

Death, whose only flowers are faded garlands on coffin lids, had
 trampled into lifelsss dust the Rose of Sharon. Death, whose only music
 is the sob of broken hearts, had padlocked the mouth that so comfortingly
 had spoken to the sad. Death, whose only palace is a huge sepulchre, numbered
 him among his victims. Death, whose only light is the darkness of the
 tomb, had quenched the light of the world. Death, whose only pleasure
 fountains are the falling tears of the world, had closed the eyes of
 him who wept over Jerusalem. Death, whose only gold is the grave's
 dust had made his body a banquet for worms. Death, with skeleton hand,
 had written "Ichabod" on his claims.

Dead

And--buried!

But there came a day when he resumed his power, recovered his challenged
 rights, regained his waning influence, reasserted his sacred grandeur.
 In the midst of his malignant enemies he arose, confounding their counsels,
 thwarting their efforts, laughing to scorn their malice. And, answering
 them thus, he sent down the ages the blest assurance that the grave is

not our goal.

The resurrection of Jesus, the whole alphabet of human hope, the certificate of our Lord's mission from heaven, is the heart of the Gospel in all ages. His victory over death is the best established fact in human history. Yes. And a Roman cross is gesture against unless his tomb is empty--unless Jesus burst the bars of the grave, spurned the sepulchre wherein human hands laid him. "If Christ be not risen then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain" (1 Cor. 15:14). "If Christ be not risen, ... ye are yet in your sins" (1 Cor. 15:17). Upon his resurrection the apostles foundationed their message and mission, building all their hope and proclamation around his claimed and attested deity.

In this complement of his crucifixion--this acceptance of his perfect sacrifice--the divinely-chosen witnesses saw that the Christ who seemed to have lost himself on Calvary found himself in the exit from Joseph's tomb--the opposite of all that his crucifiers intended when they drove the nails. Christ's Cross, purposed from all eternity, prophesied through ages, peered into by angels, found its complement in the empty tomb where Jesus, wrested from Death's brown his black diadem, wrenched from his hand the cruel scepter, shivered at a blow his empire of skulls and skeletons, changed humanity's bleak winter to flowery summer--brought life and immortality to light (2 Tim. 1:10).

No risen Christ, a tomb as worthless as any tomb--a cross no more than a martyr's cross. No risen Christ--death a king of terror with no rival, a black shadow which no sun ever penetrates. No risen Christ--no trumpet to sound through death's dreary dominions to awake the dead from eternal sleep. No risen Christ, death mocks our hopes like a coarse comedian or heartless satirist. No risen Christ, death, inexorable jailor, imprisons us in the iron slumber of eternal night. No risen Christ--the whole history of Christinaity and its existence is unintelligible. No

~~seeing again~~

risen Christ, no seeing again the faces of our redeemed dead, which we have "loved long since and lost awhile;" and they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished" (1 Cor. 15:18). No risen Christ, the whole earth in deepest mourning dressed, will, like Rachel of old, go down to the judgment weeping for her children, finding no comfort.

"Christ died for our sins."

"He was buried!"

But he arose--the first sheaf of the resurrection harvest.

So! Christ is our Contemporary.

No shadow Christ of legend. No hypothetical Christ of sentimental conjuring. No immanent Christ of nature. No lifeless Christ of historical imagination. No dream Christ of culture and romance. ~~No artistic Christ of poet's song~~ No mere heroic Christ of poet's song. No marble Christ of sculptor's chisel. No ivory Christ on a crucifix, giving an expression of the worship of defeat. No dead-figure Christ protected by a creedal sarcophagus. No dead Christ. No radiant apparition Christ of yesterday. No Christ remote, inaccessible, no longer active in this world. No such Christ will answer our needs, but a living Christ--the eternal contemporary of humanity, the Leader on all new roads--offering his efficiency to our poor inadequacy.

This contemporary Christ enabled the first Christians to change the face of the world. Through them he emptied the temples of Athens, put out the ^{altar} ~~altar~~ fires of Diana, conquered ^{Rome's} ~~Rome's~~ iron arms, lit a lamp in Caesar's palace, set the banner of the Cross over a wider territory than the Roman eagles shadowed. Whenever hostilities confronted them, whenever tyranny exulted in sheer brutality, their courage, rose with danger, and made their way, one of shining exploits, eclipsing the dread

shocks of the world by noble sacrifices, serenity, joy. But in this clever, cerotic, agitated day, let us not give way to the mischievous suggestion that such achievements are curiosities of antiquated religious experience--- that certain things happened long ago which are impossible now. God did not die when Stephen was stoned, when Paul was beheaded. Nor in the days of Luther, Cromwell, Sycliff. Nor when Carey and Judson died. Nor when Spurgeon, Moddy, Whitfield. Nor when Broadus, Carroll, Graves, Gambrell, Love, died. Christ is among us now to make the power of God usable to the neediest. The answer of Elisha's question, "Where is the Lord God of Eligah?" is the parted Jordan, giving evidence that though his servants be translated, he liveth---the same yesterday, today, and forever. Not Christ crucified and risen as an airy abstraction, but as an omnipotent help and sympathy---too near to be missed, too certain to be doubted.

"Blessed the the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:3-5).

Surely, because of all these truths, a joym, ever rich and abiding, ever strengthening, never weakening, shall fill our hearts when, going forth to the tasks of the kingdom, we know that he whome the grave could not hold is living---not shorn of his power, but, by all power in heaven and earth given unto him, mighty to honor faith with fellowship and power.

Alive, linking the exploits of the fah ers to the achievements of the children, giving us, amind the snarling clamours of the day, voices that

will not die away in error and incompetence.

Alive to the end of unending eternity--acknowledging no mastery in hostile circumstances, offering the inexhaustible fountains of his strength, keeping pace with the most unexpected challenges, original as the most novel circumstances, able, willing, mighty to help--our eternal contemporary. Centuries do not leave him behind. Knowing the truth of men centuries ago, using them as channels through which the divine became articulate, he made out of crude fisherman, with no social prestige, no political pull, no purses, brave knights who challenged kings, carried the Gospel to the uttermost frontiers of heathendom, and marched as to a wedding to face the menace of death.

So he can do today with us, saving us from all our troubles, from self-satisfied religious mediocrity, from lolling and lounging when the bugles of duty call, as we face evils that would lead our greatest graces to the grave and leave the world no copy--leading us forth by the right way, giving us strength to walk forth to larger ambitions and achievements. He can keep us from making our religion a sentimentality, a kindly emotion, having impressions but no convictions, sensibilities but no mighty experiences. Shall we let him?

Dwelling no more with our losses, our grief, responding sacrificially to the marching orders of his kingdom's great advance--shall we let him?

Putting relentless hands down into our hearts and tearing out by the roots everything that will not advance our Redeemer's cause--shall we let him?

Taking counsel no more of our fears, asking immunity no more from kingdom arenas where the fighting is fiercest and the blood flows freest--shall we let him?

Acting so that each tomorrow find us farther than today, counting all things but loss that we may know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his suffering, rejoicing that we are counted worthy

to suffer for him--shall we let him?

Living no more on the fringes, content no more to toss about in the offing, that his way may be known upon the earth, his saving health among all nations,--shall we let him?

Speaking the truth that holds the world together, supports the stars and guides the tides yet stops at the doors of the humble to comfort the weary and the mourning, and stoops to life up the fallen--shall we let him?

Looking up to that bloody cross where he died for our sins, becoming for us all that God just judge that we through faith in him might become all that God cannot judge--shall we let him?

Looking down into the empty tomb where we have the assurance that the shall resurrection trumpet ~~will~~ find us and we shall live, no matter by what dissolution scattered--shall we let him?

Faithful all, and faithful unto bleeding, while our heavenward call is the spiritual melody of our earthward walk, faithful until the vanishing goals of time give place to the many mansions of the Father's house, faithful until the fountain of human tears has emptied its last bitter drop into the silver river of divine joy--shall we let him?

By the great end for which God made us, by the high honor of his trust in us, by the remorse we shall one day feel if we "being armed and carrying bows turn back in the day of battle," by the shame that will cover us at his appearing if we fail him, by the glory and sure reunions of that day when the resurrection trumpet shall sound with resonant thunder throughout death's vast empire, let us in Christ's name, taking up the tasks our bravest hopes once fixed upon, close with out opportunity with all our souls--put out the fires of every unworthy rest camp and rise and go--never forgetting that he who died for our sins and rose again according to the Scriptures, rises to go before us, our eternal contemporary, in a leadership that sets

the pace and shares the dangers---in a leadership that is companion-
ship as well as leadership.

"Our life is but a little holding lent
To do a mighty labor; we are one
With heaven and the stars when it is
spent
To serve God's aim; else die we with
the sun."

END

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