

“CHRIST OF THE ANCIENT SEERS”

Dr. John Allan Lavender

Jn.1:1-4,14; 5:39-47

In his fine book, Life is Worth Living, Fulton J. Sheen refers to Jesus as, “The ‘missing link’ between God and man. The one who split time in two, and turned space upside down.”

This strikes me as rather happy and helpful usage of a rather tired phrase. During my college days our science classes were concerned with finding the missing link between man and the animal. We pored over pictures of the Pildown Man, and Pithecanthropus Erectus, until the mud and ooze began coming out of our ears. At that time, we were much more interested in our relationship to the brute and beast, than to God and good.

I’m inclined to believe that accounts, at least in part, for some of the problems confronting us today in terms of declining moral values. As Edwin T. Dahlberg suggests, our culture often has more resemblance to a jungle than to the kingdom of heaven, and sometimes we seem to be more at home with the Flintstones than with the Angel Gabriel.

To put it simply, we have forgotten our higher heredity. That we are little lower than the angels, not a little higher than the ants. And we need so much to reflect on the fact that in Jesus Christ we do have “the missing link” between ourselves and God. Between time and eternity. Between earth and heaven. Once again we need to remember that this One who was with God from the beginning, “was made flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.”

It’s the deep conviction of this church and this preacher that Jesus Christ is the only hope of the world. We hold this conviction without reservation or apology. There are those around us who say Christianity has been tried and found wanting, but it is our assertion that Christianity has been found difficult and not tried! And because we believe Jesus Christ is the hope of the world, we

are driven to the awareness that it's absolutely indispensable to the well-being of both ourselves and our society that we know him better.

So this morning, when so many of our single young adults and college students are worshipping with us, I want to talk about what I call the most incredible happening in history. I do so, first of all, as a means of reminding you of the uniqueness of Jesus. And then, because some of you have been bombarded these past few months by ideas and thought forms which raise questions about the Bible, I also want to talk about this most incredible happening in history as a means of reassuring you of the dependability of Holy Scripture.

The Pre-Existent Christ

Before we can even begin to appreciate or discuss the importance and impact of the Incarnation, which most assuredly is the most incredible happening in history, we must consider what theologians call the pre-incarnate existence and work of Christ.

That's a big mouthful, but what it refers to is, who and what Jesus was prior to his life here on earth. We have just come through the Christmas season with its beautiful and haunting message of the babe born in Bethlehem so long ago. But never make the mistake of believing the life of Christ began in that straw-strewn stable, or that it ended thirty-three years later on a cross stuck carelessly into a hill called Calvary.

No, the Christ we preach is the pre-existent Christ. The eternal Son of God who said, “Before Abraham was, I am.” The Christ we preach is the One who not only walked on earth, but made the earth upon which he walked! The One who not only formed the heavens from which he descended, and to which he returned, but who at this very moment is engaged in the blessed occupation of preparing a place for us in our Father's house.

“All things were made by him,” says John, “and without him was not anything made that was made.” Jesus is the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. The

Word who is God, and who was with God from the beginning, before time began.

The Prophecies Pertaining To His Coming

Not only is the Christ we preach the pre-existent One, eternally co-equal with the other “persons” of the trinity, but his coming into the world as “the Word become flesh,” was also clearly and amazingly predicted by a dozen ancient prophets in literally scores of Old Testament scriptures.

Our generation is more than casually familiar with the impact and influence of a good publicity campaign. In fact, we might well call this “the age of advertising.” But nowhere in all of human history has there been anything like the “publicity campaign” (if we can call it that) which preceded the coming of Jesus Christ into the world.

Christ In The Bible

Now think with me. This will not be one of those light, airy talks consisting of a string of stories which make you feel good. But it may do your faith more good, and give you more of a reason for the hope that is within you, than a dozen such “sweetness and light talks.” So think with me for a moment about the fact that for literally hundreds, indeed thousands of years before his birth, the coming of Christ was predicted in this book we call the Bible. In fact, he is so much a part of this book we can say Jesus is both its subject and its object. As an anonymous writer declares,

“Take Christ out of the Old Testament and it is a harp without a player,
a song without a singer, a palace with all doors locked. But put Christ
in the Old Testament and even the driest, dullest pages of that volume
blossom with light and glory as they reveal the promise of the coming
Savior-King.”

Christ And The Ancient Seers

I say the Christ we preach is the Christ of the ancient prophets. The one to whom Isaiah referred when he wrote,

“He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities. The

chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed.”

Jesus is the one who was revealed to be –

The Lord of righteousness in Jeremiah.

The man of sorrows in Lamentations.

The buried and risen Savior in Jonah.

The ruler of Israel in Micah.

The son of righteousness in Malachi.

Christ In The Psalms

The Christ we preach is also the theme of the Psalms. He is not only King David’s greatest son, he is the melody and lyrics of some of King David’s greatest songs. As my friend Roland Dutton points out, “In no less than 16 Psalms, David spoke of one who would be the son of God and son of man, crucified, risen and coming again. There, set forth a thousand years before they really happened, are the triumphal entry, the betrayal, the suffering, the piercing of his hands and feet, his death on the cross, the casting of lots and clear reference to the fact that he would be put in a tomb, be raised the third day, and ascend into heaven.”

And then, as a continuation of the Psalms, no less than six annunciations are recorded in Matthew and Luke, leading up to the time of Jesus’ birth, as the angelic messenger speaks to Zacharias, Mary, Joseph and Elizabeth. A perfectly marvelous and entirely supernatural introduction to the coming of Jesus Christ, the hope of the world.

The Unity Of Scripture

Again and again you have heard, and by the goodness and grace of God you will hear me stand behind this sacred desk, and with lisping, stammering tongue attempt to tell you of the glorious and amazing unity of scripture.

But young people, I say to you this morning, nowhere is there more staggering or striking

evidence to the supernatural authorship of this Book than that which has to do with the incredible accuracy of the innumerable prophecies relating to the coming of our Savior.

The birth of Jesus is without question the most amazing happening in history. Matthew makes at least 14 direct statements concerning his birth, the flight of his parents to Egypt, his boyhood life in Nazareth, his healing and teaching ministries, his arrest and crucifixion. Adding these words, “that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets.”

The gospel of Mark begins with this sentence, “As it is written in the prophets . . .” making such reference to the predictions of Malachi and Isaiah, and then goes on to make several other Old Testament references to Jesus such as “have you not read in the scriptures?”

Mathematical Probability

When you begin to understand the law of mathematical probability, the incredible, almost unbelievable accuracy of those prophecies takes on even more meaning. You can’t help but look with new respect on both the Bible, and the Christ who is its theme.

William Graham Scroggie, one of Scotland’s most gifted preachers, has this to say about the law of probability,

“When a single prediction is made about which there is but one feature, it may or may not come true. There is, therefore, one chance in two of its being fulfilled. This is the law of single probability.”

“When two predictions are made, each has half a chance of being fulfilled, the compound probability of its of being fulfilled is one-fourth, that is, there is one chance in four that both predictions will be verified. Every new factor which is added, makes the fraction of probability smaller.”

Dr. Scroggie has a list of 50 Old Testament predictions which cover everything from Christ’s

human pedigree to his divine person. These prophecies deal with such minute details as the place, time and manner of his birth. The names he was to be called, and the town in which he was to be raised. They cover the fact he was to be betrayed, the precise sum of money his betrayer was to be paid, the manner in which he was to be put to death, including the fact that his hands were to be pierced with nails, that he was to be given vinegar to drink, that his garments were to be distributed, that no bone of his body was to be broken, and that he was to be buried with the rich.

The list goes on and on. But the truly wonderful thing about it is that every single one of these predictions regarding Christ was fulfilled in every detail.

Now, if we apply the law of compound probability to Dr. Scroggie's list of 50 prophecies -- and incidentally, his list is by no mean exhaustive, there are many, many other prophetic utterances regarding Christ which might be included -- but if we apply the law of compound probability to just these 50 predictions, the chance of their all coming true is one in nearly forty million! And yet they did come true. Miraculously and wonderfully so.

Dr. A. T. Pierson, who is probably the greatest New Testament scholar of modern times, has said there are three rules by which true prophecy can be tested.

1. It must be such an unveiling of the future that no mere human foresight or wisdom could have guessed it.
2. The prediction must deal in detail sufficiently to exclude shrewd guesswork.
3. There must be such lapse of time between the prophecy and the fulfillment as to preclude the agency of the prophet himself in effecting or affecting the result.

Judged by these standards, the prophecies of the ancient seers regarding the Lord Jesus Christ are not only genuine, but staggering in their implications, both as to the divine authorship of this book we call the Bible, and the supernatural nature of this One we call Jesus, the Nazarene.

No human foresight could have predicted these things with such absolute accuracy. No human

luck could have guessed at such events in such incredible detail. No human being, or group of human beings, could have cleverly arranged such happenings, for these events were predicted not scores, but hundreds, and, in some instances, thousands of years before they actually took place. We can simply say, “To God be the glory, great things He hath done!”

Preparations For His Coming

Then think with me for a moment about the extraordinary preparations which were made for Christ’s coming.

Over in Jerusalem, in the church of the Holy Sepulcher, is a spot which is said to be the center of the world. Now, at first hearing that seems to be a strange, even fantastic claim. But there is a sense in which that little spot on the epidermis of the earth called Palestine, is the geographical center of the world.

Take the three great continents of Europe, Asia and Africa. In between them, linking them up, lies this little land ridge on the Eastern shores of the Mediterranean. If you were going to start a movement whose aim was to extend into these three great continents simultaneously, that neck of land called Palestine, would be the natural starting place. So it was not an accident that Bethlehem was the cradle of the Christian faith. It was the perfect place from which to launch a world religion.

But, if the place God chose was ideal for the coming of Christ, the time was ideal, too. Over in Galatians 4:4, the apostle Paul writes, “It was when the fullness of time was come that God sent forth his son.” That is to say, it was when world conditions were exactly right that God’s supreme revelation of Himself in history occurred.

“There is a tide in the affairs of men,” says Shakespeare, and I think we may add, there is a tide in the affairs of God as well.

James Stewart puts it this way, “When that tide reaches flood, when all the preparatory work is

done, when world conditions are clamoring for it, and human souls are open to it, it is then, at the flood tide hour of history, that God launches his new adventure.”

People often ask why Jesus was not born sooner, or somewhat later in history. The reason is that since time began, there has been one short period of about 50 years when all the conditions were right for his coming.

Right Politically

For one thing, when Jesus came it was the right time politically. Under the influence of Caesar and the Roman empire, the world had achieved a form of unity hitherto unknown, unless it was before the fall of man.

An uneasy peace lay over the land. True, it was peace made possible by the iron fist of force, but it was peace nonetheless. As a result, people could hear the sweet strains of the angel's song. Had Jesus come a few years earlier, or a few years later, he would have found civilization too preoccupied with wars and rumors of wars, to pay attention to him.

Language

It was also the right time because there was a common language which the early missionaries could use to spread the gospel message. Everywhere they went they found that, along with the local dialects and tongues, the people knew Greek. They were bilingual, and by using Greek the missionaries could be heard and understood.

Roads

In addition, there was a first century system of “freeways” which stretched throughout the Roman Empire. Little did the Caesars know as they planned and worked to build their fantastic network of highways, those very roads would one day be used by Christian missionaries to spread the glorious freedom in Christ Jesus which ultimately resulted in Rome's undoing.

Yes, the time of Christ's coming was right politically. The Roman peace, the Greek language

which was common to most people, and the Roman roads had made the world into one big neighborhood, throughout which the message of Jesus could spread like wildfire.

Right Economically, Morally, And Religiously

But more than that, when Jesus came it was the right time economically, morally and religiously.

Economically

It was the right time economically, because beneath the shining surface of the old world's culture lay a seething cauldron of unrest bred of widespread poverty. Two-thirds of the citizens of Rome were slaves. They were little more than chattel, sometimes less valuable than the beasts of the field.

But into that black pit of despair burst the great white light of hope, as Jesus Christ came with his wonderful message of life and liberty and fellowship with a heavenly Father who knows and loves and cares for his own.

Morally

And then, it was the right time morally. As Paul makes clear in the first chapter of Romans, the world of that day was about to go down for the last time in a sea of sin. Immorality and degradation were everywhere. The foundations of society were shot through with rottenness and decay. Despair was evident and disaster imminent.

Then Jesus came! And he brought with him the good news of God's forgiving love.

Religiously

Finally, when Jesus came it was the right time religiously.

The old heathen gods were either dead or dying. The idols before which men had done their obeisance for centuries had proved to be inadequate for their needs. Everywhere among the Jews

there were heard the whispered hopes of a coming Messiah, and as Stewart says so beautifully, "the air was tense with expectation."

To be sure, the Jews had looked for a deliverer in other times of national crisis, but never before had this passionate hope burned so brightly as when Jesus came, for "the clay idols and brazen serpents had been weighed and found wanting."

Yes, when Jesus came it was a right time in every way: politically, economically, morally, religiously, and so "the Word became flesh to dwell among us. Not one moment too soon, nor one moment too late, but exactly at the tolling of the hour, the day of the Lord had come."

What a glorious truth. The pre-existent Christ who was with God from before the beginning of time; the prophetically announced Christ who had been the subject of the writings of a dozen different ancient seers who accurately predicted his coming in every detail; came into a world amazingly prepared for his coming, at the right place to fulfill his holy purpose. Truly, "To God be the glory, great things he has done."

Over in Geneva, Switzerland, is a huge monument built to honor the Protestant reformation. Across the front of a broad facade are carved the colossal figures of four of the great reformers, Beze, Calvin, Knox and Farel. Over their heads are the Latin words, "Post Tenebras Lux" (After Darkness, Light). That to me, in a sentence, is the story of Christ's coming, "After Darkness, Light."

No more blind groping in the fog. No more doubts and fears concerning the will of God and his purpose for the children of men. "For the people that walk in darkness have seen a great light. Unto us a child is born. Unto us a Son is given. And his name shall be called wonderful counselor. Mighty God. Everlasting Father. Prince of peace."