

## **THE PULPIT OF THE CROSS - PART I**

“The Preacher”

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John 19:17-22

During His sojourn here on earth, our blessed Lord used many varied and picturesque pulpits from which to deliver His sermons on the love of God.

On one occasion, it was a mountain side where, surrounded by a throng of seekers, He spoke the words of life. On another occasion, it was a frail fishing smack which tossed lightly on the waves of the Sea of Galilee. It seemed almost any pulpit was good enough for Jesus. Be it a crowded street corner in Jerusalem, a quiet room in someone's house, or the moss-bound rocks of a desert well.

Yes, almost any pulpit was good enough until He was ready to preach His final, and most important, sermon. Then it was that He chose a pulpit which, like the sermon itself, would be remembered down the arches of the years.

Strange that He did not choose the portico in Pilot's palace for this last address for there He would have had an audience of the high and the mighty. Governors. Leaders. People of affairs. Strange, also, that He did not choose the awesome chancel of the temple of Jerusalem. For there His audience would have consisted of scribes and pharisees, a distinguished gathering of church fathers.

But no, His pulpit was to be as unique as His message. And, it was to be heard by all. People of both high and low estate were to reckon with the preacher and with His pulpit. For it would be The Pulpit Of The Cross.

Jesus was a long time in mounting His pulpit. First, he had to carry it to the summit of Golgotha.

Then, submitting Himself to the heinous manipulation of the Roman soldiers, He must be nailed with coarse, cruel blows to this implement of torture which was to be His sacred desk.

At first, the hammer blows were heard in silence. But as blow followed blow and echo built upon echo, it seemed as though the final cords of man's symphony of hate would tear the sky in two. And then, with little thought for the precious burden that it bore, the cross was lifted off the ground. For an instant, it teetered in mid-air, and then, with a thud that seemed to shake even hell itself, it sank into the pit which had been prepared for it.

Out blessed Lord had mounted His pulpit at last. And what a majestic pulpit it was! The Pulpit Of The Cross. In itself, the cross is a sermon. Indeed, it shall be the subject of our message next Sunday morning. For now, let us turn our attention to the man who occupied the pulpit. The carpenter-preacher of Nazareth whose final sermon remolded the course of history.

### **The Preacher**

There is an ancient legend which I'd like to use as the basis of my message this morning. As the story goes, there lived, many years ago, in the city of Baghdad, a wise man by the name of Hakeem. Many people came to him seeking advice and counsel which he gave freely to all, asking nothing in return.

One day there came to him a young man who had spent a great deal of his wealth, but who had gotten little in return. He said, “Tell me, wise man, what must I do to receive the most for that which I have to spend?” Hakeem answered, “Any object that is bought or sold has no value whatsoever unless it contains that which cannot be bought or sold. Look for the priceless ingredient.” “But what is the priceless ingredient?” asked the young man. Hakeem replied, “My son, the priceless ingredient of every product sold in the market place is the honor and integrity of the man who makes it. Consider his name before you buy!”

For Christians, the priceless ingredient of our faith is the good name -- the honor and integrity --

of Jesus Christ, the one who is its center. Consider His name before you place your soul upon the auction block of the world's religious market. For I unhesitatingly say that Christianity stands or falls upon the person of Jesus Christ.

### **Who He Is.**

Why pay attention to Jesus? Why heed this carpenter, this preacher of Golgotha? First of all, because of who He is. The supreme paradox. The God-man; both God and man in one person. And never did a hyphen mean so much as it does here. The God “hyphen” man. For it both divides and unites. It marks distinction and yet unity.

Jesus was not a God man. He was both God and man. He was as truly God as though He was never man, and as truly man as though He was never God. Often He proved this to be true. For instance, as a man He was asleep in the disciples fishing boat as it was tossed about by the storm. As God, He called the winds to rest and stilled the angry sea. As a man, He wept with Mary and Martha at Lazarus' tomb. As God, He drove the king of terrors from the tomb and called Lazarus back from the gruesome shades of corruption. As man, He sat weary and thirsty and hungry at Jacob's well. As God, He fed 5000 people with the lunch of a little boy. Again and again, by what He said as well as by what He did, Jesus attested to the fact of His humanity, and yet also proved His deity. I urge you to see Him in --

### **His Humanity.**

Not a son of man, mind you, but the son of man. Not the perfect human, but perfect humanity.

All other greatness has been marred by littleness. All other wisdom has been weakened by folly. All other goodness has been tainted by imperfection. Jesus alone is the one man who ever lived of whom it can be said, “He is altogether lovely.”

Jesus was the one, perfect, ideal, complete man.

“If we would look for the highest example of meekness, we would not look to Moses, but to

Jesus, who was indescribably meek and lowly in heart.

For the highest level of patience, we would not look to Job, but to Jesus, who, when He was reviled, reviled not again.

For the highest example of wisdom, we would not look to Solomon, but to Jesus, who spoke as never a man spake.

For the highest example of consuming pity, we would not look to weeping Jeremiah, but to Jesus, as He weeps over the city of Jerusalem saying, 'Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how oft I would have gathered you as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but ye would not; behold, now is your house forsaken.'

For the highest example of soul-absorbing zeal, we would not look to Paul, but to Jesus, of whom it was said: 'The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.'

For the highest example of love, we would not look to John, but to Jesus, who, while we were yet sinners loved us and gave Himself for us.

All other men have but a fragmentary goodness and greatness, but that of Jesus Christ is complete. It is perfect. It is undefiled.“

The search light of criticism has been focused upon Jesus for nearly 20 centuries, and yet not once has it found in Him one suggestion of sin, one idle word, one selfish deed.

People talk of not believing in miracles. I say then, what do you do with the carpenter - preacher of Golgotha? He is the preeminent miracle of all the ages. Who was this one and only perfect man? Was He not more than man? We can only reply, “Yes. This was the Son of God.“

I urge you, then, see Him not only as the son of man, but also as the son of God. See Him in --

### **His Deity**

There is no other logical explanation for His splendid humanity than the acknowledgement of His deity. For to worship Jesus if He is not divine is idolatry. The First Commandment says:

“Thou shalt have no other God before Me.“

August Comte, the French philosopher, was talking one day with Thomas Carlyle who was a noted Christian. Mr. Comte boasted that he was going to start a new system of thought to be known as “Positivism“ which he predicted would eventually replace Christianity.

Thomas Carlyle listened very carefully to the plan, and then replied, “Very good, Mr. Comte, very good indeed. Now all you have to do is live as Christ lived, speak as Christ spoke, die as Christ died, be raised again as Christ was raised again, get the world to believe you are still alive, and then your new religion will have a chance to get on.“

Thomas Carlyle was right. The priceless ingredient in Christianity is the person of Jesus Christ, and the priceless ingredient within the person of Jesus Christ is His deity.

To accept the high moral perfection of His humanity while rejecting the fact of His deity is to become involved in logical contradictions and moral inconsistencies which are impossible to reconcile.

Either Christ was deity or demoniac. He is either God or He is the arch deceiver of the ages. For this wise and Holy One openly claimed equality with God. “I and My Father are one,” he said. “He that has seen Me has seen the Father,” he said. “I am the son of God,” he said. When He, himself, raised the question, “Whom do you say that I am?” the disciples replied with various appraisals of His person. John the Baptist. Elijah. Jeremiah. One of the Prophets. Yet not one of these would Christ accept. But when Peter said, “Thou art the Messiah, the son of the living God,” Jesus immediately praised Peter for his spiritual insight.

I say to you that such a man as this, One who would present Himself as the possessor of the attributes and perfections of God, must either be a bad man -- a deceiver, a mad man -- a demoniac, or He must be as he claimed to be the God man -- deity in human flesh.

That He was a bad man is a contradiction of history. Even His most committed enemies admit that Christ is the highest example of life, as it ought to be lived, the world has ever seen.

That Jesus was a mad man is mere presumption. In fact, a French psychiatrist has written a book about Jesus from the stand point of psychoanalysis. It describes Him as being the sanest person, the most integrated personality the world has ever seen.

The only other alternative, then, is that He was as He claimed to be, the God-man, deity in human flesh. But, more than that, it is proved by the fact that all those who have taken Him at His word and received Him into their hearts -- untold hundreds of millions though they be -- have found that this same Jesus completely satisfies the sincerest spiritual longings of the human heart.

### **What He Is.**

But again, why should we listen to this preacher from The Pulpit of the Cross? The answer comes, not only because of who He is: the God-man. But also because of what He is: the savior of man.

Almost the first thing the angel said to Mary about the son she was to bear is this, “Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins.” The God-man then is the gateway between God and man. “Through Him, God has found His way to man. Through Him, man has found his way to God. God finds Himself in this person and is with man. Man finds himself in this person and is with God. Through the God-man, deity takes hold of humanity. Through the God-man, humanity takes hold of deity.”

By His death upon the cross, “the just for the unjust,” Jesus answers the eternally vital question of how a guilty sinner may find forgiveness and acceptance in the eyes of a righteous God. And thus it was that Mozart was moved to write

“Forever God, forever man,  
My Jesus shall endure.  
And fixed on Him my hope remains  
Eternally secure.”

In fact, it was said of Mozart that he brought the angels down and of Beethoven, that he lifted mortals up. The praise God, Jesus does both and more. “He is God's way to man and man's way to God. He is the only true and effective Jacob's ladder between heaven and earth.”

Now, if Jesus was merely a supreme example, or a matchless preacher, or the perfect human, then He could hardly have met our greatest need: that of a Savior. Sin is the terrible tragedy, the unbearable yoke in every human life. And it's at the point of sin that the value of this priceless ingredient – the deity of Jesus Christ – is most clearly seen as we behold Him, the savior of mankind, our redeemer and our King.

For the glorious truth is that when the shed blood of Jesus Christ, God's son, is injected into the test tube of humanity, it precipitates the sins of man. Our darkness is dispelled. Our burden is lifted. Our victories are won.

Now this isn't the claim of some group of small minded people. Nor is it the assertion of any single church or organization. This is the vigorous, vital, dynamic testimony of hundreds of millions of living Christians. Hundreds of millions of the little and the lost and the unremembered who, with pulsating hearts and staggering sorrows, have cast their burdens into the crucible of God's redeeming love to prove first-hand, by their own personal witness, the cleansing power of Jesus' name.

Tell me, why is it that from the beginning of time, since the world began, there has never been a single soul saved by Plato? Or by Socrates? Or by any other save Jesus? Why is it that Christ alone has been able to snap the shackles of sin?

There is but one logically intelligent answer and it is this: In Jesus, we have the only begotten son of God. God of God. Light of lights. The very God of very God. The one divine and all sufficient savior who alone can say, “I am the way, the truth, and the life, no man cometh unto the

Father but by Me.”

It is said that Paliaro, a faithful herald of Christ who lived in Spain around the time of Luther, was arraigned before the officers of the church at Rome and asked, “What is the first means of salvation?” He answered, “Christ.” “Well, what is the second means?” “Christ.” “And what is the third?” To which Paliaro gave the same unflinching answer, “Christ.” Because he gave the Christ of God his true place and made nothing of rights or rituals or ceremony or church, the leaders of that inquisition cried, “Away with Him. He isn't fit to live.” And they sent Him home to wear a martyrs crown. But Paliaro realized the truth of what one has since said:

“Without the way, there is no going.

Without the truth, there is no knowing.

Without the life, there is no living.”

How wonderful, then, to be able to sing with the saints of all the ages

“Our Lord, our life, our rest, our shield.

Our rock, our food, our light,

Each thought of Thee doth constant yield

Unchanging, fresh delight.”

I shall not soon forget my first visit to Knotts Berry Farm. I had heard about a world famous painting of Christ which is on display in a little garden chapel there. I wanted to view it alone, so I excused myself from the group of friends with which I was traveling, and made my way across the grounds until I came to the little chapel.

There was no one there but me. And yet, as I walked down the aisle and took my seat, I was overcome by a feeling that I was not alone in the room -- and looking up, I saw Him there, standing before me, Jesus of Nazareth.

It was just a picture. And yet I was transfixed, so real was His presence. His eyes were closed, but even so the beauty of His face completely captivated me. I saw Him as I had not seen Him



before. I saw the pathos, the sorrow, the agony of loneliness in the stoop of His shoulders. I saw the tenderness, the meekness, the love in His gently outstretched hands.

I saw the regal bearing of the King of Kings in his noble head. I felt the biting pain of the cruel whip, the stinging hate of the crown of thorns, the nails, the spear. I saw Him there. I felt His heart throb. I tell you, I saw Him just as you see me.

And then, a strange thing happened. For as I sat there, the sweet strains of some far off heavenly music filling my ears, the lights changed, His eyes slowly opened, and He saw me!

He saw me! He saw my sin. My shame. My sad failure to measure up. He saw me just as I am, and I could only drop to my knees and pray, “Lord Jesus, I love Thee, I know Thou art mine, for Thee all the follies of sin I resign.”

Oh, my friend, do you know Him? Have you seen Him? Have you beheld the look of compassion and concern as through eyes of love He has seen you? Seen your sin? Your sorrow? Your shame? And, despite it all, bids you come?

Why should we heed the preacher of Golgotha? I believe you now know why. Will you receive Him? Will you open your heart to Him and make Him your own? I pray that you will. May God bless you and give you peace as you make this destiny-determining decision.