

THE MAN WHO CHANGED THE WORLD - PART 1

"I am the way, the truth and the life"

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John 14:6

Many extravagant claims have been made about the person of Jesus Christ by His admirers, His friends, those who call Him Lord. But none of these are as startling as His own self-claims. Coming from a lesser person, we would look upon such assertions as rank arrogance. But coming from the lips of Jesus, they do not seem to be the least bit out of character.

For the beauty of His life, the wisdom of His teachings, the purity of His speech, the majesty of His works all witness to the fact that, in Jesus, we have Someone unique in history. It has been said, "You can compare every great and good man who has ever lived with another man just as great and just as good--until you come to Jesus Christ. And then you discover there is none go great and none so good."

He stands alone. He is the Great Unlike. The one Character in all history who shines sublimely above the rest. And there is nothing quite so startling as the fact that Jesus, Himself, was obviously aware of the grand distinction which was His.

He deliberately put Himself at the very center of His message. He did not suggest, as did the founders of the world's great ethical systems, there might be a better way of living if only it could be found. He declared, "I am the way." He did not say with other teachers, "I will give you an idea of how to recognize the truth when you see it." Jesus said, "I am the truth." He did not say with Buddha, Confucius, or any of the others, "I will strive together with you in an effort to find the key to the meaning of life." Jesus stated, "I am the life."

As Kierkegaard, the great Swiss theologian expressed it, "All other religions are oblique. The founder stands aside and points the way to truth and life. Christianity alone is direct speech, for Jesus says I am the way, the truth, the life." And, because of His uniqueness, we cannot divorce Jesus from His declarations about Himself. Banish Jesus from history, banish Him from the souls

of men, banish Him from the universe in which we live and what you have left is nothing more than "the impersonal grinding of gears."

Without Jesus, man's only distinction from the animals about Him is His ability to outwit them and even that is in question. Without Jesus history is reduced to the sad story of man's meaningless meanderings on the epidermis of the earth, coming from the island of no place, and going to the land of nowhere. Here is the one indispensable man. Kings may come and go. Rulers may rise and fall. But Christ, and Christ alone, remains.

He is the pillar from which the hinge of history hangs. He is as necessary as the air we breathe, the water we drink. He is not only The Man Who Changed The World, He is also the One who is capable of changing our world if we'll only let Him. Our world of home and job and relationships. Our world of deeply personal and intimate concerns. As you remember from the scripture we read a moment ago, Peter and Thomas had been wrestling with the meaning of life and the direction it was to take for that small band of frail followers who called themselves the disciples of Jesus. And Thomas' question, "Lord, how can we know the way?" is our question too, for ours is an age of bewilderment.

As Dr. Edward L. R. Elson said so pointedly, "We are brilliant but unhappy. Clever but unstable. Comfortable but comfortless. We own so much and possess so little. We are forlorn souls, groping and hungering and lost. For once again, as in the garden of Eden, we are fugitives from God, bereft of spiritual certitude.

"As a generation we dope ourselves in our amateur psychology. We buy up all the books of the peace of mind cult, pitifully confident that it is possible to have peace of mind in our kind of world. We follow the preachers who hawk formulas for banishing worry and fear and tension, while the prophets of God, with their painful judgements requiring repentance, go unheeded.

"We turn wistfully to 'inspirational' speakers and are left with a terrible emptiness. (And then)

every once in a while we come to our senses with a sudden jolt as we realize that our whole problem lies in the fact that we are renegades from our true nature. We do not know God."

So we cry out with Thomas of old, "Lord, we do not know, and how can we know the way?" And with the same absolute certainty with which He answered Thomas, Christ also answers us, "I am the way, the truth, the life."

This morning I invite you to ponder His words with me, for they have something very significant to say to us as a pastor and church as we look down the corridor of 1956 and see the yet unborn days before us.

In fact, as I have been alone in thought, study and prayer for much of the past week, I've been captured by the overwhelming conviction that there isn't anything more important for us to think about in these first few weeks of another year together than the person of Jesus Christ. Who He is. What He has done. And all this can mean to us in our lives as individuals and in our life as a church.

"I Am The Life"

Let's start with the last part of Christ's great assertion. "I am the life." We must have life before we can know the truth about it, or the way in which to live it.

This may come as a surprise to some of you, but in the last analysis, Christianity is not a religion. It is a relationship. And the most distinctive quality about that relationship is that it produces life. In fact, no other word better defines Christianity than the word life. That's what Christ came to give us, life! And that's what Jesus was and is, life!

He said, "I am the life." John said, "In Him was life." Paul declared, "Christ in you, Christ who is your life." And that's what Christianity is: Life. L-I-F-E. Life! And that life is Jesus. For the Bible says, "God has given us eternal life and that life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath

life" (I John 5:11). And then, as if to make it even more clear, it goes on to say, "He that hath not the Son hath not life" (I John 5:12). I don't explain it, I just believe it, for I have found it true. The One who has Jesus, has life.

There is a book by Mark Twain which is not only humorous but philosophical, in which he describes in his own curious way a man searching in the universe for this world. He comes across some supernatural being out in the infinitudes of space and asks him the way to the world. The being replies, "Which world?" The man answers, "The world for which Jesus died." "Oh" says the being, "He died for many worlds."

That may very well be true, for the Colossians 1:20 says that "though the blood of his cross (the Father has) reconcile(d) all things unto Himself, things in earth, or things in heaven." How far that cross reaches up into the infinite heights to bring reconciliation there, I do not know. But this I do know: it reached down into the depths of my heart to bring reconciliation here! And, as a result, I have life. Eternal life. Abundant life. Glorious life. Life worth living day by day.

Christ not only gives His life to us, He also teaches us how to live that life here and now. In His message to His disciples, which we call The Sermon on the Mount, He said, "Take no thought for the morrow, sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (Matt.5:34). In simple language He was saying, Live one day at a time, for each day is a life unto itself.

I came across an article in Guidepost magazine some time ago which gave these ancient words of Jesus a twentieth century twist. It said, "You can have 25,550 lives." It pointed out that each morning, in effect, we awaken to a new day as a babe awakens, by birth, to a new and wonderful world. A curtain falls on the last act of that old life which was yesterday and, through the alchemy of sleep, we are reborn. And thus, every 24 hours becomes a lifetime in miniature. So, actually, we live not one, but hundreds of lives. In fact, should we reach the biblical threescore and ten, we would have, to be exact, 25,550 lifetimes.

The glorious thing about all this is that we can live this multitude of lifetimes with God's help for we have these promises, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee" (Heb.13:5). "I am with you always, even unto the end" (Matt. 28:20).

Oh, the blessedness of this divine companionship. For the same Christ who has given us life, who has planted the seeds of eternity in our soul, is walking beside us. Guiding our feet in the way everlasting. Showing us the necessity of a daily rebirth. Revealing the relevancy of the present as He reminds us that in Him the past is forgiven and forgotten and the future is secure.

Here are Christ's words for us as we approach the new year, "I am the life, live Me!" In essence, He is saying, take this life I give you and live it to the hilt, one moment at a time, for yesterday belongs to the past and tomorrow belongs to the future. Only today is yours. You will never be able to say, "This is tomorrow." So live today as if it were the last. Bring to it the best of your mind and heart, your training and talent, your dreams and aspirations.

Grieving over past failures and dreaming of future hopes will not solve the problem of living. God has given you today. Be thankful for it. Accept it. Use it. Live it to the full. Remembering that Jesus said, "I am the life, live me!"

"I Am The Truth"

And then Jesus said, "I am the truth." Not a truth mind you, the truth. In other words, I am something to believe. To build upon. To trust. And this is one of the great needs of our age. Something to believe in.

So many of our fellows are like a chap I was talking to recently. We were trying to get at the root of a problem which was bugging him. I felt strongly it was rooted in what he believed, for what we believe colors everything about us. And so, calling him by name, I said, "Friend, what do you believe in?" And with a kind of old man look in his eyes, he said, "John, I'm fresh out of things to believe in."

Much of our world is like that. It is fresh out of things to believe in. But this need not be so. It isn't necessary for you to exist in such a forlorn state, for in Jesus we have the truth. And, if you focus your attention upon Him, you will find the truth, or better yet, you will be found by the truth and He, Jesus, will set you free.

"I am the truth," said Jesus. What a vital word for times like these when we are surrounded by a maze of "philosophical millinery" when "fads and fancies, cults and innovations" litter the pathway. What blessedness to hear that clear, calm voice cutting through the strident cries of our self-styled prophets, saying, "I am the truth, believe me!"

If The Man Who Changed The World is going to have a chance to change your world, then I summons you this morning to a new assurance of your faith in Jesus. These are times which try our souls. Therefore, be sure of Him in whom you have believed. For in Jesus, you have the truth. He won't change with every turn of the tide. Knowing this will give you something to say to a world that is fresh out of things to believe in.

"I am the Life, live Me!" "I am the Truth, believe Me!" The final word Jesus has to say which can change our world as individuals and help us make the most of our next year of service together as a church is this --

"I Am The Way, Walk Me"

According to Dr. John McKay of Princeton, "The lamentable scandal of our day is the hollow pretense of multitudes who name the name of Christ with smug complacency, but who utterly fail, either through ignorance or disobedience to accept the lofty standards of Our Holy Faith."

If Jesus is the truth by which we know all things, and He is, then He is the test by which we are tried, the standard by which our behavior is measured. As Christians, our task is to be Christ-like. To radiate through our lives the same values which are His.

"It is not enough," cries Dr. McKay, "that I hear the word of God. It is necessary that the word of God become incarnate in my flesh in a spiritual sense. That Christ be formed in me. Revealed in me and not simply to me. What we need, in a word, within the Church if the Church is to match this hour, is Christians who are utterly Christian!"

It has never been better said. The need of this hour is for "Christians who are utterly Christian." Who, regardless of the implications and changes required, will embody Christ's way in every area of life. Christians who will be like fire. Fire does not care whether someone puts a kettle on it...it merely burns. That is the limit of its duty. And our duty as Christians is to burn with self-abandonment as living torches casting light upon the darkness of the world about us.

Some time ago, I was told the story of a young Chinese student who had come to our country as an exchange student just after the War. He took his undergraduate work in one of the Western universities and then received a doctor's degree from the University of Southern California. Following that, he journeyed to the east where he earned a second doctorate at M.I.T. During the course of his studies, he was led to Christ through the work of the Inter-Varsity Fellowship and became a very active and dedicated Christian.

When our government began to relax its position thereby permitting students who wished to return to China to do so, this young man chose to stay in America. Primarily because his strong anti-communist position had become well known and it seemed certain death if he returned to his native land. However, a while ago, word came through the bamboo curtain that one of the leading native Christian pastors had been put to death because he refused to cooperate with the puppet church which had been set up by the communist regime. When this young scientist heard of the great loss which had befallen the Christian church in China, he decided to return.

When he was asked why he was doing so in the face of almost certain imprisonment, if not death, he answered, "There should always be someone waiting in line to take the place of the martyrs who fall. I am standing in that line, and so I will return. I do not know whether I will live five

hours, five days or five months. It doesn't really matter. The only thing that counts is that I remain true to my Lord and my Christ."

And that's what I'm talking about this morning. That's vital Christianity. That's walking as Jesus walked. Doing as Jesus did. "I am the way," said Jesus, "walk Me." Are you prepared to let The Man Who Changed The World change your world? He stands waiting, ready, willing and able to do so.

This next year can be the best year yet for you as an individual and for us as a church. The open secret which can make it so is summed up in this magnetic phrase from the lips of our Lord, "I am the way, the truth and the life." I am the Way, walk Me. I am the Truth, believe Me. I am the Life, live Me.