

**AWHY JESUS?@**

Evangelist Johnnie Lavender  
Acts 16:31

Sometime ago I was with a community leader, a man who had made a positive impact upon his city. In the course of our conversation I affirmed my personal conviction that our continent needs a great spiritual awakening which will turn people to Christ as the solution to our personal, social, national and international problems.

I was taken aback by the suddenness and earnestness of his reaction. He said, **A**You know, the audacity of you Christians staggers me. I'll admit that from time immemorial people have held a belief in some kind of supreme being -- even I pray to God as I conceive him to be -- we all have our guides for living. But how can you possibly tell me as an honest, intellectual seeker after truth, that the solution to the problems of my life and the life of our world is a personal belief in Jesus? Has it ever occurred to you that the first question any thinking person would ask is >Why Jesus?@ Certainly, we must all believe in someone or something as our guiding light, but why Jesus?@

His question didn't bother me too much just then. I started to make a reply when our conversation was interrupted and we had to go about our business. But, over time, I've had a chance to ponder his words carefully. I've come to see that, in a sense, he spoke the truth. As I've witnessed to students, businessmen, farmers, honest seekers after God from all walks of life, I've heard his question, in one form or another, again and again: **A**Why Jesus?@

I'm not talking about the professional agnostics who pride themselves on their ability in the art, so-called, of bursting the bubbles of other people's beliefs. Those people can't find God for the same reason a thief can't find a policeman. No, I am speaking of that man and woman, guy and gal, who, caught in the web of sin and the burning accusation of the secret voice of conscience, is

asking, AWhat must I do to be saved?@ AWhere is there a satisfactory solution to my concerns and the problems of our world?@

I want to say to such an honest, earnest seeker after truth, there is an answer to the question AWhy Jesus?@ It is an answer which has stood the test of time. An answer which has faced the burning searchlight of scientific investigation. An answer in which you can find the personal and spiritual peace for which you are longing. Yes, there is an answer to the question: AWhy Jesus?@

I am not one of those who believes all religions are the same. That Jesus is no more deserving of our attention than Buddha or Mohammed or Confucius. I am not even prepared to say Christianity is the *highest* form of religious revelation so long as we also agree all other religions contain essential and *saving* truths. I firmly believe with all my heart that, while God has revealed himself to people in a number of different ways, there is no other name given among men through which we can be saved, but the name of Jesus.

I am not content to let people tout Athe splendid humanity@of Jesus while they doubt his deity. With all my heart, I denounce such treason against the Lord Jesus, and I'll tell you why. Either Jesus is God or he is the arch deceiver of the ages. My challenge to the honest seeker here tonight is this: AIf the Lord be God, follow him. If Baal, then follow him.@ Yes, there is an answer to the question AWhy Jesus?@ As God gives me utterance, I want to share it with you.

There is an ancient legend I'd like to use as the basis of this message. It gives quite simply the answer to the great question before us. As the story goes, many years ago, in the city of Baghdad, there lived a wise man by the name of Hakeem. Many people came to him seeking 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."

The young man asked, "What is the priceless ingredient?" Hakeem replied, "My son, the priceless ingredient of every product sold in the marketplace is the honor and integrity of the man who makes it. Consider his name before you buy!"

I say to you, the priceless ingredient in the Christian faith is the good name, the honor and integrity of Jesus, the One who is its center. Consider his name before you place your soul on the auction block of the world's religious market, for I unhesitatingly say, Christianity stands or falls with the person of Jesus Christ.

Why Jesus? First of all because of

### **Who He Is**

The Supreme Paradox. The God-man. Both God and man in one person. As George Truett said so beautifully, "Never did a hyphen mean so much as here. The God -- hyphen -- man. That hyphen both divides and unites. It marks distinction and unity. Jesus was as truly God as though he were never man, and as truly man as though he were never God. How often he proved he was God and, at the same time, showed he was man. As man he was asleep on a pillow. As God he called the winds to rest and stilled the wrathful sea. As man he wept with Mary and Martha at the grave of Lazarus. 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, thirsty, and hungry at Jacob's well. As God he fed 5,000 people with the lunch of a little lad. These, and many other actions, attest to his humanity and prove his deity.@ Oh, honest seeker, I charge you --

### **See Him in His Humanity**

Not a son of man, mind you, 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 Christ is the only human whoever lived of whom it can be said, AHe was altogether lovely.@ He was the one, perfect, complete human. Man as God meant man to be!

If we were looking 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 example of patience we would not look to Job, but to Jesus, who, when he was struck, refused to strike back.

For the highest example of wisdom we would not look to Solomon, but to Jesus, who spoke the truth more clearly than it has ever been spoken.

For the highest example of compassion we would not look to weeping Jeremiah, but to Jesus, as he wept over the city of Jerusalem.

For the highest example of soul-absorbing zeal we would not look to Paul, but to Jesus, who prayed for the lost with a broken heart.

For the highest example of love we would not look to John, the beloved, 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 searchlight of criticism has been focused upon him for nearly twenty centuries, and yet not once has it found even a hint of sin in him. You say you don't believe in miracles! I say, then, what will you do with Jesus of Nazareth? He is the preeminent miracle of all the ages.

Who was this one and only perfect man? Was he not more than man? We must reply, yes, truly this was the Son of God. Oh, honest seeker, I urge you to see him now, not only as the Son of Man, but also as the son of God.

### **See Him in His Deity**

There is no other explanation for the splendid humanity of Jesus than the acknowledgment of his

deity. To worship Jesus if he is not divine is idolatry, for the first commandment is, AThou shalt have no other gods before me.@

August Comte, the French philosopher, was talking one day with Thomas Carlyle, a noted Christian. Mr. Comte boasted 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, AVery 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, maybe, 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. The priceless ingredient within the person of Jesus Christ is his deity. To accept the high moral quality of his humanity, while rejecting his deity, is to become involved in logical contradictions and moral inconsistencies which are impossible to reconcile.

Either Christ is deity or demoniac. Either he is God or he is the arch deceiver of the ages, for this wise and holy One, openly claimed equality with God. AI and my Father are one,@he said. AHe that hath seen me hath seen the Father,@he said. AI am the Son of God,@he said.

When he, himself raised the question, AWhom 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, AThou art the Messiah, the Son of the living God,@Jesus immediately praised Peter for his spiritual insight.

Someone who would present himself as the possessor of the attributes and perfection of God, must be either a bad man -- a deceiver, a mad man -- a demoniac, or he must be what 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 Jesus Christ lived the world's highest example of life as it ought to be lived.

That Jesus was a mad man is a mere presumption. A French psychiatrist has written a book about Jesus from the standpoint of psychoanalysis, and has described him as, AThe sanest, most integrated person 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 hundreds of millions of those who have taken him at his word and received him into their hearts, have found Jesus completely satisfies the sincerest spiritual longings of the human heart. No wonder Christians are able to sing,

AThere is no name so sweet on earth,  
No name so sweet in heaven,  
As that name before his wondrous birth  
To Christ, our Savior, given.@

Years ago a prize was given to the person who could identify the name or word around which clustered the greatest joys and sweetest memories. Some gave the word "mother," enlarging upon her tender loving care in infancy, her unwearied toil and patience in childhood and adolescence. Others thought "home" with its joys and comforts, its precious fireside memories, was the word most dear to them. Others said "heaven" should be the prizewinning word, and they spoke of its everlasting glories and never fading joys, the fellowship of angels and the companionship of saints. But the one who carried off the prize said, "Jesus is the name above all other names, the word above all other words." She was right. Jesus is the most precious word to ever roll through finite minds or pass by the tongues of men and of angels. Truly, Jesus is the priceless ingredient.

**What He Is**

But again, our question, AWhy Jesus?@ And the answer comes, not only because of Who he is, the God-man, but also because of what he is, the Savior of mankind. Almost the first thing the angel said to Mary about the Son she was to bear is this, AThou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins.@

This God-man is the gateway between God and man. As G. Campbell Morgan says, AThrough 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 -- Athe just for the unjust@-- Jesus answers the eternally vital question of how a guilty sinner can find forgiveness and acceptance in the eyes of a righteous God. Thus it was that Mozart was moved to write:

AForever God, forever man,  
My Jesus shall endure.  
And fixed on him my hope remains  
Eternally secure.@"

It was said of Mozart that he brought the angels down, and of Beethoven that he lifted mortals up. But praise God, Jesus does both, and more. He is God's way to man, and man's way to God. The only effective AJacob's ladder@between heaven and earth.

If Jesus were merely a supreme example, or a matchless teacher, or the perfect human, he could not have met our greatest need, that of a Savior. For sin is the unbearable burden in every human life. And it's at the point of our sin that the value of this priceless ingredient -- the deity of Jesus Christ -- is most clearly seen. It is here that we behold him as the Savior of mankind. Our Redeemer and our King.

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 our sins. Our darkness is dispelled. Our burden is lifted. Our victories are won.

This isn't the claim of some group of small-minded people. Nor is this the assertion of any single church or denomination. 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 personal experience, 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 Socrates or any other, but Jesus? Why is it that Christ, and Christ alone, has been able to snap the shackles of sin? There is but one logically intelligent answer. And that answer is **B** In Jesus we have the only begotten son of God. God of gods. Light of lights. The one divine and all sufficient Savior who, alone, can say, **A**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, **A**What is the first means of salvation?@ He answered, **A**Christ.@ **A**Well, what is the second means of salvation?@ **A**Christ.@ **A**And what is the third?@ And Paliaro gave the same unflinching answer, **A**Christ!@

But because he gave the Christ of God his rightful place and made nothing of rites or rituals or ceremonies or church, the leaders of that inquisition cried, **A**Away with him! He isn't fit to live.@ And they sent him home to wear a martyr's crown.

But Paliaro realized the truth of what one has since said, **A**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.@"

Oh, my friend, do you know him?

Several years ago I was conducting a crusade in southern California. The pastor of the church invited us to go to Knotts Berry Farm as his guests. You have heard of this world famous dining room. I will not elaborate on the magnificent quality of their food except to say that there was just one thing wrong: I couldn't get enough of it!

They have many historic relics around the gardens which extend for several acres, but of supreme interest to me that day was a world famous painting of Jesus which is on display in a little garden chapel.

I had heard so much about it I wanted to view it alone. So I excused myself from the group with whom I was traveling, and made my way across the grounds until I came to a little chapel.

There was no one present but me, and yet, as I walked down the aisle and took my seat, I was overcome by the feeling that I was not alone. 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 never 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 in his side. I saw him there. I felt his heart throb. I tell you, I saw him there, just as you see me.

And then, a strange thing happened. As I sat there transfixed, 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,

ALord 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 Jesus? I believe you know why, now. I believe you know, now, perhaps the first time in your life, I believe you know why Jesus? Will you receive him? On this first Sunday of the New Year, will you open your heart to him and make him your own? I pray you will. May God bless you and give you peace as you make this destiny determining decision.