

INCLINATIONS OF MORTALITY

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John 14:1-6

If it were possible for you to place your life in a crucible and expose it to a refiner's fire, what would be the sum total of its yearnings? What basic bents, leanings or inclinations would be made evident by the distilling process?

In other words, what is your life? What are the fundamental drives that propel you? What basic urges cry out for fulfillment? When all of the yearnings of the human heart have been refined into their deepest meaning, what are the Inclinations of Mortality?

It seems to me there are three, and every heart, mind, and soul in creation desires them. For behind the thoughts, words and actions of every mortal is a longing for three realities: the reality of life, the reality of truth, and the reality of love.

Money and the things that money buys, pleasure and the fleeting joy that pleasure gives, honor and the pride that honor brings, things and a feeling of security that goes with their possessions, all of these are but indications of something more fundamental and real: the pressing bias or longing for life and truth and love.

Life

The first of these deep-rooted inclinations is the longing for life. It is a truism, that of all our treasures, it is life we surrender last and with the most reluctance.

Money, pleasures and possessions all go first, for they are but the servants of life. Even the instinctive act of a woman who reaches out in the darkness to feel her way is evidence of the fact that we humans are willing to surrender a part of our body rather than endanger the whole—that which we value most—our life!

Truth

The second fundamental inclination which burns within the human breast is the desire for truth. Almost from the moment of birth we are asking, “Why?” Watch the little lad who tears away at the kitchen clock. What is he doing? He is trying to find out what makes it tick. The little girl who decapitates her doll is not basically destructive. She is simply following her natural feminine curiosity. Even the wife who, at 2 AM, greets her husband at the door with rolling pin in hand is just asking, “Why?”!

I love the story of Adam who, in the Garden of Eden, came home quite late one night. It was obvious to Eve that he had been imbibing wine which had been red too long. “Were you out with another woman?” she asked. To which Adam had the perfect reply, “That’s impossible, Eve, you’re the only woman in the world!” But, as the old saying goes, “A woman convinced against her will is of the same opinion still.” So Eve got him to bed and he quickly fell into a deep slumber. Later Adam was awakened by a tapping on his chest and it was Eve counting his ribs!

Our childhood, our youth and yes, even our adulthood, is spent in the pursuit of truth. As someone has observed, “We turn our telescopes on the sun and ask it to divulge its secrets. We ask the stars to tell us the story of their twinkling. We beg the ocean to surrender the mystery of its depths. We are incurably bent on knowing and discovering the truth of things.”

Love

But that’s not all. There is a third fundamental craving in the human soul. It is the desire to love and be loved. But where on earth do we find fulfillment for these longings? It is axiomatic that while we have all of them to some degree, we have none of them in their entirety. With all this world has to offer, there is still a yearning for something more,

Life

Certainly life knows no complete fulfillment here. Successes come and go. Reputations wane and are forgotten. Plans have their hour and come to naught. It is simply, undeniably true that each tick of the clock brings us closer to the tomb. With the poet, we must agree that

“Our hearts are but muffled drums beating a funeral march to the grave.”

Modern Man is suffering from a sense of cosmic loneliness.

Recently, an honor student in one of our great universities wrote these forlorn words to a friend: “Here on this swirling planet, a mere speck of congealed mud on the fringe of the Universe, the worms, you and I, live, aspire, strive, and die. Where is the meaning of life? Is there really any? Again and again I find myself face to face with this question. Like a butterfly against a window, I seem to beat aimlessly. I suppose that my impotency and my utter blankness in the face of eternal dogma is one reason for the fits of utter depression into which I fall at times.”

This is a sad confession, is it not? And yet it is the natural outcome of the frustrations of a world in which life does not, and cannot, find its complete fulfillment.

Truth

Nor do we possess truth in all its fullness. The more we study the less we know, or rather, the more we know, the more we need to know. Earnest study opens up a thousand avenues of knowledge down which we might travel for a thousand lives if we but had them. Instead, like Thomas Aquinas—perhaps the greatest mind of Christian times—we are forced to confess that our finite knowledge leaves us standing on the sea shore of a vast infinity which is the ocean of truth.

Love

And just as surely as life and truth elude us, so too does love. Broken homes. Ruined lives. Bewildered children. All are but eloquent proofs that people have not found a true and lasting love.

Propelled as we are by these three basic inclinations which are the very mainspring of our beings, we are forced to admit they cannot find complete fulfillment in the things of this earth.

Life is mingled with death. Truth is mixed with error. Love is found with hate. Wherein, then, can we find the answer to our hearts’ desire?

Well, if we are looking for the source of the light which streams in through these sanctuary windows, we won't find it by searching the shadows inside. Here, light is mingled with darkness. If we want to find the source of these warming rays, we must go out to something that is pure light, namely the sun.

So too, if we want to find the fulfillment of our basic inclinations, we must go out to a life that is not mingled with its shadow, death. We must go out to a truth which is not mingled with its shadow, error. We must go out to a love that is not mingled with its shadow, hate. In other words, we must go --

out beyond the perimeter of this sphere,
out beyond the margin of this world,
out beyond the clotted clay of our humanity,
out to *Someone* who is pure life, pure truth and pure love.

And when we do, the words of Christ to Thomas take on new meaning.

“I am the way, the truth, and I am the life” (John 14:6).

Oh, how I wish this morning I could speak with the tongue of an angel. How I wish I possessed the lips of an Isaiah touched with a coal from the altar of God. For then, perhaps, I could make you understand who Christ is.

He is not some system of truth, some philosophy of life, some theory of love.

He is love itself. He is truth incarnate. He is the life of all living. And only He can meet your need.

You cannot live on a system of truth.

You cannot thrive on a philosophy of life.

You cannot grow on a theory about love.

“I had walked life's path with an easy tread,
Had traveled where comforts and pleasure lead

Until one day in a quiet place,
I met the Master, face to face.

“I had built my castles and reared them high,
Their towers had reached the blue of the sky.
I had sworn to rule with an iron mace,
‘Til I met the Master, face to face.

“With comfort and wealth and ease as my goal,
Much thought for my body, but none for my soul,
I had entered to win in life’s mad race
When I met the Master, face to face.

“I met Him, and knew Him, and blushed to see
That His eyes full of sorrow were fixed on me.

“I faltered and fell at His feet that day,
While my castles melted and vanished away.
Melted and vanished, and in their place
Naught else could I see but the Master’s face.

“My thoughts are now for the souls of men.
I’ve lost my life to find it again.
‘Ere since that day in a quiet place,
I met the Master, face to face.”

Christ As Life

First Mate Bob, host of the popular radio show The Haven Of Rest read the following on one of his broadcasts:

“What is life? The scientist surrounded by his test tubes and chemical apparatus answers, ‘This is

life.’

“The artist, standing before his masterpiece, brushes and colors in hand explains, ‘This is life.’

“The businessman, three telephones at his elbow, secretaries at his beck and call, intently engrossed with the law of supply and demand looks up from his papers and answers, ‘This is life.’

“The athlete, flushed with the glow of victory, smiles for the clicking flashbulbs and pantingly exclaims, ‘This is life.’

“The worldling, satiating his soul with the sensual pleasures of sin, chimes in, ‘This is life.’

“Which of these is right? The truth of the matter is that none of them are. Life is not made for labor, but labor for life. Life is not made for science, but science for life. Life is not made for service, but service for life. Life is not made for sacrifice, but sacrifice for life.”

All of these things, even the highest of them, are but means to one end which is life. And thus, when Paul says, “For me to live is Christ” (Phil.1:21), he is supremely right.

Jesus did not say he was a life, but the life. And if we would find the fulfillment of our first great inclination, we must turn to Him. We were made for Him and we cannot rest until we rest in Him.

Like mistletoe, which cannot root or grow except as it clings to a life outside itself, so too, we poor mortals cannot know the full surge about life throbbing in our souls unless we entwine our hearts around the staff of life, the tree of life, the only true source of life, the Christ who says, “I am the life.”

Christianity is not a system of beliefs about Christ, Christianity is Christ. For Christ offers Himself, not just His teachings for our acceptance. As the Bible says, “In Him is life, and the life was the light of men” (John 1:4). Here is the reality for which our hearts are yearning.

As someone has said:

“There is no other experience so pivotal, so basic as that experience of knowing Christ. That moment when we are born anew and life begins. Who among us can remember the hour of his entry into this world? Where is there one who can afterwards tell on earth the experiences of his

death? But numberless millions of the most thoughtful, the most sober, the most practical of men and women can testify to that holy moment when Christ came into their hearts; they were born anew, and life began”

No wonder, then that from the lips of that vast army of the redeemed there comes this swell of praise:

“Our Lord, our life, our rest, our shield,
Our rock, our food, our light.
Each thought of Thee doth constant yield
Unchanging, fresh delight.”

Christ As Truth

But what of truth? Is Christ the answer to this second great inclination of mortality? We can but answer, “Yea and Amen!”

There is a general tendency in our time to frown upon those who believe that our blessed Lord is different from other religious leaders and reformers. It seems to be a mark of good intelligence to rank Him along with Buddha, Confucius, Socrates, and all the rest, as if our Lord were just another teacher of some strange religious truth.

Just because a few resemblances are found between the ethical teachings of Jesus and those of Buddha, for instance, it does not follow that there is no difference between them. Just because the red, blue and yellow of a Rembrandt masterpiece are the same as the red, blue and yellow of my little girl’s finger paintings, it does not follow—as much as I might personally wish it did—that Rembrandt’s paintings and Jodi’s doodlings are of equal worth.

As so it is with Christ. As my friend Dr. Clarence Cranford points out, “Jesus is more than teacher. A teacher discusses truth. Jesus reveals it. A teacher presents truth. Jesus is truth. What Albert Einstein teaches about the nature of the Universe is true or false regardless of who

teaches it. But you can never separate Jesus from what He taught. He did not just talk about life, He is life. He did not just talk about God, He is God. And likewise, He is Truth. Jesus was not only the greatest teacher who ever lived. He, Himself, was the greatest lesson He ever taught.”

That is the real significance of the text we hear quoted so often, “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32) But that is not all of the quotation. It breaks the sentence right in the middle. What Jesus really said is this, “If you continue in my word, then you are my disciples indeed (John 8:31); and you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.” In other words, Jesus says, You shall know Me, the truth, and I, the truth, will liberate you.

Now this, of course, is a staggering claim. In one of His sermons Bishop Fulton J. Sheen declares, “When Jesus said ‘I am the Truth,’ he was saying something absolutely new in history. For the first time, truth and personality were married. Up until then, and since, men have always said: ‘Here is my doctrine. Here is my system. Follow these rules.’ But ideals apart from the fabric of personality are mere abstractions. No one can fall in love with a theory. No one can be really moved by a proposition. Truth to be loved and obeyed must be personal and our Lord pointed to Himself as the Truth. Buddha, and all the others, gave systems apart from themselves. But in the person of Jesus Christ, truth and personality are one. There is no truth apart from Him. He is the truth. Therefore, those who say, ‘The Golden Rule is the core of His teaching’ completely miss the point. It was not what He said. It was not even what He did. For these are nothing apart from who He was and is.”

How can I nail this down for you in words you can understand? Will this do it? Everyone else in history has lifted their finger and, pointing off towards some vague abstraction, have cried, “Lo, there lies God.” But Jesus, lifting up His arms to enfold the Earth cries, I am God. The very essence of God is truth. Therefore, because I am God, I am Truth. Know me. Accept me. Receive me into your hearts. And “you shall know the truth (that’s Me), and the truth (that’s Me) shall make you free.”

Christ As Love

And what of love? Can it really be true that Christ is the answer to this last great longing of mortality?

If there is room in your heart for doubt, then climb with me to the summit of the Hill of Calvary.

Witness with me the only real battle that was ever fought. Fulton Sheen described it thusly:

“I say it was a battle, but it was more than that. It was a war. A war not waged with spitting steel, but with dripping blood. A war not fought with stones, as David warred with Goliath, but with scars. Five hideous wounds on hands and feet and side. A war in which the armor was not shining steel, but sacred flesh. Hanging as it were like a purple rag beneath the darkened sky. A war whose battle cry was not ‘Crush and Kill’, but ‘Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.’ A war that was not won by saving a life, but by giving it.”

Is Christ the answer to our hunger for love? You tell me! Where else in all the earth is there a love like this?

His death upon the cross is history’s great declaration that “God is love.” For when He died, He did not talk about love. He demonstrated it.

His sacrifice showed, for all eternity, what love really is. For love is God reaching down to a broken, battered and bewildered world, lifting it to Himself, and crying out, “I love you, I love you, I love you.”

We read in Genesis that when God said, “Let there be light,” there was light. But you never read that God said, “Let there be Love,” and there was love. Love has no beginning because, as the scripture says in John 4:8, “God is love” and God has no beginning. So --

When you talk of the incarnation of God, you are talking of the incarnation of love.

When you talk of the manifestation of God, you are talking of the manifestation of love.

When you talk of the sacrifices of Calvary, you are talking of the sacrifices of love.

How did the hymn writer put it? Oh, yes:

“The love of God is great afar
Than tongue or pen can ever tell.

It goes beyond the highest star,
And reaches to the lowest hell.

"Could we with ink the oceans fill,
And were the skies of parchment made.
Were every stalk on earth a quill,
And every scribe a man by trade.

"To write the love of God above
Would drain the oceans dry.
Nor could the scroll contain the whole
Though stretched from sky to sky."

What, then, does all this mean? Just this --

If Jesus is the way, the truth, the life, if He is the supreme fulfillment of your deepest inclinations,
if in Him is the life and the light of men, do you not owe Him something in return?

If an author writes a book, is she not entitled to royalties on her writings, simply because they are
the creation of her mind?

If a man invents a machine, does not the government give him patent rights entitling him to a
return on his invention?

How much more, then, are you in debt to your Lord! You are His creation. His masterpiece.

Does He not have a right to a return on his creation? Is He not entitled to a royalty on His
work?

Since He has given you truth, are you not duty bound to know Him?

Since He has given you love, should you not love Him in return?

Since he stands ready to impart to you His life, should you not serve Him?

Which brings me back to my starting point. What is your life? What are the fundamental drives that propel you? What are the basic urges that cry out to be fulfilled? Are they not those universal longings of the human heart?

If so, then hear the words of Christ, “I am the way, the truth, the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me” (John 14:6). “Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37).

“And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die” (John 11:26).

In and through Jesus you have a love that can never be fathomed, a truth that can never be tarnished, a life that can never die. Therefore -- Come! Taste! And see that the Lord is good!