

This One Called Jesus

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The Promised Savior and Lord

Did you know that for hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus of Nazareth the Jewish people were expecting the coming of one who would save them?

"We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." These were the words that were used by Philip to call Nathanael to the Lord Jesus Christ. The Christian Gospel is centered in Jesus Christ the Savior.

All throughout the Old Testament we have the record that, as Israel would hear the Law on other matters recorded in the Old Testament Scriptures, they would have this idea of salvation. They would read of how the first parents, Adam and Eve, were condemned because of sin. But instead of being wiped out as they could have been because of their sins, Adam and Eve were clothed with skins provided by the grace of God. This immediately suggests that God will save. When the Israelites read that all mankind, because of sinfulness, was doomed to be destroyed by the flood, they would read that there was an ark for Noah for the salvation of him and his household. They would read of the condemnation of the cities, of Sodom and Gomorrah and of the great catastrophe that destroyed the cities, but they would also read of how angels were sent to rescue Lot. The idea would come to them that God knows how to deliver His people.

They would read of how all Egypt was to be in famine for seven years, but then they would read that Joseph had been raised up over the whole country that he might prepare for that famine. They would read that Israel had been in bondage as slaves in Egypt and were under cruel oppression. And then they would read that God heard the cry of the oppressed people and sent Moses to deliver. So the idea would come to them — God will save.

Again they would think of how Israel, even after they came into the land of promise, through their own sinfulness fell into bondage to the Midianites and to the Philistines. Then they would see that God had sent Gideon and Barak and Samson as judges who delivered the people.

They would go on to understand that when the kings of Israel led the people into the darkness of sin, God sent them prophets. These prophets, from Elijah on through Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Hosea, Micah and Daniel, spoke words of light and of hope in a time of sin. And when the people understood that "all had sinned and come short of the glory of God," their attention was drawn to the fact that God provided a lamb, a sacrifice, and that there was a way in which man could be forgiven. The great need of mankind was matched with a great Savior from God. There was a promise: God will send a redeemer for His people.

Thus the children of Israel, as they read their Scriptures, that when Adam and Eve sinned and all mankind in them sinned and was facing death, the Scripture said the seed of the woman shall bruise the head of the serpent. There was a promise that there would be a Deliverer for them from the threat of destruction. Later on, man demonstrated his own inability to accomplish things at the tower of Babel and was left in utter confusion, scattered all over the world. Yet the Scriptures show the call of Abraham and the promise, "In thy seed shall all nations of the earth be blessed." "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me."

As the Scriptural record moves on, the readers would notice that as long as the people were not under some direction, every man did that which was right in his own eyes, for there was no king in the land. Then would come the promise to David, that one of his descendants would sit on the throne forever and God would establish His kingdom over all. This promise sank deep into the heart of the people of Israel. No matter what distress, or what kind of trouble, no matter how dark the day and how hopeless the outlook seemed to be, always there was a star shining in the future. Always there was that promise that God would deliver His people. This was given to them in various ways.

They had learned throughout all the days of their worshipping God under the leadership of Aaron and his sons that because of sin man would be alienated from God. But God in the Tabernacle showed the conditions under which He would forgive sin. A sinner could come to God and bring his lamb for a sin offering. This innocent substitute would die and the man would go free. In the grace of God there would be salvation from sin. The priest would be able to come out from the innermost part of the Tabernacle and pronounce upon all the people on the day of atonement the forgiveness of their sins from Almighty God, because the blood had been shed. And when they were conscious of the fact that man's sinfulness would cause him to turn away from God again and again and again, they would also find that there would be high priests who would go into the very presence of God on their behalf. This idea would grow in their minds. God would provide a way for them to be saved.

When God's own people were unfaithful and all the world seemed to have gone after sin, when those who had worshipped Baal and Ashtaroah were the majority and even the nation itself was being destroyed, the promise would come of the day when God's righteous Servant would rise up. And although He would suffer unto death, God would glorify Him, and the day would come when He would rule. Emmanuel would come, mighty, Almighty, wonderful, the Prince of Peace, the King of kings and the Lord of all. These things were promised.

All the Old Testament Scripture on the one hand revealed the demands of a holy God, showed mankind his sin and warned him plainly that the wages of sin is death. At the same time there were promises that God has a way of forgiving sin. God would provide a Savior. There would be redemption, and deliverance. There would be blessing. And this would come through the Anointed One of God. Among the people of Israel He was called the Messiah. In the book of Daniel He is called the Prince. Amongst us to our day and time we call Him Christ, or Anointed One of God.

Now there were certain signs by which this coming One would be recognized. Throughout the Old Testament Scriptures there were prophecies made of signs by which He would be known.

In the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son. He was born in the town of Bethlehem. In the Scriptures they saw the promise which read, "Thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel." Likewise they knew that He would be born of the house of David from the tribe of Judah. And there was more. There was the Old Testament Scripture that told them that a virgin would conceive and bear a son. And in due time He came and was born of a virgin. And in this was fulfilled the words of that prophet.

I am quite well aware that there are people today who do not believe in the Virgin Birth. That is nothing new. They did not believe in that when He was here.

There were other things about this One who was coming. It was said that Elijah would come before He arrived; Elijah would go before Him. Then you will remember that the Lord Jesus Christ in speaking of John the Baptist said to His followers, "This is Elijah, which was for to come." The Old Testament Scriptures said, concerning this person that was coming to redeem, that when He was here He would manifest His power by healing the sick. He would open the eyes of the blind. He would make the lame

to walk. He would even raise the dead. This was done by Jesus of Nazareth.

He had the power to perform the miracles that the Old Testament Scripture said would be the mark of the Messiah, the One who was to deliver us. It was said of Him in the Old Testament that when He came the gospel would be preached to the poor, and that was exactly true about Jesus Christ. It was also said about Him that He would suffer unto death, and we know He did. It was said about Him that He would redeem His people from their sins. That is the joyous testimony of every person who believes. They are completely saved and delivered by the Lord Jesus Christ. It was said that He would come riding on a colt, the foal of an ass. That is exactly what He did. It was said that He would come to rule His people, and to this day "He is the head of the Church: who is the beginning, the first born from the dead."

He is the Lamb of God who came to bear away the sins of the whole world in His death on Calvary's cross. He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah who is to come again and to reign in power and in glory forever and ever. This is our Savior and Lord.

The Incarnation

"I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary . . ." You will recognize these words as being taken from the Apostles' Creed. They represent what has been the common testimony of Christians from the very beginning.

The Christian Gospel is by no means any hidden thing. It has been openly proclaimed all over the world. All the world hears with appreciation about Jesus of Nazareth who went about doing good. Yet the world has an unusual way of accepting His life and ministry. For instance, they will accept the idea that He was born in Bethlehem. But many, many will ignore the angels. They will accept that Mary was His mother, but they will deny the Virgin Birth. It is in the very same story. They will accept His deeds as good, and they will all tell you that He did good. But they will deny that He had power to walk on the waters. They will accept the fact that He healed the sick, but they will deny His power to heal them with His words, when He could say to the leper, "I will; be thou clean." They do not believe that. They will accept His teaching as true, they will quote it and they will talk about it as if it was the very truth. But then these same people will turn right around and deny the reality of demons. They will not believe in the reality of Satan. That was in His teaching! They would accept His sinless conduct, but they would deny Him when He says, "I and my Father are one." They will accept His death on Calvary. Yes, well then what about the resurrection. They do not want to believe the resurrection. The same book, oftentimes the same chapter tells about both.

People will for instance accept His promise to be with them. You would be surprised how many people just love to hear the words preached or taught in such a way as would imply that the Lord Jesus Christ is present with us. But they will deny the reality of the Holy Spirit, and that is the only way in which Jesus can be with us. They would accept, for instance, His presence with God. That Jesus of Nazareth lived and died as the New Testament records it, and is now in the presence of God, you would find very few people doubting you there. But they would deny the ascension, when He went there. Many people who would accept the idea that He is preparing a place for us, will deny His coming again, and that is in the same book.

We are not left to the inadequate opinion of the natural man about the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have the Scriptures. And in the Bible we have what we commonly call the Christmas Story. Paul in Galatians would say, "When the fullness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of

woman, made under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." The angel of the Lord said to Joseph, "Fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shall call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins." Again we read in another place that Gabriel said to Mary, "And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David; and he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever: and of his kingdom there shall be no end."

The Gospel has Bethlehem, a little village in the hills. Here God sent forth His Son.

This is one birth that did not have to be. The Son of God took on human form on purpose — to die. We read in Hebrews, "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil."

The Bible tells us of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in a different way than anything that man would plan. Into a world of pride and show, this child was born in a stable and laid in a manger. In a world of prominent rulers and powerful parties, Joseph and Mary could find no room for them in the inn. Into a world of selfishness and greed, He came to give. Into a world of personal fame, when men are forever seeking to build themselves up to be something, He came to be humble, meek and lowly. Where men are so determined to get, he came to serve. Where men quarrel so readily, He came to love. Bethlehem was God's simple answer to the world's fevered sophistication. He came to be and to do where men only seem to pretend.

Bethlehem forever will be God's quiet answer to the world's noisy clamor. It has its symbol — the star. The darker the night, the brighter the gleam. As gentle as starlight, silent as the dawn, and yet with such a message of hope — there is a bright day coming. The star shines on. God has given Him a name above every name.

He was born unknown. They did not know who He was. God has arranged that every knee shall bow and every tongue confess "that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." He came lowly in such humble fashion. Anybody could come to Him. There is no threshold to step over when you come to the Lord Jesus Christ. But He came with power to save to the uttermost those who come unto God by Him. The Bible does not speak a great deal of these things. It says nothing of Christmas. Bethlehem is referred to somewhat, but Bethlehem was not as great as Calvary, nor as Pentecost.

When God looked down upon Bethlehem that night and saw that Babe born there, what would He think? The Scriptures tell us, "When the fullness of time was come, God sent forth His Son." He sent Him knowing that His Son would be rejected, abused and killed. What would it mean to Christ Jesus who was with the Father before the world began? What did the coming into this world mean for Him? We read He emptied Himself, He "made himself of no reputation." We read in another place that His words would be, "A Body hast thou prepared me . . . Lo, I come . . . to do Thy will, O God." He knew right well what it would mean. "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." He could say, "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." He could say, "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." We should remember that when He was born He came to die. While He lived here on earth He was conscious of this. From time to time He would say, "Mine hour is not yet come." And then there came a time when He could say, "The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified." Speaking of His death and of the fact that the people intended to put Him to death, He made this comment, "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world." When Peter would have defended Him when the soldiers came,

you will recall how He turned to Peter and said, "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and He shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" He could plainly tell His disciples, "I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me."

He was doing this for us. He went into Gethsemane and shed, as it were, great drops of blood, praying to God about the whole matter, facing the issue that this was the will of God for Him that He should die for us. All of this was known to God. All of this was known to the Lord Jesus Christ before He ever took upon Him the human form and was born as a babe.

Then what should it mean to me? God's unspeakable gift? I should receive it and be thankful. What would it mean for me? All the hope in the world and in eternity is there — redeemed by the precious blood of the Lamb. Because He came to die for me, I can expect to be forgiven. And because He was raised from the dead, I can expect to be brought into the very presence of God.

The Lord Jesus Christ coming into this world and taking upon Him the form of man and suffering for me is in a sense very much like it would be if I had my car stuck in the mud and I sent to a garage for a tow car to come and help me. The operator comes and puts his truck into position and then takes the cable to go down and fasten it onto my car. And you know what he must do? He must get down into the mud to attach his cable to my car. He has to get muddy to get me out of the mud. And Christ had to die to bring me from death to life, so that I can be raised in Him unto eternal life. Truly my heart should praise His holy name.

Calvary

"Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." These words were spoken by the Lord Jesus Christ when He was pointing forward to His own death.

Over the whole world the cross is the symbol of the Christian Gospel. The cross is recognized even among people who do not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. For instance, the meaning of the Red Cross is directly derived from Calvary. This is commonly known as the blood of Christ. When that term is used, we do not refer to the actual physical blood that was shed on Calvary as though it were going to be kept throughout all the ages, but we use that term to refer to the dying of the Lord Jesus Christ on Calvary's cross. And when we say that we have been saved by the blood of Christ, we mean we have been saved by the death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The world sees this as the violent tragic death of an innocent, good man, but much more than this is true. This death was no accident. This was no sudden calamity. The Lord knew that it would happen. From the very first He had told His disciples and warned them that this was going to occur. He would not evade it. And when one of His disciples urged that this should be far from Him, He turned to rebuke him, saying, "Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offense unto me: for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but these that be of men." This was an event, an action, that the Lord Jesus Christ did not want to escape. He Himself repeatedly made it clear." The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." He had this in mind. He came for this very purpose. On the road to Emmaus He could ask the two disciples, "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things?" And then He opened up the Scriptures to show them how this was in the very will of God.

The death of Christ which we refer to when we say *Calvary* was a voluntary action. It was not

coerced, nor forced. "I lay down my life," He said, "no man taketh it from me. I have power to lay it down. I have power to take it up."

We should look at this amazing and astonishing event, the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, until we can see its real meaning. This is what Moses and Elijah discussed with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. And Peter tells us these are the things that the angels desired to look into. The truth of the matter is that this death of the Lord Jesus Christ was necessary. This had to be done. It was involved in the project of salvation.

Let me stop here for a moment and offer you an idea of what this thing would be like. Why does the lifeguard get all wet when he goes to the rescue of a boy? Because the boy is in the water, and the only way to get the boy out is for the lifeguard to go into the water. You see I was in the flesh, as a human being, doomed to die. So He came into the flesh where I was and died as I should have to deliver me, to get me out of there. It is to the praise of Jesus Christ that He was willing to do this.

We read in the book of Romans, "God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." And again Paul writing to the Corinthians said, "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich." He paid a price. There is no question about that. This is the price that He paid for our redemption. Peter wrote "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold . . . but with the precious blood of Christ." And Paul with this in mind reminded the Corinthians, "Ye are not your own. For ye are bought with a price." This death of the Lord Jesus Christ then is of great significance and meaning to us.

While it is true that the Lord Jesus paid the supreme sacrifice on Calvary's cross, and there one time in all time and eternity died for us, it is also true that He had endured suffering every day. He is continuing to endure suffering, shame and humiliation. He is being rejected constantly. This rejection simply culminated that day on Calvary's cross.

There is much truth to be seen in this event when you look at it from the various angles and see it in its many facets. Calvary shows the consequence of sin. If it had not been for sin, there would not have been the cross. Christ Jesus died for our sins. And again Calvary shows the measure of His love. For us He would die. Again let us remind ourselves it was a real cost, as Gethsemane will help us to see.

I have never felt that I fully understood all that was involved when Jesus Christ died. I do not think that He was afraid at all of physical death. He knew that physical death would be overcome. In some deep eternal fashion He was separated from His Father on my account. The Lord Jesus however did not die to stay dead. When you think about Calvary do not think about this only as the price that was paid for sins. It was the price that was paid for sin, but we are going to see it was the key that unlocked the door. This is the way the escape hatch was opened up so that you and I could get out of there. He did not die to stay dead. He did not go down into the grave that He might be forever away from His Father. He knew that God would raise Him from the dead. We read in Hebrews, "Who for the joy that was, set before him endured the cross, despising the shame."

The cross on Calvary was not an unfortunate tragedy. It was tragic, but not only that. It was in fact a brilliant strategy. This is the way the Lord would do it. He was going to do something. He was not simply going to set us free so that we would not need to die and then we would go out and do the best we could. No, He was going to take us to Himself, but this is the beginning of real actual deliverance. In Calvary's cross we see the fate, the end of all flesh, of everything that is human. It must die "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth." Everything human is headed straight for the grave.

And for us the first step in real deliverance from Satan, is to die in the flesh. "If any man will come

after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." When you look at that statement of the Lord Jesus Christ, you see three different ideas." Let him deny himself." This is involved in the whole matter of going to the cross. And this is what the Lord Jesus Christ did. There was nothing about the cross of Calvary that would appeal to the self. The cross basically means death to self. When a man says that he has been crucified with Christ, He has crucified the flesh with the affliction and lust thereof. This strikes us very strange today. I am hopeful that you and I will see it at its full face value, because you and I are living in a culture that is featured by status seeking. We teach our children to make something of themselves. People are demanding the privilege to make something of themselves. This is just natural for all mankind. This makes the Gospel of Jesus Christ seem almost out of order.

I realize that a great many people get by in this whole matter by just ignoring the Gospel. They hear it, and they let us preachers preach it. They sing it in the churches. But they never take it out into everyday life. Then of course they never know the blessing. If you really want to know the blessing, pause at that moment and take a good look at the truth. The way to the Lord Jesus Christ, the way to eternal life, the way to future and ultimate and great blessing is the way of the cross. It leads home.

"Take up his cross daily." This is the second step. Take up his cross daily, voluntarily. Nobody pushes you to it. You actually accept the call to deny yourself day by day by day. This was what the Lord Jesus faced in Gethsemane. He cried out to His Father, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me." He concluded at the end of three hours of agonizing prayer, "If this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done." Always in the Lord Jesus Christ is this — "Not my will, but thine." Always it is the will of God that we should deny ourselves. And if we will deny ourselves we can have the Lord Himself with us.

The third step follows right on this — "Follow me." There is only one way you can follow Him. First, simply lay it down as a flat rule that you are not going to seek things for yourself. The Scripture will tell you, "Seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not." Take up your cross daily. It is not just once, but over and over and over again. Just as a matter of living, yield. Let God work for you. The one example that the Lord Jesus Christ set for me was in these words, "I come . . . to do thy will O God." That will lead me straight to the cross.

Others will take us and bind us and carry us where we do not want to go. But the cross is essential that the glory might follow. This is what He called the rich young ruler to do — follow Me. And you will remember he went away sorrowful because he had great possessions. It was this that He called Peter to do — follow Me. "This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God."

Calvary: what the Lord Jesus Christ did for us in that He died for us, but also through which He calls us that we might go on into the very presence of God. Although Christ Jesus died on Calvary's cross, we are going to see that God raised Him from the dead.

The Resurrection

"But God raised him from the dead." This is the way the Apostle Paul gives expression to history's greatest event: "But God raised him from the dead." Can you see that Easter is far more glorious than Christmas?

Our Lord Jesus was asked on one occasion to give a sign of His work. He answered that the only sign that would ever be given would be that of the prophet Jonah: "As Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." He pointed directly to the resurrection and said in effect that that is the only sign on earth. Let me repeat

that again. The only event on earth that is worthy to be a symbol or a sign of the whole Christian Gospel is the resurrection.

In I Corinthians Chapter 15 Paul maintains that the resurrection of the body of Jesus is essential to the Gospel. Paul makes this the one essential item in saving faith. He says in Romans 10:9, "that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." Confessing with your mouth Jesus as Lord is largely indicating your intention. You are going to surrender to Him, acknowledge Him as your Lord. But believing in your heart that God raised Him from the dead means that you are going to accept this event, this record, as being actually true. That will result in what will go on to the saving of your soul.

This is not to say that God is going to save your soul as a reward or prize for your believing this. Something happens to you when you believe that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead and you put your trust in Him. Whenever I think about the resurrection I think of the way in which it came to me. Here I want to give a word of personal testimony about this matter. I grew up as a product of North American schools and newspapers and culture. I was very much conditioned in my thinking to the idea of natural law. I thought everything in the universe operated according to a fixed system of uniformity. When I came to what I call intellectual self consciousness I recognized myself as an agnostic skeptic. So far as the Gospel was concerned, I did not believe it. I was very much circumscribed within this world. I saw only as far as I could see and reached only as far as I could touch. I just believed the things that I could actually sense. As I came to hear and to understand the Scriptures with the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and felt moved in my heart to accept the idea that it was probably true, I was repelled, in a sense almost pushed away, by this demand that I believe in the literal resurrection of the body. I can remember I was at home thinking this over. I was in a wheat field working on my father's farm. At the time I was a young school teacher. One afternoon while I was thinking things over I felt almost aggrieved. In my heart it did not seem right that a man's salvation should depend upon his believing such an impossible thing. Why, according to the way the Bible read, was I supposed to believe that a body that had been dead for three days actually came alive? That seemed to contradict known events. I used to wonder how anybody really could be expected to believe that.

But there was no doubt about what the Bible said. You were to believe in the resurrection.

Then I asked myself, why am I so sure it is not true? My answer was there never was anything like it. Then I would think to myself that is what His disciples said. They said there never was anything like it — that He was the first born from the dead. How do I know it is untrue? The best I could say was it just seems unbelievable. And I asked myself, why did it seem that way? And I realized that it was because of the way I understood things. I thought things went by natural law. I just could not believe it. I remember asking myself this question, "Suppose God wanted to do it? What would you say then?" I turned that over in my mind. Then I saw that what I had to believe about the resurrection was that a person who had once been created, having died, should be called back into existence a second time; he should live *again*. Suddenly I asked, where did he come from in the first place? Then I saw that the creation is a greater miracle than the resurrection.

What does the resurrection mean? It means that God having made me one time would call me back into existence a second time. But what is creation? I never existed before; God makes me out of nothing. Well, that is a far bigger miracle. And as I thought about it I could see that actually the resurrection was not impossible if the creation was understood. And the creation was obviously real because I was here.

It might not work for anybody else, but that afternoon I suddenly saw that if your God was big enough you could have the creation. If He created the world He could resurrect anybody He wanted. He

made him once out of nothing, He could make him again the second time. It just seemed to me as if my whole idea of the universe had been wrong, far too limited.

If you have difficulty about the possibility of the resurrection as I have described it to you, let me urge you to stop and realize that the whole Gospel is that way. You will not have trouble only with the resurrection. You have all the miracles to face. And if you push away the miracles and you push away the resurrection, you have got to push away the pre-existence of the Lord Jesus Christ. You and I never existed before but, according to the Gospel, He did. You are certainly going to have to push away the Virgin Birth. You cannot have that unless you are willing to believe that Almighty God is able. If you go through the New Testament and look at the works of the Lord Jesus Christ I will tell you now you will not find one thing He did that any human being could do with human strength, not one. He did some things such as washing the disciples' feet to show me an example. But if you are going to stop because you cannot believe in the supernatural and in the Almighty power of God, you have to shut the Bible and turn your back on it. You cannot have it at all. You cannot have the Lord Jesus Christ unless you have Him able. The resurrection belongs right in here.

And believe me, it does not stop with the resurrection. After the resurrection for forty days He showed Himself alive by many infallible proofs. And after that the ascension took place. After that we have His present ministry in the very presence of God. And after that we have His coming again. "This same Jesus . . . shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." I want to tell you that if you say you cannot believe the resurrection, just close the Bible. You will not be able to believe any of it.

But thank God, you do not have to do that. Thank God, you can leave the Bible open and read it and see it and glory in it. This is the way God does.

What actually did happen on the day of the resurrection? His body was raised from the dead. He showed Himself alive by many infallible proofs. When Thomas could not believe it, the Lord Jesus coming to him eight days later said, "Thomas, put your fingers in my hand and thrust your hand in my side and be not faithless but believing." Luke, who we understand was a doctor, gives us the most detailed account. If anybody has any questions in his or her mind concerning the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, just read the closing chapters of Luke.

What does this mean to us? What shall it mean to you and to me that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead? One thing, it gives us an example of the power of God. God can raise the dead. God did raise Jesus of Nazareth. He raised Him to show His power. He is able. He raised Him to vindicate the Lord Jesus and show the whole world that He was His Son.

But also He raised the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, so He will raise us who put our trust in Him. You see this is how souls are saved in the Lord Jesus Christ, by the Lord Jesus Christ and through the Lord Jesus Christ. We are raised from the dead. We are made alive, we are now able to live in the newness of life.

The second idea that comes to us from this resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is that resurrection is real. It is not only possible that we might be raised from the dead because God *could* raise the dead: the Lord Jesus Christ actually was. There shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. This world is not all. For us it is only the beginning. Every soul will face God. There shall be a resurrection of the dead, both the just and the unjust.

Another reassuring fact in the resurrection that is real is this — Jesus is alive. He is now Lord and Christ, and properly called the Lord Jesus Christ. But He is alive. Stephen saw Him. Saul on the Damascus road saw Him. And being alive He prays for believers. The living Lord can have His hand on

you. Paul in one place reported, "The Lord stood by me this night." It is marvelous that the resurrection is real. Jesus is alive.

Now in the third place, I want to say that Jesus' resurrection means that the way to eternal life here and now is open. Right now in this world we can be free from the power of our sins. Our sins are all centered in our human nature. If we come by the way of the cross we reckon our human nature to be dead. And we are raised from the dead by the power of God. Paul talked about this in the sixth chapter of Romans. Notice beginning at the 4th verse, "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in the newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection; knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin." We can be free from the power of our sins because that wherein sin held us, which is the flesh, is reckoned as dead. When it is dead, we are set free from it because we are raised by the power of God. The very power that raised up Jesus Christ from the dead will be operative in us.

Now in Romans Chapter 8, the 11th verse listen to these words: "If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you." It is marvelous to think that you can be set free. This is the kind of thing that Paul had in mind for himself. The apostle wrote in Philippians 3:10-11 that he committed himself to God "that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead." This is possible and it all takes place here and now as well as hereafter. Paul prayed that the Ephesians might know this great power of God and that it should be operative in them.

Because of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, you and I can walk in the newness of life. We can encourage each other in everything that we do to remember that we are going to be in the very presence of God. But more than that, even now God is going to be in our presence. We can have God with us right now as we live. When Paul talks about these things in the 15th chapter of I Corinthians we find him closing his comments with words like this: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." Because we do have the power of God that raised up Jesus Christ from the dead, you and I do not need to live at this poor, dying rate. We can actually be having in ourselves the power of God to deliver us from evil and the power of God to bless our work so that fruit will actually follow. God is able to raise the dead and by His power to lift us into the newness of life through the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Ascension

In the four Gospels the ascension is mentioned in only two of them. That should impress us no more than the fact that with reference to the Virgin Birth only two of the Gospel writers mention that event. However, we do have this additional fact that in the book of Acts there is a rather definite account of the ascension. Thus, in the first five books of the New Testament this event is directly referred to in three out of the five.

Now I want you to notice these few short passages. First of all, look in the Gospel according to Mark 16:19-20. "So then, after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen." This is a rather general comment if you stop to think

about it, which may not have about it the tone of an eye witness as much as it has the tone of what was commonly known among them. No one is saying he actually saw this happen. These two sentences actually refer to the preaching of the disciples from then on, over the years of time. We should not be overly impressed by the fact that there is no specific description of the event.

But now let us look in this passage itself. You will see that here are six statements of what happened. Two of the six refer to the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ. "After the Lord had spoken unto them." I count that as one statement. That refers to His earthly career. "He was received up into heaven." That is His ascension. "Sat down at the right hand of God," when He had ascended. "And they went forth, and preached every where." That speaks of the apostles. "The Lord working with them" speaks of the Lord blessing them as they were going. "And confirming the word with the signs following" refers to the results and the effects of the word preached. Those are the six statements. I am sure no one will question the first, "After the Lord had spoken unto them." There is no doubt about that, is there? "They went forth, and preached everywhere." That is an historical record. Now, "the Lord working with them." They were effective, were not they? Well then that is a true statement. "Confirming the word with signs following." There were signs that followed their preaching, right? Then that is a true statement. Of the six statements I have pointed out, four were actually factual statements of history that took place in this world. Now let us look at the other two. "He was received up into heaven" and "sat on the right hand of God." Shall we think they are not real? Are the other four real? Well with six statements like that in two sentences, shall we say that four are real and two are not real? Why not all?

In Luke 24:50-53 look closely to exactly what he said. "And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen." In these four verses we again find six statements of fact. At least one of these six statements refers to the ascension. Are the other five statements true? Is it true and real that "he led them out as far as to Bethany?" Nobody questions that. "He lifted up his hands and blessed them," that is accurate. "They worshipped him," yes, that is three. "They returned to Jerusalem with great joy," that is four. They "were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God," that is five. Why eliminate the sixth one, "He was parted from them and carried up into heaven"? If five of the six are historic and real, why not the sixth one? It is all in one context.

Now look in the book of Acts at a longer passage, Acts 1:9-14. There are ten statements of fact. "And when he had spoken these things," is that all right? Well that is number one. "While they beheld," would you accept that? That is number two. "He was taken up" is number three. "A cloud received him out of their sight" is four. "While they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up" — and they did. "Two men stood by them in white apparel." That is five and six. "Which also said" is number seven. And they said, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." That is a clear statement. "Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey. And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room." That would be number nine. "Where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alpheus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication." That is the tenth. Now in those ten statements of fact there was one that read, "He was taken up," and another one, "a cloud received him out of their sight." Then later on you will find the passages that have to do with the two men in white who stood there and what they said. Now of these ten statements of fact, four deal with what

happened to the Lord. Two tell about His going up and being received in a cloud. Two tell about the men in white and what they said. Six deal with the things that happened to the humans. Now, are the six that deal with the humans real and are the other four just fantasy? Would that make good sense, really, after all? Well then, why not just accept it the way it reads?

Actually the Bible gives us little preparation for our minds that we could be prepared to understand something of this sort. And yet there is some preparation in the Bible about it. In Genesis we have the story of Enoch. "Enoch was translated." "He was not; for God took him." That is the first case of a person taken from this world into the other world, and you have it there as a matter of record. Later than that in the case of the story of Moses you read about how Moses went up on Mount Nebo and died and how God took charge of his body. It says that God buried him and that no man ever found his grave. In the New Testament we read that Michael the archangel contended with Satan over the body of Moses. It is quite possible that the body of Moses was taken out of this world. When we come to Elijah, we do not need to have any conjecture about that. You will remember the story of Elijah. He was carried up in a chariot into the very presence of God. In the New Testament about the only thing we have that comes anywhere near this at all is the story of the transfiguration. When the Lord Jesus was on the mount, not only He Himself was transfigured before them, but Moses and Elijah came and talked with Him. Then, of course, just before the story of the ascension we have the remarkable story of the resurrection. This is about the preparation that the Bible will give to your mind to enable you to grasp this idea that the body of the Lord Jesus Christ was taken up into heaven in full view of human beings right here on earth.

Let me point out that the ascension took place in full view of men who believed the resurrection. They knew about the resurrection. I could expect one way in which a person could be disqualified from ever knowing about the ascension is just not to believe the resurrection. If you did not believe the resurrection, of course there would not be any ascension. If a body wasn't raised from the dead, then there would be no body to go to heaven. But that is idle talk. We have the body raised from the dead according to the resurrection, and now we have the body taken up into heaven.

Now what shall we think about this? Some time ago it dawned on me in a new way, and I was very much struck by the fact that the Lord Jesus did this thing in an open way rather dramatically. I think you could say in a reverent way that this whole matter was staged before the apostles and the disciples for them to see. He had appeared and disappeared. Why not on one of those occasions when He disappeared just stay in heaven? No, He wanted this to be seen. He wanted His disciples to see His body taken from this world into the next.

What shall we accept from the implications of this? The first implication is just as easy as anything you ever saw. Heaven is real. There really is such a thing as heaven. It is as real as the earth is real.

That ought to mean something to you if there is ever any one of your family gone. If anyone of your own loved ones is ever gone from here, remember what the Apostle Paul said, "I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep." Heaven is real.

The second thing I want to point out that is as plain as anything in this story is that a person can go from earth to heaven. Now we are going to find out also that a person can come from heaven to earth, because "this same Jesus . . . shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go." But just now the primary thing is that this person's body in full view of these people went up into heaven. "He was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight." You do not need to let one syllable of that statement drift from your mind. Just look at it, listen to it, take it to your heart, hold it there. Heaven is real, and a person can go there.

Now the third thing that I want you to notice is Christ Jesus did go. In a certain, final and significant

sense Jesus Christ did go from earth to heaven, and something like a hundred and twenty people saw it happen. There is not any other way to understand it.

Not only is it true that Christ Jesus did go into heaven but He is there now.

The fifth thing that is implicit in this story is He will come again. I do not know what other thoughts you may have about the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, but read it as it is in the book of Acts. "This same Jesus . . . shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." Nobody can read English and make anything else out of it.

Then I want to point out that all this is a real now. Stephen saw Him up there. Saul saw Him up there. Peter had dealings with Him up there. All this is real now. And what is so tremendously impressive to my heart is that all this is for us. As Christian people this is what we can cherish. You remember in Mark they went forth after this had happened, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them. I cannot help but feel that any man who will preach with the consciousness of the ascended Lord in heaven is going to have a power and authority in what he has to say. And in Luke we read, "They worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God." Oh, the joy of knowing that Jesus Christ is alive and in glory!

Pentecost

Do you realize that no believer in the Lord Jesus Christ will ever be alone? "I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you." These are the words spoken by the Lord Jesus Christ to His disciples just before His death. He knew that He would leave them and that they would be here in this world alone. He realized that they would feel as though they were now without anyone at all to lead them and to guide them. These are the words that He spoke to them. "I will not leave you to be orphans; I will come to you."

We have realized by now in this series that the Lord Jesus Christ is now at the right hand of God in heaven. Now for His followers, the people here on earth, He would be absent. They would be left alone. But the truth is, as we read it in the record, that before He left He taught them clearly that they would never be alone. Not only was it true that He would pray for them when He was gone, but it was also true that He would send them another Comforter, whom He called the Holy Spirit, who would take the things of Christ and show them to His people.

When we think about the disciples being led by the Holy Spirit, we should keep in mind that this is no change in leadership. Christ is Lord — always. The fellowship that was once developed person to person in the physical presence of the Lord Jesus Christ would now be continued person to person between believer and Lord in the spiritual relationship. It is characteristic of the Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus taught, that the Spirit would not speak of Himself. He would speak only of the Lord. And you know this has a very interesting message to us that actually those persons are the most spiritual who think the most about the Lord Jesus Christ. It is when the heart and mind is filled with the consciousness of Christ that the Holy Spirit is actually operating in that person.

We all need to recognize the Spirit. We need to honor the Spirit. It is proper to worship the Spirit, to be aware of His presence. We should take great care not to grieve the Spirit. We should be careful not to quench the Spirit. And we should always have in mind that we would obey the Holy Spirit.

But let us keep this in mind — that if we look for Him we will not find Him. He keeps Himself out of sight. The one way in which the Holy Spirit would guide our thinking is into the face of the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior.

We are going to be thinking in this study of Pentecost, the next great event that followed the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ. After the Lord Jesus Christ ascended into heaven, ten days had been spent in prayer. While the disciples were all gathered in one place with one accord there suddenly came upon them the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ in the person of the Holy Spirit.

What happened at Pentecost took place in the believers. It is not that anything new happened to God, nor anything special happened in the Godhead. This happened in the believer when there was now a new awareness of the presence of God. I am going to try to understand the meaning of Pentecost for the followers of Jesus Christ.

Just now I would like to bring to your mind a way of helping you to understand the significance of what happened on the day of Pentecost. I will remind you that the Bible sets out several different situations in which God will meet with His people. The idea that there would be a personal fellowship face to face between God and His believers is set forth again and again in Scripture.

In the Old Testament, there were two different situations in which God would meet with His people. First, while the people of Israel were traveling around over the desert as nomad shepherds and cattle herders, taking their flocks with them, in those days the dwelling place of God was set up in the Tabernacle. Everyone who knows the Old Testament will remember the Tabernacle, a structure of skins that was arranged in such a fashion that the children of Israel worshipping God, through the High Priest could actually come into the presence of God. Sometime later after Israel settled down in the land of Judah and had established themselves in the city of Jerusalem, there came a time when they built a permanent dwelling place for God. That was called a Temple. That was prepared by David and was built by Solomon. Although we do have both the Tabernacle first and then the Temple in the Old Testament, we are reminded in the Bible that God does not dwell in temples made with hands. But He dwells in the hearts of His people. We are prepared in the New Testament to find that God's dwelling place is in the Church, in the hearts of the followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, I want to draw your attention to something in the record with reference to these three places. The Tabernacle was designed by God and shown to Moses on the mount. When Moses came down from the mount and taught his people, among other things he taught them the design of the Tabernacle. He secured skilled workmen to prepare the Tabernacle. Moses told them about the pattern that he saw on the mount, and they built the Tabernacle that way. The Book of Exodus closes with the Tabernacle having been built and everything in place the way it was supposed to be. The sacrifices had been offered as they were supposed to be. Then a most amazing event occurred. When everything was in line and was arranged, suddenly the glory of God filled the Tabernacle with such a brightness and glory that no one could go in. That has been called by the word *shekinah*. The word *shekinah* means glory. This describes the glory of glories, the most glorious thing you can imagine happens in the Tabernacle.

Later, in the time of Solomon the Temple was built. When this great magnificent structure was finally completed, with the cedar from Lebanon and with all the gold and silver that Solomon prepared and put in that place, and the sacrifices had been offered, hundreds and thousands of animals had been slain, and everything was the way it was supposed to be, suddenly the shekinah glory came to the Tabernacle and to the Temple when each had been completed and when everything was the way it was supposed to be. Under those circumstances God manifested His approval of the arrangements by filling the place with glory.

Now try thinking about that with reference to Pentecost. These disciples had been gathered by the Lord Jesus Christ. He had instructed and taught them and shown all the things that He did. Finally during the forty days by many infallible proofs He showed them that He was really alive from the dead,

and had made all these arrangements for them, even taking them out to a hillside, and there in full view of them, being taken up into heaven. Then ten days had been spent in prayer during which time they had, you will remember, appointed the twelfth apostle so they would have the number perfect. Every thing had been done just exactly the way in which they understood that it should be done. Under those circumstances suddenly the glory of God filled the Church.

Now I want to draw your attention to the meaning of this event of Pentecost from the standpoint of the Lord Jesus Christ. The coming of the Holy Spirit into the Church makes possible the personal presence of Christ in you. Paul, writing to the Ephesians, told them and he prayed for them that they might be "strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith." Christ could dwell in the hearts of people who had been strengthened by His Spirit inwardly to believe the promises of God. So, the coming of the Holy Spirit made it possible for these disciples actually to believe the promises of God in Christ Jesus and the personal presence of Christ in you could actually take place. From a practical point of view that has such meaning as this: when you are in the personal presence of the Lord, when you really believe the promises of God and you know that Christ Jesus is actually with you, you will find that He does not instruct you where to go. He takes you by the hand and leads you where you are going. He does not direct you to which door you should enter. He opens the door before you and you walk in with Him. He does not exhort you to persevere and put out all your strength and hang on, so to speak. He urges you to cast your burden on the Lord for He cares for you. The personal presence of Jesus Christ who is alive now can actually be realized in our hearts because of the Holy Spirit.

This can mean so much about our sins. When we are conscious of the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, the weight of sin is lifted. He will purge our conscience from dead works that we might serve the living God. Even our sinfulness will be dealt with. We know we are weak. We know we are inclined to falter and to fall on any and every occasion. But when you are conscious of the presence of the Lord, when you have the feeling that His hand is upon yours, the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ will cleanse you from all sin.

If by some chance you feel your weakness and that you are weak in faith, you find it hard to believe the promises of God, hard to be faithful to Him, you have done what you should have done and it just seems so long to wait for anything to happen, under those circumstances the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ will affect you in such a way that you will be strengthened with all might by His Spirit in the inner man. Believe me, the presence of the Lord will encourage you and will strengthen you. If you are a Christian and you are wondering which way to go and what to do, you can have in mind that if you will go into the presence of the Lord and have the Lord Jesus Christ personally present with you, it will become clear to you. "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." You will find that you are guided by His personal presence even when you have suffering, sorrow and distress. He will comfort you and encourage you. When you are conscious of the presence of the Lord, you will know what it means to say, "In quietness and confidence shall be your strength." The presence of the Lord Jesus Christ is a wonderful blessing for every one of us.

If you have your Bible open to the book of Acts to Chapter 19, look at the first seven verses. You will see here that the presence of Jesus Christ made real to you by the Holy Spirit must be received. I read: "It came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus; and finding certain disciples, he said unto them, have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, we have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then

said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues and prophesied. And all the men were about twelve."

Let me point out several things for you to think about. Disciples can be real without having the full blessing of the Gospel. That is the way it was with these. They were disciples, but they had not received the Holy Spirit. One could ask this question — what were they lacking that Paul missed? What was it about them that Paul noticed? He did not ask this question of everybody he met. He was with them for a while. After he had been with them, probably in their prayer meetings, he had said to them, "Say did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And then they told him, "Why we did not know the Holy Spirit was available." Something that they would not be lacking would be their consciousness of sin. They were aware of sin because they had the preaching of John the Baptist. He made them conscious of their sin. And they were ready to repent because they had John the Baptist. Then what would it be? I wonder if it was a lack of joy. I wonder if these were Christians who were so conscious of their sins and so conscious of their weakness and although they knew that God would forgive them, they never seemed to have any more than that? They knew that God would forgive them, but they knew that tomorrow they would be weak. But they just did not know that they could have the Holy Spirit of God, that they could have the Lord Jesus Christ Himself in their presence. That would have given them joy. If you ask me why did they not know, I will tell you. Apollos was a fine young preacher but he did not know. If you will read the last verses of Chapter 18 you will find that Apollos at that time did not know. He only knew the truth of John the Baptist.

The second thing we will notice is that disciples will know whatever truth they have heard. I as a preacher can keep that in mind. According to the way I preach that is the way people understand. Now John the Baptist's message was true. No doubt about it. And Paul did not deny it at all. But it was not complete. What they believed was all right. They just did not believe enough.

The third thing I want to point out is disciples can enter into the fullness of blessing. They can receive the Holy Spirit sent by the Lord Jesus Christ.

So we have been thinking about what happens now that the Lord Jesus Christ is in heaven. What happens now that His body is up there at the right hand of God and He is interceding for us? What happens is this: He has sent the Holy Spirit to us. And the Holy Spirit takes the things of Christ and shows them to us so that we can live in the presence, in the conscious, personal presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, and be blessed.

Our Advocate

Every Christian should know that the living Lord appears on behalf of the believer before the throne of God all the time. "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." And the wonder and glory of that truth is that that personal representative is none other than the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Any believer who ever does anything that is not according to God's will has a defense attorney already retained on his behalf before the judgment power of God. And our defense attorney, whom we call our advocate, has never lost a case.

We have been blessed to see the wonderful riches of His grace toward us. He became flesh in order to die for us. He died to redeem us. He arose from the dead to deliver us. He ascended into heaven to open

our way into the presence of God. Then he sent His Holy Spirit to help us while we are here. All this marvelous provision is available.

But all this will be functional in us according to our faith. "According to your faith be it unto you." The truth of the matter is that despite the Almighty power of God and wonderful grace of our loving Lord, all these things are prepared for us yet depend upon us to receive them. They are offered to us. We are recalled to receive, and "as many as receive him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God." Any failure on our part to receive this wonderful grace of God in a willingness to respond to His will is sin.

Now here is one of the serious concerns for a Christian. Anybody who is a genuine, sincere believer in the Lord Jesus Christ and has turned to God to trust in Him is afflicted in his own consciousness about one thing — the spotty, uncertain, inconsistent nature of his response. I know there are some of us who could weep in despair as Peter did when he had denied his Lord. He was a follower, a disciple. He had been called to be an apostle. And he loved his Lord. And yet in an almost, you might say, unconscious moment he was confronted with the test, with the challenge, and he fell into denial.

Some of us could be as baffled and chagrined as we go on about our work as the disciples were when the man brought his boy to them and they tried to cast out the demons and could not. The Lord Jesus cast them out. Afterwards the disciples came to the Lord to ask Him, "Why could not we cast him out?" The Lord replied, "Because of your unbelief." They were disciples. They were servants. And yet they could falter in their faith.

Or perhaps some of us would be from time to time smitten because of our own lack of faith as Thomas was. When the Lord Jesus said, "Come put your fingers in my hands and put your hands in my side," Thomas fell at His feet to say "My Lord and my God." I say this matter of the weakness of our faith can be a real trouble to us.

I want to draw to our attention that the Lord will help us even in this. In 1 John 2:1-2 we read such wonderful words as this: "These things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins." Now this is spoken by an apostle to people who believe. Whom could we possibly have as our representative pleading for us that would compare to Him, the beloved Son of God? The Father loveth Him, and He is the King of kings and the Lord of all. Yet He appears before the judgment seat of God now to plead for us. It is so wonderful to know that He will pray for us, and in a certain sense it is almost even more wonderful to realize that He will pray for us even before we feel that we need it. I might actually be unaware of how much I needed it, but the Keeper of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps.

This was the case with Peter when we read in the Book of Luke in Chapter 22. At a time when Peter was still full of self confidence and had just told the Lord that he would never leave Him nor forsake Him, if everybody else turned away he would never turn away. Our Lord Jesus speaking to him spoke these words: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not."

As with Job, Satan is even now accusing the brethren. So far as you and I are concerned, Satan has one thing to say in the presence of God and that is that we would not be faithful if God really let us be put to the test. Satan is the accuser of the brethren. In the presence of God he insinuates that you and I would not be strong enough, we would never make it, and so he is constantly working, as it were, to reduce us in the sight of God. He points them out and insinuates that because of those weaknesses we are but chaff. If Almighty God let him put us in a sieve, he would shake us and sift us in the presence of God and the wind would just blow us away. There would be nothing to us.

But our Lord prays for us before that testing. He prays our faith will not fail in the test. It is very important for you and for me to notice here that the Advocate does not pray that the test will be removed. The Lord Jesus did not say, "Satan desired to have you, but I asked Almighty God not to let you be put to the test." That is not the way it reads. Peter is going to be put to the test. But that is the spot at which if he believed he would come through. According to your faith be it unto you. But right at that spot we may not believe and our faith may be weak. There is where the Lord Jesus will pray for us; that our faith will be strong enough to endure the test to the glory of God.

Something of His interceding on our behalf is to be seen when He is pictured as the High Priest in the book of Hebrews. In Chapter 2, verses 17 and 18 listen to these words: "Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren [that means that He took on human form], that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people." The Lord Jesus Christ was made a Priest that He might make reconciliation for our sins. He is merciful and faithful. He will look upon us with mercy and He will consider our problems that He might deliver us.

Look at verse 18: "For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them [to save them], that are tempted." He was tempted in the desert when He was hungry after a long fast to turn the stones into bread. Other temptations came to Him, and He "was in all points tempted, like as we are, yet without sin." He knows what it is for us to face the challenge of the temptations that the enemy puts before us. Again, He was tempted when Peter suggested to Him that He did not need to be taken and killed. He had to say, "Get thee behind me, Satan." In Gethsemane He sweated "as it were great drops of blood" until He did say before God, "Not my will, but thine, be done." He had gone through these things. "He knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust" (Ps. 103:14). The Lord Jesus Christ was made like unto His brethren so that He would know from first hand experience just exactly what it is to be empty and weak in ourselves and utterly dependent upon God.

Notice Hebrews 4:14-15 and you will see the same idea set forth. "Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." Touched with all the feelings of our infirmities . . . Do I feel weak and uncertain? He knows what that means. Am I dubious about the outcome of things and wonder how things will turn out? He knows about that. He knows everything about the weakness of the human being, limited as we are. He put Himself in there, and He understands these things very well.

Now notice Hebrews 5:1-2 where we see something more about what He is actually to do. "For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins." The Lord Jesus Christ Himself was taken from among men and ordained for men. He was given this commission that He may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sin. The one great sacrifice He offered was Himself. He brought His own precious blood of the Lamb of God and offered it in the presence of God that we might be delivered. He was actually set aside, ordained for this task. Now look at verse 2: "Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity?" That is, He Himself is surrounded by the evidence of the incompleteness and the instability of the human being in the flesh. This He knew; not that He was sinful but that He was human in the sense that He limited Himself to the human. He can have compassion on the ignorant, those who do not know, and on them that are out of the way. Maybe not everyone of us knows that this expression, out of the way, means wicked. That is the Hebrew word for wicked — you missed the way — you deviated from the plan of God. The Lord Jesus Christ can have compassion on

those that do not know any better and on those who have gone wrong. He was actually prepared for this by the very things He passed through.

Now Hebrews 5:8, "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered." That is not to say He ever was disobedient. When it says He learned, it does not mean He changed His mind. It means He entered into an understanding of it; He actually found out from personal experience what it means to suffer. Every believer can be assured and reassured that we have a Savior, we have a Redeemer, we have a High Priest in the presence of God, who understands our problems and who prays for us.

Now let me turn further on in the Book of Hebrews to Chapter 7:25. To my mind this is one of the most wonderful verses in the Bible. Look at it. "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." Probably you have heard the song, "I have a Savior; He is pleading in glory."

It is a wonderful thing to know that the living Lord Jesus Christ is praying for us. That always starts me out thinking something like this: If I do anything wrong and have sinned, He is praying for me, showing in the presence of God the sacrifice for sin which He offered. And if I am facing some experience or perhaps there is some actual trouble coming up, He is praying for me before the trouble comes. When I am in it, it is actually crushing me down. But He is praying for me while I am in trouble, while I am carrying the load. And afterwards when I am through with it. He prays that the benefits and the consequences will follow. He prays for us after we have had our trouble. Just think of it — Nothing can happen to you as a believer about which He has not prayed. There can be nothing that you have ever done about which He does not pray and offer His blood as the expiation for your sin, nothing that can now burden you but what He is now praying for you, and nothing can ever come to you tomorrow that is any surprise to Him. He has prayed about it on your behalf. We have an Advocate with the Father, even Jesus Christ the righteous. Always in the presence of God He is our Friend. And no wonder we can rest quiet when we remember He knoweth the way we take.

The Coming Lord

The Bible tells us plainly that Jesus Christ is coming again. "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." Acts 1:11. They were spoken by those two men in white apparel to the disciples on the occasion of the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In dealing with the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ we have need to be very careful. In Scripture we have been warned against being misled. In Matthew the Lord Jesus is reported as having said to us about His coming, "Take heed that no man deceive you." Then he goes on in the 24th chapter of Matthew to make it very plain — He will come. Do not let anybody talk you out of that. Then in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 the Apostle Paul emphatically says, "Let no man deceive you by any means." And he goes on to make it clear that the Lord Jesus will return in person. He will actually be seen and dealt with. Then again, our Lord Jesus Himself in telling about this also in Matthew 24 put in this statement, "Watch therefore; for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come." And there He makes it very plain that His coming will be unexpected as that of a thief in the night. In 1 Thessalonians Chapter 4 the Apostle Paul wrote to say, "I would not have you to be ignorant brethren, concerning them which are asleep. . . . For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him." Further, he wrote that "the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout." I

could go on and report Scripture after Scripture after Scripture.

There is no question what the New Testament has to say about this. Even the critics of the New Testament and the people who do not believe will all agree that the New Testament says He is coming back. We do well to keep in mind that all we know about the coming of the Lord we have been told in the Bible.

Now as we study the Bible we note that there are some things written about future happenings that are written for that generation which will be on earth at the time it happens. These are things that people who live earlier than the happening may not fully understand. In 1 Peter 1:12 we read about the prophets of the Old Testament, "Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves but unto us they did minister the things which are now reported unto you." You see they wrote them down, but not for themselves. On another occasion the Lord Jesus said to His disciples, "I have told you before it comes to pass that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe." I want to point out to you that before what He spoke of comes to pass we will not know. But when that does come to pass, these spoken words, this written Scripture, will confirm and help us to understand what actually happened.

A case in point concerns John the Baptist. Have in mind that the Old Testament Scripture said about the coming of the Messiah that Elijah must first come. Now our Lord Jesus said about John the Baptist, "This is Elijah, if ye will receive it." The thing that I have always noted for myself is that no one had identified him. They knew the Old Testament Scriptures, and they knew that Elijah must come. They heard John the Baptist preach and saw all he did, but it was the Lord Jesus alone that identified him and said, "This is the one that was talked about." We conclude then, on the basis of this, that there are Scriptures written about the coming of the Lord which will become really and fully meaningful, clearly understood, when they are fulfilled. At that time it will be seen that these things were said beforehand. And we could perhaps be easily deceived and fall into various kinds of inadequate notions, if we start figuring out those things before these things come to pass.

However, enough has been written to establish the blessed hope in our hearts, and I want first now to look at what is plainly stated. First I will note the verse that I quoted at the beginning of my remarks to you, "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." Nothing could be more plainly put. This is so simply and succinctly stated that there should be no question what it means.

There are several important truths that you and I can keep in mind. The first one will seem like I am saying this over and over again, but I feel in our day and time it is very important for us to hear it and to realize it — He is coming again. Now to this agree all the Scriptures. I have already pointed out a number. Now there are people today who do not believe it. There were people back in those days that did not believe it. There were always people who did not believe it. But there is no question about it being in the Scriptures.

Again, I want to point out to you He is coming in person. Just keep that in mind. It will be His personal presence. "This same Jesus . . . shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go."

This leads me to point out immediately another thing. His coming will be visible, "in like manner as you have seen him go." They saw Him go. Well, the Word says they will see Him come. In the book of Revelations we read, "Every eye shall see him." And in Matthew 24:30 we read, "They shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." His coming will be visible.

Now again, His coming will be glorious. When the Lord was speaking about this in the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew, He said people will tell you that Christ has come back, He is over here, or He is in the desert. He said do not believe them. And He went on to say, "As the lightning cometh out of the

east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." And Paul writing to the Thessalonians said, "When the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." It would appear that this will be a total whole world situation, everybody will know.

Now let us come a little closer from another point of view. His coming will be sudden. He will come "as a thief in the night." This expression is used over and over again. When men least expect it, when they are not looking for it, He is to come.

It will be unheralded. There is not going to be any warning. "Of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven," is what the Lord Jesus said. No man knows when, *but He will come.*

Now the unfaithful servant that the Lord Jesus told about in His parable at the end of Matthew 24 estimated that the Lord might come, but He would come later. He was mistaken. In such an hour as he did not expect Him, He was there. And the ten virgins you will remember were looking for the coming of the bridegroom. They all had lamps. But five of them were foolish in that they did not think He was coming then. And they made their mistake. There was no warning ahead of time. If there had been any warning to say "Tonight the bridegroom will come," they would have had oil in their lamps. But the parable is told vividly to make it very, very plain that "in such an hour as ye think not." And we are told: "Therefore, be ye also ready: in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh."

We might notice also that His coming will be in judgment. Take that unfaithful servant. When the master came and found that servant had abused his fellow servants you will remember he was judged right then and there. Take the parable of the talents, which is so very plain. The master went away into a far country and left talents for his servants to use. And after a long time the master came back. He is coming back and when He comes He will call for an account. And there will be a matter of judgment upon the faithfulness and the diligence of the people whom He has left here. Also, in Matthew 25, is the parable of the sheep and the goats. The master would come back, would judge and would separate the sheep and the goats. So also we read in 2 Timothy, "The Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom." When He comes, He will judge.

Because He will come to judge the world, His coming will also be to receive His own. "Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet with the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

Finally, we can say in this connection His coming will bring others to reunion. "Even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him."

I have quickly gone over a number of these various ideas so that you and I might recognize that there is a great deal we know. We know He is coming again. We know He will come in person, and every eye shall see Him. We know His coming will be visible. His coming will be glorious, in clouds of glory. He will come with thousands of His angels. His coming will be sudden. It will be as a thief in the night. It will be unexpected. In such an hour as you think not. And He will come in judgment, to estimate what has been done in His absence. He will come to receive His own like the bridegroom comes for the bride. Those of us who will be looking for Him and who put our trust in Him will not be afraid, because there will be no judgment for us. We are not passing into judgment. We are passing into the presence of Him who loved us and gave Himself for us. And His coming will be to bring all these to reunion. For that reason Christian people do not sorrow as others which have no hope, for we believe that the Lord will bring our loved ones back and take us to our loved ones.

His coming will mean different things to different people. Even as it is now and as it was in the days of Noah, the world will be going on pretty much as ever. There will be marrying and giving in marriage.

People will be eating and drinking and doing all the usual things that they do. And in the world there will be unbelievers and there will be believers. The coming will mean different things to different people. To the unbeliever He will come as a Judge. And He will judge all men by the law of God. It will not make any difference that they did not have it written to them. They have the law in their own hearts. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork." And the law of God is universal, it applies to everybody. And He will judge everybody. God will judge the whole world by the righteousness of that man whom He hath ordained. At the same time He is coming to the believers. For the believers He is coming as a Savior who has already dealt with their sins. Christians have already confessed their sins, He has dealt with them and He will call them to Himself. Now this is a blessed truth.

This truth of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ is doubted by some. And I would like to say humbly and reverently, so what. Have you ever thought about how the things of the Lord Jesus Christ have been doubted? The Virgin Birth; of course there are people who doubt it. Does that change it any? The resurrection of the body; I know there are people that do not believe. Does that mean He was not raised from the dead? I know there are people that do not believe the ascension into heaven and there are people who do not pay any attention to it. Men say they do not believe the Bible. Never pay any attention to this. Does that change it any? There are people right now who are paying no attention to the living Lord Jesus Christ interceding for us. Do you think that is going to stop His interceding for us? The Keeper of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps.

Something else, this truth is often ignored, like the foolish virgins. This is always at a terrible risk. If I were half-way smart I would remember it. Some think the coming of the Lord is postponed, like that unfaithful servant figured, "Well, not tonight." He made a mistake. Sometimes it is scorned, as you read about it in 2 Peter, the third chapter. Make a note of this. You will find out there are people who will laugh, saying all these hundreds of years nothing has been changed. That does not make one bit of difference. He will still come in God's own time.

Now there were some people who allowed the coming of the Lord to disturb them. You can read about that in 2 Thessalonians. They were disturbed at the one point where there is the major peril. Estimating the time — that is dangerous. Do not ever try to figure out when. Now some times people get so excited they say He might come back tonight. He might come back this week. All of which is true, but if you emphasize it too much it can be unsettling for you and you might think, "Well, what shall we do?" Go to work. That is what Paul told the Thessalonians to do. Go to work. It will help you to keep the thing in its place and balance.

But far more serious is those people who say His coming is not now. And the one parable He told about the unfaithful servant at the end of Matthew Chapter 24 draws attention to the danger of estimating that He is not coming now. That is the dangerous thing. What is the answer for them? The warning is be ready.

This is the blessed hope of the Christian. We shall not neglect it. In our thinking we are not going to postpone it; it could be any time. We are not going to schedule it. We are not going to tell you when it is going to be. And we are not going to belittle it. It is the glorious coming our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.