



THE CHRISTMAS
STORY ACCORDING
TO JESUS CHRIST

HAVE YOU EVER read the Christmas story according to Jesus Christ? I do not mean the Christmas story according to Luke, which we know so well, or Matthew, which we also know, or even the apostle John, but the Christmas story from the lips of the Lord Jesus Himself.

If we could meet the great personages of the Christmas story and interrogate them one by one, the story from each would be beautiful and stirring. Mary would have an account of the appearance of the angel, her trip to visit Elizabeth, the birth itself, the visit of the shepherds. Probably the early

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chapters of Luke give an account of those things as Mary herself told them. If we called the shepherds, they would be able to give us many details not in the biblical narrative, perhaps a description of the angels or the result of their later testimony to other people. Joseph would have his story. Yet having gone through all that interrogation, we would still want to hear from our Lord.

Where are we going to find that story? We do not have it in the gospels. The Lord's own story is in the Old Testament, in the fortieth psalm—and in the New Testament, which repeats these words in Hebrews:

Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said:

“Sacrifice and offering you did not desire,
but a body you prepared for me;
with burnt offerings and sin offerings
you were not pleased.
Then I said, ‘Here I am—it is written about me in the
scroll—
I have come to do your will, O God.’”
(Hebrews 10:5–7)

That is what I call the Christmas story according to the Lord Jesus Christ.

BORN TO DIE

What is it that our Lord emphasizes in these verses? First, that He came into the world for a purpose. That is important,

for it is uniquely true of Him. It cannot be said of any other person that he or she came into the world to do something. It is often true that there are purposes *parents* have for their children. They hope that the child lying in a crib will grow up to do something significant in this world. If the parents are Christians, they want their child to be kept from sin and be able to serve Jesus Christ. Parents have those and other aspirations. But the child does not have them. The child has to acquire them. That is why, from a Christian perspective, the child must be taught its destiny from the pages of the Word of God.

But Jesus was different. Our Lord says that He came (and was conscious of coming) for a specific purpose. Moreover, He spells that purpose out: “I have come *to do your will, O God.*”

What was that will? God willed Christ to be our Savior.

I do not know why it is, but we often lose a sense of that purpose in telling the Christmas story. We focus so much on the birth of the baby and on the sentiment that goes with that story—and there is a certain amount of legitimate sentimentality that goes with it—that we miss the most important things. Actually, the story is treated quite simply in Scripture, and the emphasis is always on the fact that Jesus came to die. The Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, took a human body in order that He might die for our salvation. When our Lord speaks of His coming it is therefore highly understandable that He is thinking along those lines.

In the tenth chapter of Hebrews the author contrasts the sacrifices that took place in Israel before the coming of Christ—the sin offerings and burnt offerings, by which believers testified of their faith that God would accept them on the

basis of the death of an innocent substitute—with Christ’s great and perfect sacrifice. It is in the context of that contrast, between the former things and that which has now come, between the shadow and the reality, that he brings in the quotation from Psalm 40. The Lord Jesus Christ came into this world with a purpose, and that purpose was to do God’s will: to be our Savior. We miss the most important thing about Christmas if we fail to see that.

WHO CAN PAY?

A second point emerges from these verses. It is not only that our Lord came into the world with a sense of purpose; He also came into the world with knowledge that He was the perfect one to fulfill that purpose.

It is possible to have a noble purpose and yet not be the one to fulfill it. We see that many times when we talk to children. They are aware of what they want to do, but often they cannot quite do it. They will say, “Here, let me do it! I can do it!” But they cannot do it, and after they have struggled a bit—wise parents let them struggle—they must be helped to fulfill the task. That was not the case with Jesus Christ. As He came into the world, our Lord had His mind on His great purpose: to provide salvation for the race. But not only did He have the purpose in mind, He also was aware that He was the one perfectly suited to carry out that purpose. He was perfectly suited by virtue of who He was. Unlike anybody else who has ever been born, He was not only man; He was God as well. Therefore while as a man He could die

upon the cross, as God He died in order to pay the infinite price necessary for our salvation.

Harry Ironside used to tell about a young man who was a soldier in the Russian army. Because the young man's father was a friend of Czar Nicholas I, the young man had been given a rather responsible post. He was paymaster in one of the barracks for the Russian army, and it was his responsibility to see that the right amount of money was distributed each month to the soldiers. The young man meant well, but his character was not up to his responsibility. He took to gambling. Eventually he had gambled away a great deal of the government's money as well as all his own.

In due course the young man received notice that a representative of the czar was coming to check the accounts, and he knew that he was in trouble. That evening he got out the books and totaled up the funds owed. Then he went to the safe and got out his own pitifully small amount of money. As he sat there and looked at the two he was overwhelmed at the astronomical debt versus his own small change. He was ruined! He knew he would be disgraced. At last the young man determined to take his life. He pulled out his revolver, placed it on the table before him, and wrote a summation of his misdeeds. At the bottom of the ledger, where he had totaled up his illegal borrowings, he wrote: "A great debt! Who can pay?" He decided that at the stroke of midnight he would die.

As the evening wore on the young soldier grew drowsy and eventually fell asleep. That night Czar Nicholas I, as was sometimes his custom, was making the rounds of this particular barracks. Seeing a light, he stopped, looked in, and

saw the young man asleep. He recognized him immediately and, looking over his shoulder, saw the ledger book and realized all that had taken place. He was about to awaken him and put him under arrest when his eye fastened on the young man's message: "A great debt! Who can pay?" Suddenly, with a surge of magnanimity he reached over, wrote one word at the bottom of the ledger, and slipped out.

The young man was sleeping fitfully. He awoke suddenly in the middle of the night, glanced at the clock and, realizing that it was long after midnight, reached for his revolver to shoot himself. But as he did so his eye fell upon the ledger. He saw something that he had not seen before. There was his writing: "A great debt! Who can pay?" But underneath it was the word the czar had written: "Nicholas."

He was dumbfounded. He did not understand how it could have got there. There must be some mistake. He went to the safe where material that bore the signature of the czar was on file. It was the czar's signature. He said to himself, "The czar must have come by when I was asleep. He has seen the book. He knows all. Still he is willing to forgive me." The young soldier then rested on the word of the czar, and the next morning a messenger came from the palace with exactly the amount needed to meet the deficit. Only the czar could pay, and the czar did pay.¹

In the same way only the Lord Jesus Christ was able to pay our debt to God. We look at the moral requirement of God's righteousness spelled out in His law. We compare it with our own tawdry performance, and we ask the question: "A great debt to God! Who can pay?" But then the Lord Jesus

1. H. A. Ironside, *Illustrations of Bible Truth* (Chicago: Moody, 1945), pp. 67–69.

Christ steps forward and signs His name to our ledger: “Jesus Christ.” Only Jesus can pay, and He does.

JOY UNSPEAKABLE

The third thing in this text is that Jesus was delighted to do the Father’s will. That very word is in some of our versions. It is certainly in the fortieth psalm. We find in many places in Scripture that the Lord was *satisfied* in His ministry. The twenty-second psalm describes His death by crucifixion, and toward the end of that psalm He is praising God. The fifty-third chapter of Isaiah perhaps better than any other Old Testament passage spells out the theme of vicarious atonement, the death of one on behalf of the many. At the end of that chapter we find Jesus looking upon the travail of His soul and saying, “I am ‘satisfied’” (Isaiah 53:11). Hebrews 10:5–7 tells us He actually *delighted* to do the will of God.

Could Jesus be delighted to come to this earth from glory, to lay aside all the privileges and prerogatives He had enjoyed as the eternal Son of God, to take to Himself a human form, to become like us, to become poor, to suffer throughout life, and then eventually to suffer upon the cross and die the death of a sinner, a malefactor, an evildoer? Yes, Jesus delighted in that, because it was His pleasure to do the Father’s will to achieve our salvation.

Imagine a person who sees something to be done and recognizes that he or she is the one to do it, but then either does not do it or does it reluctantly. The person says, “Well,

I suppose it has to be done, and I guess I'm the only one able to do it. Nobody else will do it if I don't. So, all right, I'll do it." The work is done, but there was no joy in it. I am glad our Lord did not think like that. Our Lord did not say, "Well, Father, I suppose that if this is what You want and if You haven't got anybody else, I'll go die." It was not like that at all. Jesus delighted to do the Father's will. It was His joy to bring the sons and daughters of God into glory.

Is it any wonder that the angels were joyful as they announced the coming of that one who was to be the Savior?

We too should be joyful, not because we give gifts to one another, not because there is a certain lightheartedness or Christmas spirit in the world at large, not because there is a pretty story that is nice to tell children, but because Jesus Christ was joyful as He came into the world to be our Savior. If He was joyful, we should be joyful as well.

"I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS"

There is one more thing to notice. When the Lord says, "Here I am," He is speaking in the present tense, which is undoubtedly intended to make this important point: "I have come; but not only have I come, I have come never to depart again."

Edmund P. Clowney, the former president of Westminster Theological Seminary, had been speaking about Christ to some individual. The person said, "The problem I have with Christianity is that it all happened so long ago. You're talking about something that happened two thousand years

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ago. If Christ had only been born, say, a hundred years ago, it would be different.” Dr. Clowney’s response was the correct one. He said, “Those events that happened so long ago have not ceased to be current. Rather, the Lord Jesus Christ, who came then, comes again and again through the person of His Holy Spirit to bring the accomplishment of His salvation to the individual.”

That is the reason the Christmas story is alive. It is the only reason it has the hold it has upon so many millions of people.

If the story were a fable or even an event that merely had happened 2,000 years ago (or even 100 years ago) and then ended, it would have no hold upon us. What does it really matter that somebody died long ago in a far-off land? I have my problems. You have your problems. So what? But if the One who came then still comes, if He comes to the individual through His Spirit to bring the results of the salvation He accomplished 2,000 years ago to where you and I stand and act now, then this story lives and enables us to live also.

Have you found the Lord Jesus Christ, who came at Christmas, to be your Savior? Have you placed your trust in Him? He has come. He can be yours in this moment. Phillips Brooks, in his carol “O Little Town of Bethlehem,” has a stanza that is a delight at this point.

How silently, how silently
The wondrous gift is giv’n!
So God imparts to human hearts
The blessings of His heav’n.

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No ear may hear His coming.
But in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive Him still,
The dear Christ enters in.

So He does! May this be your experience at this Christmas season.