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CHAPTER I

THE LIVING CHRIST

"I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore" (Revelation 1:18).

LARGE sections of the Christian Church are occupied with a dead Christ. One who visits the cathedrals of the old world and gazes on the multiplied crosses and crucifixes cannot help but realize this fact.

After repeated visits to some of these cathedrals, climaxed by a sight of Oberammergau, the figures seen upon the crosses prompted the writing of the following lines:

Dark is the building, and heavy the air,
Bent are the shoulders of all;
Bowed in the darkness, and ready to sigh—
Crosses, some short, and some tall.

Mystic the music and rhythmic the chant,
Faces of worshipers search—
Slight the response as from saints on the wall!
O Christ, is this Thy Church?

Art Thou still holden by death in the tomb?
Is there no joy for our song?
Chantings monotonous in tongue unknown,
Tiring the worship, and long.

Failing and halt are these poor, weary souls;
Blind as their leaders who fall.
Speak, Christ, again to the dying and dead;
Away from Thy faith is man's call.

Altars, they name them, with candles and gilt,
Reverent toward wood and toward stone;
What of the One who despised gold and show?
Dead He there hangs, and alone.

Music and stained glass, and cardinals red,
Incense, and candlelight gleam;
Pleasing to eye and to ear, though it be,
Thou, Christ, art dead, it would seem!

Have men forgotten the tomb and the morn,
While praising for Calvary's tree?
Ah, Thy glory shines forth in the triumph achieved
Over Death in Thy great victory!

Empty, the cross, of its victim and shame;
Thou art not molded in lead.
We worship in gladness a Christ who now lives—
Thou didst arise from the dead!

Is it possible that this One has actually been raised from the dead? Is He really the One foretold by the prophets? Yes, indeed, He is the Person whose birth and life and death were presented almost in detail centuries before it all occurred. Furthermore, He is the One the man of God addressed when he said, "And thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands. They shall perish, but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail" (Heb. 1:10-12).

His earthly beginnings were insignificant. Born of an unknown woman in an ordinary village, in an ignored province of a despised land, there were thrust upon

Him all the limitations of poverty and lack of opportunity. He had lived as an ordinary youth, though becoming an extraordinary man. As other men He had been care encumbered, lonely, and hungry. But more than other men, He had been despised and forsaken; falsely accused, arrested, scourged, crucified. Yet this is the One who in prophetic word has been given the name, "Wonderful"!

Yes, wonderful indeed, is He! Here He stands—wonderful in His birth—wonderful in His life—wonderful in His words—wonderful in His deeds. He died a wonderful death and came to a wonderful crisis in His triumphant resurrection. Here He stands—Conquerer of sin, and death, and the grave.

The entire series of events surrounding the resurrection lends itself to dramatization and emotion. The crowded court room and the cowardly judge. The sad procession and the curious throng. The planted cross and the suffering Saviour. The sealed tomb and the Roman guard. And finally the moment of triumph with the stone rolled away and the grave robbed of its prey. The body that was dead and buried is once more throbbing with life.

The whole scene stirs the pulse as one from the gallery of the years looks on. Yet we must remember that it was not so arranged. There was no gallery at that time and there were no onlookers.

Literature, music, art, have all given form and color to the scene. The poet and painter have united to give us a great theatrical spectacle, and unless we are careful we will be occupied with an event rather than with a Person.

Is it not sad that God gives us His best—His only begotten Son—and the church manifests its interest more in the event of His coming than in the Person who has been here? God gave His Son by way of the manger and the church is busy with Christmas. God gave His Son back in resurrection triumph and the church has only an Easter. God has promised that His Son will return to the earth and many are merely looking for another event. Are you looking for Christ to come, or are you looking for the coming of Christ?

Old Testament Types and Shadows

The Christian must never dissolve into nothingness the historical events and incidents of the Old Testament, but at the same time must keep before his mind that these but form the vehicle for presenting the revelation which finds its culmination in the Person of Christ.

The giving of the Paschal Lamb had meaning and value not only to those who were first delivered from death in Egypt because of the applied blood, but also to those who later in Tabernacle and Temple presented their offering before God. However, its greatest value was anticipatory. It pointed forward and so as we enter the New Testament we see John the Baptist pointing to Jesus Christ, and saying, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world."

You can see that while God had given them the lamb and the ordinance of the slain lamb He was also giving them a prophetic photograph of a Person. With this agrees the apostle Paul—"Christ our passover is sacrificed for us."

The ordinary reader of Scripture will remember the giving of the manna to Israel. God made splendid and abundant provision for their physical sustenance but He did more. Listen to Jesus: "Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (John 6:49-51).

They found the miraculous supply of water from a smitten rock but Paul says: "And [our fathers] did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that rock was Christ" (I Cor. 10:4). Christ is in agreement here also for He says, "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:13, 14).

In the ancient times there was a vine cut in the stone over the Temple entrance. No doubt this vine had been reproduced in the reconstructed temple, for Israel is the vine of Jehovah's planting. It is possible that our Lord looked toward that vine symbol in stone when He said, "I am the true vine."

Why can we not see that the Person of the Son of God is the heart of the Bible, the center and circumference of truth, and should be the actual heart of our faith and worship?

In the Old Testament God's people found their comfort in repeating, "The Lord is my shepherd." In the New Testament that Person says, "I am the good shepherd."

In the Old Testament occurs the dramatic story of the serpent on the pole. In the New Testament we find Jesus saying, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up."

Alas, the children of Israel forgot the experience but kept the serpent. But in Second Kings, during a revival under Hezekiah, "He brake in pieces the brazen serpent to which they burned incense."

This is the way some people treat the Cross today. They worship a bit of metal or wood, or a figure on a cross. I heard a young man who had been wonderfully saved from thieving and banditry say, "I used to go out robbing men with Jesus on a metal cross in my pocket." When he got the Christ of resurrection in his life, then he was saved from dishonesty and got rid of his sin, and his "religion," too.

New Testament Types and Symbols

If the Old Testament tries in type and symbol to point to a Person rather than to a series of events, so does the New Testament.

If Abraham was the ancient father of the Jew, here we meet One who declares, "Before Abraham was, I am."

If Moses was their real law-giver, here we meet One who quotes the law and says, "But I say unto you," and "Moses wrote of me."

If wisdom is at stake, "a greater than Solomon is here."

If men are concerned about a priesthood, this man is "after the order of Melchizedek," and if they are seeking a great King like David, why, here is the One whom David in spirit calls Lord, saying, "The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool" (Matt. 22:44).

"Abraham rejoiced to see my day," said Jesus. Did He then live in Abraham's time? Yes! "Before Abraham was, I am." It was not a mere event when to Abraham, sitting in the tent door on the plain of Mamre, "The LORD appeared." Oh, the glorious theophanies of the Old Testament—a nameless guest, a wrestling angel, a pillar of cloud, a still small voice, and a Person standing in the midst!

Here is the entire Bible presenting and picturing the Son of God, but man has merely been thrilled by events and happenings.

God would have us know that He makes much of His Son. Christ is the very center of God's affection and purpose. If God thinks of the universe, it is in connection with the One by whom all things hold together. If God has a plan for the nations, it is summed up in "the government shall be upon his shoulder."

God is interested in the Church—yes, but it is "His Body," and God's love reaches to every individual Christian as He gives the One who is the believer's life—"Christ in you, the hope of glory."

How stubborn and short sighted we are! There was the glorious Mount of Transfiguration. What would be the reaction of the disciples to such a unique experience? It is sad to relate, but here it is—"Let us build here three tabernacles." They are ignoring the Person while

they would memorialize the event. No wonder the rebuking Voice said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him."

Mary and Martha had the privilege of a visit from Jesus in their own home! And Martha would make an event of it. Of course, it was the greatest occasion the home had ever known. But He does not want to be an occasion. "Mary has chosen the better part." Not occupied *for* Christ, but occupied *with* Christ. Not a celebration, not an event, but a blessed Person.

Christ Presented in Hebrews

The Book of Hebrews presents the past, present, and future of the life of Christ. While here on earth, He was the perfect sacrifice for sin. Concerning His sacrifice, we read:

"Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh; how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Heb. 9:12-14).

Concerning His Priesthood, we read:

"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: 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.

“And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins. And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.

“So also Christ glorified not himself to be made a high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, today have I begotten thee” (Heb. 5:1-5).

Christ as the High Priest, chosen of God, presents His own sacrifice on the cross to God.

This Person fills the horizon. If you look backward He is there, for He made the heavens and the earth. If you look ahead He is there, for He is from everlasting to everlasting. He is also alive at this very hour, having taken His place as the High Priest on the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens, representing those who put their trust in Him.

The aspect of His priesthood, which sets forth His present work, is found in the Epistle to the Hebrews :

“Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens” (Heb. 8:1).

“For he testifieth, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec. For there is verily a disannulling of the commandment going before for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof. For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God.

“And inasmuch as not without an oath he was made priest. (For those priests were made without an oath; but this with an oath by him that said unto him, The Lord sware and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec:) by so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament.

“And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death: but this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood.

“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” (Heb. 7:17-25).

Our High Priest and Advocate

Christ is the Christian's High Priest and Advocate today—living, interceding, and representing us at the right hand of God. This is exactly what every Christian needs to know, for in His present existence there is that which meets the past, present, and future of these lives of ours.

Christ crucified, risen, ascended, and interceding, gives us a clear conscience covering the past, the poise of peace in the present, and quiet confidence concerning the future.

Every Christian, who knows anything of the sin of his own nature, can bring out from the book of memory enough to stir his conscience to accusation, except for the realization that the guilty past is cared for by the blood of Calvary. There is enough sin back there in the past to make any one of us miserable. But that sin has been atoned for, and the assurance of our forgiveness and acceptance is that the One who bore our sins in His own body on the tree was raised from the dead and is now in the throne room of acceptance. His offering was sufficient and His intercession is efficient.

Not only the past but the future also finds its encouragement in His present priesthood. As His blood avails forever and through His blood we have access to

the throne of grace, that boon and blessing reaches through all the future.

The special need for emphasis is on the fact that the work of the Lord Jesus is effective today. Perhaps in the days of His earthly ministry there was the foreshadowing of His intercessory work, for in John 17 He said to the Father:

“I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine. . . . And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are. . . . I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.”

On one occasion He said to Peter, “Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.” What glorious provision He has made for us. Not merely a finished work of redemption of which we have become the beneficiaries, but a blessed living Person who represents us before the Father, and one day will present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.

In all the struggle and burden of the present hour let us remember the rich truths expressed by the Apostle:

“Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us” (Rom. 8:34).

A few years ago it was my privilege to visit the Holy Land at the Easter season. On Good Friday we joined the great crowd in the Church of the Nativity at Bethlehem. In front of the altar, and then carried in procession, was a life-size wax figure of the dead Christ. Realistic it was with a pale face, and the red blood marks on the brow and side, and in the hands and feet. Mothers held little children up to kiss the Christ. It is a lie—a base, terrible lie! He is not dead! The cross and tomb are past. He is alive for evermore. He will be your Saviour, your Friend, your Advocate, and your High Priest. Will you receive Him?