

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Christ is all and in all: Christ, the focal point in the Personal Christian Life - Luke 24:15

Today we take for granted that our earth revolves around the sun. Up until the 16th century, however, men firmly believed that the earth was at the centre of the solar system and that the sun and the planets circled round it. I suppose it gave them a sense of importance that man was at the centre of it all. Just before he died in 1543, Copernicus, who is regarded as the father of astronomy, suggested that it would be much simpler to suppose that the planets, including the earth, all revolved around the sun. It was not until about a century later that Galileo finally proved that Copernicus' suggestion was correct. Man was dethroned! Galileo met considerable opposition, sadly from the church authorities at that time, and was even sentenced to imprisonment by the Inquisition. They wanted to believe that everything in creation revolved around man.

While happily those days are behind us, each of us still needs to face up to the question as to who or what our lives revolve around. Today, we are beginning a series of four talks under the general heading of "Christ is all and in all". Those words are, of course, taken from Colossians 3:11: "There is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all." Those words are a happy reminder of the fact that in the church today there should be no distinction of race or status. What matters is faith in Christ. However, they challenge each one of us to consider whether Christ is indeed all in our personal experience. What does your life revolve around? Is it pleasure, sport, wealth, family, just to mention a few of the things that dominate so many people's lives?

It was Augustine, around AD 400 who, after a life given up to every kind of selfish pleasure, turned to God and said, "You have made us for Yourself, and our heart is restless till it finds its rest in You". In our talk this morning, then, we will look at Christ as the focal point in the personal Christian life. Other talks will consider Christ in the Christian home, in the local Christian church and, finally, in personal witness. After all, the name 'Christian' which was first given to the believers at Antioch, "And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (Acts 11:26), essentially means 'Christ's ones'. It may initially have been given as a kind of nickname but there is truly no more nobler name. If anyone matters to the Christian, it must be the Lord Jesus Christ Himself!

All of the talks will be looked at against the background of Luke 24, with its account of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. We will read part of that chapter now. "Now behold, two of them were travelling that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was about seven miles from Jerusalem. And they talked together of all these things which had happened. So it was, while they conversed and reasoned, that Jesus Himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him. And He said to them, 'What kind of conversation is this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad?' Then the one whose name was Cleopas answered and said to Him, 'Are You the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have You not known the things which happened there in these days?' And He said to them, 'What things?' And they said to Him, 'The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and crucified Him. But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel'" (Luke 24:13-17).

We can almost recognise the sadness in their voices as we listen to their words, "We were hoping..." (Luke 24:21). Here were two of Jesus' followers. Up till now, He had filled their lives. But now He was dead and buried! The bottom had dropped out of their lives!

They had not, as yet, learned the glorious truth of His resurrection. Things were about to change!

Those words, "Jesus Himself drew near and went with them" (Luke 24:14), must rank amongst the loveliest in Scripture. Did it really matter to the Lord Jesus that two of His followers were wandering away from Jerusalem heartbroken? Weren't there other followers? Of course it mattered! It was He who had told the parable of the lost sheep: "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it" (Luke 15:4). How many hours of wearisome toil and heartbreak lie behind those simple words, "until he finds it"! Now here the Good Shepherd (see John 10:1-30) of His sheep would go after these two straying followers, cost what it may!

Just how much these two straying followers mattered to the Lord Jesus is evidenced by those two simple, but all-important words, "Jesus Himself". Had we read the beginning of Luke 24, we would have seen that some women had gone to the tomb, early on that first Easter morning, fully expecting to anoint the body of the Lord Jesus (Luke 24:1-3). But He wasn't there! As they puzzled over what this meant, we read, "Two men stood by them in shining garments [probably angels as we learn from John's Gospel] ... They said to them, 'Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen! Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee, saying, "The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again."' And they remembered His words" (Luke 24:4-8). But to meet these two disciples in their deep distress, no angel would suffice! "Jesus Himself drew near..." (Luke 24:14).

If I could digress for a moment, I would just say that that emphasis on the personal presence of the Lord Jesus is one of the lovely strands of Scripture running through the New Testament. Later on in Luke 24, on that same day when those two disciples rushed back from Emmaus to Jerusalem to share with the disciples there the good news of Jesus' resurrection, we read, "Now as they said these things, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and said to them, 'Peace to you'" (Luke 24:36).

Perhaps my favourite expression of this kind is in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17: "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus shall we always be with the Lord." That great work of bringing the whole Church home to glory - those who have died in faith as well as those who are alive at the time - is too great and too precious to be left to angels. An archangel may be there but it will be the Lord Himself who comes for His Church!

So to come back to Luke 24. These two disciples found the Lord Jesus walking with them, though they had not as yet realised who He was. They listened to Him as "...beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:27). Later, they would ask Him to stay with them, fearing to lose His company. He really was at the centre of their lives! These two disciples still challenge us today as to the position the Lord Jesus has in our lives.

The Lord Jesus told a parable about two men who went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, the other a tax collector. The Pharisee prayed, "God, I thank You that I am not like other men - extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess." The tax collector prayed simply, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" Jesus said that it was the tax collector, rather than the Pharisee, who went down to his house justified (Luke 18:9-14). Notice the Pharisee's prayer: "I... I... I... I... I...". It is clear that self was at the centre of his life!

The Lord Jesus challenged His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Luke 9:23). "Let him deny himself" - "Let him say "No" to self" - the words still challenge us today! When we first came to Christ as Saviour, then we - you and I - had to learn to say "No" to self. I had to recognise that I was totally incapable of doing anything to get right with God. I had to recognise, too, that God's judgment of me as a sinner was absolutely right. There was nothing I could do to save myself. I recognised at the same time, thankfully, that Christ died for my sins at Calvary and that only through trusting Him could my sins be forgiven and I could know that one day I would be with Him in heaven. As the hymn writer, Augustus Toplady, puts it in his well known hymn, "Rock of Ages":

*Not the labour of my hands
Can fulfil Thy law's demands;
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears for ever flow,
All for sin could not atone;
Thou must save and Thou alone.*

It has been aptly pointed out that a bent 'l' becomes a 'C'. That has given rise to the simple prayer, "*Lord, bend that proud and stiff-necked I, Help me to bow the head and die; Beholding Him at Calvary, Who bowed the head for me.*" (From *The Calvary Road*, by Roy Hession, © 1950 by the Roy Hession Book Trust)

Will you make that your prayer today?

As we shall see next week, God willing, those two disciples would not let Jesus go: "They constrained Him, saying, "Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent." And He went in to stay with them" (Luke 24:29). Far more wonderful than the fact that He went in with them for that short time for which He was able to stay, is the fact that when we trust Christ as Saviour, He chooses to come and indwell us by His Holy Spirit. Indeed, just before He went to

the cross, Jesus promised His disciples, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love Him, and We will come to him and make our home with Him" (John 14:23). Get a hold of the wonder of that! God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - resident within each believer! As another has put it, "He's resident, but is He president?"

If you were to invite me to stay in your home, I would probably be deeply touched. But if, after I had arrived, you were to show me all over your home with its different rooms and then take me to my room saying, "This is your room. You must stay in it and not go poking into my other rooms", I would begin to wonder if I was really welcome. Alas! That is what some of us do to the Lord Jesus. We are thankful to have Him as our Saviour. That part of Him, our hope of heaven, is secure.

But there are other areas of our lives that are not open to His control. Self is not yet dethroned! That brings us back to where we began this broadcast. Galileo found to his cost that his work that put the sun at the centre of the solar system and relegated man on earth to the subservient role of revolving around the sun was not popular. Yet the Christian's true happiness is found when the Son, S-O-N, the Son of God, is at the centre of his or her life. He is the focal point around which everything else needs to revolve. Then every area of my life will be open up to His inspection and control.

Perhaps the best example we have of a man who had the Lord Jesus firmly as the focal point of his life is the Apostle Paul. Describing the Lord Jesus, he could write to the Colossians, "He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the pre-eminence" (Colossians 1:18).

To Paul, that was more than just a theological statement. It summed up his whole reason for being. Yet his life had not always been that way. Towards the end of his life, when he appeared on trial before King Agrippa, he summarised his former life as follows: "Indeed I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities. While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, at midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven..." (Acts 26:9-13).

Did you notice Paul's frequent repetition, "I... I... I... I... I..."? Paul, that proud Pharisee, was just like the Pharisee in the parable Jesus told (Luke 18:9-14). His life was consumed by self and by what he wanted. But all that changed on that Damascus road. There the Lord Jesus challenged him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" Humbled by that voice and by the light from heaven, Paul responded, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" (Acts 9:5-6).

From that moment onwards, that simple prayer of the Apostle was the basis of his life. Some fifteen years later, he could write to the Christians in Galatia, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). Self had been dethroned and now Christ was the focal point of his life. So much so that, as he neared the end of his life, he was able to sum it all up in this way, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21). From the day of Paul's conversion, his whole life had been handed over to the Lord Jesus. For Paul, daily living meant walking with Christ, experiencing His presence and doing His will. Death would only be a fuller experience of Jesus' presence and a greater opportunity to give Him praise. Paul's daily life sprang from the realisation that this Son of God loved him and gave Himself for him.

As we draw to a close this morning, let us each face up to the challenge, 'Who is in the driving seat of my life?' Has self been dethroned so that Christ has His rightful place at the centre of my life? The words of the hymn seem so appropriate; let's make them our prayer:

*I want to walk with Jesus Christ,
All the days I live of this life on earth;
To give to Him complete control
Of body and of soul.*

*I want to learn to speak to Him,
To pray to Him, confess my sin,
To open my life and let Him in,
For joy will then be mine.*

*Follow Him, follow Him,
Yield your life to Him -
He has conquered death,
He is King of kings;
Accept the joy which He gives to those
Who yield their lives to Him.*

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