

"GOD WAS IN CHRIST, RECONCILING"

In Jesus Christ God became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory (John 1:1, 14). The prophet said, "They shall call His name Immanuel"; and Matthew explains that the name means "God with us" (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:23).

The brief records of Jesus' birth report that He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and hence was the Son of God most high (Matt. 1:20; Luke 1:32, 35). By the age twelve He expressed His own consciousness of His special relationship with God, gently correcting Mary, who had spoken of Joseph as His father (Luke 2:48, 49). Still He accepted the obligations and limitations of true humanity, and was subject to His earthly "parents."

When He was baptized, the voice of God said "Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." The Spirit of God in a visible form descended and rested upon Him. By that sign the prophet John knew that the message he had been given was confirmed, and he testified that Jesus was the Son of God (Luke 3:21, 22; John 1:29-34).

Jesus walked the earth as a man, was hungry, cold, and weary like any man. He was tempted, even as we are, yet without sin. All the while, in His spirit, personality, and character, there was the quality and nature of God. In His coming to earth, He somehow "emptied himself" of certain divine characteristics (Phil. 2:5-8). Nevertheless, He manifested on the earth a truly divine life, work, and purpose. He humbled himself to be a man, but humility is not beneath the dignity of divine excellence; and in all His humility He was still Lord and master.

He Did the Works of God

He was master of the elements. He changed water into wine; stilled a tempest with a word; walked upon the wind-tossed sea; withered a fig tree; multiplied a few loaves and fishes to feed thousands of people; produced a net-breaking catch of fish where none had been found; and sent Peter to find a coin in the mouth of the first fish he caught on a hook.

He was master over death and disease. He called forth Lazarus from the tomb on the fourth day, after the body had begun to decay, still bound hand and foot with graveclothes. He raised two others from the dead before that: Jairus' daughter and a widow's only son.

He cleansed lepers with a touch; cured paralysis with a word, and even at a distance; made the blind to see; rebuked the burning fever; and granted the cure of a twelve-year hemorrhage for a woman who merely touched the hem of His garment.

He was victor over the forces of wickedness. The demons knew Him and cried out in fear and defiance. He commanded them to be silent and made them come out of their victims. A legion of demons could not resist His authority and power. The devil himself could not deceive or sway Him, but was driven from Him.

Jesus came to earth to serve men and to save them. He did not condemn and destroy, but He knew thoroughly their sinful hearts. He read the minds of friend and foe. He chided the ambitious secret thoughts of His apostles (Mark 9:33-37; 10:41-45; Luke 22:24-30). He knew all along the character and plottings of His betrayer. He answered the unuttered accusations of detractors (Mark 2:6-12), and showed them that He did not blaspheme when He pronounced the forgiveness of sins. He answered the mistaken mental judgments of Simon the Pharisee, and showed that He knew more than Simon expected Him to know about the hearts of those present (Luke 7:36-50). He saw through the motives of pretended praise offered by those who sought to ensnare Him with a question about the tribute money (Matt. 22:15-22). He knew Peter better than Peter knew himself, and predicted his denials specifically (see Matt. 26:33-35 and Luke 22:31-34).

Jesus did not overpower the minds of men, nor overthrow the freedom of their wills. But He completely understood them, and He fitted His words exactly to each one's needs. "He needed not that any one should bear witness concerning man; for he himself knew what was in man" (John 2:25).

The works of Jesus were the works of God, and the power that was in them was God's. The words of Christ were the words of God; His was the wisdom which they displayed. The plans and purposes of Jesus' life were the eternal purposes of God: He carried out God's predetermined plan on schedule. And Jesus' motives were the motives of God. He could truthfully say, "I and my Father are one"; "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father"; and "if ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also" (John 10:30; 14:9; 8:19).

He claimed divine appointment in Nazareth's synagogue, on the occasion of His first recorded sermon in Galilee: "This day is this scripture fulfilled . . . The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me . . ." (Luke 4:16-21). He declared His divine

prerogatives in the face of the first fierce opposition of the rulers of Jerusalem, claiming to do all that the Father does; to have power to give life to the dead, to be judge of all men, to be destined to be honored by all men even as the Father is honored (John 5:19-29).

He offered Himself as all that any man needs and as a vital necessity for every man: "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed"; and "If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins" (John 8:36, 24). "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). "He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5). "I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst"; and "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you" (John 6:35, 53). "Neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him. Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest . . ." (Matt. 11:27-30).

As a Man among Men

The Christ was also the Son of David, the seed of Abraham; and He usually preferred to speak of himself as the "Son of man." In order that He might be a perfect priest, to make intercession for men, and to inspire the confidence of men, it was fitting that He should be one of them and share in human experience. The word Christ is from the Greek word for the Old Testament word Messiah, which meant "anointed one." Prophets, priests, and kings were anointed; and the Messiah was to combine all three offices in one. As a prophet He was both a faithful messenger of God's word and a perfect representation of God in human form. As a king He was meek and lowly, seeking to serve rather than to be served, but winning the highest devotion and fullest obedience, because He is the king of love. As a priest He is the only one who lived a perfect, sinless life, who is worthy to stand in the presence of God, and who is able to offer the only adequate sacrifice for the sins of others. From His human experience and temptation He is able to know our need perfectly and to be touched with the feeling of our infirmity. Because of His divinity and sinlessness He is able to make full atonement and to abide at the mercy seat of God continually.

The gospel is the story of God, our Creator, living a human life on earth, in which He revealed Himself, expressed His love, accomplished

men's redemption, and brought life and immortality to light for men. It is the story of God with us, in the midst of us, winning and restoring men to himself. He became man that He might make us partakers of His divine nature and share with us His own eternal glory and righteousness.

Reconciling Sinners to Himself

God and men needed to be reconciled to each other, because they were separated by sin. Man's sin caused God to have a true complaint and a just sentence against men. The holiness of God could not accept men for full fellowship and blessing while their guilt remained and while the hearts and lives of men continued to be full of sin.

The sinfulness of men caused them to be darkened in their understanding and vain in their reasonings, so that they did not really know God, and did not trust or love Him, but resisted His approaches to them and perverted the revelation that He had made to them.

Jesus understood that the greatest need of all men was to be set free from sin, from its doom, its guilt, its defilement, and its enticing delusion. In order to redeem men and restore them to full fellowship with God, He was willing, not only to associate with sinners, to show them kindness and teach them righteousness, but even to give His own life as a ransom for all.

To accomplish the reconciliation of sinners He had to do two great difficult works. One was to settle the just charge that God had against us by taking our sins upon himself and bearing them in His own body upon the cross, so that God might be just in blotting out the sentence against us on the ground of our union with Christ by faith and new birth in Him. The other was to change our attitudes toward God so that we would love and trust Him, willingly do His bidding, and let Him be the manager and keeper of our lives.

Jesus achieved these purposes of divine grace by accomplishing in His earthly life and ministry certain notable and necessary things. He manifested God's goodness and desire to save men from sin and its consequences. He demonstrated the power of God, showing His ability to do what He promises. He taught and exhibited true righteousness, which made clear man's sinfulness and need for pardon and cleansing from sin. He led men to hunger for righteousness they did not have, and to tremble for sin they had too much of. He himself made the atoning sacrifice for sin and opened up the new and living way of access to God. He took away sin's penalty by bearing it himself, and made it possible for any man to be cleansed and made

acceptable to God through Him. He loved men until they began to love Him and wanted to let God have full sway in their lives.

He provided a source of spiritual life and overcoming power for men by giving the Holy Spirit of God to dwell in the lives and hearts of men, to bear the fruit of a changed heart and a right spirit before God (John 7:38, 39; 14:23; 3:5; Acts 2:38; Rom. 8:1-11; Gal. 5:16-25). When men accept His death as their own and cease to live unto themselves the old life of self-will, He makes them new creatures by the life of His Spirit within them, living unto Him a life that is reconciled to God (II Cor. 5:14-19).

In His resurrection and other miracles He laid the foundations of faith; He called and prepared the apostles as witnesses to the truth; so that we might have an honest conviction of truth concerning Him to support a lifelong trust able to withstand the winds and currents of thought and emotion. He gave us abundant evidence for making an intelligent, firm and wholehearted commitment unto Him.

Jesus' work of reconciliation was not altogether completed during His life on earth. Much of it was accomplished through His death and resurrection, and even after His ascension into Heaven. But all reconciliation of men with God is accomplished through Jesus Christ—through the finished work of His incarnation, through the effect of His message on those who hear, believe, and obey it.

He has given to us a glorious part in this continuing ministry of reconciliation (II Cor. 5:18-21). We should rejoice in it as Paul did. Let us be faithful and fervent in entreating men on behalf of Christ, beseeching them, "Be ye reconciled unto God."

For Further Study:

See books listed on pages 488 and 489.

NEW LIFE THROUGH ACCEPTING JESUS' DEATH

"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me: and that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me" (Gal. 2:20).

We need to meditate on the meaning of the cross. Brief periods of meditation during the serving of the Lord's Supper on Sundays are helpful. But also we need to give many an hour to serious meditation on what the cross means in our lives.

Jesus Was Crucified For Us

The idea of sacrifice was not a human invention born of the superstitions and fears of men. God originated sacrifice! All the sacrifices made from the time of Cain and Abel and Adam and Eve until Jesus' death were promissory notes which were paid in full by Jesus' death on the cross. Why were all these sacrifices made? God required them as acts of obedient faith on the part of those who were seeking to please Him (Heb. 10:1-10).

In the Old Testament times God did not attempt to redeem man with the blood of bulls and goats. God did not try one thing and find that it failed. He planned from the beginning to give His Son. The other sacrifices were just the proclamation of the coming sacrifice of His Son. I think the Lord's Supper today does for us exactly what the animal sacrifices did for David, Moses, and Abraham. They both proclaim our sinfulness and need of a sacrifice and proclaim God's provision of a way of redemption. Only the Lord's Supper looks back upon the accomplished redemption by Jesus Christ; the animal sacrifices looked forward unto the sacrifice that would be acceptable unto God. Hebrews 10:6, 7 says that in sacrifices and burnt offerings God had no pleasure, and they were not acceptable unto Him; but He prepared a body for His Son that He might do His will. Jesus came to do God's will; but the old sacrifices did not accomplish God's will. God proclaimed the need of a sacrifice from the beginning. There has never been any way for any man's sin to be forgiven, except through redemptive sacrifice.

How could God be righteous and let Abraham get by with lying like he did? How could God be righteous and let Jacob get by with cheating like he did? (He charged an exorbitant price for a bowl