

# Jesus Christ, the Missionary

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**JESUS CHRIST** is often considered as a preacher, a teacher, a personal worker, or as a healer; tonight we are to consider Him as a missionary. Among these various callings which may be attributed to Him, that of the missionary stands out pre-eminent. His characteristics, commission and work entitled Him to be placed as the file leader of the whole enterprise. No one who understands the spiritual needs of man, and the righteousness of God, will essay to step before Him and call upon the world's benighted races to follow human guidance. In person, in teaching, in example and in service, Jesus stands alone and unapproachable; these making him the ideal pattern of the church for all people in all ages and times.

## 1. His Call and Commission

Jesus clearly recognized that His call and commission came from His Father. They seemed to ring in His listening ears at all times, and to keep His attention focused upon the will of God. Often some tell-tale words dropped from His lips, showing how divinely centered His mind ever was, and what pleasure and comfort He received from the contemplation of His heavenly call. **"My Father which sent Me,"** he once said to the Jews at Jerusalem, and again, **"As the Father hath sent Me."** This sublime consciousness steadied Him, and gave Him the highest of all authority for His work. It answered the "who?" "why?" and "what?" which were constantly thrust at Him by jealous Pharisees and Scribes. It solved the mysterious questions of daily providence and eased His life's journey, so beset by satanic perils and deeds of human hate. The perplexing problems of guidance, message, work and support, were all included in the one grand first principle of service, "My Father which sent Me." With this assured commission no Pharisee could make Him think He had missed His calling or was deluded; no Herodian or Sadducee could catch Him in His speech; no Roman authority could intimidate Him in His work. Jesus started right with "My Father which sent Me," and never did He let demons or men cause Him to side-step or waver.

## II. His Response

When the Father's voice broke the silence of the eternal ages, calling for someone to redeem the fallen race of man, Christ heard it and responded. The sublime words of that divine conversation at the throne of God might ever have remained a secret to the world had not the Psalmist, with prophetic insight, craved the knowledge of his soul's redemption. Now we have, through inspiration, the words



that sealed the covenant and show Christ at the moment He chose to be the Saviour of them that believe. Whether the angels heard those words or not, we are not told, but this we know, that He who uttered them knew their weight and what they involved for Him and us. **"Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God,"** was not the hasty utterance of one who had not counted the cost. **During His earthly life He said of His Father, "I know him and keep his commandments," and at the close of His career He declared, "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do."**

No human mind can fathom the depths of the humiliation to which His obedience brought Him. He gave up the immediate presence of God to associate with carnal man. He exchanged heaven for the hot, dry summers of Palestine, and for its cold, stormy winters. He gave up the control of worlds to be ruled by the Jupiter-worshiping Romans and the Scripture-perverting usurpers of authority among the Hebrews. He exchanged His work as architect of the universe for the work of making yokes for oxen, and crude tools for unskilled man. In heaven He was ministered to by angels, but on earth He washed the feet of men. At last He permitted the Father to turn away His face and leave His soul in foul darkness, that the gospel of grace might flow from His Cross of shame. Has there been in all human times a greater missionary response than this, or anything that approached that abandon of soul which made Christ's work so pleasing to God and edifying to men? **"I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me."**

The heaven he left is today measured by the astronomer with a line which is about six trillions of miles in length, the distance which light travels in a single year. Stretching this line out toward the broad canopy above, the student of the celestial world tells us that some of the stars which twinkle in that blue dome are one hundred years distant as light travels, and that away beyond the farthest limits of his outstretched imagination there are probably untold numbers of gigantic solar systems with suns and moons and planets like our own. All this vast domain was the workshop of Christ, where he kept all things running so smoothly by the word of His power that not one star has ever misstepped, nor has the sun ever risen one second too late in the morning. For our sakes He chose to give up this liberty of the universe and to come and dwell in human flesh. He was born in a cave, and hunted out of His country before He learned to prattle the language of His people. At last He settled down for the greater part of His life upon a tiny plot of ground measured by a few cubits instead of trillions of miles and located in a despised village in an obscure, unpopular corner of the country, where His people were the poverty-stricken subjects of a pagan nation. People today who feel they cannot leave some human task in which they are engaged to go as missionaries might well pause and consider the emptied life of Him who considered it not a prize to be grasped after to be equal with God. The measure of that sacrifice has never been reached by man. Though David Livingstone outshone the average missionary as the sun outshines the moon, yet his sacrifice for the thrice needy African pales into insignificance when compared with the glories Jehovah abandoned that He might become the pioneer missionary messenger of the world.

### **III. His Work**

One of the strongest characteristics of Christ was His love for work. Opportunities never slipped past Him, nor did time ever hang heavy on His hands. Like a true missionary, he lived for others. The question of compensation or expenses for travel were not His first consideration. When a task presented itself, He was never seen to shirk it or to seem so busy that someone else would feel obliged to undertake it. He possessed a full realization of what it meant to pass through the world but once and knew that if He failed in any detail of his commission no one else could make up the loss.

If you have never compared the missionary life of Christ with the life of the modern missionary you will be greatly edified in taking up the study. It will make Christ more real as a worker; it will sanctify common toil and will reveal to you the fact that He passed through about every trying experience known to His followers today. Truly in the realm of missionary hardships He was tempted in all points like as we are.

## **The Climate**

One of the first items of concern in the life of the missionary candidate is that of the climate. He realizes that if he cannot endure the atmospheric conditions he cannot be a foreign missionary. Although we believe Christ was a real man, yet we seldom think of Him as being affected by the varying climatic changes of the revolving seasons of the year. How much interest it would add to the gospel stories and to the vividness of the reality of the life of Christ if we could know whether it was raining on the day when He escaped from the hands of the Jews and made the city of Ephraim His hiding place, or, whether the heat was intense on that memorable summer day in which he delivered the principles of His kingdom in the Sermon on the Mount. It must be remembered that within the narrow bounds of Palestine there is exhibited the trying heat of the tropics and the chilling cold of the more northern latitudes, yet with all the sudden changes and unpleasant moods of the weather, there is no record that they ever caused Christ to change His plans or cancel His dates.

One of the most trying months in Palestine is the month of May, when the fierce sirocco "east winds" blow for three-day periods from off the burning desert sands of Arabia, driving both man and beast to seek cover, and withering up the myriads of pretty flowers for which the springtime of the Holy Land is so noted. Notwithstanding these periodical hot winds of May, it was during that month, according to Andrews' chronology, that John the Baptist began preaching repentance unto Israel, declaring that the Kingdom of God was at hand. It was during this month in the following year that Christ accomplished His first circuit of Galilee, after which, during the intense heat of summer, He pushed on to the north and made His eventful journey to the Syro-Phoenician village of Zarephath and on to Mount Hermon, the scene of the transfiguration. But it was not the summer alone which tried the physical life of Christ, for the winters brought to Him their hardships also. From December to the middle of March the climate is similar to ours at the breaking up of winter. It was during this cold, stormy season that Jesus was led of the Spirit into the wilderness where He spent forty days amid surroundings and under conditions which would have left upon most human minds the horrible effects of a tragic nightmare. The spot pointed out today as the scene of His single handed conflict with the monster prince of iniquity is one of the most weird, lonesome spots upon which my eyes ever fell; treeless, arid, rocky, forbidding hills, without human habitation; a region from which my whole being seemed to shrink. And I thought, if this be the effect upon a passing traveler who looked upon the scene from under sunny skies, what must have been the soul-struggle of one who was there appointed to fight out the battle of His willing loyalty alone amid the depressing gloom of long, stormy winter nights, when food was not to be had and when the hungry howl of the wild beasts that came up from the Jordan in search of prey filled the darkness with gruesome sounds.

Such was the introduction which this missionary of all missionaries had to His work. Surely none today can surpass Him in the violence of their experience. While the lot He has meted out to most of His servants might, in comparison, easily be likened to a bed of roses. The tax upon His physical powers was enormous. His work drained His vitality and strength until the prophet could say of Him, "His visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men: when we see him there is no beauty that we should desire him. We hid as it were our faces from him." The cause of this physical condition might be poorly analyzed today were it not for the safeguarding utterance of the disciples who one day in the midst of His wearying labors recalled the Psalmist's

explanation, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up." A thoughtful peep behind the scenes reveals to the sympathetic observer the tell-tale acts of our Saviour missionary which broke down His strength. Once the record declares He had no time so much as to eat. Again, He had no place to lay His head. The habit of His life was to be always on duty to those who needed Him, and in order to do this and yet maintain His communion with the Father, we discover Him "rising a great while before day" and out-distancing people in a land where early rising is common, in order that He might reach some secluded place and be alone in prayer. Every missionary can appreciate how the demands of an inconsiderate public must have cut in on His devotional life and how wearying was the struggle to do all that His hands and heart found to do, and yet find time to keep in living touch with the Father in heaven. Sometimes missionaries today come home broken down. Do not condemn them without a hearing, for it may be they caught Christ's vision of the condition of the lost and have worked too hard because the church at home turned a deaf ear to their appeal and failed to send them help. They have been eaten up with that same divine zeal.

### **Inhabitants**

Since the fall of man, or the flood, there has never been a time when the whole world was in harmony with God. In our own time there is not a town of five hundred people who are all Christians. Not one-tenth of the population of the globe belongs to the church in any saving sense. The missionary who goes out to evangelize soon realizes that this indifference to spiritual things rapidly develops into open rebellion when the claims of God are pressed home upon the conscience. The multitudes in Palestine eagerly followed Christ for the loaves and the fishes, but it took only a word from the priests to turn them into a frenzied mob crying out, "Away with him, crucify him." They constantly wondered at His miracles and marveled at His teaching, yet but few of the thousands who heard Him and saw His works believed fully in His mission. The intermarriage of the Jews with the surrounding idolatrous nations had so blunted the edge of their religious conviction that Jesus was astounded," and often marveled at their unbelief. You may sometimes be tempted to feel that your work is in vain when the thousands pass by and the few come in. Believe that Christ knows how to sympathize with you, for at the close of his earthly career not more than one in five thousand of the population gathered at His farewell meeting in Galilee.

### **Religionists**

The Pharisees. Every land has its numbers of people who for conscientious reasons, the love of position, praise or financial gain, spend their time in religious ceremonies or service. As soon as the missionary enters the mission field he is approached by these human parasites who undertake to catch him in some argument and overthrow his work. Palestine in the days of Christ was beset with such people. Go where Christ would, some designing individual would approach Him with a captious question. Once in the synagogue in Capernaum He took occasion to heal a man with a withered hand. Immediately the Pharisees demanded to know why he did this apparently secular work on the Sabbath day. He answered them so successfully that they were silenced in argument, though not in spirit, for they went out and held a council against Him, how they might destroy Him. Thus it often was that when they could not answer Him they plotted His death or endeavored to so prejudice the people against Him that they would not follow Him. When Jesus cured a man possessed with a devil in this same region the Pharisees overlooked all the good done to their fellow citizen and took advantage of the event to accuse Him of casting out devils through the prince of devils. Again, because they saw Him eat with those whom they considered their inferiors, they taunted Him with being a gluttonous man, a wine bibber, "**a friend of publicans and sinners.**"

## **The Sadducees**

Another sect which tried its arguments on Christ was the Sadducees. Their stock argument was the denial of the resurrection. They thought to overwhelm Him at one fell swoop by securing what to them was an unanswerable test case in the person of the woman who had had seven husbands. After stating the case they put the question with a chuckle, "Therefore, in the resurrection, whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her." Jesus answered, "Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage but are as the angels of God in heaven." I have often rejoiced because the Sadducees thrust this inquiry upon Him so quickly, for His answer reveals many important principles for Christian workers. First, the person who does not study the Bible has no safeguard against error, and the pet theory he exploits may burst like a bubble when touched with the sword of truth. Second, the one who is filled with the Word of God and with the Holy Spirit can lay human error in the dust as easily as light dispels darkness. Third, when they were silenced Jesus took occasion immediately to treat them as inquirers and teach them the way of God in truth. It was a strategic opportunity, for their strongest argument was defeated and they could do nothing but listen. What a lesson all this is for outgoing missionaries! What a warning for those of you who have not hidden the Word of God in your hearts and who do not make it your daily portion! What a mighty tower of strength to those of you who can rightly divide the Word of Truth!

## **The Herodians**

Many oriental countries have persons who loiter around the government headquarters, much after the fashion of politicians, waiting for opportunities to gain the favor of the officials. Such was probably the character of the Herodians. Having interested themselves somewhat in the Jewish missionary in their midst, they were deputed by the Jews to try to get some accusation against Him. Working along the lines with which they were most familiar, they decided to approach Him upon the subject of His loyalty to the government and its right to collect taxes from the Hebrew people. They planned and delivered their speech with Herod-like craftiness, closing with the pointed question, "Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar or not?" Christ's oft quoted answer, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's," has guided many a missionary into his duty toward the government under which he labors, for if there is any point in the missionary career which requires caution and diplomacy it is in connection with his relations to the powers that be the officials in Japan, like the Herodians of old, delight to test missionary loyalty, for they take fifty dollars out of everyone thousand dollars of missionary salary for the support of their government, and allow no missionary to own even the house in which he lives. Any property the missionary board may possess must be held in the name of a native Japanese.

## **Officials**

Every pioneer missionary knows what it is to live under the scrutinizing eye of a jealous government official who wishes the Christian workers of his territory could be driven out, because their testimony troubles his conscience and hinders his unprincipled methods. Christ's sermons and talks to the multitudes which thronged Him percolated through the entire country and gave sleepless nights to the self-seeking rulers of both synagogue and state. Herod became so embittered against Christ at one time that he would gladly have put Him to death, but he feared the people. The Pharisees heard of his murderous desire and skillfully employed it once when Jesus was in Herod's territory, thinking they might thereby frighten Him from their midst. They said, "Get thee out, and depart hence; for Herod will kill thee." Such a threat would have made the knees of most men tremble, but not His, for the perfect love which was His in such fullness had cast out all fear. Looking the Pharisees calmly in the face, he

replied, "Go ye, and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures today and tomorrow and the third day I shall be perfected." Some commentators believe that it had been the previous plan of Christ to remain three days longer in that region and that when this startling threat came he did not change His plan one whit. He promptly send word to the cunning tetrarch that He would continue with His original program.

Pilate was another of the petty officials who boasted of his authority and power over the simple missionary who always went about doing good. "I have power to crucify thee," he declared to his divine prisoner, but it brought no cringing plea for mercy. Christ was more deeply interested in the soul of Pilate than He was in His own freedom or comfort. When Pilate asked Him if He was the king of the Jews, Jesus did not take it as an opportunity to assemble witnesses and mass arguments and evidence in order to gain His freedom, but with rare spiritual discernment He quickly turned and asked His judge if he was inquiring on his own behalf. "Askest thou this of thyself?" With true missionary devotion, He craved the salvation of His judge more than His own liberty. How often this has been repeated during modern times in such conflicts as the Sepoy mutiny, the Taiping rebellion, and the Boxer movement. It is then that the enemies of the Cross find, as did Pilate, that there is something dearer than life to those who have been born from above.

## **Converts**

The servant of God who endeavors to faithfully shepherd his flock does not labor long before his heart is made sad over the waywardness of some of his new found sheep. The infinite patience which Christ exhibited toward his converts showed His wonderful power as a leader and teacher of men. Search where He would, it seems He could not have found a more unpromising band of raw recruits than were His twelve disciples. They were self seeking, devoid of gratitude, slow to learn and even bold in denouncing their Master's plans as though they were His official advisors, yet all this never ruffled His patience or discouraged Him in trying to train them for His service. One of His first great tests was with John the Baptist, who, after such a meteor-like career of brilliancy as His forerunner, suddenly wavered and from his prison cell sent messengers to ask if Christ were really the one that should come or whether they were to look for another. Such a situation would have caused much anxiety for most religious leaders for fear the enemy would get hold of the news that the forerunner had deserted, and spread the report broadcast in order that they might permanently injure the work. But Jesus did not depend upon the testimony of any man for the success of His mission. After the messengers came He went calmly on with His work, and when there was a little leisure, He turned to them and said, "Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them." He realized that the best answer to the doubting heart of John would be that He was fulfilling the prophecies which the forerunner had often read and expounded to the Jews.

Lack of spiritual discernment and understanding on the part of one's converts is another source of concern to the missionary. When Jesus was about to perform the miracle of feeding the five thousand he drew Philip into His confidence and asked him how they could feed so many. Philip, instead of trying to think of the Master's way of doing things before proposing his plan, fell back upon his own poor human calculations and lost the lesson and the fellowship which would have done much toward developing his mind in spiritual things. Pastors and missionaries today are painfully conscious of the frequency of this defect among converts. Promising native Christians in every field have been entrusted with spiritual duties, and, failing to discern the character of the task, have followed in the footsteps of the chosen twelve.

Peter gave, his Master much care. One day he contended with the others over his natural qualifications for first place in the little group. On another day he contended with the Master Himself and denounced the plans He proposed, and again, on the impulse of the moment, drew his sword and slashed off the ear of an innocent servant of the high priest. Few missionaries today would consider such a person a promising convert, but the master missionary saw in him the promising apostle upon whose confession he was afterward to build his' church. This problem of "holding converts" has never rested more heavily upon any heart than upon the heart of Christ. So faithful was He to the little flock the Father had given Him that at the close of His ministry He handed them back to the Father with the sublime words, "Those whom Thou gavest Me I have kept, and none of them is lost but the son of perdition." You will do well to ponder the secrets of His success as confessed with His own lips to His Father in that matchless closing prayer in John. One sentence reveals how He did it: "I kept them in thy name." Is it any wonder that He could say, "none of them is lost," when He was careful each moment to hold them as the property of the Father? His care over His disciples reached a climax of self-sacrifice when the band of officers came to arrest Him in the garden. Looking upon the helpless little band which had shared His joys and sorrows for three years, He turned to the officers, and with a love that was divinely pathetic said, "If ye seek me let these go their way." His master passion for souls made Him forget His own safety in that terrible crisis and exhibit that passion of love which made them speak and write so tenderly of Him in later years.



The missionary is sometimes misunderstood by his family and kindred who believe him to be carried away with a religious mania for missions. This is a great sorrow to him, especially if the news-gathering public come to know of the attitude of his relatives. Such was Christ's experience when one day he was teaching in a home where the multitudes so filled the place that His relatives could not reach Him. The generous throng passed the word in to Him that His mother and His brethren were without, seeking Him. Some may have thought that He would immediately recognize the claim of kinship and hasten out to find what they desired, but instead, He placed Himself in a new light before His listeners by His usual statement, "Whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother." He did not ignore the claims of the family tie, but, pointing to His disciples, He revealed the larger relationship, that those who did the will of His Father, as they were doing, had entered His family circle and were entitled to His attention and ministry the same as His mother and sister and brother. The consciousness of this mysterious spiritual relationship has been the impelling motive that has caused many a missionary to depart for other lands even though the sympathy and endorsement of relatives have not been free or cordial.

#### **IV. Christ's Call to His Followers**

Christ left us a missionary religion. He intended that each follower should be an active participant in sending the gospel to every creature. He knew the magnitude of the task and the foes that lay in wait

to snare the feet of His messengers. Lest we should grow faint-hearted at times, He links us up to Himself in the work as He was linked to the Father, saying, "As the Father hath sent Me, even so send I you." Lest the scorn of the wicked should make you feel that you are the special objects of their wrath, He says, "They hated me before they hated you." Lest you should feel that there is no large attainment possible in response to faith and prayer, He says, "Greater works than these shall ye do because I go to my Father." Having lifted you up in this divine partnership, and having set you such an unparalleled example, He invites you, in the language of the text you have chosen for your class motto, to take up the work of winning souls. "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men," He says to this class of August, 1913. If each of you will heed His command, and win one soul to Christ this year, and each one thus converted will lead another to Him next year, and so on for fifteen years, this class will not number sixty-five as it does tonight, but will have a roll call of three million souls for the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus Christ will take the responsibility of your success if you will be faithful and thorough in your work. He was faithful and thorough in His work. **His commission read: "To the lost sheep of the house of Israel."** How easy it would have been for Christ to have opened an office in Jerusalem and advertised certain hours for interviews! How easy compared with laboring so strenuously that He had "no time so much as to eat," and so unselfishly that He had "not where to lay His head." Such a plan could never have satisfied Christ. He had His work at heart. The "lost sheep" did not mean the few that gathered at the annual feasts at Jerusalem; it meant all those who were under the covenant of promise. Again and again He traversed the hills of Palestine through winter's rains and under the scorching summer suns in order to make sure that every lost sheep in Israel might know that the Messiah had truly come. Eight times He passed through the circuits of Galilee. Over and over He carried His message through Judea and among the hills of Ephraim. He went to the highlands of Perea among the rough shepherds and herders of camels and cattle, among men who followed a like occupation to our cowboys of today. Yea, because He was a true missionary, He went even beyond the bounds of His task for He preached to the unfriendly Samaritans and along the Syrophenician coast. You may be called upon to leave those you love, and be sent out to suffer hardship among a people who show but little interest in the message you have come to preach, but to you who are faithful; to you who count not your lives dear unto yourselves; remember, **He says, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age." "Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life."**