

Christ Foreordained Manifested for You

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In 1 Peter, the first chapter, verse 19, speaks of Christ, a Lamb, in verse 20, who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, who by Him do believe in God that raised Him up from the dead and gave Him glory, that your faith and hope might be in God.

Now, this passage of Scripture is a gem let down like Peter's sheet right out of heaven, and it would be just as applicable to any group of Christians anywhere in the world as it is to this group. It would fit into the needs, the eternal needs, of a church in Korea or among the Zulus or among the Indians of South America, or among the Jews or Gentiles the world over, because it is not timely truth, it's timeless truth. It speaks only of three persons, God and Christ and us.

Now, as a Protestant in a free America, I am at liberty to discuss any topic I might find myself capable of discussing. I might this morning discuss art. I could bone up on that at the library, and talk or two about art, maybe literature. I'd like to talk about Milton, because I've enjoyed him so much in my years. I couldn't talk about music. I might give my ill-informed opinions on politics, world events.

And I suppose that if I were real careful, and you were very patient, some benefit might come to us by my so doing. But I don't mind telling you that now more than ever in my life, I find myself smitten with something I think is nothing less than a divine stroke. Eternity is before my eyes while I talk, and increasingly before my eyes while I pray, and even while I think on religious subjects.

I am seized upon by a thought, a thought that becomes an oppressive thought. It is that the earth is growing old, and the judgment is drawing near. And that a wink of God's eye, just a wink of God's eye, will clear the earth of everyone now living on it. Everyone now living on the earth imagines himself to be vastly important in the cosmic scheme. But a wink of God's eye only, a flick of God's lash, and everyone now living, the most important and the anonymous and unheard of, altogether shall go the way of the earth.

And that nothing, not one thing, of these now so important things will matter at all in a very short time. And that all now listening to me, and all now on the earth, will stand very shortly in awful silence and see the record of their lives exhibited before them. And that all distinctions then of race or color or money or social level will all disappear. And God will not see our diplomas, nor our bank accounts, nor the color of our skins, but will look at us as human beings only, beings made in the image of God, having sinned, then redeemed or not. That is, redeemed, but whether saved or not, will lie with us.

So, with this upon me, always upon me, always as a background to everything I say, in conditioning and determining the tone as well as the choice of my material, I would talk to you then about God and Christ and you, as in the text here. And the sermon will

simply be a repeating of the phrases that make up the text, plus what I hope may be one or two thoughts on each phrase.

Now, he says here that Christ, the Lamb, was foreordained before the foundation of the world. Most or every version has it, foreknown before the foundation of the world. Now that foundation of the world expression can mean either the bringing into being of created things, or the ordering of the vast wild forces into an ordered universe; or it can mean both. Sometimes it means one in the Bible, sometimes it means the other, sometimes it means both, sometimes you don't know which one it means.

But before God brought into being, time and space and matter and law that now make what we call the world, Jesus Christ was foreknown and foreordained. And before He took the vast wild forces that moved through His worlds and ordered them into a universe, an ordered universe like a watch, as though a watchmaker were to take the pieces of a watch scattered all over the top of a table. And through His knowledge and skill, so arranged them that they now are all compact and beautiful in a case, tell the time of day to the split second.

So, God somewhere took all these vast forces and this illimitable matter that He had formed and within the framework of space and time He ordered it into the world, and that's sometimes called the foundation of the world. And before this, Christ was our foreordained Savior.

Now I point out that God did not rush in to apply first aid when man sinned. Sometimes in our instinct for direct statement we forget, and we allow the impression to get out that when man sinned God looked around for a remedy, but this is not the case. Before man sinned, the remedy had already been provided. And before paradise was lost, paradise had already been regained. Because Christ was crucified before the foundation of the world, and in the mind and purpose of God, Christ had already died before he was born. And in the purpose of God, Christ had already died before Adam was created. In the purpose and plan of God, the world had already been redeemed before the world was ever brought into being.

So that paradise lost did not drive God to some distracted action and bring about redemption. But paradise lost was foreseen before the world was and before paradise existed, and God had already preordained and foreknown the Lamb that was without spot and blemish. And this purpose in eternity lay in the mind of God.

Now it says that this was manifest in time. It was foredetermined before time, but it was manifest in time. That is, man's sinning was done in time and space. And therefore the Timeless One came to time and space in order that He might undo that which was done in space and time by man, the One who was pure spirit. Because there were creatures who had sinned in the flesh, He Himself became flesh in order that He might put to death that which was destroying the human race.

So, the Spaceless One came to space and the Timeless One came to time, and He who was pure Spirit above matter, took upon Himself a material body and came. And so that man's sinning was done in the material body, and Jesus Christ redeemed us in a material body.

Now that sounds as though it might be simply a repetition of truth already known. But brethren, if we ever lose the ability to wonder at this, we are in grave need of soul-searching and spiritual revival. If we ever lose the wonder out of our hearts just to hear these words, Christ foreknown before the foundation of the world, but manifest in time for you. If those words ever cease to move your heart, then your heart is hard.

I was telling our friend McAfee the other day something that I had read of old Saint Bernard. There were two Bernards, Bernard of Clairvaux and Bernard of Cluny. It was Bernard of Cluny that wrote so many of the songs that we sing in our day. It was Bernard of Cluny that wrote The Celestial City, from which we get the song about Jerusalem the Golden.

But this was old Bernard of Clairvaux that has been canonized and called a saint, though he was a saint before he was canonized, and he wasn't any more of a saint after he was canonized. Let's get that straight.

But old Clairvaux was an old godly saint and a teacher, and he had a young fellow under him that he thought a great deal of and taught and prayed for and helped along. The young fellow outstripped his teacher and was pushed upward, and pretty soon he became Pope. And Clairvaux wrote him a letter, and he said, now you're Pope. But he said, don't think that that affects me. He said, love doesn't know office, and love can never be put in awe by any man's position.

Now he said, the reason I'm writing you is this. He said, once when I knew you, you had a warm heart, and you served God. But he said, now you've got a big job and everybody's around you and you got a lot to do. Now he said, what I'm afraid of is that your heart will get hard. He said, if you want to know what a hard heart is, don't ask me, ask Pharaoh. He knows. And he said, the very fact you think you don't have a hard heart is plenty evidence that you have it already.

I like to hear a man talk that way to the Pope. In fact, I like a man to talk that way to anybody. I would thank any man for reminding me that it's entirely possible even for a man who in those early days, for many of those men, did and were Christians and did walk with God. And this old saint of God saw what was happening and warned his younger pupil.

And I would thank any man for warning me as I now faithfully warn you. If these old-fashioned, simple, conventional statements of Scriptural truth do not move you or in some degree affect your inner inwardly when you hear them, then it is time for you carefully to rethink your condition and search your own heart to see if perhaps that has already taken place. That hardness of heart which Bernard spoke of, and if you are flippantly sure that it has not taken place, then on the authority of that good man, I would repeat that it has already taken place and very greatly needs your attention.

Now it says here that He was manifest in time, for you. Now I like that, those two little words. If you'll read your New Testament, you'll find them. For you. For you. What was the purpose of it all? Well, it was, for you. Why was He born? It was, for you. Why did He

die? For you. Why did He rise? For you. Why is He at the right hand of God? For you. And for whom is He now making intercession? It is, for you.

Now in public service I try to be dignified and not embarrass people with any too intimate personalities, but when I'm with God by myself I have no hesitation at all in becoming just as intimate as my faith will allow me to.

So, when we come to the words, for you, I don't hesitate to write that right into the Bible. I go over some of my own Bible, my old Bibles that have gotten so badly banged up I've had to replace them and retire them and put them out to pasture for the next generation, if anybody's interested. But I find in some of those old Bibles some things that almost embarrass me now with the simplicity of them and the intimacy of them that I put myself in there. Salvation was not for the whole, round world.

I remember the first prayer I ever made in public. It was at a church meeting. We met to eat in that church, and they asked me to pray. Now, I had never prayed in public before. So, I stood up and said, Lord bless the missionaries, amen. That was my first prayer. And I suppose that a great many people are so general, as general as that prayer. I didn't tell God what missionaries, no I didn't tell him, request anything particular, I was just getting out of a jam.

And I suppose that it's possible for us to think about redemption as being so general that there's nothing particular about it. Brethren, I repeat that you can get so general that nobody gets any good out of anything.

I remember hearing of the young pastor who was very intellectual and very studious and just out of school. But he was also very orthodox and pressed upon his hearers the need of being born anew. And he summed up an eloquent passage with this statement. He said, I tell you, if you don't get saved on general principles, you'll never get saved at all. And I've often thought of the brother and his general principles. You can get your principles so general that they never touch you at all.

Now, it says here, for you, for you. You, is a pronoun of course, standing instead of a noun, and that noun is you. So, if you just put your name in there, that'll mean you, so that all this preordination, all this before time purposing of God, this coming of this Spotless Lamb into the world, and the shedding of His most precious blood, it was all done specifically for you.

Now, it was done also for the whole world, but it was done for you. A thing can be for the whole world and nobody can get any good out of it. So, while we believe in the universal atonement of his blood, we also believe in the specific atonement which means you and me. Our name, our number, our size. We, ourselves, we can be identified. So it's done for us. It says, for you who through Him believe in God.

Now, there can be no true believing in God apart from Christ. There is a great deal of believing in God. I wonder what's happening to this country. The newspapers and the Saturday magazines like "This Week," and the bestsellers, many of our bestsellers are religious books.

It's astonishing how the bestsellers are religious books now, many of the bestsellers. Quite a number of them, "Peace of Mind" and "Peace of Heart," and "A Man Called Peter," and "Mr. Jones Meet the Master," and a number of other religious books have become bestsellers. Thomas Merton's "Seeds of Contemplation" are now sold 25 cent editions, copies, anywhere in the drugstore you can buy them. And it's religious, it's old-fashioned mysticism. And the publishers are saying that a wonderful new something is taking place. People are interested in religion.

This Week magazine last evening had in it, by somebody, the thesis developed that the world could be saved by religion, and then it gave the various religions, and Christianity was one of them.

Now, if this is God's book, and Peter was God's apostle, and this New Testament is divinely inspired, then I am led to conclude that real belief in God can come only through Christ. That any other kind of faith in God, or belief about God, is spotty, imperfect, perverted, and very often erroneous.

Some things we can know about God certainly. We can know His eternal power and Godhead. And the Indian that stands on the shore of the lake and raises his arms to the Great Spirit and invokes the help of the Great Spirit on his hunting trip, as they used to do in America before the white man drove them out, that was approach to God of some sort, and that belief in God was some kind of belief.

Edison, saying he believed that God was force, and that if he could live long enough, he believed that he could invent an instrument sensitive enough to detect God, that was some kind of belief in God. And the belief of the deists, such as Voltaire and others; deists who were not atheists. But deists, their idea of God was that God was a great principle, but he was not a personality, that was some kind of belief in God. And the heathen in their blindness, every place have some kind of belief in God.

And I suppose in the long run, any belief in God is better than no belief in God. That's open to question, but at least I, for the moment, give you my tentative statement that I suppose it's better to believe in God in a vague, shadowy way than not to believe there is a God. But oh, how much better to say, you who through Him do believe in God.

You believe in God not as a pagan, not as an Indian on the shore of the lake, not as a yogi looking at his nose and controlling his bodily forces. You believe in God as the one who raised Christ from the dead and gave Him glory. That's also in the text.

And you will find back here what that means in John, Father, said Jesus, I will that they also whom Thou hast given Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold my glory which Thou hast given Me, for Thou lovest Me before the foundation of the world. And the glory which God had given Him before the foundation of the world, God restored to Him when He raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory. And then it says, and all this was that your faith and hope might be in God.

Now, hope is a beautiful word, but it's also a treacherous thing. Because it's possible to hope invalid hopes, hopes that have no foundation underneath them at all. For instance, a condemned man who is supposed to die next Friday, one minute after midnight, never

ceases to hope. He believes to the very last that his sentence will be commuted, or it will be, he will be pardoned. And every knock on his cell door, his eyes brighten with the hope that this means the governor has halved the sentence or at least taken the sting of death out of him. But that condemned man goes on to die.

Haul and Heady went to their death in the Missouri gas chamber, probably convinced to the end that they couldn't die, that somehow there would be hope, but that hope failed them. And there's been many a mother, God knows many a mother, who has hoped through to the end that her boy would return when all the time her boy was lying, his physical body gone back into decay in some far hidden corner of some burnt-over battlefield. The hope that she'd see her boy failed her. It was a treacherous hope. The condemned man's hope is a treacherous hope.

And we can hardly go on here without remembering at least Tennyson's famous and touching illustration of the young woman who expected her sailor lover back from the sea and who knew just when he was supposed to arrive at her cottage and who dressed for that occasion. And he tells in tender, cheer-bringing language of how she stood before the mirror and turned every way and did the last little touch that she knew he'd love. And he said, poor girl, she doesn't know that already his lifeless body is being tossed and heaved on the billows following the wreck.

Hope may be a deceitful thing and a treacherous thing, but real faith never disappoints, because that faith is in God. It is grounded on the character of God, the promises of God, and the covenant of God, and the oath of God.

Now, remember that an oath, a covenant, and a promise, any of them or all of them, would only be worth as much as the character of the one who made them.

There is, they tell me, a couple of men. We're going to write them up a little in the Alliance Weekly. There are a couple of men running around claiming to be friends of the Alliance, and they are simply bums and robbers. One Christian brother took such a man in, and he got up in the middle of the night, robbed him of everything that wasn't nailed down, and disappeared.

Another fellow calling himself Tom Leslie. Now I don't know whether that's his right name, maybe he made it up for the occasion. That's kind of a nice name. I know lots of nice Toms, and I know some nice Leslies. But he combined the names, and he's going about telling that he's a friend of Dr. Schumann, and he knows the missionaries and can quote them by name. Then he gets all he can get and disappears.

Now a promise from a man like that, how much would that mean, brother? He could stand on a pile of Gideon Bibles and swear, and I wouldn't believe him. He could write with his own blood on a piece of paper, and he's still a liar. A promise is only worth the character of the one who makes it. Even an oath is only worth the character.

That's why I've never been too strong for a belief. This has no place here, but it's accepted as an illustration, that certain teachers should be made to swear an anti-communist oath. My brother, you can't pin a communist down with an oath. He'd swear on two bushels of Bibles and then turn around and sneer and sell out his country.

So, a character has to be there before there can be promise and oath and covenant. And the Scripture says, this Jesus Christ the Lamb led us to a faith in God so that our hope might be in God.

So, if God is God, then our hope is sound. And we Christians can walk around absolutely sure that everything is all right, because we have God back of us. His oath, His covenant, His blood support me in the whelming flood. And God, because he could not swear by any other, swore by Himself. He by Himself has sworn, I, on His oath depend, I shall, on eagles' wings upborne, to heaven ascend.

So, let's sing together in closing, that song that contains these words from the hymn "The God of Abraham Praise," signifying that because God has sworn on His own name, we can fully trust in that promise and will be carried to heaven as a result. Amen.