

Christ as Prophet, Priest and King

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LAST Sunday afternoon I was reviewing with you the Biblical doctrine of the plan of salvation. All mankind having come by the fall into an estate of sin and misery, being utterly lost in sin, deserving only of God's wrath and curse, God was pleased in strange and unaccountable mercy to elect some to everlasting life and enter into a covenant of grace with them to deliver them out of the estate of sin and misery and bring them into an estate of salvation.

That was God's plan. We shall be studying, during this winter, the way in which He carried it out. We shall be studying the wonderful unfolding of the covenant of grace.

We made a beginning of that study last spring, and this afternoon we must try to pick up the thread at the point where we there left off.

How has God carried out the covenant of grace? I observed last spring that He has done so through a redeemer. A redeemer is one who delivers someone else by the payment of a price. It was a redeemer in that full sense of the word that God provided for the salvation of those whom He had graciously chosen for eternal life.

Who, then, is the Redeemer of God's elect? The answer of the Westminster Shorter Catechism to that question can hardly be bettered:

The only Redeemer of God's elect is the Lord Jesus Christ, who, being the eternal Son of God, became man, and so was, and continueth to be God, and man, in two distinct natures, and one person, for ever.

I observed last spring how every word and every phrase in that answer was arrived at by the Christian church only after long study of the Word of God, meditation, discussion and prayer.

Notice, in the first place, that Jesus Christ is here called the *only* Redeemer. That word "only" strikes against various errors that have arisen throughout the long history of the

church; and it strikes particularly against the prevailing modern error which admits that the sufferings of Christ were redemptive, but regards the sufferings of Christian people as being redemptive too. It strikes against the modern notion that the cross of Christ was just a particularly noble example of self-sacrifice. It safeguards the truth which is contained in that sweet Christian hymn:

"There was no other good enough
To pay the price of sin,
He only could unlock the gate
Of heaven and let us in."

There was no other good enough, and there was no other great enough, to pay the price of sin. All through our study we must bear that truth in mind. We must keep steadily before us the fact that Jesus Christ is not one redeemer of God's elect among many, but the *only* Redeemer. Our only hope is in Him.

Notice, in the second place, that this only Redeemer of God's elect is from all eternity God. "Who, being the eternal Son of God . . .," says the Shorter Catechism. That truth also finds a place, and a central place, in the hymns of the church:

"Who is this so weak and helpless,
Child of lowly Hebrew maid,
Rudely in a stable sheltered,
Coldly in a manger laid?
'Tis the Lord of all creation,
Who this wondrous path hath
trode;
He is God from everlasting,
And to everlasting God."

That great basic doctrine of the deity of Christ was not even postponed in our series so late as last year. It was treated two years ago, when we were dealing with the teaching of the Bible about God. The doctrine of the deity of Christ is an essential part of the great doctrine of the trinity, the great doctrine which sets forth what the Bible tells us regarding Father, Son and Holy Ghost, three persons in one God:

"Holy, Holy, Holy! Merciful and mighty!

God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!"

Notice in the third place that the answer in the Shorter Catechism says that the eternal Son of God became man. That is the doctrine of the incarnation, which is more fully set forth in the following answer—the answer to the question, "How did Christ, being the Son of God, become man?"

Christ, the Son of God, became man, by taking to himself a true body and a reasonable soul, being conceived by the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and born of her, yet without sin.

That doctrine of the incarnation is treated by theologians—and rightly so—in an entirely different place from the doctrine of the deity of Christ. The doctrine of the deity of Christ is part of the Biblical teaching about God. This person whom we now know as Jesus Christ would have been God even if no universe had been created and even if there had been no fallen man to save. He was God from everlasting. His deity is quite independent of any relation of His to a created world.

The doctrine of the incarnation, on the other hand, is a part of the doctrine of salvation. He *was* God from everlasting, but He *became* man—at a definite moment of the world's history, and in order that fallen man might be saved. That He became man was not at all necessary to the unfolding of His own being. He was infinite, eternal and unchangeable God when He became man and after He became man. But He would have been infinite, eternal and unchangeable God, even if He had never become man. His becoming man was a free act of His love. Ultimately its purpose, as the purpose of all things, was the glory of God; but that purpose does not conflict at all with the fact that it was a

free act of mercy to undeserving sinners. He became man in order that He might die on the cross to redeem sinners from the guilt and power of sin.

The Bible not only tells us that the Son of God became man, but it tells us something of the way in which He became man. He "became man"—if we may quote the Shorter Catechism's summary of the Bible's teaching on this point—"by taking to himself a true body and a reasonable soul, being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and born of her, yet without sin." According to the Bible, the Son of God became man not in some mere semblance but actually. The body which He took to Himself was not, as some early heretics said, a mere semblance of a body but it was a true body, a body of flesh and bones. Moreover He took to Himself "a reasonable soul." His human body was not just a human body indwelt by the divine Person, the eternal Son of God; but it was a human body that was indwelt, as other human bodies are, by a human soul—a human soul with all the faculties of reason which other human souls possess and which distinguish human souls from the lower creatures.

This stupendous act by which the eternal Son of God took unto Himself a human body and a reasonable soul took place, according to the Bible, in the supernatural act of the virgin birth. He was conceived, according to the Bible, by the Holy Ghost and born of the virgin Mary. It is needless to say that the Bible does not narrate the virgin birth as one theory advanced among other possible theories to account for the incarnation. It simply narrates it as a fact. It does not say: "The Son of God became incarnate, and one explanation of the way in which He became incarnate is found in the story of the virgin birth." But it says simply, before it narrates the virgin birth: "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise." That is not theory. It is history.

When the Son of God became man He did not cease to be God. He certainly did not empty Himself of any of His divine attributes, as an unfortunate translation, in the Revised Version, of a verse in the second chapter of Philippians tends to lead people to think. No, He remained all that He was before. He was infinite, eternal and unchangeable before the

incarnation; He remained infinite, eternal and unchangeable after the incarnation. Indeed, to assert the contrary would be quite absurd. It would be quite absurd to say that an unchangeable being changed by becoming changeable. That would surely be a contradiction in terms. No, He was infinite, eternal and unchangeable in all His divine attributes after the incarnation exactly as before. After the incarnation, exactly as before the incarnation, He was infinite, eternal and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth.

So by the incarnation He did not cease to be what He was before. But He did become something that He was not before. He was God. He now became man. So after the incarnation He was God *and* man.

Does that mean that there was some kind of merger between the divine and the human in Christ; does it mean that the human was somehow taken up into the divine and lost its identity in it? Or does it mean that divine and human entered, as it were, into some sort of chemical combination, so that a third something neither divine nor human but divine-human resulted? No, the Bible does not teach these things, and the church rightly rejected them as serious heresies. The Bible teaches that after the incarnation the Son of God was God and man in two *distinct* natures. God is God, and man is man. There can be no confusion between the two, either in the Person of Christ or anywhere else.

Well, then, does that mean that there are two persons in Christ—a divine person and a human person? Does it mean that what we have in Christ is a human person merely indwelt in some particularly intimate way by the Son of God? No, the Bible does not teach that at all. The church rightly rejected it as a terrible heresy. There are not two persons in Christ, but one person. The one person, the eternal Son of God, took unto Himself a human nature—a complete human nature—at the incarnation, but He did not thereby become two persons. So there we have the great Biblical doctrine of the person of Christ: "God and man, in two distinct natures and one person for ever."

I ask you to consider for a moment how truly wonderful that doctrine is. I ask you to consider how wonderfully it satisfies the longings of our souls. Sinful men have been prone to seek a

god who will be like them and near to them. So they have fallen into the dreadful sin of worshipping and glorifying the creature more than the Creator; they have fallen into the sin of worshipping other men. Well, we Christians have a God who is truly near to us. We Christians can without sin worship one who is truly man. We Christians can without sin worship one who was tempted in all points like as we are; we can without sin worship one who is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. Yes, we can worship a God who is very close to us indeed—namely, Christ Jesus our Lord. We can worship Him because He is God; He is wonderfully near to us because He is man. How marvellous was His condescension that He came thus near! How marvellous was that act of love by which He became man!

But we never ought to forget that that act would never have been necessary save for our sin. It was our sin that caused Him to die upon the cross; it was our sin that caused Him to become man in order that He might thus die. That marvellous act of condescension by which the eternal Son of God became man was part of the glorious fulfilment of the covenant of grace. Man was estranged from God by the fact of sin. The Son of God became man that He might for God's people bring the estrangement to an end. Christ became man, in other words, that He might be the Mediator between God and man. He could not be the Mediator between God and man unless He were God: He could not be the Mediator unless He were man. It is as one who is both God and man that He has brought us to God. The doctrine of the person of Christ, in other words, is at the foundation of the doctrine of salvation. It is useless to try to set forth the meaning of Christ's death on the cross unless you first understand just who it was who there died.

We have seen who it was. It was not merely a righteous man, giving us an example of self-sacrifice. It was not merely a divine person taking on the semblance of a man. But it was one who was truly man and truly God; it was one who was God and man, in two distinct natures and one person forever. He it was of whom the First Epistle to Timothy speaks when it says: "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (I Tim.

2:5). With that understanding, presupposing thus the great Biblical doctrine of Christ's person, we now go on to study the great subject of Christ's mediatorial work. What has that Christ, who is God and man in two distinct natures and one person forever, done for us as our Redeemer?

The Shorter Catechism introduces the subject by distinguishing three offices that Christ executes. "What offices doth Christ execute as our Redeemer?" it asks. The answer is:

Christ, as our Redeemer, executeth the offices of a prophet, of a priest, and of a king, both in his estate of humiliation and exaltation.

In the talks that follow we shall speak of each one of these offices of Christ in turn. We shall speak of Christ as the revealer of God and as the revealer of the way of salvation which God has provided for man. That is His prophetic office. We shall then speak of the atonement which He has made for sin by dying in our stead upon the cross, and of His present intercession for us. That is His priestly office. Finally we shall speak of the rule which He exercises over His church and of His defense of the church against all enemies. That is His kingly office.

But what ought to be observed very carefully is that Christ's execution of each of these offices is connected in the closest possible way with His execution of the others. Sad misunderstanding results if we take any one of the offices of Christ in isolation. Thus, suppose we should concentrate our attention upon the prophetic office of Christ. Suppose we should say to ourselves: "Let us take Christ first of all as a revealer of God, and leave out of consideration the question whether He did or did not die as a sacrifice for sin upon the cross." Would we in that case obtain a right conception even of that part of the work of Christ which we started out to study? That is very far indeed from being the case. No, if you start out to consider Christ only as a revealer of God and leave His other offices out of account, you obtain an utterly distorted notion even of His work as a revealer. A very important part of what He revealed is found in His revelation of the meaning of His atoning work. A very important part of his work as a prophet—indeed, the

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very centre and core and sum and substance of His work as a prophet—is found in His presentation of Himself as priest and as king. So also even His work as a priest—His offering up of Himself as a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice and reconcile us to God—would never have been applied to us except through His work as a prophet, His gracious revealing, through His Word and Spirit, of the meaning of His death upon the cross.

The point that I am now making is so important that I am not at all ashamed of lingering upon it. One of the root errors of much modern discussion about the Bible is found in the piecemeal method that is employed. Take some modern book about Jesus Christ. I am not thinking at all of any particular book, but am just trying to indicate the way in which any book ought and ought not to be evaluated. Well, this book presents itself for our consideration. Perhaps we have the job of reviewing it for THE PRESBYTERIAN GUARDIAN or for some other journal. Let us say that it is a book dealing with the teaching of Jesus Christ. Let us say also that as we read the book we observe at once that the writer does not believe in Jesus' atoning work; he certainly does not believe that on the cross Jesus died as a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice. He does not believe in the deity of Christ.

He does not believe in the kingly office of Christ. He does not believe that Jesus is seated now upon the throne and that He will come again in glory. But he has some very favorable things to say about Jesus as a revealer of God.

What shall we say about that book in our review of it? Shall we say that it is a faulty book, but that it is true as far as it goes? Shall we say that it is certainly weak on the doctrine of the atonement and even weak on the doctrine of the deity of Christ but splendid in its presentation of Jesus as a revealer of God?

That is what we might say if we followed the method of reviewing books which is followed by many reviewers—even by many reviewers who can be called fairly orthodox. But as a matter of fact that method is radically wrong. It ignores the fact that the truth contained in the Bible does not consist in a series of isolated observations but constitutes a system of truth. You cannot reject any essential part of the system and still get the other parts of the system right. So a man who rejects the priestly work of Christ, and drags Him from His kingly throne by denying His deity, cannot at the same time rightly present His prophetic work as a revealer of God. A man who presents Jesus as only a revealer of God is presenting a false view even of His revealing work. You cannot rightly present Jesus as prophet unless you also present Him as priest and king.

It is with that understanding that I am now beginning to consider with you the prophetic office of Christ. We shall go wrong at every point unless we understand that this One who as prophet reveals God to us is also the One who died for our sins upon the cross and is now seated upon the throne. Indeed, when He reveals God to us, the central part of that revelation is found in His revelation of Himself as God—in His gracious presentation of Himself as the eternal Son of God who became man to be our Saviour. That revelation is what we rightly call the gospel. What I am trying to do in these talks is to be Christ's humble instrument in proclaiming that gospel to everyone within the sound of my voice. God grant that some of you who have not yet received it may receive it for the saving of your souls, and that you who have received it may give thanks anew to Him who is our prophet, priest and king.