

~Other Speakers S-Z: Alexander Whyte:

The workings of our Lord's human mind, the affections and the emotions of our Lord's human heart, and all the spiritual experiences of our Lord's human life-take Jesus Christ in all these things, and He is the most absorbing, the most satisfying, and the most sanctifying study in all the universe. There is no other doctrine in heaven or on earth for one moment to compare with the doctrine of God in Christ and Christ in God: the Word made flesh, and the flesh made God. And, then, to as many of us as by His grace to us are true believers on Him and in His blood, our Lord's own faith in His Father and in His Father's word to Him is a subject of the intensest interest, the most edifying meditation, and the most transporting reflection. To as many of us as believe there is no subject in heaven or on earth like our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the true learning. This is the true knowledge. This is the true science and philosophy; and not falsely so called. This is the wisdom that cometh from above. This is the wisdom of God in a mystery. This, O Father, is life eternal, to know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, Whom Thou hast sent.

Even in the Old Testament, and in some respects and for some reasons, even more in the Old Testament than in the New, the coming Messiah is already set before Israel as the Prince of believers, and as the perfect pattern to all believers, both Old Testament and New. Take the Messiah, for instance, in two well-known Psalms that were specially prepared for Him. In the sixteenth Psalm David is inspired to speak in the name of the promised Messiah in these splendidly believing words: "I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth; my flesh also shall rest in hope. For Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption." There spake the incomparably believing Man Jesus Christ, long before He was born. And, again, just listen to the Man of sorrows, and at the same time the Prince of believers, as He speaks concerning Himself in the twenty-second Psalm: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me? But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people. All they that see me laugh me to scorn; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted in the Lord that He would deliver him; let Him deliver him, seeing he trusted in Him. But Thou art He that took me out of the womb; Thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts. Be not far from me, for trouble is near; for there is none to help. I may tell all my bones; they look and stare upon me. They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture. But be Thou not far from me, O Lord; O my strength, make haste to help me." The four evangelists themselves have nothing to surpass that, first for an unparalleled sorrow, and then for the unparalleled victory of Messiah's faith. And then, in the greatest of the Messianic prophets: "The Lord God hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned I away back. I give my back to the smiters, and my cheek to them that pulled off the hair; I hid not my face from shame and spitting. For the Lord God will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded; therefore have I set my face as a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed. He is near that justifieth me; and who shall contend with me? Let us stand together. Who is mine adversary? Let him come near unto me." When Paul's faith for himself and for all believers is at its most rapturous and its most defiant, he borrows these bold words out of the mouth of the absolutely assured Messiah, and applies them to the most advanced and assured and victorious of evangelical believers. And no wonder. For, what a faith is here, even in the thickest darkness! What a full assurance of a divine faith is here, even on the cross!

And, then, when the Messiah actually came in the flesh He sought out all those Scriptures concerning Himself, and took them home to Himself, and believed them, and made every jot and tittle of them His very own. Sabbath by Sabbath, day by day, and hour by hour, Jesus of Nazareth read in the Psalms and in the Prophets the things that were written there concerning Himself, till His Father's word was more to Him than His necessary food. He may not indeed from a very child have made much of the Messianic Scriptures. It was impossible that as long as He spake as a child, and understood as a child, and thought as a child, He could enter into the full appropriation to Himself of all these so deep and, some of them, so dreadful Scriptures. But when He became a man, He read day and night, and nothing else but the deepest Messianic Scriptures; and at every fresh reading He made them more and more His own, and made Himself more and more their own, till at last He came to the full assurance of His Messiahship, by more and more performing the duties of the Messiahship, and by more and more clothing Himself with the whole walk and conversation of the Messiahship. And our Lord's faith in all these things so worked by an equal love that He was always found both ready and willing to fulfil, and to have fulfilled in Himself, all the Messianic Scriptures concerning Himself. "Lo, I come!" was never out of His mouth, from the beginning down to the end. Even on the cross He still delighted to do His Father's will. Yea, the law of our redemption was to the end. deeper in His heart than anything else. As in Messianic prophecy, so in the days of His actual flesh, our Lord was by far the greatest and the best of believers. He was the very author and finisher of faith. If He was not actually the first of all believers in point of time, no sooner did He begin to believe than He sprang at once to the forefront of faith, till He was the most perfect, and complete and completely God-pleasing believer in all Israel. Abraham himself, the father of the faithful, would have resigned his supreme

place in the life of faith in favour of Jesus Christ, but for the best of reasons to Abraham himself and to us. But, even after the coming of Christ, and even after Christ's life of incomparable faith, Abraham still holds his God-given place. For, at his very best, and to the very end, Abraham was but a believing sinner, and thus an ever more and more justified man. But Jesus Christ was, to begin with, and much more was He at His end, a believing saint and a justified surety. He had this prerogative over Abraham, and over all Abraham's believing seed, that He knew no sin. And thus it was that He did not need, like Abraham and all his seed, to believe on God for the forgiveness of sin, and for justification of life. And therefore it is that Abraham keeps his place, and will keep it to the end, as the father of all those who submit to be justified by faith. But the life of faith in all its aspects is so large and so rich that there is plenty of room in it both for Abraham and for Jesus Christ and for you and for me.

First in His believing study and believing appropriation of the Messianic Scriptures, and then in His life of unceasing and believing prayer, our Lord stands at our head as the author and finisher of faith. And not more in His believing reading of the word than in His believing prayer and intercession continually. "Who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death, and was heard in that He feared." Day and night, early and late, our Lord lived and moved and had His being in believing prayer. He could never have entered on His great work, far less could He ever have finished it, but for His faith in His father as the Hearer of prayer. At every successive step in the process of our redemption, He took that step after a season of prayer, till He had fulfilled in His own experience what He preaches with such point to us concerning believing prayer. Preaching clearly and undeniably from His own experience in prayer, He says to us in one great place-in the greatest, indeed, of all Scripture places - concerning prayer: "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." There is a window opened into our Lord's secret life of prayer in these wonderful words-words much too wonderful for the best believer among us, but true to the letter of Him and of His faith in His Father. "I know," He said to His Father, at the grave of Lazarus, "I know that Thou hearest me always. But because of the people that stand by I said it, that they might believe that Thou hast heard Me." Such close communion of faith, and such strong assurance of faith, was there between the Father and the Son in the Son's life of believing reading and believing praying.

But, after all, it was in Gethsemane and on Calvary that the faith of our Substitute came to its absolute perfection. Loaded down to death and hell with the sin of the world, our Saviour's faith in His Father's sure word of promise was such that his burdened heart rose victorious above all the tremendous load that was laid upon Him. Our Saviour had the fullest assurance of faith; the fullest assurance that His Father who had begun such a good work in Him and by Him would not leave it till He had perfected it in the day of Christ. And thus it was that, as Bengel says, "the most fragrant part of Christ's sin-atonement sacrifice was His unshaken trust in His Father's faithfulness and love." Not only did our Lord's faith not give way even under the tremendous strain of His sin-atonement death: His faith was so strong that it actually blossomed up into absolute joy even in His hottest agony. For we have the testimony of the Holy Ghost to the fact, that it was for the joy set before His faith that enabled our Lord to endure the Cross, and to despise the shame. And then, when His darkness was at its very darkest, His last words out of the thick darkness were these: "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit." If the centurion had known all that we know, with how much more wonder would he have said, "Certainly this was a righteous man! Truly this man was the Son of God!" Our Redeemer died, having been made a curse for sin; but all the time He died without a shadow of doubt in His soul that both He Himself, and all for whom He so died, would be openly acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgment. Truly the centurion would have said, had he known all, "This is the author and finisher of faith!"

Now, my brethren, after all that is said-and the half has not been said of our Lord's life and death of faith-at the same time, in some ways you and I have the privilege and the opportunity of being even greater believers than our Lord ever was. It may well have been of your faith and mine that He was speaking and foreseeing when He said that some of His disciples would do greater works than He had ever done. It is true, He believed and rested His soul on His Father's word of grace and truth to Him, even when He was laden with sin to a bloody sweat and to the darkness of death and hell. But, then, He had this comfort at His very worst, that the sin under which He was dying was not actually His own sin. Our worst sins, and all our sins, were imputed to Him and were actually laid upon Him, and He took them up to make atonement for them as if they had been His own. But all the time they were not His own; they were yours and mine. His suretyship guilt was not a real, and an actual, and a genuine, and a never-to-be-forgotten guilt like yours and mine. And thus it comes about that, in some ways, we can magnify the grace of God, and can attain to victories of faith and trust that were not open to our Lord, who knew no sin as we know it. And, indeed, it is just here that the characteristic and essential genius of justifying faith comes out, and makes itself to appear in all its trials and triumphs. The worse our case is, under the Gospel the more able are we to adorn the doctrines of grace and to magnify its saving power, if only we aright and enough believe in the God of grace and in His word of promise. His Son, no doubt, magnified His Father's

grace and His word of promise to the very utmost possible to Him by His life and death of the most perfect faith and trust. But you and I can magnify the grace and the promises of God in a way altogether personal and peculiar to ourselves. The darker, the more accumulated, the more aggravated our guilt is, the more will mercy rejoice over judgment in our forgiveness and salvation. Where sin abounds there grace much more abounds, when we exercise faith according to our sin and according to God's grace. "It is of faith," says the Apostle Paul, "that it might be by grace." Only believe that you have to do with a God who delighteth in mercy, and you will, by your faith, bring a tribute of glory to God that only a sinner, and a great sinner, can ever bring. A tribute of glory-shall I take boldness to say?-that His sinless Son could not possibly bring, or could only bring through you. Only believe in the infinite grace of God the Father, and in the infinitely precious blood of His Son, and you will thus glorify God far more than you have ever dishonoured Him. And how great will that glory be!

Walter Marshall, one of our deepest divines, says in his "Twelfth Direction" that "Christ walked in a constant persuasion of His excellent state, and it was that constant persuasion that carried Him through." And Marshall presses it upon all his believing readers that they are to walk in the same "constant persuasion." And he bases his great counsel on this great evangelical ground, that we are all complete in Christ; complete as Christ was complete. In fact, that we stand, if we will only believe it, in the very same "excellent state" as that was in which Christ stood. Yes; we stand now in His state, just as He at one time stood in our state. And it is by believing that, and by realising that, and by continually acting upon that, that we shall best please God with us, and best adorn the doctrine of His Son. In fact, without this faith in Christ, and in our "excellent state" in Christ, it is impossible for any sinner to please God. We are to act, continues Marshall, "as those who are raised in Christ altogether above and beyond the sphere and range of nature, and are advanced to union and communion with the Son of God." Believe that, believers. Practice believing that. Read and hear about that, and about little else but that: say to your own dark and doubting hearts that it hath pleased the Father that in Christ should all your fulness dwell. Say it, and believe it, and take your stand upon it. Not Paul and Luther and Marshall only, but you, their constant readers, are with them complete in Christ. And if you feel that you need more out of Christ's completeness than they or the like of them could ever need, then that will only enable you to magnify the grace of God more than they all. Believe that, believers. Bring the whole of the scriptures of promise, and the whole of your life of believing reading and believing praying to bear upon that. And if your great and singular sinfulness threatens sometimes to shipwreck your faith altogether, at such seasons cast your anchor into deeper seas of salvation than you have ever yet sounded. And the grace of God, and the blood and righteousness of Christ, and a corresponding faith in your soul, all these things will be seen to work in you a miracle of salvation hitherto unheard of. You also will be saved everlastingly from all your sin as sure as God has promised, and Christ has died and has risen again, if you will only believe. And you should have no difficulty in believing anything and everything of that kind, since all such faith is the gift of God.

I often entertain myself and regale my great taste for words, and especially for the words that the Holy Ghost teacheth, by repeating to myself the two last times in which we shall be spoken of under this great designation of "believers." "The souls of believers," I say to myself fifty times every day, "are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory." And then, following that up: "At the resurrection, believers being raised up in glory, shall be openly acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgment, and made perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God to all eternity."

If that is to be so, who would not live and die, like Jesus Christ, a believer?