

~Other Speakers G-L: Harry Ironside:

"If Christ to His throne had not bidden farewell,
 Sad indeed were the tolling of life's passing bell;
 If Christ on the cross had not suffered and died,
 Dark indeed were the passage of death's somber tide.
 If Christ from the grave had in triumph not risen,
 Bleak indeed were the dungeons of that dreadful prison;
 If Christ were not living and pleading on high,
 Death indeed were our doom, death that never may die."

—H. G. T. PARKE

H.A. IronsideThe above lines were written by a poor unfortunate, a drug-addict, who stumbled into a Salvation Army Hall years ago and came to Christ. It is evident that the Spirit of God gave him a very vivid appreciation of four aspects of the work of our Lord Jesus Christ, upon which Scripture bases four great truths. Upon these I desire to meditate, hoping that both writer and readers may thus enter more fully into the completeness of the divine scheme of redemption.

Incarnation

Think, first, of incarnation. The word itself implies a supernatural Being linking Himself with humanity, and this of course is what actually took place when the eternal Son of God became Man in the fulness of time. Incarnation means more than the mere assumption of a human body. In Scripture we are told, "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt [tabernacled] among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1:14)... It was a voluntary act on His part. He who subsisted from all eternity in the form of God, who thought it not robbery to be equal with God, emptied Himself of the outward semblance of Deity, and took upon Him the form of a bondman; having come in the likeness of men, and being thus habited as a Man, He humbled Himself still lower, becoming obedient unto death, and such a death—that of the cross. In doing this, He linked Deity with humanity in such a way that He did not cease in any sense to be God, while He became, nevertheless, in the fullest possible sense, Man. He had a true human spirit. "He groaned in the spirit, and was troubled," (John 11:33) we are told, and on the cross He exclaimed, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit" (Luke 23:46). We hear Him saying, "Now is My soul troubled," (John 12:27) and we read that He "poured out His soul unto death" (Isa. 53:12). His body was in no sense a phantom, as some have taught in early days, but a true human body, the earthly vessel in which the heavenly One took up His abode, in order that He might be slain for our sins. All this is involved in the fact of incarnation.

But though a true Man, He was a sinless Man, and not only sinless in thought and act, but impeccable; because being as truly God as Man, it is unthinkable that He could in His humanity do that, under any circumstances, which was repugnant to His Godhead, and God cannot sin. Thus He fulfilled the types of old; He was the unblemished, spotless Lamb; like the unyoked heifer, He never came under the yoke of sin. He was as pure within as He was without, thus answering to the burnt offering which had to be laid open and examined in every part, and could only be presented to God if found inwardly perfect.

In order that this might be so, He could not come into the world through the process of natural generation, for this would have made Him heir to all the fearful entailment of sin and infirmity which characterized the human race as proceeding from fallen Adam. He was conceived of the Holy Spirit, a distinct creation in the womb of the virgin, and thus He entered this world through the portals of birth, but as the Second Man, the Lord from heaven. Herein lies the importance of the doctrine of the virgin birth, which some today insist has no real bearing upon the question of His Saviourhood. But His incarnation must be sinless and impeccable, or He could not be the Saviour of sinners. If there were within Him the least evil or tendency to evil, He must needs have a Saviour for Himself, and He could not stand in the breach for us.

We speak of His sinless incarnation. On the other hand, it is quite inaccurate to apply the term "the immaculate conception" to this wondrous mystery. This latter term is used very loosely by many Protestants who fail to realize, or forget if they ever knew, that it is the name given by the Roman Catholic Church to the Romish doctrine of the sinless, yet natural conception of the blessed virgin Mary. No such term is ever used in the Bible, nor does such a term belong in Protestant theology in connection with the sinless incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

These truths need to be emphasized more than ever today, for if we lose sight of them we become confused in our thinking, and we shall be further confused as we go on to consider the work of His cross. He had to be what

He was in order to do what He did. If He had been in any sense less than God manifest in flesh, He could not have offered up Himself in the power of the Eternal Spirit for our redemption. If He had been other than the One of whom it was written, "He knew no sin," He could not have been made sin for us.

While we are not saved through His incarnation, and our present union with Him is not because He took our humanity upon Himself, but because we have been linked to Him, the glorified Man in heaven, by the Holy Spirit, yet it is of all importance that we hold fast to the truth that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself" (2 Cor. 5:19). Bethlehem must precede Calvary. He became Man that He might die for men.

Propitiation

In the second chapter of Hebrews, we are told in verse 17, "Wherefore in all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people." The word here translated "reconciliation" is more accurately rendered "propitiation" as in 1 John 2:2 and 4:10: "He is the propitiation for our sins;" "God ... sent His Son to be the propitiation." This word is used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, made in the third century before Christ, commonly called the Septuagint, and expressed generally as the LXX, to translate the Hebrew term which occurs again and again in the Old Testament, and is rendered in many different ways in the English Version, a few of which are as follows:

1. "Pitch," in Genesis 6:14, as used for the "covering" of the ark.
2. "Appease," used in Genesis 32:20, where it means literally "to cover the face."
3. "Atonement," used in many places in Leviticus 16, and particularly in Leviticus 17:11.
4. "Satisfaction," used in Numbers 35:31.
5. "Ransom," used in Job 33:24.
6. "Put it off," in Isaiah 47:11.
7. "Reconciliation," used in Daniel 9:24.
8. "Pacified," used in Ezekiel 16:63.

If we put all of these English translations together, they do not by any means exhaust the real meaning of this word, but they do throw wonderful light upon the Scripture doctrine of propitiation. They tell us that in the death of Christ God has found a ransom for sinful men, and that a covering has been provided to shield us from the storm of judgment. Atonement has been made for our sins, full satisfaction has been rendered to the divine justice for our iniquities. God's judgment is appeased; sin is expiated, and God is pacified toward us for all that we have done, because of the perfection of the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now He Himself is our propitiation and we come to God alone by Him.

Resurrection

But although the death of our Lord Jesus Christ has accomplished the putting away of sin so that every believer is justified by His blood, it is through His resurrection that we know God is satisfied with the work that His Son accomplished when He took our place in judgment and bore our sins in His own body upon the tree. He "was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification" (Romans 4:25). It is not that we are justified by His resurrection, but it is that His resurrection proves that the work which justifies has been accomplished, and we come into the benefit of it all when we put our trust in the Risen One. Everywhere the apostles went they preached Jesus Christ and the resurrection. Just as incarnation without propitiation is in itself unable to save us, so propitiation without resurrection would be incomplete. None could know certainly that God was satisfied with the work of His Son if Christ had not burst the bands of death asunder and risen in triumph from the tomb.

More than this, had He remained enthralled in the arms of death, it would have given the lie to His entire testimony and redemptive program. It was imperative that He rise again the third day. It was this that proved Him to be in very truth the Son of God and the all-sufficient Sacrifice for sin. And so today the message that goes out to all mankind is as of old, "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Romans 10:9,10). It is the Risen One whom God has exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour. He has been made both Lord and Christ to give repentance and remission of sins to all who turn to Him in faith.

Intercession

As the risen Christ, our Lord is carrying on a special service now on behalf of all believers here on earth as the minister of the heavenly sanctuary. Therefore we are told, "He is able also to save them to the uttermost [that is, forevermore], that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25). He ministers in the holiest of all as our great High Priest with God, giving every believer a perfect representation before the eternal throne. He is there also as our Advocate with the Father, keeping the feet of His saints, and insuring the restoration of every failing Christian.

We often speak, and rightly, of the finished work of Christ. This refers, of course, to the work of propitiation, as we have already seen. To this nothing can be added, nor can anything be taken from it. It is complete. To attempt to add to it would be only to try to spoil His finished work. But on the other hand, it is just as correct to speak of the unfinished work of Christ, for He began a service in behalf of His people when He ascended to heaven which has been going on ever since, and will not be finished so long as there is one saint left on earth in the place of testing and possible failure. We have a sample of His intercession in John 17, where we find His great high-priestly prayer. In that wonderful chapter He anticipates the cross, and we are permitted to listen reverently to the tender words He speaks on behalf of His own to the end of time. In John 13 we see Him acting as Advocate, washing the defiled feet of His disciples, thus picturing the work He has been carrying on ever since He returned to the glory. He is the girded Servant still, and will be so as long as we need Him. "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous," (1 John 2:1) and "He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). His advocacy is based upon His propitiation.

Were it not for this present service of our Lord Jesus Christ, the first sin committed by a believer after his conversion would destroy communion with God, and there would be no way to restore that communion again. It needs to be remembered that there are two links that bind every saint to the Saviour, and these are union and communion. The link of union is indissoluble. Once formed, it can never be broken. The link of communion is delicate indeed. The least sin will break it, and it would never be formed anew were it not for the intercession of our Lord Jesus. He meets every accusation of the enemy. He presents our case before the Father. He, through the Holy Spirit, brings the Word to bear upon our consciences, and thus He brings us to contrition, confession, and restoration.

How full is our salvation! How wonderfully has God provided! The Incarnate Son became Himself our propitiation. Resurrection attests our justification, and His intercession carries us on to the end of the journey.

If it be asked, "Why do we need an advocate?" the answer is, "Because we have an accuser, Satan, 'the accuser of our brethren ... which accused them before our God day and night'" (Rev. 12:10). But "who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us" (Rom. 8:33,34). Jesus Christ meets every charge of the adversary. His propitiatory work is the answer to every accusation. And He will minister all needed grace to meet present need and restore the souls of His failing saints, until the glad hour when He will call us all to meet Him above and to share the joys of the Father's house.