

WHAT IS YOUR VERDICT?

INTRODUCTION: Every week thousands of citizens form hundreds of juries across the length and breadth of this great land to hear the evidence and ~~then~~ render a verdict concerning the guilt or innocence of one of their peers who is on trial before them. The right to trial by a jury of one's own peers is one of the most sacred rights handed down to us from our heritage of English common law. Even one who is called a "helpless vegetable" and accused of strangling terrorized women has a right to a fair trial. Even one who commits mass murders in a beauty parlor or from a university tower is entitled to hear the verdict from an impartial jury of his fellow citizens. It is a serious and solemn responsibility to hold the fate of another person in your hands in this way.

But we are called upon to answer the question, "What is your verdict?" in several ways in our life, which are outside the courtroom.

I. We must give a verdict about many things in life.

1. What we think of our American Way of Life.

Is it a good thing for people to decide about their own constitution and govern themselves?

Is it a good thing for people to have the right to elect their own governmental leaders in a free election, with opposition parties freely allowed, without terrorism or violence?

Is it a good thing for people to have something like the Bill of Rights, with all of its freedoms guaranteed and secured?

Is it a good thing for people to have a legal process through which they can make changes in their government, rather than for a vocal and powerful minority to impose its will by force or otherwise?

What is your verdict about a free and democratic way of life founded on moral law and eternal principles of justice and freedom and the dignity and worth of the individual?

2. We must give a verdict about moral and ethical standards.

Is it a good thing for people to follow the principle that "anything goes" in the realm of morality?

Is it ~~just~~ acceptable to condone social standards of the lowest common denominator, or is it possible for people to discover certain ~~absolute~~ of right and wrong?

Is promiscuity in sex, even though engaged in "without harm or disrespect", as desirable as the Christian standard of limitation of sexual activity within the bounds of the marital union?

We might well criticize certain aspects of the Puritan legalistic ethics and the Victorian prudish morality, but surely they were closer to true godliness than the modern display of the new morality which has led to shocking sexual orgies which would make the Greek God Bacchus blush with shame. Snickers, and giggles, and superficial sophisticated sideswipes at the so-called "old fashioned traditionalists" who are trying to stem the tide of immorality, will not change the basic truth known to historians like H.G. Wells and others that ~~the Roman civilization and other great civilizations perish not because of outward pressure alone but largely because of internal decay and corruption.~~

Are we willing to stand up and be counted and say one and all that there are moral and ethical standards which are still valid in an era of bare breasted ~~bar girls~~ and waitresses, crooked congressmen, and cheating cadets?

Christians need to learn to avoid temptations rather than to invite them. Someone said, "Temptations that are courted will conquer."

But if you resist and are still overcome by the power of temptation, you should not despair, for God still loves you. And if you are indeed living a noble moral life, perhaps you should not take too much pride in this, for you may be "up and out" and need Jesus as the "down and out." Remember that life at its best is never good enough, and life at its worst is never hopeless.

WHAT IS YOUR VERDICT ABOUT JESUS CHRIST?

Mt. 16:13-18

INTRODUCTION: In a secluded spot far from curious and hostile eyes, Jesus asked the twelve men who had been with him from the beginning this surprising question: "Who do men say that I am?" Simon Peter, acting as spokesman for the group, replied: "Men are not agreed in their opinion concerning you; some say one thing, some another. But they are all agreed that you are a great man, worthy to be ranked with the greatest of the prophets." That answer fell across the Master's face like a shadow.

Then, looking earnestly into the eyes of his apostles, Jesus put this question, "Who do YOU say that I am?" Again, it was Simon Peter who made the reply; "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

And THAT answer fell like a sunbeam across the face of Jesus. "Blessed are you, Cephas; out of men like you, and on the confession you have just made, I will build my church, and the forces of destruction will never overcome it."

I. Two opinions of Jesus Christ:

A. From the day of that conference near the city of Caesarea Philippi, on the Mediterranean coast of the Holy Land, to the present, there have never been but two basic opinions concerning Jesus of Nazareth. It may seem that there have been hundreds of ideas of his person, but all these can be reduced to TWO.

1. According to ONE, Jesus is a man, a great man, towering like Mt. Everest above the other peaks; but only a man: a Palestinian Socrates, or Confucius, or Buddha, but still a man.

2. According to the other opinion, he is the MESSIAH, the desire of nations, the Son of the Eternal, the unique Son of God, the only one of his kind, "unparalleled," the second person of the divine trinity.

From its beginning, the christian church has held the higher of these two opinions. Of course, the lower conception of Jesus as a mere man is easier to grasp. If Jesus is only a man of great genius, only an exceptionally noble teacher, we can understand him better. But if he stands in a class by himself, and if he combines in his person attributes of both God and man, he creates a problem and a challenges for us.

However, we are not after easier conceptions; we are after the TRUTH. It may be necessary to adopt the higher and the more difficult conception to explain the facts of Christ's miraculous birth, life, miracles, death, and resurrection, all of which must be accounted for.

"Who do men say that I am? Who do YOU say that I am?" These questions are inescapable. Christ compels a verdict.

Life can not be lived at its triumphant best until we make up our minds about HIM.

C. It is a fact that Jesus lived a fully human life.

This may seem to you to be obvious, but it was not to all of the first followers of Christ. Immediately after the ascension the church had to deal with the heresy which claimed that Jesus only pretended to be human—that he was a God masquerading as a man.

The early church had to fight, NOT for the DIVINITY of Jesus, but for his HUMANITY. Some doubted that he was a real man and said that he only SEEMED to possess a human body, and to suffer and to die. The church has rightly fought that heresy vigorously.

Our problem today may be the opposite. Few doubt that Jesus was truly human, with a human body like our own; that he grew hungry and weary, and experienced all our human emotions.

True humanity is not a denial of divinity.

We start, then, with this truth—that he lived, that he was truly human, that he understands our frailty, and our temptations and trials.

But church history and our christian experiences tell us that he is more than human. He is a transcendent personality, God in the flesh.

Christian conviction has taken Simon Peter's words and affirmed, "You are the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

As Paul declared, in his tremendous phrase, "in him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." We claim that He is the King of Glory and the incarnation of God Himself.

He himself was unmistakably aware that he was both human and divine.

"I am the way, the truth, and the life," he said. Either this is intolerable egotism, or madness, or it is the truth.

He associated himself in a unique way with God.

"I and the Father are one," he said.

He came to this world as the incarnate God to be the Savior of the world.

D. In what way then is Christ the Savior? Let's try to express it simply and definitely; Christ is the Savior because he changes men and women, boys and girls, who commit themselves to him, and to his way of thinking of God, of mankind, of his church, and of life.

Christ forgives all of their sins on the basis of their repentance and faith, and he calls and empowers all his children, men, women, boys, and girls, to serve him, to proclaim his gospel to others, and to minister in his kingdom as the Spirit leads them individually. And with each call to serve and minister comes the call to PREPARE to give our very best to him.

Jesus is the Savior because he shows us God.

He is the Lord of his harvest because he alone deserves our full and complete allegiance.

Jesus said, "He that has seen me...has seen the Father." We don't lay hold of this concept of the deity and Lordship of Jesus, so much as we are laid hold of by this idea.

Then, and only then, we are saved from all loneliness, despair, guilt, and inadequacy.

II. Two ways for the believer to go after becoming a Christian:

A. Give him a minor place or a marginal place in your life.

Many Christians seem to do this.

They profess to trust Christ as their Savior. Only God himself knows for sure whether or not they really do this or not. They seem to be enthusiastic about living for the Lord for awhile, but their enthusiasm cools, and their faithfulness diminishes, and they take the easy road and drift away and seem to lose interest in spiritual things. They are like the rocky ground in the parable of the sower.

B. Or, on the other hand, you can really make Jesus the Lord and Master of your life, and ACT in accordance with your profession.

Pilate said, "What, then, shall I do with Jesus?" You must not only DECIDE or give your verdict about Jesus; you must DO something about him. You must trust him or reject him.

Whenever you come face to face with Jesus Christ, you face the greatest moral challenge of your life. You never realize just how great it is until we come within a genuine personal Christian experience. Only as we freely consent to follow Christ and live with Christ can we come to know who he really is.

You cannot know who Christ really is until you come within his circle. There is a self-authenticating quality about him. But each one of us must find it for ourselves and decide that verdict and unconditionally surrender our heart and life in the privacy of the inner life. No one else can make that decision and commitment for us.

CONCLUSION: The conclusion of the matter is found in the words of the writer Emil Ludwig concerning the task of making a literary personality live. He said, "If an author is to make a subject live, he must live with him, think with him, and eat with him. Unless you have a certain mad, furious and passionate relationship to your subject, you can never make him live in the minds of others."

Now I say, isn't this OUR challenge as christians, to live so close to Jesus Christ, and to get to know him so well, so intimately, so passionately, that we can make him live in the minds and lives of others with whom we associate day by day?

Ask, "Who is this Jesus? Who do YOU say he is? What is your verdict?"

Then, "What will you DO about him?"

In the RIGHT ANSWER, the RIGHT VERDICT, and in the RIGHT DECISION, and the RIGHT COMMITMENT, is the power of God for the remaking of your life and the remaking of our generation for the glory of God. If we render the right verdict and do the right thing about Jesus Christ, then what was important to him will be important to us. What were the two very important things Jesus left for his followers after his ascension. The New Testament was NOT one of these two things. The books of the NT had not been written then. What were these two things? One was the Holy Spirit. He said, "When I depart, I will send the Comforter to you." The second important thing was the Church.

He said, "Upon this rock (the rock of confession that he is the Son of the Living God, and so the Lord of All) I will build my church. And so, upon his confessing followers, upon US and our CONFESSION of his deity and lordship, he is still building his church today. If you want to be a part in the continuing ministry of building his church, a moderate church, not given to extremes, not chained to the past, not requiring you to submerge your intelligence under ancient superstitions, yet confessing boldly the deity and lordship of Jesus Christ, then come and be a part of us and a part of this great work for the glory of God. Come now while we rise and sing.

II. What is Your Verdict About Jesus Christ?

In a secluded spot far from curious and hostile

eyes, Jesus asked the twelve men who had been with

Him from the beginning this surprising question:

"Who do men say that I am?" (MT. 16:13)

Simon Peter, acting as spokesman for the group, replied: "Men are not agreed in their opinion concerning you; some say one thing, some another.

But they are all agreed that You are a great Man, worthy to be ranked with the greatest of the prophets.

That answer fell across the Master's face like a shadow.

Then, looking earnestly into the eyes of his men, He put this question, "Who say ye that I am?"

Again it was Simon Peter who made the reply: (V. 15)

"Thou art the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

And that answer fell like a sunbeam across the face of Jesus. "Blessed are you, Simon; out of men like you, and on the work of the confession you have made, I will build my church, and the forces of destruction will never overcome it."

From the day of that conference near the city of Caesarea Philippi to the present, there have never been but two opinions concerning Jesus of Nazareth. It may seem that there have been hundreds of ideas of His person, but all these can be reduced to two.

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According to the other opinion, He is the Messiah, the desire of nations, the Son of the Eternal, the unique Son of God, "unparalleled,"

unparalleled, unparalleled, unparalleled.

From the beginning, the Christian church has held the higher of these two opinions. Say what you will about the ancient creeds; you must admit that they maintained steadfastly the uniqueness, the divinity, and the saviorhood of Christ.

"I believe...in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord:...
And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father
Almighty," is the triumphant assertion of the
Apostles' Creed.

"I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only
begotten Son of God; Begotten of his Father before
all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of
Very God; Begotten, not made; Being of one substance
with the Father..." How that language soars!

It is the Nicene Creed; it is the ancient church
laboring to safeguard its profound conviction con-
cerning Christ. Now I think we can use more contem-
porary language and ideas to express our faith today,
but what the Nicene Creed was driving at in the
language of its own day, is my faith; and it is the
faith of the vast majority of Christians today.

Of course, the lower conception of Jesus as a mere
man is easier to grasp. If Jesus is only a man of
genius, only an exceedingly noble Teacher, we can
understand Him better. But if he stands in a class
by himself, and if he combines in his nature attri-
butes of both God and man, he creates a problem;
he presents a challenge.

However, we are not after easier conceptions;
we are after the truth. It may be necessary to
adopt the higher and the more difficult conception
to explain the phenomena which must be accounted for.

"Who say men that I am? Who say ye that I am?"
The question is inescapable.

Christ compels a verdict.

What is your verdict?

Life cannot be lived at its triumphant best until
we make up our minds about Him.

Sometimes with ringing affirmation, and sometimes
falteringly, the church has declared certain things
about Christ. First of all, He is a fact of history.
The doubts which have been cast on the
historical reality of Jesus are unworthy of serious
attention. Secondly, He lived a perfect human life.

There was an intellectual depth and spiritual and social passion in his life and message that have marked him to this day as incomparable.

Jesus lived a fully human life.

This may seem to you to be obvious, but it was not to the first followers of Christ.

Immediately the church had to deal with the heresy which claimed that Jesus only pretended to be human; that He was a God masquerading as a man.

The early church had to fight, not for the divinity of Jesus, but for his humanity. Some doubted that he was a real man and said that he only SEEMED to possess a human body, and to suffer and to die.

The church has rightly fought that heresy vigorously. Our problem today may be the opposite.

For few doubt that Jesus was truly human, with a human body like our own; that he grew hungry and weary, and experienced all our human emotions.

True humanity is not a denial of divinity.

We start then with this truth that he lived, that he was human, and that he must be divine through his humanity.

But the church and Christian experience assert that he is more than human; he is a transcendent personality. Christian conviction has taken Simon Peter's words and affirmed, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God."

It has asserted in Paul's tremendous phrase, that "in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. We declare that He is the King of glory, the incarnation of one God."

He himself had unmistakably aware that He was both human and divine. "I am the way, the truth, and the life," he said. Either this is intolerable egotism, or it is the truth. He associated himself in a unique way with God. "I and the Father are one, He came to the world as the incarnate Father to be the Savior of the world.

We might well ask "What evidence hasthe church for calling Christ God? Why call him more than a Fine Man?"

Many find it more accurate to say with the first-century church that "Jesus is Lord"; that "God was in Christ," than to say "Jesus is God."

When John in his day and language said Jesus is "the only begotten of the Father" he means that Jesus is uniquely the embodiment of God.

But this discussion leads us to a prior question: "What do we mean by God?"

To believe in the divinity of our Lord is an assertion primarily not about Jesus, but about God. Men believed in God before Jesus came; men believe in God who do not adore Jesus today. What do Christians have to add to their belief in God? Simply this: We are persons, and God to be known within must be personal; He must reveal himself in terms understandable by persons.

This is what occurred when the disciples lived in the company of Jesus.

As Jesus lived, and healed men's bodies and minds, as he sought out the wayward and the lost and recovered them, as he challenged evil, and rebuked sin, and took the sin of man into his own heart, effecting reconciliation and forgiveness; so God takes the initiative, so God loves and challenges and forgives and has a cross in His heart.

To believe in the divinity of Christ is to believe in the Christlikeness of God.

What then is the evidence? It is the New Testament; it is nineteen centuries of the Christian era; it is the witness of men and women and boys and girls who have turned to Him as He is in the New Testament. These have found, as we can find, that turning to Him there, he steps out of the page and becomes a tremendous, exciting, and living reality.

In him we see Love in action, seeking to reclaim us, going to infinite lengths to make sure of that Love.

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Words stammer and fall, but from our lips the words of another come, "He loved me and gave Himself for me." By his wounds we are healed of the inner hurt caused by our own folly, our ignorance, our wilful disobedience, or by the cruelties of life. By his grace we hear God say, "Your sins are forgiven....go in peace."

In what way then is Christ the Savior? Let us try to express it simply and definitely: Christ is the Savior because he changes men and women, boys and girls, who commit themselves to His church, to his way of thinking of God, of man, and of life. He is the Savior because he shows us God.

"He that hath seen me...hath seen the father." To be laid hold of by His concept of God is to be saved from all loneliness, despair, ^{guilt} and inadequacy.

What should we do because of this? Because of Him? We must decide. We must give our verdict.

Who is this man? What shall I do then with Jesus?

In his presence each of us has a sense of moral challenge.

And we can never know until we come within a Christian experience. Only as we consent to follow Christ and live with Christ can we come to know who He really is. You cannot know who Christ really is until you come within his circle. There is a self-authenticating quality about Him. But each one of us must find it and decide that verdict in the privacy of his inner life.

The conclusion of the matter is found in the words of Emil Ludwig concerning the task of making a great personality live. If an author is to make a subject live, he said, he must "... live with him, think with him, and eat with him. Unless you have a certain mad, furious and passionate relationship to your subject, you can never make him live in the minds of others."

Is this not our challenge, to live so close to Jesus Christ, and to get to know him so well, that we can make him live in the minds and lives of others with whom we associate day by day?

Ask, Who is this man? Who do you say that he is? Now what is your verdict? Then, What will you do about him? In the right answer, the right verdict, and in the right decision, The right commitment is the power of God for the remaking of your life, personalities and the remaking of our world.

what was important to him should be important to us. His church was very important to him, and it should be very important to us. He builds his church with bold confessing "Yours little Peter", and CLOSING PRAYER: ~~make you and me if we~~ ~~make the same confession~~

to thee; may thy power strengthen us in thy service; may thy joy fill our souls. Amen.

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F.C. - Ch. #3, Feb. '87 statistics on noise dñiw quiet
WACMC - Ft. MCG. 18 Mar '79.
Pasadena B.C. July 12, '87