



the
Golden
Candlestick

THE WAY

Part 1

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INTRODUCTION

“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me’ ” (John 14:6).

“Saul ... went to the high priest, and asked letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem” (Acts 9:1-2).

“Following after Paul and us, she kept crying out, saying, ‘These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation’ ” (Acts 16:17).

“But when some were becoming hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the people, he withdrew from them and took away the disciples” (Acts 19:9).

“About that time there occurred no small disturbance concerning the Way” (Acts 19:23).

“And I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons” (Acts 22:4).

“But this I admit to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect I do serve the God of our fathers” (Acts 24:14).

“But Felix, having a more exact knowledge about the Way, put them off” (Acts 24:22).

The Lord Jesus said of Himself that He was the Way. Almost immediately after He had gone back to heaven and the events of the day of Pentecost had inaugurated the new era, Christianity became known as the Way. Christ, Who always had to speak in a kind of parabolic way without giving explanations because the Holy Spirit had not yet come as the Interpreter, meant that He was the Pathway. Just simply, undefined, unexplained, He was the Pathway. Christianity took that up, but by the Holy Spirit Christianity embodied all that Christ meant by that but did not explain. Christianity became the fulness of the meaning of Christ as the

Way. These two aspects, then, Christ's own simple statement as to Himself, and Christianity becoming the full expression of what He meant, just resolves itself into several quite simple but quite important things: firstly, what the Way is; secondly, what Christ meant as to Himself, and thirdly, what Christianity was at the beginning, and was always intended to be. Those things will be the ground of our consideration and enlargement at this time.

What the Way is

Firstly, what a way is. A way is that which links together a desire and its realization, a goal and its attainment, a beginning and an end. That is perfectly simple, almost too simple, and yet there is a profound fulness in that simple definition when it comes to the Lord Jesus. The goal, according to His statement, was and is the Father. The object is coming to the Father. "No one comes to the Father but through Me."

That implies two or three things. Firstly that implies a closed way. It says to all men — "no man". "No man comes." So that all cannot come. The way is not open that anybody and everybody can just come or go to the Father willy-nilly, anyhow, that they will all get there sooner or later. "No man" means that there is a closed door; it is a governed door or way.

Then, it implies an exclusive way — "but through Me". That is exclusive, that is the only way. It is selective, it is discriminating: "But through Me".

But then it also has its positive side which shows that there is an open way. "I am the way." So much, then, for what a way is.

What Christ meant as to Himself

Now as to what Christ meant as to Himself. Here we will just state the thing in broad outline and spend more time on it later. What did Christ mean when He said, "I am the way"?

a) The Representative of people whom the Father will receive

Firstly, He meant that there is a kind of person who alone could be received by the Father. There is a particular and special kind of person who will get to the Father and no one else, and Christ meant that He was that kind of person. He set forth in Himself what kind of people will be

found with the Father, who the Father will receive and have with Him. It is a particular kind of people, and Christ is the representative of that people, because He is speaking about people coming to the Father. He is not saying that no one ever will get to the Father. But what He is really saying is that those who get to the Father will be of a special and particular kind, and He is that kind. It will be when people take on My character and My nature and My likeness that they will be with the Father. That is simple and we will spend much more time on that presently.

b) Christ removes the reason for the closed way

Then He meant that the reason for the way being closed was dealt with and removed by Him. “No man” — that is a closed door. That door closed at a certain time. There was a particular point in the history of man when God closed the door and man could no longer pass through to God. We know the whole story. But the Lord Jesus has dealt with all that, and because He has done that, the way is open, but it is open only in Him and through Him. The first thing that we said as to the kind of person that gets to God has to do with the Person of the Lord Jesus. The second thing as to the ground of the closed door being taken away has to do with His work.

c) The way is a Person

The third thing that He meant — and I am quite sure that those of you who know your Bibles at all will be able to see that I am not speaking out of myself. I am speaking closely according to the content of the Word of God, and the third thing that He meant was that the way is not a thing, the way is not a system, the way is a *Person*. The Person is representative of God’s mind and inclusive of all those who, through faith, are in Christ. He is a great representative Person and He becomes a great inclusive Person. That again further awaits our fuller consideration.

d) Sonship the basis of coming to the Father

And fourthly, what the Lord Jesus meant when He said, “I am the way ... no one comes to the Father but through me” clearly indicates the basis of this coming to the Father. The very word that He uses and uses carefully, He uses every time knowing what He is doing; not casually, for later in the Gospel by John He made the statement, “I have manifested Your name” (John 17:6). The basis of coming to the Father is sonship. The condition is being begotten, because it is coming, though it is not said here, to God. Here it is not a matter of getting to heaven or getting into the

church; it is a matter of getting “to the Father” and that determines the basis of any kind of standing in the presence of the Father: begotten of God, children of God, sonship.

Well now, that is broadly what the Lord Jesus meant when He said, “I am the way.”

What Christianity essentially is

Then we come to what Christianity essentially is. Christianity is not a system; Christianity is not a religion; Christianity is not a form of teaching or practice or procedure. Christianity is first and last a Person. Christianity is a Person Whose constitution and nature and essential being becomes the Way. Christianity takes on the values of the Person. It is not Christianity’s business to preach doctrines, to set up systems of practice; Christianity’s whole business is to set forth Christ, to bring Christ livingly into view, to register Christ as a living Person upon the world. It is that that makes Christianity the Way. You can have all the other and people never find God and people never come to new birth to become children of God, and therefore, after all, Christianity may be failing in its ultimate responsibility of bringing about a vital union between man and God as the Father. You may have all the other and fail. Christianity is a Person in expression, a Person in revelation, a Person in impact. It is Christ Himself in His church, His Body, making Himself and His presence known. If Christianity is the making real of Christ as the way and so embodying all that Christ is and has done to bring to the Father, then Christianity must take up into itself those things which were true of Christ, making Him the Way.

Christ provides God with perfect satisfaction

The door is closed when God is not satisfied. There is no way through. Somehow God has got to be satisfied. This One, the Lord Jesus, has provided God with perfect satisfaction; God is satisfied. Christianity (or the church, it is the same thing in the mind of God, for our purposes we are using the term Christianity) must be characterized by God’s satisfaction. That is, Christians must be living wholly in the good of God having been satisfied. They must be a satisfied people. There is no testimony, no registration, no value, no influence unless there comes through Christians the impression that they are a satisfied people, that their satisfaction

rests upon God's satisfaction. Into their hearts there has been born the fact that God is satisfied.

It is a fundamental thing which Satan and all the evil powers are evermore seeking to upset. It is one of those focal points of the enemy's assault and pressure to rob us of that inborn witness that God is satisfied. You see, it is here that we are to take our character from Christ, what He was and is. He said, "I will give you rest"; "you will find rest for your souls" (Matt. 11:28-29). What did He mean? Well, just this quite simply. Here were a people in anything but rest, labouring and heavy-laden, and that does not mean that they were toiling in the work of this world of everyday vocation. They were labouring under the heavy load of the exacting demands of the law as it had been developed into thousands of meticulous points by tradition and by the rabbis, so that it was an intolerable strain to try to live up to that standard, demanding an instant watchfulness lest you should slip up and make a mistake. Life became a burden and a toil under that legal order. The meaning was, 'God is far from satisfied; He is a most dissatisfied, discontented God, and anything and everything that we can do will not please Him, will not satisfy Him. He keeps us all the time, every moment of our lives, on this ground of readiness to condemn, readiness to judge. What a discontented God He is, what a dissatisfied God He is, and therefore how hard it is to love this God, to serve this God. How difficult this kind of God makes our lives! There is no rest in this life.' The Lord Jesus said, "I will give you rest." How? Because in Him God had found His satisfaction representatively. He is the representative of those who will come by faith in Him to the Father, and then just take what is true of Him into their own hearts; what is true of the Lord Jesus, that God is satisfied, that God can look at His Son and say, "My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased" (Matt. 3:17). Then these through faith in Him can be accepted in the beloved One. God is satisfied with them in Christ, and so they come to rest, the whole burden has gone, the whole strain has gone, the whole intolerable labour, laboriousness, has gone. "Rest for your soul". So Christ is the way to the Father because He is the satisfaction of the Father.

Now Christians can only minister Christ, be here as expressing Him as the way, and in effect being the way, that is that vessel, instrument, channel and vehicle, of Christ to others, insofar as Christians themselves are living in, and enjoying, God's satisfaction. To put that the other way, our helpfulness, our usefulness, our serviceableness for the Lord to men will depend entirely upon the measure of God's satisfaction and rest in our

own hearts. Hence the enemy will seek to destroy our usefulness, destroy our testimony, destroy our serviceableness, be constantly attempting to upset that rest and bring us again in some way to feel that God is a very dissatisfied God where we are concerned. That is maligning God, undercutting the work of the Lord Jesus, and setting at naught the very meaning of His Person. It is again closing the way to men.

It is very practical, this matter of the Way. There is no theory about this. You see, the Lord Jesus brought men to God not officially but spiritually. The thing that drew people to God through Jesus Christ was that this Man has rest, this Man knows what rest is, this Man somehow or other speaks altogether of satisfaction, God's satisfaction. There is no strain in this Man's life. Rest is the secret of labour. Labour without rest, and your labour is for naught. Have rest, and your labour is fulfilled. The Lord's servants must know what it is to be in the enjoyment of the Father's satisfaction with the Son and with them in Him.

Christ's sense of sufficiency

The Lord Jesus was wonderfully independent in the right sense, wonderfully independent of this world. There is about Him, as you study and watch and follow, a sense of sufficiency, being cared for, being looked after. He had nothing in this world, and probably deliberately so in order that, having nothing in this world, He might prove that God can look after people who have nothing in this world, and that they need not suffer any lack. Interpret that spiritually, and you see that wonderful confidence and assurance in Christ's life. He was never fretted about things. He said "But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith!" (Matt. 6:30). "So don't worry about tomorrow" (Matt. 6:34). A carefree life in all those realms, that was the Lord Jesus, and He spoke to people who were so burdened with care about everything, whose lives were such a strain. Now that, of course, has an application in temporal things, but for the moment I want to keep on the spiritual side. That name "Father" was used by the Lord Jesus with the object of indicating that people who came to Him through Jesus Christ would be well looked after. "Your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things" (Matt. 6:32); "Your Father"; "How much more will your heavenly Father ...?" (Luke 11:13). It was because the Lord Jesus knew God, (if I may put it this way, not forgetting the facts of Deity and Trinity, but as

Man here), in such a real way as Father that He had a life of such sufficiency, such assurance, and freedom from fret and anxiety, that people were drawn to the Father. If they came to the Father at all in His day and afterwards, they came because they saw that this was the way of deliverance from all their worries and burden of care. Here again Christianity must take its character from Christ if it is going to bring people to God, if it is going to serve in the capacity of the Way, if it really is going to live up to that original definition and designation — the Way. Christians must enter into that which was true of the Lord Jesus, that His Fatherhood means — and it cannot mean anything else — it means that they will be looked after. They may be tested, they may be tried, but they will be looked after. That is very simple, but “Father” means sufficiency — it must mean that.

Life in Christ

And then how much was one word upon the lips of our Lord, that word ‘life’. “I came that they may have life” (John 10:10). When the Lord Jesus uses that word it means something more than existence, something more than just managing to get along. Life with Him is a quality of life; it is a great life, it is a wonderful life; it is a life no one knows anything about but those who have it. It is so different. You may have everything that this world contains and can give. When you come to have this life that is in Christ, you discover you have something more than ever the world could possibly give you, and it is not just something more, it is something different. The difference is found in its contrast. Those who have this life do not have their circumstances made easier. Indeed, it very often seems — and I think it is quite true — that the Christian life, so far as circumstances are concerned, is a much more difficult life than anyone else’s. We seem to be let in for something, a lot of trouble, when we come into the Lord Jesus, trouble that would never come our way otherwise. We meet a new world of opposition, and yet is it not true that, with all the suffering and difficulty of the Christian life, the true Christian would not give up that life for all the world possesses? That is the Christian’s testimony and that testimony is wrought out on the anvil of suffering. It is moulded in the fire, it is hammered out in affliction. The strange thing about Christians is this, that whereas they suffer so much, they cannot contemplate giving up Christ.

It has always been that, that has drawn people to God in true

Christianity. Christianity becomes the Way, in effect, as Christ was the way, when it embodies that blessed spiritual reality of Christ — a life that is different, transcendent, more blessed and precious than any other life.

Well, all that is but introductory, indicating something of the meaning firstly, of Christ as the way and then of Christianity being called the Way.

Five main features of Christ as the Way

From that point we have to go yet more fully. There are five main features of Christ as the Way. I have indicated some characteristics of Christ, but there are these major features of Christ as the Way. I mention them now, and leave their consideration for later on. These five features of Christ as the Way are the meaning of His birth, the meaning of His baptism, the meaning of His anointing with the Holy Spirit, the meaning of His walk here on the earth, and the meaning of His sufferings. We will consider them one by one in greater fulness.

The meaning of His birth

But we may begin with the first — the meaning of His birth, and by that I mean His humanity, His manhood. God's normal way to man is by man. God's normal way for man to Himself is by man. Even in those extraordinary visitations in the Old Testament when God Himself came in what are called theophanies, men saw men, and afterwards said it was the Lord. It would be perhaps speculating, and certainly not very convincing or conclusive or profitable to say that that is probably how God walked with Adam in the garden — in a theophany, in the form of a man, just as He came to Abraham, and Abraham afterwards realized that that it was the Lord. And so with others. There have been, of course, independent speakings of God to men without any personal form being taken, but God's normal way to man is by man, and for man to Himself through man. Manhood is God's means and method of communication. Bear that in mind. God has so often refused to act independently of man. He has made Himself so largely dependent upon man. He has so largely committed Himself to man. In a very real sense God has put Himself into the hands of men. That is a very solemn truth. But remember that it is man in union with God who is God's instrument and means of bringing others to Himself, being His Way. That is, it is a certain kind of man, man according to God.

So we are brought to the fact of manhood. God never has and never

does really commit Himself to a system. You may say that the Old Testament contradicts that. No, it does not. God never really committed Himself to the Old Testament system. The Old Testament system which God used was not the truth, it was not the reality, it was only a figure. If God had really committed Himself to that system and been really a part of it, He could never have allowed it to perish, He would have gone down with it. But when that system in any way failed God, God could wash His hands of it, He could desert the tabernacle in Shiloh, leaving it an empty shell. He never really committed Himself to a system, and He never does; He may use things, but that is as far as He will go. A system is not the truth. When the Lord Jesus, pointing to the temple in Jerusalem, and then pointing to its counterpart in Samaria, Mount Gerizim, said, “But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth” (John 4:23), He was drawing a broad line of distinction between these objective, outward, temporal means, and the reality, saying, ‘This is not the real thing, this is not the truth. I am the Truth, and I am the Way because I am the Truth.’

The fact of manhood is that God’s way to Himself and God’s way to man is by personal representation. Get hold of that: personal representation. “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness” (Gen. 1:26). That is God in representation. Man was made to be representative of God. I am keeping the clear distinction between humanity and Deity. I am talking about manhood. Man was conceived and made on the principle of representation. “Our image, Our likeness”. That man failed but another Man came and said, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). That is the whole principle of manhood where God is concerned — God brought near, God brought into view, God brought present in man-form. “Immanuel ... God with us” (Matt. 1:23). God’s likeness seen — representation, mediation, a two-way union, one hand on God, the other hand on man, and the Man of the hands bringing the two together, standing to mediate God to man and bring man to God. “For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5). Why did the Holy Spirit see to it that the apostle put that in? “The man”. And again, “For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead” (1 Cor. 15:21). As through man sin, and through sin death, so through man righteousness and through righteousness life — that is the argument of the letter to the Romans, but the emphasis is always upon this word ‘man’. God’s way.

So the birth of Christ or the incarnation is a master concept. God has

solved this whole problem in manhood, manhood after His own mind, His own heart, and that manhood is exclusively realized and revealed in Jesus Christ. Christianity does not become in that identity Christ, but Christianity is supposed to be the expression of the truth that there is a new creation, there is one new man; that in union with Christ we are members of His Body, of His flesh and of His bone. There is a spiritual manhood brought into being with the church and so the church fulfils the function of Christ to bring God present where two or three are gathered into His Name, to reveal what God is like, Oh, how we fail! But this is the original concept of Christianity. This is exactly what it means that Christianity was called the Way. What is God's way? God's way is man according to His own mind, expressing Himself, embodying Himself; that is God's way. That is God's way for man to Himself, and that is God's way for Himself to man — by man.

What is the point? The majority of us take the name Christian. We are in this thing called Christianity. But you see, Christianity originally, initially, was called the Way, which meant that it took its character from Him Who declared Himself to be the Way, and therefore Christianity is supposed to be that which by Christ, because of Christ, brings God into view. God cannot be seen in a world like this except through men and women. It is the world that we are thinking about. What God is like in His own realm of heaven we do not know, how He is seen there and heard there we do not know. That is another order. There will have to be a whole new set of faculties for seeing and hearing God nakedly, so to speak, in His own realm. When in a world like this, because this world is constituted on the human basis, the only way in which God can really be seen and known and understood is through man. Christianity is supposed to be that collective man in Christ, Christ in it. It is a challenge. The next chapter will bring us very closely up against that challenge. But here is the statement of fact. What are we as Christians? What is the very idea of Christianity? What is its concept? What is its nature? What is its purpose? Oh, Christianity has become so many things! Christianity has taken on so many features. But let us get right back to the beginning. What was it? And how simple is the way in which it is put forth — the Way — and that meant a kind of person that comes to God, and a kind of person that is able to bring others to God. It is men, it is manhood, it is humanity, and Christianity can be gathered up into that wholly and solely, that it is a human expression of the Lord, an expression of the Lord in a world of human beings by a kind of people that are different from all other people.

The difference is that they show forth the excellencies of Him Who called them out of darkness into His marvellous light (1 Peter 2:9).

You will see that the Lord's purpose is really to get down to the nature of Christianity and to get back to its true essence — the Way. The Lord help us to see it, and the Lord do something in us that others will be able to come to Him and will come to Him because they see the Way
in us.

THE MEANING OF CHRIST'S BIRTH AND BURIAL

We believe what we have from the Lord is based upon the conviction that Christianity as we know it is, before very long, going to be shaken to its very foundations, and that a great structure which is called Christianity is going to crash and disintegrate. I believe that what has already happened in the East is not far distant for this part of the world. Indeed, the signs are not lacking that it has begun, and certain observers are aware of what is happening. That being the case, which remains to be proven and seen, we should expect the Lord to be speaking very seriously, solemnly and definitely with such a contingency in view. We should expect that He would be speaking about the true eternal nature of Christianity, the kind of Christianity that will go through the shaking and survive, and that conviction lies behind what He has given us. Therefore we have been turned to these seven references in the book of the Acts where Christianity is originally called the Way, as the full explanation of what the Lord Jesus said about Himself, that He was the way. If we understand what He meant, having been much more fully revealed and disclosed in the ministry of the Holy Spirit after His ascension, we shall be able to understand what kind of a Christianity it is that the Lord wants that will go through the fires and the shakings which are bound to come.

There is a vast amount of praying for revival. The question is what can the Lord revive, and then further, is the Lord really going to do a great thing which will only mean the strengthening of something that is not real, or will the Lord permit the great shaking in order to revive what is revivable? I leave you to answer the question, but the necessity for us is to know what it is that the Lord would revive.

So we come back to those features and elements of Christianity as it was fresh from the hands of the Holy Spirit at the beginning.

The difference between the two humanities

That makes it necessary for us to understand the nature of man according to God; what God's mind is about us as human beings, for it is there the focal point of God's movement with mankind is found. You and I have not yet become sufficiently awake to the real and utter difference between the two humanities — Christ's humanity and ours. It is just there that we need a very real waking up. It is just there that the enemy concentrates his attention to keep us asleep or to deceive us. You see, the words used by God about man as he is now found in this world since Adam's sin are very utter and final words. When God uses the word 'lost' in relation to man, He means lost. He means that man is lost, and if you are lost you are lost; you just have to say, 'Well, I am lost.' When God uses the word 'dead', He means dead, dead in trespasses and sins. "This son of mine was dead" (Luke 15:24) is the parable, but contains the truth. And when God uses the word 'dead' about man, He means that; and when God uses the phrase 'afar off', He means afar off. When God uses the word 'alienated', He means that, just what we mean by alienate, made foreign, of another kind of nature, nationality, of another race. An alien is a foreigner, not a native, and when God uses the word 'alienate' as He does, He is saying, 'You belong to another race, another order of being, another nationality; you are a foreigner, afar off and foreign to God.' These are utter words.

Now all errors have their taproot there. You will find all errors to contain something faulty about the conception of man. Either there is that in man which makes it possible for him to be his own saviour, or some other form of making something of man which puts it within his own power and scope to do something to make himself acceptable to God, whether it be the humanism at one end, or whether it be the ritualism at the other. There are many phases between that declare that man does not need a saviour, he is his own saviour, he has only to cultivate what is in him. There is the God and the Christ in every one of us by nature; this is natural religion. That on one side. On the other, all your works, your good works, your religious works and activities, your observances of rites and so on, will bring you to acceptance with God. In between the two extremes there are many phases, all of which put something to the credit of man. Every error is rooted there.

Christ's birth, the incarnation, embodies this fact, that the very beginning holds an unbridgeable gap. Right at the very beginning where man is concerned there is an unbridgeable difference. That is the meaning

of the virgin birth. If you can repeat that, if you can duplicate that, if you can imitate that, if you can reproduce that, you have bridged the gap. If you cannot, the gap remains. And that is the whole significance of the virgin birth. There is something initial that no one can repeat, no one can reproduce, no one can duplicate. That is something by itself, different from all the processes of nature, different from all the will of the flesh, different from all the will of man. The will of man, the will of the flesh, the processes of nature, are brought to a standstill there. That is the end of all human capability. When it comes to the virgin birth, you have something that is altogether outside of the course of humanity as we know it. It is a break in from the outside of another world, and therefore of another order, another humanity.

The birth of Christ sets forth then, that that which is of God and that which is going to come to God because it came from God, is not of this order of humanity. Essentially, fundamentally, there is a difference, and such a difference that cannot be rubbed out and cannot be bridged. There are likenesses, it is true, the human form, the human constitution of spirit, soul and body. All those things are likenesses, but when you have said all that, and look at Jesus Christ, you have another. Deeply and inwardly He is not of this order; He is of another order. There is a mystery about Him that no human mind or intellect can fathom or explain, and you have either got to rule out such a thing as the virgin birth as fiction or falsehood, or you have got to accept that this is something that you cannot account for on any ordinary ground. It must be God.

The necessity for new birth

So Christ's initial and fundamental, all-governing imperative, was and is, "You must be born again" (John 3:7). That is in keeping with the incarnation. I am not talking about Christ's Deity, and I am not suggesting or hinting that what takes place in us makes us a part of Deity. You understand that. I am keeping a very wide eternal gap between the Deity of Christ and His humanity, and I am only dealing with the significance of His humanity as our Kinsman-Redeemer.

God put man originally into a perfect garden, and man has made it a perfect bear's den. It is man who makes the world, or unmakes it. Always it is man who makes the world what it is, what it becomes. Outward values depend entirely upon inward condition, inward state, and it does not matter how man may develop this world, because man is what he is,

the end of all his developments will be suffering and destruction. He cannot help himself. When the Lord Jesus says such things as “you will be hearing of wars and rumours of wars” (Matt. 24:6), He is not just making a prophetic statement in an objective way that that is how things will be. He is speaking on principle and He is saying in effect, that man, being what he is, will only increase difficulties in this world, he will only bring about an ever-increasing state of conflict because he himself is a conflict, he himself is all disrupted. War is not some objective thing; war is what man is in himself! Can you deny that? In spite of man, in spite of his outward efforts, he just does it. Man says, ‘The war to end all wars’. Man says, ‘This is the last world-war; no more war.’ What endless talk there is like that, and all the time if he were a sane creature he would realize that he is only working for more, and the end of his works does mean more, he cannot avoid it. It is the coming out of what man is and you and I know that very well. That is the meaning of this fundamental imperative, “You must be born again.” There must be another kind of man to have another kind of world. There must be another humanity. Redemption comes by another kind of humanity, and that is the principle of the incarnation.

Our discovery of the difference

You see, the Christian life is one long discovery on the negative side of this difference between Christ and ourselves. Thank God it is not only that, but on one side it is that — one long discovery and realization that we are one thing and Christ is another. That is the basis and the background of all the meaning of the Gospel, all the work of grace, all the growing knowledge of the Lord, all the discipline. There is no meaning in such words as “predestined to become conformed to the image of his Son” (Rom. 8:29) if conformity does not mean a change from one thing to another. Language has no meaning if that is not its meaning. You and I are really in this thing on one side of our Christian experience. What Christ is is something utterly, wholly different from what we are. There lies the real danger in all doctrines of eradication which put young Christians in a position where they believe that everything is done in an instant. They do not know the terrible depths of the difference, which knowledge is necessary to spiritual education and spiritual growth.

Christ provides a way back to God

If it is true, as God says it is, that man is lost, then he needs a way back. He will never be recovered unless a way is provided and set before him. Christ was never lost, hence He can provide a way, indicate the way, tell you the way. He was never lost, and so He says, 'The way is what I am, I am the way.' The way does not become objective to Christ, something to which He points. He says, 'The way is what I am, and I am the kind of Man that reaches God. I am the kind of humanity that links God's purpose with its realization, God's original beginning with God's end, God's desire with its attainment, and man's too; I am the way.'

So you see, this gives the meaning to Christianity as the Way. Christianity as the Way means that there is another humanity brought in by regeneration or new birth, another kind of being. Is not that the deepest truth and reality about us if we are the Lord's? Oh, I know about all the framework and all that we carry with us, but fundamentally some radical difference has been made, and we know right there deep down in the centre of our being there is that which is against all the rest that is true of us, that knows quite well that all the rest is wrong, all that other has got to be repudiated. Something has happened that has linked us with an order that we are not naturally. Is not that the deepest truth of our being as Christians? We have not just accepted certain teachings and practice and by so doing joined Christianity. Something has happened in us and that happening is that which corresponds to what happened at Bethlehem, a different kind of being has been brought into this world.

The distinctiveness of Christianity

When Christianity became known as the Way, it surely meant at least that it was something distinct. The article is there every time — *the* Way. It does not just say a way, although there were others. It is *the* Way. They were the people of the Way. It was this way, something quite distinct, something different, something other, something recognizable as being other. When you sift it down and ask what it is, you cannot find that it was just because these Christians were changing their religion and their religious procedure. You arrive at this, that these Christians are different people. They are different from all the rest and it is that that makes them known as the Way. It is the way which is marked out by a difference in the people themselves, and when you ask again, What is that difference? — if you had asked these people who formulated that title, that des-

ignation, ‘What do you mean by the Way?’ they would have said, I believe that they are related to Jesus of Nazareth; Jesus of Nazareth is everything to them; Jesus of Nazareth is all they have to talk about; it is the Jesus way. Ah, it is the only explanation and definition of the Way. It is something which brings Christ into view, something that presents Him. Christianity, therefore, in its very inception, is that which is intended to be the embodiment of Christ as another order of being.

We have said enough about His birth, His humanity, as the inclusive background of what is meant by the Way. It is not some *thing*, it is a kind of Person.

The meaning of Christ’s baptism

I said there were five major features of Christ and of Christianity as the Way. That was the first; and the second is the meaning of His baptism. The birth declares the difference in the humanity, of one humanity which will not be acceptable to, or accepted by God and another humanity which will be accepted. That is the secret of the birth.

The door into the Way

The baptism, as the next major outstanding thing in Christ’s life sets forth the door into the Way. Let us be very clear here. We are not preaching baptism. The apostles did not preach baptism. Oh, but, you say, what about Peter on the day of Pentecost? “Repent ... and be baptised” (Acts 2:38). What about Philip and the eunuch? I repeat, they did not preach baptism. But, you say, what about the great commission — “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19)? I repeat, they did not preach baptism. Now, you say, how are you going to get round this? Go straight through it! We are not saying that baptism is the door into the Way. We are not talking about baptism and saying that it in itself is anything; we are talking about baptism in its meaning. It is the *meaning*, not the thing. Let us leave ordinances aside, for we are not talking about baptism as an ordinance.

The apostles preached Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. They set forth Christ, what He was, Who He was, and what He signified in the sense in which we have been speaking — another, different and only way — and the Holy Spirit came upon their preaching of Christ and

brought conviction and men cried out, “What shall we do?” and then as a reply to a Holy Spirit created conviction about the Lord Jesus, they said, “Repent ... and be baptised.” You see the order. Baptism derives its value from a seeing of Christ, and God help anybody who is baptised who has not seen Christ — seen *Christ*, the altogether different, the altogether only.

The effect of seeing Christ

Where does it lead me and lead you? When we, under the power of the Holy Spirit, see Christ, we immediately see our own lostness. Is that not true? When the Holy Spirit reveals Christ to us, the immediate accompaniment is the sense that we are lost and we are hopeless. An accompanying despair goes with a real seeing of Christ. That is conviction; call it conviction of sin, if you like. It is conviction of what we are as over against what He is. This difference immediately springs into view.

Christ is one thing and I am another, and the difference is so overwhelming. In myself I am utterly in despair, there is no hope. God’s way is not negative. That is just condemnation. God’s way is positive and He reaches His ends by contrasts. If God were to come to us and just begin to bring us under condemnation in itself, where would the end of that be? Well, that is a negative way, a very unprofitable way. But if God holds up something and then shows us the contrast between us and it and then tells us this is what He wants where we are concerned, that is a positive way of salvation. That is the revelation of Jesus Christ and it brings this sense of hopelessness in ourselves in order that we may discover that our hope is in Christ. You see, the true effect of an impact of Christ upon the life is despair to begin with, and the continuous effect of the revelation of Jesus Christ is that the more we see Him, the more we see the hopelessness of ourselves as ourselves. To see Him will produce the cry — “Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man” (Luke 5:8). It is the first reaction to a true seeing of Christ. “I am a sinful man.”

The beginning of the way a grave

Now you see, that helps us, for when Christ officially takes up the work of revealing the way (and I say ‘officially’ because it was officially that He did it at the Jordan in His baptism) He was stepping into His finished work as Redeemer, and when He takes up that work of revealing

the way, He makes the very beginning of the way a grave. The beginning of the way is a grave; that is the Jordan — a burial. The Holy Spirit makes much of that idea of burial. “We have been buried with Him through baptism into death” (Rom. 6:4). Those who have seen Christ will at once recognize not only the necessity but the blessed possibility of being buried. What I am in contrast with Christ! Let me get buried and out of the way! That is the effect. Let me get off this earth, let me get out of view! The baptism of Christ is the provision for us of a grave, providing our old man with a grave. “Our old man was crucified with him” (Rom. 6:6). “We were buried”. Thank God! Let us get into that grave as quickly as we can! It has to be the result of conviction, not because the church says that baptism is something you must conform to and accept, not because in Christianity baptism has a place in the creed and in the practice, not because anybody tells you you ought to be baptised; it is the thing to do; Christ was baptised and you ought to follow His example. None of that. But it is because the Holy Spirit has come to you and made you feel, Let me get buried as soon as I can! It is something wrought in us. Do not entertain baptism until the Holy Spirit convicts you. I am not preaching baptism, I am preaching Christ, and saying that His baptism is a figure of our death with Him. He is representative and inclusive, and in His baptism we step right into what God says about us in ourselves, for Christ has taken our place officially and representatively to be carried out of the sight of God.

Ah, but with Him it was a terrible thing, for the counterpart of His baptism was the cry of anguished despair — ‘My God, You have forsaken Me!’ There is the despair Christ has entered into which is our despair when once the Holy Spirit gets to work upon us. He has touched our despair, our hopelessness, to its uttermost depths; tasted that depth for every man that in His despair our despair should be swallowed up and carried to the grave that the thing of despair should be put right out of the sight of God. Oh, thank God for the grave! It is the grave of the humanity that God knows it to be. First, what God knows it to be is something that can never stand in His presence. It is the grave of the people who have come to despair because the Holy Spirit has opened their eyes to Christ.

So long as any other hope exists, the way is closed. That is a strange contradiction. So long as any other hope exists, the way to God is closed. If we hope in our works, if we hope in ourselves, if we hope in our own righteousness, the way to God is closed. And that is one of the great emphases of Christ’s life on this earth. He thundered about that. Righteous-

ness? — it is your righteousness that bars and locks the door which opens the way to God! Your works, your good works, your religious works, they are the very things that are keeping that door closed. Your goodness, something in yourself that after all is worthy of God — such an idea keeps the door fast closed. When you have come to despair about your righteousness, your goodness, your works, your religiousness, you are not far from the kingdom of God, you are on the threshold of the Way, you are at the door, for that door finds people at it, and only people who have lost their hope in any other way or direction.

Well, baptism is something very much more than an ordinance, is it not? Baptism is a funeral, baptism is a conviction; and you do not get convicted that you ought to be baptised, you get convicted that you ought to be buried. If the Lord has provided a way for your putting your conviction into practical expression and that way is baptism, then it is just the meaning of baptism that is all-important and not the thing itself. Although the thing constitutes a challenge to our reality, seeing that we are, after all, human beings, men and women, and not disembodied spirits, we are called upon to put these things into very practical expression, but that follows something of the Spirit's work in us. People come to me and say, 'Ought I to be baptised?' I never say, 'Yes, of course', and I never ask anybody if they have been baptised. But if the matter arises I say, 'Has the Lord spoken to you about that? Has the Lord been troubling you about that? Has the Lord been showing you that that is necessary to express some work of His Spirit in you?' If the answer is 'Yes', what is left for anybody to say? There is no need to come and ask about it; *of course* the answer is 'Yes'. If that is not the cause of it, do not be baptised on any other ground at all. It is the Holy Spirit bringing the greatest truth home to the human heart, which is that we are fit for nothing but the grave. The Spirit would tell us that, and many of us know that. Perhaps some of you are knowing that very really now.

Christ's death representative and inclusive

Christ's baptism was representative and inclusive. That has been said many times, but what I mean by that is this — He takes a position as representing us. It is not so many baptisms as there are Christians who are baptised. It is not your baptism and my baptism; it is His death and He takes that place for us and as us and by faith we step right into Him, and, so to speak, we go down into His death and His grave. That is what

He did.

And let us say this simple thing again, that it is not something that will happen today. It is something that did happen. This whole thing took place hundreds of years ago. The apostle does not say, 'We are baptised with Him' or, 'We are buried with Him when we are baptised.' He says that we *were* crucified with Christ, we were buried with Him. We only recognise, acknowledge and accept what took place back then when we ourselves bear this testimony. That is, perhaps, too simple, but it may be necessary. The great, governing phrase of the New Testament is that little phrase "in Him". Sometimes it is put, "together with Him". It is "in Christ".

The death of Christ an active thing

One added word on this. The death of Christ is no mere passive thing. The death of Christ is a power, is dynamic. I think it was Dr. Mabie who many years ago said, long before this present time when we are so familiar with these terms, "The death of Christ is radioactive." Now you know what radioactivity is. You touch some ground which has been affected by radio action! You know you must be insulated, you know it is going to affect you, to disintegrate you; it will make you fall to pieces physically. "The death of Christ", said Mabie "is radioactive"; the death of Christ is a power right up to date. If you and I really come into vital touch with the death of Christ we meet a registration. Let me put that another way. If you and I have really spiritually entered into the meaning of Christ's death, then if we touch something that that death was against, we know it. You touch it, and see if the death of Christ does not register — keep off that; leave that alone; you have died to that; the death of Christ cuts you off from that; the death of Christ witnesses against that; the death of Christ said no more of that! Touch it and the Holy Spirit brings back the power of Christ's death. You say, 'Oh, I wish I had not touched that; I wish I had left it alone; somehow or other that death has touched me.' Anybody spiritually alive knows that that is true. We are not talking about ordinances, performances, rites and ritual, burial as such. We are talking about the death of Christ, and that is a mighty thing. It affects us. It is not a performance, something that we do which is objective to ourselves. It affects us, it testifies in us against a whole world, a whole realm. It witnesses against all that is not of God, and it is a living witness right up to date because the Holy Spirit has charge of that matter and He is alive

right up to date.

So, you see, baptism is not some *thing*. It is a declaration of a deep reality. It is the declaration of the meaning of Christ's death. It is interesting that as soon as Christ steps out into His official work, it is at Jordan — baptism is the door. As soon as the church starts on its course on the day of Pentecost, it is baptism. The very first thing — “Repent ... and be baptised.” Baptism comes into view. It is the door to the Way, and if the church is going to really express and represent Christ as the Way and in effect be the Way for man, it has got to be a baptised church, that is, a crucified and buried church, raised from the dead. You and I will never, never help people to God except in so far as we are crucified, dead and buried, so far as our old life and nature and relationships are concerned. Only a crucified church can bring the mighty power of the death of Christ to affect other lives.

When John was baptizing at Jordan, Jesus came, and different classes and sets of people came to be baptised. The soldiers came, we are told, and the soldiers, whether they were the Roman soldiers or the temple soldiers, represent the strength of this world, and the strength of this world, the power of this world, has got to go down into the grave. The publicans came, and they were the commercialists, the embodiment of this world's wit and wisdom and cunning and acquisitiveness, possessiveness along the line of cleverness, and it has all got to go into the grave. And the Pharisees came, and they are the embodiment of a religion that is Christ-less, and it has to go into the grave. Every class in this world is in the grave to be buried. And then the only One Who has an open heaven and the seal of God is a different kind that has come up out of that figurative grave: “My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased”. He is the only One to survive the grave and be accepted with God.

That leads us to His anointing in the next chapter.

To be continued.