

He Is Precious

by A.B. Simpson

Christ is precious because He is dear to God and has imparted His merits and glories to believers, making them part of the living Rock and reflecting His transcendent glory.

Topics: "The Preciousness of Christ", "Redemption and Transformation"

Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes the preciousness of Christ in his sermon 'He Is Precious,' drawing from 1 Peter 2:7. He reflects on Peter's profound understanding of Christ's sufferings, resurrection, and role as the cornerstone of faith, highlighting that through Christ's sacrifice, believers are redeemed and transformed. Simpson explains that Christ's resurrection is the source of our hope and life, and he warns of the consequences of rejecting this precious Savior. Ultimately, he encourages believers to recognize their shared preciousness with Christ and the importance of unity in Him.

Transcript

"Unto you therefore which believe he is precious" (1 Peter 2: 7.)

The last question the Master asked His disciple, Peter, was, "Simon, son of Jonas, do you love me?" And his beautiful letters leave us in no doubt as to the answer. It is summed up in our emphatic text, "He is precious."

But Peter tells us a great deal about Christ, and he tells it very completely. His picture of the Master leaves no lineament out, and it dwells most fully on the cruel thorns that marred His face, and the sufferings which Peter himself had once refused to hear about.

I. CHRIST'S SUFFERINGS

This is his first picture of the Lord. There was a time when Christ began to say unto His disciples that the Son of man must suffer many things and be delivered into the hands of the Gentiles, who should falsely condemn and crucify Him, and on the third day He should rise again from the dead. But Peter took Him and began to rebuke Him, and said, "Be it far from you, Lord: this shall not be unto you." Then Jesus turned and with terrible rebuke, He answered Peter, "Get behind me, Satan; you are an offence unto me; for you savor not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." Peter never forgot that rebuke, and he makes full amends for his unitarianism in this epistle. Six times he tells us about the suffering Christ.

1. He goes so far with the Unitarian as to hold up the suffering Master as our example that "you should follow his steps; who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth. Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judges righteously." This is all very beautiful and very true. But this is only the beginning. Peter goes much farther than this and soon parts company with his Unitarian friends, for

2. He goes on to tell us of Christ as our Sacrifice and Substitute on the cross. "Who his own self bore our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness." (1 Peter 2:24.) Here there is no mistake about the substitutionary character of the Savior's sufferings. He bore our sins on the tree. Thank God, He left them there, and so died to them that we with Him are also dead to sin and alive unto righteousness.

3. He makes all this plainer in another passage in the first chapter, where he describes the suffering One as our Redeemer. "You were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers. But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, who by him do believe in God." (1 Peter 1: 18-21.) We hear some speak with scorn of the theology of the shambles, and that it degrades the Lord Jesus to represent Him under the gross imagery of sacrificial death. But here Peter uses no roundabout phrases, but tells us straight and plainly that Jesus suffered for us as a lamb on the altar of sacrifice. We see the precious blood. We see the dying Lamb. We see the ransom paid for the guilty, and we hear again, "the sweetest note in seraph song" and "sweetest word on mortal tongue" -- REDEEMED. Not only so, but he tells us that redemption is God's most ancient thought, and that Christ was foreordained before the foundation of the world to suffer and die for the sins of men, so that the cross is really the center of God's plan, and the final cause of the whole work of creation. It is not merely an afterthought or a remedy suddenly conceived to meet an emergency, but Christ is "the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world," and His redeeming work will forever be the supreme glory of the universe.

"You were... redeemed," Peter says, "... from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers." So that redemption is much more than deliverance from a future hell. It is deliverance from this present evil world, deliverance from our life of sin and folly, deliverance from the spirit and maxims of the world, deliverance from the traditions we have inherited from our fathers. Beloved, have we been redeemed from these things? And have we claimed our freedom?

4. Christ as our atonement is still more definitely presented in 1 Peter 3: 18, "For Christ also has once suffered [rather, once for all suffered] for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." This passage is an excellent statement of the doctrine of the atonement. It asserts the once-for-all-ness of that great transaction, the finished work of Christ as a complete and eternal settlement of the question of sin. This passage has special reference to the relation of Christ's sufferings to the justice and law of God. "Christ... once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." There were questions on God's side that must be answered, and problems that must be solved, arising out of His inflexible justice and demanding a settlement of the debt of sin. Had God simply blotted out the record of man's sin without an adequate satisfaction, the majesty of His law and His righteousness would have been compromised. His word would have been set at nought and His authority annulled throughout the universe. It was necessary that He should be a just God as well as a Savior. The debt could not be canceled. It must be paid and receipted in full. And this is just what the atonement of Christ has provided, putting the believer in the same position as if he had never sinned, and not only forgiving his fault, but

judging him and pronouncing him righteous through the righteousness of Christ.

Then on the side of the sinner there were difficulties to be adjusted before He could bring us to God. The distrust and dread of the guilty soul must be removed and a spirit of confidence awakened. We must be reconciled to God. And, therefore, "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself." By the exhibition of the Father's love and the place of salvation into which He brings us through His cross, the sinner is brought nigh to God by the blood of Christ, and thus atonement, that is literally at-one-ment, is accomplished, and we are brought to God in confidence and love.

5. Christ's sufferings have accomplished our healing, "by whose stripes you were healed." (1 Peter 2:24.) Our body as well as our soul is included in this great redemption. This is one of our redemption rights. Let us not suffer it to be lost by our default. Literally this means, "by His stripes." His whole body was one dreadful laceration, and in that deadly stripe all our physical liabilities on account of sin were met. Well may it fill us with shame to think what our redemption cost, and with jealous love to make sure that such a costly boon shall not be lost.

6. Christ's death is the pattern of our death as well as the price of our life. "Forasmuch then as Christ has suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind; for he that has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin." (1 Peter 4: 1.) That is to say, as Christ died to sin, so let us die with Him and thus arm ourselves against sin by entering into the fact of His death and resurrection. While in one sense

"He died for us that we might live,"

in another sense it is even more true that

"He died for us that we might die."

The deepest experience of the Apostle Paul was this: "I have been crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live." There is an absurd story told of an official on one of the Irish railroads whose superior had just died, and who, in sending by wire the announcement of his master's death, did not feel at liberty to send it in his own name, but used the usual form signed by the principal, and running like this: "I regret to have to inform you that I died this morning at ten o'clock of pneumonia, W. J. Brown, Mgr., per J. Jones." There is a real truth behind the Irish bull. The greatest crisis in our spiritual life is when we are able to say with the apostle, "I died today, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me." That is the only way to get victory over sin. So long as we identify ourselves with our past self we are under the power of our old life. It is when we bury it and take the position that we are no longer the person that sinned, but that we have died with Christ and risen again in Him, and are now living His life, we have power over sin, and the wretched man that we dragged about with us is consigned to an eternal grave, and the new life springs into liberty and power.

Such then is Peter's view of the sufferings of Christ, and the vision from which he once recoiled with intense antagonism is now to him so blessed that he speaks of it as one "into which the angels desire to look," and he condenses into a single phrase his intense appreciation of the value and the glory of the cross when he tells us not only of the precious Christ, but "the precious blood of Christ."

II. CHRIST'S RESURRECTION

He next bears testimony to the power of His resurrection.

1. It is the source of our life. He "has begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." (1 Peter 1: 3.) Our regeneration comes to us through the fellowship of His resurrection. We are born again through the fellowship of His resurrection life. We are born again through that life.

2. Christ's resurrection is the ground of our faith and hope. "God... raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God." (1 Peter 1:21.) Christ's resurrection is the foundation of our faith. For "if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain... you are yet in your sins." He went into the prison of the grave a debtor for your sins. Had He not come out, it would mean that the debt is still unpaid. But when we see Him rise in glory and ascend to the Father's right hand, we know that the ransom has been accepted, the debt is paid, and our sins are gone. Therefore, He "was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification."

His resurrection is also the foundation of our hope. "For if Christ be not raised.... Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished." The resurrection of Christ is the pledge of our resurrection and our future glory. Therefore our hope as well as faith rests upon His open grave.

3. The resurrection of Christ is set forth in Christian baptism. "The like figure whereunto even baptism does also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 3: 21.) That is to say, baptism does not signify the putting away of our uncleanness by washing, but by death and resurrection. We are so vile that no water can wash away the stain. The only thing to do with us is to bury us and raise up a new life through Christ's resurrection. This is implied in the figure of baptism. "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism unto death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."

Now Peter tells us here that the ark and the deluge were also typical of the same spiritual truth and experience. The expression is used in the twentieth verse that "eight souls were saved by water." It is not from water they were saved, but by water. The deluge saved Noah and his family from the sin that was engulfing the world, and through the ark his family was carried as by a seeming death and resurrection into the new world, where the race began again its career. So in baptism we pass through a seeming death and resurrection with Christ into a new life. The resurrection, therefore, is the brightest and most uplifting object of the believer's faith. While it is true that we die with Christ once, it is more gloriously true that we live with Him forevermore. Have we entered into the fellowship of His sufferings and the power of His resurrection?

III. THE POSTHUMOUS MINISTRY OF CHRIST

This is His ministry in the interval between His death and resurrection. This is a part of His work of which Peter is almost the exclusive witness. It is true the Apostle Paul alludes to it when he speaks of Him who "also descended first into the lower parts of the earth." Peter, however, tells us definitely that during the interval after His death He was quickened in the spirit, and in this state "he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; which sometime were disobedient... in the days of Noah." (1 Peter 3: 19, 20.) There is little room to question the literal reference of this passage to the disembodied spirits of those who had lived in the days of Noah, and who were now in prison in the realm of the dead, the region called Hades in the Scriptures. That Christ visited this region is certain, and that He gave some message there is also plain. That it was a message of salvation to these imprisoned spirits there is no reason to believe, and

there is no hint of it anywhere in the Scriptures. The word translated "preached" here is not the word usually employed for the preaching of the Gospel, but it literally means to herald, to give a proclamation. It is not difficult for us to surmise what He might have proclaimed in the realms of the dead. These souls had heard the Gospel for a hundred and twenty years in the days of Noah, and rejected it with scorn while God's Spirit strove with men. Now they are informed by the authority of the Son of God that the message which they rejected and ridiculed is true, and has been at last fulfilled, and the testimony of Noah is vindicated. At the same time how natural it would be for Him to proclaim to the other spirits in Hades that had died in faith and waited for His coming, that at last the great redemption was complete, that sin was canceled, that death was conquered, and that He was about to open their prison doors and lead their captivity captive, and take them up with Him to heaven, to which He was about to ascend and open its portals henceforth to all believers. When He did ascend to heaven, we know He took with Him these captive spirits; and since that time the souls of believers, like Stephen, no longer pass into Hades to wait for their reward, but pass immediately into glory and are with Jesus Christ Himself in heaven, awaiting the resurrection of their bodies and their full inheritance and reward at His second coming.

IV. THE EXALTATION AND GLORIOUS SECOND COMING OF JESUS CHRIST

1. His ascension and exaltation. "Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him." (1 Peter 3:22.) This is the picture of His present high priestly and kingly work. There He sits in the place of supreme authority and power; Head over all things for His body, the Church, every angel at His bidding, every authority and law in the universe subject to His command or suspension, and every power available for the help of His redeemed people.

2. His coming again in glory. It is only necessary to quote the apostle's repeated references to this blessed hope. In 1 Peter 1: 7, He tells us that our trial "might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." In 1 Peter 4: 13, we are told that "when his glory shall be revealed, you may be glad also with exceeding joy"; and in 1 Peter 5: 4, the faithful minister of Christ is reminded that "when the chief Shepherd shall appear, you shall receive a crown of glory that fades not away." Thus we see that the blessed hope of the Lord's return was very clear to Peter's mind, and very dear to his affection and his hope.

V. HIS RELATION TO THE CHURCH AS THE CHIEF CORNER STONE

"To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious.... Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious; and he that believes on him shall not be confounded." (1 Peter 2: 4, 6.) It is recorded as a Jewish legend that when the temple of Solomon was being reared with noise-less hands, each prepared stone and timber being simply adjusted to its place, one stone of singular form was laid aside as unsuited to any place that they had found for it. After a while it became covered up with refuse and was known as the stone which the builders rejected. But later a niche was found on the principal corner that no stone would fit, and then they looked up this rejected stone and found it was the chief cornerstone, and the one designed to fill this place and connect together the two walls, and thus make the building one. And so it came to be a proverb among the Jews that the stone which the builders rejected is made the head of the corner. Our Lord applied the proverb to Himself. And well He might. For it is in Him that all the parts of the building are united and compacted and grow together into an holy temple in the Lord. It is as we are united to Him that we are attached to each other, and all Christian unity depends upon oneness with the Lord. The nearer we grow to the Master's heart, the closer will we stand heart to heart in unison with each other. The secret of Christian union is not platforms,

creeds, or even cooperative work, but it is one life, one heart, one spirit, in the fellowship and love of Jesus Christ.

VI. HIS RELATION TO THE INDIVIDUAL BELIEVER

"Unto you therefore which believe he is precious." (1 Peter 2: 7.) Literally this means as in the revised version, "Unto you which believe he is the preciousness." He is called in the previous passage the precious stone of God's election. Now His preciousness passes over to you who believe. His merits are imparted to you, and His rights and glories become yours also. And thus "you also, as lively [living] stones" are built up into Him and become as precious as He. Just as when the iron touches the magnet it becomes partaker of its magnetism and in turn a magnet, too, so the soul that is united to Christ partakes with Him of His divine purity and power, and is no longer earthly and common, but precious and divine. Peter is undoubtedly referring to the interview between him and his Master when he was first called. "You are Simon the son of Jona," the Lord had said. That is, you are but a piece of earthly clay. But "you shall be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, a stone." That is, your nature shall be transformed by contact with Me, until you shall become part of the living Rock, which the word Peter signifies. And so we find in the vision of the New Jerusalem that Peter and the apostles of the Lamb are there as precious stones laid first on the corner Stone, Jesus Christ, and reflecting all His transcendent glory. This, then, is the meaning of the preciousness of Christ. It is not only that He is dear to us, for that is ineffably true, but rather that we are dear to God even as He, that we share His preciousness, shine in His beauty, stand in His merits, and shall be partakers of His glory.

"All that He has shall be mine,

All that He is I shall be;

Robed in His glory divine,

I shall be even as He."

VII. HIS RELATION TO THE UNBELIEVER

"And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed." (1 Peter 2: 8.) If you reject this precious Savior, if you miss this supreme opportunity, if you pervert the grace of God and make it only an occasion for your idle criticism, Christ will become to you as great a curse as He might have been a blessing. "Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken," but, oh, there is something immeasurably worse, "On whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder."

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