

Christ Is Central

by Dennis Kinlaw

Dennis Kinlaw's sermon emphasizes the central role of Christ in understanding His authority, compassion, and the significance of His actions in the temple.

Duration: 50:39

Scripture: Malachi 3:1, Matthew 9:2-7, John 2:13-22

Topics: "Jesus Christ"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses a story from the Bible where Jesus forgives a man's sins after he is lowered through the roof of a synagogue. The preacher reflects on the dramatic nature of the event and imagines the reactions of the friends who brought the man. The preacher then explores the significance of looking in a mirror and finding a symbol of getting one's life under control. The sermon concludes with a discussion of Jesus cleansing the temple and emphasizing the importance of the temple as a house of prayer for all nations.

Transcript

Our scripture lesson this evening is found again in the Gospel of John, and reading from the second chapter, beginning where we stopped this morning. If you have a Bible, you may want to follow it, because I trust that in the course of the evening I will get back to this passage and will discuss part of it in a little more detail. And you may find it illuminating to have the text in front of you.

Reading from verse 13, When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So he made a whip out of cords and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle.

He scattered the coins of the moneychangers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, Get these out of here. How dare you turn my father's house into a market? His disciples remembered that it is written, Zeal for your house will consume me.

Then the Jews demanded of him, What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this? Jesus answered them, Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days. The Jews replied, It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days? But the temple he had spoken of was his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said.

Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken. Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover feast, many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name. But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men.

He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in man. If you and I could have lived in the days that Jesus was here in the flesh and moving about in Palestine, and if we had been residents of Palestine and could have heard him in person and followed him about over that country, if we could have been in his crowds and gotten close enough to see his face and watch his intimate reactions with people, what are the things, do you suppose, that would have impressed us the most about him? I don't have any question but that one of the things that would have impressed us would be the things that impress them, and one of those was his unbelievable power to do things that no one else could do. We speak about them as miracles.

And if I could slip into one of the hospitals of Detroit, or all of the hospitals of Detroit tonight, and go from room to room and lay my hands upon people and heal them, it would be interesting the kind of congregation that we would have tomorrow night. You would have trouble getting your seat. Jesus apparently had that power and did it, and multitudes of people came to see him for the same reason that people in this country years ago went to see Barnum and Bailey's circuses, because there was that that was unusual, extraordinary, and we always enjoy the spectacular.

But I suspect if that was what brought us to him in the first place, before we left, something else would begin to get to us. Because the scriptures indicate that always linked with these miraculous acts, there were words of interpretation that helped men to understand themselves and their situation, their needs, and God's provisions for those needs. I've always loved the passage, since it really came home to me, of that scene in Capernaum where he preached the first time.

And when they heard him preach that first time in that synagogue in Capernaum, one Jewish listener nudged the other one and said, he's astounding, isn't he? And the other one turned and said, what's so surprising about him to you? And the first guy said, he makes sense. And it's always remarkable when a preacher makes sense. And the second Jew said, you certainly are right.

But you see, he spoke as if he knew who they were, and knew what their needs were. And there's not a person that lives that is not looking for someone that can make sense out of the experience of our lives. He spoke with wisdom, and men came back to hear him again.

But I think we would have been impressed also not only with his teaching and with his wisdom, but his personal character and the love that he had. You and I may not have it. We may be filled with bitterness or hostility or even just simply indifference to people.

But when we bump into people who overflow with human compassion and concern and love, it's always impressive to us. I have a Southern Baptist friend, a psychiatrist, who visited Mother Teresa's work. And he told me, he said, I was there, and suddenly I saw her step out of a building and start in my direction.

And I thought this is a bit unusual for a Southern Baptist. He said, my first reaction was I wanted to get down on my knees and give gratitude for a person like that. We, I think, would have been impressed with the way he could reach out to a woman of Samaria that no Jewish man would speak to, and certainly no Jewish woman.

He could reach out to a legion who was possessed with devils so that men were terrified of him. He could reach out to a Zacchaeus who was a social outcast, a person looked upon with great scorn and contempt, and your reputation would be in danger if you associated with him. But Jesus didn't seem to care about that.

He could reach out to a woman taken in adultery. He had arms that were long enough to include every person that he ever met. And there's something in us that says when we see that kind of thing, we're impressed.

I suspect we also, if we had been among the leadership of the Jews, would have been impressed with something else. Because you will remember very quickly they decided that he had to be dealt with. And so they said if we're to control him, we must find some weakness in him.

And so they assigned the FBI and the CIA, or the equivalents, and the agents began to watch him, and they followed him for the next three years. They watched every move he made. And at the end of those three years, they had a full dossier on him, and they searched it to find something with which to accuse him.

And the only thing that they found is a quotation from this passage. Because, you see, he looked at them and said, which of you convinces me of sin? Because he was sinless. And we are always impressed with holiness, true holiness, when we meet it, aren't we? But I suspect if we had lived in those days and been able to follow him about, the thing that would have impressed us even more if we had stayed with him, and been able to interact with him, would have been his attitude toward himself.

Because if you will scour the Gospels carefully, you will find this coming through in every chapter, in every instant and almost. He had a very strange view for a human being about himself. It was as if he felt he were different from other people.

You know, and I know, that the one mark of good breeding is that you don't talk too much about yourself. If I want to offend you, just let me fill my messages with personal references, and you will walk out with a feeling that you have been in the presence of something that's obnoxious to you. We teach people this in manners, and we also teach them that it's good religion that a man should not be preoccupied with himself.

Paul summed it up in the Roman letter when he said, Let each esteem others more highly than himself, and we respect humility. But you know, Jesus was like some people that we see in every church. It was as if he couldn't let any moment pass without making himself the center of the conversation.

You've seen people like that. When they walk in, you look for a side door, because you know what they're going to talk about. They're going to talk about the same thing they've talked about the last twenty times you've bumped into them.

They're obsessed with themselves. And we speak about the fact that it's either bad manners or unconscious self-interest. But it's interesting, Jesus violated both of those canons.

It was as if when a conversation started, he was honor-bound to make himself the center of it. Do you remember that woman at the well? He'd never seen her before. She'd never seen him before.

Total strangers. And he says, Give me some water to drink. And she said, This is amazing.

I'm a Samaritan. Jews don't speak to Samaritans. And you ask me for drink? And more than that, if I gave you drink according to your law, it would defile you.

And Jesus said, If you knew who it was that was speaking to you, you'd ask him and he'd give you living water so that you didn't thirst again. Do you notice the progression? They've never met. They meet.

He introduces the conversation. He asks a favor. She responds saying, This is astounding.

And he says, If you knew who I was or who I am, you'd ask me and I'd give you living water. Now you can't get yourself to the center of the stage any faster than that, can you? Now why did he do this? It really was as if he felt that he was different from you and from me, and it was not illegitimate for him to do that. And if you will live with the Gospels a little while, it will become very impressive and incredibly right.

I've read the Gospels many years, but it's amazing how long I've read some of these stories and never seen how radical they were or are still. You will remember that he obviously felt that he was not subject to things that other people are subject to. Let me borrow from the synoptics for a moment before we get back to the Gospel of John.

When he left that wedding at Cana of Galilee, he went to the city of Capernaum, and there you will remember that he entered into that synagogue and talked, and then he went out and went home with Simon Peter. And after he had visited in Simon Peter's home, he left, walked out into the roadway, and a leper came running up to him and knelt in front of him, and looked up and said, Sir, if you will, you can make me clean. Now that's an astounding story, because if you know anything about the customs of that day, and if you know anything about leprosy, you know that it was not permissible for a leper to get that close to ordinary society.

Leprosy was looked upon as deadly dangerous, but not only as deadly dangerous physically, it was looked upon as religiously defiling. It was not safe to touch one physically, but worse than that, they believed that it was so religiously defiling that if the wind blew across a leper and then blew across you, you needed to go get a priest to baptize you and clean you up so you could go about ordinary business again without carrying that defilement to other people. That's the reason it was legitimate to stone lepers if they got too close.

They didn't have a right to interfere with your daily routine. And so now this leper comes, and Jesus lets him get within a few feet, and he looks up into his face and says, Sir, if you will, you can make me clean. Now, the unbelievable thing is that Jesus took his hand and reached out and laid it on his head.

I read that for years before this kind of thought crossed my head. I wonder where Peter was about the time that Jesus laid his hand on his head. I suspect that Peter was already as far away as he could get and still see what was going on.

And then when Jesus laid his hand on his head and said, You're clean, I suspect Jesus turned and said with that hand, Peter, come here. And Peter turned and said, Lord, I don't dare get close to you because you're defiled, and if I get close to you, I'll get defiled, and we've got work to do today. And Jesus looked back at him and said, Peter, come here.

And I expect Peter did just like that head waiter did. When Jesus spoke, he came. I expect he had goose pimples all over him, because I imagine that when he got close, Jesus took that hand he'd had on the leper's head and reached out and put it around Peter's bare naked arm and pulled him in close while Peter

died.

And then he looked at Peter and said, Peter, do you really believe that there's anything in him that can defile me? No, there is something in me that can cleanse him. That's an interesting way to teach theology, isn't it? But that's what he was doing. He obviously felt that things that you and I are subject to, he was not subject to, that he was different.

Now, you will remember something that happened just before that, the day before that that illustrated the fact he felt he had powers that other people didn't have. Because when he stood in that synagogue, you will remember that as he preached, there was a man that was lowered through the roof. And when he got down right about this level in front of the pulpit, you will remember that Jesus looked at him and said, son, your sins are forgiven you.

I've always loved that story. It's so dramatic. And I miss the drama of it.

I wish we had a videotape of the faces of the four fellas up above, the friends who brought him. Because I am sure that when they lowered him, they were very disappointed. The crowd was so great, they brought that fella a long ways.

It's some pain to themselves to get him cleaned up, get him healed so they could go fishing again. And now they couldn't get near Jesus, and now they've got him and they're lowering him right down. And when he gets down in front of Jesus at eye level, Jesus looked over and says, son, your sins are forgiven you.

And I'm sure one of those four fellas up above jammed his elbow into the one next to him and said, what did he say? And the fella who got jammed said, well, I thought he said his sins were forgiven. And the first guy said, well, that's what I thought he said too. How'd religion get into this? We didn't bring him here because he's a sinner.

He's a good guy. He's our friend, our buddy. Jesus looked up and said, well, whatever you, whatever, I want you to know his sins are forgiven and he's well.

And about that time, there were two Pharisees standing over against the wall, you will remember. And one of them jammed his elbow into the other one and said, what did he say? And the second one said, uh, I thought he said his sins were forgiven. And the first Pharisee said, apoplectically, that's what I thought.

Who does he think he is? Nobody can forgive sins, but God and God alone. And I think at that point, Jesus looked over and caught the eye of the first Pharisee and winked, but he was saying, yes, I'm not subject to some of the things that you are. And I have powers that no man can ever have.

Pharisees understood him and the temple understood him and they decided that they must dispose of him because you see inherent within that attitude toward himself were some claims that they were not ready to acknowledge. But I suspect that the most impressive thing in the gospels about his own attitude toward himself is found in the scene that we have seen tonight in chapter two. We don't know really how quickly this came after the event in the beginning of the chapter.

We know that he was baptized of John, picked up some disciples, went north into Cana and to Galilee was it Cana for the wedding. The synoptics tell us, I went into Capernaum and preached and perform miracles, many healings. And then when the Passover time came, he headed for Jerusalem.

It is the first time after John has introduced him as the Messiah, that he makes his way to the city of David. Now you will remember that Israel was looking for the Messiah. We know that Israel was looking for the Messiah because when John had such crowds, the temple sent representatives to him and said, are you the Christ? And John the Baptist said, no, I am not the Christ.

The one whom you seek is in our midst. Now we know that Israel was looking for the Christ. And now, interestingly enough, the Christ comes to his city, his own city.

If you will read the beginning of the gospel of Mark, you will find that Mark picks up a quotation from Malachi, the last of the books of the Old Testament. And in the closing section of Malachi, the last section of the last book of the Old Testament, the prophet speaks and says, and suddenly the messenger whom you seek will come to his temple. And now Jesus comes.

And when he walks in, he sees the money changers, and he sees the sheep and the goats and the cattle and the doves. And you will remember he releases the animals and he opens the cages and he boots over the money changers' tables and the coins go rolling. You will remember that he took some cords and bound them together and made a scourge of whip and he drove them out.

And he said, you make my father's house, which is supposed to be a house of prayer for all nations, you make it a marketplace. Now there really is an astounding thing. And the Pharisees, the priests of the temple particularly, they were aghast.

And so they came to him and looked at him and said, show us a sign that you have a right to do this kind of thing. And I think he looked at him, now he's not in the King James, but I think this is really what he said. He looked back at him and said, what do you think I just got through doing? It's interesting.

God's signs oftentimes come to us and they're already behind us as part of our experience before we know they're God's signs. And they said, you're a Galilean peasant. What right do you have to do this? Now, if you've ever studied the structure of the temple, you will remember that it was built, it was structured architecturally to let a person know his place.

You will remember that there was an outer court of the Gentiles. And at the inner edge of that outer court into which Gentiles could come, the evidence now is that there were 18 stones placed around that area. And on each stone was an inscription that said, any Gentile who goes past this point will promptly be stoned to death.

It would be interesting if we had something in the narthex out here that said any Southern Baptist or Roman Catholic that goes past this point will promptly be killed. But that's what they had in the temple in Jerusalem. If you will remember, there was a court into which Jewish women could come, but if they went beyond that, they went at danger to their own lives.

There was a line beyond which a Jewish man couldn't go unless he was of the tribe of Levi. And there was a line beyond which a Levite couldn't go unless he were a son of heir and a priest. And there was a line beyond which a priest couldn't go unless he was the chief priest.

And then he could only go one day a year on Yom Kippur, the high day of atonement. The structure of the place was to let a man know his place and that he'd better stay in it. And Jesus walked in like he owned the joint.

And the people who were assigned the responsibility for running it, they said, who do you think you are? You are a guest here. And he looked back and said, that's odd. I thought you were the guest here.

You see, this is my house and you've been waiting for me all these years. You made it for me and I finally appeared. Now, you know, the synoptics tell this story differently from the way the Gospel of John does.

The synoptics put it at the end of his ministry. John puts it on his first trip to Jerusalem after his baptism. Now there are some scholars who said it obviously couldn't have happened twice.

So there are some scholars who say the synoptics are right. There are some scholars who say John is right. But you know, in all candor, it seems to me that we've missed one of the major thrusts if we say it didn't happen twice.

Because the first time he came to his own city, he laid claim to his own right. And the last time he came, he laid it claim again. Because, you see, that house was built for him.

God had said, the messenger whom you seek will come suddenly to his own temple. And he came and they booted him out. Now, you know, I have a little bit of sympathy for them.

Because I remember the day when God began to make some claims in my life. And I began to get panicky. Because, you see, you don't have but one life.

And you like to be in control of it. And when he comes in and begins to say, I want to rearrange the furniture in this life, I found myself saying, wait a minute, Lord, this is my life. And he said, oh, I thought it was mine.

You see, I made you for a temple for myself. And I said, now, wait a minute, I'd be delighted to have you as a guest in my life. I'll give you a place of honor and of preference.

And he looked at me and said, but I'm not to be a guest in your life. In this business, Dennis, you're the guest and I'm the host. And the host plays a different role from the guest, doesn't he? I remember preaching this once in a Presbyterian church and one of the elder sons who was a university student had just become a Christian a couple of years before and he had all the zeal and fervor of a young Christian.

He came to me that night and he said, you know, you've had my dad climbing the wall all afternoon. I said, what do you mean? He said, he'd been walking around the house all afternoon, thumping himself like this saying, I'm not the host here, I'm the guest in my own life. But do you know that's what the scripture says, that we are made for him and he and his infinite love comes to us.

And of course, when he comes, he wants to come as Lord. And we say, wait a minute, I want to be Lord in my life. And he says, there's only one Lord and I am he.

And it's interesting, that's what we call him, isn't it? That's the supreme title of scripture for him, the Lord Jesus Christ. And so when he comes, we begin to sense that our control over our lives is threatened. And if you want to know how sinful the human heart is and how deeply seated our sinfulness is, you sense the panic that's in you and me when we begin to find that he wants to run our lives instead of our running them.

There is where we get the true indication of how far we have fallen from our right intended relationship to him. Now why does he do it? It's not because he's mean, and yet sometimes we feel that way, because

we're reluctant to let go our lives to another. But you see, what he knows is that if I keep my hand on my life and run it, I will not run it as well as he will.

I think the hardest things for the typical person to believe is that God's smarter than he is. At least that was a problem for me. I thought if I give my life to him and let him run it, you'll foul it all up.

And one day he said, really Dennis, you think you're brighter than I am? That's a tough one to answer, isn't it? Now, not only that, but you know, sometimes we say, anybody says, is God loved? We say, of course he's loved. Then he says, well, it's safe for you to trust me. I won't hurt you, will I? But you see, it's easy to theorize about his love.

It's another thing to believe that if I let him run my life, it'll be run more joyously and more for fun. He will do me only good. I thought at one time, if I let him have my life, he'll get me in a hole he can't get me out of.

Yet how easy it is for us to say he has all power. But you see, it's safe to trust him because he is the one for whom we are made. And his way is our way, and our way is the wrong way.

And when we find his way, we say, for heaven's sakes, that's the thing for which I was made. A number of years ago, I had the privilege of developing a bit of a friendship with an Episcopalian theologian. He had been in China back before 1950 as a missionary to China.

He told me about an experience in his life. He came home from China, and in the transition period they gave him a small rural parish in Connecticut. He said the income was not too good, and so it was a farming situation.

And so he said, I had a barn, and I farmed a bit along with my parish responsibilities. He said one Sunday morning before going to church, he said I was doing some chores, and he said I was in the barn, and he said I was attracted by my little three-year-old girl who came toddling in the barn a bit unsteadily, and in her hand outstretched she had something shining in the sun. And he said I looked, and when she got to me, to my shock, I saw that it was a double-edged razor blade.

And he said I thought I must take it, and I realized instantly if I made a move she'd close her hand. And he said I knew if she closed her hand, her hand was so small she'd cut it, and she could cut it seriously. So I restrained myself and didn't make a move, but I said honey, it's very dangerous.

If you close your hand it will cut you, and I will have to take you to see Dr. Jones. He said she looked up at me with those three-year-old white eyes and said I like Dr. Jones. He gives me suckers when I go.

He said how do you convince a three-year-old to turn loose of something that she doesn't know is deadly and that's very attractive to her? He said do you know finally I had to reach down and pull every dirty pudgy little finger back to extract that deadly instrument from her little hand? And I thought what a parable of the way we are. We get our lives, we hold them, and as we hold them we find our very hold has death in it and destruction. And so the most precious relationships in our lives are corrupted or demeaned or diminished because they're under our control instead of under his.

Are you really going to suggest to yourself or am I to me that it is unsafe to let Jesus Christ be supreme at any point within any man's life? He never damaged anything he ever touched. He only blesses that which is surrendered to him. But there's where our sinfulness is that we want to hold and keep and doubt.

And so he came to his house and they shut him out. It's interesting what he said to them. And this next bit, this closing bit of what I want to say is a little subtle.

I've wrestled with it for 30 years. I may not say it well. If you don't understand it, it's not because it's too complex.

It's because I haven't found a way to say it well. But it's a very fascinating thing. Do you notice what he said? They said, what right do you have to do this? He said, if you will strip this temple down, I will raise it in three days.

And they said, man, we spent 46 years building this structure and you're going to raise it in three days? At that point, John helps us. John says that after the resurrection, they realized, his disciples, that he was not talking about that temple. He was talking about his body.

Now here is something, if you were here this morning, I think may illustrate and may be helpful. You will remember this morning, we were talking about the climax of the creation as a wedding and the climax of human history is a wedding. And we raised the question as to which is the reality and which is the symbol.

And we said, it's obvious that Adam's wedding and your wedding and my wedding, they're the symbols. And that eternal one of Christ and his church is the reality. Therefore, this should be like that.

And this should be a sign that points to that. Really the heart of marriage is when a person comes to the place where he finds he's incomplete and that there is another who can complete his life. And that his greatest fulfillment is when he gives himself completely irrevocably forever to that person and that other person reciprocates in that kind of giving.

And do you know that's what Jesus is saying? You're made incomplete and you need me. No man is complete without God. And if a man will open his heart and surrender fully to God, God will give himself fully to the man.

And then the person will say, this is the thing for which I was made. This is life. This is life eternal.

Now there's symbol in reality. Do you know what I believe Jesus was saying? He said, you know, a temple is a place where God comes and dwells in it. And what he is saying is this temple is a symbol, a symbol of what? A symbol of what happened in the birth of Jesus.

Where God himself, the second person of the blessed Trinity took up his abode in a human person. And God dwelt in flesh. We beheld his glory.

The glory is of the only begotten of the father, full of grace and truth. Read the first chapter of John. God came and tabernacled among us, templed among us in a human person.

And he said, you see, you pull the symbol down and I'll erect the reality. But now that points me to this. Do you remember those two passages in first Corinthians where Paul says, don't you know that you are made to be the temple of the spirit of God? He is the one whose temple you are.

Do you know that there is a sense in which there should take place in your life and mine, something comparable to what occurred in Christ where God comes and lives within my heart. But do you know when he comes, I have to let him come as God. And if he's God, he has to be Lord.

Now it's interesting. There's a little bit of history in them through. It's interesting.

He came to his own temple and they rejected him. It was 40 years later that a Roman general came with his Roman armies, surrounded the city of Jerusalem and in three years captured it. And those Roman soldiers came and pull that temple stone from stone.

And it's never been rebuilt. If you will go to Jerusalem today, you will find that the Jews are doing their best to locate and develop, identify for sure the foundations of that temple. And they think perhaps they've located some of it, but it's never been rebuilt.

Why? You know, I'm convinced that there is something about life that will not let a lie stand. It will ultimately be exposed. And when he came to his own temple and they rejected him, it was inevitable that ultimately that symbol should be destroyed because it had rejected the reality that says something about your life and mine, doesn't it? You know, I'm convinced that that's the reason so many of our lives are empty, distraught, full of conflict, full of disillusionment, full of despair, because we were made for him.

But when he came, we said, glad to have you as a visitor. And so we would not let him be who he is, the Lord. I have a wild story to tell with Adam Threw.

I always think twice before I tell it, but it illustrates what I want to say. If the audience is sympathetic, so you'd be sympathetic for a minute. I had a young friend who was a graduate student in English literature, and periodically she would come to visit me.

She, very bright, very attractive young lady. She was working in things like Milton and so forth, and she would come. I remember conversations like on the biblical references in Milton.

She came in one day and I noticed she was different. That day we talked about Samson agonistes in Milton and Samson in the book of Judges. It was the days when the girls were first starting to wear their hair loose, flowing, and long, and she dyed hers the color of corn silks, beautiful yellow.

You could spot her a half mile away. One day I saw her, and I thought, no, that can't be Gil, because her hair was short and it was darker brown. Well, the next week she walked into my office and her hair was short and it was darker brown.

Well, we sat and talked about Samson, Milton. When we had finished, she got up to go, and when she got up to go, she was halfway out the door when she turned around and came back, and she said, Dr. Kenloff, one thing I meant to tell you. She said, I can't leave without telling you.

Then she hesitated a moment. She looked at me and said, you know, I found reality. I said, what? She said, I found reality.

I said, Gil, sit down there and tell me what you mean. She said, you know, I grew up in the church, and when I was in my teens, I found a very real relationship with Christ. But as I grew older, I let him go to the margin, and I let other things take his place.

And life became form and ceremony instead of reality. And I went to my pastor and began to talk with him. Said we sat through a number of sessions, and finally he looked at me and said, Gil, is something you're holding out on me about? And I said, oh, no.

He said, yes, there is, because if you do what God tells you to do, he will be real within your life. He said, there's something you're not telling me. He looked at her and said, let me put it this way.

He said, is there anything when you get the closest to Christ and the most concerned about your relationship to him that keeps coming up? Oh, she said, that couldn't possibly be it. He said, there is something like that then. She said, oh, yes, but it's ridiculous.

It couldn't be it. He said, tell me about it. She said, I couldn't.

You'd laugh. And he said, no, I won't laugh. What is it? She reached around and pulled that yellow hair up.

And she said, do you know, doctor, every time I look in a mirror, there's something inside me that says, Gil, you're as false as the color of that hair. Now, I'd like to think that hair has nothing to do whatsoever with a man's relationship with God. So don't draw any false notions about that.

But this is what she said to me. She said, you know, and when that happens, there's something inside me that says there ought to be something authentic and real. And I have a strange impulse to let it go back to its natural color.

And she said, you know, he laughed and I laughed. And she said, but you know, I said, Lord, would you let me die back as close to the natural as could be. And start from there.

And she said, he wouldn't argue about that. And she said, you know, the funny thing as I found reality, I said, Gil, that's ridiculous. Pray tell me why you think he started there.

Now, listen, she looked at me and she said, do you know, I think it's very simple. Do you know the first thing a woman does when she gets up in the morning and the last thing she does before she goes to bed at night? I said, no. She said she looks in a mirror.

And she said, do you know, the first thing I do every morning now is when I look in the mirror, I see that. And there's a voice inside me that says, there's our symbol that we're getting your life under my control. She looked at me and she said, do you know, I think it's very simple.

Do you know the first thing a woman does when she gets up in the morning and the last thing she does before she goes to bed at night? I said, no. She said she looks in a mirror. And she said, do you know, the first thing I do every morning now is when I look in the mirror, I see that.

And there's a voice inside me that says, there's our symbol that we're getting your life under my control. And she said the last thing at night he speaks to me and says, there's our symbol. And I say, yes, that's our symbol.

You know, I've always cherished that story because you know what I believe? We've got common symbols that everybody has like baptism, church attendance, the Lord's supper. But I suspect that a man or a woman's relationship to Christ is so personal and so intimate that the real evidence of his Lordship in my life is something that wouldn't make a bit of sense in yours. And the thing that's in your life might not make a bit of sense in mine, but in our relationship, it's a sign between the two of us that he is in control.

All I know is that Gil said to me, Dr. Kinlaw, life is totally different since I'm bringing my life under his Lordship. And I'd like to ask you this. Is your life a symbol without the reality? Or is your life a symbol with the reality? Let me go to communion.

You know, we come and we take a wafer and a cup and say we've had communion and we go away with the wafer and the cup. Do we go away with forgiveness? And do we go away with his living presence? You see, he wants my life full of reality, not just symbols. And so he comes.

And sometimes he comes rather lordly in manner because he loves us enough that he wants to redeem us. Shall we bow our heads together for prayer? Father, we are among the privileged of the world because we have thy word. We are among the privileged of the world because we have thy church.

We are among the privileged of the world because we have the hymns, the liturgy of the church. We have a thousand witnesses to thee and to thy concern for us. But more than that, we have that spirit of thine that ever keeps seeking to get control of us.

Open our eyes that we may see that the point at which we resist is the point of our tragedy. And the point at which we surrender is the point of our salvation. And grant that the nose in any life here may be turned into one great supreme yes to him who longs to be our friend and our God.

We will you praise in Jesus name. Amen.

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