

Christ's Mission and Return.

by Edward Payson

Jesus Christ came to earth to save us from sin and death, motivated by love and a desire to rescue us from moral blindness and sin.

Scripture: John 1:1, John 16:28, Philipians 2:6, Colossians 3:1, Hebrews 9:28

Topics: "Christology", "Eschatology"

Description

Edward Payson preaches on the profound statements made by Jesus about His divine origin, earthly mission, and return to the Father, emphasizing the disciples' growing faith and understanding. Payson delves into the preexistence of Christ in a state of glory with the Father, His humble incarnation into the world, and His eventual return to heaven. He highlights the unparalleled love and sacrifice of Jesus in coming to save a fallen world, underscoring the gravity of humanity's spiritual condition and the necessity of accepting Christ's redemption. Payson urges listeners to consider the certainty of Christ's teachings, the reality of heaven, and the imminent return of Jesus as Judge and Savior, encouraging believers to set their hearts on eternal things.

Transcript

"I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: Again, I leave the world, and go to the Father."

John 16:28.

words, uttered by our Saviour during his residence on earth, appear to have given his disciples greater satisfaction than these. He had just before said to them, A little while, and ye shall not see me; and again a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go unto the Father. This declaration they did not understand; and, though desirous to ask an explanation, were either afraid or ashamed to confess their ignorance. Our Saviour however perceived what was passing in their minds, gave them unasked the desired explanation, and ended by saying, I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world; again, I leave the world, and go to the Father.

His disciples answered, Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb. Now we are sure that thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask thee; by this we believe that thou earnest forth from God. They believed this truth indeed before; but their faith was so much increased by this conversation, that it appeared to them as if they then believed for the first time, and as if their former belief was scarcely deserving of the name. It must indeed be acknowledged by all, as the disciples

remarked, that our Lord here speaks plainly.

No one can pretend that there is anything figurative or hyperbolical; that there is any proverb or dark saying in the words, I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world; again, I leave the world, and go to the Father. Here everything is plain, simple, intelligible. Let us, then, attend to their import. They will not, perhaps, teach us any new truths; but they may possibly cause us, as they did the disciples, to believe more firmly, truths which were known before.

First. We learn from this passage, that our Saviour existed in a most exalted and happy state before his appearance on earth. He was then with the Father; or as another passage expresses it, in the bosom of the Father. The same truth is elsewhere taught with at least equal clearness. In the first verse of this book we are told, that he was in the beginning with God. And in the prayer which immediately follows this chapter, he says, Father, I come to thee; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.

And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was. Unless we suppose that he could utter falsehood, even in an address to heaven, we must then believe that he not only existed with the Father, but that he possessed glory with the Father before the world was made. And what was he then? He was not a man; for he became man, when he was born into our world. He was not an angel; for an apostle asserts, and brings many arguments to prove, that he was not.

Unto which of the angels, he asks, did God ever say, as he did to Christ, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee. But if he was not a man, not an angel, what was he? Let inspiration answer. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Nor did he cease to be God, when he became man. No, he was God manifest in the flesh, God over all blessed forever. But this leads us to remark, Secondly. Our Saviour teaches us in these words, that from this preexistent, exalted, happy state in the bosom of the Father, he came into our world.

I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world. This truth also is, in other places, largely insisted on both by himself and his apostles. In several passages he says, expressly, I came down from heaven. Being in the form of God, says an apostle, he made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient to death, even the death of the cross.

He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, his own creatures, his own world, but his own received him not. Thirdly. Our Saviour here teaches us that, when he left this world, he went back to his Father, or to heaven from whence he came. The truth of this declaration, so far as human eyes could see it, his disciples afterwards saw. They saw him ascend up visibly toward heaven, till a cloud received him out of their sight.

And what they could not see, the Spirit of God revealed to them. He assured them that their Master had entered into heaven, and was seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty on high, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but in the world to come. The view which has been taken of the import of our text, brief as it is, opens a wide field for serious and instructive meditation. Indeed it is connected more or less intimately with every fact and doctrine of Christianity.

To some of the reflections which it most naturally suggests, your attention is now requested. 1. It is obvious to remark, that the events mentioned in this passage are, both in themselves and in their consequences, by far the most remarkable which have occurred in our world since its creation. Indeed the creation of the world itself was an event far less wonderful. That a being possessed of infinite wisdom, power and goodness, should create a world, or many worlds, is nothing very wonderful or surprising.

But that, after he had created it, and after its inhabitants had revolted from him, he should visit it, --visit it in a human form, in the likeness of sinful flesh; that he should enter it, not as the Ancient of days, but as an infant; live in it, not as its Sovereign and Proprietor, but as a servant, a dependant on the bounty of his own creatures; and above all, that he should die in it, die in it as a malefactor, on a cross, between two thieves; that this earth should not only have been pressed by its Creator's footsteps, but wet with his tears, and stained with his blood; these are wonders indeed, wonders which would be utterly incredible, had not God himself revealed them; wonders which will still be regarded as incredible by all, who forget that God is wonderful in working, and that as high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are his ways above our ways, and his thoughts above our thoughts.

No wonder that angels should desire to look into these things. No wonder that they left heaven in multitudes to visit our world when their Creator and their Lord lay an infant in a manger. No wonder that raptures and ecstasies unfelt before swelled their bosoms, and called for new songs to express them. The wonder is, that man, stupid, insensible man, should be no more affected by this event; that he should regard it without interest, and almost fall asleep while he hears it described.

It is not thus, when events comparatively trifling solicit his attention. Let the king of Great Britain visit his Irish and Scottish dominions, and the world rings with it. Let the President of these States come among us, and every house pours out its inmates to welcome or to gaze. Let a comet blaze athwart the sky, and thousands of sleepless eyes are open to watch the ethereal stranger. But let the Creator, the Eternal Sovereign of the universe, by whom and for whom all things were made, come in the most interesting form, to visit this rebellious province of his dominions, and how few are found who even trouble themselves to ask whence he comes, or what is his object; how much fewer to give him the welcome which he had a right to expect!

My hearers, how strange is this: and how strange it is, that we cannot see and blush at our own stupidity. Why is this event, which will cause the name of our world to resound through the whole created universe of God, and to be had in everlasting remembrance, regarded with such indifference? This world itself will soon with all its works be burnt up. Its place in the heavens will know it no more. Not even a wreck will remain to remind future orbs that here once rolled, the planet called Earth; and its very existence would at length fade away from the memories of all, except its former inhabitants! but the fact mentioned in our text, will preserve its name from oblivion, and through eternal ages it will be remembered as the world which its Creator visited, and for which he died.

And for similar reasons its inhabitants, the posterity of Adam, will be objects of intense interest and curiosity to holy beings through interminable ages. Show me a man, show me one of that race for which my Creator died: show me one of those whom he redeemed by his blood, will, we may suppose, be one of the first exclamations of all who, through the ages of eternity, shall from various parts of Jehovah's dominions enter heaven; and when they wish to see what sin can do; when they wish to behold it in its most dreadful effects, in its blackest forms, they will turn and contemplate, with shuddering wonder, those who perished in consequence of neglecting this great salvation, and receiving this unparalleled grace of

God in vain.

These, they will exclaim, were some of the inhabitants of that highly favored world. And how could the inhabitants of such a world perish? How could they resist such love, such mercy, such a bright display of all the divine perfections, as was exhibited to them! How could they break through so many sacred obligations, resist the influence of so many most powerful motives, and win their way to hell over the body of a crucified Saviour! of such a Saviour too as died for them? My hearers, if, as our great Teacher assures us, much will be required of those to whom much is given, it seems certain that the responsibility, the sinfulness and the guilt of those who perish after hearing of what Jesus Christ has done and suffered for them, will be greater than those of any other creatures! for surely, without intending to limit God we may venture to say, that he never will, that he never can do more for any race of beings than he has for ours.

But it is not sufficient simply to contemplate this great event, wonderful as it is. We must look also at the motives which prompted it. Indeed when we see the Creator leaving his native heaven, the bosom of his Father, descending into our world, assuming, and suffering in our nature, we are naturally led to ask, what motive impelled him? what object could in his view be of sufficient importance to induce such humiliation, such suffering as this? It must have been a great object, a powerful motive, which could have induced him to visit our world, even had he come in the form of God.

But how much greater must have been the object, how much more powerful the motive, which induced him to visit it in the form of a servant, in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to die as a malefactor. What could induce him to exchange heaven for earth, the bosom of his Father for the body of an infant, the celestial throne for a manger and a cross, the adoration of angels for the scoffs and insults of men? It evidently could be no personal object, no selfish motive, no motive such as those, by which we are naturally actuated.

It could not be to gain any thing for himself; for he already possessed all things, and he knew that, by coming into our world, he must sustain a temporary loss of almost everything dear to him. It must then have been for others, and not for himself, that he came. And it was for others, it was for us. He came to be the light of the world. He came to seek and to save that which was lost. He came to save his people from their sins. He came to redeem them from the curse of a violated law, by bearing it in their stead.

He came to die, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us back to a forsaken God. In a word, he came to rescue immortal souls, beings capable of containing inconceivable happiness or misery, from moral blindness, and sin, and guilt, and death, and hell; and to open a way by which they might ascend to the heaven from which he came, but whose gates their sins had forever barred against them. Such was the object for which the Creator did and suffered all this. And, O, how puerile, how trifling do the grandest objects of human pursuit, and the most splendid human enterprises appear, when compared with this!

All succeeding ages have combined to admire and extol Columbus, embarking to seek, over a pathless ocean, a then undiscovered quarter of the globe. But what was this in comparison with our Saviour's descent from heaven into the grave to seek a lost, to bring back a wandering, to save a ruined, self-ruined world? This was indeed an enterprise for a God. But still the question returns, if this was the object, what was the motive? Why did he wish to save such a world? He needed it not.

He could have made a thousand worlds at less expense. And he had every reason to abhor and renounce our race, both on account of what they had done, and on account of the manner in which he foresaw they

would treat himself. My hearers, there was but one motive, but one principle in his breast, sufficiently strong to prompt him to this; and that principle was, love, pure disinterested love. And now I have mentioned its name, many of you will not understand me. You cannot conceive of such love, because you never felt it.

According to a trite and homely, but just remark, you judge of others by yourselves. When you hear of missionaries leaving their native country, and going to spend their days among the heathen; among savages, far from all the enjoyments and conveniences of civilized life, some of you can scarcely believe that they are prompted by love; love to the souls of men whom they never saw. Many of you probably suspect, that they are secretly actuated by some more selfish motive. How then can you expand your narrow views sufficiently to grasp, to comprehend that immeasurable love which Jesus Christ displayed in his mission from heaven!

The Christian, in whose breast a spark of the same celestial fire has been kindled, can conceive something of it; but those who are destitute of this love, as all impenitent sinners are, form no conception of it, and hear of the love of Christ, and of all its astonishing effects with a kind of stupid amazement, or with perfect indifference. But, my hearers, whatever any of you may think of it, all the love which was ever felt on earth, and all that was ever felt by angels, could it be collected into one bosom, would be as nothing compared with the love which Christ displayed, and would leave that bosom cold in comparison with the fervor which glowed in his breast.

His love was a love like the deluge of Noah, such a love as we might expect could be displayed, when the windows of heaven were unstopped, the fountains of its great deeps broken up, and all its treasured stores of love poured down at once upon us. To think of such love is like trying to think of existence which has no beginning, or of power which makes something of nothing. Tongue cannot describe it, finite minds cannot conceive it, angels faint under it, and those who know most of it can only say with inspiration, that it passeth knowledge. 2.

The appearance of such a person as Jesus Christ in our world, gives us an appalling view of the moral state and danger of its inhabitants. If it was necessary that such a being should come from heaven to save us, our situation must be deplorable indeed. How dark for instance, how black, must have been that night of ignorance which nothing less than the descent of the Sun of Righteousness from his celestial sphere could illuminate. How strong must have been those bands of sin, which none but all Almighty deliverer could break.

How incalculably great must have been that guilt, for which nothing but such a sacrifice could atone. In a word, how incurable, how desperate must have been the spiritual maladies of our race, when such a physician was necessary to heal them, and whenever he could find no remedy sufficiently efficacious but his own blood! Well may we say, with an apostle, that if one, if such an one, died for men, then were men dead. My hearers, it is not those passages which speak of the blindness of the human mind, the desperate wickedness of the human heart, and the vast amount of human sinfulness and human guilt, that give me the most appalling views of our situation.

No, it is the means which were thought necessary by infinite wisdom to save us from that situation. I know that God would not leave heaven for a slight cause. I know that the Creator would not be born, and suffer, and die, unless some most tremendous exigency demanded it. And when I am told that the situation of man was so hopeless, so deplorable, as to render such means necessary for his deliverance, then, then I

view our situation as terrible indeed. I see the dreadfulness of our fate in the means employed to rescue us from it.

My hearers, you would in other cases, reason in a similar manner. Were either of you sick, and should your friends at a vast expense send to a great distance for a most skilful physician, you would conclude at once, that they considered your disease as exceedingly dangerous; your fears would be excited, and you would readily submit to every means which might possibly effect a cure. Why then, when you see, not a prophet, not an angel, but the eternal Son of God, the Creator, Upholder, and Governor of the world, sent from heaven to cure you, will you not reason and act in a similar manner?

Why not say, if my own merits, if a man, if an angel could have saved me, Jesus Christ would never have come forth from his Father into this world to do it. Why not believe that there is none other name given under heaven among men, whereby you can be saved. And why not receive thankfully, and at once, this great Physician, and submit to the means of cure which he prescribes? Remember that if you neglect to do this, you will, you must be left in that awful situation, and exposed to that tremendous doom from which Jesus Christ came to save sinners.

Remember, that that doom will be awfully aggravated by your neglect of such a Saviour. Remember that, if you reject him, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation. Today, then, if ye will hear his voice harden not your hearts. That you may be induced to do this, permit me to remind you, 3. Of the certainty which attends every truth revealed to us by the Lord Jesus Christ. You sometimes say, at least in your hearts, no man has ever returned from the other world to give us any information of what awaits us there, or even to assure us of its existence.

We cannot then be certain that there is another world, or a day of judgment, or a heaven, or a hell. If indeed one would rise from the dead, and assure us that he had seen and known all these things, we might believe. But, my hearers, something far more satisfactory than this has been done. Not a man merely, but the Son of God, our Creator, our future Judge, has come from the other world to this, on purpose to reveal it to us, to bring life and immortality to light. He came directly from the bosom of his Father, and is therefore, intimately acquainted with all his counsels and designs.

He came from that very heaven which he revealed to us; and lest we should refuse to give him credit, he by his miracles fixed the broad seal of heaven to his doctrines. Lest even this should be insufficient, the eternal Father, by an audible voice from heaven exclaimed, This is my beloved Son: Hear ye him; that is, yield full credit to all which he reveals; yield implicit obedience to all his commands. And how much better, how much more satisfactory is this, than would be the report of some fallible mortal, returning from the other world, who might be deceived himself, or willfully deceive us.

My hearers, if you will not yield to this evidence, if you will not believe the Lord Jesus Christ who came from heaven, and is returned to heaven, most certainly you would not be persuaded, though one rose from the dead. You must however do as you please; but for us, I speak in the name of all his real disciples, until you can show us a better, a more infallible Teacher, we must and will follow him. Nor are we ashamed to avow our faith. No; we exult and glory in it. We triumph while we point to the strong foundations of our belief, and build upon them our eternal hopes.

We can look up and say, to our ascended Saviour, Lord, we believe and are sure that thou art the Christ the Son of the living God. And we know experimentally the truth of the apostle's assertion, He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself; a witness, which cannot deceive him. Tell us not

then of the vain opinions, the endless conjectures of ignorant, fallible, short-sighted men, groping in midnight darkness. Tell us not of conjectures, when we have certainty.

Everything which Christ has revealed respecting the other world, is fixed, established, certain. It is no longer a matter of doubt or dispute. We rely upon it, as if we had ourselves visited the other world, and seen all which he reveals. We venture our all upon it. We renounce things which we have seen for things which we have not seen; and while we believe, we find our Saviour's declaration verified, I am come a light into the world, that he who believeth in me should not walk in darkness but have the light of life.

Hence too, we firmly believe that he will again visit our world as its Judge, that to them who look and wait for him he will appear the second time without sin unto salvation. He has assured us that he will, and we can rely confidently upon his word. Nor is it, even humanly speaking, one half so improbable that he will come the second time, as it was that he would come the first. It appears far less astonishing that he should come as God to judge the world, than that he should come as man to die for the world.

And being assured that he did come once, we feel assured that he will come again. Meanwhile in obedience to his commands, we will, by eating of this bread and drinking of this cup, assist in showing forth his death till he shall come. 4. How real, how accessible, and how near to us, my Christian friends, does heaven appear, viewed in the light of this subject. When we hear our Saviour, our Head speak of coming from heaven into this world, and returning from this world to heaven, it is like hearing a friend speak of going to Europe and returning home.

We have as much reason to regard heaven as a reality, as we have to regard Europe as a reality; nay we have more, for surely our Saviour's testimony is more satisfactory, more infallible, than that of all the men who ever returned from Europe. And as our Saviour returned to heaven, he is now in heaven, he appears there for us, as our Advocate; our representative, our forerunner. Whither the head is gone, all the members must in due time follow. I will, he said, in his dying prayer, --Father, I will that those whom thou hast given me, be with me, where I am, that they may behold my glory.

Yes, he wills it, and it shall be done. Soon will your disembodied spirits, freed from all imperfection, follow your ascended Head and Lord, to mansions above, mansions which he is even now preparing for you; and there shall you be forever with the Lord. Comfort and encourage one another then with these words. Place your affections, not on things below, but on things above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God; and live in such a manner that you may be always able to say with an old disciple, My Head is in heaven, my heart is in heaven, and ere long I shall myself be there.

To conclude: Gladly, most gladly, my impenitent hearers, would I say something to render this subject profitable to you; for the subject of the last Sabbath, the never dying worm, and the unquenchable fire, are still before me. I see a vast and most expensive apparatus of means employed to open a way for your escape from that fate. I see heaven opening, your Creator descending, angels attending him down, and all their enraptured hosts exclaiming, Mortals, we bring you glad tidings of great joy; unto you is born a Saviour.

I see this Saviour living, teaching, working miracles, dying on the cross; reascending to heaven. I see his heralds sent out to proclaim these facts, to offer peace and pardon and salvation to dying men. I turn with anxious eagerness to you, to see how you are affected by all this; and alas, I find you scarcely affected at all. I find you paying no regard to all these wonders, taking no pains to secure this great salvation; but eager in the pursuit of trifles, and pursuing that very course, which, your future Judge has most explicitly

declared, will terminate in everlasting woe.

My hearers, do you believe there ever was such a person as Jesus Christ? Do you believe that, standing in the midst of his disciples, he said, he came forth from the Father and am come into the world, and again I leave the world and go to the Father. If you believe this, you must believe that everything which he said, was infallibly true, and will infallibly be accomplished. You must believe that he is now at the right hand of God, that he is speaking to you in his word, and that, if they escaped not who refused to hear him when he spake on earth, much more will you not escape, if you turn away from him speaking from heaven.

But why do I ask whether you believe these things? The conduct of many among you declares, with ten thousand voices, that you do not believe them, or that, if you have any faith in them, it is only that cold speculative faith, which being without works is dead. Did you believe them, nothing on earth, nothing that you ever heard or saw, would appear so interesting, so affecting. Then, instead of seeing you crowding away from the table of Christ, we should see you, with deep interest in your countenances and strong affection in your hearts, coming around it to commemorate a crucified and ascended Saviour. But as it is, we can only say to you, He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.

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