

One Jesus

by John A. Broadus

Jesus is the most important personage in human history, and his divinity and humanity make him a perfect example of redemption.

Scripture: Matthew 10:32, John 1:1, John 14:6, Acts 25:19, Philippians 2:10

Topics: "Christology", "Redemption"

Description

John A. Broadus preaches about the significance of Jesus Christ, emphasizing His central role in human history, the Scriptures, and our personal lives. He highlights how Jesus founded an empire of love that continues to impact Christian civilization, and how all ethical conceptions stem from Christianity. Broadus discusses the uniqueness of Jesus as both truly God and truly man, and the unparalleled work of redemption and reconciliation He accomplished. He challenges listeners to consider their personal relationship with Jesus, stressing the importance of confessing Him as Lord.

Transcript

And of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive. ACTS 25:19

A new military governor had come to Caesarea. The people knew well enough that it was important for all those who had anything to do, especially with the government, to make the acquaintance of this man and try to gain his favor. For in all such cases the character and good will of the ruler was a matter of consequence. Among the persons who hurried to Caesarea to meet the governor Festus was a native ruler, a young man named Herod Agrippa.

He was a great grandson of the celebrated Herod the Great, and was at that time allowed by the Romans to be a king, subject to them, over the northeastern portion of his ancestor's dominions. Agrippa came and spent a number of days at Caesarea. He had been educated in Rome, but as there were no newspapers, there would be much information which Agrippa could obtain from the governor respecting the state of society and the gossip of the capital.

On the other hand there would much that Agrippa could tell the governor about the curious people he had come to rule over, a people well known over the world for their excitability and extraordinary stubbornness, a people hard to govern and hard to understand. And so the days went on with varied talk and counsel and feasts and baths and theater and gladiators, and all the apparatus of Roman luxury which Herod the Great had gathered in his capital city of Caesarea.

After Agrippa had been there many days, we are told it occurred to Festus-possibly he was coming to be a little at a loss for new subjects of conversation-to mention to the young king a singular prisoner whom his predecessor Felix had left there in prison, a man named Paul, whom he found to be exceedingly unpopular with the Jewish rulers though he could not exactly understand why. For when the Jewish rulers were summoned before him according to the Roman custom, he found they had no accusation to make against the man, no civil offense-but they had certain questions of their own superstition and about one Jesus who was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive. One Jesus. How little did the Roman governor dream that as a fly preserved in amber he was going to be remembered in the world's history simply because of his connections with Paul the prisoner and with this Jesus!

Things have changed since then. The long progress of what we call the Christian centuries has brought its changes and we live in what calls itself a Christian land after Jesus Christ. And yet, O my friends, it is very sorrowful to think how many there are, even in this so called Christian land, who seem to care very little more about Jesus Christ than poor Festus did. Busy, some of them are with philosophical thought, and some with schemes of statesmanship, and some with the charms of literature, busy with the harassing pursuits of life, with its perplexing cares, with its bewildering pleasures, busy with everything else and hardly ever a thought at all of Jesus. What I wish to say is simply this: there is no one who has a right to think lightly of Jesus, and I wish to offer some reasons why that is so.

In the first place, Jesus is the most important personage in human history. The obscure and insignificant one, of whom Festus spoke so carelessly, has founded this world's most wonderful empire. The carpenter of Nazareth is a king of men. You will remember what Napoleon said, and those words have often been repeated, as he spoke to one of his friends during life, "Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and myself founded empires, but they were force, upheld by force, and when the force was withdrawn, how soon they all mouldered away. Jesus Christ has founded an empire of love, and it lives through all the ages, and nothing seems able to destroy it." Yea, from him went forth the influences which have given to what we call Christian civilization, its highest dignity, its truest power. Much we have derived, no doubt, from Grecian literature and art, and Roman law, and something from our Gothic ancestors, but the chief power in Christian civilization comes from that Jesus.

Yea, the men nowadays who fancy they can do without Christianity, who prate that they have risen above Christianity to a higher plane than it has reached, seem not to know that all the elevated ethical conceptions and sentiments of which they boast and which they suppose make them independent are but the result of this same Christianity which they disdain. They are like a silly schoolboy who has but half learned a few of the teacher's lessons, and then fancies he knows more than the teacher and can henceforth do without him. Yea, the thoughtful world is coming to see somewhat more clearly that Jesus is the Center of the world's history. Bossuet made that remark, and it has often been repeated: that the cross of Jesus Christ is the center of the world's history. All lines of preceding events seem to converge to that cross, and from it diverge all the great events of the world's subsequent history.

It is a kindred thought to say that Jesus is the center of the Scriptures. Everything in the Old Testament points forward to him: everything in the New Testament proceeds forth from him. You cannot understand the history of the Old Testament, if you think of it merely as a history of Israel. It is a history of redemption, that is its characteristic idea, and in Jesus Christ it has found its consummation, its climax, its completeness. Jesus is for us indeed the pledge of the divine authority of the Old Testament. Does a man say, "How do you know that what we call the Old Testament is from God?" I answer, the Jews were just as familiar in our Lord's time, as we are, with the phrase "The Scriptures." "The Scriptures," used so often in

the Old Testament, and we know from Jewish chronicles that what they meant by Scripture was the Hebrew books which we call the Old Testament, and this selfsame scripture Jesus declares is from God and cannot be broken. I stand hearing his testimony to its authority and am content.

Men rise up in every successive age and say science has at last discovered—they seem to imagine that science will never make any discoveries after their age—science has at last discovered certain facts which are incompatible with the Old Testament. Jesus declares the Scriptures cannot be broken, and I believe that whenever physical science has truly interpreted the works of God, which is only partially done as yet as every thoughtful man knows, and philological science has rightly interpreted the Word of God, that people who are prepared for it will see that there is no conflict. In the meantime the conflict we hear so much about grows out of the hasty conclusions of those who but partially understand God's workings, and still more partially understand God's providence. Jesus says that the Scripture is God's Word and cannot be broken and I am content. I am dependent upon no man's knowledge. Let knowledge come and welcome, only when it comes to be knowledge then we will turn to God's Word and study the passages and we will see about the so-called conflict.

So trusting in Jesus, we make sure concerning the miracles he wrought. People say, and it is not an unnatural question, how do you know but that the persons who witnessed the miracles of Christ were deluded, not to say deceivers? Well, much might be said about their character, and about the fact that both friend and foe united in bearing witness to these things, but apart from all these Jesus himself declared, over and again, that he did work these miracles by the favor of God, and who is going to say that he was deluded and who is going to say that he was a deceiver? His character bears testimony to the reality of his miracles, and his character and his miracles like two sides of an arch holding each other up, support the whole fabric of Christianity. Against his character, all human opposition breaks and is shattered like surf against a rock. The few men that have ventured to try to say something against the character of Jesus, their tongues have not been palsied but their words have been manifestly weak and vain.

It is not strange that the history of Jesus himself, the center of Scripture, has come to be the great subject of inquiry among the friends and foes of the Christian religion. Th our time you have all noticed how many books have been written in the last generation on the life of Christ—the like of it never seen before—in Germany and France, in England and America. There is a work about to be published now in this city about the life of Christ, more elaborate in some respects than any before published. And why so much of this? Because the world is beginning to feel that Jesus is the center of Scripture; that Christianity is in the world and the character and the work of Jesus himself. The men who question its power and who deny its authority are coming to see that Christianity is in the world though, and has been a mighty power in the world, and though often grievously perverted and misdirected, is on the whole a beneficent and blessed power, and they have got to account for it. That means study the history of Jesus.

Yea, Jesus is the whole fact. The proud young French king said, you remember, when someone spoke of the State, "I am the State," but, not with arrogance, not with egotism, in simplicity and truth, Jesus said: "I am the way, the truth and the life." Jesus is the gospel. The gospel is not a creed simply, is not a society of priests, the gospel comes to us embodied in a person. Jesus is himself the gospel; receiving him we receive the power of God unto salvation. Have we a right to think lightly of Jesus who is the most important personage of the world's history, who is the center of the Scriptures?

And thirdly, Jesus is a being unique in the universe. God the pure spirit, is only God, and man, strange being that he is, is only man; but Jesus-the Scriptures require us to believe it-Jesus is both, truly God and truly man. I do not wonder that persons shrink away from that fact, it is stupendous, it is inconceivable in one sense, yet it is the plain teaching of God's Word. He is not simply a man, he has risen from us to divinity. He is not simply God taking upon him some outward semblance of humanity. He is truly God and truly man-truly each. His divinity: why friends, it lies plain on the surface of God's Word. Plain people, unsophisticated, who just read it right along and take it as it is, cannot well help seeing that. I pray you remember, God's word was not written for learned divines, for skillful commentators, for skeptical inquirers, God's word was written for the people. It is a handbook for practical guidance.

Therefore, whatever lies plain on the surface of God's Word, not in one phrase alone but in many places, that is exceedingly apt to be what is meant. Bible learning is all a good thing in its place, but after all if we want to get practical truth for our own guidance out of God's Word we shall be most likely to get its meaning more clearly and truly if we take the plain meaning of the passage that lies on the surface to any unsophisticated observer. You might as well pluck the throbbing heart out of this bosom and call what is left a living man as to take the divinity of Jesus Christ out of this book and call the rest God's Word. It is set forth in a thousand ways in all parts of the Scriptures and if anyone should ask me to mention three or four passages why here they are: "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us-full of grace and truth." And when Thomas after his long doubting was convinced, he cried, "My Lord and my God." If he to whom he said it had been a mere man, he would have shrunk from such an idolatrous utterance, but he commended him for saying it.

On the other hand the Scriptures as plainly set forth Jesus as having a human nature. The Christian world has long been half oblivious of the humanity of Christ. It is only until now that men are beginning to realize the humanity of him who is also divine-the carpenter of Nazareth who worked with hard hands over homely toil. A great many of those who try to lead the masses offer speculative delusions and talk against Christ and Christianity. Why don't they tell the people that the founder of Christianity was in the truest sense a working man and the friend of the poor? His humanity made it possible that he should be really tempted. Why could not any human nature be tempted? Our first parents in their Eden, in their purity, were tempted and fell. The high angels were tempted and fell out of heaven. The humanity of Christ could not morally be overcome with sin due to the influence of the Holy Ghost, yet the humanity of Christ could be tempted, and the temptation could be a reality. As man he could take Our place before God, he could suffer in our stead, he could die and rise again for us, and his divinity gave to that suffering, atoning death and resurrection a dignity and significance.

My friends, these souls of ours crave a perfect example. We need imperfect examples such as the Scriptures furnish and life furnishes us every day, of every grade and condition, but then our souls crave an idea of perfection, and there it is, a perfect example, at the summit of them all-a perfect example in the humanity of our Lord and Saviour. As man he gives assurance of his sympathy with his having been tempted only once like as we are, yet without sin. Oh, how wonderful is the fact! I often pause to dwell on it, that not only do tempted ones in this life bow safe around the glorious throne, but one who was tempted here sits upon the throne, and we know that he can sympathize with our infirmities, with our temptations, with our trials, and being unique, in all, exists the God-man. When he stood upon the Mount of Olives do you not remember how he said: "All authority and power in heaven and earth is given unto me," and "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world"? Who over all the nations, who over all ages, has a

right to think lightly of Jesus?

In the fourth place, Jesus has wrought a work that is unparalleled in its nature and in its importance. It is the most wonderful that has ever occurred in the universe. It is not creation, it is redemption. It is reconciliation between the holy ruler of the universe and the beings who have broken his law. A work so wonderful it is that the Scriptures give us an intimation that the most exalted creatures of God that do exist, look down amid all the world's wonders and wonder most at this. Nay, with the strange perversity which we human beings show about many things, there are many persons who cannot believe it because it is so wonderful. It seems impossible that the maker and ruler of the universe should have chosen such a stage to do these things. The theater is too small; the stage is too insignificant for such a drama as the atonement, they say. Well, nearly all the most important things in this world have had comparatively an unimportant theater. Daniel Webster had evidently thought of this when he wrote these words to be placed on his tombstone: "Philosophical argument, especially that drawn from the vestures of the material universe, and the apparent insignificance of our world have sometimes shaken my reason for the faith that is in me, but my heart has always assured and reassured me that the mission of Jesus Christ is a divine reality."

There is no need to have our faith shaken when we remember what I have said; the most insignificant spot of earth may be the scene of earth's greatest events. And this little earth came to be, as the Scriptures declare, the scene of the mightiest event of the universe, the reconciliation of God's creatures to himself.

Now once more, Jesus sustains, and must sustain, a personal relation to each one of us. I do not mean as a matter of history-there is a sense of course in which every person has a relation to each of us-but I mean as the loving Saviour. He must by the very necessity of things sustain a personal relation to each of us. We can as well shake off our own being as to prevent the necessity of that personal relation to him. We can determine its character, we can be his friends, by the grace of God, otherwise we are, we cannot but be his enemies. There are those who think they can live neutral with reference to Christianity, who think they can treat Christian mysteries, and people in general, with a certain respect, and be kind and courteous, and play neutral. But O my friends, it is not my saying, merely Jesus himself has said "he that is not with me is against me." "He that gathereth not with me, scattereth." There is no neutrality. We must be his friends or we are his foes, delude ourselves as we may.

The most important question of life is, "What is a man's relationship to Jesus?" And that turns upon another question, "What does a man think and feel about himself?" Jesus came not to call righteous men, but sinners to repentance. If I am a sinner, if I have been trying hard to do right, and have learned more and more how hard it is for me to do right, if my own conscience condemns, therefore God who is greater than my heart must condemn me. If I am troubled how my guilt shall be removed, and my sinfulness, then Jesus is for me, and then I am for Jesus. But if I feel that I am a good kind of person, fond of comparing myself with my fellow men, looking upon my faults as reasonable defects, then no wonder I get so fanciful theories about Jesus. Then I am not in the position from which he came to relieve me.

O my friends, what is your relation to Jesus? It is the question of all questions: what is your relation to Jesus? It is a question which you should settle in your honest heart, and the decision you reach you ought to proclaim to your fellow men: for he said: "Whosoever shall confess, I will myself confess, and whosoever shall deny me"-and to refuse to confess him is to deny him- "him will I also deny before the angels which are in heaven." O my friends, what is your personal relation to Jesus? It is a question which you can postpone now, if you will, but it will come back again and again. It is a question which will face

you. You will face it in the day for which all other days were made; in the day when before the Saviour, you shall stand, and he your judge. In that day every knee shall bow, and shall confess, willing or unwilling, that Jesus is Christ his Lord, to God the Father. O my friends, prepare for that day by turning to Christ now! What is your personal relationship to Jesus? Confess him now!

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