

# Christ as the Searcher of Hearts

by John Nelson Darby

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*The sermon emphasizes Christ's role as the Searcher of Hearts, calling believers to self-examination and true discipleship through the cross.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 139:23, Matthew 16:24, Mark 10:27, Luke 9:23, Hebrews 4:12

**Topics:** "Following Christ", "Heart Examination"

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## Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes that Christ, as the Searcher of Hearts, reveals the true state of humanity, showing that there is no inherent goodness in man apart from God. He illustrates how Christ's probing of our hearts leads to a deeper understanding of our need for grace and the necessity of taking up the cross to follow Him. Darby highlights the importance of self-examination and the dangers of allowing worldly affections to distract us from our relationship with God. He encourages believers to trust in Christ's love and to recognize that true life is found in being dead to the world and alive to God. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a heart fully surrendered to Christ, willing to follow Him despite the challenges of the world.

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## Transcript

### CHRIST AS THE SEARCHER OF HEARTS

MARK 10 : 1-46

IT is a wonderful thing that the Lord came into this world and took all our sorrows and trials, but was entirely above them all. He was thus able to take up everything that was of God, and at the same time to shew what the state of man really was, just as the word of God divides soul and spirit, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. As the perfect light and mind of God, it comes and dissects our hearts, recognising everything that is of God, and shewing what we are.

Here the Lord judges all that would attempt to take the cross in a legal sense, that which would deny God in natural goodness, and also the thought that there is some good in man. He has no idea of anything good in man for God, and at the same time all that is of God is put in its own proper place. He owns everything that God establishes in the world, and yet probes the heart to the bottom. There were some who condemned everything, as if God had made nothing good. God never denies nature, because He made it; but Christ goes deeper, and puts the probe to the centre of man's intents and thoughts, yet He knows how to divide between them, and thus shews His perfectness. He was the perfectly obedient Son, who must be about His Father's business. He had power to own everything that was of God, and, if there

was occasion, to be subject to it ; but He had power too to detect everything of man, and that we have to learn, to have ourselves totally and fully judged. There is progress in seeing it, but we cannot go to God at all unless self is judged. There is a danger too of not getting with God above the evil. Here the Lord, in the exercise of His own blessed grace, can take notice of His own works-all He has done and all He has made ; and it is just this One who can also discern what man is. He can say, " Consider the lilies " ; not that they were of any value. But I find the blessed Lord, the Man of sorrows, who felt the sin all around, who looked for comforters and found none, and (except where His grace wrought) getting nothing but hatred for His love, yet so completely with God practically (He was God over all) that He was above evil. That principle is fully manifested in Him, and is to be looked for in us. It is not condemning the sins of nature and recognising it, nor yet saying that man is all bad, or I falsify the holy nature of God. What meets the power of evil is, that He gave His life a ransom. But there is evil a around us, and it is apt to hinder our being gracious, and to get power over us, and that hinders our having power over it, and over ourselves, and judging ourselves, as well as presenting grace, and basking in the sunshine of God's favour.

Our natural tendency is to get pleasures for self. Innocent they may be, but they take the heart from God ; they are spoiled by sin. People ask the harm of these things. The question is, What use are you making of them, and where is your heart ? The moment there is a turning from the cross (death to everything), our Lord says, " Get thee behind me," for that is all He has. He is going to Jerusalem, and they are amazed, and as they follow they are afraid. There I get the way the cross makes me afraid of following Christ; but He says, If you do not take it up, you cannot be my disciple. The Lord judges man totally, and utterly; we cannot go too deep. People say, If man is not good, he can be made so. But the thing Christ brings us to is, " In me dwells no good thing." There is no good in talking of good fruit when the tree is bad; there are self-will and lusts. Then we see that before we take up the cross for ourselves there is the cross for us. He suffered, and gave His life a ransom. There my sins were put away, and the old nature judged. I have died , and my life is hid with Christ in God. I am alive to God, not to Adam. That separates me from the world. Christ is my righteousness and my life up there. He has given me His Spirit, and I look down from there in grace, being an object of His favour, at what is of His hand in the creation. When I have got out of it, I can look at it. He had a divine view of the world. He can judge man's heart as man's heart, and at the same time admire the beauty of the lilies. Though He was with God, and was God " He could not despise the work of His hand. Everything was corrupted, even the brute creation, through man ; but whenever anything had the stamp of God, He could see it. We have to learn this, and it is difficult ; but I do look that Christians should walk with God. Either a man is letting his mind go after what the flesh likes, or he is applying the cross to it. If you admire a flower you see, all right; but if you care for it, all wrong. I can see the hand of God in its beauty, but if I am thinking of the thing it is not the beauty, but my own will and inclination. The Lord runs the sharp edge of His word in, dividing between soul and spirit.

First, He takes up marriage, and says, God allowed divorce for the hardness of their hearts ; but it was not so at first. There is natural affection ; but if it gets hold of us it may become idolatry. A child or a husband may take our heart from God, but being without affection is one of the signs of the last times. In the last days men are not only not spiritual, but they are not natural. The Lord puts His seal on every relationship. It is an awful thing, even if a child is not converted, to see it failing in affection to its parent ; and the nearer the relationship, the more dreadful it is. God owns the relationships, and it is a sign of the last days to be wanting in the affections proper to them.

Then we get the Lord greatly displeased at the disciples sending away the children, not that there was no sin in the children, but they were the expression of what God had created -the confidingness of a child

without the distrust that grows up with one. The world lives in distrust (miserable at root), but that is not the case with a child. It has no distrust, but a disposition to believe everything (it often gets cheated) ; and the Lord says that is what He likes. Unless you receive the kingdom as a child you will not enter it.

Then I find a thoroughly lovely character, and the Lord "beholding him, loved him." It was not the love of God to the world, nor the special love of relationship and grace for His own ; but the Lord loved what was lovely - a ready, willing mind to learn everything. The young man had no idea of the ruin of man. He does not say, " What shall I do to be saved ? " or Christ would have given him no such answer. He takes him on the ground of a Jew (v. 19), and the young man answers, " All these have I observed from my youth." The Lord does not say, You have not; but beholding him, He loved him. He saw what was lovely in his character (and we ought to see natural loveliness) ; but his conscience must be touched, and his heart was unknown to himself " Sell whatsoever thou hast, and take ... up the cross," v. 21. He went away sorrowful. The instant the state is detected the loveliness vanishes. His character was lovely in its ingenuousness ; but when it is searched and detected his heart comes out as a thing in which there was nothing for God. He deceived himself as to man's state ; but there was natural loveliness in him (and we often meet unselfish, amiable characters). How does the Lord meet it ? He says, " There is none good save one, that is God." There is no such things as a good man in the world. You are totally on wrong ground. There is none good but God is a principle. Why do you call Me good if you come to Me as a man ? The Lord takes him up on the ground of law that he was on, and says, Don't say man is good, but keep the law.

Another thing comes out. The disciples say, " Who then can be saved ? " And the Lord tells them, " With men it is impossible." There is no such thing as being saved on man's ground ; but God can save by His Son. That is another thing (v. 27). By man it is impossible ; but the means of being saved has reached man. He can get eternal life ; but when his heart is detected it is totally wrong. This young man turned away with sorrow and grief; for his heart was with his money. The gospel does not deny natural loveliness ; but that will not do with God. It will not do for Him to have no vile ones. He looks for the vilest sinners (the thief on the cross, for instance), and takes them to paradise. He does not take the pretty flowers and leave the weeds. What man calls goodness is often abominable selfishness ; and they say, If that man does not go to heaven, who will ? They do not know the heart a bit. The supreme goodness of God takes up the one that will not have God and Christ, and will have his lusts and pleasures, and saves him. " All things are possible with God." The gospel does not build on what is there, but judges it. The flowers of a wild apple may be as pretty as others, but there is no fruit on it. What Christ says is, Where is your heart ? Have you not a will, and the thoughts of your heart and your conduct in everything moved by it ? And the answer of it is only hatred to God.

That is very humbling, but it puts the gospel on the right ground. There was unspeakable love to sinners, with all their sins. He was ever moved at oppression and sorrow-never at insult or outrage to Himself, but always moved with compassion for man-" Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ." He brings all this goodness to where we are, but He must detect the conscience. He will not build the goodness of God on ours, and deceive us. The Lord lays the young man's heart bare. He does not drive him away ; He never drove any one away ; but he went away because his heart was never reached. Self must be detected-" All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." When I learn His goodness in coming in grace into this world to win our hearts, I say, " Search me, O Lord, and try my heart." I know He has not come to impute sin, and I come into His presence with an open heart. The moment I fully trust this blessed love of Christ my place is that of the man to whom the Lord imputes no sin. He has given His

life a ransom, and put it all away. He lays bare our hearts, but gives us confidence ; so that we desire to have everything out before God, and the whole ground we stand on before Him is " truth in the inward parts." He stood where I was, and now I stand where He is, and that is the only place I have before God. The Christian stands between accomplished redemption and the glory, at liberty with God and from the world and sin. We may fail and grieve the Spirit, but there we are set.

The disciples are thinking, What is the meaning of this, that this lovable character is driven away, and cannot come to God ? Well, the very grace that has come to seek and save, drives away the natural heart because it cannot bear it. It detects the heart, and must claim it for God both as Creator and Redeemer. They were still looking to tack the new thing on to the old, looking for the glory in a carnal way. The Lord says, You must take up the cross and follow me. If you follow Me, I can give you the cross ; that is all I have to give you now. He takes the lowly place as to man and the world ; death was all He had for those who followed Him (v. 38-40). Can you drink of the cup that I drink of?" They say, Yes," deceiving themselves. He says, " Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of " (not atonement, but suffering) -you will have to suffer if you take up the cross and follow Me really. You shall be like Me, and close to Me too ; but what you must reckon on is the cross, if you are going to glory. " If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour." Not that there is not joy, " a hundred fold now in this time ; but He says, I must have your hearts : I have to die, and if you are going to follow me, the road I am going is to the cross, that is the path I am going to the glory. Are you ready to take up your cross, or have you a question if the cross is right, or if there is any other road ? The Lord knew none, and I know none.

There is another point. If we were perfect, all would be simple ; but we have a great deal to learn and to detect and correct. At this time the Lord set His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem, and the disciples want to know the meaning of it. "The Jews sought to stone thee, and goest thou thither again ?" "As they followed they were afraid." Not only will and lust were detected, but they were afraid of following Christ. Do not you know what that is ? The instant you are following Christ there is the consciousness that the world is against you. Nicodemus went to the Lord by night because he was afraid to go by day. There is the instinctive consciousness that the world is against us, and we are afraid to confess Christ in our habits, our houses, etc. It is very base, but there it is. Paul says what things were gain to him he counted loss for Christ ; he did not go away sorrowful. He says, I am glad to get rid of it (it is dross and dung) " to win Christ." There was the energy and power of the Spirit. Did Paul follow trembling ? Not at all. Five times forty stripes save one-beaten, stoned, all sorts of things 1 It was all on the road, and he had real liberty, " always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus." These disciples did not dare leave the Lord ; they kept in the way, for here was eternal life in Him and nowhere else ; but they had no liberty. When He spoke of the cross Peter says, " That be far from thee " ; and the Lord says, " Get thee behind me, Satan "-the very man who had confessed Him as the Christ, and to whom He had said, " Blessed art thou." But if he will not take up the cross, he is " Satan." " Thou art an offence unto me." The cross deals with all that is of man, and where there is the willing spirit and blessed free liberty with God, the power of Christ rests upon us, and it is no sacrifice to give up human righteousness, or all I possess if need be, that I may win Christ ; they are only weights as I run the race.

Natural affection we are. to have by the power of God; but the Lord is in heaven, and the cross is the path, because though we are in a world where there are a thousand needed things, and all richly to enjoy, when it is a question of what our hearts are, there is none good. Christ has been rejected, and I am dead to the world, sin, and the law, and alive to God. It should be so more practically every day with willing hearts. Our

steps are feeble, but He shews us the way, and we delight in His love. Of course the Spirit reproves us, instead of bringing us joy, if we are grieving Him.

How far have our hearts believed this voice of the blessed Son of God in such love, when He puts forth His own sheep, going before them, meeting the dangers and leading them in the path ? How far are our hearts in truth and simplicity disposed to follow Him, to think His love not mistaken in the path He has marked out ? It is real deliverance from the flesh ; but we must trust His love. When my heart thoroughly trusts Christ, it is His cross and His reproach ; and it has the sweetness of Christ, and all is sweet (we may be cowards in it), and we judge everything that hinders His leading us in the path.

The Lord give us to trust Him, that we may have courage to follow Him, and learn what this poor world is!

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