

The Birth of Christ

by Leonard Ravenhill

The sermon emphasizes the importance of the incarnation, virgin birth, and resurrection in understanding Jesus' mission and the Christian life, highlighting the need for humility and surrender.

Duration: 53:51

Scripture: Isaiah 7:14, John 1:14, Philippians 2:7

Topics: "Christ", "Incarnation", "Humility in Service"

Description

Leonard Ravenhill emphasizes the miraculous nature of Christ's birth, highlighting the significance of the virgin birth and the incarnation as central to Christian faith. He reflects on the humility of Jesus, who came into the world not with pomp but as a servant, and stresses that the true essence of Christianity is not in philosophy but in the life of Christ living within believers. Ravenhill challenges the church to embrace the supernatural and to recognize that Jesus' coming was a divine gift meant to restore God's image in humanity, rather than merely to save from hell. He calls for a deeper understanding of what it means to follow Christ, urging believers to live in humility and service, just as Jesus did.

Transcript

Not all preachers have the same problems, any more than all people have the same problems, but I've been with preachers when they say, you know, I haven't got a word for Sunday, I just don't know which way to go, don't know what to give the folk. This usually is solved about this time of the year because, of course, we come to the Advent season, the, I like to think of it as the adventure of the Lord Jesus into this world in which we live. And there's an endless variety of subjects that can be dealt with at this time of the year and I guess a lot of them are profitable, or all of them should be profitable.

And there's no question that somebody's going to lay to the point about the Virgin Mary and somebody else will take up the study of a young man who was baffled, young Joseph not knowing what was going on with her, and he must have had an awful lot of questions and had to meet the in-laws and the out-laws and ask a few things about the baby that was coming and that must have been pretty rough. And there are many, many that, as I say, there are so many different aspects of this coming of Jesus. Some will dwell on the angels and others will dwell on other aspects.

But I was thinking how wonderful it really is that time is divided by a babe, not a bomb. The Bible is divided by a babe, not a bomb. It's the most stupendous miracle.

It's very difficult for me, anyhow, to try and find which is the greatest miracle. I don't know if you can say there is a greatest miracle. This miracle of Jesus coming into the world is what the theologians call the incarnation.

But you see, we live in days that are very tricky. I tease folk about that horrible thing called the Living Bible because one thing they've done there in the prophecy of Isaiah, they have eliminated that the Virgin shall be with child, it's a young woman. There are theologians who say I believe in the incarnation but not the virgin birth.

You can't divorce the one from the other. It isn't that Jesus just had an extra endowment of the Holy Spirit above, say, John Baptist or above some other man in the Old Testament. He was very God of very God and it makes all the difference in the world that we stand by the virgin birth.

And I thought of it this way, you see, you've got links in this chain, obviously. The first thing is the incarnation. As Wesley put it so beautifully, God contracted to a span.

Incomprehensibly made man. The Bible says that the heaven of heavens cannot contain him. Well, how do you press him into a virgin's womb? You see, science, you've got to leave it at the other side of the door.

It can ask all the questions, ridicule us all it likes. But it does so happen that in the Christian revelation we do believe in the supernatural, at least we should. And if the church isn't supernatural, it's superficial anyhow.

And I don't know, I've said to you, I don't know any church on earth where every gift of the Spirit operates. I wish I did. And next week I'm going to talk about gifts of the Spirit, not in the area you think either, in another area, entirely different.

All concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. But the incarnation is God contracted to a span. Another verse of Wesley says, He laid his glory by and he wrapped him in our clay.

God's love gift to us was gift wrapped in flesh and blood. There's another way that God could give it. If God had given Gabriel, if God had given an archangel, that would be very wonderful.

But God gave himself. God so loved the world, he gave his only begotten Son. And so you have again this mystery of the incarnation which culminates of course in the resurrection.

If you don't have the incarnation, you can't have the resurrection. If you don't have a resurrection, the incarnation is not complete. Now I guess I have said this many times, and I suddenly discovered sometimes I make mistakes.

It's very humiliating, but sometimes I do. But, you know, we stress the fact, we say, you see, he was born for our sin. Right.

When Jesus came to us, God gave his Son in birth. In his birth, he was God's gift to us. In his death, it was God's gift for us.

I don't see any problem with the virgin birth. After all, almighty God made Adam, the first Adam, as the Word of God calls him, without a mother. Why couldn't he make the last Adam without a father? There's no problem.

I don't believe that deity has any problems. If I can step back, I say I believe the biggest headache to God, if I could use that right now, is his church. I think we've potted around for 2,000 years and haven't yet come into the riches that there are in Jesus Christ.

So God didn't give Jesus to redeem us from hell. Forget it. That's a fringe benefit.

The work of Jesus Christ was to restore the image of God in us. That, that other thing, saving us from hell. Amazing as it is, but it is not the supreme work of God.

Now, after the Holy Spirit conceived Jesus in the matrix of the Virgin Mary, you know, I don't know why we sit down. I, honest to goodness, I think we're sheer lazy that we sit down. I think we should stand and sing every hymn with majesty and dignity.

After all, we're not in a club. We're not with a bunch of sinners outside. We're talking about the Holy Being that came into the world.

We're talking about the King of kings and the Lord of lords. And, and everything about God is majestic. The Holy Spirit brooded over the world.

It was a piece of clay in the womb of the universe. And the Holy Spirit brooded over it. And what did it become? It became a world.

The same Holy Spirit that brooded over chaos and brought cosmos, that same Holy Spirit brooded over the matrix of the Virgin Mary in Jesus Christ was born. The same Holy Spirit. Now, I, I could dramatize this.

I, uh, I'd rather like to do it. I'm not going to do it, but I'd like to. I'll give you a hint at it.

But, you know, I, I like to think of Jesus lying on a slab, stone cold. And the devil goes in and he says, you know what? He's dead. He's as cold as the slab he's lying on.

And you know what? We've only got about 30 more seconds to hold him there. If we can hold him there. This is the first countdown in history.

Not Cape Canaveral. Forget it. They're 2,000 years behind.

Science is always behind. It took the scientists 2,000 years to find Jesus. The shepherds found him by revelation.

The scientists didn't find him for two years. And when you see a little cliché or whatever you call it up the street with wise men buying at the stable, put a match to it. And quote me for it.

They go, they never went to the stable anyhow. The wise men went to the home. And they saw the young child.

It says they went to the house and saw the young child. The shepherds went to the manger and saw the babe. There's a great deal of difference.

Science is late. All right. The first countdown was that resurrection morning.

I don't know how you are. I've not been feeling so good today. I'm, I'm feeling rough to tell you the truth.

I've had all kinds of sickness and a bad night and all the rest of it. Okay. But you know what I'm doing right now? At this moment, I'm hanging on the resurrection life of Jesus Christ.

It's the only life I know right now. The resurrection. All right.

Satan says, I've just been in and seen Jesus and he's dead. Now, if we can hold him there 30 more seconds, we can damn the whole human race. Nobody has a chance.

You see, the apostle Paul builds a great pyramid of truth. Fourteen epistles if you take the epistle to the, to the Hebrew. There's one of his which I do.

And he turns it all upside down and he balances on the point and he says, Listen, if there's no resurrection, you're still in your sins. You better forget it all. And so in that last split second, when Satan said, I've got it all.

I'm going to damn the human race. Boy, this is great. And do you know what happened? The Holy Ghost just, in fact, in use of words, sneaked in and touched Jesus.

And Jesus jumped up. Because it says in Romans 8, doesn't it? The spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead. I believe the devil went howling down hell.

I still think that. I sometimes lay on my bed at night and say, Lucifer, you're still howling. Jesus told it on me at the very last moment.

And one of these days, the church is going to wake up and realize there are riches in Jesus Christ. Because God has not merely given us redemption. He's not merely given us gifts of the Spirit as we trade them.

He says he has with him freely given us all things. Now, do you think we're ever going to explore all, all in that? As I said to you repeatedly, I don't care who you are. You may be a washerwoman and hallelujah if you are.

Praise God. I love you as much. Or a scientist.

But you've only the same book that I have. Stimmy only had the same Bible I had. John Wesley only... Well, what did they do? They explored it.

You know, John Wesley was a marvelous man. He's English. And he was only about five foot one.

And he was a scholar. And his family had more influence in England than anybody except the royal family. One day he found a scrap of paper.

It had been written by a little French lady. When was he converted? 1735, 1635. Petite little French lady.

Fell in love. And left a love letter which was dangerous. But you see, she fell in love with Jesus and left the wall with a love letter.

And in that love letter she says this. Come, Savior Jesus from above. Assist me with thy heavenly grace.

Empty my heart of earthly love. Do you know what most of us want? We want clothing before we've been stripped. We want filling before we've been emptied.

We want resurrection life before we die. And God doesn't play. And therefore you find out that I have a lot of big meetings.

Casualties all over the place. All right, she says. Assist me with thy heavenly grace.

Empty my heart of earthly love and for thyself prepare a place. John Wesley got that and he said this is fantastic. It's almost like scripture.

And then he came to the next stanza. If that's a big one, listen to this. Nothing on earth do I desire but thy pure love within my breast.

This only this will I require and freely give up all the rest. Wealth, honor, pleasure and what else this short enduring world can give. Well, it's easy to say that.

You see, Dr. Tovey used to say, Len, most Christians don't tell lies. You just sing them in church. You know, what a whole realm of nature mine.

It's too wet to go out Wednesday night to a prayer meeting. Well, I can't go to So and So. No, I can't do it.

John Wesley says, is that what it really means? And he took it and pasted it in some book somewhere and he saw that it got into the first Methodist hymn book which was written, I guess, somewhere about, I don't know, 17... Do you know? You don't. 17 and 38. 17 to... 60, somewhere around there.

Anyhow. Nothing on earth do I desire. Do you ever have trouble with the hymns you've sung? Do you ever take a hymn like, um... Jesus, you lover of my soul, where... Again, Charles Wesley says, thou, O Christ, art all I want.

But apart from that, I'm going to make it. Thou, O Christ... You see, that's the whole explanation of redemption. That Jesus didn't tag anything and he left everything behind in eternity and he was stripped and he came down in our flesh.

Robed himself in our flesh. God contracted to a spam and incomprehensibly made man. Well, that was something, wasn't it? I've reminded you so many times.

To me, the simple, beautiful, challenging, humiliating life story of little Joseph is up here and his daddy says, take some bread and cheese to your brothers in Dauphin and when he goes, they put him down in a pit and then they sell him for the issue of the likes and they take him down to Egypt. In Egypt, they put him down in a prison and in prison, the bottom falls out and almighty God leaves him there for 13 years. One of the things that I do not understand, and I'll show you ignorance because you don't, I do not understand the mercy and patience of God.

If you're ever tempted to be impatient that almighty God isn't speeding things up... Do you know what I think of? I think of Moses on the backside of the desert. He could have said every night, Lord, 10,000 people have died today in Egypt. They've been whipped and they've been bruised and killed.

Don't you care about it? You do that, and when you see somebody, you look at them very sweet amongst them and say, does Christ live in you? As I said sometimes in meetings, next time they have a meeting in your church, don't stand up and say, I'm saved and then, I went to a dry old church where I came to this church, I got the baptism and everything's been wonderful, or if you're Nazarene, I got sanctified. Don't do it that way. Just stand up and say sweetly, well, friends, it's wonderful to be here tonight.

You know, Christ lives in me. And sit down. Maybe your wife will nudge you and say, Jack, when did that happen? I didn't know.

I've never dreamed I was living with Jesus. You mean that was Jesus that barked his head off last night? That was Jesus that blasted the door? Well, that's what it means. Christianity is not a philosophy, it's a life.

And the very Son of God who came into that world, John, says that when you are really born again of the Spirit of God, that's a fantastic phrase, isn't it? It says that God is born in you. He that hath the Son. Not he that's repented of his sins.

Not he that's joined the church. Not he that's been through the tank and paid his tithe. He doesn't say that.

It says that if you and I are really born again, we've repented of our sins and Christ has come, then Christ has come to live in our hearts by faith. And there is no greater thing this side of eternity than a heart which is full of God. You can have all the riches you want, I don't care.

All the positions and possessions. You won't make me envious. But if a man has more of God and he knows some secrets I don't want, I want to get up near to him and say, well brother, will you share those things with me? Where did you find them? How did you discover them? And nine cases out of ten, they come out of crisis hours in the life of Jesus.

As I've told you before, he had twelve disciples but they weren't all the same. Don't you fool yourself, if you join the church, everybody's the same. Forget it.

Theologically, yes, they'll sign on the dotted line. Out of the twelve, what did he do? He had three that he took with him on the Mount of Transfiguration into the Garden of Gethsemane. There was one that he talked to out of the three.

God is very selective. He took seventy out of the children of Israel. Then he took Moses and Aaron up on the mountain and then he says, Moses, you've got to leave the boys here just to deal with you and I. And that's when it's across.

You see. If the Lord says, well I'm going to get all the Herb and Sammy and Joe and let them go together. But he says, just a minute, Herb, I'm taking you this way.

Joe, I'm taking you this way. Sammy, I'm taking you the other way. Oh, if God would only duplicate it.

Huh? If the Lord would only lift the pattern off next year and say, you know, raise me what you're going to do the first three months, the next, the next. Boy, I'd get all geared up and all excited for it. And he says, now we see through a glass garland.

No favoritism, no revelations. But all saints are not the same saints. We don't all mature the same in 24 hours.

Some of us still drag our feet. As I said to you, I know people have been saved for 50 years, about six months old yet. I know people have only been saved a year, they're 30 years old.

They've come to maturity. They've pressed on as the Apostle Paul said. But you see, this is progressive humility.

We've been talking, if you weren't here, in the last two or three weeks about what we call the greatest sermon ever preached by the greatest man that ever lived, the Sermon on the Mount. And it begins right at that sore spot. Blessed are the poor.

If it started, blessed are the pure, we'd all back off, we wouldn't have a chance. Blessed are the poor, isn't that where Jesus started? He laid aside his glory. John says, the word was made flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld his glory later on the Mount of Transfiguration.

But when he comes into the world, he comes dispossessed, what the theologians call the kenosis theory. He emptied himself of all but love. Now, but the word says, being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself.

You know, Jesus didn't have a good start, not anywhere at all. After all, sure, he's coming into the world. Okay? We're looking back two thousand years, we're very smart with our hindsight.

But what about that bunch whirling round him? Did you hear about this baby that was born? Yeah, I heard they took him in the temple and there's an old lady there but she's not much, she's a hundred and, you know, she's a bit senile. And Simeon, well, he's getting up in years and it's a bunch of old folk there. After all, how many received him the first time he came? Not very many.

They didn't send a procession down Main Street, he came stealing into the world with a shard of illegitimacy overhead. You can pick books up now where it says that Jesus was conceived by a German soldier because there was a squad of German soldiers in Jerusalem at that time, in that area, and he was conceived by a German, which is poor nonsense, of course. Alright, he lays aside his glory and he wraps him in our clay.

And all he has is a bunch of nobodies in the temple that say, you know what? History was made today. I think they must have been thrilled to death. The old man says, Lord, I've lived all my life for this, now you can take me right now, I've seen him.

Isaiah wanted to see him. Wasn't it Jacob that said, I shall see him, but not now, I shall behold him, but not nigh, a star shall arise out of Jacob that shall rule my people Israel. And he says, you know what? Everything that was promised from the first moment that Adam sinned, it's all fulfilled in that little baby I saw yesterday.

He's going to change the whole history of the whole world. You know, sometimes we say that he was a lamb slain before the foundation. This picture doesn't say that.

It says the lamb slain from the foundation. It says he knew us before the foundation of the world. I don't see any reason for him to be slain before the foundation of the world.

What joy would God get in that? But from the moment Adam sinned from the foundation, then the Redeemer is there. I tell you, I think those men must have gone, I remember somebody was talking the other day about Gypsy Smith. Well, I had dinner with him often when I was at Cliff College.

And he used to say, the big monstrous man, he used to say, you know, Dr. Chadwick, the night I got saved, if the road had been paved with eggs all the five miles home, I wouldn't have walked in one of them. I was so late. I'd lost my burden.

I felt so thrilled that I'd become a new creature in Christ Jesus. Well, again, I say that I think that these people there in that historical setting must have felt just the same. He only had a bunch of people that weren't famous or great.

After all, he didn't have a high priest backing him. He didn't have any of the deacons or elders, anybody else backing. He just stole quietly into the world.

And then a little later, you remember that Hugh and the Crown, they said, did you hear the news now? Oh, there's a man down in the wilderness there, he's fantastic. Oh, what seminary is he from? Well, as a matter of fact, they're trying to trace him right down now. They're having a committee go to see him and ask him where he got his credentials.

But I'll tell you something. I'd often wish I'd lived in the day when Jeremiah was around or I wish I'd heard somebody like Elijah. But man, this man is a flaming prophet.

He's even pointing a finger at the king. He's no respect for anybody. Man, he's just tearing the world apart.

And somebody said, are you the news man? He said, no, no, I'm just the road maker. I'm the fellow mentioned in Isaiah 35. Every valley shall be exalted.

Every hill shall be pulled down. Every crooked place shall be made straight. You know, I get a thrill out of that.

God didn't send Gabriel and Michael the archangel to prepare the way for what he sent a humble man in flesh and blood. They didn't have a suit worth 50 cents on him. And he'd solve the problem of his food bill, too.

He was strange in his dress. He had an old shirt round him and a pig of camel's hair. That's something.

And strange in his diet. He ate the locusts. And strange in his doctrine.

He said, repent. And they hadn't heard that word. And this is the man who is the advanced man for Jesus.

This nut. Oh goodness, Jesus, he could have done it better. I mean, after all, why didn't you let him preach just once in the temple and tear the place apart? I mean, he's down there amongst the weeds and the coal and the waters and everything else.

Is that all there is to it? And the Lord says, will you just keep this in your mind, my ways are not your ways, and my thoughts are not your thoughts. You like to do everything pompously. You like to do everything as a big storm, a blast of trumpets and rolling out the rain.

I don't do it that way. I don't see the sun get up too many mornings these days, but I watch it go to bed. And when I see it, I'm always glad it didn't get up with a blast of trumpets.

We do it that way. Our boys on TV call God a storm. Boy, they'd have Gabriel and all the rest every morning blasting the trumpets.

See the sunrise! And God lets that majestic thing just come out of the darkness and rule the world and slip back. No noise. No noise.

No noise when the Christ was born again. Oh, a bit of a noise show down in the wilderness there when John Baptist is raising his voice. But you see, again, it's consistent with everything that God does.

God is doing this on the poverty line. There's no showmanship. Now, what I want to do is quote now and quote the text for you, in case you forget it.

Jesus said, whether it is greater that he that sitteth at meat or he that serveth, is not he that sitteth at meat, but I am among you as him that serveth. I guess you could hear a hundred sermons this Christmas and not hear one on the serving Christ. We'll all be talking about the trumpet sounding, the herald angels singing, and all the other things.

And Jesus came in the world specifically to do one thing. He says, I am among you that him that serveth and this other blessed wonderful thing, he rises from supper and laid aside his garments and took a towel and girded himself and washed their feet in case you forget, forgot, in the previous chapter somebody washed his. But they didn't wash them the same way.

They anointed them. But they didn't anoint, he didn't anoint anybody's feet. Oh no, he didn't anoint their feet.

And Jesus took a towel. I wonder what his father thought as he looked down from heaven. I wonder what the angels thought that they escorted him and they went back lonely and said, we're not going to be seen for 40 years.

Heaven's going to be empty. Do you ever think about the loneliness of God in eternity? And Jesus took a towel. Jesus is everything so simple.

I wish he was going for a bit of style, don't you? I mean, fancy going into Jerusalem on a donkey. At least he could have got a white charger and gone into Jerusalem on it. Fancy borrowing a boat from a guy.

He could have walked on the water. Oh, they're so miracle hungry a miracle. If a miracle doesn't happen in every meeting, oh boy, we're going away.

Jesus walked on the water once. He went by a boat other times. He didn't do miracles for the fun of doing them.

So he goes down the street on the back of a donkey. He goes to the upper room, which was barely furnished. He goes to a woman at the well and says, borrow, borrow.

He was always borrowing. Somebody once told a marriage story. The eldest daughter of the father of the Salvation Army, William Boole's lovely daughter.

I met her a lot of times and she said, you know, people say to me, you're always, always taking what people give you. She said, yes, so did my Lord. He was always borrowing.

He borrowed a body to come into the well. A body was out prepared for him. He borrowed a tomb to die in.

He borrowed a cup to drink at the well. He borrowed a boat to go to the sea. He borrowed a horse and a donkey to ride on.

He borrowed, he borrowed. He was so broke one day, he says, young fellow, do you have a penny? He says, render the seeds of the things of the seasons. I've said to you, I'm not so sure all these tax exempt stunts are legal according to the script, according to the government they are.

What's the government got to do with it? Jesus says, render the seeds of the things of the seasons as well as the things of the spirit. That's something else that you owe me. But Jesus, he doesn't do it with any style and pomp and circumstance.

It's poverty all the way. And he took a towel. I'd like to see him taking that jacket off, you know, and laying it on one side of his upper garment and taking a towel and putting it round his waist.

If you go to England, you'll notice when a man becomes a bishop they give him a yard of black cloth with black tapes on and he puts it round the front and he must wear it all the time to denote that he's a servant. But I suggest if you're trying to get him to serve you, I don't have another problem. He likes wearing the insignia.

I was telling Herb about a man, we have a friend, a good friend here, Bob and Bev know him, called Gordon Olsen. He's a very brilliant man. And he was asked to go and speak at the induction of a very fine young man.

A young man who had made his way in college and come out shining, you know, got straight A's and everything from college, he went to university, university, he went to Bible school, Bible school, he went to seminary, he jumped ahead of everybody, lustrous and everybody says oh, this man, he's going up like that. And they asked Gordon Olsen to speak at his induction. The church was crowded.

Granny was there, she couldn't keep her eyes dry. The little baby, she used to nurse and now she has her collar backwards way. Don't comment on that, it's perfect.

But anyhow, and all the signatories were there and the bishop and everybody was there. The mother was there, she couldn't keep her eyes dry. This boy that cut all the out, you should see his bedroom, all the different societies he was in and everything.

My friend Olsen stood up and said to him, young man, this is why you hit the dust today. You lose all your glory and importance, you become a servant. If not, you're not a true minister.

And he labored the point. You forget all about those diplomas, forget all about those things. If you have the nature of Jesus Christ, your life isn't your own from this moment, you're a servant.

And a servant has no rights to say, well maybe I'll do it in the morning. He has no right, he has no will, he's in total submission. And he went down the line like that.

You see, when we think of a king, we think of a king with privilege and honor and, well, the Queen of England, if you happen to go to England, watch out because if the royal carriage knocked you down, the royal royal voice, you can't claim against the Queen of England. And so you better watch out. He has certain prerogatives.

Jesus laid all his prerogatives on one side and he took the form, not of a king, but he took the form of a servant. There's a wonderful hymn written by, um, who wrote when actually, Isaac Watts, Isaac Watts. A servant's form he wore and in his body bore out dreadful curse on Calvary.

He, like a victim, stood and poured his sacred blood to save, to set us guilty captives free. He started off with a great hymn this afternoon, didn't he? Did he really mean it? I have a parody on that, Take My Life and Let It Be. I say sometimes we should think it like this.

Take my wife and let her be consecrated Lord to thee. Take her moments and let her days. I'm busy otherwise.

It's got to about that in most churches anyhow. But you see that hymn goes down and it gets tighter as you get down till it was take my silver and my gold. That's not too difficult.

Take my will and let her be Lord to I sometimes it like this. It's got to about that in churches anyhow. see that hymn goes it gets tighter as you get down till it was take my silver and my gold.

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churches be Jesus laid aside his glory. He asked for no priorities, he asked for no privileges. Again he has a bunch of people like this, and I think John Baptist could have made it a lot better for him, but he didn't.

That's my puny thinking, you see. If people had said, you know, I have no doubt about it, I was down there yesterday, you should have seen John's healing line. I'm not lying.

Never seen miracles like that. You know what the Bible says? It's a tough one. It says he was filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother's womb.

It says Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost. It says his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost. And it says the man in the temple was filled with the Holy Ghost, the spirit of the living God was upon him.

And he never did a miracle. It says it in big bold letters, John did no miracle. But I'll tell you what, I'll sacrifice every miracle you've ever seen, and I don't care who's done them in this country, but I'll sacrifice every one of them to do what he did.

He didn't straighten a crooked arm, he didn't put a sight in a blind eye, he didn't unplug a deaf ear, he didn't raise a dead man. I'll tell you what he did, he raised a dead nation. And you can talk as much as you like about recovering the economy and all the baloney we're going to have next year, but unless almighty God breathes on this nation, we're sunk, we're finished.

Finale. Wasn't it Thomas Hill who came to this country and said I don't know why? How is it a little country, a new born country, top of the life twice in a row? So he went to the universities and he went everywhere and he said I can't find the answer. Just before he was leaving somebody took him to a church.

And he said I've got to stay next week. And do you know what he said? Oh, this took a little bit. He said every church I went, I'd a flaming preacher in the pulpit.

And he went back to France and said the spirit of America is very easy to explain. She's a great nation because she's a good nation and when she ceases to be a good nation, she'll become an obsolete nation. And we're talking last week again, weren't we, about righteousness exalting a nation.

Not recovering the economy, righteousness. Legislation which is as righteous as it could be under God. We need some legislators like that surely.

But you see, it is in a sense, it's typical again of the Lord Jesus isn't it, that he took a towel and girded himself. Peter didn't like that. Oh my, you know I did it for just being arguing.

Well when he goes, who's going to run the kingdom? Peter, you're no good, you're Willie Warren, you know, you're wishy-washy. What about you Thomas? Well you doubt a bit too much. What about you? And there was a struggle amongst them and so Jesus says well I'll show you what greatness is.

And he took a towel and he girded himself. And he washed their feet. And Peter seems to have got hold of it.

He says Lord, don't just wash my feet, wash me right from the top to the bottom. I need a real good bath. Clean me up, get me straightened out.

I think it's nice when people are as humble and as straightforward as that. Lord, I'm not asking you, I mean I can manage most of my life. I mean like if you'll take care of my sins, I'll take care of finances.

Well what did you sing this afternoon? Take my will, take my silver and my gold, take my heart, the seat of my affections. You see it's poverty the whole way to Jesus. The disciples went to a house at night, nothing wrong with that.

He went up to the mountain to pray. I don't know what kind of bed they had, they certainly weren't beauty rest, but he says I'll go to the mountain. That final opportunity he gave them, they must have really, as we would say, nearly driven him up the wall.

They hardly seemed to understand, they were so slow. He said to them, didn't he, oh fools and slow of heart to believe. Now I don't know how often you go to the judgment seat, you should gravitate that.

Do you know what, I tried to see myself at the judgment seat and God calling witnesses against me and finally he calls the devil and the devil says well I'll tell you something. Ravenhill did a bit of exciting preaching and this, that and the other, but he never worried me too much. He didn't ask too much power over me.

He didn't embarrass me too much. Am I as poor as that? This is one place where it's great to be poor. That's what he thought.

You remember that church in the Revelation? Oh, I don't know, nearly everybody goes to the first church in town, don't they? They go to the first, the politicians go there, the business people there, everybody goes to the first church. I preach in the first church, I don't often get in, and I got one in a while ago and I said to the folk, I wouldn't go in this church for anything. I said well why not? It's the first.

I said yeah, but the church says the first is the last. I think we ought to turn around and get to the back of the line a bit, you know. No, no, no, no.

There was no priority like that that Jesus wanted. There was no seeking anything for himself. And this church in the Revelation says, you know what, maybe two thousand years from now people will talk about the church and say, you know, that was the greatest church of the seven churches.

And they had all these folk, let me lift them off. And then you get the other side of the picture. You know what she said, I'm rich, increasing good, I'm in need of nothing.

Well boy, you get it made, don't you, when you're like that. She said that, she said I'm rich, increasing good, I'm in need of nothing. And God said, alright, let me turn it around on you.

Thou knowest not, thou art naked, and blind, and wretched, and miserable. It was the same church. It was as though you're looking at a piece of paper on one side and you say, well that's what's written on it there, that's what's written on it there.

And this judgment of herself, you know why, she judged herself by others. And the Apostle Paul kicks against that, he says, listen, don't you start measuring yourself with others and you'll all drown about you. Because if you do that, I remember going to Australia, Northern Australia, the Aborigines are there, and I guess they're just about seven feet high, majestic men and women, man, they were beautiful.

You know, I had to look up like this, I got my neck aching there, marvellous looking people, all giant, a whole race of them. But if you drop me in the Arturi forest in Africa, where the tallest man there is about four foot eight, I'm a giant, I look down a little short. A massive man like me, with a chest like this, I look down on those little pigments, you never saw anybody like me, did you? But when I catch the plane, I'm going to look up there and that guy's going to say, you little skirt, what are you doing round there? Oh, well, of course, everything's for relatives.

It's beautiful, I think. Paul says, you know, if we judge ourselves, we will not be judged. If you don't want any big shocking exposure at the judgment seat, judge yourself every day, like some of you ladies weigh yourself every day.

But be quite sure of this, will you, that one of the greatest marks, as we've said, in the Great Sermon on the Mount, what is the first thing? Blessed are the poor, okay. What's the second? Blessed are they that mourn, they mourn over their poverty. And because they're poor and they've mourned over their poverty, blessed are the meek.

And Jesus was the embodiment of meekness. You know, when we're kids, we think all the great men are the rich men of a famous name. Boy, you want to be somebody like that.

I lost my hero worship years ago. I like to see meek men. That didn't mean they're weak, because Jesus was the strongest man that ever lived in that sense, in character, in virtue, but he was meek.

And he says, come on, you bunch of folk, you're trying to kill yourself this way, and you thought you were somebody if you had that, and if you possessed that and wrote your name, get it off. Are you going to stay in the material kingdom or come inside? Because in my kingdom, blessed, blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. You know, if you have a meek and a quiet spirit, and that's what the apostle Paul says, he says, I beseech you by the gentleness and meekness of Christ.

Oh, I think there must have been something so sublimely beautiful about Jesus, about the way he spoke, even his enemies said. He's not like the other guys, those other raving fellows down there, and they tell you how to obey the Lord and what you have to do. But you know, there's something about him, his words are weighty, they have authority.

And you know, the next nearest man that comes to that is again the apostle Paul. I had a man who came to see me a while ago, he was a friend of some great big people in this country, and in the course of talking, he was talking about being spiritual, and if you're spiritual, everything will come your way, you've got a bigger house, a bigger car, a bigger income, everything else. And we said, what do you think of that? He said, below me.

Not spiritual foundation for it. Oh, Mr. So-and-so, I don't care what he teaches. After Jesus, the poorest man that ever lived spiritually was the apostle Paul.

I mean, one Corinthians 4, he says, unto this present hour we suffer need. My sweet daughter will tell you that every day without missing, I go into the Gulag Archipelago. I go to the hell holes of the earth.

You don't need to, but I'm going to go there. I see how wealthy I am compared to them. I see the misery that they're in.

I think of the Church of God that's suffering tonight, and you can't say it won't come our way. I remind you again that in this great book, Schaeffer and Fritzl and says that in China, 800 years ago, every city and village had a thriving New Testament Church, 800 years ago. I remind you that God is married to Israel, and he divorced her, and he's letting her get kicked around like a football for the last 2,000 years.

Five times in the history of Israel, she's almost been annihilated. They've been reduced to less than a million people. They're back to about 16 million now.

We blasted, or somebody did, killed about 6 million in Buchenwald and Dachau and so forth. Here they are. They're a headache.

They're the headache of the nation. You curse them, God has blessed them. You bless them, God has cursed them.

They're an enigma. And for two thousand years, God has let that nation be kicked around like a football, and they're having more travel than anybody under the sun, and they're going to have more, because I don't think they've got to the time of Jacob's trouble yet. If God, who loved Israel like that, let it go through that suffering, do you think he's going to put a big fence around America? Or not one of our darling hairs are going to suffer? That's why I keep telling you, drill something into your children.

Read books. If you have, read them like Foxy's Book of Martyrs. Read stories of Kerrigan.

Read that beautiful book, what's Doc Pervis's book called? Sleep Believing, and get it at the bookstore. That's the only commercial we use. But you can get it, and it is fantastic.

You see those people, they pay dearly. Most of us would say, I think we'd be honest, most of us would say they live in easy street and more clothes than we can wear, more food than we can eat, one or two little privations, but oh my, we're only a tiny, tiny little fragment of a body of Jesus Christ. The other part of the body's in Russia, the other part is in China, the other part is in Spain, the other part is a country that's been shut up for years, nobody talked about it, Burma.

Some of those other areas, I guess, in India, and Angladesh, and up in those areas, that has been horrible atrocities. Vietnam, tragedy of Vietnam, brother, what a mess there. Fifty million people went down the drain like that, and more people cried over a race horse that broke its leg than they did over Vietnam.

Fifty million people up. When do you think we're going to get them back? Ford has already told us we can have them. He's told that we won't break any boundary lines in Europe, they can have Latvia, and Czechoslovakia, and Estonia, and all those old, no, we're not going to, you've stolen, you can have them, be happy about it.

Isn't it great that God is a just God? Yeah, we've gone round a big circle, but I want to tell you this, the more, longer I live, the poorer I realise I am. I know so little, I do so little, my vision is so limited, and every man I've quoted only had flesh and blood like me, the apostle Paul didn't have two heads, he didn't have four hands, and he didn't have two lives, and he didn't live that long. I remember when I first came to the States, when I was commuting the Atlantic for some years, and it was 1950, I went to a conference of those wonderful people in the Christian Missionary Alliance, and in all those conferences they gave one day to missions, and it was always to me very exciting, and very humiliating, and people brought their maps, and they brought types of clothes, people wore, and so forth, and what not.

One young man started me with, two of them started me, one of them said, I'd been out for one term, and he was in the Vietnam area, and he said, we ran into trouble, they sent a telegram or a wire or something from headquarters saying that funds have gone down tremendously, and they told the superintendent, well, you have so many juniors under you, you know, like you're the senior, then there's another assistant, and then we have about 10 little guys that have only been out there three years, now we're not going to change your, we're not going to change your wages, but we're going to cut everybody else's. You, you've deserved this money, you've been here so long, you've done this, that, and the other, and he said, you know what won me to that man, he said, he brought us around the table and said, look, this is what they say at headquarters, I'm still going to get whatever it was, a hundred dollars a week, and Jack, you're going to get 80 because you've been out so long, and you other folk here, you're going to get 35. He said, that's what they say in New York, I want to tell you what I say, they're putting it all in the kitty, and everybody's getting the same, and he said, immediately when he got down to that level, I realized, here's a man who's got no distinction.

The other thing was a man said, and I've never forgotten him, he said, I'm going out to this new area, I think it's somewhere in the upper vulgar in Africa or somewhere, and he said, this is my goal, to be dispensable as quickly as ever I can, to train those people there, and get out of the way, because he said, I'm sure of this, and it's proving there in Africa sure enough. What I've said to you before, and it's terrific, that the white man has had his day, the white man has had his day. Every new nation that signs up in the United Nations is a coloured nation.

I'm not unhappy about it, I'm telling you facts. We've had our day, what have we done with it? England had the greatest empire in history, it was the Roman Empire, Medo-Persian Empire, and the other empire, there was never an empire like the British Empire, and we missed the whole thing, as you would say, we fumbled the ball. We had our day in Vietnam, so what? Tragedy.

I thought this morning, because I'm sure you're glad I don't have this power, but I thought today, if I could be a kind of hope in Protestantism, do you know what I'd do? I'd say every man, woman and child on Christmas Day goes without eating the whole day, spend it in prayer and seat guard. After all, when they had revival in the middle, they even put sacks off on the donkeys and the horses. A lot more sense than we have with all our enlightenment.

You say you're going to a banquet or a breakfast next week in Houston, five dollars a place, and somebody's going to preach on fasting and travel in the Holy Ghost, you'll get what I got when I went to two not too long ago. They said there'd be 400 people there, there were 15. The second place, oh brother wait, they've read your books and I'll tell you, you're going to have a whale of a time.

What was it there, six people the first night I think. We make 45 by the third night, that was real good going. You see, if we'd been swinging on the chandeliers and just merely talking about gifts as precious as they are, and talking about something, oh we'd have had crowds there.

I'm saying that to say this, you know what God's going to do. I don't know if he'll find them. He's going to find the people that are willing to be stripped of everything they have.

Not just self-righteousness, all our own rights. Because that's what it means. Paul says I'm a bond slave of Jesus Christ and you have no right.

When he finishes there, right into the glaciers, what he says, he says don't trouble me. I like it. It's too bad to say, but I think almost he's turned his nose to everybody and said look, world, flesh, devil, don't you trouble me.

I want to tell you something. Let me put it this way and finish. You know Herodotus is not the father of history, he's a father of historians maybe.

And he says in the temple of Heracles there was a fire that was kept burning 24 hours a day. You might have to wake the priest up, but there he was. And if you ran away as a slave, you ran in the temple and said hey burn me quickly.

Well which god? Burn me with that iron. He put the iron in the fire, you opened your hand and he burned it and your flesh would sizzle. He'd slit down your toga and he'd burn the back of your neck.

Lift up your foot, he'd burn your instep. You'd stay in the temple till you were healed. You might be going down the street and somebody say, you hear a voice say, see you there, there's Aristarchus.

Marcus, run after him, bring him back. I'm going to flog him with an inch of his life. And the angry man who used to own that slave begins to pour his hatred out.

I want to tell you I'll put you to the whipping close, we'll take flesh off your back, man by the time I've done. And he lets him go on and then he says, sir just one minute. You're branded.

Yeah, look, see my instep. I can't walk where I want now, I'm branded for my God. My hand, I can't do what I like, it's branded for my God.

You see the back of my neck, I can't even think about it, it's branded. And Paul uses that figure, he says, let no man trouble me, I bear in my body. I think it's Moffat's translations I like, it says I bear branded in my body the owner's marks.

We used to sing a hymn in England, let my hands perform his bidding, let my feet run in his ways, let my eyes see Jesus only, let my lips speak forth his praise. All for Jesus. And I don't care what life you read, you can read C.D. Studd, anybody else.

There came a place where they got sick of meetings and sick of being nice people and said, almighty God, look I'm going to gamble it and have all I have. After all, C.D. Studd was 53 years of age when he went to Africa. He'd already been a missionary in China, he'd been up the Nile.

Nobody would back him, no missionary society would take him, 53 years of age. He's getting wrinkled and old. You know, I can't find anything in the New Testament that says a thing about that.

There you are Jesus, there you are. There C.D. Studd, spirit, soul and body, my mind, my will, my heart. He went out.

Your darling wife didn't see him for 15 years. Sacrificed. Little David Livingstone that split Africa open was there for years without seeing his wife.

Finally she came. Of course people were gossiping. She had a baby, they buried it.

She had another one, they buried it. Came a day, went under a big, I don't know what it was, blander tree. Dead in the hole.

They put Mary Moffat, the daughter of that gorgeous missionary, Moffat, the missionary, John Moffat was it? He put her down in that hole. Two babies in a hole. Well that's part of the deal, he said, but really she wasn't killed by mosquitoes, she was killed by gossiping tongues in the church at home.

That's what he said. You see, the essence of it is this. Don't you try and get away with it.

You can impress everybody except God. Maybe that's a good thing to write and put it on your dressing table. You can impress everything but everybody but God.

And if I can't impress God, I'm not a bit interested in impressing you or anybody else. Jesus gave all he had. And in that lovely hymn written in this country, my faith looks up to thee.

The second stands and always thrills me. As thou hast died for me, all may my love for thee, pure, warm, and changeless be. A living fire.

Everything that God takes and uses, he breaks. He took bread and break it. This is my body which is broken for you.

He took an alabaster box of ointment and break it. He took bread and God never uses anything but for it. If you want to save your life, save it.

Be a pretty little Christian. But if you say I want to live full stretch for God, come hell or high water, come the world, the flesh, the devil, you get criticized, brother you will, no matter which way you go. But will you remember this, that God has with Jesus Christ freely given us all things.

There's not a situation that you and I may come in that you can't get out of, not in your way or my way. But what, what God will work everything again after the counsel of his own will. He took a towel, I'm going to thank my dear brother that I talked with him yesterday about this and it just moved us so much as we thought again of this brilliant young preacher and somebody there to pull him down the peg and strip him in front of a congregation and did not happen.

While Gordon Olsen was preaching, seven or six or seven or eight preachers got up, he never made an altar call, they got up and walked to the altar and began to repent. I've just wanted to be boss in the church. I've wanted to say deacons do this and do that and look this is my program and you give me your money to do this.

And they were there crying like babies, they never made an altar call. You see what humility does again, it does more than the hammer, it does more than the fist. They saw a young man that somebody had the genius to say to, if you're going to be a true disciple of Jesus, you lost all your rights just now when you were inducted into this church, when you received your ordination.

You were 10 feet tall when you came in, you're about three inches tall now, you've lost all your privileges, take up the burdens, wash people's feet, go to the poorest, don't have any limits on your time or anything, say look I'm available in God for this. Oh Jesus is wonderful isn't he? The embodiment of humility, beauty and love and it makes me say I want to be like him. Can you say that Joe?

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