

# The Living Christ

by W.A. Criswell

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*The Lord Jesus is a historical character, a personality, an entity, and a character, who is somebody, not just an influence or a memory, and is God, the Jehovah of the Old Testament, the I Am, and the Yahweh of the Old Testament.*

**Duration:** 39:12

**Scripture:** Psalm 23:4, Isaiah 6:1-3, Daniel 6:22, Matthew 28:20, John 12:41, Acts 8:9-10, Acts 27:23

**Topics:** "Divine Presence", "Christian Service"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the presence and power of the Lord Jesus Christ in our lives. He references biblical stories such as the three Hebrew children in the fiery furnace and Daniel in the lion's den to illustrate how Jesus was with them in their trials. The preacher also mentions the Apostle Paul's experience of being shipwrecked and how an angel appeared to him, assuring him not to fear. He emphasizes that Jesus is someone who is always with us, helping and empowering us, and that serving and caring for others is a way to serve and know Christ.

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## Transcript

Twenty-seventh chapter of the Book of Acts, and the twenty-third verse. You will find an incident in the life of the Apostle Paul that parallels the text from which we've been preaching these last two Sundays. In the twenty-seventh chapter of the Book of Acts is the story of the terrible storm and shipwreck of Paul as he was sent, a prisoner bound to Jerusalem, to Rome from Caesarea.

In the twenty-third verse of the twenty-seventh chapter, For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul." Now, the text from which we've been speaking the last two Sundays in the eighteenth chapter of the Book of Acts, the ninth and the tenth verses, Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision. Do you believe that? For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, And then the text in the eighteenth chapter, Then spake the Lord to Paul by the night in a vision. Evidently the Lord is somebody, a personality, an entity, a character.

Evidently he speaks, and he lives, and he directs, and he guides, and he's interested, and he's full of the intensive life. Do you believe that? So many, the Lord Jesus is there. He's a historical character.

They are readily willing to admit his historicity. Like Washington lived, or Lincoln lived, or Buddha lived, or Alexander the Great lived, or Napoleon lived. There must have lived somewhere sometime a man by the

name of Jesus.

But he's dead, and he died two thousand years ago. Then there are those to whom the Lord Jesus possibly is at the heart and center of a great religious faith of which we are nominally a part, but he's far, far away. There's no conception, there's no sense, there's no feeling, there's no persuasion, there's no consciousness of his being present, of his being active and alive and vitally intermingled with our lives and our destinies.

Then there are many who look upon the Lord as an influence, and they identify him and his life like they identify our immortality. We live in the good influences that we set in motion in the earth, but when we die, we die. Our influence will live like the influence of the Lord may be alive, but he is dead.

And the tendency of all of those things, and a multitude of others I could mention like them, the tendency of it all is to depersonalize the Lord Jesus. He no longer is active and vibrant, he's no longer somebody, he's no longer a personality, he no longer lives as such, like you live now. But he's become identified with historical processes, with influences, with memory, with history.

But he's not prevalent and not active and vibrant and living in any of the issues today with which we actually have anything to do. He's not somebody who looks and cares and loves and watches and works and helps and guides and keeps. He's just something out there, indefinable, intangible, ethereal, evanescent, but not real and actual.

I have a friend, he's still my friend, though he's on the opposite side of the theological world from me, I have a friend who's a pastor in Virginia, and he's very liberal, he is decidedly modern. And we were talking about George Frederick's book, Prayer, a great book, a very fine book, splendidly written, entitled Prayer. And the great divine theory of prayer is this, he says, Prayer is the same sort of a thing for good in this world as though a man had something wrong with his foot, or he had something wrong somewhere else in his body.

And so the physician gives him a shot in the arm, and the circulation of the blood takes that shot in the arm and it goes all around, finally gets down there to his foot, and his foot is healed and made well because of the thing the doctor did over here. Now he says prayer is that way. When a man prays, he sets good influences in the world, and they circulate around and around and around, and by and by they will break and will be answered in the mediation of the thing for which the man prayed.

It may be over there, it may be in China, it may be in Hong Kong, it may be in India, it may be some other place. But his idea of prayer is that there's not any personal God to whom you actually talk, there's not any actual God up there who listens to you and turns things in order that your prayer might be answered, but that we just set forth good influences in the earth. Now my liberal friend in Virginia says, that's just great, that's just right, that's what prayer is.

But I said to him, if that's all prayer is, then there's not any God. There's not anybody who listens to it. There's not anybody who answers.

There's not anybody who directs this thing and has it in his hands. It's just an influence for good that we set forth in this earth, and that's all. That's all.

I could not tell you the number of men, Christian men, two for ten, leaders of the denomination of great drive in so many areas, not so much ours as in other faiths and communions, who identify the whole

Christian faith and the whole Christian message with social work. We worship the Lord Jesus, we serve him by being good to those who need us. We feed the poor, we heal the sick, we minister to those who are in poor housing conditions, and the whole kingdom of Christ is identified with tremendous social movement.

And that's the way we serve him, that's the way we know him, that's the way we love him. We do it through the people, and Christ is identified with the people. I remember reading a book by James Street called The Gauntlet.

Neverbody read that thing when it was published a few years ago. And the whole thesis of that book is that Christ is identified with humanity, and when you serve humanity, you serve Christ. I could go on for hours with stuff like that.

Now, this message tonight concerns the reality and the personality, the somebody-ness, the like-youth of the Lord Jesus Christ. For the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by Ephesus. In the nighttime, he appeared before Paul and said to him, and he could speak, and he knew Paul, and he knew what Paul was doing, and he was guiding Paul in a tremendous way.

Do you believe that? That he's somebody. Now, the thesis of this message is that Jesus is an entity in himself, and that he has flair, and that he has bone, and that he has a personality, that he's somebody. The Spirit of God is also called the Spirit of Jesus.

And the Spirit of God is in my heart, and he's in your heart. And the Spirit of God is in this world, and the Spirit of God is in this church. But the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Jesus is not the Lord Jesus himself.

I cannot enter into the mystery of the Trinity, and I don't try. I cannot understand it, I don't accept it. Nobody does.

But I know this, that according to the Word of God, the Holy Scriptures, the Lord Jesus is like you are. He has flair, and he has bone, and he's in a place, and he looks down on us, and he can appear to us, and he can talk to us, and someday we shall see him as a man, as an individual, as a character, as a somebody. And another thing about the Lord Jesus, he always was.

He always was the Lord Jesus. He always was that somebody. He always was the Lord God, Omnipotent.

But he was somebody. He was not ethereal and intangible. He was like you are.

He was a reality. He was a being. I think, and I'll give you the scripture for it, the Jehovah, the I Am, the Yahweh of the Old Testament is the Lord Jesus incarnate of the New Testament.

They're the same character. They're the same individuals. In the eighth chapter of the book of John, Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Therefore Abraham was, I Am.

I've heard that before, haven't you? I Am. When Moses was shepherding the sheep of Jethro, his father-in-law, he was on the backside of the desert at Sinai, and as he was shepherding the flock, there was a bush that burned without being consumed. And Moses stopped and said, I say, look at this great sign.

And he stood there and watched the flames in the bush unconsumed. And out of the fire and out of the flames, the Lord God spoke to Moses. The Lord God spoke to Moses.

And he commanded Moses to go down into Egypt and deliver people. And when Moses said, And what is the name of the God that speaketh to me? The voice came from heaven saying, I Am. You go down to Egypt and tell them the great God whose name is Yahweh.

I Am that I Am. And Jesus said, Verily I say unto you, Therefore Abraham was, I Am. I Am.

The voice that speaketh unto Moses out of the burning bush was the voice whom we know in the New Testament. But as the Lord Jesus Christ, he is the same person, the same God. I have another persuasion in there.

In the 12th chapter of the Gospel of John, in the 41st verse, after John quotes from Isaiah, he says this, These things said Isaiah when he saw his glory and spake of him. Now, from the quotation, I turn to Isaiah. And the quotation is from the 6th chapter of the book of Isaiah.

And John says, Isaiah said this when he saw the glory of Jesus. So you turn to the 6th chapter of the book of Isaiah and what does it say? You listen to it. In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.

Above it stood the seraphim. Each one had six wings. Which plane he covered his face.

Which plane he covered his feet. And which plane he did fly. Had one cried unto another, saying, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.

The whole earth is full of his glory. Who was that? Who was that? Isaiah saw him on a throne high and lifted up. John says in the 12th chapter of his gospel that Isaiah saw the Lord Jesus Christ.

It was the Lord Jesus that he saw. The Jehovah of the Old Testament. The great I Am of the Old Bible.

In the New Testament he is incarnate in the form of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Born of the Virgin. They're the one and the same.

The Lord Jesus is somebody preexistent in the endless ages before the world were made. And the Lord Jesus is a man. He's somebody.

He's a character. He's an entity. He's a personality.

He's like you. For the Lord God says, let us make man in our image. You were made in the likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And in time he's a man. He's a person. Incarnate, the Lord Jesus is somebody like you.

When you turn to the pages of church history, for hundreds of years the church was involved and the whole empire was involved and all theology and philosophy were involved and sometimes the East went to war with the West over it. They were involved in Christological controversy. They were trying to define, to delineate, to describe, to set in clear definition who Jesus was, who he was.

They called it Christological controversy. They were led by men like Arius and Sebelius and Eutychius and Nestorius and the Monophysites. And for centuries the conflict waged and waged and waged who Jesus was.

Now, those Christological conflicts and those Christological controversies were not only true in the development of church history but they go clear back and back and back to the very days of Christ

himself. In the days of the Christian religion when it was first promulgated it had a tremendous antagonist in a philosophy, a Greek philosophy called Gnosticism from the Greek word gno. What do you mean this word comes from the Greek word g-n-o? Gno, to know.

They were sophists. They were initiated into the mysteries of delirium knowledge. They were Gnostics they called themselves.

And it had a tremendous hold upon the people and Gnosticism was the greatest rival of Christianity. Now, Gnosticism was eclectic. It was not exclusive.

It would accept any faith. It would accept any philosophy. It would put its arms around anything.

So when Christianity under Paul and Timothy and John and those men, when Christianity came to be a relentless and a dynamic thing in the history of the world, Gnosticism put its arms around it. It amalgamated. It began to, in its eclecticism, to take the great principles of Christianity and make them a part of the system of Gnosticism.

Now, there were two great systems of that that the Apostles met. One was Gnostic, from a Greek word meaning feeling, and the other was Corinthian Gnosticism from the arch enemy of the Apostle John in Ephesus, a man by the name of Corinthian. Now, Gnostic Gnosticism said this, Jesus just seemed to be a man.

He was no actual man. He was no actual personality. He was no actual somebody, but he just walked around here in the days of his life in the earth, and he just looked like a man.

He just seemed to be a man, but he wasn't a real man. Now, the first epistle of John was written against Gnostic Gnosticism. You look how John starts off, that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have used to phone, and our hands have handled the word of life, and honest to goodness real genuine man, for the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life which was with the Father, and which was manifested unto us, that which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you.

That book, that epistle, 1 John, was written against Gnostic Gnosticism. These teachers and sophists who were going around all over the Roman Empire saying, Jesus is not a real person. He's not a real man.

He was not a real somebody. He just seemed to be. No, said John.

He was as real as you are. And our hands touched him, and we felt of him, and we held him, and our eyes looked upon him, and our ears heard him, the word of life, the Son of God. Now, Corinthian Gnosticism.

Corinthian Gnosticism was the thing written in Ephesus when John was pastor of the church in Ephesus. And this was the doctrine of Corinthus. Corinthus said he was a man all right.

He was a man all right, an actual man. He lived and walked and talked and lived. He was a man all right.

But he wasn't God. He wasn't God. The Spirit of God came upon him.

They called it some of those angelic names. They call them in Greek eon. The eon came upon the Lord Jesus at his baptism.

In the story of the visitation of the heavenly spirit in the form of a dove, the eon came upon Jesus at his baptism. And the eon left the Lord Jesus on the cross when Jesus said, Lord, into thy hands I commend my spirit. And Corinthus said that Jesus was just a man, like any other man.

But he had a special endowment of an angelic power from above. But he was nothing but a man. Now against that, the apostle John wrote the gospel of John, the first gospel.

And he started off with Adam Powell as the deity of the Son of God. Don't you remember it? In the beginning. In the beginning was the Word.

And the Word, and he's using a Greek philosophical term there, translated Word, Logos. In the beginning was the Logos. The Word.

And the Logos was with God. And the Logos was God. The same was in the beginning with God.

All things were made by him. And without him was not anything made that was made. John is saying there that this man, the Son of God, is using himself.

In the beginning he was, and he was God. The personality, the entity, the somebody of the Lord Jesus Christ. And in heaven, resurrected and in glory, he is still the same Lord Jesus.

Handle me and see, said the Lord. But it is I myself, for a spirit hath not flesh and bone, such as ye see me have. The Lord Jesus is in a place.

I go to prepare a cup of flesh for you. If I go and prepare a cup of a flesh, like this is a flesh, if I go and prepare a flesh for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself. The Lord Jesus is in a place.

He is in the heaven, and he lives there, a man. He hath flesh and bone. Thomas said, I don't believe it.

I don't believe it. Except I put my finger in the scars in his hand, and except I thrust my hand into his side, I wouldn't believe it. And the next Sunday night, when they were gathered together, the Lord himself appeared in the midst, a man.

Just like he was in the days of his place, only immortalized, glorified, resurrected. And he held out his hands and said, Behold, we sever your fingers. And he opened his side, and there was a scar in the side from the spirit of the Roman soldier, the same Lord Jesus.

He lives. He is some body. Flesh and bone.

He has a body, resurrected, glorified. But it's he, and he speaks, and he works, and he's with us, and he helps us, and he guides us, and he blesses, and he keeps us. He sees us through, this Lord Jesus.

The Lord spoke to Paul in the night, saying, he knew him. He was with him, and he helped him, and he walked greatly in his name. Now, we have a glorious promise from that same Lord Jesus.

Wherever you are, there am I in the midst of you. He's here. He looks upon us.

He sees us. He watches. He knows, and he cares.

Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age. He works with us. He helps us.

He empowers us. He does marvelous things for us, this Lord Jesus. He's somebody, just like you're here.

He can be here. Just like somebody can help you, he can help you. Just like somebody can walk by your side, he can walk by your side, this Lord Jesus.

Somebody just like you. Just like you. And he works marvelously and gloriously.

There's a very popular picture called The Rose. It's a cinemascope, widescreen, and possibly will have the greatest run of any picture thus far that's ever been made. In the screen display, the presentation, of those who made that picture, you will find a man's name, William Freeman.

Last summer, when we had our big Cotton Bowl campaign here in Dallas with Billy Graham, there was a man here in the city who owned three nightclubs here, owned two in Las Vegas, Nevada, an actor and a movie magnate. He was here in Dallas. He had three children.

It was Sunday, and the children wanted to go swimming, and all the places were closed except the fair park. So he took his three children on a hot summer afternoon and went out to the fair park. After he had delivered his children where they could swim out there somewhere, he walked up and down the midway until he got tired of the midway.

He didn't have anything to do, and he heard something was going on in the Cotton Bowl. So he went to the Cotton Bowl and sat down under the sea 105 degrees. He sat down there and listened to that service, and to my amazement, Billy Graham made an invitation.

You remember it if you were there? I didn't think anybody would come. Couldn't imagine anybody responding. That was the most unpromising thing I ever saw in my life, that blazing sun.

He gave an invitation, and the first man who responded to that invitation was this man, William Freed. Came down out of the Cotton Bowl there at the front, stood in front of a stand. He sold his three nightclubs here in Dallas.

He got rid of his nightclub in Las Vegas, Nevada. He's in Jerusalem now. The United Artists are preparing within a period of about two years, they are preparing to play on the screen for the first time in the history of the world, the last story of Jesus Christ.

The first thing that had to be settled in preparing a film depicting the Lord Jesus was who was going to be the Christ, who's going to play the part of Jesus. And it was finally decided that the man who did it would be anonymous. He will not be named in the pictures, nor will he be named in the advertising, nor will he be named before the world.

He's going to remain anonymous as far as any publicity is concerned. No famous actor, no anybody. He's going to have an anonymous man Who is the anonymous man? It's the actor, William Fried.

He is doing it now. And about two years from now, United Artists will present for the first time the story of the Lord Jesus to the world. And where'd it come from? Why, you stand amazed in the presence.

The first man who walked out of that cotton gold stand and stood down there in front of that little place where the man preached was this man, William Fried, who so largely shaped and gave the road to the world. Why, it happens all the time. It happens everywhere, everywhere.

I talked to a man this morning begging him to come back to the Lord in the church. He said, there's so many difficulties lying in the way. I said, come over there to the congregation and look.

If I could take time out for it and have the opportunity to do it, I could have men stand up all over this house, all over this house, and tell you stories of the miracles of regeneration that would almost be unbelievable. What you once were, and you once were, and what you once were, and what you now are. One of the finest Christian men that belonged to this church, and one of the greatest consecrated men that I have ever known, came out of a gutter, came out of a gutter.

If you were to see him now with a big, fine executive job and a lovely family, you'd say, Pastor, you mean he? You mean that man? You mean, you mean he was in the gutter? I mean that man was in the gutter. He was in the gutter. That's what the Lord has done for us.

He lives. He lives. He's somebody.

He can speak to us. He walks with us. He talks with us.

He empowers us. He makes us able. He gives us wisdom and direction.

And the Lord Jesus speaks to Paul in the night. He talks to you. He can talk to you any way that he wants.

Just like I could. Just like somebody next to you. The Lord can be somebody to you.

I cannot close without saying a word of the comfort of that. The indescribable blessedness and sweetness and preciousness of that. I cannot close without it.

The Bible, in telling the story of the three Hebrew children who were thrown in the fiery furnace, when the king looked in there, don't you remember, the king turned to those who cast in those three Hebrew children and said, didn't we put three in the furnace? Were there not three in the furnace? And the captors said, yes, we threw three men in the furnace. And the king said, but I see four men walking free in the fiery flames. And the covenant of the fourth one and the form of the fourth one is like unto the Son of God.

Who was he? Who was he? That was the Lord Jesus. Free him, call him. The fourth one walking with the three Hebrew children.

Who was it that closed the mouths of the lions when Cain was cast, when Daniel was cast, and the dead alive? Who closed the mouths of those lions? Whose story is it all the way through? It's the Lord Jesus. It's the Lord Jesus. He's the one that Thomas was talking about when he said, Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I won't be afraid for thou art with me.

Thou art with me. The preciousness of the presence, the comfort of the nearness of Jesus. He is with us.

Do you remember Ellis Fuller? Do you remember him? All that man. Pastor of the First Church, Atlanta, Georgia. Went to the president of the Southern Seminary and we had him here for two weeks at a revival meeting.

Do you remember that? Oh, there are some things and messages and sermons that Ellis Fuller preached here in this movement that will stay with me as long as I live. He blessed my life. Ellis Fuller, then president of the seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

This is one of the little things that he said that has stayed with me through these years. He had a little boy and the little boy was taken to the hospital for an operation. The pastor said to the church, nobody to call me, nobody to get in touch with me, nobody to know where I am.

He went to the hospital and though it was against the rules of the hospital, being a trustee of the institution, he got updated and he put it in the room with that boy and stayed with that son, stayed with the boy. Went in the operating room with the boy and stood there as the anesthetic was administered and as the operation was done and then went back into the room with the boy and he stayed with the boy all day long as the lad came to consciousness and at night time he pushed his bed right over there next to the boy's bed and lay down to go to sleep with his hand on the hand of his boy. And in the night time while they were lying there close together before the lad dropped off to sleep he turned his head and said, Daddy, this is the greatest day of my life.

And Ellis Fuller said, Son, the greatest day of your life, why son, this has been the most terrible day I've ever lived through. I've been so anxious, head full of care. Son, the greatest day of your life.

And the boy said, Yes sir, daddy, this has been the greatest day of my life. Daddy, you've been with me all day long. I am persuaded that the sorrows and the tears and the heartbreak and maybe the despair and discouragement and disappointment and finally the death that come into our lives are just somehow that we might know the nearness of the presence of Jesus.

So I walk through the valley of the shadow of death. I will fear no evil for thou art with me. And it's a great day.

It's our greatest day if He is there. And in the night the Lord speaks to Paul. He's somebody the Lord.

Well, and while we sing the song, somebody, you, give your heart to the Lord. You come, stand by me. Put your life in the hands of God.

You come, stand by me. Somebody, put your life in the Spirit. You come, stand by me.

Pastor, here I am. Here I come. Taking the Lord as my Savior.

Or coming into the fellowship of the Church. However, the Lord says, open the door and lead the way while we make appeal. You come, you come.

On the first note of the first sentence, anywhere somebody needs me. I want to be baptized. I want to come to the letter, or come to the letter, or by faith, or by rededication of life.

However, God says, lead the way with the joy. Anywhere, somebody needs me. While we stand on faith.

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