

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit

I would like to address three questions this morning

that when answered make the case of **why**

we would want to claim ourselves to be,

and invest our life in,

being a Christian.

These three questions,

are:

What do you mean by God?

What is the message from God in Jesus?

How then shall we conduct ourselves?

First, then, **what do we mean by God?**

Underlying our faith is primarily an experience of God active in the created order and in our individual lives.

My theology professor in seminary, Charlie Price, is reported in our recent seminary journal to have said:

"What we mean by God

"in the religion of the Old Testament and New testament
is an experience of liberation,
a moment of deliverance,
a time when somebody or some people get through
safe despite prior expectations.

"So profound," says Professor Price, "is the experience of that
moment

"...that it is taken to be a disclosure of the underlying character of
all reality."

"...in which underneath the darkness there is light, underneath
suffering joy, underneath silence endless praise."

It is my belief that such an experience is incredibly important and
necessary for a mature faith

that when we hear and see the revelation of God in
Jesus it resonates with something already deep within us

certainly reflecting the working in our hearts of the
Holy Spirit;

but also simply the existential experience of God's
deliverance

the human experience that causes us to say ah ah...**this
must be God.**

This is what we mean when we speak of God

that underlying experience and awareness that God exists and is active.

Secondly then, what is the message from God in Jesus?

Understanding basic Christianity is all about asking the right question.

Jesus is the answer...but what is the question?

And the right question seems to me to be the one asked in this morning's gospel

"Lord, will those who are saved be few?"

The good news is not about a lot of the things we try to make...

The good news is firstly and primarily about our salvation...

If we engage in true confession

...acknowledging things known and unknown,
...things done and left undone,

If we own ourselves absolutely,

...the good and the bad,
...our failures and successes,

Then we will know that our predicament is that

left to our devices, we will not make it through that narrow gate,

we will simply, on our own, not be among those who are saved,

and that we definitely need an intervention from the outside to save us

So, first and foremost Christianity is about the good news

that into our helpless situation

from outside and beyond our human condition

God has sent Jesus Christ:

To die in our place

that we might live

To pay the price and penalty for our sins

that we ourselves are unable to cover

As Charlie Price says:

"...everything in the Christian faith is related to this redemption accomplished by Jesus Christ."

Or to quote John Gresham Mehan:

"Jesus is our Savior,

not by virtue of what He said,

not even by virtue of what He was,

but by what He did.

"He is our Savior,

not because He has inspired us to live the same
kind of life that He lived,

but because He took upon Himself the dreadful
guilt of our sins

and bore it instead of us on the cross."

Mehan goes on to write:

"This Bible doctrine is not intricate or subtle.

"On the contrary, though it involves mysteries,

it is itself quite simple.

"We deserved eternal death, but the Lord Jesus,

because He loved us, died instead of us on the
cross"

Christ died to present us faultless before the throne of God is the good news

that addresses the despair of our eternal predicament,
by overriding our own inability to gain entrance to the kingdom of God"

And this,

which we call the doctrine of the atonement,

is fully dependent on the doctrine of the deity of Christ.

For although no mere man can pay the penalty of another man's sin:

Jesus is the eternal Son of God

So that in his death on the cross,

He has done what none other could possibly do;

He has borne our sin.

Machen writes:

"The atoning death of Christ, and that alone,

has presented sinners as righteous in God's sight"

"But", declares Machen, "Christ has done for Christians even far more than that.

He has given to them not only a new and right relation to God,

but a new life in God's presence for evermore.

"The New Testament does not end with the death of Christ.

The death was followed by the resurrection,

and the resurrection like the death was for our sakes."

And this brings us to our third question: How then shall we conduct ourselves?

In the resurrection, Jesus brings a new life of glory and power for those for whom He died.

The Christian, on the basis of Christ's redeeming work,

not only has died unto sin,

but also lives unto God.

This is far more than Jesus being a positive influence upon life,

but it is a matter of his giving us a new life;

it is a matter of being **born again.**

St. Paul describes this rebirth as not being conformed to this world:

but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds,

Martin Lloyd-Jones in his Exposition of Romans 12 says that

"everything must be considered in the context of

"our new future and our new relationship with God."

When we talk about context in theology

it is not about our fallen lives and its symptoms

But this new life in Christ

Colored and flavored by the promise and
hope of eternity in God's kingdom

He writes that:

"The Christian's attitude and behavior is never negative. It is never small and it is never fearful.

"But the Christian approach should always be positive; it should always be big and always glorious.

"The Christian gospel tells us:

Be what you are; realize what you are;

and proceed to show that you are what you are:

'born again',

This is far more than just being an ethical person:

Martyn Lloyd-Jones says:

"The ultimate objective in the incarnation and all that followed was the production of a new humanity.

"We were all 'in Adam',

we are now 'in Christ'.

"Jesus came in order to form this new humanity

"and Jesus is the Head of the new race of people.

The object of salvation is not merely that we may be forgiven and not go to hell.

But that we become this new people, this new humanity

Christ is 'the firstborn among many brethren'

And thus says Dr. Jones:

We must say to ourselves each day:

'I no longer belong to the darkness;
'I no longer belong to the 'no people';
'I am of the people of God;
'I am in His kingdom.

'I am a pilgrim on the way to eternity,
'I am one of God's children heading home.

And in that way we do not ponder each event...

'Should I do it or should I not?'

Rather as people of God we operate out of new identity remembering:

Who we are

What we are about

Where we are headed eternally

This is exactly what Hebrews suggests

...that in imitation of Jesus our perspective, our outlook should be the joy that awaits us:

"Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith;

who for the joy that was set before him

endured the cross, despising the shame"

Or what St. Paul is describing when he writes:

"I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed to us."

So in an essay on *Christian Conduct*, Martyn Lloyd-Jones concludes and I thus conclude my sermon:

So we think in this new way,

from our renewed minds,

from this God news of God in Christ bringing the whole world to himself

and we resist slipping back into the old way of thinking.

We are renewed in our minds, precisely we are renewed

in the controlling principle of our thinking and praying.

This is the context from which the Christian faces the problem of how to live in a world such as this.

And answering these three basic questions in this way:

What do you mean by God?

What is the message from God in Jesus?

How then shall we conduct ourselves?

will lead us I am sure to no other credible answer or life.

Amen

