

## JESUS --THE SAVIOR OF MANKIND

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A century ago, the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the creeds of five or more of the popular churches, stated a<sup>belief</sup> in predestination. The Westminster Confession phrased it thus; (We quote articles 3 and 4.) " By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death. These angels and men, thus predestinated and fore-ordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed; and their number isso certain and definite that it cannot be either increased or diminished."

If you believe in predestination, as a few backward people still do, the work of evangelizing the world is easy. Simply invite each person in the world, by radio, by tract, or by evangelistic sermon, to come to Christ. If he rejects your invitation, throws away the tract, and goes serenely about his business, he is predestined to be lost. There is nothing more you can do about him. All you can do is to be on your way to give the invitation to someone else who may accept your invitation, proving that he is predestinated to be saved. Stated thus bluntly, the whole belief in this kind of predestination, and the attitude that goes with it, seems slightly silly; yet this is the belief of a substantial number of people today. It is a belief and an attitude which almost inevitably develop a complacency and a self-satisfied laziness in those who espouse it. If I thus believe, and hand a man a tract which he throws into the gutter as soon as my back is turned, I reason then that my duty is done towards him. I can go home and sleep in peace, because it is HIS fault that he has rejected Christ. But the truth which I don't see is that he may not have been rejecting Christ at all, but only my stupidly clumsy method of inviting him to come to Christ. He may only have been rejecting me.

There are those people in the world today who think that the coming of Christ's kingdom will be cataclysmic, rather than evolutionary -- that some day a trumpet will sound, the earth will be devoured in a single puff of smoke, the wicked destroyed, and only a few righteous saved. God is going to prove his glory, think these good folk, by blotting out forever the billions of wicked, and saving a small remnant of the righteous. Some have gone so far as to limit the number of saved to a hundred and forty-four thousand --not one more, nor one less. Their attitude is that we should rejoice when we see the world getting more and more wicked; that it is useless to try to do anything to stop the onward march of wickedness, for it is God's plan that men shall get more and more wicked, until they reach a state in which he would be justified in destroying them all. The sooner this happens, the sooner the destruction will take place, and the sooner God will set up his kingdom of the few remaining righteous. Don't struggle against fate, then; save yourself; invite others to come to Christ but don't be concerned if they don't; they are probably predestinated to be lost anyhow, and the sooner the better. Such is the philosophy of some of the religious bodies that call themselves Christian today.

How will the kingdom of God come? All at once, spectacularly, cataclysmically? Or slowly, gradually, steadily, by growth and evolution? The people of Jesus' day looked for a spectacular, cataclysmic coming of their Savior, and refused to believe in one who came quietly, humbly, comparing the kingdom to the slowly growing mustard seed, or the leaven working silently in a measure of meal. Jesus told his disciples that his kingdom came not with observation. It is not going to be a spectacular event

but a gradual, evolutionary change. Jesus commanded his disciples to go and TEACH all nations; and teaching is not a spectacular process; it is evolutionary. The 2nd chapter of Isaiah and the 4th chapter of Micah present an almost identical picture of the kingdom which shall be set up in the last days. It is not to be set up with a magic, spectacular, cataclysmic upheaval, but by a process of evolution and growth. That kingdom is to spread, as "all nations flow unto it," and as the people of those nations say, "Come, let us go up to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us his ways....." The book of Revelation says (11:15) "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ," indicating that these worldly kingdoms will not be utterly and cataclysmically destroyed because of their wickedness, but CHANGED, until they yield to Christ's reign, and become his. Jesus suggested an evolutionary process on another occasion, when he said that all things (not all people) that offend should be gathered out of his kingdom. The people who will learn, who will grow, who will develop spiritually, who will rid themselves of the THINGS which offend, may remain.

This does not mean that the second coming of Christ will not be spectacular and cataclysmic, or that the end of the world and the judgment of all men after the resurrection and the millennial reign of a thousand years, will not be somewhat cataclysmic. We do not mean to say that there will be no destruction of the wicked, or no cleansing of the world. The resurrection morning, when all the dead leave their graves, will certainly be spectacular. People will be changed in the twinkling of an eye, according to Paul, and the dead restored to their bodies with equal suddenness. But spiritually, men are not changed so rapidly. Character is the result of long, slow growth. Instantaneous conversion and repentance may make you a new man, in the sense that the slate is wiped clean, and the old debt of sin cancelled, but it cannot make you a good man until there is some good, useful writing on the slate, or some store of spiritual treasure in the bank as a result of your right living. Conversion may be spectacular and cataclysmic, but Christlike lives are the result of slow growth and evolutionary development through days, and months, and years.

When Christ comes to his kingdom, the people who enter there with him will not be the ones who are waiting for him to make them over instantly and miraculously into the kind of people they ought to be. Rather they will be the ones who have fought their way through, who have learned of his ways, who have been taught, have grown, have evolved, and overcome little by little, who have become prepared for such association. It is our responsibility to keep on working, to keep on preparing ourselves, to keep on growing, to help others to prepare and to grow, to keep on calling for repentance and helping men to overcome, to continue to labor in love with those that have refused Christ, in the hope that they may yet grow to a place where they can be worthy to dwell with Christ in his kingdom. Jesus was patient with his disciples, though they made mistakes again and again, and even forsook him in his time of greatest need. Can we be less patient than he?

It is God's plan to save all men. It is Satan's plan to destroy all men. Of course, each man may choose for himself. It would be a hellishly wicked God who chose for me, and then condemned me to suffer because of that choice. But who is going to win in this battle for the souls of men? Some of the people who believe most strongly in a cataclysmic coming of the kingdom take pride in thinking that they will be one of a very, very few who will be saved. (Some have even set the figure at 144,000. Now, let's use our common sense for a moment. It is conservatively estimated that 150 billion people have lived on this earth since Creation. If only 144,000 of these are to be saved, that is less than one in a million. The score is a million to one in favor of the devil. God, the omnipotent, the all-powerful, the

creator of heaven and earth, and Christ, who some day shall put all things under his feet, are whipped by a score of a million to one. Reason rebels at such a picture.

There are approximately 2½ billion people in the world today, and only 585 million of them are even nominally Christian. Not more than a billion and a half of the 150 billion people who have lived and died since creation, ever heard the name of Christ. Are all these to be lost in the destruction of the world and the final culmination of all things? Shall we stand complacently espousing the theory that there is nothing we can do about wickedness and sin, because men are predestinated to be sinful and wicked?

It is true that men are evil and sinful by nature; that many of them are careless, rebellious, wicked. Sin always brings its punishment -- or perhaps it would be better to say, its consequences. But punishment does not necessarily last forever. We do not put a man in prison for life for stealing a ten cent loaf of bread. God is not going to punish all of the sinful men of earth forever, either. Punishment is not vindictive or vengeful, but corrective. When men have suffered the results of sin, and been convinced of the futility as well as the error of their ways, the punishment will cease. Hell is not eternal, for revelation 20:14 reads, "And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire." Some few rebellious souls will perhaps persist in wickedness and rebellion to the end. They will be cast into the lake of fire and forever lost, but there will be a second chance for all the wicked who repent, and for all the billions who never had a first chance in this life to hear of Christ or his saving mission.

Read the third and fourth chapters of the first epistle of Peter, and you will find that Christ preached to the wicked spirits in prison, that they might have another chance after punishment, to accept the Lord they had once rejected. All who have never heard of Christ, all who died without the chance of knowing him, all who never understood his message, all who were blinded by the faults and hypocrisies of men so that they could not see Christ clearly, will have the gospel preached to them somewhere after death, so that they may exercise their own will and decide for or against Christ. When these decisions are all in, you may be sure that the score will not be a million to one in favor of the devil.

Perhaps we need a word of caution here. Not everyone who is saved will receive the same reward. Some will receive little or none; some a great deal, with all the gradations in between. Read Paul's explanation of this in 1 Corinthians, 15:40-41, where he speaks of the glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars. God is not going to save a mere fractional remnant of his creation, but most of them, rewarding them with that degree of glory which they have earned, and which they are capable of appreciating and using.

We look forward then to the day when "all nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship thee, O Lord, and shall glorify thy name," Psalm 86:9; when "many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven;" when "they shall teach no more every man his neighbor and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sins no more." In preparation for that day, we shall try to grow ourselves, and seek to lead others also to grow in righteousness, that we may be prepared for the day when righteousness shall sweep the earth as a flood, and the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ.