

BLOOD, BREAD AND FIRE

The Christian's Threefold Experience

by

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CHAPTER TWO

SHALL WE CROWN OR CRUCIFY JESUS?

What then shall I do with Jesus which is called Christ? (Matthew 27:22)

WE live in a strange world. Scientifically it is round; spiritually it is flat, and it never has been more flat than it is now. It has become the fashion of the times to sneer at all venerable institutions. We live in a calloused generation that ridicules all the sanctities of life. And it is not surprising that the Christian faith should be attacked by these literary snipers with whom a little learning has become indeed a dangerous thing.

The old-time religion, by which we mean the historical faith of our fathers and not the hysterical faith of some today, is being assaulted by hordes of fools who rush in where angels fear to tread. But we Bible Christians feel no alarm. Like Paul from the Philippian dungeon, we would say to these assailants, "**Do thyself no harm, for we are all here.**" We are not losing sleep for fear that some scientist will dig the foundations of our faith from under us nor are we worried over the critic's vials of scorn. The burial rites have been pronounced before now over a supposedly dead Christianity, but the "corpse" has always come to life in the midst of the interment to outlive all the pallbearers.

We do not expect to make a "hit" with the times. We are not surprised to be rated in some minds along with the family carry-all as relics of a simple-minded past, to be greeted in some quarters like poor relations come to town. After all, this generation is not so "smart."

About the really great matters of life it knows less than any generation before it. It simply uses longer words to tell what it does not know.

We lead the world in mass production, but we have failed in man production.

We produce, but we do not create. Other generations left art galleries; we leave signboards.

We have printing presses, but no Shakespeares; radios, but no Demosthenes; pulpits, but no Pauls.

We can turn out fiddles by the thousands, but no one can make a Stradivarius.

We print books by the millions, but who is writing anything worthy of such distribution?

We send words around the world in split seconds, but who is saying anything worth sending around the world?

Never has a generation traveled so fast and covered so little ground. Modern youth, forgetting that it is training for a race, lives as though racing for a train.

There are those who imagine that nobody really believes the Bible any more except intellectual throw-backs in rural Podunks, back-number preachers with “Mother Goose” mentalities. But there are still thousands who have not bowed the knee to Baal and not all of them are down in the “Boll Weevil Belt” either! Our views are not fashionable, but our faith has proved its case long ago, and any generation that has made as big a clown of itself as this one has no business criticizing the faith of its fathers.

Certainly the foundations of this country were laid in the light of this faith.

We Bible Christians are not the ones who today honeycomb the land with class hatred. It is not we who are destroying the sanctity of human life, home, and marriage. It is not we who are undermining the institutions of law and order. It is not we who are corrupting a true patriotism with a false pacifism. If we are derided for still preaching the old Bible, we submit that we prefer a text from Moses to a theme from Moscow!

We insist that the supreme issue before men today is the old, old question, “Shall we crown or crucify Jesus?” Those who have seen the original of Munkacsy’s painting, “Christ before Pilate,” will remember how the artist makes the figure of the Lord Jesus stand out from all the rest. He is still on trial in the midst of this age, and among all other issues He stands supreme. On that historic occasion, Pilate faced the greatest question of all time, “**What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ?**” A lot of water has run under the bridge since then, but still the supreme issue with individuals and nations is, “What about Jesus Christ?”

In this trial of the ages, Pilate faced three alternatives.

First, he asked Jesus, “**Art thou a king?**” Jesus declared that His kingdom is a kingdom of truth, and that everyone who is of the truth hears His voice.

I imagine that Pilate must have shrugged his shoulders as he asked wearily, “**What is truth?**”

He had listened to Oriental jugglers and Roman lawyers and Greek philosophers ranting about truth until he was in no position to believe that standing before him was One Who not only knows the truth but is the Truth.

So, standing before the greatest alternative of his life, he did what millions have done since, he crowned the cynic and crucified Christ.

The first alternative therefore was

CYNICISM OR CHRIST

We live in the age of the cynic who sees the price of everything and the value of nothing. It is a strange day when the less one is sure of, the more he is supposed to know. If a minister says, "We may well suppose," he is counted brilliant. If he declares, "**Thus saith the Lord,**" he is called a fanatic and a bigot. This generation calls itself "hard-boiled," but really it is just "half-baked," like Ephraim, who was "**a cake not turned.**"

Nobody need ask today, "**What is truth?**" for the truth has been revealed. The Lord Jesus Christ said, "**I am the truth,**" and if any man will do His will he shall know of the doctrine. Coleridge said the test of Christianity is, "Try it." "The proof of the pudding is the eating." Anyone can know the truth if he will take Christ at His word and see what happens. We shall turn question marks of uncertainty into exclamation points of conviction if we quit asking, "**What is truth?**" and learn that truth is not a "what" but a "Whom," and rest our souls on a Person, not upon a philosophy.

Our Lord said, "**Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free**" (John 8: 32).

The secret of freedom is to know the truth, and the secret of truth is to know the Son. "**If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed**" (John 8: 36). The natural man cannot know the truth any more than a blind man can appreciate a landscape, for the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God. "The heart has its reasons of which the reason knows nothing." Truth is learned by believing, then seeing. The intellectual doubter is really only a moral coward who is not willing to give the gospel a fair trial.

No one should criticize the gospel until he has tried it; then he will not criticize it.

There are no reasons for being a cynic. There are excuses, but an excuse is only the skin of a reason stuffed with a lie. The Lord Jesus Christ made a fair proposition. He said that willingness to obey God's will would prove the claims of Christ.

Those who criticize the gospel are not honest enough to try it on its own terms. They are too ignorant to speak wisely about it, but not too wise to speak ignorantly. Let Christ prove Himself; He is His own defense. Come to Him as a sinner on His terms, not yours. After all, we are not sinners because we are skeptics; we are skeptics because we are sinners. Skepticism is only a smokescreen thrown before a sinful heart. Instead of cynically asking, "**What is truth?**" come to Him just as you are without one plea but that His blood was shed for you, and He will prove Himself to be the "Whom" where all your "whats" will find their answer. The second alternative that Pilate faced was

CRIMINALITY OF CHRIST

It was customary to release a prisoner at the Passover. He chose to release Barabbas and to crucify Christ. If we do not choose Christ, we choose the criminal. Life is a choice between the best or the beast, and when we crucify Christ, we release Barabbas.

It is very evident that Barabbas is loose in these tragic days.

We lead the world in crime here in America, crime that has increased 1200 per cent in the last thirty-five years. Our annual murder rate is eleven to twelve thousand, and that is partly because murderers know that the chances are three to one that they will never be caught; twelve to one that if caught they will never be convicted; and a hundred to one that if caught and convicted they will never die for the crime.

Murder, robbery, kidnapping, immorality, suicide— these crowd the headlines in a day supposed to set the high-water mark for civilization. Jails and penitentiaries are filled with criminals under twenty-five. Our Pilgrim forefathers carried guns to church; we may soon find it necessary again to do the same. Criminality is the natural consequence of the rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

When He is crucified in the souls and societies of men, Barabbas is set free. Christ is the only cure for crime. **“If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new”** (II Corinthians 5: 17).

Pilate’s third alternative was

CAESAR OR CHRIST

That was the finishing blow. Pilate sought to release Jesus, but the Jews cried, **“If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar’s friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar”** (John 19: 12).

It was Caesar or Christ, and Pilate chose Caesar. Today that Rome has passed and Caesar has passed, but Christ remains **“the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.”**

If we are strictly honest today, we must confess that most of us have no king but Caesar. We have sold out to the god of this age.

Modern America is repeating the story of decadent Rome. We have gone wild over the same things. They wore purple robes and we wear dress suits, but the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life are still our gods.

We are a befuddled generation, sick of old conditions and unable to create better; too ignorant to explain life, too shallow to endure it, too bitter to enjoy it, too weak to overcome it. We are not transformed but conformed to this world, slaves of its fashions, disciples of its philosophies, devotees of its pleasures. Wrapped in ourselves, we make small packages. Our eyes are glued to stocks and bonds, clothes and cars, and all the tinsel trappings of life’s mad masquerade.

Even in our church circles, we claim allegiance to Christ, but too often our tribute is to Caesar. Since Constantine embraced Christianity and made it fashionable, Christ has been betrayed in the house of His friends. We call Him **“Lord, Lord,”** but we do not His commands. We sing and talk about Him, but under the auspices of His cause we live in Rome and do as Rome does.

Today we face the same alternatives that confronted Pontius Pilate.

Shall we crown the cynic and try to find our way through the wilderness of life by the feeble candle of reason?

Shall we take the way of the criminal, the way of the beast, instead of the best?

Shall we crown Caesar and crucify the Christ?

Shall we crown or crucify Jesus?

He is the answer to cynicism, because He is the truth.

He is the answer to criminality, because when we put on the Lord Jesus Christ we do not fulfill the lusts of the flesh.

He is the answer to Caesar, because in Him we become citizens of heaven.

Let us crown Him now in our hearts that one day we may have part in the final coronation, when the nations will lay their tributes at His feet and crown Him Lord of all!

~ end of chapter 2 ~

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