

GOD'S ANSWER TO MAN'S SIN

by

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE ULTIMATE QUESTION

"Pilate said unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ? They all say unto him, Let him be crucified" (Matthew 27:22).

THIS is the ultimate question in time and eternity. It is by far the most important one we shall ever have to answer. Answer it right, and all else is right; answer it wrong, and all else is wrong.

It is a personal question.

We cannot answer it for each other. There are mothers in this congregation who would gladly shed every drop of blood in their veins to decide this problem for their children in the right way. There are fathers in this congregation who would gladly suffer any sacrifice, endure any pain, if they could make this decision for their loved ones. It is, however, an altogether personal question.

It is a pressing question.

There are some questions you do not have to answer, but this one you must. If you avoid it here, you will face it hereafter. There is no escape from it. You may as well realize this tremendous fact and not foolishly delay, neglect, or reject the implications of this query. God, grant that it may never leave you, that it may never lose you, that it may keep pressing upon you until you come to the right conviction and conclusion.

It is a present question.

You must, you can, and you will answer it before this service comes to its end. There is no side-stepping it. There is no pleading of neutrality. There is no avoiding it in any conceivable way. You face it squarely tonight. You will either decide for Christ or against Him. You will either walk out of this congregation with Jesus on the road to heaven or with Satan on the road to hell.

Because of the vital importance of this question, because of its eternal implications, may I press it upon your consideration from these three angles. First, who is this Jesus? Second, why should you do anything with Him? Third, what will you do with Him?

I. WHO IS THIS JESUS?

He is not just another man, another teacher, another Jew, another priest, another ruler, another statesman, another reformer, another ethical culturist, another religious visionary. He is the Son of God. He is God encased in the flesh of the virgin-born Son of Mary.

He is the Son of God who loved you and died for your sins.

The love of Christ, the passionate, pure, persistent love of Christ, ought to constrain every one of us to love Him in return. The agony death of Christ on the cross, the bloodletting, the blood shedding, the heartache, the heartbreak of Calvary's cross, must move each of us toward Him with the deepest affection of our souls. This is what makes unbelief such a heinous crime. This is what makes rejection of Christ the sin for which there is no forgiveness, neither in time nor eternity. That He loved us and died for us should lead every sinner to an acceptance of Christ as Savior and every Christian to surrender to Christ as Lord and Master.

That was the motto, the motive, the message of the apostle Paul.

“The love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead, and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves but unto him which died for them and rose again.”

That was the ultimate expression of the ministry of John the Beloved:

“Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”

That is the very soul of the gospel:

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

This love the Holy Spirit offers to every one of you on the terms of the gospel. It is this love you must consider when deciding what you will do with Jesus, which is called the Christ.

He is the Son of God, Who loved you, Who died for you, Who alone can save you from your sins, keep you out of hell, admit you into heaven.

To Him God has given the full, the only authority for salvation. It is as true today as it was back yonder in apostolic times that **“neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”**

Not even God can forgive the sins of a single soul without the mediatorship, the shed blood, the saviorship, the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

- Refuse Him, reject Him, neglect Him, and the fierce fires of an eternal wrath-filled hell will be your portion.
- Accept Him, and though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

This Jesus can save you. He wants to save you. He will save you this very hour if you will choose with the overtures of His mercy. Refuse Him, and some day you will face Him, no longer the tender, patient, pleading, inviting Redeemer, but the stern, inexorable, inflexible Judge and Executioner, the Arbiter of your eternal destiny.

Yes, this Jesus is a two-sided Christ. To those who believe, He is the compassionate, gracious, pitying, longsuffering Jesus of the healings of Galilee, the prayers of Gethsemane, the blood of Calvary. To those who live and die in unbelief, He is the sword arm of the Lord, the warden of God's marches, the destroyer of God's enemies. In answering the question, what will you do with Jesus? dwell earnestly, attentively, even anxiously on the eternal verity that Jesus will either be your saving God or your condemning Judge.

II. WHY SHOULD YOU DO SOMETHING WITH JESUS?

There are a great many reasons. There is not time nor space for all of them. I could very easily, very definitely, very truthfully say, "Because you've got to; you cannot help yourself. God puts you to the question, to the test. You cannot escape the quandary." But that would be a slavish reason, a weak answer.

To do something with Christ because you are compelled to is to make a tyrant of God, an unwanted guest of Christ. No, the Lord will not force you to decide. He will plead with you, press Christ's claims upon you, present His love to you, but the decision must be yours, free, whole-hearted, whole-souled, uncoerced. The Lord will force no man into Christ. The Lord will drive no man into heaven. However, there are three basic reasons why all should do the right thing with Jesus.

First, you need Him.

- You need Him in life.
- You need Him in death.
- You need Him at the judgment.
- You need Him throughout an endless eternity.
- You need Him for the forgiveness of your sins.
- You need Him for the feeding of your souls.
- You need Him for the understanding of the Word, the will, the work, the way of God.
- You need Him in joy.
- You need Him in sorrow.
- You need Him when you are well.
- You need Him when some dread disease takes possession of your body.
- You need Him in business, in school, in politics, in the social circles.
- You need Him at home.

- You need Him abroad.
- You need Him from the moment of your birth to the hour of your death.
- You need Him when the family circle is unbroken.
- You need Him when the angel of death visits the bosom of your family to snatch away some loved one into the darkness and mystery of eternity.
- You need Him when the clods of earth fall heavily upon a dear coffined form as though each were dropped on your very hearts.

Yes, with all the passion of my love for you, I plead with you to see how desperately, how definitely, how dependently you do need the Lord Jesus Christ in the trials, the troubles, and the tests of life.

- You need Him when your time comes to render your soul back to the God who entrusted you with it as a sacred stewardship.
- You need Him when the heavy-winged, sable-hued messenger of death comes to bring the warrant of God for you to quit this life and go out into eternity.
- You need Him when your eyes begin to glaze, when your limbs begin to stiffen, when you lose sight, hearing, motion, when the death dew appears on your forehead, and the death rattle in your throat, when your soul stares out into an uncertain eternity.

If you have accepted Christ, you need not fear. He who loved you enough to die for you loves you enough to lead you through the valley of the shadow of death safely by His side. But, oh, if you have rejected Christ, if you have neglected His tender invitations to salvation, if you are dying unsaved, the fearful horrors of those last minutes! There is nothing waiting for you but

The wrath of Him whom your sins have offended,
And the night, the dark night of eternal despair.

It is a fearful thing to die out of Christ.

- You need Him in eternity.
- You need Him in the judgment.
- You need Him to shut the gates of hell and to open the gates of heaven to you.

To those of us who are in Christ, the judgment holds no terrors. **“We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”**

- He will represent us.
- He will speak for us.
- He will be our Counsellor, our Defender, and our Lawyer.
- He will plead our cases.

God cannot; God will not refuse Him the boon of our admission into glory. But, suppose you do the wrong thing with Christ. Inevitably, unavoidably, inescapably, you will face God in the judgment.

What will be your defense when you are asked, “Why have you rejected Christ?” What argument, what alibi, what discussion, what extenuating circumstances will you advance to ameliorate the awfulness of the fact that you lived in sin, that you persisted in sin, that you died in sin, that you rejected the way out of sin, even the Lord Jesus Christ?

Truly you have no excuse that can be or will be accepted in that court of final justice. Naked, stripped of every reason, of everything on earth so high sounding, so seemingly logical disputation, with the burden, the barrier, the bondage of your sins spread before the eyes of men and angels, with Christ a witness against you instead of a pleader for you, where will you be in that hour of fearful scrutiny? O brother, O sister, flee to Christ tonight! Let His precious blood wash away your black sins! Retain Him as your capable counsel, as your undefeatable advocate. He is offering His services to you in this hour. By faith, close with Him!

Second, He needs you.

That is a joyous thought, an inspiring challenge. The Son of God, the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the Creator, the Preserver, the Sustainer of all this universe, this Son of God, Who has all the power, all the wisdom, all the authority of God Himself, this same Jesus, Who could just as easily have used the holy angels in the work of His heart, this Christ, wants you, needs you, appeals to you to enter into His magnificent service.

Were the president of these United States to look into your face; were he to say, “Men, women, children, fellow citizens, I need your help to make America what it should be; your beloved country needs your help,” there is not a soul but who would leap up in glad response and say to the president, “Here am I, send me.”

Tonight, Jesus Christ comes to you and says: “I need you in My service. I need you to help Me bring in the kingdom of God. I need you to help Me build a better world. I need you to win lost souls to a saving acceptance of the gospel.”

Tell me, what is your answer to this Master? Will you say right now, this very moment; will you say it and mean it; will you say it and do it: “Lord Jesus, I love You for first loving me. I love You for dying for my sins on the cross. I love You for all the many blessings You have bestowed upon me. I love you for the heaven You are preparing for me. I love You, Lord Jesus. I cannot do much, but I love you and gladly want to help You. If You can use me; if You can find some lowly place in Your service for me; if You can use my poor, humble talents in some corner of Your great kingdom, here am I, take me, break me, mold me, fill me, use me.”

You need not be afraid of your sins, of yourselves, of your shortcomings. Jesus can forgive your sins, overcome your weaknesses, supply out of the fulness of His inexhaustible treasures whatever may be lacking in your serviceability, in your effectiveness.

The Master has a place in His service for everyone of you. There is not a boy nor a girl, not a man nor a woman, anywhere in this great throng tonight whom Jesus Christ cannot use. Do not hesitate for any thought or consideration. Do not look to yourselves. Do not look to others. Look to Jesus.

All He seeks is a glad surrender. All He wants is an emptied life. All He asks is a faith-induced submission. Just heed His call. Just turn your life over to Him. Just come now into His salvation, into His service.

Third, others, all about you, your loved ones, your friends, your neighbors, others need you as Christians.

“No man liveth unto himself, no man dieth unto himself,” is still the dictum of experience.

The least and the highest among us have spheres of influence. You are either pointing, aye, leading souls to God and heaven, or you are directing them to Satan and hell. There is not a listener so rotten, so polluted, so stained, so cursed of soul, so low in character, who would deliberately cause a single sinner to stumble into hell over our lives, to be eternally lost. But, O friends, unsaved friends, drifting, irresponsible Christians, don't you see that by doing the wrong thing with Christ you are permitting the devil to use you as a stumbling-block, as a decoy to those whom he is seeking to destroy? By rejecting Christ, you are helping others to do the same. By neglecting Christ, you are leading others into the same fearful road of unavoidable destruction. Think of this.

Tonight perhaps you are not a Christian; or you are a backslidden Christian, having dropped your cross somewhere along the road. You drift on and on. Your influence against Christ spreads out and out in ever-widening circles. Perhaps at some future date you yourself come or come back to the Lord. The Redeemer, because He is so everlastingly longsuffering, welcomes you and saves your soul, but these others, these men, these women, these children, these whom you have touched day in and day out, these, where are they? Some have died and gone into hell. Others, following your bitter example, have become hardened in sin, with the blessed gospel having no effect upon them.

It is a fearful thought that your delay, that your indecision, although by God's grace has not sent you into the pit of burning, has been used of Satan so terribly, so effectively to drag others into hell.

Brethren, sisters, God help you to see that there is many a soul in torment tonight sent there by a Godless father, a Christless mother, a prayerless wife, a Bible-less husband, a heedless brother, an indifferent sister, a careless friend, or a loveless neighbor. For the sake of these others all about you, each of you should do the right thing with Jesus. Your example, your influence is asked for by Christ and by Satan.

One you must choose. Oh, what will your decision be? Eternity is standing still; the angels are bending down from glory; the demons are looking up from hell to see what you will do with Jesus.

Many of you have unsaved or backslidden loved ones and friends. You may be waiting for them to make the good decision before you take any stand. That is exactly what the devil wants you to do.

Two wrongs no more make a right in the Christian sphere of conduct than they do in any other sphere of human activity. Do your part! Get right with God yourself! Let the Lord have your life! Then, when you are on the altar for God, when you have recognized the claims of Christ over your own life, pray, work for your loved ones' souls. The merciful Lord will answer your prayers in saving and consecrating them also. Do it God's way! Do it the Bible way! Throw no obstacles in the path of the Holy Spirit! Give Him your life that He may use it to answer your prayers!

Father, mother, come to Christ, come into your church, then go back and win your blessed children. Husband, come to Christ, then go about to win your wife. Wife, let God have His way with you tonight; then ask Him for the soul and the salvation of your husband. Children, this one time you must not wait for your parents. They cannot decide your destiny. It is a personal matter between you and the Lord. Give yourselves to the Redeemer of souls. God will use your young lives to break the hearts of your parents and bring them also to the cross. There is not one but who can and will help others to find Christ, if you answer this question right.

III. WHAT WILL YOU DO WITH JESUS?

We are back to the same question. What will you do with Jesus? As God gave me utterance, I have shown you who this Jesus was and is; why you must do something with Him. Now, what will you do with Him?

What will you do with Him, Christian?

- Will you give Him the right of way in your life?
- Will you enthrone Him as the Lord and Master of all you are and have?
- Will you give Him, as He gave for you, the best of your time, of your talent, of your money, of yourself, of your home, as much as you can of your loved ones?
- Will you consider Him in the morning, let Him guide you during the day, blessing Him, praising Him, serving Him whenever and wherever opportunities offer themselves?
- Will you be loyal to His cause, to His kingdom, to His church?
- Will you spend some time with Him each day in prayer?
- Will you seek to learn more about Him in the pages of His Book?
- Will you try to tell others about Him that they, too, might share Him with you?

Christians, give up the besetting sin that has robbed Christ of your lives and love, and dedicate your lives afresh on His holy altar. There are some of you who could magnify and glorify Christ by coming into the church in the community where you live, on transfer of membership. The church is the bride of Christ. In serving the church, you serve Christ. In serving the church, you serve a needy world. In serving the church, you invest your lives in the best possible, the most profitable way. The church needs you. Your membership is but of little use in some far-off place where you seldom, if ever, go.

- This is where you want God to bless you.
- This is where you expect God to answer your prayers.
- This is where you are looking to God to prosper you, to keep you and yours in health.

If you should die in your present home, it is from this place that you look to God to take you to heaven. This is where your church-membership should be also. This is where you should be serving the Lord with all you are and have. Salvation is at best a one-sided affair. God gives and keeps on giving. We take and keep on taking. We owe Christ a great debt. At the very best, we can pay but little of it. Christian, will you do the right thing with Jesus?

What will you do with Jesus, my unsaved friend? He is in your hands this hour. Some day you will be in His hands. It will be too late then to answer this question. Jesus puts Himself at your mercy.

- You can crown Him or crucify Him.
- You can love Him or leave Him.
- You can receive Him or reject Him.
- You can believe on Him or turn Him down.

You must decide. Tell me, nay, tell God, tell Christ, tell the Holy Spirit, tell the angels, tell the saints in heaven, tell the demons in hell, tell time, tell eternity, what will you do with Jesus which is called the Christ? The heavens are bending down to catch the sound of your answer. See, yon moon and stars have paused in their orbits to watch your decision.

The recording angel of God has dipped his pen in the blood of Jesus and has lifted it out to hold it poised over the Book of Life. Tell me, unsaved friend, will this mighty angel write your name a child of God as tonight you come accepting Christ or will he sadly shake his head and write the fearful word "lost" on your record? The devil is marshalling all of his forces to cause you to deny Christ.

- You know God wants you to come to Jesus.
- You know Jesus died to provide your salvation.
- You know the Holy Spirit is inviting you to come.
- You know deep down in your heart you also want to come.

The only one who does not want you to come is Satan. Oh, do not listen to him. Close your ears to his hellish suggestions. He means you evil! He seeks your destruction! Turn away from him and his sly whisperings. Exert your courage; exercise your wisdom; come to Christ! Let Him save you! Come to Him this moment!

Much depends on your decision. There is your own salvation. There is your influence. There are the multitudes of others whom you might induce to come to Christ. There is the matter of wasting your life with the devil when you might be piling up rewards by using it for Christ. Why hesitate? Why delay? Why put it off? Do you really believe that Jesus will be more ready or more able or more willing to save you tomorrow than He is today? You cannot believe that. Jesus wants you this very hour, this very moment. Do not wait until some dreadful accident, some fearful calamity, some heart-breaking experience drives you to God. Come willingly, lovingly, gratefully. God is waiting for you.

Some years ago, in one of the Gospel Missions in the city of Philadelphia, during a patrons' service, a well known lawyer stood up to testify as to how he became a Christian. He said that when he was about twenty-four years of age he married a beautiful, talented, exceptionally good Christian girl.

He, himself, was more or less of an atheist, at least in practice, without regard for the Lord, the Bible, or the church. He tried in every way to break his young wife from her church-going, God-serving habits, but, thank God, to no avail. She grew, if anything, more devout, more zealous, more spiritual.

After some years there came into their home a baby daughter, a flaxen-haired, blue-eyed gift from the Lord. When the girl was small, young, a child, the mother carried her about. They would go to Sunday-school and church together. They attended prayer-meetings, W. M. S. sessions, revival services, and many of the other worship and service hours conducted by the church. But when the daughter grew to be a young woman, the father took her in charge. She was beautiful, cultured, talented, and the father was inordinately proud of her. He would take her to his clubs, on week-end trips, on yacht parties, to dances, to night clubs, and to other places of gayety and amusement. Bit by bit the father weaned the girl away from the religious ways of the mother, much to that dear woman's chagrin.

The father would lie in bed on Sunday morning and chuckle sinfully as he would hear his wife talking to the girl. "Doris, please get up and come to Sunday-school and church with Mother this morning," and as he would hear the answer of his child: "Mamma, Daddy brought me in so late last night. I am so tired. Mamma, if you'll forgive me this time, I'll go next Sunday sure." Next Sunday it would be some other excuse until the daughter hardly ever went to church anymore.

The months and years sped past. The girl was twenty. She was engaged to be married to a fine young man. The wedding was set for the late fall. About the middle of October, when it gets pretty cool in the Pennsylvania mountains, a group of young friends of that girl accompanied the two lovers on a trip to a mountain lake, forty or fifty miles from the city. They chartered a motor boat, got far out into the lake, and had a great time. When the shadows of the evening began to fall, they turned for the shore. There is always a smart-aleck in one of those parties, and this group was no exception.

One of the young men began to rock the boat. He tilted it a little too far, and it turned over, dumping the whole crew into the water. They were about a block from shore. They could all swim. Not one of them was so much as bruised, but the water soaked them to their skins. Instead of waiting until their clothes dried off, they jumped into their cars and sped back against the cool, rushing night wind into Philadelphia.

The next morning the girl complained of a headache. She stayed in bed. The doctor came and pronounced it a cold. The girl, however, did not improve. The doctor came every day. The father called in a specialist, who declared it a case of pneumonia. All that medical science could possibly do— careful nursing, choicest of medicines, carefully prescribed diet—was done for the young woman, but it just didn't help.

On the eleventh day after she had gone to bed, the family physician came out of her room, walked into the lawyer's study, told him that the girl was dying and that only a miracle could save her life. The doctor asked the father whether he wanted to tell the girl the terrible fact himself or whether he wanted the doctor to do it. The man said, "I'll tell her."

He walked into the sickroom, sat down heavily in the chair by the side of his daughter's bed, took her hand in his, and began to pat it. Many minutes went past before he could get up enough courage to tell the girl that she was dying, but finally he broke the fearful news to her. The mother began to weep silently. The girl threw herself toward her father.

"Daddy," she sobbed, "I don't want to die! I can't die! Daddy, I'm not ready to die! Daddy, you've got a lot of money. Isn't there anything you can do to keep me from dying?" She tried to raise herself out of bed, but Father and Mother held her down. For some minutes she cried wildly, then calmed down somewhat. She turned to her mother.

"Mamma, I guess a person has to die sometime, and this is just my turn. Mamma, do you think it would be bad taste for me to be buried in my wedding-dress?"

"No, darling," said her mother, biting her lips to keep from weeping. "I guess it will be all right if you want it that way."

"Mamma, do you think Ralph [that was her fiancé] would mind if I wore our engagement ring away?"

"No, darling, I do not believe he'd mind if he knew you wanted it that way."

The girl and mother kept on talking soberly, softly. The girl's voice grew weak, hoarse with the approach of death. She turned to the father, bowed over with his head in his hands.

"Daddy, before I go, there is one question I must ask you. Daddy, please tell me the truth about it."

"Go ahead, darling, I'll do the very best I can to answer you."

"Daddy, you've been saying all this time not to worry too much about religion. You've been saying that if I am a good girl, live right, follow the dictates of my conscience, heaven would take care of itself. Mamma has been telling me all these years that if I wanted to be with God when I died, I would have to take Christ as my Savior. Daddy, now I am dying, please tell me, whose way shall I take, yours or Mamma's?"

The man said he threw himself on his child, picked her up in his arms, almost out of bed, pressed her to his heart and told her:

"Darling, if you have a moment to spare, for Christ's sake, for your own sake, for Mother's sake, for hard-hearted Daddy's sake, take Mother's way."

He said that by the time he lowered his daughter into bed, she was dead. As he testified, he stepped out into the aisle in his deep agony, pulled at his grey hair as if he were trying to tear it out, and in a voice of terrible emotion, cried out:

“Brethren and sisters, only God knows whether my darling had time enough to take Mother’s way.”

But, O beloved, you have time enough to take Mother’s way, to take Mother’s Christ. Your very minds respond to the truth of the plea. Your hearts ring with the tenderness of the appeal. Your souls are moved with the constraint of the invitation. The pierced hands are tugging at your very beings. The Holy Spirit is pulling at every fiber of your make-up. Come to Christ. Say:

I will arise and go to Jesus,
He will embrace me in His arms,
In the arms of my dear Savior,
Oh, there are ten thousand charms.

~ end of chapter 4 ~

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