

QUESTIONS OF THE DAY AND THE QUESTION OF THE DAY NO. 1093

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JANUARY 26, 1873,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“What do you think of the Christ?”
Matthew 22:42.*

IT was a custom among the Jews before the Paschal Lamb was killed to shut it up for several days for examination. It was at first selected with great care, for it must be, “A lamb without blemish, a male of the first year.” And lest at the first choice, some blemish should have been overlooked, it was continually inspected from day to day. It was meet that the lamb of God's passover should pass through a similar ordeal. It is remarkable that our Savior, during the days which preceded His being offered up for us on Calvary, was examined and questioned, both by friends and foes. The sharpest eyes were brought to bear upon Him—eyes made extraordinarily keen through the malice of wicked hearts. He passed under the scrutiny of Pharisees, of Herodians, of Sadducees, and of lawyers. They tested Him in all parts, and tried Him from all points; yet they found no fault in Him. “They marveled, and left Him, and went their way,” but like Pilate, they found no fault in Him. Read the chapter before us in that light, and it becomes singularly interesting, as exhibiting the unassailable perfection of our Divine Redeemer. Let us pray that, when we are proved and tested, we also may endure the fiery trial and be found to be pure gold. As they tried our Master, so will they also try us. May we, through His triumphant grace, endure even to the end.

As I looked upon our text in my study, another current of thought passed through my mind. The text stands in a remarkable connection. The chapter, which contains it, opens with the parable of the wedding feast. The marriage banquet was spread and the guests were invited. They would not come and therefore, special messengers were sent to compel as many as they could find to partake of the feast. Then, as to warn ministers in all generations that the greatest hindrances they would ever meet with would arise from the quibbling, critical spirit of mankind, we have in the same chapter a long account of the various cavilers that assailed our Lord. When we preach the gospel, men do not repel us point blank by telling us that there is no importance in our message. Instead they suggest difficulties, propound frivolous inquiries, or fly off at a tangent upon some other less important topic. They evade the pursuit of the gospel by plunging into the mists of debate. Like the cuttle-fish, which escapes by clouding the water all around it, so do they avoid the invitations and declarations of the Word of God by raising questions of a secondary character. It was so in Christ's day. His adversaries met His arguments with quibbles or with wrangling. It is certainly so now. We cannot get at men—they repel us off. They parry our home thrusts and baffle us by hiding behind the shields of evil questions. We cannot get close to them. They lie entrenched behind the ramparts of disputation, and with other questions, they push off the main question and keep far from them the soul-saving truth of God. The Lord Jesus Christ here teaches His ministers the art of leaping over the sinner's defenses, dashing into the center of his stronghold, and smiting him with the edge of the sword by means of the inquiry—“What do you think of the Christ?” We should deal with matters of disputation as He did—answer them, as far as they are to be answered, with wisdom and prudence, but then, He would have us carry the war into the enemy's country and attack the human conscience with the demand, “What do you think of the Christ?” This morning I purpose, first, to speak upon *questions of the day*, and then, to press home upon you *the question of the day*—the question of all questions, in which life and death are wrapped up.

I. First, a little upon some of the QUESTIONS OF THE DAY, not with any intent of interesting you in them, but rather of calling you somewhat away from them, lest they too much engross you.

The first question of the day is nearly akin to that which was proposed to our Lord by the Pharisees and the Herodians. It deals with the connection between politics and religion, *the vexatious question of Church and State*. How far does Caesar's rule go? Where does it end? And where are we compliant to

God alone? This inquiry, in a very practical shape, presses upon the Dissenters of England. I very largely attribute the partial decline of religious prosperity in some of our churches to the interest which has been taken in the questions, which naturally arise out of the unscriptural and adulterous connection at present existing between the Church and the State in this land. We have, each of us, a certain amount of mental power, of time, of energy, and no more. And if it is a necessity, as it is a necessity, that every Nonconformist should contend for his rights and liberties, and should never rest till perfect religious equality is established in the land, then so much of our strength is taken away from higher and better matters to attend to that which, nevertheless, it is unavoidable that we should consider. It is not possible for us to cease from our efforts to obtain deliverance from the degrading yoke which now burdens us. We are told that we enjoy *toleration*—the very word is an insult. What would the members of the dominant sect think if we talked of tolerating them? We shall never be satisfied until all religious communities stand upon an equal footing before the law. Caesar has no right to demand of us that we shall support the religion or the superstition which he chooses to select. An Established Church is a spiritual tyranny. We wear no chains upon our wrists, but on our spirits, our oppressors have thrust fetters which gall us worse than bands of steel. We are compelled, as a part of the nation, to support through taxation, a church whose business it is to pull down that which with prayers and tears, we live to build up and would even die to maintain. As Protestant Dissenters, we see the truths we preach assailed by an army of Anglican Papists, whom we are compelled to support that they may oppose our most cherished designs. Popery is this day installed and endowed among us, and we are compelled to acknowledge its puppets as the clergy of our own national church. That which our fathers died to overthrow, we are compelled to support. We cannot help being indignant. We would be less than men if our blood did not boil within us at such injustice. If men want Popery, or any other form of error, let them pay for it themselves, and call it their own. But to foist their superstition on us, as part of the nation, is an oppression against which we appeal to the Judge of all the earth. Men cannot long bear to be saddled with the maintenance of a superstition which they abhor—least of all can the descendants of the Ironsides endure it, who, though they have laid aside all carnal weapons, cannot quite forget the fields on which their fathers made the Cavaliers feel the weight of their right arms. The insult to our consciences, which is embodied in the present Church and State, is a daily provocation to us as men and Christians. Of the present unrighteous domination I would say, “Down with it. Down with it, all you who have a spark of justice left in your souls.” As for us, we will never rest till we are free from this excuseless injustice, and free we will be, as sure as God, the God of righteousness, yet lives.

Now, we cannot think about all this and be earnest about it—we confess it, and are grieved it is so—without very much of our strength running in that direction, strength which we would rather spend upon pure, spiritual religion. We desire to be always preaching Christ and only Christ. We desire to be building up His church and living at peace with all our brethren. We need, in all things, to be giving unto God all our heart and soul and strength. But this altercation concerning God and Caesar will come in. It imperatively demands our attention, and so it distracts us in a measure from our higher work, and therefore, the sooner it is done with, the better. We cannot be always taken up with this matter. We count the gospel of Jesus Christ to be worth 10,000 times as much. The Savior, when the Caesar question was brought forward, answered it most completely. They said, “Shall we pay tribute to Caesar?” “Whose money is this?” asked Jesus. “It is Caesar’s money.” “Very well, you have evidently submitted to Caesar’s government. You are under his sway, therefore, pay to him the tax which he demands of you, but still by no means forget that you are under God’s government. Therefore, render unto God the things that are God’s.” He drew a line of distinction here, which always ought to be maintained. “To Caesar, the things that are Caesar’s”—to maintain order, to repress crime, to preserve individual liberty, to protect each man’s rights—this is Caesar’s business. To teach us religion—is Caesar to do that? God forbid, for what religion will Caesar teach us? Is he a Pagan? He will enforce idolatry! Is he a Papist? He will ordain Popery! Is he an atheist? He will establish infidelity. Recollect the days of Queen Mary and see what Caesar is capable of when he meddles with religion. It is none of Caesar’s business to deal with our consciences. We will never obey Caesar in any matter which touches conscience. He may make what laws he will about religion, but by our loyalty to God, we pour contempt on Caesar when he usurps the place of God. He is no more to us than the meanest beggar in the street, if he goes beyond his own legitimate authority. Render to Caesar, Caesar’s; politics to politicians; obedience, cheerful and prompt, to civil

rulers; to God, and to God only, things that are God's. And what are these? They are our hearts, our souls, and our consciences. Man himself is the coin upon which God has stamped His image and superscription (though, alas! both are sadly marred), and we must render to God our manhood, our wills, our thoughts, our judgments, our minds, our hearts. Consciences are for God. Any law that touches a conscience is null and void, *ipso facto*, for the simple reason that kings and parliaments have no right to interfere in the realm of conscience. Conscience is under law to none but God. We do not believe in liberty of conscience towards God. We are bound towards Him, to believe what He tells us, and to do what He bids us. But liberty of conscience, in respect to all mankind, is the natural right of every man of woman born, and it ought to be tenderly respected.

Our Lord here lays the controversy to sleep by telling us to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's. Now, if there is any person here who is unconverted, but whose mind is much occupied with the Church and State dispute, whichever side of the question he may take up, I would earnestly say to him—important as this is, and to some of us, it is the question which, next to our soul's salvation, weighs most heavily on our hearts, yet still, first of all, attend to the more serious inquiry—"What do you think of the Christ?" Is He the Wonderful, the Counselor, the Mighty God in your esteem? Are you saved by Him? If not, I would bid you waive the topic upon which we have just now spoken until the higher question is answered. When a man is at the point of death, the question is, what can we do to restore him? When the vessel is going down, the one thing necessary for every man is, "How can I get to the lifeboat?" Sometimes in a desperate case, as that of sudden shipwreck, the love of life may drive men to do even more than they would do for themselves, and tempt them in their mortal terror to become forgetful of the claims of others. O, I wish that something like that excess of diligence, if such could be, would come upon men's hearts with regard to their souls. There are enough saved men who can fight out the ecclesiastical dispute. You unsaved ones had better go to the cross, and there seek and find salvation. The question has, doubtless, vast importance, but with you the far more important matter is to believe in Christ. Suppose you were to die tonight? It would then be a small matter to you what may be done in the next session of Parliament with the question of the separation of Church and State. If you have to stand before the bar of God before this year is out, the established churches will be of small account to you if you are banished from heaven and hope. Therefore, see to it, I pray you, that no business interferes with the business of your soul.

A second problem of the age also crops up in this chapter—the inquiry into the *details of the future state*. I think none of us remember a time in which so many strange theories have been brought forward with regard to the doom of the ungodly and the condition of the righteous. Some are teaching, and teaching with great vehemence, that believers, as well as others, die at the time when they depart out of this world and that there is no more existence for the righteous until the day of the resurrection. They teach that there are no such things as immortal souls, but that even the godly dissolve into dust and cease to be until the resurrection raises them out of the grave. Now, these are solemn topics, and I believe that it is highly necessary to be orthodox upon them. I do not think any man wastes his time that stands up to defend the old faith with regard to these things. I am persuaded that the generally received views are truthful and healthful and that the novelties which swarm around us will breed abounding mischief. Still, for all that, there are other matters to be thought about besides that carnival of errors which comprises soul-sleeping, annihilation, universal restoration, and the like. There is a prior question, and that is, "What do you think of the Christ?"

However, since the facts of the future ought to be known, our Savior dealt with the Sadducees' heresy. The Sadducees, believing in pure materialism and denying the resurrection, the Savior declared to them the certainty of a future state, and took out of their hands a weapon of fancied difficulty. In answer to their question about the woman married seven times, He declared that in the next world men are neither married nor given in marriage—where death's ravages are unknown, there is no need of reproduction. Since the Sadducees denied that there were angels, our Lord, without noticing their skepticism, declared that the risen ones are as the angels of God—thus killing two birds with one stone. He corrected their views as to what men would be in the other world and quietly confirmed that there are spirits called angels. Then, the great Teacher proved beyond question the continuous existence of the saints by reminding the Sadducees of the voice that spoke out of the bush to Moses. The Pentateuch was the great authority of the Sadducees. They did not reject the other inspired books, but they held the writings of

Moses in superior veneration. Therefore, our Lord, with wisdom, selects from the book of Exodus and quotes the words of the Lord's address to Moses out of the bush, "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." He then added a well-known Jewish axiom, "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living," and routed the skeptics in one battle. It followed clearly enough that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were not alive in Moses' day—they were in their graves—that was certain. Therefore, it was equally certain that a something which was truly Abraham was not in the grave, but was somewhere else. That is to say, that the souls of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were living, and living in the possession of God, though their bodies had been consumed by the worms. There was the Savior's argument. The patriarchs, as to their bodies, had been dead for some generations, yet God called Himself their God. Therefore, in the truest sense, they could not be really dead, but must still exist.

It has been said that the nerve of this argument lies in the fact that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were, as to their bodies, dead at the time. That is true and yet the argument would be strong if Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had been alive at the time. Note this well and consider the point. When God says to a man, "I am your God," what an infinite blessing He bestows, and how much the words imply! As long as God exists, He belongs to that man, and therefore, the man himself must exist as long as God does, for that which does not exist cannot possess anything. That which possesses anything must itself exist. Therefore, it follows that as Abraham and all other saints must forever possess God, as their God, according to the word, "I am your God"—therefore, they must eternally exist. In order to receive and experience the sum and substance of the divine promise, nothing less than eternity will suffice. When God bestows a blessing upon a man, He gives him such a range of being as shall give him the capacity for enjoying that blessing. Temporal blessings have attached to them a natural being. The vast spiritual blessing of possessing God is infinite and needs an everlasting existence for its enjoyment. The saints are still living or else God could not be their God—and the saints are still conscious, for God is not the God of unconscious things, that by hundreds of years together neither think or feel. He is the God of those who are living in the sense of being active. They still worship and adore. They still love and serve. Their rest with Jesus is not that of unconsciousness. They are living—not merely existing, but living unto the living God. This was our Savior's proof and it is one which is overwhelmingly convincing.

The doctrine of the continued existence of the righteous is bound up with that of the resurrection. Immortality and the resurrection are kindred truths. When God said, "I am the God of Abraham," He did not say, "I am the God of Abraham's soul." If He had, the existence of Abraham's soul would have fulfilled the promise. But, "I am the God of Abraham," includes the whole of his person, and Abraham was body as well as soul—it was necessary, therefore, that Abraham's body should rise to enjoy the fullness of God. There was, as a learned writer observes, an advance all the way. God was the God of Abraham while he was in the body of this death; He was the God of Abraham when unclothed, and He will be the God of Abraham when he is clothed with his house which is from heaven.

Now, my dear hearers, I would at once call you back to the main point. These questions ought to be thought of, and you should receive the teaching of Christ about them, and yield to none of the inventions of these evil days. Yet is there for you this more pressing question—"What do you think of the Christ?" Have you a part and a lot in Him? Are you saved by Him? It seems to me mere folly for an unconverted man to be asking, "What is the nature of heaven? What is the form of the resurrection body?" Did you ever see a poor, shivering, miserable beggar in the street, starving for lack of food, and yet curious about the exact details of the imperial revenue for the current quarter of the year? What business can that be of his? Is not this his first business—to win a morsel of bread? And should it not be your first concern, as a man, that you should be pardoned? That you should be accepted before God? That you should be saved from hell? Speculations upon the second advent and the prophecies of Ezekiel and Daniel—what have they to do with you while you are without Christ? Are you mad, you unsaved ones? Will you gratify curiosity while your souls are perishing for lack of the knowledge of Christ? The wrath of God abides on you. You are like a man in a condemned cell waiting for the day of execution. Is this a time to be puzzling your head about things which concern others, but which as yet certainly do not concern you? "What do you think of the Christ?" Put other things aside until that is settled. Then you shall attend to them in order, according as God shall help you.

There are, however, other questions which will arise—questions *upon theology*. One of these was asked of our Savior by the Pharisees. They wanted to know which was the first and chief commandment.

They believed that Moses had given them 365 commandments, corresponding to the number of days in the year, and that he had given them 248 prohibitions. They made a great point of knowing the exact numbers. Among them, there were great disputes as to which entailed the more sin, the breaking of this or the breaking of that other command. Some maintained that the ceremonial ordinances were more important than the moral commands; another party held that the ceremonial precepts were very secondary as compared with the moral law. Scribes and lawyers wrangled without end. Our Savior answered their question by telling them that the love of God and the love of their neighbor were the two great commandments and so He ended that matter. But He did not permit their thoughts to stay there. He pushed on to the more vital question, "What do you think of the Christ?" At the present day, if you speak to a man about his soul, he will ask, "Are you an Arminian, or a Calvinist?" To this we reply, "Dear fellow, are you saved? That is the matter. We will tell you what we are another time. For the present you need a Savior, and there ought your mind to settle." "Well," he asks, "what is your opinion in reference to baptism?" Our answer is ready enough, for we see the Lord's will plainly enough in His word, but we beg you to think more of Jesus than of ordinances. "But," asks the quibbler, "are you Presbyterian in church polity, or do you favor Episcopacy?" Dear friend, what has that to do with you? Have you passed from death unto life? That is the point. A man is drowning, and I put out my arm to rescue him, but he will not grasp my hand till I can assure him that I pronounce a certain Latin word correctly—is he not an idiot? My dear fellow, right quantities or false quantities are inconsiderable things compared with your being drowned—let us get you on dry land first, and then we will talk about long vowels and short ones.

So also, we cannot afford to split hairs while souls are being lost. We are far from saying that any doctrine is insignificant and that any truth is unimportant—a grain of truth is worth dying for. Still, there are solemn facts to be thought of before we come to controversial doctrines. There are persons who will say, "But how would you celebrate the Lord's Supper?" I reply, "We do not celebrate it at all with such as you are. Until you know the Savior, we have no Lord's Supper for you whatever." "But," he says—and he begins to question you whether there should be an altar of stone, or a table of wood, and whether the elements should be dispensed by a priest, or by a minister, or by a common Christian—"These are very weighty matters, and I must have them all solved at once." Dear friends, we also think them weighty, and our testimony about them never hesitates, but we are not going to dispute with you, for we earnestly entreat you, first of all, to know Christ, and Him crucified. Make your calling and election sure, and then, we will be ready to give you reasons from the Word for our faith and practice. At present, "What do you think of the Christ?" is the only inquiry which demands your care. I think I spoke out plainly enough, just now, upon the first question referring to politics and religion to let you know that I am by no means lukewarm on minor points. And I would speak with equal definiteness here about doctrines and ordinances, if it were necessary to show you that I do not undervalue them. But for all that, "What do you think of the Christ?" is far above all other questions for a man who is unredeemed, and I do beseech you not to let those other points destroy you, as they may do by taking away your thoughts from the one thing necessary. Till you are saved, you need your mind concentrated on the one essential point; after that we will teach you to observe all things whatever the Lord has spoken. Just now, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved," is the most important text in the Bible for you to consider.

II. Now, let us come to the second part of our subject—THE QUESTION OF ALL QUESTIONS, the question of the day, the question of all days until days shall end—"What do you think of the Christ?"

Observe that it is an inquiry *which concerns the Savior*. "What do you think of the Messiah, the Sent One, the Christos, and the Anointed One of God?" Do you think His errand was necessary? Was there a need for such a person to come here? Was a Savior necessary in your case? He came to save men from their sins—have you any sins? Have you sins from which you cannot escape of yourself, for which you can make no atonement yourself? Have you felt this? Do you feel it now? If you say you have no sin, your thoughts of Christ will be that He was a needless commissioner from heaven, as far as your case is concerned. He came not to call those who need not to be saved. Why should He do such a work above and beyond what is required? Have you felt sin? Do you confess it? Do you believe, therefore, that God, in sending Christ to save His people from their sins, has done a gracious and merciful act? Do you accept the person whom He has sent? Are you willing to be saved by Him? Are you willing to be saved on His terms, which are that you yield yourself up to Him, that He shall be your only Savior that He shall

have all the glory of your salvation; that you shall not be saved by any merit of your own, but be pardoned through His blood and righteousness? Do you agree to that? Does your soul say, "Yes," to that before the living God? If so, your thoughts of Christ are right. But if not, if you kick at His sacrifice, and say, "I see no need for it;" if you think it insufficient to put away sin, and if, therefore, you do not trust in Him, then, you have made God a liar by not believing His testimony concerning His Son. But I trust that this morning your thoughts of Christ are just these—"I am a sinner deserving punishment from God. I see that God has punished sin in Jesus Christ, and I trust myself in Christ, the atoning sacrifice, wholly and alone. I give myself up to Christ Jesus that He may save me, that He may rule me, that He may make me holy even as He is holy. If He will but have me, I have no opposition to Him. No, I feel, on the contrary, a complete yielding of my soul to His divine will, happy to be saved by such a Savior." I am favored, indeed, to be addressing persons who feel this in their very souls. Whatever else you have to perplex you, beloved, always hold to this, and let your thoughts of our dear Savior ever be humble, ever sweet, and ever pleasant to your hearts. Then, shall you be strong for sacred service. But never, never, never cease to think well of Jesus.

Please notice that this question not only concerns the Savior, but it concerns *the Person of the Savior*, and this is a point too often forgotten. We speak of the Lord's teachings and doings, but we ought, more often, to remember that He is a real person—not a name, or a fiction; not a shadow that has passed across the historic page, but a man of whom we may ask the question—"Whose Son is He?" as the Master asked it here. Now, shall I put the question to you? What do you think of the person of Christ? Do you understand how sonship and lordship blend in Him? Do you understand Him to be the Son of David, and therefore, yielding obedience on earth, both to man and to God, He became the servant of servants for our sake and obedient, even unto death; and yet do you comprehend that He is Lord of all, that the government is upon His shoulders? Is Christ your Savior and yet your Master? Has He washed your feet and yet do you bow down and kiss His feet? Has He done all for you, and now do you feel that He is enthroned in your heart's best love, and that you would do anything and everything for Him? Bleeding on the cross and yet exalted on the throne—can you reconcile these two things? The crown of thorns and the crown of universal monarchy—have you seen how these two are united in His blessed person? What do you think of Christ—sonship and lordship blended? And have you seen, and does your faith know that He is both human and divine—Son of David, truly such by natural descent; Son of God, also by nature and essence? It is no use our mincing matters—we cannot believe in the salvation of a man who does not believe in the deity of Christ. We would have the utmost charity possible, but we must have honesty, too, and it seems to us that the rejection of Christ as God is the rejection of His salvation altogether. Beloved, have you accepted Christ, the whole Christ, the Man Christ, the God Christ, Immanuel, God with us? Is He your trust? If not, may the Lord bring you to look the question in the face before any other. Put all the rest in the background, and consider this—Have you thought rightly concerning God in Christ Jesus, the Savior of men?

Have you thought rightly of Him too, in the matter of the opposition which is rendered to His kingdom, and yet of the sure conquest He will gain? Notice how the Holy Spirit has led David to write concerning it, "The Lord said unto my Lord, sit you at My right hand, until I make Your enemies Your footstool." Christ is opposed; you see it; do you also lament it? Does your faith, at the same time, grasp the thought that all this opposition will be overcome; that Christ will yet sit upon the throne of His Father David and will sway His scepter over the fiercest of all His adversaries? Oh, it is well when we can get to this—Christ in my own soul fighting with sin. Christ resisted by my depravity and corruption. And yet Christ sure to reign, and sit as king when all my sins are overcome and all my corruptions overthrown. It is a blessed sight to see the struggling and soon the triumphing, of the Savior and to think of Him in that respect. I exhort you to make sure work about the divine person of our dear Lord Jesus Christ, and to let all other things go or wait their turn for many a long day until you know Him, and are found in Him, and are saved with a complete salvation in Him.

But I must pass on a little further. This question is not only about the Redeemer and His person, but it is about *thoughts*. "What do you *think* of the Christ?" It has been said that we shall not be hanged for our thoughts. It may be, but many have been damned for their thoughts. Indeed, this is the source of damnation—that men will think amiss, and from thinking amiss, go on to speak and act amiss. "What do you think of the Christ?" This is a searching inquiry to some, for their relation to Christ consists of any-

thing else you like except thinking. Many who attend a place of worship never give themselves the trouble of thinking. They say a prayer night and morning, but as to thinking, that is out of the question. They go to the sacrament, and they do not mind how often, but they never think. What is a priest but an invention to think for me, to do my religion for me? But the question is, “What do *you* think of the Christ?” If there is no thought in your religion, there is no life in it. Man invents mechanical forms and modes in order to get away from the horrible necessity of thinking, but in so doing he destroys his soul. Every man should do his own thinking, and do it at home too, and not need to put it out for somebody else to perform it for him. The mind must exercise itself towards God, and if it does not, our worship is dead worship. Our Savior suggests to us that we must think and think of Him—“What do you think of the Christ?” Is it a pleasure to you to think of Christ? Do you so love Him; is He so comely in your esteem that you delight to think of Him? Do you frequently think of Christ, just as you often think of those you love? And do you naturally think of Christ just as we naturally think of food without being reminded of it, seeing we have to live upon it, and therefore, inward appetites render impossible to forget? Have you a passion for Christ? These are the kind of inquiries which try a man. Is your nature so changed that Christ has become your friend, and therefore you delight in Him? Has He become your food, and therefore, you inevitably long for Him, and must do so because of new appetites and cravings within your nature? Do you think of Christ joyfully? Can you say—

*“In the heavenly Lamb
Thrice happy I am,
And my heart it does leap
At the sound of His name?”*

Do you think of Christ, desiring still nearer access, and a clearer view of Him, sighing out with sacred love-sickness, saying, “O that I were with Him where He is or that He were with me where I am”? Do you think of Him with admiration, wondering at the Altogether Lovely One? Do you think of Him with an ardent wish to be conformed to His image, saying, “Gracious Savior, make me like Yourself.”? Do you think of Him with practical love; so that you help His cause, succor His poor people, proclaim His truth, aid His church, and pity sinners for whom He shed His blood? Do you so think of Christ as to speak well of Him, and commend Him to the love of mankind? Do thoughts of Jesus keep you back from sin and incite you to continue in the paths of holiness for His name’s sake? Do you so think of Christ that you pray for Him, that you give to Him, that you work for Him? “What do you think of the Christ?” Is He worthy of your actual, practical, diligent service, or is it to be all talk and idle chat, and broken resolutions, and vain professions? “What do you *think* of the Christ?”

Then notice, the question is about *your own thoughts*. How pleased we all are with the work of judging other people. There are certain persons to whom, if you will speak against all Churches and all religious people, and say, “How all are departing from the truth, and all going aside,” you are furnishing them with the sweetest possible nuts. They delight in sacred scandal. Now, it may be true that everybody is very bad, but I do not particularly see what I have to do with that. The main thing, at any rate, for the most of you to consider is—“What do *you* think of the Christ?”—*you*. “Ah,” says one, “I like to see abuses exposed.” Very well, come here and let us turn *your* heart inside out. “What do you think of the Christ?” “I like a searching ministry,” says one. Very well, then, let this question search you, and go right through your soul like a hurricane—“What do you think of the Christ?” “Alas! My neighbors are great Sabbath-breakers.” What are you, sir? Cannot you break the Sabbath, and yet attend a place of worship? Do you not carry burdens in your soul on Sunday, and is it not ordained to be a day of rest for the mind as well as for the body? “Ah, but some of my neighbors are very erroneous in their doctrine.” What are you the better for your orthodoxy? That is the point. May it not involve more sin to have the light and not to act upon it, than to be in the dark altogether? I beseech you, each person for yourselves—put the question to your own soul, “What do you think of the Christ?” How many times after a sermon have you said, “I wonder how So-and-so could sit still and listen to that part of it. I thought, as I was sitting there, what a home-thrust the preacher gave So-and-So”? Were such thoughts right? Is that the way to hear the gospel? Are we not to hear for ourselves? Should there not be a personal application on all matters? I push home this demand with vehemence—with leave or without leave, I beseech each one of you to answer to this inquiry—“What do you think of the Christ?”

And here let me close by saying that this question, though it only deals with thoughts, is entangled with every other spiritual subject. If you are not right here, you are right in nothing. The hymn says correctly—

*“You cannot be right in the rest
Unless you think rightly of HIM.”*

I never knew a man think little of the Savior, but what he thought little of sin. There was never a man who thought little of the Mediator, but what he had very strange ideas of the Godhead. Never a man went astray in his thoughts about Christ, but he also was going wrong in his thoughts of himself. If you know Jesus to be a Savior to the fullest, putting away all sin by the sacrifice of Himself—then you will know yourself to be a sinner, with sin to put away—and soon you will know yourself to be a saint with sin put away, and so you will get right ideas of everything else. Go to the fountainhead, I pray you! Make heart-work of that essential question—“What do you think of the Christ?” If you would allow me to catechize you upon your spiritual state, I shall not treat of any peculiarity of creed or sect, but I shall begin and end with this one thing—“What do you think of the Christ?” If a man has a disease in the vitals, the mere adornment of his person will avail little—the inward parts must be set right. And if you are wrong in reference to the Lord Jesus, the evil must be remedied by the grace of God, or you will die eternally. Remember, if our views of Christ are wrong, our state is wrong. When a man is born-again, he knows Christ, He may think he knew Him before, but he did not, for only the spiritual man understands spiritual things. If your present state is wrong, your future state will be wrong, unless you are set right in reference to the Lord Jesus. So that the question before us encompasses both time and eternity!

Do I address any brother or sister here who is already saved, but who possesses a scant measure of joy? Dear brethren, I should not wonder but what the reason of your despondency may mean unworthy thoughts of Christ Jesus! If you knew more about your union with the living Savior, about the perfection that is given to all His people through His blood and righteousness, surely your joy would overflow, and your despondency would cease. If we permit groveling ideas of our Lord to dwell in our minds, our whole spiritual nature will decline in consequence. Narrow notions of the Redeemer narrow our love to Him and our enterprise for His glory. Low thoughts of Christ will palsy the strongest arm, but a great Savior, greatly loved, leads to great deeds. See Him to be lovely beyond all things, and let Him engross your heart, and fire your spirit, and He will make a man of you to the fullness of your manhood so that you shall serve God wonderfully. Let not Jesus be a shadow to you or your religion will be unsubstantial. Let Him not be just a name to you, or your religion will be nominal. Let Him not be just a myth of history or your religion will be mere fancy. Let Him be not just a teacher or you will lack a Savior. Let Him be not alone an exemplar or you will fail to appreciate the merit of His blood. Let Him be the beginning and the end, the first and the last, the all in all of your spirits. As He is God’s beloved, so let Him be your beloved. As He is Lord of lords, let Him be your Lord, and when any inquire of you, “What do you think of the Christ?” tell them, “He is all my salvation, and He is all my desire.” Amen and amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SEASON—MATTHEW 22.

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