

Jesus - His Ministry

The ministry of Christ lasted approximately three years. Other great men in history would have accomplished very little if only given so short a time in which to fulfill their life's purpose. But the ministry of Christ changed the whole course of history. What was it that caused this ministry to be so effective in accomplishing worthy goals? Let us see.

1. SIMPLICITY

The first thing we notice about the ministry of Christ is that it was marked by the utmost simplicity. Matthew emphasizes that in chapter 12, verses 16-20, "*Warning them not to tell who He was. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: 'Here is My servant whom I have chosen, the One I love, in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on Him, and He will proclaim justice to the nations. He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear His voice in the streets. A bruised reed He will not break, and smoldering wick He will not snuff out, till He leads justice to victory.'*"

This ministry of Jesus was so different from what the Jews expected of their Messiah! They stumbled over its very *simplicity*. Yet the effectiveness of it has been demonstrated through the centuries. Jesus Christ wrote no book, constructed no building, gathered no army, collected no endowment fund; but the greatest book of all time was written to tell about His ministry, death, resurrection, etc.; thousands of buildings have been erected through the centuries in His name and honor, an army of spiritual moral soldiers has gone forth to fight for His principles, and millions...yea, *billions*...of dollars in money have been freely given by saints of all nationalities to further His cause in the world.

2. UNIVERSALITY OF APPEAL

A second great fact which confronts us when we examine the ministry of Jesus is the universality of its appeal. It is true that Christ Himself was a Jew, and that His public ministry was planned first of all to reach His own countrymen, and that the first followers were of that race. Furthermore, His ministry was confined to the small country of Palestine. But, on the other hand, we discover a Syrophoenician woman appealing to Him for aid and receiving it. The Greeks came to His disciples with the appeal: "*Sirs, we would see Jesus.*" The hero of one of His stories was the Good Samaritan who belonged to a group greatly despised by those of Judea. His Great Commission found in Matthew 28:19-20, has sent His followers into all the countries over the globe to tell men the good news of a Savior. There is no other teaching ever given forth by men that has such universal appeal in it as does that of Jesus Christ. Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, Mohammedanism, are all oriental religions. Some efforts have been made to propagate these religions in the occident...[or the countries of Europe and the Americas]...however, not one of them could be called in any sense a *universal* religion.

And the ministry of Christ is acceptable to all classes of people no matter what their condition in life may be. The rich or the poor, the educated and the ignorant, find help in this ministry. The farmer, the doctor, the lawyer, the mechanic, the carpenter, the student, the house-wife, the down-and-outer, the aristocrat, alike derive benefit from this unique ministry. It appeals to men when they are strong and well, and benefits them when they are sick and discouraged. It challenges them when everything goes well with them; it lifts them up when they have fallen to low levels. It helps them in the midst of life's battle, and comforts them in

life's sorrows. At every crisis which man can face there is something here of benefit. Can this be said of the ministry of any other teacher of all time?

AUTHORITATIVE BEYOND COMPARE

In the next place, we find the ministry of Christ was authoritative beyond anything with which we may compare it. In His famous Sermon on the Mount, Christ said words like these...*"Ye have heard that it was said...But I say unto you."* And such words were repeated again and again. He was giving new teaching and giving it on His own authority. When this sermon was ended, the idea of His authority was the one thing that stood out in His message as far as His crowd was concerned. For instance, Matthew 7:28-29 states, *"When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law."* The Scribes of that day made much use of elaborate quotations from famous rabbis and what they thought about controversial issues. However, Jesus gave forth His teaching with *Himself* as His great authority for saying what He did. When Jesus gave forth His great *"marching orders"* to His followers He prefaced His words with the statement **"All authority is given unto Me in heaven and on earth"** [Matthew 28:18]. Because He spoke with all authority, therefore He had the right to order His followers to go to the ends of the earth and proclaim His Gospel to all the nations and peoples of earth. Because He speaks with such authority, men should give serious consideration to heeding what He has to say.

SACRIFICIAL IN SPIRIT

Again, the ministry of Christ is seen to be sacrificial to a most remarkable degree. We are told He had no home of His own. Luke 9:58 states, *"Jesus replied, `Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head.'"* Jesus chose to depend upon the hospitality of others who ministered to His needs, rather than own a residence of His own. Matthew 20:28 states, *"Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many."* Although He depended on others for His *material* needs, nevertheless the principle upon which His whole ministry was based was to go around ministering to the needs of others rather than have servants to wait upon Him and do things for Him in a personal way.

But His *sacrificial spirit* is best illustrated by this striking fact about Him as given in Luke 9:51, *"As the time approached for Him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem."* Jesus knew that going to Jerusalem would cost Him His life, yet because this was a part of the final fulfillment of His life's purpose, nothing could keep Him from going.

John Maynard was a well-known God-fearing pilot on Lake Erie. He was in charge of a steamer traveling between Detroit and Buffalo on a summer after- noon. When smoke was seen coming from below deck a man was sent by the Captain to see what it was and he returned, saying, *"Captain, the ship is on fire!"* Buckets of water were thrown on the flames, but the fire could not be put out. The large quantities of rosin and tar which were on board made it impossible to try to save the ship. The passengers began to question the pilot, *"How far are we from land?"* The answer was, *"Seven miles."* Again, *"How long will it be before we reach it?"* *"Three quarters of an hour at our present rate of speed."* The only thing to do was to make a desperate effort to reach shore. As time went on, passengers and crew, men women, and children crowded to the forward part of the ship where John Maynard stood at his post as

pilot. Flames burst forth and great clouds of smoke arose. The Captain cried through his trumpet, "*John Maynard!*" The answer came back, "*Ay, ay, sir!*" "*Run her on shore!*" Nearer, they approached the shore, Again the Captain cried out, "*John Maynard!*" Feebly, came the response, "*Ay, ay, sir!*" And then came the question, "*Can you hold on five minutes longer, John?*" And the noble reply was, "*By God's help I will!*" The old man's hair was scorching from the scalp, one hand was disabled, yet his teeth were set, he stood as firm as a rock. He beached the ship, and every man, woman, and child on board was saved, but John Maynard paid for this deliverance at the cost of his life.

And even as John Maynard set his face to get to shore with the ship, so Jesus Christ set His face to go to the city of Jerusalem, and He went there though the price He paid for going was His death on a cruel cross.

ACCOMPANIED BY SUPERNATURAL POWER

Again, the ministry of Christ was accompanied by supernatural power. Jesus multiplied the loaves and fishes, restored eyesight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, and speech to those who could not speak. He displayed power over all manner of sickness, demons obeyed His command, and dead people came to life through His word. On one occasion, when He and His disciples were in a boat on the lake, He was awakened out of sleep. Matthew 8:25-27 tells the rest of the story. It states, "*The disciples went and woke Him, saying, 'Lord, save us! We're going to drown!' He replied, 'You of little faith, why are you so afraid?' Then He got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. The men were amazed and asked, 'What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey Him!'*" Yes, the ministry of Jesus was accompanied by a display of supernatural power!

When John the Baptist was cast into prison, he sent two of his disciples unto Jesus. Matthew 11:3-6 tells us the conversation which took place with Jesus, "*The two disciples of John the Baptist ask Jesus, 'Are you the One Who was to come, or should we expect someone else?' Jesus replied, 'Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of Me.'*" Why did Jesus send back to John's prison this answer to his question? Jesus knew that John was acquainted with the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah to come. He was saying to John, "*You know the credentials which the Old Testament required of Messiah. My miracles which accompany My ministry prove that I have these credentials.*" Isaiah 61:1 states, "*The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners.*" Isaiah 35:4-6 states "*Say to those with fearful hearts, 'Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you.' Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert.'*"

There was an old Frenchman named Lepaux who thought he would get up a new religion which he proposed to call "Theo-philanthropy." He had great difficulty in getting the people to accept it. One day he complained about his difficulty to Talleyrand, who said to him, "*I am not surprised at the difficulty you find in your effort. It is no easy matter to introduce a new religion. But there is one thing I would advise you to do, and then, perhaps, you might succeed.*" "What is

it? What is it?" cried Lepaux. Talleyrand answered, *"Well, it is this, Go, and be crucified and then be buried, and rise again on the third day...and then, if possible, you may accomplish your end."* Is it any wonder the old philosopher went away silent? The final proof that the ministry of Christ was that of the divine Son of God was His miraculous resurrection from the dead after His cruel crucifixion. Who else could boast of such supernatural power accompanying his ministry?

UNIQUE CHARACTER OF TEACHINGS

The unique character of the teachings of Jesus, first of all, may be seen if we note His method of teaching. Three methods which He adopted were strikingly different from other teachers of His day.

1. He taught by using short, crisp sayings, which were frequently paradoxical. Here are two examples: Mark 10:31 states, *"But many who are first will be last, and the last first."* Luke 14:11 states, *"For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."*
2. Then Jesus taught by action. Two examples will show this method. Mark 9:35 states, *"Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, 'If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all. He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in His arms, He said to them, 'Whoever welcomes one of these little children in My name welcomes Me and whoever welcomes Me does not welcome Me but the One Who sent Me.'"* John 13:12-14 States, *"When He had finished washing their feet, He put on His clothes and returned to His place. 'Do you understand what I have done for you?' He asked them. 'You call Me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet.'"*
3. In the third place, Jesus taught by parables. He used two kinds: The first was the parable germ, or a brief, undeveloped fact drawn from life. Examples of this type are: Mark 2:17 states, *"On hearing this, Jesus said to them, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.'"* Mark 2:19 states, *"Jesus answered, 'How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them.'"*

The other type of parables Jesus used was the parable story. These are familiar to all. The Sower, the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son, the Ten Virgins, etc., are known to Bible lovers all over the world. But we can scarcely imagine how fresh, how unusual, how different these stories were in Christ's day from the teachings of the scribes. Is it any wonder that it says in Mark 12:37, *"David himself calls Him 'Lord.' How then can He be his son?" The large crowd listened to Him with delight."*

All of Christ's teachings were different, but some of them were strikingly so:

Jesus placed a tremendous value on the worth of a soul. Mark 8:36-37 states, *"What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?"*

Jesus taught the humblest person was not to be despised. Mark 9:42 states. *"And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck."*

Jesus taught that the heavenly Father cares for each child of His. Matthew 10:29-31 states, *"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows."*

Jesus taught men concerning the real nature of sin and that it originates in men's hearts. Mark 7:20-23 states, *"He went on: 'What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean.' For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.'"*

In spite of the fact that Jesus loathed sin and spoke out against it in no uncertain terms, yet He displayed a remarkable love for the sinner. This was so much so, that He was given the name, *"Friend of publicans and sinners"* [Matthew 11:19]. Again, this is in contrast to the Jewish teachers of His day, who could not separate the sinner from his sin. Jesus loved the sinner, but hated the sin.

At this point, it is important that we should give attention to the teachings of Jesus about His own death and resurrection. Much is made by some teachers of the Bible, of the fact that the Sermon on the Mount, which is the longest single discourse of Jesus, says nothing about the death of Christ or His resurrection. They argue that Jesus does not place much emphasis on these doctrines or He would have mentioned them in this great sermon. But we must remember that the Sermon on the Mount was given comparatively early in the ministry of Jesus, and the disciples were not prepared to receive His teachings about His death and resurrection. When the right moment arrived, however, Jesus began to make predictions concerning these important events. Matthew 16:21 states, *"From that time on Jesus began to explain to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that He must be killed and on the third day be raised to life."* That Jesus taught men what would be the significance of His death is made clear by Matthew 20:28 when Jesus says, *"Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His a life as a ransom for many."* [John 3:14-15 and Luke 24:25-27 are other examples.] The unique character of these teachings can be readily seen.

We must also mention the teachings of Jesus about His second coming and the judgments coming upon mankind. Jesus made remarkable statements about events which would happen in the period to precede His return a second time to this earth. He predicted wars, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes [Matthew 24:7]. He told about false Christs and false prophets. He prophesied a period of terrible tribulation to come upon the earth. Then He foretold His coming in the clouds of heaven [Matthew 24:30]. What other teacher of all time has dared to risk his reputation by making such sweeping predictions about the future history of the world as did Jesus Christ? Many predictions which Jesus made have already been fulfilled, and this warrants our saying that every single prophecy He has made will one day come to pass just as He has said.

Teachers and heathen religions like to boast that their so-called *"sacred"* writings are of a high order, but the proof of the worth of these books is seen in the effect they have on the lives of

persons who are under the influence of those teachings. The teachings of Jesus and of the Bible have transformed, literally, millions of lives.

A little girl once came home from public school and said that her teacher had made this statement, "*The Koran is just as good as the Bible.*" The girl's father sent her back to school the next day and had her ask the teacher if she would like to live in Turkey! The answer was obvious. The teachings of Jesus are unique in their effect upon human lives.

ATTITUDE TOWARD WOMAN

The attitude of Jesus toward women is so important that it deserves more than a passing notice. In Christian lands today, women have so long been accorded a place of equality with men, that it is difficult for us to realize that this condition is not so in heathen lands today, nor was it true of general conditions in the world until the teachings of Christ and of the Bible changed the situation wherever the Bible was accepted. The following summary of the teaching of Buddhism in regard to women will give us an idea of what the position of womanhood might be had it not been for the ministry of Jesus Christ. A woman "*...dares do nothing without her husband's permission. She has no soul and her only hope of heaven is to be reborn a man.*"

Great prominence is given in the four Gospel accounts of the life and ministry of Christ to the attitude which He took toward women. His love and respect for His own mother has set an example to people of all generations. He preached a sermon to His disciples by noting the sacrificial giving of the poor widow [Mark 12:41]. He was often entertained in the home of Mary and Martha, and raised their brother to life [John, chapter 11]. He had compassion upon the widow of Nain [Luke 7:13], and brought back her son from death. He dared to talk with the woman of Samaria, a sinful woman, although the Jews usually had no dealings with the Samaritans [John 4:9]. He refused to condemn the woman taken in adultery, but told her to go and sin no more [John 8:1-11]. He healed Simon Peter's mother-in-law of a fever [Mark 1:30-31]. The woman with the issue of blood had but to touch the hem of His garment and she was well [Matthew 9:20-22]. He showed pity for the Phoenician woman by healing her daughter [Matthew 15:21-28].

Luke 8:1-3 gives us an insight into how much the women of Christ's day appreciated His attitude toward them and all that He did for them. This passage states, "*After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with Him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.*" These women expressed their appreciation of Jesus in this very practical way of ministering to His material wants. And thankful women all down through the centuries since that day have been serving Christ in many practical ways. When we read how much Jesus Christ has done for womanhood, how appropriate it is to read in our Bible that women were the last at His Cross and first at His sepulchre on the glad resurrection morning! And the risen Christ revealed Himself first of all to a woman - Mary Magdalene! The debt which women owe to Christ is great!

ATTITUDE TOWARD CHILDREN

Jesus' attitude toward childhood is also worthy of our attention. His attitude was entirely different from that held by the disciples. Mark 10:13-14 is a familiar story, but it needs to be read again and again. It states, "*People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.'*" The disciples thought of children as unimportant and did not want to be "*bothered with them.*" Jesus realized the true worth of children and the importance of having them come to Him early in life. Jesus many times used children to illustrate spiritual truth. Surely, the children of all ages owe everything to the children's Savior, Jesus Christ!

A woman missionary in the orient tells that one day a woman came to her with a baby which she had found in a ditch. This child had been thrown there by a father, like thousands of others in heathen lands do, because "*it was only a girl.*" The woman begged for the missionary to take the poor child, who was covered with mud, and take care of it. She said to the missionary, "*Please do take this little thing; your God is the only God that teaches us to be good to little children.*" How degraded childhood would be all over the world if it were not for the influence of our Christ.

ATTITUDE TOWARD THE SCRIPTURES

Jesus Christ made constant use of the Old Testament Scriptures in His public ministry. Besides direct quotations from the references to the Old Testament, we find His teachings full of allusions to thoughts of the Scriptures. Regarding His familiarity with all sections of the Old Testament, Jesus, in His teaching, constantly alludes to the writings of Moses and the prophets. He refers to almost every period of the history recorded in Scripture. He speaks of the creation of man, the institution of marriage, the death of Abel, the days of Noah, the destruction of Sodom, the history of Abraham, the appearance of God in the burning bush, the manna in the wilderness, the miracle of the brazen serpent, the wanderings of David, the glory of Solomon, the ministry of Elijah and Elisha, the sign of Jonah, the martyrdom of Zechariah - events which embrace the whole range of the Jewish record. And not merely do we meet with these direct references, the allusions to Scripture are almost innumerable; and every careful reader of Christ's discourses, who possesses a knowledge of the so-called Old Testament, must feel convinced that Jesus knew the Scripture from a child; and that His mind, His memory, His imagination, His whole inner man, were filled with the treasures of the written Word.

And furthermore, Jesus made use of Scripture in His own personal experiences. When the Devil tempted Him, three times over Jesus answered him, "*It is written,*" using an Old Testament Scripture as the Sword of the Spirit to put the evil one to flight. In His wonderful prayer recorded in John 17 we find Him saying, "*That the Scripture might be fulfilled.*" And on the cross His cry, "*My God, My God, Why hast Thou forsaken Me?*" was taken from the Twenty-Second Psalm; and His final words, "*Into Thy hands I commend My spirit,*" were taken from the Thirty-first Psalm.

But what was the attitude of Jesus toward the question of the inspiration of the Old Testament? Certainly He considered the Scriptures as authoritative. When dealing with questions which men put to Him, He answered with words such as these, "*How readst thou?*" or "*What is written in the law?*" In most of His debates with the religious leaders of the day He referred to

Old Testament passages in such a way as to indicate their finality. Instructing His disciples He taught them to look on the Scriptures as the infallible Word of God. Thus, His use of the Old Testament proves His belief in its divine inspiration. If we would follow the example of Jesus, ours must be an attitude of reverence for the Bible.

STUPENDOUS CHARACTER OF HIS CLAIMS

The real significance of the ministry of Christ is seen when we give heed to the claims which He made for Himself. We have already seen the bearing of these claims upon His deity. However, now let's notice the wide variety of claims which He made, which no other person on earth would dare to make. The stupendous character of these claims is readily seen.

Jesus claimed to be the Jewish Messiah. John 4:25-26 state, "*The woman said, 'I know that Messiah (called Christ) is coming. When He comes, He will explain everything to us.' Then Jesus declared, 'I who speak to you am He.'*"

Jesus claimed to be a king. Matthew 21:4-5 state, "*This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: 'Say to the Daughter of Zion, See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'*"

Jesus claimed to be the Son of God. Luke 22:70-71 state, "*They all asked, 'Are you then the Son of God?' He replied, 'You are right in saying I am.' Then they said, 'Why do we need any more testimony? We have heard it from his own lips.'*"

Jesus claimed to be God Himself. John 14:9 states, "*Jesus answered: 'Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, Show us the Father?'*"

Jesus claimed to be the Light of the World, excluding all other would-be lights. John 8:12 states, "*When Jesus spoke again to the people, He said, 'I am the Light of the World. Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.'*"

Jesus claimed to be the source of real satisfaction. John 6:35 states, "*Then Jesus declared, 'I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me will never go hungry, and he who believes in Me will never be thirsty.'*"

Jesus claimed to be the universal magnet as He was to be placed on the cross. John 12:32 states, "*But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself.'*"

Another all important claim that Jesus made for Himself, was that He was the only way of salvation. John 10:7-9 state, "*Therefore Jesus said again, 'I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.'*"

Some men think they can climb into heaven by their own good works, but we know that this is not possible as salvation is the *gift* of God to those who receive Christ as their personal Savior. A man who thought he could climb into heaven by his own good works, one night had a dream. In his dream he seemed to be climbing a ladder. Each step represented some good deed by which he made progress towards heaven. By and by he neared heaven. He could see the beautiful city. He stood on the top rung of his ladder, but he heard a voice from heaven say, "*He that entereth not in by the door into the sheep fold, but climeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.*" Christ is the only way of salvation.

An important claim that Christ made for Himself in relation to His followers is this: He claimed to be indispensable to the one living the Christian life. In John 15:5, Jesus said, "*I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing.*" The relation of the Christian to Christ is the same as the relation of the branch to the vine.

Some one has said,

*"If you take the word `Christian'
and leave `Christ' out of it,
what do you have left?
The letters I, A and N are left,
and they spell, `I am nothing.'"*

Without Jesus Christ, **I am nothing!**

The religious leaders in Christ's day once sent officers to Jesus to arrest Him. When asked why they failed to do so, their reply was, "*Never man spake like this man.*" Anybody who studies the ministry of Christ earnestly will feel like saying the same thing today. Such a remarkable ministry proves that Jesus Christ was a remarkable man. Yes, He could be none other than God - God manifested in human flesh.