

Dartmouth Bible Notes

The Claims of Christ



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: ~~Christian Marriage~~ Lesson 1

Scripture: Mark 14:61-63

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: April 5th, 1998

Who Jesus Claimed to Be

Introduction I have always believed that if we could just make the Gospel message clear enough to people, many more would more naturally respond to it in faith. The problem is that the Gospel message is so buried under other themes, that all too often the poor non-Christian doesn't get a chance to actually just hear what Jesus was claiming.

Whether we feel it or not, on a daily basis—take my word for it, there is a great deal of confusion today about exactly whom Jesus claimed to be. My belief is that if, somehow, WE can have it real clear in *our* minds about who He said He was and exactly *what* He said He would do, we are set up pretty well to simply tell other people what those claims were—and then leave it with them what to do with the claims. And I think that is the main part of evangelism, is just clearly communicating His claims, accurately... But there is a lot of widespread confusion about what were His claims.

- ♦ One large religious body (the Catholic Church) has made Jesus out practically, to be so severe that He really can't be directly approached—we need intermediary go-betweens—Mary and Joseph—and other so-called "saints."
- ♦ Another large religious movement (Mormonism)—a movement which is growing so quickly that it is about to be declared the first major *world religion* since the inception of Islam in the seventh century—says that Jesus was a "son" of God, like Satan was a "son" of God and that he came to *this* continent in recent centuries. This group tells people that Jesus never claimed actually to *be* God.
- ♦ A small but influential family of scholars (the Jesus Seminar) is going around today, making the talk-show and university forum circuits, saying with great scholarly authority that Jesus' *identity* as Son of God, Israel's Messiah, etc. was really something which evolved in the minds of church leaders in the first three centuries of the church—that He, Himself, did not personally claim these titles. They base this claim in their belief that the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are *not* reliable records of what Jesus really said.

So today, on Palm Sunday (as it is often called), we want to begin a look at some basic things that Jesus actually did claim and we'll start with a passage appropriate for today. Our information comes from the Gospels and unlike the "Jesus Seminar" we are assuming that those records are completely reliable.

When I read about Jesus, I get a whole set of good feelings. My confidence is reinforced. My mind is intrigued with many questions. The fires of my admiration for Him are re-stoked all over again. When I read about Jesus in Matthew, Mark, Luke or John, I love how each of those four guys paints a picture of Jesus which is a little different. Almost half of John's whole Gospel (43%) deals with just the very last days of Jesus' life, and John said absolutely nothing about the first Christmas! Matthew and John both knew Jesus. Luke did not and likely, neither did Mark although it is very possible that Mark got a lot of his information from Peter. If you spent a whole year and read nothing in your Bible but from the Gospels, you would do OK, I think. There is much there for the soul and for the mind and for the heart.

Now Matthew tells us that during Jesus' mock-trial He was being questioned by the high priest (an incredible irony, I think). For the most part Jesus wasn't saying much, except to this question: ***tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God.*** He responded, ***You have said it yourself; nevertheless, I tell you, hereafter you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.*** (26:64)

Mark recorded that Jesus' reply went like this: ***I am; and you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.*** (14:62) Both Matthew and Mark also recorded that to the Roman governor's question, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus gave him the reply, ***As you say.***

Luke recorded it this way, ***Yes, I am... If I tell you, you will not believe; and if I ask a question, you will not answer. But from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God.*** (22:67b-69)

John added more information, although he did not write down what the others said that Jesus said. Read with me what John recorded, in John 18:20-23 and before Pilate in 34-37.

Now, putting this all together, whom did Jesus, Himself, claim to be? Here's a summary:

- 1) Jesus claimed to be the one and only Messiah, the Christ, the anointed and predicted One.
- 2) Jesus claimed to be God's Son.
- 3) Jesus claimed to be the Son of Man.
- 4) Jesus claimed to be a viewable, future-man, empowered and seated next to God the Father.
- 5) Jesus claimed to be a viewable, future-man, approaching the earth on clouds from heaven.
- 6) Jesus claimed to be a pre-destined "alien" King. (John 18:37b)
- 7) Jesus claimed that His claims would be embraced by an elect group of people. (John 18:37c)

These are seven claims of Christ. There are many others. But notice that *these* seven claims were not given to a favorable audience. They were given when He was in real discomfort, humiliated and in great danger. There is risk involved in unveiling the real things that Jesus Himself claimed. The politically empowered guys listening to Jesus had a severe reaction to what He was claiming and they did not misunderstand. They knew that He was claiming to be the one, true God-man, prophesied from of old. He was

claiming to be “The Man.” He was not claiming to be a *just* great prophet. He was not claiming to be a *just* great Master-teacher, Rabbi. He was not claiming to be some great philanthropist. He was laying claim to the whole Enchilada! He was grabbing the Big title. He was claiming to be *Mashiah* (מָשִׁיחַ), the predicted King and THE Savior both of Israel and the whole world. I think it is hard for us to really appreciate the profound *disbelief* being felt by Annas, Caiaphas, Pilate, and most of the people. This was just a man. He was not equipped with any heavenly clouds that they could see. He wasn’t even saying a whole lot—you might expect more of a great prophet, anyway! Even His disciples were doubting. Jesus had looked pretty good up in Galilee. He had sounded pretty good just last week over on the Mount of Olives when His words were so sublime. But now, here, in front of Israel’s scholars and power-brokers He appears on the losing end of the stick. The Council was *rabid* in their frenzy, “A fool like this ought to be exterminated immediately.” And exterminate Him, they did. The most incredible death in all of history was the death of Messiah, of God’s Son, of the Son of Man, of the God-man. That He could die at all is amazing. There is much we do not know about it, except that it happened and that it served as an atoning sacrifice for all time and for all persons who would ever entrust themselves to it.

My friends, it is so very important for us to communicate clearly to people whom Jesus claimed to be. We must never water down His claims. They may get us in trouble with some people, especially if WE suggest that Jesus Christ, alone, is the only One who can really save. But we must make His own claims clear. And then I believe we can depend on what Jesus also proclaimed to Pilate, *Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.*

Some people that we want to hear His voice, do not. We must just accept this. But some people will surprise us because although we would never have predicted that they would hear His voice, they do! I think a good number of you here this morning, would testify that you were an unlikely candidate to become a religious person, which is how many of your family or friends would describe you. A person who hears Jesus’ voice and accepts His claims to be the one true Answer is a person who knows in his/her heart that Jesus really is exactly whom He claimed to be. And they are transformed by that decision. They don’t do it to themselves—it *happens* to them.

Now when people hear His voice, their lives are never the same. And they may imagine Him saying things to them sometimes that other people do not believe or understand. But we want people to see us and hear us but our great desire is for them to see *beyond* us. We want them to see past us and to see Jesus. We testify that He is there, even that He is here. We witness to the proposition that He is not dead. We witness to the fact that He is alive.

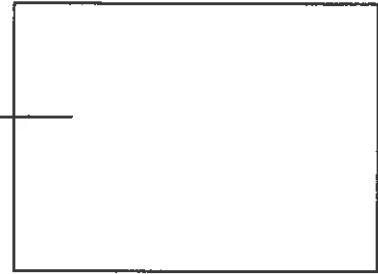
Jesus

- “Mashiah” (מָשִׁיחַ) ***Messiah***
- God’s Son
- Son of Man
- A viewable, future-man,
empowered, seated next to
God the Father
- A viewable, future-man,
approaching the earth on
clouds from heaven
- A pre-destined “alien” King
- His claims would be embraced
by an elect group of people

Dartmouth Bible Notes

The Claims of Christ

Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: ~~Christian Marriage~~ Lesson 2
Scripture: John 2:19
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Date: April 12th, 1998



What the Undead Savior Claims to Do For People

Introduction In the New Testament books of Matthew and Mark (Matt. 26:61; 27:40; Mark 14:58; 15:29) we read how during the trial and crucifixion of Jesus various people threw up in His face His three year old prediction, ***Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.*** The actual prediction, we find in John's Gospel; He said these words very early in His ministry (2:19). Luke mentioned neither the original statement by Jesus nor the later raising of it again by His detractors but he *did* refer to it in his Book of Acts. During Stephen's trial we read from Luke that ***false witnesses...said "This man incessantly speaks against this holy place, and the Law; for we have heard him [Stephen] say that this Nazarene, Jesus, will destroy this place and alter the customs which Moses handed down to us.*** How Jesus' original words had become distorted and misinterpreted by this point! And we know that Jesus was not talking about the Jerusalem temple but about the temple of His body (John 2:21) which would be destroyed but then which He, Himself, would raise up ***in three days.*** And the written record of the witnesses, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, proclaim that Jesus did just exactly that. He had claimed to come to life again after three days of being dead. And, to absolutely everybody's surprise He came back to life. No one had ever done that before. No one has ever done it since. And I find it interesting that nowadays Hollywood writers are writing scripts with people doing it (on a recent *Star Trek* a character is resurrected after being dead for 18 hours). But it doesn't happen in real life. It only happened once and Jesus had claimed it *would* happen. Now, I have to say coming back to life after being dead is pretty impressive—especially if you say you're going to do it.

Perhaps this goes without saying, but I think that becoming dead is our biggest problem. For most of us, we would rather avoid it and we try pretty hard to avoid aging, sickness, accident and combat. There are whole industries built up around the market of death avoidance. But Jesus dealt with death. He defeated it and He did so for the purpose of reclaiming people back to Himself. This is the most basic truth of Christianity. And although some scholars today would banish it to the "back seat" and suggest that other features of Christianity are more significant, the apostle Paul wrote these words:

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried and that He was raised the third day according to the Scriptures and that He appeared to Ciphers and then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep. Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all, as it were to one untimely born, He appeared to me also (1 COR. 15: 3-8).

Jesus' appearing to people, after His death, burial and resurrection, was real important. Had He appeared to just one or two might have been something that could be put aside. But He appeared to so many that one cannot rationally just dismiss that much testimony.

Now folks, this is a big claim of Christ! He claims to be alive. And He claims that this is of great value to people. He claims that by the same power that raised Him from dead, He can and does change people's lives today. Paul says the *God, being rich in mercy...has raised us up with Christ (Ephesians 2:6)*. If this is still true today two thousand years later--that's big power! Nuclear power can't even do that.

So we have an undead Savior. Here are some things I believe He offers to people today, if they will receive them:

1. He offers us a reliable record of what He did and a reliable basis on which to build our faith. Jesus never once questioned or contradicted the books of the Old Testament and His stamp of approval is all over the New Testament. It is a concrete, authoritative and challenging creed-basis for your life. In the original documents I believe there was an inerrant and perfectly integrated and comprehensive message of good news for all peoples.
2. He offers to transport your being, your spirit, your essence, your soul to be with Him immediately upon your physical death.
3. He offers that when you are then with Him your *status* will be completely free of debt or guilt.
4. He offers to give you a new body, a resurrection body, when He returns to this planet, physically.
5. He offers to include you, personally, in a great company of people who will accompany Him back to earth at the time of His second coming.
6. He offers to, now, here and in this present, give to you personally His very Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. The Spirit is then prepared to offer you progress and growth and increasing victory over sin. All the cool things that most people deeply hunger for—peace, love, joy, self-control—are part of the Jesus' Spirit's blueprint to construct.
7. He offers you courage and confidence against fear. Nothing is more daunting to people, more fearsome than death. To the person who entrusts himself to the hope of the resurrection of Christ, Jesus says, "Fear not death; it has been completely defeated."

8. The Risen Savior claims to have a plan for all who would trust Him. He offers to share that plan with you and help you to realize its fullest potential for you, personally.
9. The Risen Savior offers all of this to any person at all, free of charge, as a free gift in response to deliberate belief in it. You must believe that it is possible, that you are eligible and that He will actually, wonderfully, respond to you.

I know that exercising surrender to Christ, and believing all this involves some sense of risk. Take the risk! Learn what Easter is all about. It is about following after a Savior who is undead; who was dead for your sins and mine but who is not dead now. He is invisible, I admit. I wish I could perform a substantiating miracle for you like the apostles sometimes could, but I cannot. You must cling to Him and His promises simply on pure faith alone.

My friends, when I compare being a disciple of Jesus Christ with all of the other “packages” out there to which we might give ourselves—agnosticism, blind religionism, hedonism, to name just three—there is not even a *close* second. Take the risk, secretly invite Jesus into your life. Pray silently and keep crying out to Him. Ask Him to show up. Invite Him to honor His promises TO YOU. I would love it if over the next couple of months we had a secret revival in and around our church and we didn’t even know it for a while. I would love it if 30 or 40 or 50 people made that once-in-a-lifetime decision to BECOME a radical Jesus-follower but that the church didn’t know it at first. And then after a while we started to wake up to it and see the effects. God would get ALL the glory then. May it happen, O Lord! May you bless us before we even know we’re being blessed, with a person here, a couple there, a teenager here and a senior citizen there, who meet Jesus Christ, the Risen Christ, and turn their lives over to Him...

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: The Claims of Christ Lesson 3

Scripture: Isaiah 52:7; Romans 10:15

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: April 19th, 1998

What if I'm Afraid to Bring Up the Claims of Christ?

Introduction I can imagine a few people that I would be hesitant to share the good news of Christ with...a very few. Maybe I would be scared to share the good news with Jack Cassidy, bass player of the Jefferson Airplane (whom I once met). Maybe I would be hesitant to say to Senator Ted Kennedy (whom I was around last year), "So, like, Ted, do you know that you can go to heaven with all your sins paid for, free of charge?" I might find it difficult to bring up to Lady Sassoon (whose swimming pool I once cleaned), "Hey lady—have you heard that Jesus Christ claims that He is actually coming back to earth?" I can imagine a few folks to whom I might naturally find it difficult to bring up spiritual matters because I would be awe-struck to actually be in their presence. It's silly, but if we're honest I think most of us would feel that way. (And those people, of course, need to hear about Christ just like anyone else). But there are hundreds of people with whom I would have no hesitancy whatsoever to speak about Christ, because— I am so completely comfortable with the message itself. The claims of Jesus Christ, both about Himself and who He is, and about what He did and what He actually offers, are incredible news for people to hear, if we can just get the words out; if we can just get them to concentrate on exactly what Jesus claims. Then...how come we don't do it more?

Now, there is a wonderful line in the Old Testament which the apostle Paul picked up upon and incorporated and applied it to the age in which we *now* live... The original line is in Isaiah 52 and there it is a prophecy of good news for Isaiah's specific readers (or hearers): Jewish exiles in Babylon WOULD be *redeemed* unto Jerusalem; they would be able to return there and they would get the whole city back! To Isaiah's hearers, coming from the word of God, that was incredible news, full of joy and hope. Isaiah said,

3 For thus says the LORD, "You were sold for nothing and you will be redeemed without money." 4 For thus says the Lord God, "My people went down at the first into Egypt to reside there, then the Assyrian oppressed them without cause. 5 "Now therefore, what do I have here," declares the LORD, "seeing that My people have been taken away without cause?" Again the LORD declares, "Those who rule over them howl, and My name is continually blasphemed all day long. 6 "Therefore My people shall know My name; therefore in that day I am the one who is speaking, 'Here I am.'" 7 How lovely on the mountains Are the feet of him who brings good news, Who announces peace And brings good news of happiness,

Who announces salvation, And says to Zion, "Your God reigns!" Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices, 8 They shout joyfully together; For they will see with their own eyes When the LORD restores Zion. 9 Break forth, shout joyfully together, You waste places of Jerusalem; For the LORD has comforted His people, He has redeemed Jerusalem. 10 The LORD has bared His holy arm In the sight of all the nations, That all the ends of the earth may see The salvation of our God.

Paul takes the verse and uses it to wonderfully describe people in his day and ours who bear the message of good news about Jesus Christ. He is talking about all Christians who would tell others about who Christ is and what He claims to offer.

*How shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, **HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GLAD TIDINGS OF GOOD THINGS!** (Romans 10:14c, 15)*

So, we would probably be willing to talk through the Gospel with most people, if we thought they wanted to hear it, and Isaiah and Paul say we have lovely feet if we do it (which means it is a message that is welcomed from the lips of those who would speak of it). So why do we do it so little? Oh, I believe that a few of us describe or explain the Gospel fairly frequently and with ease. But I don't think most of us do...

And it is true, we do a lot of *pre*-evangelism. We distribute tracts to people. We recommend books, we speak in general and philosophical terms about many of the categorical issues that WE know people need to have straight. We might place some tapes or a Christian video in someone's hands. And we definitely share the gospel as often as we can with children IN our church building. But it is fairly rare, I fear, that we actually lay out the basic and simple points of the Gospel for people. I confess to you it is rare for *me* to do it, outside of my office or this pulpit. Now I don't want to beat myself (or us, corporately), too hard about this because I believe we use lots of cool resources to try to get the message across... but without actually having to *bring it up*, one to one. And I ask you today, what if I told you I am afraid to bring up the claims of Christ to some of my non-Christian friends? These would be non-Christians that already know I am an evangelical Christian (although they probably know little about what that would mean). What's the problem? Why is it so hard for us to get the words out?

Now, the gospel itself isn't really that complicated. A child can understand it if it's put simply enough. Here it is:

1. People have a serious problem, a problem that they are born with. It is called sin.
2. Sin has ruined people insofar as their basic relationship with God is concerned.
3. But because God possesses such a fundamental love for people, He could not allow this sin problem to ultimately win—to destroy His relationship to people.
4. So, He dispatched His only Son to come to earth and rectify the problem. That required the Son to sacrifice Himself in death for those people. And after dying He rose up from being dead, thus defeating death itself.

The New American Standard Bible, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1977.

5. Based on that, He now offers to *redeem* people BACK into a happy and close relationship with their Creator, with God. He offers this to anybody at all who will simply open up their hands and receive it. He's been offering it and people have been receiving it for two thousand years.

Now is that complicated? Do you think there might actually BE some people out there who would want to know those simple truths? Sure there are. YOU did! Then, why is it so hard for us to get to the point where we actually, personally, one to one with our friends, work associates, family, neighbors, DO SHARE these things, point by point? I think the reasons are several:

First, I think we struggle to believe there is anyone around who hasn't already heard it. We assume most if not everyone we know, could spit back those basic points themselves. They know the facts.

Second, we are afraid they will "cubby-hole" us and dismiss us as wacky, religious nuts. We do not want to compromise the friendships we have established with folks, friendships we which we enjoy, and so we avoid bringing up something so personal as *their* religious status.

Third, we, ourselves, are embarrassed and recoil and wince at the excesses, erroneous stupidity and sometimes outright scandals that have occurred within our own camp and we would rather avoid having to defend our faith due to weirdness that evangelicalISM sometimes markets.

Fourth, we're afraid we'll mess it up by not being articulate enough, or simple enough or capable enough at answering people's questions or worse, their objections. We're AFRAID. It's fear...

Fifth, sometimes we just don't THINK of it. Personally, my problem isn't this one; my problem is fear. But for some of you, you rarely if ever get around to bringing it up with people because you just don't think of it in time. Myself, there isn't a non-Christian that I know whom I don't think of as a candidate for hearing about Jesus. I pray that God will get the news to them—"just get it to them, Lord, without using MY mouth." Now, I know this is my being pretty honest with you and some of you are probably disappointed with me. But maybe this is part of what God is doing in my life these days...

Now, I am afraid that I cannot find a New Testament passage which sympathizes very much with us. I can't find a place in Scripture which says to us, "There, there...it IS hard to witness for Christ. Go ahead and don't do it, because you might mess it up." I looked. On the contrary what I do see is instance after instance where people were so excited about the claims of Christ and what He had done for them, personally, that they didn't really give a care who turned off to it or not, who rejected the claims of not. They just moved on to the next person to see if he or she would be interested. The New Testament—in fact, the whole Bible—portrays God as being sovereignly involved with

who comes to Christ anyway, with who actually has faith to embrace Christ. So His people seem to intuitively know that, and they just go out almost randomly and proclaim it wherever they can find the chance. They don't seem to worry about the quality of the product. Because, dear ones, it IS fabulous news! It is really good news!

What we have all over the place in the New Testament are verses like one we found in our Wednesday morning Bible study this week (Acts 6:7):

And the Word of God kept on spreading, and the number of disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem...

And if we could just get to the point of telling the news to folks, and doing so personally, there will always be some who respond. Yes, there will also be some who having heard the news and understanding it even, will reject it. But that is out of our control. The news itself is fantastic and wonderful. Paul wrote to Timothy (2 Tim. 4:2):

Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season...

Now I haven't figured it out completely, for myself yet, how to bridge the gap between establishing a satisfactory friendship with a non-Christian and actually bringing up to them the good news of Christ. One pastor friend of mine told me, "Neil, just do it." But I so very much do not want to be thought of as guilty of "spiritual assault." I don't like being treated that way, myself. And frankly, that is how evangelicals DO IT so often. Out of the blue, we launch into a person's most private and intimate area of his life and we expect him to welcome us there.

No, I think we need most often to WIN the chance to bring spiritual things up and then to tell them that, "Hey, I've got great news for you. Your spiritual life can become the best part of living! Even with all the hard things life includes."

And if we will pray and ask God to help us bridge the gap into a sharing of the good news, itself, I think He will honor that and set it up for us. After all, He is the one who wants us to all be evangelists—evangel-givers. It was Jesus' command that all of His people make disciples, teaching them.

Now there are several in this church already who share the news with ease. I am thankful for them and I derive some Christian joy from being around that. I myself, don't bring it up with ease and I need more confidence, but I like being around those who do. Maybe enough exposure to success will rub off on me! So, let's honestly appraise where we are at with this; let's be prayerful about it and ask God to make us a church of loving, sensitive evangelists. Let's grab fear and throttle it and when it rears its head again let's throttle it again, in the power of God's Spirit Whom He has given to us.

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: The Claims of Christ Lesson 4

Scripture: various

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: April 26th, 1998

New-Birthing People

Introduction When our daughter Susanna was born, in Charlton Memorial Hospital, the maternity ward included a special room available for us to use, called a “birthing room.” It was a room set up like a bedroom in your home and the idea was that labor and delivery could occur in a single room, which would look and feel more relaxed and home-like. Our daughter was “birthed”, a term I hadn’t heard before that year, by a wonderful doctor and couple of nurses and of course her Mom and me too. It was a wonderful morning in Fall River 13½ years ago.

My wife was “birthed” in the Bethesda Naval Hospital.

Our daughter Jocelyn was “birthed” in Baylor University Medical Center in Dallas.

And I was “birthed” in George Washington University Medical Center in Washington.

But what makes our church really unique (among the many churches in our area) is our belief in something called the “second birth.” We get this terminology from two places in the NT—John 3:3,5,6 and I Peter 1:3. The Bible claims that this is a real thing. It is authentic as the Bible is. But I also know that “being “born again” has become more popular in the past thirty years. And we hear some religious scholars say that this is just a matter of interpretation. But there is no interpretation—it is just reading the text and deciding if you think that the text of the Gospel of John and the first epistle of Peter are authentic or not.

But I know I’m preaching to the choir here this morning. You well know, it is a real thing. And the thing I want to deal with today is the claim that not only CAN it occur to people—and it is NEEDED—but that it can occur at any time. And if you are present with somebody WHEN they are born again, it is a beautiful thing.

I know that among older people, the notion of the husband being in the “birthing room” is unfamiliar and perhaps a little violation of your sense of protocol. But in this generation it is common and I must tell you that I was present at the arrival of both my daughters. And a strange thing happened to me in each instance. Without any forewarning or expectation, I began to weep. It was such an incredible thing for me to witness a new life that I was overwhelmed. It wasn’t a pride thing, for me; it was a deeply spiritual thing and beautiful blessing to be there. It is also true when you are present during a second birth.

Now maybe some would feel that it is undignified for someone to be present at a person's second birth. It should be private and it is nobody's business but the person's. Well, I can understand modesty—physical or spiritual. But IF you are with another person when they experience being born again it is a wonderful thing.

Now, I am convinced that the NT claims (and really teaches) that becoming born again can happen at any time. Listen to some of the claims of the NT:

Jesus, Himself, said to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well,

If you knew the gift of God and who says to you 'give me a drink' you would have asked Him and He would have given you living water. John 4:10

She could move from being spiritually dead to being a possessor of eternal life right then and there.

Peter replied to Jesus when Jesus saw many of his early disciples change their minds,

Lord, to whom shall we go. You have words of eternal life. And we have believed and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God. John 6:68,69

In Acts 2:47 we read

And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Did you hear Luke's words? BEING SAVED... One day a person was lost and the next day he got rescued. He was born again. *The fish stocks must have been booming because Peter and James and John couldn't get to them, so busy they were emptying the fish nets of people-fish. How sad it is when we sleepily believe the lie that this doesn't happen today!*

In Acts 6:7 there is another fabulous and exciting comment by Luke (which we read last week—forgive me for bringing it up again!)

And the word of God kept on spreading, and the number of disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, AND A GREAT MANY OF THE PRIESTS WERE BECOMING OBEDIENT TO THE FAITH.

In Acts 8 we read this wonderful encounter between Philip and this politician, the Ethiopian eunuch. Clearly the man believes in Yeshua Meshiach (Jesus Christ) who was prophesied about in Isaiah 53 (where the eunuch was reading) and he receives a wonderful new birth. It happened *outside, in a chariot*, and then the man is immediately baptized as a testimony and I believe, as a solidifying gesture. He understood baptism not AS the new birth but as the first thing a person does to TESTIFY of the new birth.

Time will not permit more examples but over and over again, the NT offers the new birth to people and illustrates people who come to faith in Christ and are wonderfully "born again." And for most of you here, this has happened. You maybe believed that Jesus

existed (or not) but then when you *trusted* in Him—believed in Him like Peter was talking about—you were born again. Wouldn't you like to see that happen to more people? And I want to tell you today that *you can be part of the process*. You don't have to sit out in the waiting room, pacing, smoking cigarettes! You can be right in the "birthing room."

It might be an adult with a child or a parent with a child.

It might be you with a friend of yours.

It might be you with one or even both of your parents, even though it was they who birthed you in physical birth.

It might be a teenager and a senior citizen or vice versa.

It might be a teacher and a student.

But it is the possibility of IMMEDIACY that is claimed by the Bible. The Bible never mandates a prerequisite of going to classes, becoming good enough first, being a certain age or being in some set of preconceived circumstances. It is wonderfully wild how becoming a Christian can happen at any time. Jesus said to Nicodemus that in this thing, the Holy Spirit—who is the agent of God in conversions of people—moves like the wind. He is unpredictable. When God moves on a person, the person himself sometimes is caught quite unexpectedly.

Now, I know that we encourage people to always make a rational decision about receiving Christ as Savior. And I will always do that. I am Mr. Rational and I am not suggesting that if we can just get folks to jump on some band wagon they will be saved. No, there are issues to consider. Nevertheless, from an observer's position there is no way to predict when the sovereign Spirit of God might work, nor exactly in whom. That is why I just want to get as many non-Christians as possible into this room on May 14th and on May 15th and into the banquet room at Thad's on May 16th—do the best possible job of presenting the claims of Christ—and then sit back and watch God work. I don't claim to understand how it all works nor in whom He might work. It SEEMS reasonable to me that He might work dramatically among a collection of people who have already been seeking, inquiring, searching and asking questions. That's why I'm asking you to search and to find people like that. But if you brought some crusty, hardened, longtime objector, who knows but that the mighty Spirit of God might not shed His grace and rain down His mercy on THAT some of those people too?

And so, what do I do? How do I be the midwife? How do I know that the second birth is imminent? How do I time the contractions? What do I do, go boil water? Well, we're going to continue with this next week and in the meantime I'm going to a conference in Pennsylvania and I will make it my mission to research this a little bit. I will ask some of the people there what they think our job as midwife actually is?

But let me encourage you about this. Hey, just like physical birth—when the time comes, it's going to happen all by itself, believe me.

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: The Claims of Christ Lesson 5

Scripture: Acts 16:31

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: May 3rd, 1998

New-Birthing People, Part 2 *Closure, Midwifery & Assistance*

Introduction We ended last week's message with the encouragement that whether we are ready or not, when the time has come, a baby's going to be born! And when it comes to people experiencing the second birth, whether we are ready or not the second birth is going to happen. It would be folly to think that because we may not know what to do, other than to pace and go boil water, the birth may not happen. The Holy Spirit does not *hover*, waiting for the potential convert to get properly "set up." At least that is not at all what the Bible teaches! It's going to happen in whomever it's going to happen!

You see, dear ones, we are interested in people experiencing the new birth. We are not just interested in reminiscing over and over again about OUR new births. We want to see other people come to new life in Jesus Christ. What other people? I don't know. And that's the exciting thing. It may surprise us a lot, who might come to new faith in Christ if we were to make ourselves available to be the midwives. I can imagine that Paul and Silas were just a little surprised when that correctional officer came to faith right in front of them. They, themselves, were not exactly wearing their Sunday best! Now I have always been intrigued with this account by Luke of what happened there in Philippi. I think it is one of the scariest and yet most exciting passages in the NT. Scary, because Paul and Silas are trapped in a prison cell during an earthquake—a claustrophobic's worst nightmare. Exciting because out of this seismic event comes the unexpected opportunity for the apostle to lead a whole family to faith in Christ. It is one of those passages that, to me, invites a multitude of questions. But what I want you to see is the simple process of leading this man to Christ.

First, you notice that he calls them *Sirs*... Not to make too much of this, but clearly he ascribes some respect and deference to Paul and Silas. He must have heard their singing and their conversation. I can imagine him overhearing Paul saying to Silas, "Silas, God may use this jail term for some reason..."

Then, he asks the right question, *What must I do to be saved?* Maybe he meant literally. After all, he was liable for every and all the prisoners in his charge. If ONE

escaped, he was liable to pay out that prisoner's term. If ALL escaped, well...what's the use? Maybe by saying *what must I do to be saved?* he simply meant *from this situation*. But since I think he may have overheard at least some of what Paul and Silas had been talking about, and there's nothing to tell us that they had NOT shared more fully the gospel with him (although the text does not specifically say that). But the question is the right one for him and it is the prototypical "Right One" that we want to get people around us to ask.

They then gave the right answer, and it was a very simple one: ***Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household.*** The simple goal of evangelism is to get the word to people to believe, to trust, to deliberately depend on Jesus Christ for the claims that He made to be true. Do not miss that they called Him LORD Jesus. Saving faith includes, I take it, a certain acknowledgment that Jesus is the King. He is to not only be believed on that He exists; not only that He can do something for me; but also for His claims to be King. He claimed to be Messiah and Savior but also Son of God and Lord, the Lord of all lords on the earth, the Authority of authorities. I take it that when saving faith is happening in a person, when the new birth is really occurring there is, as part of it, a certain surrender ^{is} involved, a certain bowing to his Lordship even if the convert does not possess the *vocabulary* or the right *terminology* yet.

The promise is simple and direct, salvation. It is also comprehensive in that it is offered to anyone who might embrace it, even the man's family and employees that are clearly not there at the moment.

Now I am taking this passage as a simple but important example of evangelism and spiritual "midwifery"; an example that we can use. So, how do we engage ourselves? Should we just tell people about Graham crusades on television and then just hope that they will watch, and somehow respond? Or do we get involved? And if so, how?

1. I think it is not that complicated. First of all we have to be WITH them. That is a simple thing but it is not an insignificant thing. We have to be around some non-Christians and inside of their confidence. We need to be with them and good enough people, enough of a blessing to them that they might listen to something we've got to say.
2. And then we need to be willing to BRING UP spiritual things, at least an introductory thing of two to get the ball rolling. This is the delicate part and we need to be sensitive, I think, and maybe a little creative. We don't have to bring up all of systematic theology to them but just a basic thing or two: there is a Savior for people who perhaps think that they might need saving. If they don't think they *need* saving, then so be it.
3. And once that person has heard about Christ, we COULD pray for them or with them. This is a little tricky because we don't know, except in the occasional dramatic case, whether saving faith is really being "birthed." But on the hope that it is we can offer to humbly pray for them or with them.
4. Then, we talk with them and begin to try to give them understanding of what the faith is all about, piece by piece, step by step.

5. And we offer them fellowship and warmth and acceptance.

And dear ones, I think that's about all that's needed. I think that the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ is sovereign enough to go out and reach the elect of God. I think He is pleased to use us if we will be used but I think He will get the job done and perfectly. People are GOING to come to faith in Christ. And we can be there, or not. I do believe there are some variables—whether we are sharing the Gospel or not; the spiritual climate around us; whether we present an attractive portrayal of new life in Christ—all these things, perhaps, contribute to how OFTEN we might see the new birth occur. But make no mistake about it, people WILL be coming to faith in Christ. You did.

Well, you won't be surprised if I tell you that I think that, somehow, we're supposed to be involved. We're supposed to tell people about the claims of Christ. And beyond that, I believe that if we want a blessing we can be involved in helping them come to faith. I do not believe there is any one, universal procedure. But however we can work our way into the situation, we can be greatly used of God and then blessed back if we involve ourselves.

I guess there's a little bit of risk. I guess we risk personal embarrassment or looking a little silly if that person asks us a question we don't know the answer to... But what a little thing to pay for the privilege of helping somebody come to Christ. And they do need assistance. They could use a midwife. Although coming to faith in Christ is the most single wonderful thing that can happen to a person, it is not always an easy thing. In those for whom it is supposed to happen, it will...it will. But it may not be easy for everyone. Salvation is a free gift, but prying open my hands to receive it may be hard. It requires a humbling and not everyone is naturally humble. It requires some small amount of understanding and some are thick-headed and stubborn. It requires faith and some need reassurance that their exercise of the smallest amount of faith in the claims of Christ will be met with the gift of the Holy Spirit. They need our help. And when we do help, there is no finer joy in life. Whether it is a child, a teenager, a college student, a young working person, a down and outer, an up and outer, or whomever...Let us help. Let us engage in the process of midwifery. Let's not be apathetic. Let's not be frightened. Let's not be unsure of our Gospel. Let's look for ways to get involved in the process.

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: The Claims of Christ Lesson 6

Scripture:

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: May 17th, 1998

What Happens When a Person Embraces the Claims of Christ

Introduction I want to talk today about entrance-level Christianity. I want you to consider the first days in a new Christian's life. And let me ask you seriously, is the "born again" phenomena real, or is it imagined?

- ♦ Does it actually happen, that a person—anywhere, at any time, any kind of person—might somehow "germinate" a new, fresh, never-before faith in Jesus of Nazareth; a kind which is not merely intellectual but also heart-moving, a *trusting* faith—and then become truly and genuinely transformed?
- ♦ Is it really a real thing, that a teenager might make a secret and highly personal decision to really turn their life over to God, to really begin to seek Christ and then FIND that his life has been quite miraculously changed—quite apart from any *intent* or *plan* on their part?
- ♦ Is it actually a real experience to have, that a man or a woman could go to bed one day, lost, unsaved, dead IN sin and then the next day become rescued by God, saved, dead TO sin?

Does that really happen? I am here to suggest to you today that the Christian religion claims, "YES." ABSOLUTELY. UNAPOLOGETICALLY. QUITE SO. AMEN. And the proposition of the Christian religion is that, not only DOES it really happen to real people (sometimes, it seems, more often than at others) but that it CAN happen in a quite unexpected and unpredictable way. Not only is it real but it is powerful. Not only do some things happen IN a person but they happen TO a person, from an outside source—things that, at least according to the Bible, completely change their destiny.

Now, evangelical Christians are quick to speak of conversion in terms of pure theology. And from some of the theological things that the Bible plainly says, we understand that when a person personally embraces the claims of Christ that they experience things like justification, adoption, and Spirit baptism. These are purely theological terms: English words given to certain spiritual realities which while we absolutely and *fiercely* believe in them, we admit their *invisibility*.

Justification occurs and a person is declared completely righteous by God with no approval sought by anyone else.

Adoption occurs and the person goes, in status, from being an outsider to being a cherished family member.

Spirit baptism occurs and the person is sealed by God for the future; now indwelt by the third person of the Trinity who is given to him like a down-payment on the future.

All very, very important but also very theological. And some of us converts can get excited about these realities but other converts among us look to Jesus and can say little more than, "Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom."

Today I want to talk about NOT what happens *invisibly* but what happens *visibly* when a person personally embraces the claims of Christ. And by visible I don't just mean "visible to other people" but also what is visible to YOU, YOURSELF. What can you look for that will be different from being unsaved one moment and saved the next? What can you see inside of yourself that has CHANGED?

When I trusted Christ I looked like a hippie. I did not change that right away and had someone suggested to me that I *should*, I'm sure I would not have wanted to. (I didn't realize it at the time but I was blessed as a brand new convert to Christ by immediately walking into a very accepting environment and as it happened that I started to grow in grace I slowly started to NOT want to look so worldly.) The mature Christians understood that that process takes a little time and they allowed the gradual transformation in appearance.

But for me, my interest level in spiritual things changed. In the first week after I surrendered my life to Christ I developed a voracious hunger for all things related to Bible study, prayer, fellowship and music. I was already a music lover and so it was natural to NOW want to see what *Christian* music was all about. I was intrigued with these songs, "Pass It On," "He's Everything To Me," and "We Are One in the Spirit." I grabbed by guitar and said, "What are those chords?" And I remember thinking that those little "verse packs" carried around by some of the Christians I was meeting, were cool "equipment." I wanted one. (I wanted a leather one, with leather braiding, that you could kind of hang with a chain off your belt) but I *wanted* one and what was more I wanted to start memorizing the Bible sentences ON the little cards. And so I started with 2 Cor. 5:17 and then Gal. 2:20, Rom. 12:1,2 and so forth. My visible appearance did not change right away but what HAD changed almost overnight was my HUNGER, my APPETITE for anything spiritual, anything related to Jesus, heavenward... Of HIM, I could not get enough.

Now is that experience unique to my testimony? It is not. I think it is the main thing which visibly happens to a person when they first embrace the claims of Christ. Any person... Smart, not smart. Old, not old. American, not American. Because if you have stood at the feet of the cross, looked up at Jesus and realized that He is hung up there, dying FOR YOU and that He didn't have to do that, and you think to yourself, "Man, I wish that would be for me..." He sees it. And He moves on it, rendering AT THAT MOMENT, justification, adoption and wonderfully, amazingly, inexplicably, Spirit baptism. Somehow the woman in Mark 14 felt this:

1 And I believe that what changes immediately, in noticeable ways, is a person's vision of the attractiveness of Christ. When a person embraces the claims of Christ, each day from there on out is a new chapter in discovering a wonderful new relationship with God. He is no longer distant. Thinking about Him no longer seems boring. You find that you LIKE what you've trusted in and now the Kingdom becomes interesting: going to church, meeting other Christians and hearing their stories, and helping them. The Bible

becomes something new to you. You find you are drawn to it. You sense it is more than just a book, that there is something special about it.

And while He was in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper, and reclining at the table, there came a woman from an alabaster vial of very costly perfume of pure nard; and she broke the vial and poured it over His head.

And standing behind Him at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears, and kept wiping them with the hair of her head, and kissing His feet, and anointing them with the perfume... Luke 7:38

I think when someone really comes to Christ their affections are changed. He may not abandon all the things he formerly loved but the ORDER of affections gets immediately rearranged. The stories about Jesus get him excited. He wishes he could have been there WITH Jesus. He wishes he could have just five minutes to talk with Jesus, now (and then someone instructs him about *prayer* and while he finds prayer a little elusive and hard, because it takes faith, He automatically starts to do it).

He finds he now LIKES other things about the Kingdom of God (although he may not be familiar yet with the *term* "the kingdom of God." But he senses he has this new *need* to be around the things of Jesus' domain. He wants to access these things, the activities, the conversations which contribute to his sense of the presence of Christ.

Worship music starts to mean something; indeed corporate worship at all is brand new!

The Lord's Table suddenly reminds him of the cross.

Preaching, if the preaching itself is not distracting, says something to him.

Time spent around the things of the kingdom is not something he is counting.

2 Another thing that happens when a person really personally embraces the claims of Christ is that the burden of sin is lifted. This is so hard to explain to someone else who has not yet experienced "justification" but YOU feel it. That "cloud" of judgment under which you realize you've been walking all your life has suddenly been lifted. The sunshine of breaks through and you realize that you no longer have to dread meeting your Maker! You know, oh so keenly, that you are a sinner. In your mind, the blood of Jesus over you has not even dried yet—your conscience is still tender and you secretly hope you never become callous to sin. But you know ALL your sins have been placed on Him on that cross. And you think, "Man, what a feeling!" This is an immediate sense that the new convert to Christ has, wherever He is.

There is therefore, now, no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Romans 8:1

3 A third thing which happens; a thing which is very clear in Scripture, is a strange but wonderful need to TELL someone about what has happened. This is the first point, the middle point, the last point of baptism. Baptism is a means of telling people that Jesus Christ has come into my life. He is now not just "the" savior; He is MY Savior! (And

if you are a Christian and you have known about baptism but have to this point refused to be part of it, there is something mutant in your faith). But the desire to tell someone about this new embracing of the claims of Christ does not end when you dry off after baptism. That is only the beginning.

A new convert to Christ, because what has happened to them is so incredible, wants others to consider the claims of Christ, too. It seems to him that if this could happen to me, it could happen to others. And I know others who are still walking around under that black cloud of judgment, of sin.

You can see this in the singers we hosted this weekend; Richard and Annie, Marilyn and Melody all just want to tell someone, through song, about what Jesus has done. That's why they sing. It isn't because they want to win some colossal philosophical argument. It isn't because they want to gain influence over people. They just want to tell somebody what Jesus has done for them.

When I first came to Christ, I had two buddies whom I so much wanted to come to Christ now, too. Their names were Joe Paul and Craig and they were architecture students. They were close buddies and I remember walking into their room in our college dormitory right after I came to Christ and talking to them about Jesus. I felt so new, so different, but they thought I had gone nuts and they didn't get it. But I remember an overwhelming feeling of just wanting them to simply trust in Jesus, to see what I saw on the cross, to feel the liberation from sin's debt that I felt, and to feel this incredible sense of purpose and revolution. I tried hard to explain it to them...

My friend Sandy, recently told me about Abbie Hoffman coming to our campus at Virginia Tech and getting the chance to personally share the Gospel with him. By 1972 when this happened, Hoffman was burned out, cynical, dark-spirited—all the right conditions to hear about new life in Christ and His claims. But Sandy told me that try as he did, he couldn't convince Hoffman that Christ's claims were reasonable and reliable.

But when a person *does* embrace the claims of Christ he is transformed. He sees a difference inside of himself. He wants to tell someone about this. Who wouldn't? He likes things he never liked before and he can't even really explain it. The claims of Christ are TRUE, he realizes. I haven't been duped! It's real! He is all that He said He was and I know He's going to do all that He has promised to do. He is wonderful. He is worthy of believing in and worthy of seeking and serving.

What Happens?

Affections Change

***Burden of Sin
Lifted***

***Want to Tell
Somebody***

JUSTIFICATION

ADOPTION

SPIRIT-BAPTISM