

The Christ Connection
Colossians 1:10-20

November 25, 2001
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It has been there for my entire lifetime—a neon sign on a narrow country road piercing the darkness with these simple words—CHRIST IS THE ANSWER. As a child, I used to wonder what kind of magic pen God used to write it on the side of the barn. As a teenager, I drove so fast I did not have time to see it at all. But, as an adult, sometimes I take the long way home so I can make sure it is still there, shining on the foggiest of nights. So out of place in one way and yet, such a revelation in another. CHRIST IS THE ANSWER.

Of course, if Christ is the answer, we must naturally ask what is the question? Specifically, does Christ offer any kind of answers to the questions that you and I might be asking today? I believe He does.

Paul said to the cult-ridden culture of Colosse, “In Christ all things hold together.”

Wesley said to the morally and socially deprived of England, “Today, I offer you Christ.”

E. Stanley Jones said at the Round Tables of World Religions, “Christ is God’s Divine **Yes**, who will stand the test of time.”

I ask you today, in this terror-stricken, war-driven, anthrax-threatened world, “Will it be Christ or will it be Chaos?” Christ has an answer for current culture. He has an answer for the kinds of questions that you and I are asking. I would like to propose a few of the questions that I think are on your mind and on everyone’s mind today.

WHO IS GOD?

Have you ever asked that question? A little girl was drawing a picture when her mother asked, “What are you doing?” “I’m drawing a picture of God,” said the little girl. An enlightened mother asked, “How could you draw a picture of God? No one has ever seen God to know what God looks like.” The child said, “They’ll know what God looks like when I finish my picture.”

Paul said of Jesus Christ, “Christ is the image of the invisible God.” Eugene Peterson, in translating this theological treatise of Paul says, “Everything of God gets expressed in Christ.” You do not need a telescope, microscope, or horoscope to realize the fullness of Christ and the emptiness of the universe without Him. When you come to Christ, the fullness comes together for you.

Does God care? Look at Christ. Can God forgive? Look at Christ. Why do people suffer? Look at Christ. Who holds the future? Look at Christ. As Jesus describes the way to Heaven to His disciples, Philip comes and says to Him, “Show us the

Father, and we will be satisfied.” Jesus says in response to him, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.”

In the heavens we see God’s handiwork. In our hearts we sense our hunger for God. In the Church, God is glorified. In Christ, God comes to us as a living person. God is personified in Jesus Christ. “Behold, I stand at the door and knock,” says the Lord of lords and the King of kings, “if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with me.”

The distinguishing characteristic of Christian religion, which separates it from all other religions of the world, is that God is looking for us. In every other world religion, people are searching for God, trying somehow to feel after Him and hoping to find Him so the hunger of their souls will be satisfied. Christian religion is different. It is different in that God comes searching for us. Indeed, He searches for us in a loving way, by giving none other than His own Son, Jesus Christ. In Christ, God is patiently, persistently, longing for relationship with His own. I ask you today, how long are you going to leave Him at the door knocking without having the courtesy to at least stand up, open the door and let Him come in? Christ is the answer to the question, “Who is God?”

WHAT IS LIFE?

Have you ever asked that question? Christ is the answer to that question. James Thurber says, “Living is a thing we do, now or never, which do you?” The problem with life is we must learn it as we go. We have to lead and sometimes follow, without knowing the real essentials of either. We have to teach our children how to live and make it in the world. We have to make it, ourselves, in the world, before we have figured out the nature of life itself. Far too often, we are called upon to be loving and to share love when we have never experienced the love of another person. We are asked to live life without adequate instruction. *Life’s Little Instruction Book* is hardly an adequate textbook for the awesome responsibilities of the social and human development of humanity.

Some people have suggested that maybe God got it backwards. Why can’t we live life in reverse? Die first! Then, with the maturity of the years, raise our children and pursue our careers with a lifetime of experience under our belts, until, at last, we finally revert to the innocence of childhood, the security of our mother’s womb and live forever as a twinkle in our father’s eyes. Well, that is not the way it is.

Sometimes it is not such a wonderful life. It is demanding, troubling, perplexing, and often, disappointing. But, we are not alone. The Good News is that One comes to us who understands life—how it is supposed to work, how it fits, and with the instructions on how to live it. When John announced the birth of Christ, he provided no stories of mangers, Mary, wise men, or shepherds. Instead, he said, “In Christ was Life, and this Life was the Light of all people.” Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth and the life.” Jesus said, “I came that you may have life and have it abundantly.”

In Christ, human nature becomes its very best. Sometimes we get down on people, don't we? A woman gets drunk, a man has an affair, a child throws a temper tantrum, a nation goes berserk over materialism—we are prone to say, human nature, being what it is, what else did you expect? The flesh is weak. We are full of lust, hate, and greed. We are only human.

But, Christ said something dramatically different. Christ said, human nature being what it is, just a little lower than the angels, is created in the image of God. Why don't you rise to love one another, just like I have loved you? Why don't you rise to forgive one another, just like I have forgiven you? Why don't you rise to serve one another, just like I have served you? Human nature being what it is, realize the heights and potentials within you. In Christ, we see life as it was meant to be.

Christ, the Son of God, where would the world be without you? Even those who do not claim You as Savior and have yet to crown You as Lord, acknowledge you to be the greatest moral leader who ever walked the face of the earth. You have touched our world, inspiring human kind with a dignity that is often denied, a community that is often compromised, and a purpose for being that is seldom pursued. At our best we become like You because You were the model of the way life ought to be. CHRIST IS THE ANSWER to the riddle of life.

Paul, trying to help us understand the unique nature and power of the risen Christ says,
“IN CHRIST, ALL THINGS HOLD TOGETHER.”

I have been trying for at least twenty years to understand that phrase. “In Christ, all things cohere”, says one text. “In Christ, all things hold together.” What is Paul trying to say? I think he is trying to say that Christ is the glue, the mortar, the centripetal force, the head of all things.

Is it not true that what holds things together is often a person? Isn't that true in our human relationships one with another? For fifty-four years my mother held our family together. She was such an incredible cook that all she had to do was call and announce there was a meal coming and her grandchildren would leap for joy and her children would rearrange their schedules just to get to eat at her table. Deep in my memory are Thanksgiving, Christmas, hog-killings, birthdays, and summer cook-outs at that country home. Then, my mother died. The “stuff” that caused our family to stick together died with her. What seemed like a close family suddenly disintegrated into stubborn, head-strong people like me. It persists to this day. She was the glue that held that family together and when she was gone, our connection with one another was gone with her.

I think, in a microcosm way, that is what Paul was trying to say, here, about Christ. “In Christ, all things hold together,” all things cohere. It is in Christ that we find the glue that helps things stick together in the right order. Christ is the Head of the Church, Paul affirms. Without Christ, Christians run around like

chickens with their heads cut off. We flutter here, keeping traditions there, developing systems, all of which have a hollow ring. Without Christ, we are nothing. Our denomination would do a great service in the 21st century if it rediscovered its Christology. It is a great need of our denomination today to understand how Christ pulls us together.

But, Paul went beyond that. He says Christ holds the whole universe together. He is the creative force of all creation. He keeps it united one with another. That is why we do not dare, as Christians, go off in some corner to nurse our own theology and be our own persons. We have to stay in community together. Instead of separating ourselves, we need to join hands with Muslims, Jews, Hindus, and New Agers. Let us meet at the Round Table of Dialogue where we can face common problems and perplexities together.

E. Stanley Jones was one of the great Christian leaders of the 20th century. He spent most of his life in India. In one of his books he says, "I went to India with everything to teach and nothing to learn, only to discover that no one has the right to teach until they first sit down to listen and learn." What a word for our day.

It was E. Stanley Jones who developed a Discipline of the Round Table, where people of all religions and backgrounds sat down together, not to argue about their religion, not to talk abstractly, not to develop theology, or to even iron out their differences, but to share their common search for God. Brother Stanley said, "Christ was always present and well respected at those tables of world religions." In Christ, the universe holds together. CHRIST IS THE ANSWER.

I still see it! On that dark, foggy night. It was on a little straight stretch of the road. The neon sign would leap out of the darkness, —CHRIST IS THE ANSWER.

What is the question? The question everyone has asked me in the last eight weeks:

WHAT IS HAPPENING TO THE WORLD?

What is the world coming to? Isn't that the question on everyone's mind? You only have to watch the TV ads to understand that we are on our way to a different Advent and Christmas than we have seen in recent years. It is another ballgame.

We have some brothers and sisters in the Christian community who would like to take advantage of this moment. They would like to announce that the world is coming to an end, that the Rapture is in the making and you had better get ready or you will be left behind.

Left Behind is one of the best selling series in Christian books today. In the meantime, Jesus was explicit and critical of those who wanted to calculate the end of time. Be careful how you interpret time in light of eternity. That is not the question.

The question is not, what's the world coming to? The question is:
WHO IS COMING TO THE WORLD?

Sandy and I slipped out to see the Rockettes on Thanksgiving night. Our kids had not yet arrived. It was a night out to watch some precision dancing, great tradition and get in the mood for the holiday spirit. It just seemed the right thing to do. I was not anticipating what I experienced, namely, the best portrayal of the Nativity I have ever seen. Here, at the Grand Ole Opry House, I am suddenly face-to-face with the meaning of Christmas. It caught me off-guard. I was not planning on it there.

The chorus stands and breaks into Handel's *Messiah* and the *Hallelujah Chorus*. The words are familiar— "*The kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever, King of kings, and Lord of lords, and He shall reign forever and ever. Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Hallelujah.*" I was on my feet. I thought I was at a camp meeting back in Kentucky, not at an opera house. People were standing around me and suddenly, there was this awesome spiritual moment in that place. It hit me! Ah, Christ is coming to our world. That is what is happening in our midst.

It is not, "What is this world coming to?" It is coming to Christ, for Christ is coming to our world. We have heard it so many times, but somehow it sounded fresh and new again.

Of all the armies that ever marched, all the navies that ever sailed, all the governments that ever met, and all the people who ever reigned, none have influenced the destiny of humankind like that one solitary life.

So, which will it be for you? Chaos or Christ. I am not offering a creed, I am not offering a church. I invite you to see something beyond that. I invite you to be "in Christ," which was the favorite phrase of Paul. Again and again in the New Testament he talks about being "in Christ." "In Christ," we see His revelation of God, His way of life, the hope that He instills into us each day.

I can still see it on that dark, dark country road, coming into view, with those neon letters so out of place, but so powerful. CHRIST IS THE ANSWER. I stake my life that it is absolutely true. CHRIST IS THE ANSWER. Amen.

