

"HEAR YE HIM"

A Devotional Series For Radio

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The Sermon: GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD

Scripture: John 3:14-17

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth.

Why does the world keep Christmas? The quick and easy and obvious answer to that question is that we celebrate Christmas as the birthday of Jesus. But who was Jesus? Why should the world bother to remember his birthday? Again it is easy to answer with platitudes which we do not understand -- to say that he was the Christ, the promised Messiah, the Son of God, the Savior of the world. What do these terms mean? None of us can hope to understand or to comprehend fully the depths of divine love and of spiritual and philosophical truth suggested by these familiar titles, but all of us may hope to understand and appreciate Jesus more than we do.

We remember the birthday of Jesus because even among the great men of earth whose birthdays are remembered for their historical importance, Jesus is a unique personality. Compare him with the greatest of religious prophets and leaders and messiahs, compare him with the world's greatest teachers, philosophers, statesmen, warriors, generals, conquerors, kings, and emperors, and in any company he still stands unique.

Just how unique we can at least begin to understand when we try to analyze something of our need for him, and of how his personality meets that need. Because of something which happened in the very beginning of the human race, man became a lost and fallen creature, helpless to redeem himself. It is not necessary that we know what was the overt act by which man fell. It is enough to observe the consequences of it. By that fall, sin

entered the world. By the fall, the heritage of the human race somehow became corrupted, so that every man born of Adam's race finds within himself the tendency to self-centeredness, rebellion, and depravity, as well as intimations that he was created for a higher fellowship with God than he has found it possible to achieve in his own strength. Because of the fall, every man born into the world finds himself subject to physical death. Because of the fall, and because of his own personal sin which is the result of the sinful nature received from his racial ancestors, every man born of woman finds himself separated from God, even while yearning in his inmost heart for God's presence and fellowship and companionship.

Separation from God is spiritual death. Lost and fallen man is utterly helpless to redeem himself or to extricate himself from either physical or spiritual death. It was to meet this need, this absolute necessity for a Redeemer, that Jesus came into the world. God, who created man in the beginning, and who gave him the right to choose for himself, did not stop loving his creatures when they chose evil and became separated from him and helpless to find their way back. He accepted some of the responsibility for man's fall, by assuming the obligation of providing a means of redemption which should reunite body and spirit, and restore this resurrected man again to the presence of God where he had been placed in the beginning, and where he by right belonged. All of this thought is behind the familiar and well

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

Only a unique personality such as Jesus could have cancelled the results of the fall, and redeemed man from both physical and spiritual death. The person to undertake this tremendous task of redemption must necessarily take upon him human flesh. He must partake fully of the nature of man, to share all the appetites, passions, temptations, and physical limitations which men know. He must know heat and cold, joy and sorrow, friendship and loneliness. He must know bitter and sweet, weariness and rest. For this reason Jesus was born of a woman, that he might partake of the physical nature of man, and by his atonement bring both physical and spiritual man back into the presence of God.

There are some philosophies of Christianity which teach that this is all that Jesus was -- just a man, born naturally of Joseph and Mary. They admit that he was a great man, a good man, a great prophet, a great teacher, a great example. They even admit that Jesus was the Son of God -- in the same way that you and I are the sons of God, but to a superlative degree. They teach -- and quite rightly so -- that there is a spark of the divine in every man. But quite wrongly they teach that in Jesus this divinity was superlatively great in quantity, but no different in quality from the divinity in every one of us. If Jesus was only a superlatively good man, then he could never have risen from the dead, nor could he have conquered death for us. If Jesus was only a superlatively good man, or a great teacher, or a great prophet -- and nothing more -- then we are still separated from God. We are still in our sins, and without hope of immortality.

Jesus was more than a great man. He was perfect God, as well as perfect man. The nature of Deity and the nature of humanity were perfectly blended and fused in him. Because he was perfect God as well as perfect man, he could live a man's life and yet remain without sin. Because he was perfect God as well as perfect man, he could lay down his life in death, and yet take up that life again in the resurrection, cancelling man's debt to sin and death and the grave. Because he was per-

fect God as well as perfect man, he could make the power of his resurrection available to any man who would believe on his name, repent of his sins, and become a new creature through the new birth of water and of the Spirit. Because he was perfect God as well as perfect man, he could take his resurrected body back into the presence of God, to prepare the way for every resurrected man to be restored in the flesh to God's presence for final judgment.

Only Deity could do these things. Only Deity has power over life and death. Only Deity could live in human flesh without sin. Only Deity could make the infinite atonement which would rescue man from the consequences of sin, and make possible the reuniting of flesh and spirit in the resurrection, and the restoring of resurrected, immortal man to God's presence. Jesus therefore partook equally of the nature of Deity as well as of the nature of man. God was his Father. His birth was a miracle. He was God incarnate in human flesh. His name was called Immanuel, which being interpreted is, "God with us." Long before his birth, Isaiah had prophesied of him, saying: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace."

Again at this Christmas season we commemorate and celebrate the miraculous incarnation of God's Son, who was born of a virgin in a humble stable, yet who was the Lord of Glory, come to manifest God to man in the flesh. He is Son of God, and Son of man. He is perfect God and perfect man. He is unique among all the personalities which ever dwelt on this earth. It is not enough to acknowledge him as the Son of man. If you would claim his atonement, his redemption, if you hope for immortality and eternal life, you must acknowledge him as the Son of God, or in the language of one of the old creeds, as "God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God." He is God's great gift, given because God loved the world and desired that men should not perish, but have everlasting life. He is the Word made flesh, which dwelt among us, full of grace and truth. Therefore repent, and come unto him all ye ends of the earth, and be saved. This is the invitation, the message, and the miracle of Christmas.