



WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“WHAT CHRIST MEANS TO ME”

John Galbreath
Bible Study Series

Date: Children's Work Conference, October, 1960

Church Teacher's Conference, September 1963

About Westminster's Galbreath Bible Study Series:

This lesson is one taken Dr. Galbreath's comments at two conferences held at Westminster Presbyterian Church, one in October, 1960 and one in September, 1963.

Review the outline of his comments. Reflect on them and how you would "fill in" the remainder of the message from your own perspective. Note that Dr. Galbreath began his notes with a portion of the Apostles' Creed.

Then, review the study questions posed about the lesson — whether by yourself or in your small group.

Finally, share your thoughts on the Galbreath Bible Study blog on the Westminster Intranet.

"I believe . . . in Jesus Christ, our Lord, who was born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. He descended into hell, and the third day rose again. He sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the quick and the dead."

I. "His Only Son, Our Lord"

A. Can we assume belief in the deity of Christ?

1. It is one thing to nod "yes" -- another to say what we mean and why.

B. What Jesus said concerning himself

1. "I can believe what Jesus said, but not what the church has said about him."
2. "I and the Father are one."
"He spake as one having authority, and not as the scribes."
"Thy sins are forgiven you."

C. God in our image.

1. What image is conjured up in "Deity of Christ?"

- a) *If what is often thought of in terms of Christ's deity were so, it should be rejected.*
- b) *The "Deity of Christ" does not mean he was a spooky phantom.*

2. Man needed an incarnation of God.

- a) *Revelation of the prophets was not enough.*

(1) The answer of Job to the problem of suffering was not enough.

(2) The question of immortality was still open at Jesus' time -- and is today in Judaism.

- b) *The only thing man understands is man -- and the best way to sell any principle is to personify it.*

3. Man had taken a try at personifying God.

- a) *The Greeks tried it in Zeus, Apollo, Mars -- the Homeric legends*
- b) *The Egyptians in Isis and Osiris.*
- c) *Try it yourself some time.*

4. Christ refused to fit the box.
 - a) *This wasn't what the Jew expected.*
 - b) *It isn't the way we would have done it.*
5. God is like Jesus.
 - a) *The adjectives that fit Jesus fit God, too.*
6. If we would deny the deity of Christ, we must say:
 - a) *We need no incarnation -- our knowledge is sufficient.*
 - b) *If I were God, I could do a better job of dreaming up an incarnation, so I'll wait until the real thing comes along.*

II. "Born . . . suffered . . . died . . ." -- Jesus' humanity.

A. "Born"

1. The oldest and most persistent heresy was -- and is -- gnosticism -- the attempt to disembody Christ.
2. Matter was evil, and God could never really be human.
3. The Apostles' creed was underlining time and again the fact that Jesus was "very man of very man." Born, suffered, crucified, died.

B. "Suffered" -- Jesus glandular construction was the same as yours and mine. "Of like passion." He had to deal with the same emotional problems we face.

1. Ambition. The wilderness experience.
 - a) *The problem of bread -- to one who has seen hunger strike those for whom he was responsible. This was not necessarily selfish.*
 - b) *"Throw yourself down from the pinnacle."*
 - (1) Short cut to notoriety
 - (2) P.R. men would be scandalized by his ineptness at getting attention.

c) "All these kingdoms will I give" -- power.

(1) Power for its own sake.

2. Sex -- His hormone reactions were normal.

a) Otherwise his virtue would have no relevance to us. "Chastity in an old man is not virtue."

b) The practical problem of celibacy.

(1) Probably head of a family of 8 or 9.

(2) One who is facing martyrdom has not right to involve a wife and children.

c) He faced the problems that celibacy involves.

(1) Jesus was the world's greatest lover -- loving many men, women and children.

(2) Jesus did not put himself in a position to be involved.

3. Pressure -- "If Thou hadst been here, my brother would not have died."

a) A problem of doctors, ministers, mothers, students . . .

b) "In this world, you will have pressure (tribulation)."

c) Jesus took 27 vacations. He had a human body, with human physical limitations.

4. Fear. "Get thee behind me, Satan . . ."

a) Peter's goading Jesus toward cowardice.

b) Peter struck a very sensitive spot.

c) Fear becomes evil when it immobilizes us. General Turenne, when told his knees were shaking before a battle. "They would shake even more if they knew where I were taking them today."

C. Gnosticism is not dead. It is found in our church school when we rob Jesus of his passions.

1. A passionless Christ has nothing to say to me, for my greatest problems -- and my highest possibilities -- arise out of my handling of my emotions.

III. "I Believe" -- the Meaning of the Credo

A. Faith is a three-cornered stool -- intellectual, emotional and volitional.

B. Intellectual

1. We have an obligation to be honest, above all.

a) No youngster should have to unlearn what has been taught.

b) Honesty may require humility -- admitting a lack of understanding.

2. Our children should have a total picture as well as piecemeal.

C. Emotional content

1. We are trying to make our children fall in love with God, through Christ.

2. Love requires intellect and emotion.

a) We cannot leave our selection of a mate to Univac.

3. Emotional content will reflect our own sense of devotion.

D. Volitional

- 1. The life of devotion. Here is where theology pays off.**
- 2. Doctrine that does not pay off here has no significance.**

IV. Conclusion

You are not alone. You will convert no one. You will present facts, bear your witness to what your faith has meant to you. Only the Holy Spirit can change the heart. If you do not intent to take the glory for conversion, you should not feel personal guilt if, having done your best, your work does not seem to have borne fruit.

Study Questions -- Part I

Bible Reading: There is no specific Bible reference for this message.

Study Questions -- Part II

Sermon :

I.A.1. Dr. Galbreath asks "what we mean and why" when we talk about belief in the deity of Christ. What do *you* mean? And why do you mean it?

I.B. 1. Where do you stand? Do you believe what Jesus said? Do you believe what the church has said about him?

I. C. 2. Dr. Galbreath suggests that man needed an incarnation of God. Think about what it would have taken for you to believe if Christ hadn't appeared in human form. How might your faith be different?

I. C. 3. The statement here is "Man had taken a try at personifying God" then suggests "try it yourself some time." Is personifying God something you can even imagine? Would you use words or visual images? What would you take into consideration? What would you try to make your personification encompass?

I.C. 4. If Christ refused to fit the box, most people in most times would likely have branded him a rebel. What do you do that is out of the box? Do you do things that are "out of the box" in living your faith?

I.C. 5. a. Think about adjectives that describe God. Now think about adjectives that describe Jesus. Which terms refer to only one? Which terms refer to both?

I.C. 6. b. If you had created the incarnation of Jesus, is there anything you would have changed back then? What would you think about if you created him for today's world?

II. A. How does the fact that Jesus was born the same way you were impact how you experience him?

II. B. People talk about suffering a loss. Or suffering from a disease. Or suffering a setback. Do you think there should be a separate term for what Jesus experienced? If so, would that very separation make him seem less human?

II. B. 1. How do you think Jesus viewed ambition in the context of his life and ministry?

II.B. 2. One of the criticisms of Martin Scorsese's film "*The Last Temptation of Christ*" is that in it Christ imagined himself engaged in sexual activities. Does thinking of him struggling with those temptations change how you envision him?

II.B. 3. Much like suffering, we think about the pressures we face in life. How can contemplating how Christ faced the pressures of his life help you deal with the ones in your life?

II.B.4. We often hear discussion of the last words of Christ. But fear is reflected in other gospel messages. What can we learn from these descriptions?

II.C. The outline says: "A passionless Christ has nothing to say to me, for my greatest problems -- and my highest possibilities -- arise out of my handling of my emotions." Can you even imagine how your feelings about Christ might be different if he hadn't experienced so many human events and emotions: born, suffered, died, ambition, sex, pressure, fear?

III. "I believe . . . in Jesus Christ, our Lord, who was born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. He descended into hell, and the third day rose again. He sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the quick and the dead." Look at the Creed in Dr. Galbreath's context of intellectual, emotional and volitional and review it phrase by phrase. Where do you find it easiest to believe? What is most challenging for you?

Conclusion Dr. Galbreath suggests "you will convert no one." Do you believe that is true? What can you do in your interactions to bear witness so that the Holy Spirit can change hearts? Are you able to accept when your best efforts do not bear fruit?