

Preach Forgiveness

Well, in 1971 we celebrated our jubilee since the gospel came to the area from which my wife and I come, fifty years, halfway between. In that area in the past fifty years we have seen a mighty movement of God, picking men and women from nowhere, as it were, from utter darkness and despair, from frustrations of life, Africa is a land of great upheavals. In your own cultures you regarded Africa as a great continent covered in darkness, whatever that meant. It is the most sunny continent on earth from January to December, and it is true that while the sun shone and poured its rays upon Africa, deep in the hearts of men darkness reigned supreme, and men while they walked in the brilliance of physical sunshine, yet they missed the sunshine of the love of God in Jesus Christ.

I was among them, brought up in a home where Christ was never heard. I never heard about Him or the God of the Bible until I was about ten. And yet my father was a religious person and he was very faithful in worship as most Africans are, there are no atheists in Africa at all. Africans are very religious people always seeking, always sacrificing, always groping after Him the creator. So, my father being so religious, and yet he never found the light and that's how I grew until missionaries who came teaching introduced me to the light after which we were groping for centuries and had not yet found. Therefore, in sharing with you today very briefly, I want to direct you to the Son of Righteousness who, when He comes, He comes with healing in His wings. That is a word from the Prophet Malakiah, but I am not going to go to the prophet as you have been hearing, I am going to take you to a simple passage in St. John's gospel chapter 8, and the talk centers on the blessing of forgiveness. The blessing of forgiveness.

You know, the New Testament message comes as good news, when it came to Africa it was good news. Why good news? Because you see when you are groping for reality and reality keeps evading your grip what else do you turn to? You become a frustrated human being. You become tired in your search, you fall back into despair and this is what our human race has been suffering from repeatedly, century after century, philosophy after philosophy, cultural patterns after cultural patterns. Men have groped and sought and sought until they nearly killed themselves. The good news is when the seeker, as it were, by surprise finds what he was seeking after. That is good news, and that's why christianity is the only religion on earth which can be called Good News Religion. It does not claim to have a better philosophy than Baddaism, or Hinduism, or my father's own religion - animism. Nor does christianity claim to have higher morals than those religions either. Islam has tremendous moral standards. But christianity come with a tremendous message which you will never find in any other religion at all. What is it? That God actually came.

Other religions ^{simply} say, here is God, here is the standard, you work your way up until you get to Him. You do your best, you work hard at it. You shape your life accordingly. You stick to the teaching. You establish standards, you stick to them, and then ultimately you'll get to Him climbing on your own ladders of self-achievement. That is what all religions teach, and christianity comes in the person of Jesus Christ. And it says, "Down with your ladder. Down with your standards, down with your efforts. They are futile. God has come to your rescue." God has taken the responsibility of lifting you from your failures upon His mighty shoulders and when God does it He does it beautifully, and He did it beautifully, realistically, in the person of His dear Son. Oh, the name Jesus.

So, in John, just in short, what is the record there? We are told in chapter seven that there was a feast in Jerusalem. One of the greatest feasts. The Jews celebrated, they remembered the misery of slavery in the land of Egypt and how the God of mercy sprinkled the blood of the lamb, rescued His people from despair, led them out of bondage into liberty. They remembered the experiences of the wilderness when they lived in the booths. They remembered when God gave them water to drink, manna for food, cloud for cover, light for guidance, oh what a God of mercy. So, they celebrated for a whole week in Jerusalem. This was the only feast where women and children and men and everybody participated. It was a tremendous, joyous feast of the tabernacles. It was during that period that Jesus quietly walked into the feast. Not under pressure, and He participated in the feast with His people, and on the last^{day} of the feast, so we read in the record, the priests went to the pool of Saloam and they drew this ritualistic water, and as they drew the water and they came to the temple, the congregation was singing Isaiah 12, 'Therefore shall we draw water with joy from the wells of salvation.'

Then the priests sprinkled the water of the blessing upon the people of the congregation, expectancy. And yet the master saw in the midst of celebrations, in the midst of the singing, in the midst of ritual, deep down in the hearts of those who celebrated there was a gaping thirst, a pressing desire. That was the feast, the background. At the end of the week when the celebrations were over, when Jesus had preached and spoken those wonderful words on the last day, "If any man thirst let him come unto me and drink, and anyone who believ^es in me as the scriptures have said or stated, out of his inner personality shall flow rivers of living water." A tremendous statement. When it was heard the congregation divided. Some said he must be the Christ.

Others say He can't be the Christ, others say we should arrest Him, and there were officers, or FBI agents if you like, who had been sent by the chief priests to be in the crowd and arrest Him. They were there, and John says they did not arrest Him, they went back. And the priests said, "Why didn't you bring Him?" And as it were taken back, they said, "We have never heard anyone speak like He spoke." "But we did not send you to go and listen to Him we sent you to go and arrest Him." "We simply couldn't help it."

And that is the background, now the message. A few days later, after it was over He was teaching in the temple on a particular day in the morning, and as the crowds were now dispersing from Jerusalem, the leaders of the religious group - the pharisees and the scribes - happened to find a woman who had broken the law of Moses, who was actually arrested in the very act of committing sin. John tells us that she had committed adultery. She had broken the commandment of the God of Israel. She had broken the moral standard. She had fallen a victim of immorality. And they arrested her. I don't know how far it was, very early in the morning, the religious leaders dragged this lady into the temple. Publicly they brought her, and Jesus was in the midst of teaching just as I'm speaking to you now, so John says, in one of the temple halls He sat and He was teaching a crowd of people early in the morning, and the door fell open and into the room came the religious leaders dragging with them a victim, a woman caught in the act of immorality. Guilty, shattered, ashamed of herself, ready to die, and they made her stand right in the center and those who were hearing looked upon her, and the pharisees and the scribes stood aside and they put a question which I read to you here. And they said to Jesus, chapter 8 of John, and this is what they asked Him, and this is the message for today, remember the blessing of forgiveness is what I'm talking about.

So, those who brought this poor woman and they made her stand in the center, they said, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery," verse 4, "Now in the law of Moses we are commanded to stone such cases to death. What do you say?" And so they kept quiet. And what did Jesus do? Do you know Jesus Christ? You want to know Him? This is the best way. Instead of answering He turned His eyes away from the poor woman and He looked embarrassed on the ground. Why did He look on the ground? You see, of all the people in that hall, He alone knew what was going on inside the heart of that woman. Others simply looked at the woman as a case, not a person, a case of a sinner arrested in sin, should be condemned, should be stoned to death, she broke the law, no one looked at her, she was as it were, dead. She did not exist as a person, and those religious people dragging her to the temple never treated her as if she had any feelings of shame, of guilt, of personality, to her she was a dead exhibit to be used to catch Jesus, to catch Him.

But Jesus, oh, how alive. What a saviour. As she stood there He understood. That's why He is good news for bad people. He understood. She was already embarrassed, should she be embarrassed more? She was already guilty, should she be told about guilt anymore? She was lonely, should she be made more lonely? She was despising herself, should she despise herself more? What do you do? Jesus knew what to do. He turned away from her to save her more embarrassment and He looked down, covered her sin, treated her as a person, began to create something new in her. She was frozen. You know, guilt is terrible. She was corroded. A dilapidated personality, like an old house, eaten through and through with guilt, waves smashing upon her one after another, condemnation. She needed to be released, set free, made alive. Oh my! And in His presence, bless her, she stood in His presence. That was

what made all the difference in the world.

And they pressed Him, "Please give the answer. Please give the answer." And Jesus lifted Himself up and said to them, "Anyone among you ladies and gentlemen, who has never committed the same sin, or never desired to commit the same sin, will you please be the first to throw the first stone." I suppose they had their stones in their pockets. They never put their hands there. Do you know what He did again when He knew that this was now very clear that in His light they had seen who they were? They thought they were better than the woman, now no one was better in the presence of the eternal light, they were just as guilty as she was if not worse. And He looked away again, this time not to save the woman from embarrassment, but to save them from embarrassment. He loved the woman, He loved the pharisees, He loved the scribes all the same. Categories did not matter, and when He lifted Himself there was no one in the room, all had gone, quietly, they had gone. Only the woman remained standing in the room in the center, and when Jesus looked at her, do you think it was easy? There she stood. This is the price of forgiveness. You think that woman found it easy to be found alone with the eternal God in the light of perfection? And she was all messed up. Was it easy?

And yet Jesus looked at her, and for the first time He began to speak to her, "Woman, where are your accusers? No one condemns you?" And she answered for the first time, the first time, addressed by Jesus as a person, not as a case. Addressed by the Son of God, eternity has put her together, she was now mended, restored, made to live. "woman," or lady in Greek, lady, because the word which Jesus used is ~~the~~ exactly the same word He used when He addressed His mother. Can you think of it? At ? of Galilee when He spoke to Mary His mother, He used exactly the same expression, "woman," lady.

you have? Dear woman, what is it that you have? You seem to be laughing and rejoicing? Oh, I found the liberator in the room, someone loved me to the extent that His love has now completely set me free from my chains. Oh, we know you are going to fall back again. Now this time I am bound by the chains of love and therefore I am eternally set free.

May this Sunday mean that experience to someone in this congregation. Have you ever entered into that eternal liberation. Do you enjoy that experience of forgiveness in your homes, in your life, in your offices, in your farms. This is what the world is missing. This is why men and women are completely frozen. That woman entered the room judged, condemned, frozen, and she left the room liberated, warm, free to live.

And I was exactly the same, when the master came to my aid, when He came into my cell, a captive of my desires, and when He spoke that word, "Go home, and sin no more." Do you know how He speaks it? Vernon read us that beautiful Isaiah 53, He was wounded for our transgressions, He took upon Himself our sins. He was numbered among us on Calvary's cross. That is where your permission and my permission come from, sealed with His blood. It is eternally powerful. Come, like that lady, whatever your guilt, whatever your shame, whatever is corroding you, whatever burden comes, Come, by your side stands the understanding Saviour of eternity. With blood in His hands He can heal your wounds. With the nakedness over His body He can cover your nakedness as He covered that woman's nakedness. He will not embarrass you, He will only liberate you. Let us pray.

Prayer: God, Oh Jesus, thou a joy of loving hearts. To those who fall how kind thou art. To those who find what a joy. Enter every chamber of each heart here, of your precious people, liberating each and everyone, the young and the old, and here as they go home they go home rejoicing, it is well, it is well with my soul for my sin, my whole sin, not a part, has been forgiven by the blood. Thank you Jesus. Amen.