



DON'T WASTE YOUR
SYMPATHY

PRESENTED

by

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on

*The
Back to God
Hour*

THE DENOMINATIONAL BROADCAST OF

THE REFORMED CHURCHES
OF
Australia and New Zealand

DON'T WASTE YOUR SYMPATHY

My sheep hear my voice - . . . John 10:27

It's possible sometimes to detect a note of sympathy in the voice of many who are asking questions about Christianity nowadays. Some times those of us who are in the movement encounter it when occasionally someone shows a spark of interest in our work and then suggests that it's rather quaint that anyone should still be interested in anything so outmoded as Christianity is.

There is a bit of nostalgia in their voices, too, when they talk this way. For most everyone agrees that there are several things about the Christian faith that are rather intriguing and even useful. And it is a shame that it seems to be passing away so quickly now. It's something like the passing off the scene of other items of historic interest; everybody will miss them, but everyone agrees that they must go. Many feel the same way about Christianity as it fades from the scene.

Occasionally one even gets the impression that Christianity these days is a good product, but there is no market for it. Some apparently feel that there is nothing basically wrong with it, but few want to buy it now. After all, Christianity must compete with a great deal. With other religions, yes even with them. But with other products, too. What with so many alternative things to enjoy, who needs Christianity, really? Therefore many think that, though it is sad, it looks as if the good old Christian movement is coming to an end.

A television interviewer put the question to me, a couple of months ago, "Do you really think there is any future for the Christian

faith?" He was very polite and I do believe genuinely concerned. I think he was even a bit embarrassed asking at all, because everybody is embarrassed by failure. Maybe you wonder the same thing. Maybe you feel just a bit sorry for misguided people who still think that Christ is important enough to arrange one's whole life around. If you feel that way, may I just say, "Don't waste your sympathy."

No, don't waste it. The cause of Jesus Christ of Nazareth does not need any sympathy at all. For it will prevail. It will be victorious. It might add, too, that every cause that is not united to His will, will fail. But that's not the point right now. The point is this: the great Christian movement is not going to die out. It has been around for nearly two thousand years now, and if human history continues another two thousand, it will be around two thousand years from now as well.

Maybe the reason many people feel the cause of Jesus is lost is that they are so mistaken about what's really is. Take the whole matter of the sacrifice of Christ, for example. Often we are given the impression that Jesus did a great thing on Calvary's cross, but it was basically futile. No one questions His heroism, but the fact is, He was crushed and failed.

Then, too, there are those who feel that Christ didn't really fail on the cross, yet they describe what He did in a way that makes Christ's work look hopeless. These are Christians themselves and they believe that Christ suffered, died, and He even rose again and ascended into heaven. They know He did this in order to pay the price of sin. But then the impression is given that Jesus is pacing through the courts of heaven wringing His hands and

hoping against hope that some people will believe on- Him and be saved.

In other words according to the model of Christ and His work, whether or not there are going to be any people in Jesus' movement at all depends upon how men feel. According to that description of the way it is with the Christian faith, the will of man becomes the decisive matter. Sure God has done a great deal, and Christ has, but now God and all the rest of us have to wait and see what happens. Will man respond, or won't he?

Now, I agree, that if that's the way it is, the Christian cause is very hopeless indeed. For men do have a great deal to take their attention away from Jesus and His work. They have their Playboy philosophy, and all their work to do. And they are terrifically skilled at keeping deep thoughts out of their heads, like thoughts about death and about the meaning of life. They spend half their time avoiding subjects like that. So, if this is the way it is- Jesus has done His part and now He's waiting for man to do his- there is not much hope. Men are just not that interested frankly.

But that's not the way it is.

That's not the way the Bible says it is. That's not the way Jesus says it is. God is not waiting breathlessly in His heaven, waiting to see what man is going to do with all His good gifts.

In the Gospel of John in the New Testament, Jesus shows how it really is. He talks about Himself and about His people. Perhaps you have heard Psalm 23. It starts with the well known words, "The Lord is my shepherd".... Well, that figure of speech is a very powerful one in the Bible, the figure of the shepherd and his flock, a shepherd and his sheep. And Jesus takes up the same figure of speech in the 10th

chapter of John's Gospel when He takes all the ideas that were connected to the concept of shepherd and applies them to Himself.

He says, "I am the good shepherd." Then He continues and says, "I know my own and my own know me, as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep." (vv. 14, 15) Notice that. Jesus is the good shepherd. He knows His own perfectly, and He gives His life for His sheep. Understand. Jesus died for *J-!is. sheep* the people whom He knew with an intimacy and precision that He Himself compared to the precise knowledge God the Son and God the Father had and have of one another.

Now Jesus continues in the 11th chapter of John's Gospel, and He says, "My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand." (vv. 27, 28) With these words Jesus took the figure of speech of a shepherd and his sheep and carried it all the way. "My sheep hear my voice ... He said. That is very simple. But once one understands what it means, he will never waste his sympathy on the Christian movement." "My sheep hear my voice"

As Jesus uses the figure of speech of a shepherd and his sheep in John 10 and as He then declares that His sheep respond to His voice, He shatters once and for all the erroneous model of the Christian movement we were talking about a few moments ago. You remember what it was, don't you? It was the model that pictured God doing all kinds of things to make Himself interesting for men and then hoping that men would respond, as a salesman would present this product and then hope

customer would buy it. So God is pictured making His invitation to the world, hoping that someone here or there will believe. But Jesus destroys that model with what He says.

The shepherd and sheep model Jesus uses indicates that there is a certainty and finality about the great work of Jesus Christ. When He died on Calvary's cross it was not a nice gesture that might or might not accomplish something, but it was the art that was necessary in order that God's great saving work would certainly be accomplished. When Jesus died He died for His sheep, and they were and are a definite people, whom He most certainly knew and knows, for this is the point He underscored: "I know my own and my own know me." And now Jesus' cause is realized in the world as the sheep of Jesus hear His voice. They hear it, Jesus says, just as surely as you hear this right now. The sheep of Jesus hear the voice of the shepherd, and they respond in faith to what they hear. They have this faith because they are His sheep.

The Jesus cause, you see, is the most sure cause in the world, for it is a great history sweeping movement that gathers in the sheep of Jesus so that not one of these people is missed. It's not like the beginning of a television season, for example, when the new shows are heard for the first time. Everybody holds their breath to see what is going to happen—which shows will be successful. But all of them will be. No one can make a prediction. One has to wait and see which programs will be popular.

Well, it's not like that with Christ's cause. He died for His sheep, a specific flock of sheep, a specific group of people, some of whom lived in centuries gone by and some who are living now—because of this we know with ab-

solite certainty that the Christian faith shall continue to advance today. Whenever the gospel returns to a new place for the first time, for example, the question is not, wonder how many people will like it. No one will like it, for the gospel comes with shattering force and it unroves the deepest thoughts of men's hearts and it turns their lives around. And people are not going to like it at all. But that's not the question. In fact, there is no question. When the message of Jesus comes anywhere, the sheep of Jesus will hear, and they will respond. And they will be saved. They will hear. There is no question that they will. They will respond and be saved.

What does it mean exactly to hear the voice of the shepherd? Let me explain it by telling about a lecturer who said some time ago that he never listened to the radio. It would be on, his children would play it, but it was just so much noise in the background. Then one day he went to a town to give a lecture. As he rode from the airport to the hotel in the taxi, the radio was playing and he wasn't listening, as usual. But suddenly the announcer began to talk about the lecture he was going to give that night. All at once he was all ears. He heard every word that was said.

That's the way it is with the sheep of Jesus, too. When the voice of the shepherd comes, the good news of Jesus' great work on Calvary's cross circles the globe and penetrates thousands of communities by radio and in many other ways, hundreds of people never hear at all. To them it is just background noise. Maybe they reach over and turn the message off if they can. But the sheep of Jesus are like that man in the taxi, they hear when the message of Jesus' great works comes to them. Perhaps they read

about it in the Bible. They may hear it over the radio. They may listen to it Sunday after Sunday in church. Someone may tell them the good news. But however they get it, they respond when they hear it. They are the sheep of Jesus. Jesus knows them. And He gives them the power to respond in faith.

Oh that's a remarkable thing, the way the sheep of Jesus respond to the message of the good shepherd. It is an event that is not bound by time or space. A man living today may write something about the gospel that may bring salvation to sheep of Jesus who are not yet born and who will read what he wrote 50 years from now. A person may use radio to bring the gospel to a nation he has never been in, but the people there will respond, the sheep of Jesus will.

So, you see you should not waste your sympathy on the Christian movement. In a case you are beginning to think that it is going out of style and therefore it is doomed. It is not out of style but it is not doomed. It is going out of style because the style of life today is so Godless and hopeless and empty and meaningless. There is a brooding insanity that lays over the human experience like a cloud, and much of the empty joy men seek, they seek in order to dull their senses to the horror of our age. In such a time, the real joy of the Christian faith, the full hope of the gospel, the available opportunity to work in the kingdom of Jesus is out of style, indeed. It's out of style as a matter of fact. It is a funeral home. But the fact that it is out of style is not an indication that Christianity is now done for and everything else will endure. Not at all. It's the other way around. The way men have chosen for themselves is the way of life, and those people who are Jesus'

people, the people whom He has known from before the foundations of the earth, sense this, and they respond to His voice with faith.

The most beautiful thing going on in our world right now is the great work of the Good Shepherd as He moves throughout the world and seeks out His sheep. They are in so many strange and far out places. Some of them are in places where the gospel has seldom come and new shepherds have not found the gospel to them. But Jesus goes there, too. In the book of Ezekiel we find a tender description of the way the Good Shepherd goes after His poor sheep. Listen, this is God speaking: "I will be the shepherd of my sheep, I will make them lie down, says the Lord God. I will seek the lost, and I will bring the strayed, and I will bind up the crippled, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will watch over; I will feed them in justice." (34: 15, 16)

Down through the years, many people have wasted their pity on Jesus Christ. When He went to the cross, for example, He was surrounded by many people who were terribly distressed by what was going on. And there was a group of women from Jerusalem who were particularly impressive with their weeping and their sobbing. The Bible records it in Luke 3. This is what it says: "And there followed him a great multitude of the people, and of the women who bewailed and lamented him. But Jesus turning to them said, 'Daughters of Jerusalem do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children' (vv. 27, 28). And then Jesus went on and described the fierce judgment that would surely fall upon them. It was a judgment that would be as ugly as the very cross Jesus was marching toward. That's

why He said, "Don't weep for me weep for yourselves."

So today, too, Christ says, to you, feel; 't sorry for me. Don't feel sorry for Christians. Don't waste your sympathy on me weep for yourself, and for your children."

' Jesus' cause is not going to fail go to be victorious. But if you do not believe in Jesus today, your cause is going to fail. You are going to fail. Don't worry about Jesus and His people. Worry about yourself and about your children.

After all the big corporations have hit the dust, after all governments of the world have toppled after all the great systems of man have been destroyed, Christ and His kingdom will endure. And He shall reign forever and ever. I know that everything in this world contradicts this. Everything, except the message of the Bible. And we must believe the Bible because it is the truth.

So don't waste your sympathy. But if you are still outside Jesus' great movement, may I plead with you right now, believe in Jesus yourself and be saved. Believe that He on the Calvary's cross in order that sin might be destroyed. Repent of your sins and believe that He is your Savior.

It's true that Christ's sheep hear His voice. And they are a specific people. But the Bible never uses this great fact to keep me from pleading with you right now. Jesus' sheep are gathered in as people just like you are confronted by the gospel of salvation through the cross, and they repent and they believe.

Don't waste your sympathy on Jesus. If you reject Him, your own future is terribly bleak. It's hell. Repent and believe the gospel. And be saved.

PRAYER

Thank you, Lord, for this good news. Some times things can look grim. It seems as if the beautiful cause of Jesus Christ is doomed. Yes, it looks as if everything is futile and in a few more years nobody will believe anymore.

But now we know again that salvation does not depend upon the will of man, it depends upon the will of God. Lord, help us praise and adore our Creator and Savior and thank of this great truth.

As the gospel circles the world today, use it, O Shepherd of the sheep, to gather in the flock of God that is scattered so widely. Accomplish the great purposes which have been designed in heaven before the foundation of the world. Bring many to their knees in confession and repentance and lift them up in the joy of salvation.

Accept our praise and thanks, living, through Jesus' cross. Amen.

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The message printed in this pamphlet was heard over the Back to God Hour, which is broadcast every Sunday in co-operation with the Christian Reformed Churches of America, in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania and Western Australia, and by shortwave throughout the world.

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