

## Jesus First

A sermon by Larry Kirkpatrick

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Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me. This He said, signifying what death He should die (John 12:31-33).

Jesus first. God has revealed so much to us through the pages of inspiration—so much that is absolutely needful. And yet, if we have not Jesus we have not Christianity; we crawl the earth, slimy and misguided advocates of another gospel. And so, today, we come, first of all, to the cross.

We call ourselves Christians, that is, followers of the Anointed One. And the Anointed One is Jesus, the Infinite God, come all the way down into human flesh. “The word was made flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). But why enter such a dangerous state? Why take on humanity, or, as Paul dares call it, “corruption,” and “corruptible” (1 Corinthians 15:42, 50, 53, 54)?

Yes, Jesus took corruption, (called) in Hebrews, “flesh and blood.” There was a purpose.

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage (Hebrews 2:14, 15).

Jesus took humanity in order to be able to defeat the devil. He who is immortal had to place Himself in a situation where He could die. Adam in his humanity before his fall was conditionally immortal. That would never do. Jesus must take a humanity capable of dying.

All of this had to do with destroying Satan. The human race needed deliverance. Jesus looked to His death to accomplish this. And so, today, we consider Jesus first. That is, Jesus first in the judgment of this world, Jesus first in the casting out of the prince of this world, and Jesus first in being lifted up and drawing the lost to Himself, dying the death of the cross.

## **The Judgment of This World**

Approaching the cross, Jesus said, “Now is the judgment of this world.” How is the world judged at the cross?

The “world” is a frequent theme in Scripture. It is directly mentioned some 288 times. The creation is good, and God does not condemn His own creation. The world as often presented in the Bible is a reference to the values and activities of fallen man constructed upon the foundation of God’s good creation. Solomon nails it: “God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions” (Ecclesiastes 7:29). God’s creation, when He had prepared it for man, was “very good” (Genesis 1:31). But we know the rest of the story.

It is not God’s purpose to condemn the world (John 3:17), but to infiltrate it, reveal its toxicity, and show Himself as the exit, the return ramp to humanity.

If we value the world first, we make ourselves enemies of God. “The world” is not looking for an exit; it prefers to be the world as it already is. It does not view itself as in need of judgment.

Nevertheless, at the cross we have Roman law operational. Roman law was the most fully developed the world had ever seen. The Romans prided themselves on the justice of their laws. Rome was an empire, not so much militarily, but administratively. And the height of Roman civilization was the perfection of its law.

So. What was the very most developed civilization, with the most developed law, the very centerpiece of its boast, able to produce in the case of Jesus? Roman law allowed a Roman procurator to yield to the mob; to, by his own admission, condemn an innocent. Jesus was sentenced, not merely to torture but death. This, from the most excellent, the most just and

perfected legal system the world ever saw. *This* is what we can expect from an excellent legal system!

The most just law that the world can produce did this: condemned to crucifixion the most innocent. It murdered Jesus. Fundamentally, human justice is not justice and will never be.

God alone is just. All judgment is committed to the Son (John 5:22). Jesus will deal with the world justly. A longer look at the gospel of John shows more. In chapter 11 Jesus does the unforgivable—He resurrects Lazarus. He demonstrates that He *does* have power over the grave. At this point, the die is cast. He is too dangerous. He will end the monopoly of the Jewish religious elite, or they will end Him. This is the Great Controversy War, good versus evil, and who will win?

Jesus was judged to be too dangerous. And evil was right. He was. And is. And so Jesus came down, entered humanity, and there defeated sin. He struck a double blow against sin. He judged the world by His life, and then the injustice of the world was judged in its murder of Jesus. As His last hours on earth ticked away, Jesus knew He had reached the crisis point. “Now is the judgment of this world.”

### **The Casting Out of the Prince of This World**

Jesus did not only die at the cross. As our text said, Satan was there cast out. But cast out of what?

We know that when Lucifer rebelled, he was cast out of heaven. He lost certain interstellar privileges and earth became his base of operations (Revelation 12:9, 10). But if the casting out of Satan from heaven was literal, we know that the Great Controversy War is

spiritual. It has to do with who will be the king of the north, not just in some abstract sense, but over the mind of each and every created being. Lucifer wants to get into your head.

When Jesus sent out the seventy, their mission was defined as healing the sick, declaring the presence of the kingdom, and announcing the approach of Jesus Himself (Luke 10:9, 1). But the work was resisted. They were opposed such that they actually found themselves in direct contest with the powers of darkness (10:27). When they reported this Jesus replied that He saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven (Luke 10:18).

Was Jesus referring to Satan's original casting out from heaven or to what had happened in the mission of the seventy? It would be difficult to make an absolute determination from this text. Nevertheless, the context of Jesus' statement is His reaction to their mission.

Surely there was some result from the mission of the seventy. They reported that the devils were subject to them. In the mission of the seventy, surely Satan was struck a harsh blow. Remember, the Christian is joined to Christ. He is, in a sense, crucified with Him, and He does, in a sense, triumph with Him. Jesus would be crucified, but in His murder, Satan would again be cast out. First he was cast out of heaven "physically," and at last he was seen for what he was, cast out of angelic affections.

Satan saw himself as ruler of earth, but Jesus had entered his self-declared kingdom. Now, a stronger than he would bind him and cast him out (Luke 11:32). He sought to remove Jesus from His throne, but Jesus would strip him of his assumed kingship. He would completely remove him. The cross was the key moment in the contest. "Now shall the prince of this world be cast out."

## **Jesus Lifted Up and Drawing the Lost to Himself**

Jesus claimed that His being lifted up would draw all men to Him. This lifting up pointed to His death, a prediction of His crucifixion. His death draws men, but every man must still choose for himself how to respond. It is, of course, more than a death; it is the sacrifice of God's Son, the slaying of an innocent, the murder of the Creator by the creatures He made.

Some would die for another, for someone they perceive as good (Romans 5:7). Or, maybe a person would give his life (a good gift) if need be for his child (Luke 11:13). But why would God Himself come down, enter human flesh, subject Himself to the machinations of wicked men, and then—at their hands—die for them? Philippians explains:

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus . . . [who] became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:5, 8-11).

No one else died on the cross for you. No one else can give you eternal life. No one else can change you and give this mind which was in Christ Jesus. After all, a salvation through Christ which somehow did not include a gaining of the mind of Christ, could never be a salvation through Christ. Christ in you is the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27).

Jesus' death on the cross, which is outside of us, must enter us. Through His Holy Spirit, Jesus must come inside. He is the great center of attraction. That is, His mind lived out in actions, draws. Men must look and live, and they can only live if they see Jesus (Numbers 21:8, 9).

The death of the cross is the death of an innocent for the guilty. The Father made Jesus, who never sinned, to be sin for us, so that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21). As soon as there was sin there was a Savior. As soon as humankind stood in need, Jesus leapt into the chasm of need.

Adam sinned. All his children have freely chosen to join him in rebellion, chosen to sin against God. The death of the cross is the ultimate cosmic example of self-givingness. Jesus was innocent. And yet, He died for a race weakened as result of Adam's Fall. That is who He died for: a race of self-seekers, only some of whom would turn and accept His redemption.

The Bible does not lift up saint this and saint that, artificial human mediators. There is one Mediator between God and man, and that is Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5). At the cross the Father gave all of heaven in one gift. He gave Jesus to the human race. Jesus, not a system of ideas, saves. Present Truth is very, very important. It even has a power to draw. But the purpose of Present Truth is to lift up Jesus.

### **Conclusion**

And so we conclude.

Jesus first. Seventh-day Adventists must be actual, genuine, died-in-the-wool, Christians; and we cannot be this unless we put Jesus first. We are not only to be blood-bought at the cross, but blood-soaked because of the cross (Revelation 1:5). The sacrifice of Jesus and the giving to us of Present Truth has everything to do with the judgment of this world, the casting out of Satan, and the drawing of the lost to God.

The church today needs to understand that the world is judged, that Satan is cast out, and that its business is unambiguously to lift up Jesus. If these things are in place, there will be an influence that will grow the kingdom.

Every one in the hearing of this word today, ought to question himself closely, and ask if Jesus is first. The answer should be more than, “Of course He is first,” extending to, “What concrete thing can I do to more strongly establish via personal action that Jesus is first?” Too often we have trained ourselves to say one thing and do another. Let us beware of trusting in our own assertions, and find fresh new ways of pressing in ever closer to Jesus.

**Biographical note:** Larry Kirkpatrick has served in the ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church since 1994. He is a pastor of the American West, having led churches in Nevada, Utah, California, and Idaho. His writings include the books *Real Grace for Real People*, and *Cleanse and Close*. Larry and wife Pamela presently serve in the Upper Columbia Conference, ministering to the Bonners Ferry and Clark Fork churches in the incomparable beauty of Northern Idaho.