

Message in a Bottle, pt. 3: (Christ In Us)

A sermon by Larry Kirkpatrick

2009-11-21

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Location: Bonners Ferry Seventh-day Adventist Church, ID, USA
Delivery: 2009-11-21 19:31Z
Publication: GreatControversy.org 2009-12-08 05:38Z
Type: Sermon

CITE THIS ARTICLE AS: Larry Kirkpatrick, "Message in a Bottle, pt. 3: (Christ In Us),"
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Today, the third of four parts. Our series is “Message in a Bottle,” a closer look at Jesus. Part one was “Christ With Us,” a look into how Christ lived while on earth. Part two was “Christ For Us,” Jesus’ death for us at Calvary. Part four will be “Christ Victorious,” Jesus’ high priestly ministry for us in the heavenly sanctuary. But today’s presentation is “Christ In Us,” a look at what it means to have Jesus living inside of us.

We have named this series “Message in a Bottle,” taking the idea from the familiar picture of a message written, rolled up, popped into a bottle, the bottle being sealed with a cork, cast into the sea, carried across the ocean, washing ashore on a distant continent, and discovered by some random beach comber. Such a message would be a very rare find and as such very valuable, a preserved message, and a personal one. God’s truth for us written down by holy men of God, preserved for thousands of years, and personally placed in our hands in Scripture, is the message of Christianity. But there are so many versions of what being a Christian is all about. In order that we might review and refresh our understanding of the message of the gospel, we look at Bible teachings surrounding Jesus.

But before we look into the Scriptures that give us direct information about Christ in us, a theological question. We may want to skip theological explorations, considering them unimportant in the grand scale of things. And yet, such questions often have a deep and subtle impact on how we view other matters. Choosing the answer off-the-cuff which seems to be the right one, may lead us astray.

Synergism?

So. Are you a monergist, or a synergist?

Monergist is a word literally composed of two words, “mono,” meaning “one,” and “energy.” Synergism comes from two words, meaning “together” and “energy.” So, in the life of the Christian person, do you believe there is one working agent in the believer, or that the believer works together with another agent? That is, does God do all that is to be done in the believer, or, does God in cooperation with the believer, accomplish His will in the believer?

The monergist is urgent to say that when we come to Christ, God is intervening, causing us to be regenerated, and that we have no role in the matter; God unilaterally causes our regeneration. He wants to deny us any role whatsoever so that we can be certain that we are not in any way gaining any bit of merit, being saved by our own works. Man is totally depraved, so they say, and thus is totally incapable of cooperating with God; there is nothing within fallen, unregenerate man that is attracted to God. There is no desire to do good.

But is this true? I mean to say, is this true biblically?

What does John 1:9 say? It says that Jesus is

The true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world (KJV).

Or, the *New Living Translation* says

The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world (NLT).

Jesus gives light, not just to a select group, the “elect,” as some would have it. He gives light to everyone, no exceptions. See John one again and verse 4: “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.” The next verse tells us that the light shines in the darkness yet the darkness does not comprehend it. A better translation is that the light shines in the darkness but that the darkness does not overcome the light.

That is to say, that God gives life to every person, and that although the Fall of man has bent us and obscured the way, still, the light of God is stronger. Jesus gives light to everyone. The light gets through. Everyone has a measure of spiritual light from Christ.

This does not mean that everyone is regenerate, everyone starts out converted; we do not. But everyone gets to see the truth of God; God engages in a moral interaction with every person. He gives conscience. He sends His Holy Spirit to convict. He does not force us to accept what we see, but He treats us as we are—moral beings, able to discern and choose.

Here's the point: Even unconverted people, even the evil, desire to give good gifts to their children (Luke 13:11; Matthew 7:11). There is in man, even fallen, unconverted, unregenerated man, a desire for goodness, an interest in truth. Adolph Hitler probably enjoyed beautiful sunsets and back rubs as much as Billy Graham.

To teach total depravity, meaning that the human will of fallen man possesses no inclination to holiness, is simply wrong—if we are making the Bible our measure. The goodness of God (Romans 2:4) leads us to repentance. If goodness had no attraction to the unconverted heart, this could not be true.

Even as we say this, we remember that fallen man, unconverted or converted, cannot in any respect earn or merit his salvation. We are saved by Jesus. His merits and His alone are acceptable to the Father for us. We are not saved 95% by Jesus and 5% by ourselves. The merit by which we are saved is 100% because of God and we cannot claim any personal share in it.

And so, even unconverted people can cooperate with God, at least so far as, with His help, to choose Him. Synergism is true. There is energy working. Man chooses and God empowers. Instead of these terms (monergism and synergism), it might be more helpful to think

of these as the cooperationist view and the noncooperationist view. We either see ourselves as capable of cooperating with God, or incapable. And certain results flow from which of these two ideas you embrace. By the way, in case someone accosts you with this question, the urgent monergist is almost always a Calvinist.

His Healing Stripes

Isaiah 53:5 helps us to understand. With Jesus' stripes we are healed. That is, with the punishment that He endured on our behalf, we are healed. This is a present healing. Even the JPS (*Jerusalem Publications Society*) translation sees the passage identically to the way that we do in terms of which actions are completed ones:

He was wounded because of our sins, crushed because of our iniquities, he bore the chastisement that made us whole, and by his bruises we were healed.

Look closely at the Isaiah 53 passage, and notice something. Although sin is repeatedly mentioned (eight times in the chapter), the solution that is given is not as much a legal as a medical one. The solution offered is not a good lawyer but a good healing. So here is the sequence: Jesus suffers for us, we are healed.

Do you recall the text we looked at last time? It was 2 Corinthians 5:21, which said that Jesus was made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. Do you begin to see a pattern?

Jesus' stripes, that is, His punishment on our behalf, and for us healing and righteousness—that is what we have. Another way to think of this is that from Jesus' death on the cross flows certain certain consequences. His entrance into the human situation and the tortured death of His living sacrifice makes possible our restoration.

There is a viewpoint which says that Jesus came so that we might have pardon and have it more abundantly. But Jesus said that He came so that we might have life and have life more abundantly. His life is the light of men and lights all men (John 1:4). Because of Jesus we have a new hope, a fresh life. Job's life was a test tube, wasn't it? The watching universe saw the question answered, What kind of a person does belief in God lead to?

But maybe Job was an anomaly. Can God do this consistently? Was Job just a mutant? An unrepresentative sample? Even when Jesus did die on the cross, the conflict between good and evil was not ended. The question remains: Can God do this again? Can He do it in more than a few unusual persons? And so, welcome to the laboratory! Each of our lives is another test tube.

Our Lord Jesus is making experiments. He is transforming people. The devil looks on. To him, these modern Jobs who follow Jesus are an incomprehensible mystery. How does God do that? he wonders. And he will always wonder. But let's you and I talk about that now.

All At the Cross?

Is salvation all at the cross? Not according to my Bible. Turn to Colossians 1:27.

Colossians says that although we have in past time been Christ's enemies, He has now reconciled us (Colossians 1:21). Verse 22 says that through His death on the cross we are to be presented holy and blameless. But the next verse warns that that cannot be unless we continue in the faith. Paul is a messenger, he says, a bringer of the gospel, of the mystery which has been hidden for generations, seen only in glimmers, a Job here, an Enoch there. But now, when Jesus has died on the cross, now (verse 26) the glory that was waiting is "made manifest" in His saints.

You know who His saints are, don't you? The word "saints" simply means "holy ones." Who are the holy ones? Are they a select few, long-dead persons whom the Roman Catholic

church has declared have an excess of merits? No. Saints are really just people who live for Jesus today. You are to be God's saints today.

So the mystery of the ages, from thousands of years, the thing that angels have desired to look into and to understand (1 Peter 1:12)—how God can change rebels into clean and loving people—that is what God now plans to reveal to the watching universe. Through us.

Verse 27 tells us that God wants to make known to somebody the depth of God's riches through this mystery. To whom? To us. God wants to show us by experiment what He has been planning to do for the last 6,000 years. What is it? It is for Christ to live in us. That is our hope of glory. Notice, our hope of glory is not in the cross. There would be no hope of glory for us without the cross. But our hope of glory is in Christ in us.

Join me at yet another New Testament text: Titus 3:5, 6 ESV:

He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior.

See, it is not because of right-doing on our part that we are saved, but our salvation comes strictly on the basis of God's mercy. Notice what that salvation is. Is it legal acquittal from sin? In this text, it is "the washing of regeneration." Washing involves some activity, doesn't it? Here, salvation is described as a washing that is a process of regeneration, a being made new. And the next phrase in the text is "the renewal of the Holy Spirit." We are made new by the Holy Spirit. And doesn't this match the testimony of Scripture in so many other places? For example, 2 Corinthians 5:17:

If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

Titus 3:6 continues, saying that those who have this washing, regeneration, renewal, Holy Spirit companionship, are “being justified by His grace” (ESV), and that is correct. We will explore that further on another occasion, but the most common understanding is to take it as a strictly legal metaphor, meaning that one has been pardoned for sin. The less popular understanding is that one who is justified by grace is one who is being made right by God. Or, as Isaiah might say, “with His stripes, we are *healed*.” The theme of washing, regeneration, and renewal in the previous verse should help us understand which understanding best fits the context!

But we must move on. So much good news to share, and so little time to share it in!

Turn to 2 Peter 1:3, 4.

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us to His own glory and excellence, by which He has granted to us His precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire (ESV).

Little time remains today even to begin to unpack this powerful passage. And yet, in but even a glance at it, we see what? His divine power, given to us, offering everything that we need to live the life of a last-day Christian. He calls us, not to our own conception of what glory and virtue is, but “to His own glory and virtue.” It is through this that He has given to us extraordinary promises, through which we may become partakers of the divine nature. And notice, escape is not future. Rather, “having escaped” the corruption that is in the world.

This is our heritage. Nor is it an inheritance limited to some distant future. It is for us in this present evil age (Titus 2:12).

One last text, again, all too briefly, Galatians 2:20:

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me (ESV).

What does to crucify mean? To put to death. And who have you been crucified with? If He, our Lord Jesus, has been, then we know that it is no longer our old self who lives. The man, the woman, who lived without Christ, who burned his finite candle on his own terms, apart from God, is no more. And yet, we live. How? Remember, Christ is our life. He lights every man. What we have is not the old life, but the new. We have the new life that is from Christ.

Notice that Paul does not leave us guessing about this life. He says that there is a life that he now, presently, lives in the flesh. In his fallen, damaged humanity, he lives it. He lives it by trusting in Jesus. Jesus gave Himself for us. Is that only the cross? Or does it also speak to us of the new connection between the believer and Christ through the Holy Spirit? Did Jesus give Himself for us only to pay a penalty? Or was it heaven's purpose to also cause old things to pass away, to make all things new, to make us partakers of new life through Christ?

I am reminded of the dog who is trained to sleep in a cage. There is no moral issue in a dog being trained to do that. But what about men? Through our life of sin, we have trained ourselves to sleep in a cage. The cage is familiar. We return to it over and over because it is so familiar. New environments are not so familiar; they require us to trust more, to experiment, to take a risk, to subdue in ourselves the discomfort of entering a new and larger space. And so, when God has given us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ, what is our tendency? So much freedom! So unfamiliar! Ah, but there is the filthy old dependable cage. I can live there.

Friends, we can live the life of Christ in us. Or, we can return to our old haunts, our small life of sin, our habits of thinking, of doing, of offending God and sometimes His people. Which will it be?

Conclusion

We are not in this alone. We would perish. But we are changed through this pattern: crucifixion in me, and resurrection in me.

Christ is risen and is ready to live in me, you, and every believer. Christ came and lived with us, then He died on the cross for us, then He rose to live the new life in us. And at last, through His heavenly sanctuary ministry, He will be victorious. All these are elements of God's precious gospel, His message for us in a bottle. If we miss the experience of Christ in us, we deny the core purpose of God, to change His people.

Why would we do that?

Next time, we conclude with part four, Christ victorious!

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.