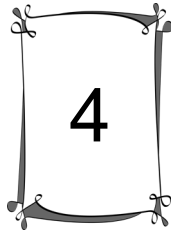


The background of the slide is a scenic landscape. A paved road curves through a valley, flanked by trees with autumn foliage in shades of yellow, orange, and green. To the left of the road, a railway track with overhead power lines runs parallel. In the distance, a large, rugged mountain peak rises under a cloudy sky. The entire scene is framed by a green border with decorative, rounded corners.

Sermons of Robert Murray M'Cheyne

4. Christ the Way, the Truth, and the Life

Sermons
of
Robert Murray
M'Cheyne



Christ the Way, the
Truth, and the Life

“Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh to the Father but by me.” John 14:6.

It is the saying of an old divine, that God often orders it, that when he is in hand with the greatest mercies for us, then we are the most of all sinning against him; which he doth to magnify his love the more.

In the words I have read, we find an example of this. At no time did the heart of Jesus overflow with a tenderer and more sovereign love to his disciples, than when he said, “Let not your heart be troubled.” They were troubled by many things. He had told them that he was going to leave them; he had told them that one should betray him — that another should deny him — that they should all be offended because of him that very night; and perhaps they thought he was going from them in anger. But, whatever the cause of their trouble was, Jesus’ bosom was like a vessel full to overflowing, and these words were the over lipping drops of love — “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.” Surely such words of confiding tenderness were never whispered in this cold world before; and O then, think how cold, how dark, how dull is the question with which Thomas breaks in upon the heavenly discourse — “Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest, and how can we know the way?” And yet how condescendingly does Jesus bear with their cold-hearted dullness! How lovingly does he begin the very alphabet of salvation with them, and not only answers, but over-answers Thomas — gives him more than he could ask or think. He asked about the way and the place, but Christ answers, “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me.” Regarding this, then, as a complete description of the gospel salvation, let us go over the different parts of it.

I. Christ is the Way. — “I am the way; no man cometh,” etc. The whole Bible bears witness that by nature we have no way to the Father. We are by nature full of sin, and God is by nature infinitely holy — that is, he shrinks away from sin. Just as the sensitive plant, by its very nature, shrinks away from the touch of a human hand, so God, by his very nature, shrinks away from the touch of sin. He is everlastingly separate from sinners; he is of purer eyes than to

behold iniquity.

1. This is impressively taught to Adam and the patriarchs. As long as Adam walked holily, God dwelt in him, and walked in him, and communed with him; but when Adam fell, “God drove the man out of paradise; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden, cherubim and a flaming sword, which turned every way to keep the way of the tree of life.” This flaming sword between the cherubim was a magnificent emblem of God — the just and sin-hating God. In the bush, he appeared to Moses as a consuming fire — in the temple, he appeared between the cherubim in the milder glory of the Shecinah; but here he appeared between the cherubim as a sword — a just and sin-hating God. And I beseech you to remark, that this flaming sword turned every way to keep the way of the tree of life. If it had not turned every way — if it had left some foot-path unglanced across — then Adam might have stolen in by that foot-path, and made his own way to the tree of life. But no; whatever avenue he tried — however secret, however narrow, however steep and difficult — however silently he crept along — still this flaming meteor met him and it seemed to say, “How can man be just with God? by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh living be justified.” Well might Adam sit down, wearied with the vain search for a pathway into life; for man by nature has no way to the Father.

But Christ says, “I am the way.” As he says in the sixteenth Psalm, “Thou wilt shew me the path of life.” No man could find out this path of life; but Jesus says, “Thou wilt shew it me; in thy presence is fullness of joy — at thy right hand are pleasures for evermore.” Jesus pitied the poor sons of Adam vainly struggling to find out a way into the paradise of God, and he left the bosom of the Father, just that he might open up a way for us into the bosom of the Father. And how did he do it? Was it by escaping the vigilance of the flaming sword? No; for it turned every way. Was it by exerting his divine authority, and commanding the glittering blade to withdraw? No; for that would have been to dishonour his Father’s law, instead of magnifying it. He therefore became a man in our stead — yea, became sin. God caused to meet on him the iniquities of us all. He advanced in our stead to meet that fiery meteor — he fell beneath its piercing blade; for he remembered the word of the Prophet, which is written, “Awake, O sword! against my shepherd,

and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of Hosts.”

And now, since the glittering blade is bathed in the side of the Redeemer, the guiltiest of sinners — whoever you be — whatever you be — may enter in over his bleeding body — may find access to the paradise of God, to eat of the tree of life, and live forever. Come quickly — doubt not; for he says, I am the way.

2. The same fact — that man has by nature no way to the Father — was impressively taught to Moses and the people of Israel.

When God condescended to dwell among the children of Israel, he dwelt peculiarly in the holiest of all — the innermost apartment of the Jewish temple. There the visible token of his presence rested between the cherubim — at one time described to us as a light inaccessible and full of glory — at another time as a cloud that filled the temple. But this innermost apartment, or holiest of all (or secret place, as it is called in the Psalms), was separated from the holy place by a curtain or veil, and through that veil no man was allowed to pass, lest he should die, except the High Priest, who entered in, once in the year, not without blood. Now, no picture could express more plainly that the way into the holiest was not made manifest — that no sinful man has any way of coming into the presence of God.

But Jesus says, “I am the way.” Jesus was grieved that we were shut out from the holiest of all — from the presence of God; for he knew by experience that in that presence there is fullness of joy. But how did he open the way? Did he pull aside the veil, that we might steal in secretly and easily into the presence of the Father? No; but he offered himself — an offering to satisfy Divine justice and reconcile us to God. “He said, It is finished, and bowed his head and gave up the ghost. And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain, from the top to the bottom.” It is finished — the punishment of the law is borne — the demands of the law are answered — the way is finished — the veil is rent, from the top to the bottom! Not a shred of the dreadful curtain now remains to intercept us. The guiltiest — the vilest sinner of you all has now liberty to enter in through the rent veil, under the light of Jehovah’s countenance — to dwell in the secret of his tabernacle — to behold his beauty, and to inquire in his temple.

And now, my friends, is this your way of coming to the Father?

Christ says, "I am the way; no man cometh unto the Father but by me." If, then, you will still keep to your own way, whatever it be — whether it be the way of tears, or penances, or vows of amendment, or hopes that God will not deal strictly — if you will not be warned, you will find in the judgment day that the cherubic sword turned every way, and that you are left a prey to the consuming fire.

But oh! if there be one soul that can find no peace in any self-righteous way — if there be one of you who find that you are lost in yourself — behold Christ says to you, "I am the way," as he says in another place, "I am the door." It is a full, free, and open way, and it is a way for sinners. Why wait a moment longer? There was once a partition wall between you and God; but Christ hath cast it down. God was once angry; but his anger is turned away from this blessed path. In Christ he is ever well pleased.

II. Christ is the Truth. — The whole Bible, and the whole of experience, bear witness that by nature we are ignorant of the truth. No doubt there are many truths which an unconverted man does know. He may know the truths of mathematics and arithmetic — he may know many of the common everyday truths; but still it cannot be said that an unconverted man knows the truth, for Christ is the truth. Christ may be called the key-stone of the arch of truth. Take away the key-stone of an arch, and the whole becomes a heap of rubbish. The very same stones may be there, but they are all fallen, smothered, and confused — without order — without end. Just so — take Christ away, and the whole arch of truth may be there; but they are all fallen — without coherence — without order — without end. Christ may be called the sun of the system of truth. Take away the sun out of our system, and every planet would rush into confusion. The very same planets would be there; but their conflicting forces would draw them hither and thither, orb dashing against orb in endless perplexity. Just so — take Christ away, and the whole system of truth rushes into confusion. The same truths may be in the mind, but all conflicting and jarring in inextricable mazes; for "the path of the wicked is as darkness; they know not at what they stumble." But let Christ be revealed to an unconverted soul — let it not be merely a man speaking about Christ unto him — but let the Spirit of God reveal him, and there is revealed, not a truth, but the truth. You put the key-stone into the arch of truth; you restore the

sun to the centre of the system. All truth becomes orderly and serviceable in that mind.

Now he knows the truth with regard to himself. Did the Son of God really leave the bosom of the Father to bear wrath in our stead? — then I must be under wrath. Did the Lord Jesus become a servant, that he might obey the will of God instead of sinners? — then I must be without any righteousness, a child of disobedience.

Again, knowing Christ, he knows the truth with regard to God. Did God freely give up his Son to the death for us all? — then, if I believe in Jesus, there is no condemnation to me. God is my Father, and God is love.

My friends, have you seen Christ, who is the truth? Has he been revealed to you, not by flesh and blood, but by the Spirit of our God? Then you know how true it is that in him “are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” — that he is the “Alpha and Omega,” the beginning and the ending of all knowledge. But if you have not seen Christ, then you know nothing yet as you ought to know; all your knowledge is like a bridge without a key-stone — like a system without a sun. What good will it do you in hell, that you knew all the sciences in the world — all the events of history, and all the busy politics of your little day? Do you not know that your very knowledge will be turned into an instrument of torture in hell? Oh, how will you wish in that day that you had read your newspaper less and your Bible more — that, with all your getting you had got understanding — that, with all your knowledge, you had known the Saviour, whom to know is life everlasting.

III. Christ is the life. — The whole Bible bears witness that by nature we are dead in trespasses and sins — that we are as unable to walk holily in the world as a dead man is unable to rise and walk.

Both Scripture and experience alike testify that we are by nature dead in trespasses and sins; and yet it is not a death in which we are wholly inactive, for in it we are said to walk according to the course of this world — according to the prince of the power of the air.

This truth is taught us impressively in that vision of the prophet Ezekiel, where he was carried out by the Spirit, and set down in the midst of an open valley, full of dry bones; and as he passed by them round about, behold there were very many in the open valley, and lo! they were very dry.

Just such is the view which every child of God gets of the world. The dry bones are very many, and they are very dry; and he asks the same question which God asked of Ezekiel — “Can these bones live?” Oh yes, my friends; and does not experience teach you the same thing? True, the dead cannot know that they are dead; and yet, if the Lord touch your heart, you will find it out: we prophesy to dry bones; for this is the Lord’s way; — while we prophesy the breath enters in. Look back over your life then. See how you have walked according to the course of this world. You have always been like a man swimming with the stream — never like a man swimming against the current. Look into your heart, and see how it has turned against all the commandments; you feel the Sabbath to be a weariness — instead of calling it a delight and honourable. If ever you tried to keep the commandments of God — if ever you tried to keep you eyes from unlawful desires, your tongue from words of anger, or gossiping, or bitterness, your heart from malice, and envy, and covetousness — if ever you have tried this, and I fancy most unconverted men have tried it — if ever you have tried this — did you not find it impossible? It was like raising the dead. Did you not find a struggle against yourself? O how plain that you are dead — not born again! Marvel not that we say unto you, ye must be born again. You must be joined to Christ, for Christ is the life. Suppose it were possible for a dead limb to be joined into a living body, so completely that all the veins should receive the purple tide of living blood — suppose bone to join on to bone, and sinew to sinew, and nerve to nerve — do you not see that that limb, however dead before, would become a living limb. Before, it was cold, and stiff, and motionless, and full of corruption; now, it is warm, and pliable, and full of life and motion. It is a living limb, because joined on to that which is life. Or, suppose it possible for a withered branch to be grafted into a living vine, so completely that all the channels should receive the flow of the generous sap, do you not see that that branch, however dead before, becomes a living branch? Before, it was dry, and fruitless, and withered; now, it is full of sap, of life, and vigour. It is a living branch, for it is joined to the vine, which is its life. Well, then, just in the same way, Christ is the life of every soul that cleaves to him. He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit. Is your soul like a dead limb — cold, stiff, motionless, and full of

corruption? Cleave you to Christ — be joined to him by faith, and you shall be one spirit — you shall be made warm, and vigorous, and full of activity, in God's service.

Is your soul like a withered branch — dry, fruitless, and withered, wanting both leaves and fruit? Cleave you to Christ; be joined to him, and you shall be one spirit. You will find it true that Christ is the life; your life will be hid with Christ in God. You will say, I live; “yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”

Remember, then, my unbelieving friends, the only way for you to become holy is to become united to Christ. And remember you, my believing friends, that if ever you are relaxing in holiness, the reason is, you are relaxing your hold on Christ. Abide in me, and I in you — so shall ye bear much fruit. Severed from me, ye can do nothing.

