

## Editorial 1-16: Consider Him

When I became *Ministry* Editor back in 2004, the theme for my first editorial was 'New Beginnings'. In it I considered a few of the wonderful privileges that had flowed from a new beginning in my own life in August 1986, when, in simple childlike faith, I trusted Jesus Christ as my own personal Saviour. As with all who come in faith to Christ, I was made a new creation in Him – the old had passed away, and all things were made new (2 Cor 5:17). In my editorials over the years since I have tried to exalt and uplift the name and person of Christ. In this, my last editorial, I want to consider just two words from Hebrews 12:3 – 'Consider Him' – and to focus our thoughts and attention one more time on the sinless, spotless and altogether lovely Son of God.

**1. Consider His CONDESCENSION.** Isn't it amazing - the only person in history, who was able to choose where He was to be born, chose a stable! The vast majority of babies born in the West today are born in clean, sterile, high tech modern hospitals, staffed by highly trained medical professionals. Just stop for a moment and contrast all this with the birth of Jesus Christ. He left the lofty splendour of heaven for the lowly squalor of a stable. He left the angel's songs of worship for the braying of donkeys and lowing of cattle. The Eternal stepped into time, clothed in flesh and bone. The Omnipotent was born a helpless baby; the One who spoke the universe into existence became a wordless one. He exchanged a place of sinless perfection for a world of sin and hate. The foxes had holes, and the birds their nests, yet the Son of man had nowhere to lay His head (Mt 8:20). His feet would walk on water, yet He laid aside His garments to wash His disciples' feet. He came to serve, not be served (Mk 10:45). He left the realms of glory, counting not the cost, and willingly trod the path that one day led to the cross (Phil 2:7-8). What a step – and what a stoop of matchless condescension. 'For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.' (2 Cor 8:9)

**2. Consider His COMPASSION.** Time after time in the Gospel accounts we read these beautiful words concerning Christ: 'He was moved with compassion.' He had compassion on the needy – feeding the hungry (Mt 15:32), cleansing the lepers (Mk 1:41), healing the sick (Mt 14:14), giving sight to the blind (Mt 20:34) and bringing peace to the tormented in mind (Mk 5:15 & 19). He loved and always made time for children; and affirmed the dignity of women in very different times from today. He called His exhausted disciples to 'come ... apart ... and rest a while' (Mk 6:31), knowing full well, if they didn't, that they would come apart *after a while*. His humanity was so evident as He wept at Lazarus' grave (Jn 11:35). And, in His parable of the Good Samaritan, He emphasised compassion as a guiding principle for how we should deal with and treat our neighbours (Lk 10:33 & 37). 'Oh, what a tender, compassionate Friend / He met the need of my heart / The shadows dispelling, with joy I am telling / He made all the darkness depart.'

**3. Consider His CONCERN.** Jesus cares about our bodies, He understands our frailty. He cares deeply about our material, physical and emotional needs. Yet Jesus' primary concern is for our great spiritual need, for that is the key reason why

He came, as highlighted by the angelic messenger to Joseph: 'Thou shalt call his name JESUS, for he shall save his people from their sins.' (Matt 1:21) Scripture time and time again reinforces this truth. "... I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance ..." (Lk 5:32) "... Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners ..." (1 Tim 1:15) The term *sinner* may offend some sensibilities, but we all fall short (Rom 3:23) – does anyone ever need to teach a child to lie or be selfish? Jesus, though, befriended people whom many might shun, leading to the self-righteous Pharisees deriding Him: 'This man receiveth sinners ...' (Lk 15:2) and labelling Him 'a friend of sinners' (Mt 11:19). But what comfort those words contain! Whoever you are, wherever you have been, whatever you have done, Jesus longs to receive you – but not to merely leave you the way you are. When the scribes and Pharisees brought to Jesus a woman taken in adultery, Jesus told them: 'He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.' (Jn 8:7) One by one their consciences pricked them, and they all fell away, till only Jesus and this lady were left, and He asked her: 'Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.' (Jn 8:10-11) 'For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.' (Jn 3:17) Many hold a totally unbiblical view of Jesus, thinking He'll welcome them into heaven, regardless of what they've done or how they have lived. Jesus' words to this woman show that sin must be dealt with and put away. To those who would die in their sins, unforgiven, Jesus plainly warned them: '... whither I go, ye cannot come.' (Jn 8:21). Heaven is *not* our default destination by birth. But Jesus is the Way (Jn 14:6) and the Door to heaven (Jn 10:9). He came that we could be forgiven, and died in our place to provide the one and only remedy for sin – the blood of Christ, flowing from the cross of Christ, which has the power to cleanse us from every sin (1 Jn 1:7).

**4. Consider His CROSS.** Maybe you may ask me: 'Does God love and care for me?' In response, I simply say, look to the cross; consider His unmatched suffering, and the price He willingly paid that He might bring you into an unbreakable, eternal relationship with God. Consider His soul's deep agony (Lam 1:12), as He sweat great drops of blood in the garden of Gethsemane (Lk 22:44). He gave His back to the smiters, to be torn up like a ploughed field (Is 50:6), as a howling mob screamed 'Crucify.' (Lk 23:21) He was buffeted and blindfolded; He was despised, rejected, betrayed and forsaken. Consider His blood-soaked, thorn-crowned brow (Mt 27:29-30), as men with derision, in feigned humility bow, while others hurled oaths and insults, and even their filthy spittle (Mt 27:39 & 30). Consider His sword-riven side and nail-pierced feet and hands (Lk 23:33), and His face that was marred more than any other man's (Is 52:14). At times I can but wonder why Jesus would shed His blood and die on a cross for someone like me. But I was something to Him, though thoroughly undeserving of my own, and the cross bears clear witness of a love without measure, and to exactly how God views *your* value. Our sin is so serious that it took Jesus being crucified to rescue us. On the cross, amidst all the viciousness against Christ, God was lovingly at work. The extremity of hell is matched by the extremity of God's love for us. Sin is serious, but God is just as serious about saving us, if only we will ask Him to do just that.

**5. Consider His CONQUEST.** On that first Good Friday, as Jesus died upon the cross, the devil no doubt thought he had defeated God's Son and emerged victorious. But he was very wrong! The Lord's final words on the cross were not 'I am finished' but '*It is finished.*' (Jn 19:30) He had finished the work He came to earth to do – to die as our substitute and sin bearer, shedding His blood for our redemption (1 Pet 1:18-19), that He might give eternal life and open heaven's gates to all who look in faith to Him alone for salvation. Death could not hold Him. If you visit Jerusalem – as I have – you can visit the place where His body lay, but He is no longer there. It is an empty tomb. Easter Sunday joyously proclaims "HE IS RISEN" and is today our victorious, risen, ascended and glorified Saviour, seated at God's right hand, and ever interceding on our behalf (Heb 7:25). And, though Jesus' passion is over, His compassion is not. Whatever problems you're fearing today, whatever giants you're facing, whatever demons you're fighting, hear Jesus' triumphant words: 'I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.' (Rev 1:18)

**6. Consider His COMING AGAIN.** The truth that Jesus was born and lived among men for 33 years is a proven and undisputed historical fact. That He came to earth is never in doubt. The fact that He is coming again is similarly not in doubt. For every prophecy in the Bible relating to His first coming there are no less than *eight* prophecies about His second coming. His coming again is *sure*. Speaking to His disciples in the upper room, He gave these precious promises: 'In my Father's house are many mansions ... I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, *I will come again*, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.' (Jn 14:2-3) And, on the day of His ascension, as a cloud received Him out of the disciples' sight, the angelic messengers gave this clear promise: '*... this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.*' (Acts 1:11) His coming again will be *sudden*, being compared to the blink of an eye (1 Cor 15:52) and to a flash of lightning (which moves at 220,000 miles per hour – or 3,667 miles per minute – the distance between London and Washington DC!). In the final book of the Bible the Lord Jesus said '*... behold, I come as a thief.*' (Rev 16:15). A thief doesn't phone ahead or make a prior appointment – he comes unannounced, without warning, and when least expected. The chorus to the 1969 song 'I Wish We'd All Been Ready' has these poignant words: 'There's no time to change your mind / The Son has come, and you've been left behind.' The message is clear – we need to be ready, for His coming again will usher in a great *separation*. When the Lord returns, two shall be in the field, two at their place of work, and two sharing a bed – in each case, one is taken, but the other left. When Jesus returns, will you be caught up – or caught out? Bethlehem slept at Jesus' first coming, who will be sleeping at His second? He likened the days of Noah to the time of His return (with the ark being a picture of the refuge we find in Him). Noah preached for 120 years, but a careless world was caught up in seeking pleasure, relationships etc and oblivious to impending judgment – until one day the door of opportunity closed (Gen 7:16). 'Therefore be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.' (Mt 24:44)

**7. Consider His CALL.** It is a call to *salvation* – on the basis of our coming by God’s grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone – and not by works (Eph 2:8-9). In Matthew’s gospel Jesus calls us to give up our useless attempts to win favour and acceptance with God through our own efforts or merits – ‘*Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*’ (Mt 11:28) He is a tender teacher, and a merciful master: ‘Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.’ (Mt 11:29-30) Jesus’ call is a call to *sacrifice*. ‘Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.’ (Mk 8:34) And His call is a call to *service*. When He touches and changes lives, He wants them to go and share His good news: ‘Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee.’ (Mk 5:19) And He longs to use us to reach others for Him: ‘Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.’ (Mt 4:19)

As you’ve read these words, maybe you, too, are asking yourself a question that Pilate asked long ago: ‘What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ?’ (Mt 27:22) It is easy to throw up questions and objections to trusting Him, not out of genuine interest, but as a smokescreen to avoid having to come to a decision yourself on whether to trust and accept Christ – or to reject Him. Please don’t do the latter. ‘What will you do with Jesus? / Neutral you cannot be / Some day your heart may be asking / What will He do with me?’

Perhaps you can, though, accept all that has been said of Christ, but are put off because you have witnessed hypocrisy or failings in the lives of Christians you know. Christians can – and do – slip up, sin and let their Saviour down. Yet I find great comfort in knowing a God whose mercy, grace and longsuffering is amply demonstrated in how He freely loves, receives, forgives and is willing to use imperfect people. No Christian will ever be perfect this side of heaven – but there is no hypocrisy in God, and no failing in Christ. He truly is no disappointment. I can recommend Him as a wonderful, merciful and unfailing Saviour. He longs to be your Saviour too – and calls you to come to Him for salvation. Will you come to Christ today? ‘Come to the Saviour, make no delay / Here in His word He’s shown us the way / Here in our midst He’s standing today / Tenderly saying ‘Come!’