

THE GREATEST NEED IN THE WORLD

By

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In a humanist welfare state the role of Christ is reduced to that of the model social-worker, whose chief concern is poverty, health, housing and equality. The poor are viewed as victims of sin; as those sinned against, as those upon whom sin has acted, not as sinners themselves. Jesus is the symbol of a good citizen who dutifully lobbies for greater welfare programs and devotes his time to community efforts “for the good of all.”

The media, the schools, the government and liberal churches all work in harmony to produce the general concept that the greatest need in the world is more and better things to satisfy the desires of all people, or in the words of the late F. D. Roosevelt, “freedom from want.” Christ is celebrated by the masses as One whose chief mission was to bring this about.

Not so, according to the scriptural record. “And thou shall call his name Jesus,” the angel announced, “for it is he that shall save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21). True, He also saved a few people from disease and fed the crowd on two occasions, but these miracles were for the purpose of establishing faith that they might be saved from sin and have eternal life (John 20:31).

His own words were that “The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost” and “to give his life a ransom for many” (Luke 19:10, Matt. 20:28).

When we hear of so many people in the world who are striving, living in poverty which we in this country can hardly imagine, our hearts are filled with pity and compassion to the extent that we cannot think of them as sinners suffering under the condemnation of a loving God. The sinner who must face judgment surely is not the miserable poor, who already seems to suffer enough in this life, but the prosperous merchant who, by hard labor and God-given ability, earns a comfortable living! We have a conditioned reluctance to see in these with emaciated bodies, sitting amidst the flies and filth of a refugee camp, anything but humble and loving people who only need to be fed, clothed and housed. It is hard to look upon such a person as a sinner. After all, what has he done? He is the victim of vile circumstances, and needs to be liberated from such an environment.

When Christ was confronted with a pitiful lame man, brought to him on a sheet by four compassionate friends, His first words were “Son, be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven” (Matt. 9:2). He was still lame and miserable in his crippled condition. “Man looks upon the outward appearance, but God looks upon the heart.” Jesus saw that the man’s greatest problem was sin, and this He dealt with immediately. The healing, that came later, was for the purpose of proving Christ’s authority to forgive the sins.

The tendency is to look upon the poor and all minorities as victims of sin. It is the Mafia, the Communists, the criminals who sin. It is the oil barons, the fat cats of politics, the terrorists who sin. The common man is their victim. He isn’t perfect, of course. He makes mistakes, has faults, and short-comings but his sin is not great, comparatively, and his real needs are in other areas.

The world wants a Santa Claus, not a Savior from Sin. When the world comes to celebrate Christ's birth, it is not out of consideration of the problems of sin, but rather in contemplation of material benefits, pleasures, luxury and a sense of contentment and satisfaction that may be gained. The people who consider themselves to be suffering from the lack of all these things are not wanting a Savior from sin; they are looking for a Santa Claus.

Nevertheless, from Christ's standpoint, what they really need is salvation from sin. Adam and Eve were driven from the garden so they would NOT have all these things, lest they eat of the tree of life and live in sin forever! The so-called "liberation theology" which is so popular with the mainstream churches of today would reverse God's judgment and put Adam and Eve back into the garden, sins and all.

In no way is this to deny our responsibility to give to the one who is in need. We are stewards of God. We are to use all our resources — abilities as well as money — as that which belongs to Him and honors Him. We are to give to the brother in need and love our neighbor and help him as we would want him to help us. We must be generous in trying to help those suffering from famine. But feeding the five thousand did not fulfill the mission of Christ, nor did it do anything of eternal value for those fed. It did make Jesus extremely popular, and He could have been strongly tempted to accept the goal of feeding the hungry. How much more challenging and satisfying the mission of distributing food to grateful mouths than hanging, bleeding in torture, on a Roman cross. (And, besides, the food was free!). But He knew the real threat was not that men would die of starvation, but that they would die for their sins on the day of judgment!

He stuck to the higher goal of saving man from sin. This still is His purpose and the reason that His message must be preached and believed.

Christ entered the stream of human life to release the captives...from sin's captivity and from death row.

The tragic state of sin has not only to do with gross crimes and single acts of sin, but with the fact that all have sinned and unless one has obeyed the gospel of Christ he is enslaved to sin. When Jesus spoke of freedom to the Jews they retorted, "We are Abraham's seed and have never yet been in bondage to any man; how say you, You shall be made free?"

Jesus answered them. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, everyone that commits sin is the bondservant of sin." Even as He talked to them they were burning with the passion to kill Him. He said, "But now you seek to kill me...you are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father it is your will to do" (John 3:33-44).

They did not see their true condition because they were slaves of sin. This was the verdict of the Lord. We are accustomed to hearing the excuse, "I have tried to give up this or that bad habit, but I can't." What is this but to admit that one is a slave to that habit? And what is more grievous than this kind of slavery? One could flee from a human master, but one cannot flee from his own sin. One cannot get away from his own sinful desire. He commits the act and it is over, but the sin remains! He is a captive of sin.

Besides this, there is the final accounting for sin at the judgment. The sentence has already been established by law. "The soul that sins shall die." "The wages of sin is death." The sinner knows he is guilty and God has already pronounced the sentence of death. Therefore every sinner lives on death row.

Christ entered the stream of human life to take man's punishment of death for sin, to release the captive — not by "liberation" in the sense of the liberal theologian nor in the sense of the revolutionary who destroys governments, promising freedom from every fleshly want — but release from sin's captivity and from death row.

The disease of the race is sin. The symptoms are sadness, distress, guilt, depression and anxiety. Humanism (the apparent official religion of the nation) would treat the symptoms only, by drowning sadness in a cocktail, diverting distress by a round of sensual pleasures, covering guilt with a blanket of good works and treating anxiety with massive doses of things — all the luxuries of modern living and the promise of cradle-to-grave security.

But under such treatment the disease remains, the fever still rags and the sickness mounts while the patient ignorantly relaxes in the thought that he is recovering. Like those in the church of Laodicea, he now thinks he is rich and in need of nothing, thanks to the humanist gospel of liberation. But Jesus declares that he is in reality the "wretched one and miserable and poor and blind and naked" (Rev. 3:17).

The true diagnosis of man's condition has been made by the Great Physician who said, "They that are while have no need of a physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mark 2:17). This is to say that the sickness He came to heal is sin. It is of greater importance than any other need that Jesus was willing to give up His life in its prime that sins might be remitted. His blood, he said, "is poured out for many unto remission of sins" (Matt. 26:28).

One cannot imagine how many people Jesus could have healed, fed, clothed and lifted to higher and more prosperous levels had He postponed His death for another thirty or forty years. In fact, if that were His purpose, His mission was a giant failure. But it was His own choice to die when he did, for He held the crisis of sin to be far more urgent than the plight of poverty.

This is not to say that this is all Christ did in His coming to earth. He also revealed the Father and the very character of the Godhead. He demonstrated the perfect image of God, perfect manhood, total obedience to the Father and the meaning of immortality. But the express work for which he became flesh was the work of redeeming man from the degradation of sin and from its ultimate inexorable penalty of death.

The meaning of Christ's birth is all but lost in the attention given to the incidentals: the manger, the shepherds, the angels and the gifts. It is amazing that the church and millions of Christians help to obscure this meaning by supporting the pagan notions and fantasies, and by an undeclared moratorium on any suggestion that man is sinful and needs a Savior.

The fact that a humble stable was sufficient, that poor shepherds rejoiced in His birth (not in better prices for wool) teaches us that His coming had a meaning far greater than the solving of material problems. The fact that the Wise Men were directed by God to bring some of their wealth to the Savior indicates that salvation is of more value than living standards. It is observed in history that where the gospel has first been received, a better living standard has followed. It simply does not work the other way around, but has the opposite effect.

The Bible teaches that nations as well as individuals will suffer judgment for their wickedness, and gives examples such as the Canaanites, the Egyptians and even the

nation of Israel. Yet, how many are willing to admit that modern nations may be suffering under God's hand for the same reason?

Christ came as man, to die as man to pay man's death-penalty for sin. This is the need of the hour, of the world, that sin be recognized, repented of and cleansed by the power of the Savior.

“Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name unto all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem” (Luke 24:46–47).

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