

## "WHAT THIS WORLD NEEDS"

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter on December 28, 1969 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee and heard over radio station WLAC at 8:05 P. M.

There is an advertising jingle currently being heard which says, "What this town needs more of is....." On this last Sunday of 1969, a year not without its major problems and disturbances, I want to borrow this jingle and modify it a bit so that it says, "What this world needs more of is....." Instead of filling in a few words to suggest what I believe is one of the greatest needs of mankind today, I want to suggest that need through the reading of half-a-dozen passages of scripture.

PASSAGE NUMBER ONE: "Jesus said, I came not to judge the world, but to save the world" (John 12:47).

PASSAGE NUMBER TWO: "And it came to pass, as he sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with Jesus and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Teacher with the publicans and sinners? But when he heard it, he said, They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what this meaneth, I desire mercy, and not sacrifice: for I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." (Matt. 9:10-13).

PASSAGE NUMBER THREE: "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured unto you. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, let me cast out the mote out of thine eye: and lo, the beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye: and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye." (Matt. 7:1-5).

PASSAGE NUMBER FOUR: "Be ye merciful, even as your Father is merciful. And judge not, and ye shall not be judged: and condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: release, and ye shall be released...For with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again." (Luke 6:36-38).

PASSAGE NUMBER FIVE: "Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, even as God also in Christ forgave you." (Eph. 4:32)

PASSAGE NUMBER SIX: "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (Matt. 6:14-15).

Do you recognize a central theme running through these six passages? Could you put into your own words a summary of what all of these passages seem to be saying? In all probability you could do so, but I believe the best explanation of what Christ meant when he uttered the words which we have quoted from him is to be found in an incident which happened during his ministry on earth. We have heard what he taught, now let us see how he practiced it.

### A Case Study

In verses 2 through 11 of the 8th chapter of John, we find an interesting story concerning Christ and his dealing with a sinful woman. The story begins, "And early in the morning he came again into the temple, and all the people came unto him: and he sat down and taught them." Many people had come to recognize the teachings of Jesus as both profound and meaningful, to their daily lives. They followed him wherever he went and eagerly listened to his message. Such was the case on this particular day. Jesus sat on some parapet in the temple area and the people surrounded him, faithfully drinking in every word he spoke. It was a quiet and beautiful scene.

Then suddenly a group of rowdy men, speaking in strident, angry tones, invaded the quiet temple scene. The text continues, "And the scribes and the Pharisees bring a woman taken in adultery; and having set her in the midst, they say unto him, Teacher, this woman hath been taken in adultery, in the very act. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such: what then sayest thou of her?" In our mind's eye each of us can visualize this poor woman, dishelved in appearance, clothing torn, hair streaming across her face, cowering on the floor of the temple area, trying to bury her head in her arms and sobbing convulsively.

Why had these angry leaders not brought the man who had been engaged in the sinful act, with even equal or greater guilt? Who was he? Where was he? Why should this woman be made to pay the whole price? There is another question: Why had they brought the woman? Were they really disturbed by her sin? Did they have a deep desire to help this sinful woman turn from her life of sensuality to a better way of life? Were they concerned for her at all? As we read John's next sentence, "And this they said, trying him, that they might have whereof to accuse him," we discover that they were not at all interested in this poor, wretched woman, but were only using her to frame a situation in which Jesus, whom they considered to be a rival, might be trapped. If he voted for stoning, as Moses' law decreed, they would hurry to the Roman centurion and accuse Jesus of disregarding the regulation that death could be decreed only by the Romans. If, on the other hand, Jesus called for the woman to be released, they would hurry to the High Priest and accuse Jesus of disregarding the sacred law of Moses. In either case, they felt they could destroy his influence. This was their goal.

#### A Difficult Decision

Jesus was faced with a difficult decision. Actually it was not so much a decision between stoning this poor woman or releasing her, as it was a decision between raw justice or sympathetic mercy. Jesus choose the side of mercy. Then, in a most ingenuous way he turned the situation so that the accusers were themselves entrapped.

The text reads, "But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground." This, of course, did not satisfy the angry men, for they continued to call for some kind of decision. "But when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again he stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground." We can almost visualize the quiet that descended over the scene and the facial expressions of the men who had been so demanding a few moments before. Their eyes would meet and then lower. The scripture continues, "And they, when they heard it, went out one by one, beginning with the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman, where she was, in the midst." While we have no knowledge at all from the scriptures about what Jesus traced on the dusty floor of the temple area, tradition tells us that he lined out the letters of the words: Extortioner, Liar, Idolater, Drunkard, Murderer, and Adulterer. As the men saw their own private sins lettered on the ground, they slipped out one by one.

Alone with the woman, "Jesus lifted up himself, and said unto her, Woman, where are they? did no man condemn thee? And she said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said, Neither do I condemn thee: go thy way; from henceforth sin no more." It hardly need point out that in his dealing with this woman who had been involved in the shameful violation of God's law, Jesus did not condone her sin. No one who ever walked on the earth saw with such clarity the awfulness of sin. No one gave himself more fully than Jesus in the battle against sin. But, what Jesus really saw was the woman, made in God's image, who had been contaminated by sin and who desperately needed to be lifted up and started on the upward way again. In his directions to her, there is no hint of condoning her sin, but there is great

encouragement toward the beginning of a new and better way of life. "Go thy way; from henceforth sin no more." With deep, loving concern, Jesus dealt with the woman; with impure motives, the men tried to use this woman for their own selfish purposes.

What This World Needs.....

We go back to the advertising jingle with which we began: "What this town needs more of is....." Modifying it, we say, "What this world needs more of is love and mercy and understanding and kindness among men." Instead of the harsh, critical judgments, that are all too common, we need to seek to understand each person with whom we work or live. We need to judge their acts as sympathetically and kindly as possible. So often there are misunderstanding, suspicion, distrust, hatred, and even acts of violence.

These negative, destructive feelings are especially common between the different ethnic and racial groups. How easy it is to dislike someone of a different racial background, or even of a different national origin. Tensions also exist between those who are richer and those who are poorer. The day laborer, the blue-collar worker, and the white-collar worker find it difficult to appreciate each other's position, and all three join in being suspicious of management. The younger find it difficult to understand and appreciate the older and the older find it almost impossible to understand and accept the behavior and the attitudes of the younger. These tensions have always been present, though they are more emphasized and even possibly more pronounced in our day. But what is needed is an understanding, sympathetic concern, and a willingness to judge kindly. Barriers can be removed, gaps can be narrowed, and those who have been estranged may be brought back together--if Christ's way is tried.

There is an interesting passage, Luke 18:9-14, in which Jesus "spoke also this parable to certain also who trusted also in themselves that they were righteous, and set all others at naught: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in a week; I give tithes of all that I get. But the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote his breasts, saying, God, be thou merciful to me a sinner. I say unto you, This man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for everyone that exalteth himself shall be humbled; but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." One man was very correct in his outward observance of the religious laws, but his heart was far from God. The other man, a sinner, came openly confessing his sins, asking for God's forgiveness. Of the two, God was pleased with the penitent sinner rather than the self-righteous religious leader.

The fifteenth chapter of Luke tells the familiar story of the prodigal son, who took his father's substance and went away into a foreign land and wasted it in riotous living. The climax comes when this wayward boy comes to his senses, and returns to his father, asking forgiveness. The scripture reads, "But while he was yet afar off, his father saw him, and was moved with compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him." (Luke 15:20). The father brought forth the best robe, put a ring on his finger, and shoes on his feet. Then he killed the fatted calf to prepare a fine meal of celebration. The message of the story is very simple. God is always ready to welcome back those who admit their sin and are willing to begin again. God's love is infinite.

This story has also the ugly account of an older brother, who would not join in the celebration of his wayward brother's return. Rather, he remained but-side in self-righteous indignation, resenting the fact that his father had forgiven the prodigal and was providing for him a fine meal and restoration to the family circle. How easy it is for men to fall into this critical, holier-than-thou attitude toward their fellowmen. How wrong it is for Christians to be judgmental and censorious in their attitudes toward others, for only God can judge. We do not know all of the facts in the case. We certainly do not know the motives behind the acts. We do not know the attitudes of heart that may be involved. For all these reasons it is far better for us to love and help those about us and leave the judging to God, who knows the whole story and is in a position to pass righteous judgment.

Several years ago I preached for a congregation which had as one of its elders a man by the name of J. C. Hutcheson. At that time he was in a position of management with a large trucking concern. He had hired a man and after some days assigned him to a run from Nashville to certain cities in Pennsylvania. Along the route there was a narrow bridge which had angled irons at the side which made it impossible for a large tractor truck and trailer to pass through, unless the driver crossed the bridge in the middle of the road. Instructions were given this new driver and the danger fully explained. However, he either forgot or failed to recognize the bridge as he approached it and the result was that he tore out the top of a long, expensive trailer.

When he returned to Nashville, he dutifully made his report of the incident. Brother Hutcheson calmly heard the story, discussed the matter without feeling and then closed the conversation. The driver of the truck had expected anger, condemnation, and that he would be fired. When none of this happened he asked, "Aren't you going to fire me?" The answer was, "No, you are more valuable to us now than before the accident. You will never do that again." How easy it would have been to have condemned the driver and fired him. How much better to keep him on as an appreciative, grateful employee. He would be willing to work extra hours, and take the unattractive jobs, because he now knew that he was working for a man who was sympathetic and understanding.

#### Conclusion

Finally, there is a passage in which the apostle Paul is speaking of the proper attitude for the eating of the Lord's Supper, in which there is the line, "But let each one of you examine himself..." There is no possibility of our beginning with the other man in this project to foster greater love and understanding among men. The only place that each one of us can begin is with himself. So, let each one of us examine himself and make sure that his judgments of others are kind, sympathetic, and helpful. That is what this world needs more of.

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