

DON'T KEEP CHRIST IN CHRISTMAS

11 ¹¹[Jesus] entered Jerusalem and went to the temple. He looked around at everything, but since it was already evening, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

¹²The next day, when they came from Bethany, [Jesus] was hungry. ¹³Seeing in the distance a fig tree with leaves, he came to it, hoping that he might find some fruit on it. But when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for it was not the season for figs. ¹⁴Then he said to it, May no man eat any fruit from you ever again. Now his disciples heard this. ¹⁵When they came into Jerusalem, [Jesus] entered the temple. [There] he began to throw out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple [courts]; and he overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who sold the doves. ¹⁶He would not allow anyone to carry any merchandise through the temple [courts]. ¹⁷As he taught, he said to them, Is it not written, My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations? But you have made it into a den of robbers! ¹⁸The chief priests and the scribes heard about this, and sought a way to get rid of him; they feared him, because the whole crowd was astonished at his teaching.

¹⁹Each evening [Jesus] went out of the city ... ²⁷They returned to Jerusalem; and as [Jesus] was walking in the temple [courts], the chief priests and the scribes and the elders came up to him ²⁸and asked him, By what authority do you do these things? Or who gave you the authority to do these things? ²⁹Jesus said to them, I will ask you one question, if you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I do these things. ³⁰The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or from men? Answer me. ³¹But they reasoned among themselves, saying, If we say, From heaven; He will say, Why then did you not believe him? ³²But if we say, From men—they feared the people, for everyone believed that John really was a prophet. ³³So they answered Jesus by saying, We do not know. Then Jesus said to them, Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.

12 Then he began to speak to them in parables. A man planted a vineyard, and put a wall around it, and dug a pit for the winepress, and built a watchtower. Then he rented [the vineyard] out to some tenant farmers and went away to another country. ²When the harvest season arrived, he sent a servant to the tenants, so that he might receive some of the fruits of the vineyard from them. ³But they took [the servant] and beat him, and sent him away empty handed. ⁴Then he sent another servant to them; but they wounded him in the head, and treated him shamefully. ⁵Then [the owner] sent another [servant]; but [the tenants] killed him. He sent many others; some of them they beat, others they killed. ⁶He had only one [man left whom he could send], a beloved son. As a last resort he sent him to [the tenants], thinking, They will respect my son. ⁷But those tenants said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours. ⁸So they took him, and killed him, and threw his body out of the vineyard. ⁹Now then, what will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and get rid of the tenants, and will give the vineyard to others. ¹⁰Have you not read this scripture, The stone that the builders rejected, that [very stone] has been made the cornerstone; ¹¹the Lord has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes? ¹²They wanted to seize him, for they understood that he spoke the parable against them; but they feared the crowd. So they left him, and went away. (Mk. 11:11-19; 11:27-12:12)

Introduction

Many times we hear the slogan, “Let’s keep Christ in Christmas!” And many times that is precisely what people do: they keep Christ in Christmas. They confine Christ to the role of an adorable, but powerless, little infant sweetly lying in a manger. They may view this child as growing up, but only to become a mild mannered gentleman with long hair and cocker spaniel eyes who has great rapport with little children and blesses people. Then this gentleman is tragically crucified. Once again, at Easter, He is the center of attention, but only as a poor, pitiable man hanging helplessly upon a cross. He continues to be viewed as “the Christ of Christmas;” the center of attention, but only as an object to be adored or pitied, one who is perceived as being powerless and harmless.

As we approach the next passage of the Gospel of Mark, the picture of “Christ in Christmas”—Christ the helpless, adorable babe, or Christ the helpless, pitiable man—is counterbalanced by an encounter with His awesome divine authority as the Lord of glory before whom all men shall one day give an account. Let us be sure to have a true and accurate understanding of the Lord Jesus Christ, let us make sure that we do not “keep Christ in Christmas.”

I. Don’t Keep Christ in Christmas, on the contrary, Recognize His Awesome Authority (Mk. 11:27-33)

The chief priests and religious leaders of Israel approached Jesus and inquired, *“By what authority do you do these things? Who gave you this authority?”* (vs. 28.) They had just been confronted with Christ’s divine authority when He cleansed the temple:

When they came into Jerusalem, [Jesus] entered the temple. There he began to throw out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple [courts]; and he overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who sold the doves. ¹⁶He would not allow anyone to carry any merchandise through the temple [courts]. ¹⁷As he taught, he said to them, Is it not written, My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations? But you have made it into a den of robbers! (Mk. 11:15-17)

We are confronted with Christ’s divine authority when He taught in the synagogue:

They came to Capernaum; and immediately on the Sabbath day he entered the synagogue and taught. ²²The people were astonished at his teaching; because he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes. (Mk. 1:21-22)

Christ does not offer us His religious opinion as just one among many competing and contradictory opinions, He is speaking to us the very Word of God; as John

the Baptist testifies of Jesus: *"the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives him the Spirit without limit"* (Jn. 3:34.) Christ does not submit unto us conjecture about spiritual things and the life beyond, He speaks to us as the One who comes from there and is an eyewitness of that place and those things. Jesus said to Nicodemus, *"I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony"* (Jn. 3:11.)

We are confronted with Christ's divine authority when He expelled demons:

And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Keep quiet and come out of him. ²⁶And the unclean spirit, after shaking him violently and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him. ²⁷All the people were astonished, so much so that they questioned among themselves, saying, What is this? [Here is] a new teaching! With authority he even commands the unclean spirits, and they obey him. (Mk. 1:25-27)

Christ does not only teach with divine authority, He acts with divine authority. The one who is the prince of this world (the devil) cringes before Christ, is compelled to obey His command, and lives in conscious terror of that inevitable day when Christ shall cast him into the flames of hell forever. A graphic portrayal of the devil's final destination is presented in Revelation 20:10,

And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night forever and ever. (Rev. 20:10)

We are confronted with Christ's divine authority when He cleansed the leper:

A man with leprosy came up to him, kneeling down before him and begging him, If you are willing, you can make me clean. ⁴¹Being moved with compassion, [Jesus] stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, I am willing; be made clean. ⁴²Immediately the leprosy left him and he was made clean. (Mk. 1:40-42)

At Christ's command, the foul, putrid, flesh-consuming disease of leprosy was not only arrested, but the whole process was thrown into reverse and retreated before the creation of fresh new healthy flesh. Christ brings to a halt the curse of death, and replaces it with fresh new life, simply because He wants to, He has the authority to do so—note His statement, *"I am willing"* (vs. 41.)

We are confronted with Christ's divine authority when He forgives the crippled man's sins:

But in order that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins (he said to the paralytic), ¹¹I tell you, Get up, pick up your mat, and

go home. ¹²And [the man] got up, immediately picked up the mat, and went out in the presence of them all. As a result, they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, We never saw anything like this. (Mk. 2:10-12)

By way of illustration, a state governor has the authority to issue a pardon that is able to save a convicted criminal from execution. But Christ has the authority to issue a pardon that is honored in the court of God and is able to save a condemned sinner from hell itself.

We are confronted with Christ's divine authority when He stills the raging storm:

He awoke and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, Peace, be still. The wind ceased and there was a great calm ... ⁴¹Then they became exceedingly afraid and said to one another, Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him? (Mk. 4:39,41)

All the forces of nature are subject to Christ's almighty will and operate at His command. Note the testimony of Colossians 1:16-17, *"by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. ¹⁷He is before all things, and by him all things hold together."*

We are confronted with Christ's divine authority when He raised Jairus' daughter from the dead:

Taking the child by the hand, he said to her, Talitha, cumi, which means, Little girl, I say to you, Get up. ⁴²Immediately the little girl got up and walked; for she was twelve years old. (Mk. 5:41-42a)

Christ not only possesses the authority to halt the process of disease and drive it away before it seizes its victim and drags him away into the dark recesses of death, like a predatory animal dragging its prey to its den; Christ has the authority to reach into the mysterious realm of death and reunite a departed soul with its body, restoring the person to wholeness and physical life. Jesus testifies, *"I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades"* (Rev. 1:18.) We are assured that, until the day of final resurrection, the Lord Jesus keeps the souls of His people safe in His own immediate presence. In 2 Corinthians 5:8 the Apostle Paul expresses the Christian's confidence, *"We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the LORD."* The penitent thief on the cross cried out, *"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. ⁴³Jesus answered him, I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise"* (Lk. 23:42-43.)

Let us not "keep Christ in Christmas," on the contrary, let us recognize His awesome authority. Just prior to His ascension, the Lord Jesus declared, *"All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth"* (Matt. 28:18.) Jesus Christ

has the authority to make you a child of God, if you receive Him as your Savior: *"to all who received him, to those who are believing in his name, he gave the right to become children of God"* (Jn. 1:12.) Jesus Christ also has the authority to finally condemn to hell all those who remain in their unconverted state of sinfulness: *"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels'"* (Matt. 25:41.)

II. Don't Keep Christ in Christmas, on the contrary, Submit to His Awesome Authority (Mk. 12:1-12)

Let us not be like those tenant farmers described in Christ's parable; those who were constantly rejecting the owner's authority (Mk. 12:1-5.) They refused to acknowledge their position as tenants and respect the authority of the vineyard's owner to which they were subject. Let us acknowledge and respect and submit ourselves to the divine authority of God our Maker and His Son Jesus Christ, the only Savior; may we not be like those described in Psalm 2,

Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? ²The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against Jehovah and against his Anointed One. ³Let us break their chains, they say, and throw off their fetters. ⁴The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them ... ¹⁰Therefore, you kings, be wise, be warned, you rulers of the earth. ¹¹Serve Jehovah with fear and rejoice with trembling. ¹²Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him. (Psl. 2:1-4,10-12)

Let us not be like those tenant farmers, who foolishly misinterpreting their situation, supposing themselves to no longer be accountable to the owner (Mk. 12:6-8.) As the commentator Norval Geldenhuys points out, when the landowner sent his son, the tenants mistakenly assumed that the land owner was dead, and if they got rid of his son, they could claim possession of the property (*New International Commentary, Gospel of Luke*, pp. 418-419.) May we not be like those whom the Psalmist describes in Psalm 50,

But to the wicked, God says, What right have you to recite my laws or take my covenant on your lips? ¹⁷You hate my instruction and cast my words behind you ... ²¹These things you have done and I kept silent; you thought I was altogether like yourself [i.e.; one who disregards sin or condones it]. But I will rebuke you and accuse you to your face. ²²Consider this, you who forget God, or I will tear you to pieces, with none to rescue. (Psl. 50:16-17,21-22)

Let us not be like those tenant farmers; they were finally confronted with the owner's authority as he pronounced the just and righteous sentence against them (Mk. 12:9.)

Let us not “keep Christ in Christmas;” on the contrary, let us reverence His awesome authority and submit to it. We must entertain an attitude of reverence towards Christ, which stems from a recognition of and respect for His awesome divine authority as the Son of God and the eternal Lord of glory. It is from this attitude of reverence that true and godly obedience issue forth into a life of righteousness and holiness. Let us pray that such an attitude would indeed be created in our hearts and cultivated by the Holy Spirit as an act of His divine grace and favor.

Conclusion

Shall we “keep Christ in Christmas?” God forbid! For the glory of Christ and for the sake of our own souls, we dare not “keep Christ in Christmas!” On the contrary, let us recognize the awesome authority of the Lord Jesus Christ and let us show reverence for that divine authority by submitting to it.