

What Think Ye of Christ

by A.W. Tozer

The sermon explores the significance of Jesus Christ and the various responses people have to him, highlighting the importance of a genuine and transformative response.

Duration: 33:58

Scripture: Psalm 90:1, Psalm 110:1, Matthew 22:41-42, Matthew 22:45, Acts 17:28, 1 Peter 1:18-19

Topics: "Christ"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker uses the analogy of a sinking ship and a lifeboat to illustrate different responses to Jesus Christ. He describes various individuals on the sinking ship who see the lifeboat but react differently. Some are indifferent, some appreciate the boat's design, some are sentimental, and some admire the heroism of those on board. The speaker emphasizes that while these responses may be valid, they do not guarantee salvation. The true Christian is the one who recognizes their need for Jesus and cries out for His mercy.

Transcript

In the 22nd chapter of the Gospel of St. Matthew, St. Matthew's record of the Gospel, 22nd chapter, verse 42 following, verse 41 following, while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, What think ye of Christ? Whose son is he? They say unto him, The son of David. He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord? Saying, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies their footstool. If David then call him Lord, how is he a son? No man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions.

Now the question here in the 42nd verse, What think ye of Christ? is the one that I want to use tonight. Let us have a moment of prayer. Lord, we thank thee for every evidence of thy presence in our midst.

Soon, very soon, it will be all we have. And we want to cultivate it, learn to recognize it, and appreciate it, and live with it joyously forever. For thy presence, thy self, thou wilt be our eternal home.

Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. In thee we now live and move and have our being. And in those days and centuries before us, thou wilt be our dwelling place.

And we would learn to be at home in thy presence. Breathe, O breathe, thy loving spirit upon us this evening. Upon the truth as we attempt to give it, upon all of us as we listen.

May our response please thy Son, who poured out his soul for us unto death, and gave himself a ransom for many. We ask it in his name. Amen.

Now, Jesus Christ is Christianity, if the truth were known. Or, turning it about, Christianity is Christ. Paul begins his gospel to Romans by saying, the gospel of God, his epistle to the Romans, by saying, the gospel of God concerning his Son.

For the gospel concerns Jesus Christ and lost men. But it concerns Jesus Christ primarily, and most importantly. Now, the Church visible has a definite beginning.

It had a definite beginning, a definite historical origin. It's easily traced back, link by link, to its beginning. Some things are lost in antiquity, and we are unable to discover their beginnings.

But not so with the Church that we call the Church of Jesus. This is easily traced back, link by link, to its origin. And that origin is not in an idea at all, but in a man.

You can trace Communism back to an idea. You can trace almost every religion of the world back to the birth of some idea, false or true. But when you come to the Church of Christ, you trace that Church back to a man.

There's nothing vague or mythological about the man. He is not lost in the shadows of the past. But he is definitely placed as true geography in time.

His birthplace can be found on any map. You can turn to any map, and by a little careful examination, you can put a pencil down on the very town where he was born. The town where he lived and the country where he roamed and taught and did his wonders can be located, I say, on any map.

And the city where he was crucified is there, written down for us. And the mount from which he ascended after his crucifixion and resurrection, it is there. It can be located.

Any visitor can go there and find it, and a guide will show him where the mount is, and he can look at it and photograph it. It's there. And then everything was located evidently as to time.

Up to a certain point in history, there was no church. And then suddenly it broke on the world and became vastly important, and it has never been out of the historical eye from that time to this. And its appearance coincided with the appearance of this man that I'm talking about tonight, who was born in that town, in that country, at that time.

And the historicity of this man is bound up with certain great historical figures that identify him and give further proof that he lived and existed. There was Herod, the king of Judea. There was Cyrenius, governor of Syria.

There was Tiberius Caesar. There was Pilate, governor of Judea. There was Annas and Caiaphas, who were high priests.

These all lived and history records their being in the world, and they were there when he was there. And their place in history had its origin about the time that they were contemporary with him for a while. And his advent is easily the greatest occurrence in history, because his impact upon the human race is greater than that of any other man that ever came to the world.

And for strategic importance, his coming to the world was the greatest event in the world, and for quality of the effect on mankind. There lived a man once by the name of Marx, and that man taught the world and gave them certain ideas. But the quality of those ideas have been proved by all right-thinking and God-fearing people to be of the very devil himself.

For out of those ideas there was born the terrible scourge that we call communism. And then the perpetuity of the effect upon the race of man. He's still here.

He's still to be dealt with. He's still breathing over everybody's shoulder. His name is still heard, and after all the passing of these years, the proof is among us that his advent was the greatest occurrence in history.

Now, the church that I mentioned, the church we know and love, is an extension of the personality of the man Christ Jesus. For 1900 years there has been felt a presence, and the church has not created nor perpetuated that presence, but that presence has supported and fired the church. It is not the church that has kept the name of Jesus alive, but it's the Jesus that has kept the name of the church alive through all these centuries.

Now that brief sketch, and we come to the question, it was a theological question as first asked there. What think ye of the Christ? And the question of whether the man Jesus was the Christ or not had not been settled. It has been settled now by God having raised him from the dead and set him at his own right hand, and then sent down the Holy Ghost to establish the church.

So instead of making it a merely theological question, I am going to make it a practical question. What do you think of Christ? Now I would assume that some people may say, well, the trouble is we're just talking to each other. The people who are present here tonight all believe that Jesus the Christ is God's very Son.

He is the Lord, and I don't see why the question should come up at all. Well, maybe before I get through we'll see why the question should come up and why it should be faced and answered boldly, courageously, and candidly by every one of us. Because we answer the question, what do you think of Jesus Christ, by the response we make to his gospel.

And there are about five responses that I want to mention tonight briefly. Some response is hardly to be called a response at all, because it is what we call the negative response. People hear about him and do absolutely nothing at all.

There were people by the thousands, and I suppose even tens of thousands in this great city of Toronto today, who heard chimes. And in fishing around for some news, they got a church bell or a hymn on the radio or television. And so somehow Christ managed to make himself heard and felt.

And the stream of people, or twos and threes and ones, moving off to some local church, said to all of these people that there is a man by the name of Jesus, that he is a historical figure. He is not a myth, not something that has been pulled out of acuity and given a name, but that he is a man who was born, a woman, at a certain time, in a certain place, in a certain country, and that you can trace him back to his beginning, that is, back to his earthly beginning. And then the organization that he formed, you can trace back.

This one, Jesus, has to be dealt with. We've got to do something about him. What's our response? What do we think of him? Well, some had that question put to them today, and they did absolutely nothing at all.

They were indifferent to the whole thing, and silent. But these dead souls, nevertheless, are making a response. They are answering the question, because this same man said, He that is not with me is against me, so that there is no such thing as neutrality.

During the war they said only the stars are neutral. Situations were so plainly black and white, so obviously opposed good to evil, that only the stars above could be negative. Anybody that had any moral sense at all, the saying had it, had to take sides.

I believe the same is true today in the question of communism. I don't believe it is possible to be neutral and say, Well, I'm not on anybody's side. You are on somebody's side.

If you're not on the side of the Bible and God and Christ and morality and righteousness and freedom and the dignity of the individual, then you're on the other side. There is no middle ground. And Jesus knew it when he said, He that is not with me is against me, and he that gathers not with me scatters wildly abroad and wastes what he's doing.

Some try to be negative, and we'll go that far with them. We'll call it a negative response and say that it is not a response at all. But it is a response.

If your little baby was in the home and that little child was dying, it was obvious the child was dying, and the doctor couldn't help, for at least there was hope that he might be able to help. And a lazy man lay in his bed, and nobody could get him to get up to go for a doctor or call a doctor. And the child lay there and moaned.

You say, Well, I'm indifferent. No, he was not indifferent. No indifference there.

It was not indifference. He was against that child and loved himself better than, his own comforts better than the child. And so when the message of Christ comes, and he stands and says, Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest, and we respond by doing nothing, we're responding all right.

We're responding even though we're doing nothing. It's a response. It's a negative response that is a positive response at last.

Well, then there is a second response, and that is the response that is intellectual. Some people see the beauty of the character of Jesus. I remember that Friedrich Nietzsche, who taught nihilism, and the superman, and whose crazy ideas inspired Hitler to become the devil that he was.

This man said there was something beautiful about Jesus Christ. He didn't like Paul, he said, but he couldn't help but love this Jesus. Even this evil man recognized in that quiet figure that moved about in Palestine, taking babies in his arms and blessing them, and mingling with the poor and the common people of his times, and healing the sick and blessing them wherever he could.

This one had something beautiful about him. There was something beautiful about the character of Jesus. He is the one character in which there is no flaw to be found.

There is flaw in every character. There isn't a man in the scriptures, unless it might be Joseph, that we can't find fault with. Certainly Abraham, we can find a lot of fault with Abraham.

You don't have to try to find it, it's there, obvious, God put it there. And then there's Jacob, everybody knows about Jacob, and lazy old Isaac, everybody knows about him. And all the way down there was no man, no woman, that was perfect of character.

And in history it's the same. And all the great characters that have lived in the world, we can name them all down the centuries, and yet there wasn't a one of them, but what we have to apologize somewhere and say, well, he was great in spite of this. This was a blemish on his character.

This was a blot on his scutcheon, but he was great in spite of it. But there is no blot to be found on the scutcheon of Jesus Christ. There is not a blot upon his holy name, not a single moat in the beam, not a speck upon the white surface of that holy character.

Not anywhere. And of course, men grab that intellectually, and they see the dignity of the teaching of the man. I suppose nowhere in the world is there to be found anything quite so beautiful as the Sermon on the Mount.

It is so beautiful that it's like a palace of carved ivory, filled with low music. It's charming, it's gracious, it's deep, it's strong, it's noble, it's elevated, it's everything. And of course, great minds talk about this.

Great minds appreciate it. It's an intellectual response. And his effect upon history, mentioned before, this all has intellectual fascination for men.

When they look at history, they say, this man stands head and shoulders above any other character that ever lived in the world. This simple man, born of a virgin mother yonder in Palestine, and born in the manger, and brought up in the carpenter's shop, and without formal education, yet he moved out and stands strong and tall and shining above all of the sons of men. And of course, there's intellectual fascination there.

And then, others have sentimental response. A lot of people are sentimental in their response to Jesus Christ our Lord. There's an emotional fixation that is created, just as a moviegoer has an emotional fixation for some of the characters, some of these fellows who go about.

I remember when Rudolph Valentino was the big idol of the day. He came to one of the large cities, I've forgotten which one in the United States, and he was there of what they said, in person. And the women all went to see him, you know, this love-making idol.

And they say that they worked themselves up to such a fury that they finally, a lot of them, took off their wedding rings and tossed them at his feet. As much as to say, I repudiate all my vows and my husband and that bum that I married. Here, here, I want you.

And threw their wedding rings at his feet. Well now, that's a fixation. There's an emotional response, a sentimental response to a man.

And you will find that possible, entirely possible. It's impossible to have a sentimental attachment to the Virgin Mary. And I have no doubt that some people love the Virgin Mary with a very beautiful and wonderful affection.

They love her. They love the Virgin Mary. And their Ave Maria rings and vibrates with reality.

They mean what they're saying. However false and however far from truth, it's really true that they love this woman that they never saw. They love this woman who's been dead for 1900 years.

They love this woman. It's entirely possible to get a fixed idea, an emotional fixation. And yet it's a powerful and enjoyable thing.

I remember in the days when I used to do a lot more reading of literature than I do now, that I read the writings of Wilde and Rossetti, just to mention two. Dante Gabriel Rossetti and of Oscar Wilde. And it's astonishing how these men talk about Christ.

They write about him and they use him as an example. And they say fine things about him and they make gestures of affection toward him. And yet neither Gabriel Rossetti nor Wilde were Christians.

But they had a sentimental attachment to the man Christ Jesus. It didn't lead them to God and this doesn't lead men to God. It doesn't transform their life.

It doesn't change them. It doesn't give them a new birth. It doesn't impart eternal life.

It doesn't justify them. It doesn't take away their sin. But it serves as a very beautiful and high ideal.

Something wonderful and beautiful. My wife and I rode down from home this morning in a tax cab. And I gathered from the young man, a blond young fellow who was driving, that he was a Hollander.

And I said, Would you be a Hollander by any means? And he said, Yes. And I said, Are you acquainted with a town in Holland named Dettingen? And he said, Yes, I come from near there. I said, Do you happen to know Handel's Tadam sung by the Dettingen choir, Bach choir? And his face lighted up immediately and he almost exploded there behind the wheel.

And he began to talk about Bach, as he called him. I can't scrape my throat the way he did, not being Dutch. But he said, Oh, Bach, he said, and Handel.

He said, I tell you, if you don't like church music, you're missing something. And he just lectured us on the west of the way down. He was all a thrill with it.

But he smoked. He must have been on fire because there was a place, the hole inside of the car reeked. And I doubt whether the man was a Christian, but he loved church music.

He loved the Tadam, the Adumas. He loved to hear the great things sung by the great choirs, composed by the great Handels and Bachs of generations gone. Now, it's entirely possible to be religious in that sentimental fashion and to go to church and love the sound of music and the sound of the nasal twang of the pastor.

Not this one. But the nasal twang of the pastor as he reads the Psalms and leads us in prayer. And it's possible, I say, to become sentimentally religious and never have been born again.

And it's possible also to have another kind of response, and that's a moral response. Now, the moral excellency of the teachings of Christ I have mentioned before, and they're too well known for me to spend any time proving. Everybody acknowledges the superiority of his moral teachings, and they do have a claim upon mankind.

There is still a light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world, and he must be a pretty low kind of creature who could know that one would die for another and not be affected by it. He would have to be a pretty low kind of creature that wouldn't like truth better than error, that wouldn't like telling truth better than lying, that wouldn't like an honest man better than a thief. And so some people make a moral response to Jesus Christ our Lord, and you will find it in the newspapers and magazines and over the radio.

You'll find the politicians running, bringing the changes on at peace, goodwill toward men. And you will find greater love hath no man than this, that he lays down his life for his friends, and the least of these, my brethren, and the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man and internationalism and togetherness. And all this, you will find it, men are morally on Jesus' side.

They may in private be scoundrels, but they have decency enough that they believe in the morality of Jesus. And such people as that may live in fine sections of the town, and when a petition is made to build a church there, they say, sure, we'd like to have a church. And then they say expansively, we wouldn't want to rear our children in a neighborhood where there was not a church.

They believe in the church. They believe that her teachings have high moral value. And so their response to Jesus Christ is moral.

They're certainly not going to go all the way with him. They're certainly not going to be so ridiculous that they think it's just as bad to look on a woman lustfully as to commit adultery with her. They're certainly not going to be such fools, they would say, as to believe that if a man wants your coat, give him your vest along with it.

They'd say, oh, well, that's extreme. Of course, that's extreme. Nobody can carry that out.

But nevertheless, there's something beautiful in the teachings of Jesus about goodwill toward men and brotherhood and all that. So their response is a moral response. But that is not a redeeming response either.

Any philosopher, old Socrates, would have loved Jesus for his morality. Any of the philosophers down the years had to admit and have to admit now that the moral teachings of Christ are beyond all telling in their purity and lofty idealism. But you can have all that and not be born again at all, not be saved, not have eternal life, not be justified, not have a Redeemer, not have an advocate before the throne of God, not be ready to die.

You can be morally on the side of Jesus. Not that anybody follows him all the way, but in their hearts they want to do it, and they believe in him and say nice things about him and go to church and support the church and maybe even get on the board and become members in good standing and useful members. And still, they've never made anything but a moral response to Jesus.

They've never known what it is to have that awful sudden moment of awareness when they pass from death unto life. They've never known what it was to take that sudden, awesome, wonderful leap into the arms of Jesus Christ and to become Christians indeed and pass from death unto life and have imparted to them the life of God by the Holy Ghost and have their names written in heaven and know that they belong to God. They've not had that.

You know, I've been in Canada long enough now to think there's an awful lot of this that I'm describing among the fine, lovely people of Canada. I said to the council down in Columbus that I didn't mind going

away from Chicago because I'd found myself among the nicest people in the world, and I have no hesitation in saying that. I think the people that I've met in Toronto are, from the standpoint of just sheer human niceness, about the nicest people I've ever known in my life.

And that takes in all Americans I've known, too. I hate to say that, but it's so. But I believe that.

But better than that is one thing, but it's another thing altogether to be born again. It's another thing to come out of your sin into salvation. It's another thing to have attached yourself to Jesus Christ the Lord and be His and His alone.

It's another thing altogether to be a Christian and carry a cross. And that brings us to the last response that I want to mention tonight, and that is the spiritual response. Now, there are a few who make a spiritual response.

I've said that some have a negative response in that they don't do anything. Their response is positive. They're against Him.

There are others who make an intellectual response, and they can write books on His place in history. There are others who make a sentimental response, and they're very tender, and they love organ music and choir music and poetry, and they're sentimentally attached to Him. There are others, I say, that have made a moral response, and they admit the superiority of His teachings.

But all of this put together in one man doesn't save that man. All of this doesn't save that man. Here is a ship that's sinking.

And out there is a lifeboat. It's painted white, painted red around the gunwale, and it's shaped nicely. And here is a man when the ship finally jumps overboard to keep from being sucked down.

Here is a man when the ship sinks and swims away and looks above him, raises his head as high as he can, and he sees this lifeboat. Half a dozen of these men see it. And one of them shrugs and strikes out in another direction.

He's the indifferent one. Another one is an engineer. And he begins to, as he swims there and blows saltwater, he begins to talk to himself and to anyone within hearing about the beautiful shape of that boat.

He's an engineer, and he knows about such things. Another one is a poet or an artist. He sees that boat bouncing and floating there on the waves as they rise and fall, and he's struck with the beauty of it, that beautiful white boat floating on that green water.

He's the sentimental one. Another one is greatly struck with the heroism of those on board that boat. And he says, isn't this wonderful that there's so much good in humanity? Look at those sailors there, drenched to the skin, laboring and struggling to keep the boat afloat and to bring everybody in.

That's beautiful. He is the man with the moral response. But all of these men can perish in a few minutes from the cold, icy saltwater they can't keep afloat.

And they can all perish. And their last thought can be of the beauty of men who risk their lives to save other men or of the beauty of the shape of that boat. Then there's another kind.

And that's the fellow who yells and begins to use every trick he knows to propel himself in the direction of that boat. And he has the spiritual response. What think ye of Jesus Christ? Well, some ignore him.

Others respond variously as I've said. Then there are the few who cry out, Lord, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me. And they see everything everybody else sees.

The true Christian is not blind to the moral excellence of his teaching. The true Christian is not blind to the emotional appeal of his dying for us. The true Christian is not blind to all the beauties that lie in Jesus Christ, the lily of the valley and the rose of Sharon.

But he knows that isn't sufficient. He knows that if he's going to be saved he must make a spiritual response that will go to the roots of his being, that will change his manner of living, that will reorient him. This man who makes the spiritual response knows that it will be necessary for him to see his sin and admit it.

He knows that there must come a break with that sin. It isn't enough to confess it. Some hate their sins and confess them every day and commit them again before the sun sets.

Not that, not them. They won't be saved. The man who will be saved, who makes the right response to the man Christ Jesus, is the one who says, God, I'm sorry that I have sinned.

Forgive me for Christ's sake, and I'll not do it again. And settles it that he's not going to do any more of this sinning business. But he breaks off with everything that's necessary.

He breaks off with the friends that are ruining him. He breaks off with the kind of living that is dragging him down. He breaks off with it all, changes his life, and becomes another man.

He's the man who prays past these fears and these doubts. He's the man like that fellow Barakamias, was it? Who said, Lord Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me. And they tried to stop him, but they said, the scripture says he cried out all the more.

The more people that tried to stop him, the louder he cried. He wanted Jesus Christ to hear him. And then surrendered himself to Jesus.

That's the person that is saved. That's the person that will be saved in the judgment of the great day. That's the person whom God knows as his child.

That's the person who has seen his sin, who has seen the sufficiency of the Lord Jesus Christ, who has heard the invitation and the command to repent and believe on Christ, and who breaks off with everything and attaches himself to Jesus Christ as his Lord and all. That's the man, and that man will be saved. No other man will.

Now there it is. I've made it just as plain, and I think it is possible for any man to make it. Here stands Jesus Christ, God Almighty's last spoken word to the world, our hope for all time.

With him we can't lose, and without him we can't win. We perish without him, and we can't perish with him. There he stands, above all the world, and says, Come unto me.

Some make no response at all. Some look up and say, That's a beautiful gesture. And they write a book or a poem about it.

Others look up and are sentimentally moved and wipe a tear and say, I love to hear Rock of Ages sung. Others make a moral response and say, I'm going to try to live clean. I think that's the right way to live.

I don't want to go down in the gutter. I want to live clean. But not one of these, not one of these will get the benefit of his atonement or the cleansing of his blood.

Not one of these is a child of God. It becomes necessary, I repeat, for the last time, that if we want to gain the benefit of his atonement and be washed in his blood and have him own us before the throne of God and have God call us his child and allow us to call God our Father, there must be a putting away of every sin. There must be a breaking off of every known wrong habit and deed.

There must be a straightening out of our lives so far as we can straighten them out. There must be a committal of ourselves to Jesus Christ irrevocably, now and for all time to come. And if need be, cut off that right hand.

If need be, pluck out that right eye. If need be, say goodbye to father and mother, friends and loved ones, that we might follow him. That's the person that will be saved.

The others will not be. They cannot be. Because it's all soulish and intellectual.

This is spiritual and profound and eternal. May God help us to make the right response and have the right answer. Let's pray.

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