

A melancholy man was once walking through a cemetery on a cold wintry afternoon. As he walked slowly he noticed a man dressed in a long gray wool coat standing with his arm around the shoulder of a young boy about twelve or thirteen years old. Both man and boy were staring at a freshly filled grave, with a newly engraved monument which indicated that lying deep in the ground was the boy's mother and the man's wife. Tears filled the eyes of both of them and the man began to speak. He talked tenderly, yet forcefully, and with great passion. He talked of life, of death, of Jesus, and of eternal life to his son. The man was not a professor or a scholar or a preacher. He was a working class man who had a job in some factory or office.

The man who had been walking through the cemetery managed to overhear all that the father was telling his son. This incident proved a turning point in his life because he was a seminary student and his name was Soren Kierkegaard, a man who later became a famous theologian. Up to

that time Kierkegaard had heard the truth of the Gospel witnessed to only by coldly orthodox ministers and professors. He had heard many lectures as a seminary student about God, about life, about death, about Jesus, and about eternal life. But it seemed as though his professors spoke as if they didn't really care about the truth to which they were bearing witness. It seemed so cold and objective and scientific. They spoke of God as though he were some biological specimen being examined under a microscope. They spoke of God with such cold detachment that they might as well have been describing some geological phenomenon.

Then he heard this father talking to his son about life, death, Jesus and eternal life and what a difference it made. Here was a man who spoke of God with tears in his eyes. Here was a man who spoke of God in such a powerful, persuasive, personal way. Here was a man for whom God mattered more than life or death, a man for whom God's truth provided the only comfort in his grief.

As Kierkegaard walked home that evening he thought of the reaction that would take place if this bereaved father were to speak before his seminary professors on the topic of eternal life, Jesus, and death. Would any of his professors be at all interested in hearing what this uneducated man had to say about these great truths? The man would be written off as a theological ignoramus just as Jesus had been. But standing before the grave of his wife with his arm around his son the truth he bore witness to was the most powerful truth in the world. And it did for Kierkegaard what none of the lectures of his professors ever did. He found himself taking sides with what the husband and father had said.

This is the kind of truth Jesus was born to bear witness to. Jesus is like that husband and father bearing witness to the truth. He is not a cold, distant philosopher who has a take it or leave it attitude about what he says. He is not someone who has come to give a lecture about God and who packs up his notes, puts them in his

briefcase, and ascends back to the ivory palaces of heaven. Jesus did not come to earth as, perhaps some outer space creature, to examine the different life forms on this planet and bear witness back home to what he had studied. He did not come as a scientist to tell us merely disinterested facts and doctrines about God and ourselves which might have some appeal, perhaps, to a few intellectuals or philosophers. He was born into this world as a little baby, he did not come as a philosopher or a scientist, and he came to bear witness to a truth that can save us in our deepest distress and rescue us from making ship-wreck of our lives.

He has come to us like a father. He is born to us like a little brother. He is born into this world to grow up and stand beside us before the grave of a loved one, to bear witness to the truth of eternal life, to the truth of God's love, to the truth of God's ultimate victory, to the truth of our lostness and need of a savior. He is born to weep with us. He is born to embrace us when

life comes tumbling in on us. He does not stand before us, cold and passionless, delivering lectures to us about God. He stands beside us, Emmanuel, God with us, bearing witness to what he knows is true.

That is why Jesus was born. That's why he came into the world. Not simply that we should learn more Bible verses and more facts about the ancient middle east. But that he should bear witness to the truth we need most in our distress, when crises comes, when we are lost and don't know which way to go, when our lives are all messed up and there seems to be no hope, when we hate ourselves because of the things we have said and done and thought.

"For this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth." He testified to the truth as a baby. In the hymn, What Child is This, we sing,

Why lies He in such mean estate  
Where ox and ass are feeding?  
Good Christians, fear,- for sinners here  
The silent Word is pleading.

He testified to the truth throughout his life, not coldly, but with tears in his eyes, with compassion in his voice. He testified to the truth before Pilate and on the cross. He testified to the truth when he rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. He sent his disciples to carry on his mission to testify to the truth. He continues to testify to the truth in the Word that is written and preached. He testifies to the truth to you this morning.

The truth to which Jesus came to bear witness demands a decision. It's a truth we cannot remain indifferent to. That's why, when Pilate asked, "Are you the king of the Jews?" Jesus responded, "Is that your idea, or did others talk to you about me?" That is, "Is this a question you are personally interested in or are you simply curious about what people have been saying?" "Are you interested only in cold facts or do you have a personal interest in whether or not I am king?"

There are many truths that we don't have to take sides for or against. There are many important truths of physics, or geology, or chemistry which it makes no great difference to the average person whether or not they are known or believed. But the truth to which Jesus bears witness demands a decision. It requires us to take sides. That's why Jesus said, "Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." What did he mean? He means we have to take sides with regard to the truth he bears witness to. A person on the side of truth is someone who is vitally interested in what Jesus says about life, death, eternity, and himself. He or she listens intently to all Jesus says, They become Christ's subjects and form his kingdom, a kingdom of truth.

Perhaps some of you have never take sides with regard to the truth of which Jesus was born to bear witness to. You believe in God. You have lived a fairly decent life. But you have never taken sides with Christ in a decisive way.

You remain on the sidelines. You are not listening to Christ or obeying him in every area of your life. You recognise him as king, but you have never personally bowed to him as your king and lord. Maybe you are waiting for some sign, some experience, some proof that will force your decision. You have heard Christ bear witness to the truth that apart from faith in him you are lost. You have heard him bear witness to the truth that we must be born again to enter the kingdom of heaven. You have heard him bear witness to the truth that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life. But till this time you have, like Pilate, been paralysed by indecision and fear of the consequences. Why remain undecided any longer? The truth that Jesus bears witness to in His written and preached word and through his Spirit is not a truth that can be proved before you make your choice.

G.A. Studdert-Kennedy, the famous WWI

Anglican chaplain so beloved by his man once wrote,

How do I know that God is good? I don't  
 I gamble like a man, I bet my life  
 Upon one side in lifes great war. I must,  
 I can't stand out. I must take sides.  
 I bet my life on Christ-- Christ crucified  
 ... Such is my Faith, and such  
 My reasons for it, and I find them strong  
 Enough. And you? You want to argue? Well,  
 I can't. It is a choice. I choose the Christ

It is a choice and we must take sides with regard to the truth to which Jesus bears witness. "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Everyone that is of the truth (Everyone that takes sides with the truth) heareth my voice."

AMEN