

Merits of Christ

#0582

Study given by W.D. Frazee—November 23, 1963

To know Him as a friend is to be secure. Our text this morning is found in the eighth chapter of Revelation. This is a wonderful book. We are studying some of the marvelous prophecies in our Sunday evening evangelistic series at the American Legion hall. This morning I would like to have us note this great picture, this glimpse of the heavenly sanctuary and what is going on there.

“And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel’s hand” Revelation 8:3-4.

Now I want to ask you, friends, why should the incense be offered with the prayer? Why not just offer the prayer? Apparently the incense is needed. Now incense, of course, is fragrant. There are various kinds of incense. But the idea of incense is that of fragrance.

You remember in the ancient sanctuary here on earth, which is a type of the one in heaven, that there was an altar devoted especially to incense. In fact, it was called “the altar of incense.” That fire was kindled by God Himself, and it never was to go out. Every morning and every night the high priest put fresh incense on that altar. The incense was put on especially at the time called the hour of prayer. It was in the morning and again in the evening.

You remember in the third chapter of Acts when Peter and John went up to the temple, the time they healed the lame man, it says that they went up at the hour of prayer. That is the hour when the priest was putting the incense on the altar.

But remember, although it was put on at special times, the fire never went out and so the incense was always ascending. So there was something about this incense, the fragrant incense that represented something going on in heaven. Now in heaven, as we get this glimpse of it, that incense ascends with what? With the prayers of the saints. Even the saints need to have incense added to their prayer. That incense, of course, represents the righteousness of Jesus, His merits.

This morning I want to study a bit with you about these merits of Jesus, and their relation to us, and our relation to them in the work we have to do for Him, in our own character building, and in seeking to help others. I am persuaded that if everybody knew how simple the Christian life is, that many more would embrace it, and many more who are already entering into it would run with joy the road ahead.

I think that one of the great things that holds people back is the fear of failure—the fear of failure in overcoming sin, or the fear of failure in witnessing to others. People hesitate to try something for fear they might fail. And, of course, sometimes they do try and do fail, and that confirms them in the fear. That is what I would like to study with you a bit this morning, because if the fear of failure is to hold us back, then we will all be held back. I can assure you of that.

Paul says, I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing. And you and I can well echo that confession of Paul. Young Christians sometimes look at those who have been in the way for a long time and without being too well acquainted with them they suppose that there are men and women who have reached the place of attainment and who can confidently say, “Well, everything is alright with me.”

But the Apostle Paul in writing to the Philippians says, Not as though I had already attained. He hadn't attained yet. Philippians 3:12.

“Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect” Philippians 3:12.

Well, Paul aren't you perfect yet?

No. Not perfect yet.

Well, how long have you been in this?

A number of years.

Paul, haven't you been preaching a long time?

Yes.

Haven't you raised up churches?

Yes.

Haven't you suffered much persecution for Jesus?

Yes.

Haven't you been put in prison, scourged, ship-wrecked, stoned, and aren't you in prison now Paul?

Yes. Paul wrote this from the dungeon.

And you mean with all that, Paul, you have attained yet? You are not perfect yet?

That is what Paul says. Well, I don't see there is any hope for me then. What is the use in trying? What is the use in making any effort? I am sure if Paul, after all those years, hadn't attained yet, I am sure that there is not use of me even starting.

Well, I want to study that problem with you this morning. The answer is found in 1 Corinthians, the third chapter, and the ninth verse. I want you to see two very important words there.

“For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye *are* God's building” 1 Corinthians 3:9.

Who are we laborers with? God. Now watch. It isn't that God is working over here by Himself, and I am working over here by myself. I can't do it without God. And God won't do it without me. We are laborers together with God.

Too many people seem to feel that God is somebody that has left them the corn to hoe and He has gone off somewhere. And they are afraid of what is going to happen when He comes back. Will they have the corn all hoed? And are they doing it right? Paul says, We are laborers together with God. If I am in the cornfield at His direction, where is God? He is in the cornfield. That is true literally, friends. That is a beautiful thought that I can go hoe corn with God. Isn't it? Yes.

Can I wash dishes with God? Well, if I can't I had better not wash dishes. Give treatments with God. Wash the clothes with God. Do the ironing with God. Set type with God. Play the piano with God. I had better be sure that what I am playing is something He is interested in playing. Hadn't I? Yes.

But in all these different things we are what? Laborers together with God. And so when we seek to do missionary work, as I say, some people are fearful. “Oh, I couldn't go out and talk to anybody. I am just sure I would say the wrong thing. I am afraid.”

But Jesus says, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations... and, lo, I am with you alway, *even* unto the end of the world” Matthew 28:19-20. So both in our individual Christian life, and in our witnessing we are laborers what? Together with God.

Now this thought is beautifully expressed in *The Desire of Ages*, page 297:

“However imperfect and sinful we may be, the Lord holds out to us the offer of partnership with Himself, of apprenticeship to Christ” *The Desire of Ages*, page 297.

Let's notice those two terms—partnership with God, apprenticeship to Christ. Now both are echoes of this expression we have read from the Bible, “laborers together with God.”

What is a partner? Well, by the way, if there is a partner, what else is there? Another partner. Was there ever such thing as a partner by himself? If there was,

he wasn't a partner, was he? No. A partner includes the idea of another partner. So we are called into partnership with whom? With God. That is very important.

Also, apprenticeship to God. Is an apprenticeship ever a person alone? No. There is somebody that he is a apprenticed to. Is that right? Yes. If there isn't, then he is not an apprentice. Isn't that right? Yes.

Then as God calls me into His service, both to live His life, and to witness for Him to others, He offers to me the privilege of doing all that, not only for Him, but what? With Him. He invites me to be an apprentice and learn from Him. He invites me to be a partner and share with Him.

But now let us look at the wonderful result of that. This is amazing. Almost unbelievable. This partnership, friends, means that I put in all my assets, and He puts in all His assets.

Now let's illustrate it. Suppose Brother Daman and I go into business together. At the end of the first week we figure up and we find that the business has run behind a hundred dollars. There are bills to be paid. Those bills are in excess of any income that we have. Now if the partnership is going to continue in business, what has got to happen? Why that deficit must be made up. Somewhere the money must be found. I look at Brother Daman and I say, "You know, brother, I just don't have a nickol."

He says, "Well, I do. I do. I will put the hundred dollars in so the business can keep going."

Are we still in business? Am I still a partner? Thank God, yes. So we continue in the business. Somehow or another at the end of the second week as we figure up, we find out that the deficits are a hundred and fifty dollars. It doesn't look very good, does it? But he still wants to go on with the business, and he still wants me for a partner.

But I am say to him, "But brother, I don't have a nickel."

He says, "Never mind, I have got some more." He digs down into something somewhere and pulls out 15 greenbacks and the deficit is made up and we are still in business. Right? Yes. Our credit rating is ok. The bills are paid. The partnership is preserved.

How long could that go on? Until his money ran out, or his patience ran out with me. As long as he wants me for a partner, and as long as his money holds out, that thing can go on.

Now, my dear friends that is exactly the way it is in partnership with Jesus Christ. And if everybody could know that and realize it, it would save a lot of needless worry. God knew when He took us in partnership that we were an insolvent lot, that we were full of deficiencies. I suppose most of us here this morning have grasped the promise of God to take care of our past deficiencies, but

somehow we have the idea that if God is good enough to forgive us for the past, we ought to walk straight from now on.

We ought to. That is only have of it. We should have in the past. Yes. We should. We should have in the past, but we didn't. We ought to now.

But you say, "Does that mean that we are going to stumble and fall again and again?" I am afraid it does, my friends. I am afraid it means just exactly that. Now don't anybody leave the room until I finish the talk because I would hate to leave you right there. But I would like to have us face up to that.

Paul says:

"Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect" Philippians 3:12.

Well, if he hadn't already attained, and wasn't already perfect, what was he? Imperfect.

"We shall often have to bow down and weep at the feet of Jesus because of our shortcomings and mistakes, but we are not to be discouraged" *Steps to Christ*, page 64.

Now don't misunderstand me, friends, I do not mean that we should make provision for failure. I do not mean that we should say, "Well, after all I am allowed ten failures today. I guess here is one of them I will make right now." No. Nothing like that. Students sometimes in a certain course in school, they are allowed to miss one class out of the semester without loss of credit. So some of them have the idea that if they have got near the end of the semester and haven't had to miss any, might just as well miss one, it won't change the grade anyway.

No. We should never make provision for failure. We should never plan to fail. We should never plan to fall. That would miss the whole point. But, on the other hand, friends, oh, praise His name! God has not planned for us to fall, but He has planned what to do in case we do fall.

Look at 1 John 2:1 and you will see what I mean. Both these thoughts that we are trying to get clear are right here side by side. And if all we see is the first verse, we will get discouraged. If all we see is the second verse, we might get presumptuous.

"My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins" 1 John 2:1-2.

What does propitiation mean? It means that He is making up for our deficiencies. He is the mercy seat. It is His mercy, His grace that is taking care of it. But what is the goal of it all in that first verse? I am writing to you that you what? Sin not. That is the goal. Perfection. Freedom from sin. Never failing. That is the goal.

We should never accept any goal less than that. But oh, in our human weakness as we struggle along, if we falter and fail, what is Jesus doing? He is our advocate with the Father.

Friends, what is an advocate? A lawyer, an attorney. Do you know when a lawyer is valuable? When you are in trouble. Isn't that right? Yes. And the reason you and I need an advocate is because of our failures. He is our advocate. He is our propitiation.

"The atoning sacrifice through a mediator is essential because of the constant commission of sin. Jesus is officiating in the presence of God, offering up His shed blood, as it had been a lamb slain. Jesus presents the oblation offered for every offense and every shortcoming of the sinner" *Selected Messages*, Book 1, page 344.

What is an offense? Something we do that is wrong. What is a shortcoming? Something we don't do that is right. Yes. And those comprise our failures: doing the wrong things and failing to do the right things. And what is Jesus doing? He is offering His life, His incense, His blood to cover our deficiencies. He is our partner. We are in partnership with Him. Whatever the deficit, a hundred dollars a week, a hundred and fifty dollars a week, whatever it is, He is putting in the incense.

Do you see why in our opening text that the incense is added to our prayers? Did you know that even our prayers aren't good enough? Somebody says, "Brother Frazee, that is just what I have been afraid of, and that just discourages me. That is one reason I don't pray. I don't think my prayers are good enough."

Well, they are not. They are not good enough at all. But there is good news for you. Listen.

"The religious services, the prayers, the praise, the penitent confession of sin ascend from true believers as incense to the heavenly sanctuary, but passing through the corrupt channels of humanity, they are so defiled that unless purified by blood, they can never be of value with God. They ascend not in spotless purity, and unless the Intercessor, who is at God's right hand, presents and purifies all by His righteousness, it is not acceptable to God. All incense from earthly tabernacles must be moist with the cleansing drops of the blood of Christ" *Ibid*.

Why, my dear friends, our very prayers need cleansing and our tears need washing. There isn't one thing we do in our best moments but what is defiled with our poor humanity. That is true of the best man in the world today, as well as the worst.

What hope is there for us? Why, it is in this partnership with Christ. Jesus says, Come and go with Me to the sanctuary. Come. Put in what you have, however weak and unworthy, however poor and small it is. Put in what you have. I will make up the deficit. Together we will be accepted at the throne.

Isn't that fine, friends? Why should anybody hold back? Why not come with what you have? Why not come with what you have? Why, you remember back there in the sanctuary when it came to certain offerings, maybe the requirement was to bring a large animal, but here was a man that was too poor. Well, he could bring a smaller one. Suppose he was so poor he couldn't bring that? Bring a dove. Go out here in the wilds and catch a dove and bring it.

You read there under certain circumstances a man might be so poor that all he could bring was a handful of flour, but the priest was to pray for him and it would be accepted for him. My dear friends, if you and I can get hold of this, instead of holding back, either in our witnessing for God, or in our efforts to live His life, we will run with His commandments. If we fall down, say, "I am sorry I fell down, but Jesus is here to pick me up." I am going to get up and run on again. Just keep doing it over and over again. If I have got to fall a thousand times between here and the pearly gates, let me run, friends, and get those failures out of the way as fast as possible and learn the lessons. My Teacher has assured me that He is going to make up my deficiencies. Praise His holy name!

I say, if people could get hold of this, they wouldn't hold back so much. They would be full of courage. Not in themselves, but in Jesus. That is what God wants. People to be full of courage, not in themselves, but in Jesus. Why be tense and worry?

"Oh, I wonder what I am going to do today? I failed yesterday and I mustn't fail today." So I grit my teeth and clench my fists and every nerve tense just afraid, afraid, and by ten o'clock, yes, I have done it. I have done just what I was afraid I would do. I have just spoiled the whole thing. What is the use?"

Well, what is the use, friends? Oh, we are to look away from our poor sinful selves and all our failures to Jesus the Lamb of God who does what? Takes away the sin of the world.

But somebody says, "Why doesn't He take it away from me?"

Listen, friends, what God is trying to teach us is the weakness and the unworthiness of poor human nature. We sometimes think that we have an inferiority complex, but the trouble with most of us is that we don't have enough of inferiority complex. That is right. I have no interest in building people up. Somebody said to me the other day about somebody, "They need building up." Why they don't at all. They need tearing down.

Yes. Our hope is not in ourselves. It is in Jesus. Peter, he thought he could walk on the water and he did as long as he did what? Look to Jesus. But when he took his eyes off Jesus, then what? He sank. Is that because he hadn't been walking long enough? Is that why he sank? No. Why, friends, if he had walked for five hours, if he took his eyes off Jesus he would have still done what? He would have sunk in the water and drown unless Jesus had pulled him out.

This thing of walking with Jesus, working with Him, is a partnership and He is making up our deficiencies.

Now another wonderful statement on this:

“When it is in the heart to obey God, when efforts are put forth to this end, Jesus accepts this disposition and effort as man’s best service, and He makes up for the deficiency with His own divine merit” *Ibid.*, page 382.

You know, I think of an experience in the life of Sister White. As a mother her little children wanted to help her, of course, and mother-like, she wanted them to help her. And so she would let them patch clothes. And then at night after they had gone to bed, she would take those clothes and pull out those awkward bungling stitches and do it all over again.

Well, what is the sense of that? Well that is the way they learned. They wanted to help. She wanted them to help. And I was telling somebody the other day, I wonder if one reason the Lord lets us have time to sleep is so the angels can work on our work while we are asleep. Did you ever think about that? Probably they have to work at it twenty-four hours a day pulling out the stitches that we have put in, and making up our deficiencies.

Now is that to discourage us? Why, no, it is to encourage us. Praise the Lord, friends! Whether it is giving treatments to the sick, giving Bible studies to interested people—whatever we do for people, there is an awful lot of human failure and human error in it. Did you know it? And if God and angels weren’t standing by to cover for our ignorance, I wouldn’t want to be anywhere or in any part of God’s work.

But if Jesus says, “Come. Come with Me. I will go with you. Go and teach. I will be with you always, even unto the end of the world. Whatever your deficit, if you will give Me what you have, I will put in what I have and the partnership will always be solid and always be successful.”

What more could God offer than that? What do you say, friends? Look here. This is a beautiful little promise on this from *Christ’s Object Lessons*, page 363:

“When we give ourselves wholly to God and in our work follow His directions, He makes Himself responsible for its accomplishment. He would not have us conjecture as to the success of our honest endeavors. Not once should we even think of failure. We are to co-operate with One who knows no failure” *Christ’s Object Lessons*, page 363.

Now how can God guarantee success? Why, He has made arrangements to make up for all my deficits, all my deficiencies. And there is nothing I can do, I say this reverently, friends, there is nothing that I can do to bankrupt the firm because God’s reserves, His resources are infinite.

Well, somebody says, “Well don’t you think that you could wreck it?” There is only one way, friends that I can spoil this partnership, and that is simply to run out on Him. I don’t propose to do that. Naturally, if I choose to leave the partnership, if I choose to say, “Well Lord, I have been in this long enough. I am not going to stay any longer”, God will not force me. He cannot. It is a partnership of the will. My will with God’s will. That is the only way in the world that this thing can fail. It is for me to deliberately turn my back on Jesus and leave Him, and say, “Lord, I don’t want anything more to do with You.”

Judas did that. Too bad. He sold out awfully cheap. He lost his soul—an eternal life. But all the other disciples, full of failure as they were, they all became victorious and final successful. Didn’t they? Even Peter who made that terrible mistake of denying His Lord there in the courtyard, but Jesus took him on through, and within two months, he was standing preaching that wonderful sermon at Pentecost with thousands of people accepting Jesus. Who had worked for him? God had. And Jesus is the same mighty Savior today, the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Now I want to put it here in a beautiful wording that the Lord’s messenger wrote to somebody back in 1884:

“No man has the least cause for boasting or self-exaltation, even when he does his very best. Man often fails of doing his duty, leaving undone a vast amount that a close connection with God would have enabled him to do. Constantly God is laboring to make up man’s deficiencies” *Reveiw and Herald*, December 1, 1904.

Now that last sentence I want to read again.

“Constantly...”

What does constantly mean? All the time, yesterday, today, tomorrow, constantly.

“Constantly God is laboring to make up man’s deficiencies” *Ibid*.

That gives me courage. What does it do for you, friends? Oh, think of it! I can put my human will along with His will into seeking to live His live and to work His works, and if there are deficits, and will there be? Oh yes. There will be.

“We shall often have to bow down and weep at the feet of Jesus because of our shortcomings and mistakes, but we are not to be discouraged” *Steps to Christ*, page 64.

Remember, that is not making provision for sin. That is not planning to fail, it is just knowing that whatever are weakness or lack, somebody is in the business of adding His incense to our poor efforts, adding His prayers to our poor prayers, adding His righteousness to all that we do. And the partnership stays solid. It stays successful. God and I.

Now our closing text, Philippians 1:6:

“Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it...” Philippians 1:6.

The margin says will finish it.

“...until the day of Jesus Christ” Philippians 1:6.

Who will know when we are done? Who knows when the cake is done? The cake or the cook? The cook. Who will know when we are done? God will know. Friends, I propose to stay with Him until He takes me out of the oven. What do you say?

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