

### BIOGRAPHY

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### THE WESLEYAN MESSAGE

Our Scripture portion is contained within the first chapter of Luke. We will primarily emphasize verses 74 and 75, but later we will look at the context, verses 68 to 75. I have been too realistic in my ministry to dare to aspire to great preaching, but I do believe that there is a technique which makes it possible for God to lead us in bringing to our people that which is needed at a time like this. I believe that if we will aspire to preach the Word, if we will seek to find the great themes in God's word, and if we will seek to find them in their greatest simplicity (for simplicity is not a mark of ignorance but of revelation), we will come to the real answers. If it takes too many words to say it, and it takes too much profound discussion to get around to it, then we do not know what we are talking about.

### The Core of the Gospel

When we come to the simplicity of the gospel of Jesus Christ, it is like pulling aside the curtains and getting a view of that which is within the veil. I think this is one of those passages where a man saw the simplicity of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The man by the name of Zacharias didn't really live in the Old Testament, nor did he really live in the New Testament. He rather lived in between where the revolving doors were opening and closing. All of his life he had been, so far as we know, a devout man, a man of prayer – also a man of delayed hope and of disappointment. In his personal and family life he had come to the approach of old age and had no offspring. In his career, we are told, as a priest among the thousands of priests who were in the Jerusalem area, he had not yet had the opportunity of ministering at the focal center of their religion, in the temple of God where he might appear before the altar of God. Finally, it came his turn. I suppose that all his life he had saved up, in his heart, petitions that he wanted to present to God for himself, as well as for his people on that occasion. When the time came, he did not dare believe that God was fulfilling His promise. This saint was chastened by dumbness for a period of months. And then, later, by the Spirit of God he did speak, and this is what he said, *Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David; As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began; That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; The oath which he swore to our father*

*Abraham. And here is the statement of the promise—That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.*

Now there is your gospel. There are more involved ways of saying it. There are even inspired explanations of it. And there are certainly many uninspired explanations of it to which we have been exposed through the years. But in a nutshell, here is our message. Some of us are rather frightened that we may lose some of our peculiarities in the shuffle. We've been frightened by meeting new people and being in new places, by new demands, by the speed of a jet and missile age, and so on. Now — horror of horrors — merger is likely to take care of some of our peculiarities. And what will become of us poor people? It depends on what becomes of our message. It depends on whether we have a firm hold on the real purpose of our existence.

### OUR REAL PURPOSE

The real purpose of our existence is not to perpetuate peculiarities. It is to proclaim and live the gospel of Jesus Christ. God has a future for us, if we are true. If we are not true, it is just as well if He does not have a future for us, because peculiarities, in and of themselves, are not worth preserving. We need to be sure that whatever else we have, or do not have, we stand squarely on the gospel of Jesus Christ.

There is a simplicity about the gospel of Jesus Christ that does not satisfy everybody. Within the century in which Christ came, and within the century in which the apostles spoke, there came a dissatisfaction with the gospel of Jesus Christ that nearly wrecked the church. The gospel was too simple. It needed more philosophical trappings, to be adorned by human wisdom and human thinking. It needed to be something that would satisfy the human ego and that would give the person a chance to stand out.

There came Gnosticism in the early Christian centuries that almost destroyed the church. One of the great miracles of grace is that the church survived this popular wave of Gnosticism. What was it? It was a self-sufficient intellectualism in which people loved their own ideas more than they loved God and trusted in their smart ideas and cute ways of saying things more than they trusted in the blood of Jesus Christ and the love of God that was shed abroad upon us.

There came, in the providence of God, a second chance

to Christianity in a great reformation four centuries and a half ago, and again in the great evangelical revival of a couple of centuries ago. This revival shook the world to its roots, as it had not been shaken since the time of the apostles. People again found what it was to know the life of God as given to us in Jesus Christ and as recorded in His Word.

But this did not satisfy some people. There came a new "gnosticism" that permeated Liberalism in the last century, and even much of the Neo-orthodoxy and many of the supplementary ideas that have been coming over the horizon in the last half century or more.

Still the answer is in the simplicity of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Woe be unto the person that forsakes the fountains of living waters and hews to himself broken cisterns. If Wesleyan Methodism becomes too smart to believe simply in Jesus Christ and to draw freely from the wells of living water, then in spite of our background of a century of loyalty to Wesleyan Methodism, I hope we die. Unless the gospel of Jesus Christ continues as the central theme, unless we continue to come in simple faith, unless we continue using our institutions, our learning, our administrative know-how, and all the other things we strive so hard to attain, to the glory of God and to the proclamation of the simple gospel of Jesus Christ, I hope we die.

### A Great Heritage

This simple gospel comes to the point in a way that focuses attention on some old truths, some very fundamental truths, which many have not well grasped, but, dare I say with some pride, better grasped by the forefathers in our movement than in many movements. The kind of emphasis that the Holy Spirit gave to Zacharias is the kind that we can preach in our tradition with greater freedom and with better insight than most movements. I do not think this is just a matter of bigotry and of pride. I believe there is a genius to the evangelical revival which Wesleyan Methodists have inherited. If I properly understand our message, it is closer to the scriptural thrust than any other movement I know.

I think it would do us good to look somewhat deeply into the nature of Zacharias' proclamation that this is what Jesus Christ came for, that this is what redemption is—that we, being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, might serve Him without fear. Some theologies do not realize that you ever are really delivered out of the hands of your enemies. You are just called righteous, but are still in the

clutches of the enemy. Here is the purpose: that we being delivered out of the hands of our enemies might serve Him without fear, and, note this—in holiness and righteousness before Him, in the presence of Him all the days of our life. Too much of religion in our day is for some other dispensation, or for looking at us through colored glasses, or for God somehow to overlook something. Therefore, it is good for us that God is far off and totally "other" as the Neo-orthodox tell us. But this is not what the Scripture says. The Scripture says what the purpose of Christ's coming is—that right up next to the throne, in the bright light of His presence, we can live in holiness and righteousness, delivered from our enemies. This is a gospel of real salvation. It is seldom found uncontaminated. But here it is at the center of our tradition. If we don't stand with it, we had better move back to the center of our tradition, for this is our great privilege.

We appreciate what other movements have taught us. We appreciate what the Calvinists have taught us, and the Lutherans, and the Catholics. We appreciate still more the full light of the gospel. When the curtain was pulled back and we looked behind the veil, we found that God's purpose is a triumphant living faith in the living Redeemer. God is *not* dead. After His Son gave Himself for us, He rose again and lives forevermore. We know that our Redeemer lives. This is the glory of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

### Man's Problem

We see in this Scripture the predicament of man, specified in a way which we ought to understand. We see the kind of redemption that is needed and we see the accomplishment of it. The danger for a speaker is to lose one's terminal facilities—for we have something to talk about, and we have something to experience, and we have something to live. There's a shout of triumph in this kind of revelation that comes from God, this glimpse of Jesus Christ, this glimpse of our Redeemer. What is this predicament of man that we see? Is it that man is unclean? Oh, yes he is, but that is not the point here. Is it that man is limited and needs training? Well he is, but it doesn't discuss that here. Is it that man is confused and emotionally upset and needs some clinical sessions? Well, it might help, but that is not what is discussed here. Is it that man had a bad reputation, a bad record? He certainly does, but that is not the theme here. Is it that man is sick? It is certainly true that this is a sick old world, but that is not what he is saying here. Is it even that man is dead? Certainly he is, in trespasses and sins, but that is not what he is talking about here. What he is talking about here is

slavery, bondage, the enemies that have overcome us. I do not think that he is talking about the fact that poor little old Palestine, surrounded by such strong neighbors, was sometimes defeated in battle. I do not think he is talking about national or international squabbles. I think he is talking about a great battlefield in which all of us have been defeated and enslaved—in the moral and spiritual conflict of trying to be a man, a man who can look his Maker in the face, a man who could drink the deep satisfaction of life's real meaning.

But we are slaves. The enemy did invade our homes and pull us from our hearths and take us into slavery. I have tried to imagine sometimes the horrors of a prisoner of war. So often they used to capture prisoners of war, take them from their homes and transplant them into other lands. They were no longer a part of the household in any sense of rights and privileges. Oh, they could still walk and they could still move their arms, and they could still do this and that. They still had all kinds of skills, but those skills were used for somebody else's purposes. It was somebody else's home for which they were caring. The food was being carried to somebody else so that somebody else could eat, drink and be merry. It was somebody else's happiness to which they were always contributing. It was somebody else's objective they were carrying out. Their own hearts were lonely, sad and hungry, frustrated and defeated. Why? For one cause, slavery.

You are a prisoner. The enemy has taken you, and life simply cannot have the meaning it ought to have when you are in bondage. This is the picture of man. Who are the enemies? Are they enemies from the outside? Not necessarily. They may be your own stubborn will, your own passion, your own pride, your own wilfulness. You may be a slave to self, which is a slave to sin, which is a slave to the devil, which is a slave to all about you. You who were made in the image of God! You who were made for dominion! When God made man, he said, *I will put him in charge of the works of my hands*. Then, look back at man. Man is a slave to things, to people, to self, to all the notions of man's own being. He cannot rise above himself, cannot be a real man, but is as a chip tossed on a sea of turmoil, as a slave always contributing to something else and to somebody else, but never satisfying the meaning of his own life, what life out to be. There is much elaboration possible here, but I would like to bring this point to focus. The most important principle I know, as a foundation to theology, is that man is a moral being, made in the image of God, that man's need

is deeper than that which could be cared for by force. If forcing people to be good would work, God would have had no problems. The power of God is sufficient to fling worlds into being.

What kind of an explosion was it back there when God flung this world from his finger tips? I don't know whether the scientists know what they are talking about or not. But scientists are guessing that back there, so many billions of years ago, an explosion occurred which is still thrusting the universe farther and farther into space. It was quite an explosion when God said, *Let there be*, and there was. I don't know the nature of all this. It is too vast for me, but God did a great work when He said, *I will divide with my creatures the greatest thing I possess. I will share with them personality. I will share with them the power of choice. I will share with them my holiness, my righteousness, my love, my grace and my goodness.* This was the greatest decision that was made in the history of eternity. God's choice!

### The Key to Redemption

Somehow the nature of man, the fact that man is a moral being, made in the image of God, is the deepest fact in theology. Any system of theology that does not have this fact at its center is off balance and is bound to be distorted.

We do not understand the strength of our position in Wesleyan Methodism and Wesleyan Arminianism. We do not take advantage of it. Here we have a concept that is at the center of the Scripture teaching. Right here is where redemption does its best work. Redemption cannot be a matter of force, I repeat. It must be a matter of God's sharing his infinite holiness through His infinite love in a kind of redemption that does for us what punishment could not do. Year after year and century after century mankind has paid a heavy price for sin. But that has not saved anyone. Israel went into captivity from time to time. That did not save them. Nor did the many things that happened under the providence of God. What did save was the coming of the Redeemer.

Man's predicament was too deep for force, too deep for persuasion, too deep for the ordinary processes of discipline. All these things helped, and God was gracious and good, forgiving man. But nothing short of Jesus Christ, the true Redeemer, could penetrate deep enough into the human heart. Oh, I have not explained anything, I know. We like to play with explanations of the atonement. And that is good. But somehow there is a deeper fact here. Sometimes, when

we try to explain, all we can do is stand back and gaze. We cannot even explain a mother's love. How could we expect to explain the love that redeems us? Some things are not meant to be explained. The exercise helps us, but a look at the Saviour is what we really need.

When God gave his Son, when the Redeemer came, that was the fulfillment of what the prophets had said since the world began. That is God keeping His covenant. That is the oath that He swore to His beloved friend, Abraham. Whenever people drew near to God, that is what they began to see — the Redeemer that comes. Man is a slave, but he can't stay a slave when he comes near the Redeemer.

### A Full Redemption

Whatever else it is, man's predicament is the bondage of sin that will not let him go beyond himself, that will not let him know what it is to be a real man. The ideal of perfection, the ideal of fulfillment, has often been laughed at as improper and inadequate as a view of theology. I would call to your attention that Paul's great goal was to present every man perfect in Jesus Christ. I would present to you that the ninth fruit of the Spirit is the old Greek word for self-control, self-discipline, "egkrateia," which is translated temperance. This is man put back into control of himself, put back into the dominion for which God created him. It is man righted so that he can fit time and eternity and serve God before Him in righteousness and holiness all the days of his life. His is the wonderful deliverance, the kind of redemption that is needed. This is the kind that doesn't just talk about holiness, as if God is far off — so great and so holy that never in this world could we approach unto Him, even by grace. Holiness is the most striking concept in the world, but it is nevertheless true that this holiness is not just unapproachableness. It is Redemption. This righteousness is not given to frighten us, but to draw us. So terrible was the sight at Mt. Sinai, in the presence of lightning and thunder and black clouds, that even Moses was quoted as saying, *I do exceedingly fear and quake.* If so much as even a beast touched the mountain, it died. People were in terror and some were struck by the judgment of God. But, when the first shock of that terror was over, Moses said, *You know, I cannot stay away from that. There's something that draws me, frightened as I am. As impossible as the concept is of drawing near to a Holy God like that, I must go nearer. I must somehow go into that Mount. I do not have to come back, but somehow I have to go up.* He went up into that cloud and disappeared from sight for a month or more.

When he came back there was so much of the glory of God upon him that people could not even look at him. That is what holiness is. One becomes like God, transformed into the image of His dear Son. This is not something that is just put to one's account. This is not the juggling of accounts. This is not the forging of records. This is Redemption.

### The Life of Holiness

This is a whole new concept of holiness to some people. But I submit to you that this is the scriptural concept of holiness. I would prefer to be scriptural rather than to be theological in some people's terms. Christ is a real Redeemer.

Furthermore, holiness is not a late short chapter in divinity. It is the whole book. Wesley understood this well when he said, *Repentance is the porch, faith is the door, but holiness is religion itself.* There is no real conversion without holiness. There is not real life in Christ without holiness. There is no vital religion without holiness. Nobody sees the Lord without holiness. For holiness is Godlikeness, this Christlikeness, this fullness of life that is planted first in the new birth, when we are born of God, and which grows till it fills the whole house. Grows? Yes, there is growth. There is something else. There is cleansing. There is purging. There is a filling. There is a crisis. There is also a growing application where we bring every thought into captivity to the will of God, where every man who has this hope in him continually purifies himself even as He is pure, *And we all continually beholding as in a mirror the glory of God are being changed into the same image from glory to glory even as by the Spirit of God.*

We would not under-emphasize crisis, neither would we under-emphasize process. Anyone who has been set right by the crisis demonstrates it by the process, daily living. There is not room for anything else but holiness in a vital Christian life. If there is one voluntary exception made to holiness, it is a denial that there is holiness at all. Religion is all or nothing. Start saying 99% religion, 1% something else, and it does not turn out that way. It turns out 100% self and no God. But delivered from our enemies, we serve Him in holiness. There is no other way. Holiness is not primarily negative. Holiness is not primarily a single aspect. It involves negatives and it involves single aspects. But the word holiness is basically from the same ancient word as "whole." It also shows up in old English in several other forms, in the word "hale," which is the old word for health, and the greeting "hello"—be healthy. Holiness is simply spiritual health. It may be a shocking thing to say that God

can give health. It is more shocking to say that He cannot. The reason that Jesus came was that we being delivered from our enemies might serve Him in holiness—this holiness that belongs to the whole man renewed, integrated by the grace of God—this holiness that reaches to the whole personality.

There is plenty of room for growth and development after sanctification. But insofar as life is subject to will and intelligence and insofar as our wills and intelligences can catch up, by the grace of God, all must be under the discipline of grace and of the human redeemed spirit or else we are not living in the holiness and righteousness that we ought to have. This business of growing in grace is the conquest from day to day of the new territories that God shows us. That is what was meant in II Corinthians—that we all beholding from day to day as in a mirror the glory of God, the face of Jesus Christ, are being continually changed. Why continually? Because when I look back tomorrow I see something I missed today, and my whole goal as a Christian is to be like Him. That is what holiness is. It is Christlikeness, which is fullness of life. And John, after some 60 years of living in the presence of the living Christ, said, *Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God.* We just do not know the full extent of this. We know not what we shall be, but we know that when we shall see Him as He is, we shall become exactly like Him.

There is fullness that comes as we grow in grace and as we catch new visions. We are not disobedient unto the heavenly vision. There comes a fullness that even transcends the glory of our original fullness when we were first cleansed and filled with His Spirit. There is a glory to Christian maturity that even goes beyond the crises of salvation and sanctification.

There is even glory beyond this maturity. When He shall appear, when we see Him fully as He is, then our limitations are overcome in a new sense. Then, since the moral issue has been settled way back here, since we have said the last "yes," since we are fully yielded to him, nothing hinders the fullness of His grace in the sense of resurrection perfection, whatever that is. Do not expect me to describe it to you. I have not experienced it. But it is a hope. It is *the* hope. It is the great Christian hope!

This holiness of God expresses itself in the righteousness of God, in what He does, and in the way He relates himself to His people. This holiness imparted to man ex-

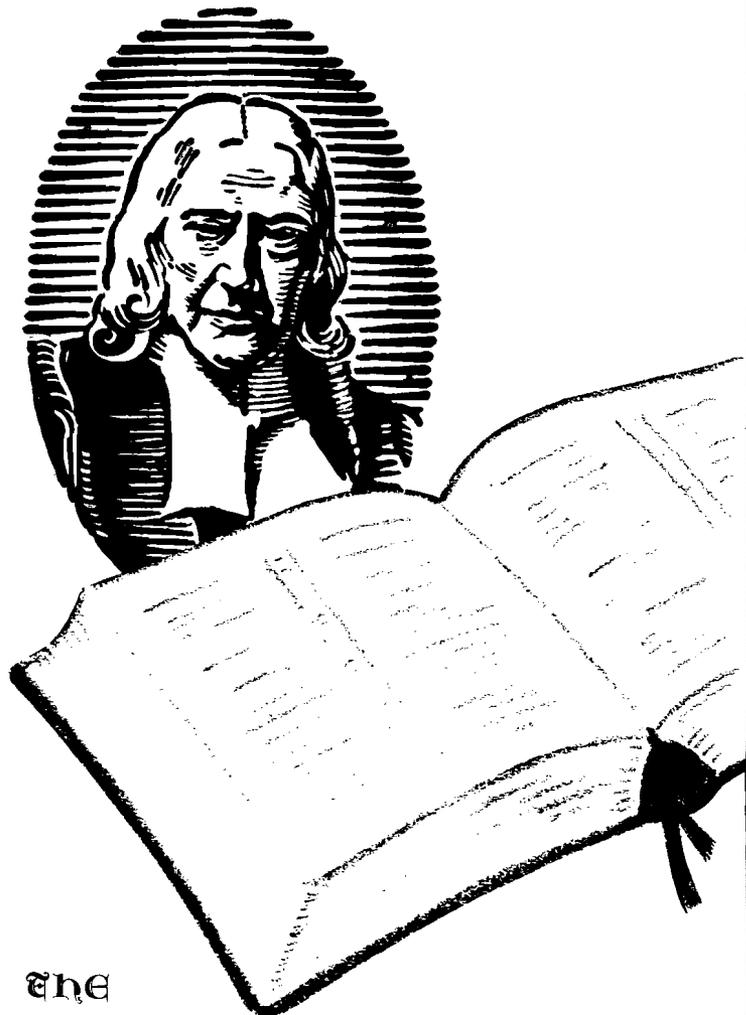
presses itself in righteousness imparted to man, victory over our enemies, ability to serve him in righteousness. John says, *Don't let anybody deceive you. Let me state it bluntly. He that does righteousness is righteous, even as Jesus Christ is righteous.* Now if you become a little too morose reading, *There is none righteous, no not one,* read this one, *For God is able to deliver us from our enemies so that we can serve Him in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life."*

### The Central Person

One is tempted to dwell too long on these things, but I would call to our attention again the crux of this whole matter. This is not a philosophy. This is not a theory. This is not a myth—a redemption theory that came in from the Gnostics. This is a Person. This is the second Person of the Holy Trinity. This is Christ, the Son of the living God. This is God the Son who came to visit His people, not as an overnight guest who bids us farewell and says, *It was so nice to see you.* But this is the indwelling Christ, the Christ in you the hope of glory. This is the One who said, *Even my physical presence with you is not enough.* This is the One who said, *You can experience this so much better if you will just let me again veil myself in the heavens and let me send that other Self, the blessed Holy Spirit, to dwell in you forever. He will take the things of mine and keep revealing them to you. The more you live in His fullness the more you will experience Me. And do not forget the Father loves you just as much as I do. And do not forget that We are all one. We are not leaving you "orphans" (for that is the original word in Greek) but We will come to you. The fullness of the Holy Spirit is the fullness of My presence and the fullness of God. Beloved, be filled with all the fullness of God.*

### Our Responsibility

You know all the negative currents that are in our day, and that always have been. You know that truth has always seemed to be on the scaffold. But behind the shadows and above the shadows is God. I am sure he is grinning. I am sure that He that sitteth upon the circle of earth laughs at the folly of man who even goes so far as to say that God is dead—just because men are dead and haven't found him. I am sure that God has a sense of humor and that it sustains Him through this pathetic period of man's sin. But let us be true. Let us wholeheartedly receive God, who has come to redeem us. And may God forbid that we ever forsake our main mission—to proclaim Him as our living Redeemer.



THE

## WESLEYAN MESSAGE

AN ADDRESS BY

**Dr. Wilber T. Dayton**

AT

**30TH GENERAL CONFERENCE JUNE 1966  
WESLEYAN METHODIST CHURCH OF AMERICA  
MARION, INDIANA**

**WESLEYAN MINISTERS' SERIES**