

THE MAGNIFICENT CHRIST
THE MAGNIFICENT CHRIST (PHILIPPIANS 1:23)

All religions, when contrasted with Christianity, leave much to be desired. Their teachings cannot be compared with the doctrines of Christ, and are unable to satisfy the need of a human heart. That might have been one of the reasons why the writer to the Hebrews repeatedly used the word "better." During the first century the Jews were overwhelmed; their temple destroyed, and their hope shattered. Many young Christians were in danger of losing their faith, and to encourage and console such people, the letter to the Hebrews was written. It explains that Christ excelled anything which had been lost. The word "better" was used thirteen times for the epistle mentioned a better hope; testament; covenant; promises, sacrifice; country and finally, a better resurrection. The writer emphasized that although many things had apparently been lost, Christ remained and surpassed anything they had known. Nevertheless, the truths taught in the epistle can be seen more clearly in the daily life of the Savior.

An Increasing Pleasure... His Wine Was Better
(John 2:9-10)

the governor of the feast called the bridegroom,
And saith unto him. Every man at the beginning doth
set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk,
then that which is worse: BUT THOU HAST KEPT
THE GOOD WINE UNTIL NOW."

Eastern weddings were prolonged times of rejoicing; the festivities continued for several days. It would appear from the text that Mary was a friend of the happy couple, and was invited with Jesus and His followers to celebrate the happy event. It has been suggested that the presence of the disciples imposed a strain on the supplies of wine, and Mary assumed the responsibility for the shortage. To prevent embarrassment for her friends, she confided in Jesus and the problem was quickly solved. It was significant that the governor of the feast expressed amazement at the quality of the new wine. It is difficult to decide whether this practice hid the stinginess of the host, or the inca-

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pability of drunkards to recognize cheap refreshments. Much has been written about the wedding at Cana, but for the purpose of this study, it is sufficient to emphasize that anything produced by the Savior was better than the world could offer.

During World War II a thousand marines sat on a South Pacific Island listening to a gospel message which was accompanied by the sound of gun-fire in the distance. When the Chaplain concluded his sermon, one of the marines sang the closing hymn. As the shell scarred palms swayed nearby, more than half of the company came forward to profess their faith in Christ. The marine soloist, a former opera singer, sang:

I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold:
I'd rather be His than have riches untold
I'd rather have Jesus than houses or land,
I'd rather be led by His nail-pierced hand.
Than to be the king of a vast domain
Or be held in sin's dread sway:
I'd rather have Jesus than anything
This world affords today.

George Beverly Shea

(Quoted from 100 More Hymn Stories, Kenneth

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W. Osbeck, Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, MI)
An Inspired Presentation... His Teaching Was Better
(John 14:8-9)

"Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?"

One of the most appealing stories ever told from a pulpit concerns the little boy who was afraid of the dark. When his mother reminded her child that God was with him, the lad replied, "I know God is with me, but I like somebody with skin on!" Long ago, Philip was apprehensive. He had heard his Master speaking about the Father, but everything appeared to be vague. He had heard about God and knew the scriptures

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referred to Jehovah. Yet, Jesus appeared to possess intimate knowledge of the Almighty and the disciple desired that things be explained more clearly. When Jesus assured Philip that he had already seen the Father, things became more confusing than ever. The disciple had yet to learn that Jesus was God with skin on! The Almighty had come to earth and had walked among men. People who listened to Jesus heard the voice of God; those who looked at the Savior saw the face of Jehovah. Philip could not comprehend the lesson being taught; like us he was an immature student!

The New Testament supplies many examples of the excellence of Christ's teaching, but probably His references to sparrows are among the most inspiring. The Lord said: "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father (seeing it)" (Matt. 10:29). He also said: "Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God?" (Luke 12:6). A sparrow was an insignificant bird, unworthy of being used in the temple sacrifices. It was considered to be almost worthless and was sold two for a farthing—one of the smallest coins in Palestine. When a customer bought four birds, one extra was given without additional payment. That little bird was so valued by the Almighty, that one of its kind could not fall to the ground in India, China, Africa, or any other part of the world without the fact being known to the Lord. Such a revelation of divine kindness had never before been given. Jehovah had been an almost mystical Deity, and the idea that He was a Father to be loved and trusted was a truth men failed to grasp. God saw greatness in simple things. Jesus said: ".... Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these" (Matt. 6:28-29). Jesus revealed that God so loved that He could hold children in His arms. The teaching of Jesus surpassed anything ever heard.

An Infinite Patience. . . His Attitude Was Better
(John 8:11)

Jesus practiced what He preached, and this was never more

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apparent than when a sinful woman was pushed into His presence. Her accusers said: "Master this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou?" (John 8:4-5).

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They were not concerned about the woman's immorality. They were schemers who planned to arrest the Savior, and if the woman's execution could enhance their chances of success, they would have stoned her immediately. The scribes and Pharisees were cynical, merciless and vicious. The Lord was more gracious for when He was left alone with the adulteress, He said: where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said: No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go and sin no more." The Savior was exceedingly gentle. His attitude resembled refreshing rain after a drought; sunshine after an ice storm; kindness after criticism.

The early church fathers refused to include this story in their sacred writings for they feared it would encourage immorality. They failed to understand that when the woman said "LORD" she did so by the enabling power of the Holy Spirit; her faith had brought pardon. Jesus had already forgotten her past, forgiven her sin, and was offering advice concerning her future (1 Cor. 12:3). The Savior was different from all other teachers. Those who looked into His face saw the heart of God.

An Infallible Promise... His Gift Was Better (Rom. 6:23)

It is an interesting fact that although the Egyptian magicians emulated the example of Moses (Exod. 7:11-12), no person ever accomplished what Christ did. The Savior honored all His commitments. He fed thousands of hungry people, healed all kinds of diseases, but His greatest promise concerned the possession of eternal life. Jesus said to Martha of Bethany: "I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.. ." (John 11:25-26). Death is the greatest enemy of mankind, and even the best of human efforts are destined to end in a grave. Science may delay the inevitable,

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but even the most illustrious benefactors of mankind die. They bequeath their works to posterity, but their sojourn on earth is limited. Millions of dollars are being spent in the hope of increasing longevity, but unfortunately mortality terminates in death. It was amazing that Jesus gave everlasting life to all who sought it. It should be remembered that He spoke of eternal life. Doctors may relieve pain, and under certain circumstances, restart the beating of a heart, but even the most renowned surgeon cannot give eternal life.

An Incomparable Presence.. . His Company Was Better (Luke 24:30-32)

The journey had ended, but the two travelers were uneasy. Their Companion had said "Goodbye" and was leaving. "But they constrained him, saying, Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. And he went in to tarry with them" (Luke 24:29). Those people had been away from home for at least a week, and, possibly were unprepared for an overnight guest. At that time of the evening it would have been difficult to obtain provisions. They could have managed with a snack, but something more substantial would have been needed for the Stranger.

Nothing is known of the house into which Jesus was invited. It might have been spacious or small, but although it might have seemed unwise to extend an invitation to their fellow-traveler, they constrained Him to enter their home. The Lord probably said he had no desire to impose upon their generosity,

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but they had been captivated by His conversation, and thrilled with His company. They had walked the road to and from Jerusalem many times, but had never known such fellowship. Their Companion was well-informed, courteous and charming. He knew the scriptures, and what He said made sense! They desired to know more, and any inconvenience would be worthwhile, if they could prolong the fellowship known on the highway. After leaving their pessimistic colleagues, it had been delightful to listen to the Stranger's exposition of the sacred writings.

Hastily the meal was prepared, and then "He took bread, and

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blessed it, and break it, and gave to them" (verse 30). They stared at their Guest and remembered other hands had done a similar thing. When the nail prints became visible, ". . . he was known of them in breaking of bread" (Luke 24:35). Suddenly they were looking at an empty chair, for He had "vanished out of their sight. And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?" (Luke 24:32). The disciples never forgot that wonderful experience; they had walked and talked with the risen Son of God. Many others have proved that fellowship with Christ is better than anything else on earth. It is refreshing to remember that Jesus said: "Go ye therefore and teach all nations... and lo, I am with you always even unto the end of the world" (Mail. 28:19-20). It is wonderful to believe on Him; better to walk with Him, but best of all to see Him face to face at the end of our pilgrimage. "And they shall see his face" (Rev. 22:4).

He speaks, and the sound of His voice,
Is so sweet, the birds hush their singing.
And the melody, that He gives to me,
Within my heart is ringing.
And He walks with me, and He talks with me,
And He tells me I am His own:
And the joy we share as we tarry there,
None other has ever known.

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