

Sermon for Sunday, January 23, 1972 by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor
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THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND THE THEOLOGICAL

Text: "Because, if you confess with your lips that Jesus Is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Romans 10:9

When I was a young boy growing up it was the depression years in poverty stricken rural Mississippi. Things were important to us because we didn't have many things. It was a big event at our house when we could afford to have the electric lights turned back on and put away the kerosene lanterns. I remember walking around from room to room and marveling that it was "bright as day." When we could afford finally to order a radio from Sears and Roebuck, my brother and I fought over who would get to carry the package home from the post office. We would sit for hours just listening to it and the whole family marveling over the miracle on our living room table. Of course, we didn't think anything about our privations because we were no different from anyone else. Those were desperate years, and because they were we all put an emphasis on things. We became materialistic because materials were important. Any new item demanded planning, saving, and sacrificing. When we finally got it, there was a sense of pride and accomplishment in owning it.

Looking back, I remember that most of us were religious. But in retrospect, maybe not for the right reasons. When there isn't much work, and when you don't know where tomorrow's grocery money is coming from, you are awfully dependent upon God. So God was important to us because we needed him for our daily bread. By the time our kids came along things were better and we didn't need God for our daily bread anymore. No, we were doing very well, thank you. We kept telling the kids that God was important, but we were not sure why and we didn't act like it and the kids didn't believe us anyway. So we began to raise a generation of youth who heard us saying God was important but they were puzzled as to why this was so.

But something else was happening to the youth. They didn't want for a thing. You and I saw to that. We said, "I don't want my kids to do without the things I did without." We said, "I want my kid to have all the things I was deprived of. I don't want them to lack for a thing." And it was true--they didn't lack for a thing.

But in the process we deprived them after all. We deprived them of anything that gave meaning and significance to life. Life had meaning for us because we were struggling to acquire things. But when we gave them everything and they didn't have to struggle for material things, we gave them nothing to take its place that would give their life meaning and purpose. Maybe if they had had to do without, go hungry on occasion, work and save and sweat to own something they would have been as materialistic as the rest of us and I think we have to face it that we are materialistic. But when you have had everything handed to you on a silver platter you begin to think the world owes you everything and you soon lose interest in it. So when we said to our youth, "Be like us. Have our values. Give your life to things." They politely told us to go to hell.

So our youth said, "We don't like your political structures because they ignore people and they squeeze persons into molds of black or white, rich or poor, or the have or have nots." They said, "We are going to change those political structures by fair means or foul even if it means burning down the cities and fighting the power structures in the streets." They said, "We reject your educational system with its values

that tries to conform us to your image. We will take over the schools if we can and blow them up if we can't." They said, "We reject your materialism and your social patterns and we will become outcasts of your society. If you want us bright, clean and well-groomed, we will become unwashed and unshorn. And if you want us to live in little ticky-tacky house boxes with neatly manicured lawns and all set in neat rows, we'll go live in the dirt and the filth." They said, "We reject your false pietism and your fake moral codes and we will be free to experience without guilt or shame all of the experiences that life has to offer us." We are still reaping the harvest of this attitude in sex-oriented movies that focus on immorality and perversion.

Decadence, decadence like an evil fog settled in on America and Jack Shepard of Look magazine wrote in January of 1971, "The frontiers died. America, speeding on the wit of her people, stopped inside. Like an unwatched bull whose horns grow into his skull and drive him insane, America turned on herself. We gorged and fattened, we rioted and assassinated. We shot and cursed and burned and polluted and stomped. And we lost the American vision. America today smells of despair.

During those days the church tried to dance to the decadence tune. The church had fallen into the hands of the liberals and they tried to out-hip the hippies. We were served up the theological hors d'oeuvres of God is dead, the moral dessert of the new morality and our main course consisted of social action without any spiritual imperatives. The simple New Testament story of personal salvation through a personal relationship to Jesus was considered out of date and unhealthy for a creaking, tottering old institutional church that seemed to be mortally stricken. Our modern theologians and liberal mimics were trying to pump new life into a tired old lady by making the church dance away her life to the acid rock tune of radicalism.

A year has gone by since Jack Shepard wrote of the smell of despair. Today there is a new odor on the breeze blowing across America--it is the odor of revival. Strangely enough that odor isn't coming from the institutional church--not from the liberals and not even from the conservatives. No, the smell of new life blowing across the land is coming from the youth. Yes, there is a new generation of youth today--they are the Jesus Generation.

Many of our slick magazines have been writing about these youth such as Life, Time, and Look. I want to share with you briefly some of the things going on among the youth of today. First of all there is a movement among our young people that is centered squarely on Jesus. Last year at the General Assembly the Time magazine came out with a twelve page spread and the Religion writer from Time magazine was at the General Assembly and I talked with him about this article for which he had been largely responsible and I said, "Dick, is this for real?" He said, "This is the most real thing happening in the world today. A movement centered on Jesus." And Dick wrote, "Jesus is alive and well and living in the radiant spiritual fervor of a growing number of young Americans who have proclaimed an extraordinary religious revolution in His name. . . He is an awesome, supernatural Jesus Christ, not just a marvelous man who lived 2,000 years ago, but a living God who is both Savior and Judge, the Ruler of their destinies."

Second, it is a movement centered squarely on the Bible. Our liberal friends have done so much to discredit and take away man's faith in the Bible, but for the young people today the Bible is true and miracles still happen, and God really does so love the world that he gave his Son to save it. I have trouble getting you to bring

your Bibles to church. One of my Elders said, "You've got us trained to bring it, I wish you'd train us to take it home. I left mine there two weeks in a row." But not so with the young people. My little 11 year old girl takes hers to school. This mood has spilled over into our church and the Bibles that I see the kids with today are Bibles that are worn and dog-eared from use.

Third, the movement today among youth is centered on a demand for an experience with Jesus Christ. They are not willing to hear about or read about some ancient, historical figure. They want to meet a living Jesus who is alive today and they want to meet him in a personal way. This often disturbs our middle class minds which think that an emotional thing like religion ought to be unemotional. But the kids are getting high on Jesus.

Fourth, the movement today among our youth is centered on the Holy Spirit. Billy Graham reports that ten years ago he asked the leading theologian of the world, Karl Barth, what the new emphasis in theology would be in the next twenty years. Without hesitation he replied. "The Holy Spirit." During his lifetime, Jesus could relate to only a small group of men at any one moment. But after his ascension into Heaven now through the Holy Spirit, youth are discovering that Jesus dwells in a real way in the hearts of those who receive him as savior. By the power of the Holy Spirit they are the new Pentacostals like those disciples of the first century.

There are other things happening to our youth as they discover Jesus. They are coming off of drugs, they are learning Christian discipleship, they are becoming socially concerned. But above all the movement is centered on evangelism. When the team from Look magazine did its research for its article some months ago, two of the three team members were converted by the young people. The third said, "Everyone wanted me to accept Christ too. I haven't decided yet, but I'm thinking about it." Time magazine said, "They are afire with a pentecostal passion for sharing their new vision of Jesus with others. Fresh-faced, wide-eyed young girls and earnest young men badger businessmen and shoppers on Hollywood Boulevard, near the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, in Dallas, in Detroit, and in Wichita witnessing for Christ with breathless exhortations." And this summer over 100,000 youth will converge on Dallas in a massive effort to create revival in the entire city. Evangelism--last Sunday there was a little Jewish girl in our church who had been converted to Jesus by our young people. After church this morning there is a young man who attended a liberal oriented church but through our young people has found Jesus Christ and he is going to join on re-statement of faith this morning. God is at work as these young people are reaching out in the name of Jesus to embrace in his love, those who are lost.

Already critics are rising up to sling their arrows at the youth--especially the liberals. The Jesus generation represents everything the liberals have fought against. It represents commitment to Jesus and a personal relationship. It represents believing the Bible literally. It represents sharing Jesus with other people and these things strike at the heart of the liberal movement. Some criticisms are valid. Some say it is too superficial--and in some cases it is. Some say it is too emotional--and in some cases it is. Some say it is outside the established church--and in some cases it is. But there is one thing I want to make abundantly clear this morning. In my humble opinion the Jesus generation is God's mighty move in the last quarter of the twentieth century in a world that stinks of decadence and despair. And the question that faces the church today is not whether or not it approves of the Jesus generation because that is an act of God. No, the question that really faces us this morning is

this: are we going to be a part of what God is doing today? Are we, you and I and our denomination, going to be on the cutting edge of God's mighty move in these last years of the twentieth century?

Not long ago, in a conversation with some friends, a casual statement was made that has stuck in my mind. That statement was this: One of the persons said, "So many of us are psychologically convinced about Jesus, but so few of us are supernaturally converted to Jesus."

I do not question this morning that most of us here are psychologically convinced about Jesus and about Christianity. We believe in God and we believe in Jesus. Psychologically, we are committed to certain statements about Jesus--who he was, what he did--and we believe that Christianity is a good way of life and good for society and it is good for America. But I just want to raise this question: have we also been supernaturally converted, has there be a divine invasion into our lives that has transformed us?

Recently in Decision magazine, a young intellectual, a Phi Beta Kappa named Vera, told her story. She had stopped believing in God during high school. Her views were close to those of Camus and Sartre. At Berkeley, the last wisps of her faith had been blown away because everything she studied seemed to agree that the concept of a personal God was a figment of man's imagination. However, she met some young people working with Campus Crusade and was amazed to hear students speak as though they actually believed the Bible was the Word of God and that Jesus was real. She began to study the Bible with them. A month or so later when she was taking a trip by plane the aircraft flew through clouds for awhile and then soared up into the blazing sunlight of God. "I can't explain what happened," she said, "but it was as if a veil were pulled back and I could see beyond. In that instant God spoke, saying 'I am!' and all of the pieces fell together for me." She added, "For a moment, I became as the Bible tells us to--like a little child. Then I said, 'all right, Jesus, I give myself to you. Do whatever you want.'" And then I felt such a flood of love and such deep peace and joy that I knew things were going to change forever."

I just want to raise the question, have we been supernaturally converted, has there been a divine invasion into our lives by the living Jesus that has transformed us--that will put us on the cutting edges of God's move in a world that smells of despair