

Sermon for Sunday, August 29, 1976, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Senior Pastor
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"WHAT'S ALL THIS JAZZ ABOUT JESUS?"

Ephesians 6:10-20

Text: "Therefore take the whole armor of God, that you may be able to
withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand." Ephesians 6:13

Recently a young girl in her mid-teens sat in my study. She was there because of serious conflict with her parents. Some months before her parents had been on the verge of divorce and she had been delighted. She hated her mother and planned to live with her father. But something had happened. Mother had come into a personal relation to Jesus and suddenly she had changed. Her father had trouble at first accepting a wife who was so dramatically different. But, as he began to realize what had happened to her was real, he, too, began to seek for what she had found. Now their marriage had changed and the daughter couldn't understand or accept the new relationship. She looked at me with puzzled eyes and said, "What is all this jazz about Jesus?"

She had seen a shrew of a mother change before her eyes; she had seen a father drop his illicit relationships and become a new person. She had good reason to ask, "What is all this jazz about Jesus?" This morning I would like to share with you some of the things I am trying to share with that young lady.

One translation makes our text for this morning read this way: "Therefore, take up God's armor; then you will be able to stand your ground when things are at their worst..." At her home my young friend had seen things at their worst and suddenly she had seen two people able to stand their ground. And that's what all this jazz about Jesus is about.

Notice first that you can stand your ground when things are at their worst because you discover you are someone to stand. One of the biggest problems that some people have today is a low opinion of themselves. We become convinced that our life is a tale told by an idiot, signifying nothing. Tennyson, in his poem entitled, "Dispair", tells of a couple who have lost their faith in the meaning of life. Life had become unbearably miserable and they resolved to destroy themselves by drowning. As they walk out into the surf towards the strong, outbound current, they pause and kiss one another. Tennyson writes, "Dear love, forever and ever, forever and ever farewell! Never a cry so desolate, not since the world began, never a kiss so sad, no, not since the coming of man." They felt their lives had no meaning, they were no one at all.

Dr. John Redhead tells of the journalist in New York who took his own life. The note he left behind read, "I have run from house to house, from wife to wife, from country to country in a vain endeavor to get away from myself. I have done what I've done because I am fed up with the necessity of inventing devices for getting through 24 hours a day." That is what happens to life when you do not feel you are a person of worth, that you are someone to stand.

But move over into the atmosphere of the New Testament and see what a different air you breathe! Once you look at the cross of Jesus Christ--once you understand how much He loved you--once you understand that had you been the only person in the whole world, still He would have died for you--even you!--then you can never think lowly of yourself again. No, you are not an offspring of the apes, you are the tadpole of an archangel. You are not a meaningless mass of dancing dirt, come from

nowhere and going nowhere, but you are the creation of God, filled with His Spirit, and loved by Him. And all that jazz about Jesus says first of all that you are a person of worth--you are, indeed, someone.

Notice in the second place that you can stand your ground when things are at their worst because all that jazz about Jesus gives you something to stand on. Is life--is history--going anywhere worth going? Or, as one cynic put it, is life just one bad thing after another, destined to end in a cosmic wreck? When a baby is born deformed and retarded, does life have meaning? When a loved one is snatched away, does life mean anything? When dreams collapse, is anything worthwhile? You see it is precisely here that all this jazz about Jesus gives us something to stand on. Shaw, in his masterful play, "Joan of Arc," has her facing the stake and speaking to her executioners. This is what she says, "Yes, I am alone on earth. I have always been alone. Do not think that you can frighten me by telling me that I am alone...It is better to be alone with God: His friendship will not fail me, nor His counsel, nor His love. In His strength I will dare, and dare, and dare, until I die." She could stand her ground when things were at their worst because she had something to stand on, and she could dare and dare and dare.

You see, as long as you believe that what we call history is the gradual unfolding of a divine purpose which will, in the end, get itself worked out, then you've got something to stand on. If God is in control, then not even a Russia or a China or a ballistic missile can rock the boat and you have something to stand on. "I would have fainted," said the Psalmist, "unless I had believed." As St. Paul once said, "all things work together for good to them that love God..." And when we know that, we can stand our ground when things are at their worst because we have something to stand on.

Notice in the third place that all this jazz about Jesus gives us something to stand for. What many people stand for today is not very flattering. When the scandal of Watergate broke, America seemed shocked. Yet, Watergate was only the tip of a national iceberg of immorality and deceit. It is fascinating to observe that even our national political leaders are calling for a spiritual renewal in this country because they, too, are painfully aware that we don't stand for much any more.

For example, look at this picture presented in a letter of the editor of a magazine written by a young girl. "Dear Sir," she wrote, "I drink, I gamble, I go out with men. My parents do not know these things, or at least don't seem to know. Understand I'm not out with a tough crowd, just the boys and girls of the best families I was brought up with. What bothers me is all the older folks having faith in us, and these preachers standing around telling us how fine and good we are. Next time I go to a party I think I'll kidnap a preacher and take him along. Maybe his next sermon will be about sin. And that is what we need. Did my mother do the things I am doing when she was a girl? Did my older sister? If I keep on doing these things will I go to heaven or hell? These are the things that are bothering me. Please write something to quiet my mind or I shall surely go mad."

Here is a girl that has nothing to stand for, and when the strain is put on, the chances are she will fall. But look at this other picture. During the Vietnam conflict, many stories were run about the children of American soldiers with Vietnamese prostitutes for mothers. When one young man returned from duty there his father called him aside. "Son," he said, "I've been reading about our men in Vietnam, how they cast their morals to the wind. I've been wondering, son, if you followed the crowd." And the boy answered, "Of course not, Dad; don't you know there are some things men with the name of Christian can be trusted not to do?"

You see, it does make a difference in standing up to life if we have something to stand for--an ideal, a code of honor, a pattern of behavior, a blueprint of conduct. The person who has no moral ideals or code, who does whatever the current fad happens to be, will find difficulty holding his footing in life. But the person who has gone all out for Jesus--the one who has surrendered his life to the Master--will be able to stand when things are at their worst because he has something to stand for. There are some things that those of us who carry the name of Jesus can be trusted not to do.

So, all this jazz about Jesus means you are someone to stand, a person of worth; it means you have something to stand on, for you know that life and history is the unfolding of God's divine plan; it means you have something to stand for that is worth living for and dying for. Carlyle, in one of his great books, writes of Martin Luther's appearance before the Diet of Worms on April 17, 1521. He makes this comment about that event: "(this) may be considered the greatest scene in modern European history, the point indeed, from which the whole subsequent history of civilization takes its rise. The world's pomp and power sets there on this hand: on that stands up for God's truth one man, the son of the poor miner, Hans Luther. It is the greatest moment in modern history. English Puritanism, England and its parliaments, the Americas, the French Revolution, Europe and its work everywhere at present--the germ of it all lay there; had Luther in that moment done other, it would have all been otherwise." Yes, had Luther done other--but Luther did not do other. He had something to stand for. As Luther himself put it that fateful day, "Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me."

Yes, someone to stand, something to stand on, something to stand for. Notice last of all that more than anything else all that jazz about Jesus gives you someone to stand by you when things are at their worst. That, most of all, is what we need. In standing up to life it is worth more than all else to have someone to stand by us; someone who, when our morale begins to crack, when we begin to lose faith in ourselves and in our ideals, can reach down and touch us with a steady hand.

Most of us have either seen on television or read or heard about Graham Kerr, the "Galloping Gourmet." He and his wife Treena came to America and professionally were a tremendously successful team. Soon they had over a million dollars in the bank. However, a tragic highway accident ended their careers when they were both seriously injured. The consequences of the accident only intensified the strain of a marriage that was already in deep trouble. Treena sunk into deep depression and despair; she began to take all kinds of pills--"uppers", "downers", pain-killers, sleeping pills--but nothing worked.

Treena tells what happened this way: "We had a black maid working for us at that time. Her name was Ruthie and she shimmered with joy every day. I turned to her one day and said, 'I just don't know what to do, Ruthie.' She simply said, 'Why don't you give your problems to God?' to which I brusquely replied, 'Okay, God. You take them. I can't handle them any more.' God took them! Seven days later I went to Ruthie's small church in Bethlehem, Maryland. As the singing, handclapping congregation prayed for their 'new sister' I fell to my knees, crying tears that flowed like waterfalls. 'I'm sorry, Jesus. I'm sorry, Jesus,' I repeated again and again."

Treena goes on to tell how she was baptized and was asked if she wanted to tarry for the Holy Spirit. She writes, "I didn't know who the Holy Spirit was, let alone what tarry meant." "What do you do?" I asked. Ruthie told me to say, 'Thank you, Jesus.' So I did--over and over. The church was hot and I felt ridiculous. Really,

I thought, you are a sophisticated woman of forty going right out of your mind! Then a bright light fell on my face and I thought, 'now they've turned up the church lights to make me think that I've got it--whatever "it" is!' I opened my eyes and there I saw a Man. He was dressed all in white and He had the most wonderful smile I have ever seen. It held all the love in all the world. He stretched His hand toward me and He touched my heart. He said, 'You have it.' and I laughed tears of joy as I said, 'I know...I know...I know.'"

Treena writes, "I believed in Jesus at that moment. He is alive; I've seen and spoken with Him, so I truly know." Three months later Graham was convinced that Jesus was real and that He was alive in Treena. He says, "It was then that I went on my knees and told him, 'Jesus...I love you.' and with that confession, He loved me right back."

Today the Kerrs write, "When we pray together we hold hands, and through us now flows the love of Jesus. We are forgiven, so now we have the ability to forgive. There are no old hurts left, only the hunger to serve Him and His people with our lives." Yes, you can stand your ground when things are at their worst because most of all it gives you someone to stand with you. And that's what all that jazz about Jesus is all about.

Yes, someone to stand on, something to stand for. Notice last of all that more than anything else all that jazz about Jesus gives you someone to stand by you when things are at their worst. That, most of all, is what we need. In standing up to life it is worth more than all else to have someone to stand by. Not someone who, when our mortal bodies begin to crack, when we begin to lose faith in ourselves and in our ideals, can reach down and touch us with a steady hand.

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