MATTHEW 27, 22.

"Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ? They all say unto him, Let him be crucified."
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During the past week every downtown corner in Springfield carried a sign which read something like this: "Success always comes if you think right. The Church helps you to do this." These signs were placed there, I understand, by a number of business men whose purpose was to bolster the pathetically meagre church attendance in many of the congregations of our city. For various reasons they are intensely interesting.

In the first place these signs set forth very clearly the ridiculous results obtained by these so-called undenominational efforts to find the lowest common denominator for all churches. In the effort to do this everything distinctively Christian has been lost; without a single word changed those signs could appear before a Mohammedan mosque in Turkey; they could be placed above the door of a heathen temple in the wilds of Africa; they would receive the unqualified support of every Christless fraternal organization in the country today. And why? Because, my friend, these signs make of the Church's business here on earth a horrible mockery; again and again the invincible and immovable authority of the Word of God must be summed up in the unflinching statement that the Church's business is not to bring earthly success to her members or to help them think right or to make them good citizens. All these may be byproducts of Christianity, but they are not true Christianity. True Christianity has to do with souls and is the same today as it was two thousand years ago when it was summed up in the supreme statement: Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ
and thou shalt be saved. To us is entrusted the
ministry of reconciliation and this ministry has
to do with souls, immortal, bloodbought and
Christ-redeemed souls, souls for whom the blood of
the divine Redeemer dripped into the dust of
Calvary, souls which are infinitely more precious
in the sight of Almighty God than all the success
which you and I may attain. And let me remind you
also this morning that these souls may be clothed
in bodies pockmarked with sin, in bodies lying in
the gutter before our glittering business offices,
in bodies looking wearily from behind prison bars.
Oh, that our beloved Lutheran Church would never
turn from her Christgiven passion for souls to join
in the dollar worship of a money-crazed and money-
mad world; oh that she would never forget that her
supreme concern is with the eternal fate of souls
and not with the fleeting, transitory, earthly
things which men call success; would that we, the
members of the Lutheran Church, would really become
the salt of the earth and go out and tell the
world: Go ahead, make all the money you can, be
successful, attain power, wealth and position; but
remember, oh man, that when you come to Church you
are but a poor miserable sinner, black and dirty
with sin, and that you need a Savior, you need
salvation,—you must give an answer to the most
important question which can come before the
children of men:

What shall I do then with Jesus? With
the blessed help of the Spirit of God I would
discuss this question with you this morning,
considering:
1. Why it must be answered!
2. How it can be answered!

I would first point out to you that the question must be answered because Christ is inevitable. You all remember who first asked it: Pilate, the proud, agnostic, and yet pitifully weak representative of the power of Rome. You remember too what desperate attempts he made to avoid answering the question placed before him. First he thought the Jewish Sanhedrin would take care of the case, but Christ came to him; then he sent him to Herod since Christ was a Galilean, but Christ came back again; then he scourged him in the hope that the wounded and whipped body of the silent sufferer would arouse the pity of the howling mob, but Christ still stood before him; finally he played his last card and offered the Jews the choice between Christ and Barabbas; they chose Barabbas and Christ was still to be considered. Christ was inevitable; Pilate had to decide and his failure to get rid of Christ rings through his last desperate question: What shall I do then with Jesus, which is called Christ?; his failure to get rid of Christ shines through his dramatic action in washing his hands before the people and saying: I am innocent of the blood of this just person; his failure to get rid of Christ is evident in the remainder of his life when, haunted and conscience-stricken, he wanders over the Roman empire to die finally, miserable and lonely, in the farthest corner of the province of Gaul.

Friend of mine, if Pilate found Christ inevitable in the hour of our Lord's deepest humiliation, what about him today, two thousand years later,
when we hear God's Word say to us: "Wherefore God hath also highly exalted him and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Do you think that men can get away from Him today? Do you believe that they can avoid an answer to the question: What shall I do then with Jesus? Do you think that today when the sun never sets on the steeples of our churches and the Word of God is broadcast over the face of the earth that men can ignore Him? Ah no; He is as inevitable today as He was in the days of His flesh; Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever; even today the business man, concerned with the cares of this world, must find time for the question: What shall I do then with Jesus?; even today the young man and woman, clutching madly at the pleasures of youth, must face the question: What shall I do with Jesus?; even today the student, attracted and fascinated by the wisdom and learning of past ages, must study above all the question: What shall I do with Jesus? And why? Because Christ the glorified and exalted is eternally inevitable; He is the changeless in a changing world. If our fathers and mothers, now dead in their graves these many years, were to come to life again they would be overwhelmed and perhaps terror-stricken by the changes which have come over the world in these latter days. And if they would look for something familiar, something old, something known, something
unchanged, could they find it? Ah, yes, they could; towering o'er the wrecks of time they would see the eternal, unchanging, limitless Christ still calling to a decaying, disobedient and dying world: "Look unto me and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth. I am the Way, the Truth and the Life; no man cometh to the Father but by me; I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end." The question, etc.

But if the question, "What shall I do then with Jesus?" must be answered because Christ is inevitable and unchanging, it must also be answered because man does not change. It is vitally necessary that this fact be hurled into the world with all the power of the Word of God behind it since the danger that we forget it has never been greater. Men say to us: Can there be any doubt that we are making progress? Look at our marvelous system of education, our unprecedented prosperity, our material comforts, our steady advance in the solution of such problems as war, unemployment, capital and labor, and so forth. Men are getting better; civilization moves onward; man will raise himself gradually to a higher level. Oh, the pitiful blindness of those who use such catch phrases! All these things are only on the surface; underneath them is the old heart of man, perennially the same, sinful, full of enmity against God, proud, self-righteous and especially in our day selling itself for a pot of gold. Under our fine glow of prosperity there is the ageold cancer of sin eating men's souls away, ruining our churches, filling our prisons, hospitals and insane asylums, driving our youth pleasure-mad, turning us ever farther and farther away from Christ. Oh Christian, if yours is a passion
for souls go out and tell men that they have not changed; that the mark of Cain is still on their brows; and that they must therefore face the question: "What shall I do then with Jesus?"

Prosperity, wealth and power will avail nothing beyond the gates of eternity; morality and civic righteousness will mean nothing before the throne of God; churchmembership and regular payment of dues will not be a passport to heaven. There is only one thing that will be important there and that is your answer to the question: "What did you do with Jesus? This question must be answered because sin is an unchangeable fact.

II.

If we have seen why this question must be answered, it remains for us also to see how it can be answered. At this point we are at once confronted with the fact that there are two possible answers; and the greatest tragedy in the world is that man when face to face with the question: "What shall I do then with Jesus?" can say: I shall reject him.

Pilate, the first to ask the question, was also the first to give this answer. Blind to the importance of the scene in which he played a leading role, blind to the divine beauty of Christ's character, blind to the meaning of Christ's words, he washed his hands and delivered Him to the Jews to be crucified. And after him have come millions of men and women who have done the same thing. What a tragedy! The eternal Son of God comes to men and offers them eternal life, and they choose eternal damnation; the King of Kings and Lord of Lords asks
for a throne in the hearts of men and they give Him a cross; the sinless Son of Mary offers them the balm of Gilead to heal the hurt of sin and they choose to remain under the whiplash of Satan. Can there be a greater tragedy than this? And let us remember, too, that we shortsighted human beings see only a small part of this tragedy; we see weary eyes and trembling hands and say: Behold the marks of sin; we see broken and sintered bodies carried into our hospitals and insane asylums and say: Behold the result of sin; we see men imprisoned by the State and say: They have rejected Christ. But we fail to see the tragedy in the millions of men and women who are outwardly respected successful and good citizens but who have turned away from Christ; we fail to see the tragedy in the additional millions who acknowledge Christ as a great moral leader and prophet, but have not found in Him a divine Savior from the burden of sin; we fail to see the tragedy in those who belong to His Church, profess His name, but to whom a thousand other things are infinitely more important than Christ. And day by day we go on, while the souls of men are dying, while they are rejecting Christ, because the natural heart of man can do nothing else, and we are forgetful of our high calling as messengers of the King of Kings, forgetful of the fact that He Himself says to us: "Ye shall be witnesses unto me." Christian, will you not face the terrible fact that your friend, the man in the office with you is doomed to hell because you fail to point him to Christ; your son and your daughter who leave the family circle night after night for the pleasures which the world has to offer are turning away from Christ because you fail to warn
them with the irresistible power of the Word of God; your relatives, who have no use for religion are on the road to eternal destruction because you think that Christ is not a good topic for conversation? Many years ago in England a famous murderer was finally caught and condemned to die. A pastor made several desperate attempts to see the man before he was hanged, but each time the murderer refused to see a minister of the Gospel. Finally the preacher did gain admission to his cell and brought to him the age-old message of sin and grace. The condemned man listened attentively and then said: "I don't know whether to believe you or not. I have lived in a Christian country all my life and no one has ever told me this before. But sir, if it is true and I could get out of here I would, if necessary, crawl all over England on my hands and knees to tell people about it." Several years ago in one of our own churches in Brooklyn, N.Y. the following took place: Two men, etc. My friend, do you see the tragedy in all this? Oh, let us never forget that men have the awful power to answer the question: "What shall I do then with Jesus?" with the terrible words: "I shall reject him," and that often this answer is directly due to the fact that we have failed to be witnesses unto Him in whom we have found peace and the forgiveness of sins.

And that thought brings me to the last thing I would say to you this morning: Men can also, by the gracious power of the Spirit of God, answer the question: "What shall I do then with Jesus?" by saying: "I shall accept him"—accept Him as my
Redeemer from the bondage of sin and the power of the devil - accept Him as the eternal Son of God who by His vicarious life and atoning death has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature - accept Him, my Lord and my God, as the master of my destiny and the Captain of my soul. And that is the only answer which finally can give our question any meaning for the individual soul. Men may recognize that Christ is inevitable, but the devils in hell do that also - that is not enough; there must come into the heart of man the deep, Godgiven and Godinspired realization that all his righteousness are as filthy rags, that he is helpless, hopeless and godless and that he needs the eternal Rock of Ages, the glorious and mighty Christ to atone for his sin and to bring him back into blessed communion with God. It is to the sinner torn and weary with his sins, crushed by the curse of the law, to whom Christ comes and offers forgiveness and healing. Remember the striking saying of Luther. He says: "Satan once came to me and said, 'Martin Luther, thou art lost, for thou art a sinner.' And I said: 'Satan I thank thee for saying I am a sinner;' I answer thee thus: 'Christ died for sinners and if Martin Luther is a sinner, Christ died for him.'" Hear the note of triumph in these words; here was a man who had certainly answered the question: "What shall I do then with Jesus?" in the only way that will bring peace to the mind, joy to the soul and the blessed assurance of the forgiveness of sin to the troubled hearts of men.

My friend, if Christ Himself, the searcher of all hearts were present here this morning, He could very quickly divide all who are here into two classes:
those who have rejected Him and those who, by the grace of God, have accepted Him as their King and Savior. Among the Twelve who walked with Him during His life here on earth there was one who rejected Him; shall we say that there is no one here this morning who has turned away from Christ and rejected Him, turned again to the glitter of gold and the love of life, to the lure of pleasures and the tragedy of sin? Oh, my friend, if you have done this, then turn to Him again in this day of grace, hear Him in His Word, see Him come to you in the means of grace - accept Him, believe on Him, cling to Him until you and I shall join in the eternal song of the great choir of God's redeemed: "Unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us Kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever." Amen.