

# The One Issue

A young preacher asked me the other day if I could see any hope for the future, and I said that the only hope I see is that everybody that gives any evidence of being involved in the mission of God in Christ is asking that same question, “Do you see any hopeful signs?” And the only hopeful sign we see is that there are more people today among God’s professing people who are not satisfied with the withered condition of God’s church. And these are looking about for a cloud the size of a man’s hand that precedes the rain that is sure to fall.

I wish to speak tonight and ask two questions about THE ONE ISSUE. I don’t have too much information about it, but I wish to lay some groundwork for all of us who are gathered here and who are hungry, hungry for fellowship and in great need.

WHAT IS THE ISSUE? In Genesis chapter two the issue was stated, and from that hour to this every other issue has grown out of this one. That which was the issue in the Garden of Eden remains the issue today.

I was up in Binghamton, New York many years ago and God was giving us great and glad harvest. At that particular time someone invited a person to come and hear me preach, but he said, “There’s no use to go. He says the same thing every time he preaches!”

I met a young Methodist preacher and got well acquainted with him. He’s less than 40 years old—a product of Duke University—and yet he is one of the powerful preachers of this hour! He started a church under the Methodists with nine families and yet has caused that city to sit up and take notice, as he is seeking to create a fellowship of men and women who live in the power of the resurrection life of the Risen Lord. And I asked him how on earth he had come to the clearness and the oneness of his message, and he said, “Brother Barnard, there isn’t but one message to be preached, and that is **God’s eternal purpose in Christ Jesus**, that on the basis of His life laid down, God proposes to set up His totalitarian rule in hearts, in institutions and in the world before the end time comes.” But that’s quite a purpose, isn’t it? That’s quite a message!

The issue is stated, as I said, in Genesis chapter two at verse 15 “*And the Lord God took the man and put him into the Garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.*” Note also in the Gospel of the Old Testament, Isaiah 9:6-7, “*For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, AND THE GOVERNMENT SHALL BE UPON HIS SHOULDER, and His Name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. OF THE*

*INCREASE OF HIS GOVERNMENT AND PEACE THERE SHALL BE NO END, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.”*

A hundred years ago, the controversial voice of his age was a young man who was never ordained as a public preacher—a man who wasn’t perfect like we think we are—but he was crying out against the same thing we have in America today, where we go to church on Sunday and then go home, but have unanimously agreed that we won’t get involved in what is going on. This world is being torn to pieces today and we watch it—this generation of people is content to go to church on Sunday morning, listen to the preacher preach, and then go home.

This man I mentioned (Mr. S. Kierkegaard of Europe) wrote a parable and called it “The Tame Geese.” He says, “Suppose it was so that the geese could talk. Then they so arranged it that they also could have their religious worship, their divine service. Every Sunday they came together and one of the ganders preached. The essential content of the sermon was, What a lofty destiny the geese have—what a lofty goal the Creator has for them (and every time this was mentioned, the geese curtsied and the ganders bowed their heads)—what a high goal the Creator had set for these geese! By the aid of their wings, they were told, they could fly away to distant regions, blessed climes where properly they were at home. For here they were only strangers! And so it was every Sunday; and as soon as the assembly broke up, each waddled home to his own affairs, and then the next Sunday again came to divine service, and again home. And that was the end of that!

“The geese grew and were well liked and became plump and delicate, and then were eaten on Martinmas eve, and that was the end of that! For though the discourses sounded so lofty, the geese on Monday were ready to recount to one another what befell a certain goose who took seriously the preaching and wanted to make serious use of the wings the Creator had given him, the wings that were designed for the high goal that was proposed to him. And the geese were wont to tell about what a terrible tragedy, a terrible death, that this one encountered. Also among the geese there were some individuals that saw suffering and grew thin. About them it was currently said among the geese, Ah, you see what it leads to when you take this flying seriously! So because their hearts are occupied with the thought of wanting to fly, therefore they become thin, do not thrive and do not have the grace of God that we have who are become plump and delicate.”

And then Mr. Kierkegaard says that when someone read this he says, “Ah, it’s very pretty”—and that is the end of that! And then he waddles home to his affairs and endeavors with all his might to become plump, delicate and fat. But on Sunday morning, the parson preaches and he listens, just like the geese.

This world is going to Hell because we have reduced that for which God's Son hung on the cross to a matter of attending divine worship on Sunday morning, then waddling home and refusing to get involved in what is happening to a world that is being butchered from every direction. The geese just listen to the parson "preachify" and that is the end of that!

There are two testimonies that speak to my heart. One is by this same gentleman. Listen: "Of all the nonsense uttered in these miserable times, perhaps the most nonsensical is the sentence written with a pretense of wisdom which I have often enough met with in my reading and whose excellence I have heard some people praise. The nonsensical sentence is this: 'Nowadays no man can be a martyr anymore, for ours is an age incapable of making a martyr of anyone.'" And then Mr. K. says, "What a misconception! We are not to think it is the age which has the power to put a man to death or to make him a martyr—but **it is the martyr, the genuine martyr, which gives to the age the passion, the bitter passion, to kill him!**"

So help me God, I am getting so sick and tired of us being so nice—I wish under God He would build a fire underneath us until we would take the ONE ISSUE of this hour and make this generation so aware of it until they would say, "Away with him! Kill him; get rid of him!" We're the nicest little bunch of orthodox grace-preaching in-for-hell people that this world ever had to put up with! And we couldn't disturb a convention of fleas, the whole "shootin' match" of us!! We couldn't!

The other statement I want to use to preface my further remarks comes from the great French pastor, E. Mathoit. And this is for us preachers. After 25 years of preaching, he says, "I am still appalled by all the fine words I have uttered from the pulpit Sunday by Sunday for 25 years—any one of which words, if lived up to the hilt, would have been enough to send me to prison. **If Christianity is not persecuted in the West, it owes its security to its unfaithfulness.**" God help us! Now I ask my heart once again some questions!

When a king or queen is crowned in Great Britain, one part of the traditional service is as follows: They take a golden orb surmounted on a cross and present it to the sovereign, and then these words are spoken: "When you see the golden orb set under the cross, remember that **the whole world is subject to the power and to the empire of Jesus Christ.**" This focuses our attention on the ONE ISSUE of this hour—the ONE ISSUE of every hour, past, present and future—in **whom** is authority and how may it be recognized?

In the Garden of Eden, there was just ONE ISSUE. On Golgotha's hill, there was just ONE ISSUE. In the garden the issue was, Does God have the right to be God and does He exercise that right? There was ONE ISSUE at Calvary: "We **will not** have this man **to reign** over us!"

Does God have the right to sit on a throne? The Bible says He does. Does God have a right to *exercise* that right? The Bible says He does! Remember there was peace in Abraham's tent as long as Ishmael was the only son, but there was WAR when Isaac came. A soldier in the Second World War kept getting letters from his wife—he was a henpecked sort of husband—and she kept nagging him in the letters, worrying him about her problems. He finally sat down and wrote her a letter and said, "For God's sake, quit worrying me with your troubles. Leave me alone to enjoy this war in peace!"

We would have peace but all go to Hell together, if God Almighty would only abdicate, and if He'd step down and quit bringing His commands, quit pressing His claims, quit meddling with our lives!

There in the Garden of Eden two things happened. First, God's throne was threatened. If Adam had won, God would have been out of business. Secondly, for man, his wholeness was lost, so lost that now the Scriptures speak of "the natural man" to describe what is really the unnatural man—the fallen man, who is crazy, beside himself, and who must be brought "to himself" before he has sense enough to come in out of the rain. The whole condition of man is "out of kilter." Now the issue of the throne rights of God Almighty has got to be settled, **for God will never listen to you on any other matter until this one issue is settled!**

Some of us used to look in the back of the algebra book to find the answers—well, praise God, I've looked in the back of the Book. In the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter of 1 Corinthians we read, "For HE must reign, till He hath put all enemies under His feet!" and until this world, praise God, is brought into subjection to Almighty God in Christ! Man's wholeness was lost in Eden. Man was made to be governed and THERE'S NEVER BEEN ANY GOVERNMENT PLACED ON ANYBODY'S SHOULDERS EXCEPT JESUS CHRIST'S! "The government shall be upon His shoulder" Isaiah 9:6. The whole outfit has been turned over to Him. Nobody now has the right to make the decisions except Christ.

John Calvin dedicated his Institutes to the reigning monarch of his day, and in the boldness of his heart, Calvin was pleased to remind that ruler that he would only sit on the throne as long as it pleased the One Who has been given all rule and government, Jesus Christ! Yes, man was made to be governed—the ungoverned man is not a real man—the only way he can be a real man is by being ruled. HE WAS CREATED TO SERVE GOD! His human personality was designed for something more than self-centered animal existence. Man was made not to stand alone but to be lost in a great purpose. That strange expression is still true: "**In His service is perfect freedom!**"

SIN IS PERSONAL SLAVERY instead of true freedom—to be free, a man must be under Him upon whose shoulders the government is! What a Saviour!

God's salvation, then, is the restoration of the throneship of God and making man truly a man one more time.

Let us notice, WHAT FOLLOWS FROM THIS ONE ISSUE? Three things are now true: 1. The Gospel of God's salvation is the proclamation of Him, for in Him, through Him, and for Him, God purposes to sum up all things: and in and through Him to regain His throneship over all the world. Buy B.B. Warfield's book, ***The Plan of Salvation***, and when you get the blues read it. Ah, this old world is going to be redeemed. God bless your heart, the world is going to be brought back to see God on the throne. The Gospel is the story of how God has put all of His purposes, all of His eggs, in one basket. The Gospel is as broad as Christ and as narrow as Christ. It shuts the door of hope everywhere except in Christ, but it opens it there!

The Gospel of God's salvation is the proclaiming of a Person in Whom and through Whom God purposes to do everything that will be done for kingdoms or worlds or systems or individuals! Therein we can understand Paul's threefold description of Gospel preaching. The Word of the Cross is a scandal, a downright insult to a Baptist or a Methodist or a Presbyterian or a Roman Catholic or a Jew or anybody else who has religion but doesn't know Christ!

The message of the Cross is foolishness. I have said many times that only a fool or a Christian believes that Jesus is the Son of God. There are not enough brains in this world to figure that out. If you are an idiot I can understand how you can believe it; otherwise you can't apart from **the miracle of the New Birth**.

It is not a simple Gospel. I heard a preacher the other day say, "Well, just give them the simple plan of Salvation." Well, if you do, they'll take it and never know when they swallow it, never miss it when they lose it and **ever** regret it in Hell! It's not simple. It's not simple. It is the power of God and the wisdom of God to them who are **called**.

If the issue of the hour is the threat to the throneship of God and man's rebellion, then the Gospel of God's salvation is the proclamation of One Who is scandalous to religious people, downright silly to the educated, but WONDERFUL to those who are in Him.

Then the second thing, if what we've said is so, *to be saved is to be converted to the kingdom of God and the kingdom of God in Christ*. To be saved means to be converted to the RULE of God in Jesus Christ. To be saved means that one's heart consent is freely given to God sitting on the throne. Here is wholeness. We must keep preaching and inviting sinners to come with an open hand—but, under God, we must preach as we've never preached before that while your hand is open let your knee be bent. We must preach that men must become captives of Christ and thus be made free! We must preach that man is made to be governed, and any salvation that doesn't take care of that is not the

salvation of the Cross! We must preach that we are most free when we are most His, and that we never stand so straight as when we bow to Him. We must preach that under His authority and nowhere else is a man free.

We must preach that the greatest need of a man is to find the right answer to the question: "Where shall supreme loyalty be given? And how may I resign as the General Manager of my universe, how may I render up my sword, my symbol of authority—God will have that sword or send you to Hell!—and how shall I come to be able to swear allegiance only to Him?" The New Testament says (Acts 2:47), "*The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved*"; or, "*such as were being saved.*" Oh my soul! I can understand these people who in their profession never have to pray, never have to confess, never have to repent, never have to apologize and never have to walk the floor at night and cry when the heavens seem to be as brass—they have never faced for one second the **claims** of Jesus Christ! If I compare myself to you, I get along fairly well, but the claims of Christ's Lordship slay me and I must say, "O God, I look forward to that time when with undimmed eyes I can get a look at the Lord Jesus Christ and then I'll be like Him!"

A Christian is the most miserable happy person this side of Hell and will never be satisfied until he awakes in the likeness of Christ. If nobody has got a right to make a single decision except Christ, if any move that Rolfe Barnard takes apart from His leadership is S-I-N, sin—my God, we'd have private mourning benches in our hearts, and in our churches once again the icicles would fall apart and Mr. Wet Eyes and Mr. Amen would come back to our meetings!

The truly saved man has found freedom as he has come to Christ, but the unsaved man just comes to church on Sunday morning, then waddles home and that is the end of that! He refuses to recognize the claims of God on his life. The only kingdom he can recognize is one he has built; thus he attempts to become the ruler of his own life, and his will becomes his god, for his will is in the one place God says He will not share with another. Listen!

- THIS IS SIN—the setting up of our own little kingdom in opposition to God.
- THIS IS SIN—to build a tower of Babel, reaching up to God to bring Him down to do our bidding.
- THIS IS SIN—attempting to be the Creator and not willing to be just the creature.
- THIS IS SIN—the subject trying to be the Sovereign.
- THIS IS SIN—open rebellion. **REBELLION!** Rebellion against the will and the authority of God; spiritual deafness to His voice. Sin is a lot more than an action now; it is a condition.

Salvation must come where man is and he must be converted to a life-long pursuit of the will of God. I am so hungry—I am so tired of preaching to a dry-eyed bunch—I am so tired of this nice little convenient stuff that we call being saved today! I long to meet somebody who, although he might make 1700 mistakes a day, you know he is headed toward doing the will of God! Oh to be converted, to be hungering and thirsting after righteousness, instead of bragging about “So-and-So is straight on the doctrines of grace”!

Thirdly, if the Gospel is the proclamation of God’s rule and reign in Christ, and if to be saved is to be converted to the kingdom, **and then it follows that revival, the glory of the church is coming.** Yes, it’s coming somewhere down the road. Revival, what is it? It is when men see Christ sitting on a throne and they say, “Praise the Lord, I’m glad He is there!” Amen! Amen! Revival won’t be when we get some more church members; we’ve got plenty of them. It won’t be when we get some more people “saved” as they do it today—they’ve “saved” America over and over again! But you’re going to Hell as sure as you’re a foot and a half high if that is all you’ve got. Revival will be when “all’s right with the world and God is on the throne” and men are saying “Amen” to it!

Now before I close, LET US FACE TWO VITAL QUESTIONS. Can a local assembly be brought to rejoice that Christ is on the throne? My God, how much longer is the Lord going to tolerate the rebellion that is in the average church? Some of you pastors have gone about as far as you can go. Unless God’s voice begins to be heard in the church one more time, we’re gone. **THE ONLY WAY CHRIST MANIFESTS HIMSELF IS AS HIS AUTHORITY IS RECOGNIZED.** We saw it on the day of Pentecost and we must see it again! The issue of this hour is not salvation by grace not election or any other great truth—though these things are precious—but the issue of the hour is **WHO IS BOSS?** Lawless church members are dragging the Gospel under their dirty feet, professing loyalty to a far-off Risen Lord, but not subject to Him as He speaks through the church of which He is Head! Will we see in our day churches where Jesus Christ is sitting on the throne?

My final question: Can we again see in our day men who are utterly taken captive by the Lord Jesus Christ? Oh, I’d love to see somebody **really converted** in our day! When a man is converted, he’s not perfect but he sure is burning a trail in that direction! **A converted man is changed.**

My friends, in the time of the Reformation, Luther and Calvin said that the Church of Rome had a man-centered faith and they enforced it by asking two questions: Is your faith in God only for what you can get out of it? And secondly, do you believe that by your own efforts you will get from God what you need? In answer to these two questions was born the doctrine of justification by faith. For there are two types of faith—a faith that centers in **me** and what I can get out of it, but also, praise God, there is a faith that centers on **God** and His glory. Faith is basically a relationship between God and man. It is either God-centered or man-

centered. Do you seek God because you think a right relationship with Him would benefit you? Then your faith is man-centered. Do you believe your own efforts will bring those results? Are you worshipping yourself and your own efforts? Luther saw that true faith was a bowing to God even if nothing resulted to him, and thus he came to define salvation as “the realization of God’s will and purpose whatever that might be, rather than the satisfaction of human need.” He went on so far as to say that “those who truly love God freely offer themselves to all the will of God, even to Hell and death eternal should God so will in order that His will should fully be done.”

Calvin echoed this by saying, “The true Christian should be willing to be damned for the glory of God.” He said, “We should be willing to affirm God without demanding that He affirm us!” Calvin further said that “**true faith means having confidence in God regardless of profit or loss,**” and “only those will go to Heaven who is willing not to go!”

We are right back to our subject—THE ONE ISSUE. Which is first, the will of God or what we shall get out of Him? One issue and that is the **GLORY OF GOD**, and “whether we spend eternity in Heaven or Hell, to God be the glory!” **This emphasis must come back to our pulpits!**

Let us so press this issue that this generation shall compliment us by treating us a little like they treated the One we profess to love—“Away with him! Away with him!” May God give us the power to press His claims on men until while some shall gnash their teeth; others shall say that it is impossible that He is anybody except the Son of God! Amen!

Preached at 13<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church, Henry Mahan, Pastor,  
Ashland, Kentucky  
In the 1960’s.