

The Great Attraction: The Uplifted Christ

by: REUBEN ARCHER TORREY—1856-1928

And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself — John 12:32.

IN A RECENT ADVERTISEMENT OF A Sunday evening service in one of our American cities it was stated that there would be three attractions: a high-class movie show, a popular gospel pianist and his wife, rendered by a well-known prima donna. It is somewhat startling when an unusually gifted and popular preacher, or his advertising committee, thinks of the gospel of the Son of God as having so lost its power to draw, that it must be bolstered up by putting on a selection from a very questionable opera, rendered by a professional opera singer, as an additional attraction to help out our once crucified and now glorified Savior and Lord.

This advertisement set me to thinking as to what really was the great attraction to men in this day as well as in former days? At once there came to my mind the words of our text containing God's answer to this question: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself." There is nothing else that draws like the uplifted Christ. Movies may get a crowd of empty-headed and empty-hearted young men and maidens, and even middle-aged folks without brains or moral earnestness, for a time, but nothing really draws and holds the men and women who are worthwhile like Jesus Christ lifted up. Nineteen centuries of Christian history prove the drawing power of Jesus when He is properly presented to men. I have seen some wonderful verification of the assertion of our text as to the marvelous drawing power of the uplifted Christ.

In London, for two continuous months, six afternoons and evenings each week, I saw the great Royal Albert Hall filled and even jammed, and sometimes as many turned away as got in, though it would seat 10,000 people by actual count and stand 2,000 more in the dome. On the opening night of these meetings a leading reporter of the city of London came to me before the service began and said, "You have taken this building for two consecutive months?" "Yes." "And you expect to fill it every day?" "Yes." "Why," he said, "no one has ever attempted to hold two weeks' consecutive meetings here of any kind. Gladstone himself could not fill it for two weeks. And you really expect to fill it for two months?" I replied, "Come and see." He came and he saw.

On the last night, when the place was jammed to its utmost capacity and thousands outside clamored for admission, he came to me again and I said, "Has it been filled?" He smiled and said, "It has." But what filled it? No show on earth could have filled it once a day for many consecutive days. The preacher was no remarkable orator. He had no gift of wit and humor, and would not have exercised it if he had. The newspapers constantly called attention to the fact that he was no orator, but the crowds came and came and came. On both rainy days, and fine days they crowded in or stood outside, oftentimes in a downpour of rain, in the vain hope of getting in. WHAT DREW THEM? The uplifted

Christ preached and sung in the power of the Holy Spirit, given in answer to the daily prayers of 40,000 people scattered throughout the

earth.

In Liverpool, the Tournament Hall, that was said to seat 20,000 people, and that by actual count seated 12,500 comfortably, located in a very out-of-the-way part of the city, several blocks from the nearest street-car line, and perhaps half a mile from all the regular street-car lines, was filled night after night for three months, and on the last night they crowded 15,000 people into the building at seven o'clock, and then emptied it, and crowded another 15,000 in who had been patiently waiting outside; 30,000 people drawn in a single night! By what? By whom? Not by the preacher, not by the singer, but by Him who had said nearly nineteen hundred years before, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself."

The Exact Meaning of the Text

Let us now look at the exact meaning of the text.

First, notice who is the speaker, and what were the circumstances under which He spoke? The Speaker was our Lord Jesus. Not the Christ of men's imaginings, but the Christ of reality, the Christ of actual historic fact. Not the Christ of Mary Baker Eddy's maudlin fancy, or of Madam Besant's mystical imaginings, but the Christ of actuality, who lived here among men and was seen, heard and handled by men, and who was soon to die a real death to save real sinners from a real hell and a real heaven.

The circumstances were these. Certain Greeks among those who went up to worship at the Jewish feast came to one of the apostles, Philip, and said, "We would see Jesus" (John 12:21). And Philip went to Andrew and told Andrew what these Greeks said. Andrew and Philip together came and told Jesus. In the heart-cry of these Greeks, "We would see Jesus," our Lord recognized the yearning of the universal heart, the heart of Greek, as well as Jew, for a satisfying Savior. The Greeks had their philosophers and sages, their would-be satisfiers and saviors, the greatest the world has ever known-Socrates, Aristotle, Plato, Epictetus, Epimenides, and many others-but they did not save, and they did not satisfy, and the Greeks cried, "We would see JESUS." In their eager coming Jesus foresaw the millions of all nations who would flock to Him when He had been crucified as the universal Savior, meeting all the needs of all mankind, and so He cried, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself."

In the second place, notice the words, "If I be lifted up." To what does Jesus refer? The next verse answers the question. "But this he said, signifying by what manner of death he should die" (John 12:33). Jesus referred to His lifting up on the cross, to die as an atoning Savior for all mankind. This verse is often quoted as if it meant that, if we lifted up Christ in our preaching, He would draw men. That is true, and it is a crying shame that we do not hold just Him up more in our preaching, and we would draw far more people if we did; but that is not our Lord's meaning. The lifting up clearly referred not to His not being

lifted up by His enemies on the cross, to expose Him to awful shame and to an agonizing death. It is Christ crucified who draws; it is Christ crucified who meets the deepest needs of the heart of all mankind. It is an atoning Savior, a Savior who atones for the sins of men by His death, and thus saves from the holy wrath of an infinitely holy God, who meets the needs of men, and thus draws all men, for all men are sinners. Preach any Christ but a crucified Christ, and you will not draw men for long. Preach any gospel but a gospel of atoning blood, and it will not draw for long.

Unitarianism does not draw men. Unitarian churches are born only to die. Their corpses strew New England today. Many of their ministers have been intellectually among the most brilliant our country has ever known, but their churches even under scholarly and brilliant ministers die, die, die. Why? Because Unitarianism presents a gospel without atoning blood, and Jesus has said and history has proven it true, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself"

"Christian Science," strangely so called, for as has been often truly said, "is neither Christian nor scientific," draws crowds of men and women of a certain type, men and women who have or imagine that they have physical ailments, and who will follow anything no matter how absurd, that promises them a little surcease from their real or imagined pains. It also draws crowds who wish to fancy that they have some religion without paying the price of true religion, genuine love, real self-sacrifice, and costly sympathy. But Christian Science does not draw all men, that is, all kinds and conditions and ranks of men. In fact for the most part it does not draw men at all, but women, and the alleged men it draws are for the most part women in trousers, and men who see any easy way to make a living by preying upon the credulity of luckless females. No, a bloodless gospel, a gospel with a Christ but not a Christ lifted up on a cross, does not meet the universal needs of men, and so does not draw all men.

Congregationalism of late years has been sadly tainted with Unitarianism. In spite of the fact that it has been an eye-witness to Unitarianism's steady decay and death, Congregationalism has largely dropped the atoning blood out of its theology, and consequently it is rapidly going to the wall. Its once great Andover Seminary, still great in the size of its endowment that was given for the teaching of Bible orthodoxy, but which the conscienceless teachers of a bloodless theology have deliberately taken for the exploitation of their "damnable heresies" (2 Peter 2:1), and which is still great in the number of its professors, graduated at their annual graduating exercises last spring just three men, one a Japanese, one a Hindu, and one an American. A theology without a crucified Savior, without the atoning blood, won't draw. It does not meet the need. No, no, the words of our Lord are still true, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself."

Note, in the third place, the words, "Draw all men." Does "all men" mean all individuals or men of all races? Did Jesus mean that every man and woman who lived on this earth would be drawn to Him, or did He mean that men of all races would be drawn to Him? The context answers the question. The Greeks, as we have seen, came to one of the apostles, Philip, and said, "We would see Jesus," and Philip had gone and told Andrew,

and Andrew and Philip had gone and told Jesus. Our Lord's ministry during His earthly life was to Jews only, and in the coming of these Greeks so soon before His death, our Lord saw the presage of the coming days when by His death on the cross the barrier between Jews and Gentiles would be broken down and all nations would have their opportunity equally with the Jews, when by His atoning death on the cross men of all nations would be drawn to Him. He did not say that He would draw every individual, but that all races of men: Greeks as well as Jews, Romans, Scythians, French, English, Germans, Japanese, Americans, and men of all nations. He is a universal Savior, and true Christianity is a universal religion. Mohammedanism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and all other religions, but Christianity, are religions of a restricted application. Christianity, with a crucified Christ as its center, is a universal religion that meets the needs of all mankind. It meets the needs of the European as well as the needs of the Asiatic, the needs of the Occident as well as the needs of the Orient, the needs of the American Indian and the needs of the African Negro; and so our Lord said, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself."

No race has ever been found anywhere on this earth to which the gospel did not appeal and whose deepest need the crucified Christ did not meet. Many years ago, when Charles Darwin, the eminent English scientist, came in contact with the Terre del Fuegians in their gross degradation, he publicly declared that here was a people to whom it was vain to send missionaries, as the gospel could not do anything for them. But brave men of God went there and took the gospel to them in the power of the Holy Spirit, and demonstrated that it met the need of the Terre del Fuegians, with such grave results that Charles Darwin publicly admitted his mistake and became a regular subscriber to the work.

The gospel, with a crucified Christ as its center, meets the needs of all conditions and classes of men as well as of all races. It meets the need of the millionaire and the need of the pauper; it meets the need of great men of science like James D. Dana our Lord Kelvin, and the need of the man or woman who cannot read nor write; it meets the need of the king on the throne and the need of the laborer in the ditch. I myself have seen with my own eyes noblemen and servant girls, university deans and men who could scarcely read, prisoners in penitentiaries and leaders in moral uplift, brilliant lawyers and dull plodding workingmen, come under its attraction, and be saved by its power. But it was only because I made "Christ crucified," His atoning work, the center of my preaching.

Notice in the fourth place, the words "Unto me." "I will draw all men unto me." The Revised Version reads "Unto myself," and that was just what Jesus said, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself." It is not to a creed or a system of doctrine that Jesus draws men, but to a Person, to Himself. That is what we need, a Person, Jesus Himself. As He Himself once said, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). Creeds and confessions of faith are all right in their place, they are of great value; the organized church is of great value, it is indispensable, and it is the most important institution in the world today; society would soon go to rack and ruin without it. We are all under solemn obligation to God and to our fellow-man to support the church and belong to it, but creeds and confessions of faith cannot save. The church cannot save. A Divine Person can save,

Jesus Christ, and He alone. So He says, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself."

Why Christ Lifted Up on the Cross Draws All Men Unto Himself

But why does Christ lifted up on the cross, the crucified Christ, draw all men unto Himself? There are two reasons why Christ lifted up, and Christ crucified draws all men unto Himself.

First, Christ crucified draws all men unto Himself because Christ crucified meets the first, the deepest, the greatest and most fundamental need of man. What is man's first, greatest, deepest, most fundamental need? A Savior? A Savior from what? First of all, and underlying all else, a Savior from the guilt of sin. Every man of every race has sinned. As Paul put it in Romans 3:22, 23, "There is no difference, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, at this point, nor is there any difference between English and German at this point, there is no difference between American and Japanese at this point, no difference between the European and Asiatic, no difference between the American and the African. "There is no difference; for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God."

Every man of every race is a sinner, "there is no difference" at this point. And every man shall have to answer for his sin to the infinitely holy God who rules this universe. Therefore, all men need an atoning Savior who can by His atoning death make propitiation for, and so cover up, our sins-thus reconciling us to this holy God, delivering us from His awful wrath, and bringing us out into the glorious sunlight of His favor. And Jesus lifted up is the only atoning Savior in the universe. He who alone was at the same time God and man, He alone can make atonement for sin. He has made it, has made a perfect atonement, and God has accepted His atonement and, testified to His acceptance of His atonement by raising Him from the dead. The Lord Jesus actually meets our need. He actually meets every man's first, greatest, deepest, most fundamental need, and He alone.

In all the universe there is no other religion but Christianity that even offers an atoning Savior. Mohammedanism offers Mohammed, "The Prophet," a teacher, but not a Savior. Buddhism offers Buddha, supposedly at least a wonderful teacher, "The Light of Asia," but not an atoning Savior. Confucianism offers Confucius, a marvelous teacher far ahead of his time, but not an atoning Savior. No religion offers an atoning Savior, offers an atonement of any real character, but Christianity. This is the radical point of difference between Christianity and every other religion in the world, yet some fool preachers are trying to eliminate from Christianity this, its very point of radical difference from all other religions. But such an emasculated Christianity will not reach the needs of men and Will not draw men. It never has and it never will.

The Bible and history are at one at this point. Jesus Christ offers Himself lifted up on the cross to redeem us from the curse of the law, by "becoming a curse in our behalf." "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us; for it is written,

Cursed is, every one that hangeth on a tree" (Galatians 3:13). Men know their need; they may try to forget it, they may try to deny it, they may try to drown their sense of it by drink and dissipation or by wild pleasure-seeking or wild money-getting, or by listening to fake preachers in supposedly orthodox pulpits, like one who in this city declared recently that, "the old sense of sin is fast disappearing," and added, "the change is for the better not for the worse." He spoke also of "imaginary and artificial sins like "the sin of unbelief," and then went on to say, "In this we agree with Christ," apparently not knowing enough about the Bible to know that Jesus Himself was the very one who said in John 16:8, 9, "And he, when he is come, will convict the world in respect of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment; of sin, because they believe not on me." But in spite of all our attempts to drown or stupefy or silence our sense of sin, our consciousness of guilt before a Holy God, we all have it, and like Banquo's Ghost, it will not down. Nothing gives the guilty conscience abiding peace but the atoning blood of Jesus Christ. And so, Christ lifted up draws all men unto Him, and even wicked ministers of Satan, like the preacher I have just referred to, sometimes come to their senses and flee to the real Christ, Christ crucified, as I hope this one may. Yes, Jesus, Jesus only, Jesus lifted up on the cross, Jesus crucified for our sins, making full atonement for our sins, He and He alone meets the deepest need of us all, and so His cross draws us all unto Himself. Happy the man or the woman who yields to that drawing; woe be to the man or woman who resists that drawing; final gloom, despondency, and despair are their lot. Oh, how many men and women who have gotten their eyes opened to see the facts, to see their awful guilt, and who have been plunged into deepest consequent despair, have come to me, and I have pointed them to Jesus on the cross and have shown them by God's Word all their sins laid upon Him and thus settled. They have come to Him and believed God's testimony about Him, that He, had borne all their sins in His own body on the cross, and they have found perfect peace and boundless joy. And that is the only way to find perfect peace and boundless joy.

Will you set out to find peace? If you do not, great gloom and utter despair, await you some day, in this world or in the world to come. In my first pastorate I tried to get a man to come to Christ lifted up to meet his need of pardon. Though this was many years ago, he held to the theology that is preached as "new theology" today. He sought to still the voice of conscience and stupefy his sense of sin by denying his guilt and his need of an atoning Savior. He did not wish to listen to me nor to see me. But the, hour came when death drew nigh. A cancer was eating its way through scalp and skull into his brain; then he cried to those about his dying bed, "Send for Mr. Torrey." I hurried to his side. He was in despair. "Oh!" he said, "Dr. Tidhall tells me that I have but a short time to live, that as soon as this cancer gets a little further and eats through the thin film of skull and touches the brain I am a dead man. Tell me how to be saved."

I tried to make as plain as I knew how the way of salvation through the uplifted Christ, Christ uplifted on the cross, and I think I know how to make it plain, but he had waited too long, he could not grasp it. I stayed with him. Night came on. I said to his family, "You have been up night after night with him, I will sit with him tonight." They instructed me what to do, how to minister to him. Time after time during the night I had to go to another room to get some nourishment for him, and as I would come back into

the room where he lay, from his bed in the corner there would rise the constant cry, "Oh, I wish I were a Christian. Oh, I wish I were a Christian. Oh, I wish I were a Christian." And thus he died.

In the second place, Christ lifted up on the cross, Christ crucified draws all men unto Him, because lifted up there to die for us He reveals His wonderful love, and the wondrous love of the Father for us. "Hereby know we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us" (1 John 3:16), and "God commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:6, 8). There is nothing that draws men like love. Love draws all men in every clime. But no other love draws like the love of God. John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life," has broken thousands of hard hearts.

One night, preaching in my own church in Minneapolis, the whole choir stayed for the after-meeting. The leading soprano was an intelligent young woman, but she was living a worldly life. She remained with the rest. In the after-meeting, her mother arose in the back of the church and said, "I wish you would pray for the conversion of my daughter." I did not look around but knew instinctively that her cheeks were flushing, and her eyes were flashing with anger. As soon as the meeting was dismissed, I hurried down so that I would meet her before she got out of the church. As she came toward me I held out my hand to her. She stamped her foot, and with flashing eyes cried, "Mr. Torrey, my mother knows better than to do that. She knows it will only make me worse." I said, "Sit down, Cora." She sat down, and without any argument I opened my Bible to Isaiah 53:5, and began to read, "*But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.*" She burst into tears, and the next night accepted Jesus Christ. I had to go to Duluth for a few days, and when I returned I found that she was seriously ill. One morning her brother came hurrying up to my home and said that she was apparently dying, that she was unconscious and white from the loss of blood. I hastened down. As I entered the room, she lay there with her eyes closed, with the whitest face I ever saw on one who was not actually dead. She was apparently unconscious, scarcely breathing. I knelt by her side to pray, more for the sake of the mother who stood beside the bed than for her, for I supposed that she was beyond help or hearing. But no sooner had I finished my prayer, than in a clear, full, richly musical tone she began to pray. These were about her words, "Heavenly Father, if it be Thy will, raise me up that as I have used my voice for myself and only to please myself, I may use my voice for Thy glory, but if in Thy wisdom Thou seest that it is best for me not to live, I shall be glad to go to be with Christ," and she went to be with Christ. Oh, I have seen thousands melted as I have repeated to them and shown them the picture of Christ on the cross, as told in Isaiah 53:5, "But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed."

A few days ago I received a missionary magazine containing a testimony from one who was going to Egypt under the Egypt General Mission. This young missionary said, "When I was twelve years old, during the Torrey-Alexander meetings, in 1904, I gave my

heart to the Lord Jesus Christ. Dr. Torrey was speaking on the text, Isaiah 53:5, and he asked us to repeat the words with him, but changing the word "our" into the word "my." While repeating the text in this way I suddenly realized, as if for the first time, that Jesus had really suffered all this for me, and there and then I gave my life to Him."

Oh! men and women, look now! See Jesus Christ lifted up on the cross, see Him hanging on that awful cross, see Him wounded for your transgressions, bruised for your iniquities, and the chastisement of your peace laid on Him. Oh, men and women living in sin, men and women rejecting Christ for the world, men and women who have looked to the lies of Christian Science, Unitarianism and other systems that deny His atoning blood, Listen! "But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed."

Won't you yield to that love, won't you give up your sin, give up your worldly pleasures, give up your willful errors, and accept the Savior who loves you and died for you, who was "Wounded for your transgressions; bruised for your iniquities" and upon whom the chastisement of your peace was laid? Accept Him right now.