

The Wonderful **by T DeWitt Talmage**

"His name shall be called Wonderful." Isaiah 9:6

The prophet lived in a dark time. For some three thousand years the world had been getting worse. Kingdoms had arisen and perished. As the captain of a vessel in distress sees relief coming across the water, so the prophet, amid the stormy times in which he lived, put the telescope of prophecy to his eye, and saw, seven hundred and fifty years ahead, one Jesus advancing to the rescue.

I want to show that when Isaiah called Christ the Wonderful, he spoke wisely. In most houses there is a picture of Christ. Sometimes it represents him with face effeminate; sometimes with a face despotic. I have seen West's grand sketch of the rejection of Christ; I have seen the face of Christ as cut on an emerald, said to be by command of Julius Caesar; and yet I am convinced that I shall never know how Jesus looked until, on that sweet Sabbath morning, I shall wash the last sleep from my eyes in the cool river of heaven. I take up this book of divine photographs, and I look at Luke's sketch, at Mark's sketch, at John's sketch, and at Paul's sketch, and I say, with Isaiah, "Wonderful!"

I think that you are all interested in the story of Christ. You feel that he is the only one who can help you. You have unbounded admiration for the commander who helped his passengers ashore when he himself perished, but have you no admiration for him who rescued our souls, himself falling back into the waters from which he had saved us?

Christ was wonderful in the magnetism of his person.

After the battle of Antietam, when a general rode along the lines, although the soldiers were lying down exhausted, they rose with great enthusiasm and huzzaed. As Napoleon returned from his captivity, his first step on the wharf shook all the kingdoms, and two hundred and fifty thousand men joined his standard. It took three thousand troops to watch him in his exile. So there have been men of wonderful magnetism of person. But hear me while I tell you of a poor young man that came up from Nazareth to produce a thrill such as has never been excited by any other. Napoleon had around him the memories of Austerlitz, and Jena, and Badajos; but here was a man who had fought no battles; who wore no epaulettes; who brandished no sword. He is no titled man of the schools, for he never went to school. He had probably never seen a prince, or shaken hands with a nobleman. The only extraordinary person we know of as being in his company was his own mother and she was so poor that in the most delicate and solemn hour that ever comes to a woman's soul she was obliged to lie (down amid camel-drivers grooming the beasts of burden.

I imagine Christ one day standing in the streets of Jerusalem. A man descended from high lineage is standing beside him, and says, "My father was a merchant prince; he had a castle on the beach at Galilee. Who was your father?" Christ

answers, "Joseph, the carpenter." A man from Athens is standing there unrolling his parchment of graduation, and says to Christ, "Where did you go to school?" Christ answers, "I never graduated." Aha! the idea of such an unheralded young man attempting to command the attention of the world! As well some little fishing village on Long Island shore attempt to arraign New York. Yet no sooner does he set his foot in the towns or cities of Judea than every thing is in commotion. The people go out on a picnic, taking only food enough for a day, yet are so fascinated with Christ that, at the risk of starving, they follow him out into the wilderness. A nobleman falls down flat before him, and says, "My daughter is dead." A beggar tries to rub the dimness from his eyes, and says, "Lord, that my eyes may be opened." A poor, sick, panting Roman presses through the crowd, and says, "I must touch the hem of his garment." Children, who love their mother better than any one else, struggle to get into his arms, and to kiss his cheek, and to run their fingers through his hair, and for all time putting Jesus so in love with the little ones that there is hardly a nursery in Christendom from which he does not take one, saying, "I must have them; I will fill heaven with these; for every cedar that I plant in heaven I will have fifty white lilies. In the hour when I was a poor man in Judea they were not ashamed of me, and now that I have come to a throne I do not despise them. Hold it not back, oh weeping mother; lay it on my warm heart. Of such is the kingdom of heaven."

What is this coming down the road? A triumphal procession. He is seated, not in a chariot, but on an ass; and yet the people take off their coats and throw them in the way. Oh, what a time Jesus made among the children, among the beggars, among the fishermen, among the philosophers! You may boast of self-control, but if you had seen him you would have put your arms around his neck and said, "Thou art altogether lovely."

Jesus was wonderful in the opposites and seeming antagonisms of his nature. You want things logical and consistent, and you say, "How could Christ be God and man at the same time?" John says Christ was the Creator: "All things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made." Matthew says that he was omnipresent: "Where two or three are met together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Christ declares His own eternity: "I am Alpha and Omega." How call he be a lion, under his foot crushing kingdoms, and yet a lamb licking the hand that slays him? At what point do the throne and the manger touch? If Christ was God, why flee into Egypt? Why not stand his ground? Why, instead of bearing the cross, not lift up his right hand and crush his assassins? Why stand and be spit upon? Why sleep on the mountain, when he owned the palaces of eternity? Why catch fish for his breakfast on the beach in the chill morning, when all the pomegranates are his, and all the vineyards his, and all the cattle his, and all the partridges his? Why walk when weary, and his feet stone-bruised, when he might have taken the splendors of the sunset for his equipage, and moved with horses and chariots of fire? Why beg a drink from the wayside, when out of the crystal chalices of eternity he poured the Euphrates, the Mississippi, and the

Amazon, and dipping his hand in the fountains of heaven, and shaking that hand over the world, from the tips of his fingers dripped the great lakes and the oceans? why let the Roman regiment put him to death, when he might have rode down the sky followed by all the cavalry of heaven, mounted on white horses of eternal victory?

You cannot understand. Who can? You try to confound me. I am confounded before you speak; Paul said it was unsearchable. He went climbing up from argument to argument, and from antithesis to antithesis, and from glory to glory, and then sank down in exhaustion as he saw far above him other heights of divinity unscaled, and exclaimed, "that in all things he might have the PRE-EMINENCE." Again: Christ was wonderful in his teaching.

The people had been used to formalities and technicalities; Christ upset all their notions as to how preaching ought to be done. There was this peculiarity about his preaching: the people knew what he meant. His illustrations were taken from the hen calling her chickens together; from salt; from candles; from fishing tackle; from a hard creditor collaring a debtor. How few pulpits of this day would have allowed him entrance? He would have been called undignified and familiar in his style of preaching. And yet the people went to hear him. Those old Jewish rabbis might have preached on the side of Olivet fifty years and never got an audience. The philosophers sneered at his ministrations and said, "This will never do!" The lawyers caricatured, but the common people heard him gladly. Suppose you that there were any sleepy people in his audiences? Suppose you that any woman who ever mixed bread was ignorant of what he meant when he compared the kingdom of heaven with leaven or yeast? Suppose you that the sunburned fishermen, with the fish-scales upon their hands, were listless when he spoke of the kingdom of heaven as a net? We spend three years in college studying ancient mythology, and three years in the theological seminary learning how to make a sermon, and then we go out to save the world; and if we can do it according to Claude's Sermonizing, or Blair's Rhetoric, or Kames's Criticism, we will let the world go to perdition. If we save nothing else, we will save Claude and Blair. We see a wreck in sight. We must go out and save the crew and passengers. We wait until we get on our fine cap and coat, and find our shining oars, and then we push out methodically and scientifically, while some plain shoresman, in rough fishing-smack, and with broken oar-lock, goes out and gets the crew and passengers, and brings them ashore in safety. We throw down our delicate oars and say, "What a ridiculous thing to save men in that way! You ought to have done it scientifically and beautifully." "Ah!" says the shoresman, "if those sufferers had waited until you got out your fine boat, they would have gone to the bottom."

The work of a religious teacher is to save men; and though every law of grammar should be snapped in the undertaking, and there be nothing but awkwardness and blundering in the mode, all hail to the man who saves a soul from death! Christ, in his preaching, was plain, earnest, and wonderfully sympathetic. We

can not dragoon men into heaven. We cannot drive them in with the butt-end of a catechism. We waste our time in trying to catch flies with acids instead of the, sweet honeycomb of the Gospel. We try to make crab-apples do the work of pomegranates.

Again: Jesus was wonderful in his sorrows.

The sun smote him, and the cold chilled him, the rain pelted him, thirst parched him, and hunger exhausted him. Shall I compare his sorrow to the sea? No; for that is sometimes hushed into a calm. Shall I compare it with the night? No; for that sometimes gleams with Orion, or kindles with Aurora. If one thorn should be thrust through your temple, you would faint. But here is a whole crown made from the Rhamnus, or Spina Christi --small, sharp, stinging thorns. The mob makes a cross. They put down the long beam, and on it they fasten a shorter beam. Got him at last. Those hands, that have been doing kindnesses and wiping away tears--hear the hammer driving the spikes through them. Those feet that have been going about on ministrations of mercy--battered against the cross. Then they lift it up. Look! Look! Look! Who will help Him now? Come, men of Jerusalem--ye whose dead he brought to life; ye whose sick he healed: who will help him seize the weapons of the soldiers?" "None to help! Having carried such a cross for us, shall we refuse to take our cross for him?"

"Shall Jesus bear the cross alone,
And all the world go free?
No; there's a cross for every one,
And there's a cross for me. "

You know the process of engrafting. You bore a hole into a tree, and put in the branch of another tree. This tree of the cross was hard and rough, but into the holes where the nails went there have been grafted branches of the Tree of Life that now bear fruit for all the nations. The original tree was bitter, but the branches engrafted were sweet, and now all the nations pluck the fruit and live forever.

Again: Christ was wonderful in his victories.

First--over the forces of nature. The sea is a crystal sepulcher. It swallowed the Central America, the President, the Spanish Armada as easily as any fly that ever floated on it. The inland lakes are fully as terrible in their wrath.

Recent travelers tell us that Galilee, when aroused in a storm, is overwhelming; and yet that sea crouched in his presence and licked his feet. He knew all the waves and the wind. When he beckoned, they came. When he frowned, they fled. The heel of his foot made no indentation on the solidified water. Medical science has wrought great changes in rheumatic limbs and diseased blood, but when the muscles are entirely withered no human power can restore them, and when a limb is once dead, it is dead. But here is a paralytic--his hand lifeless. Christ says to him, "Stretch forth thy hand!" and he stretches it forth.

In the Eye Infirmary, how many diseases of that delicate organ have been cured! But Jesus says to one born blind, " Be open!" and the light of heaven rushes

through gates that have never before been opened. The frost or an axe may kill a tree, but Jesus smites one dead with a word.

Chemistry can do many wonderful things, but what chemist, at a wedding, when the refreshment gave out, could change a pail of water into a cask of wine?

What human voice could command a school of fish? Yet here is a voice that marshals the scaly tribes, until in the place where they had let down the net and pulled it up with no fish in it, they let it down again, and the disciples lay hold and begin to pull, when, by reason of the multitude of fish, the net brake.

Nature is his servant. The flowers he twisted them into his sermons; the winds—they were his lullaby when he slept in the boat; the rain—it hung glittering on the thick foliage of the parables; the star of Bethlehem—it sang a Christmas carol over his birth; the rocks—they beat, a dirge at his death. Behold Iris victory over the grave! Tile hinges of the family vault become very rusty because they are never opened except to take another in. There is a knob on the outside of the door of the sepulchre, but none on the inside. Here comes the Conqueror of Death. He enters that realm and says, "Daughter of Jairus, sit up;" and she sat up. To Lazarus, "Come forth;" and he came forth. To the widow's son he said, "Get up from that bier;" and he goes home with his mother. Then Jesus snatched up the keys of death, and hung them to his girdle, and cried until all the grave-yards of the earth heard him, "O Death! I will be thy plagues! O Grave! I will be thy destruction!"

But Christ's victories have only just begun. This world is his, and he must have it. What is the matter in this country? Why all these financial troubles? There never will be a permanent peace in this land until Christ rules it. This land was discovered for Christ, and until our cities shall be evangelized, and north, south, east, and west shall acknowledge Christ as King and Redeemer, we can not have permanent prosperity. What is the matter with Spain? with France? with all of the nations? All the congresses of the nations can not bring quiet. All the Bismarcks and Gladstones of the world cannot permanently settle things. When governments not only theoretically, but practically, acknowledge the Savior of the world, there will be peace in the United States, peace in Spain, peace in France, peace in Germany, peace in Mexico, peace every where. In that day the sea will have more ships than now, but there will not be one "man-of-war." The foundries of the world will jar with still mightier industries, but there will be no molding of bullets. Printing-presses will fly their cylinders with greater speed, but there shall go forth no iniquitous trash. In laws, in constitutions, on exchange, in scientific laboratory, on earth as in heaven, Christ shall be called Wonderful. Let that work of the world's regeneration begin in your heart, oh hearer! A Jesus so kind, a Jesus so good, a Jesus so loving—how can you help but love him?

If, is a beautiful moment when two persons who have pledged each other, heart and hand, stand in church and have the banners of marriage proclaimed. Father and

mother, brothers and sisters stand around the altar. The minister of Jesus gives the counsel; the ring is set; earth and heaven witness it; the organ sounds, and amid many congratulations they start out on the path of life together.

Oh that this might be your marriage-day! Stand up Immortal soul. Thy Beloved comes to get his betrothed. Jesus stretches forth his hand and says, "I will love the with an everlasting love," and you respond, "My Beloved Is mire, and I am his." I put your hand in His henceforth be one. No trouble shall part you--no time cool your love. Side by side on earth--side by side in heaven! Now let the blossoms of heavenly gardens fill the house with their redolence, and all the organs of God peal forth the wedding march of eternity.

Hark! "The voice of my beloved! Behold, he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills."