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Jesus, the Lover of Human Nature [String-Bound Sermons]

Earl Clement Davis

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Jesus, The Lodor of Hum Thatme .. II. In Series of Servors on the Peligin of ferus and its Relation to the Religions Schop of Worlew Life. In speaking last Sunchy of the Keligion of Jerun. June the fourt of min of ferrer as a mon, and its relation to the Religious that of worlen Life. I tried to fint out the fact form is in close sympothy with one of The quot icleak of to. dry, - that to ferrer the voice of wature spoke, telling him of the former, and manifestations of Gochin the world. I based this states ment ufor the enidences formed in his reforted sorgings, wherein it is workelier he uses the symbolism of watere to inteaching the truths of life, because thre truthe had come to him as notice spoke to him. again I found enidence

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and by the ferfle, we less than three (5 hunched thread wer, gave of their liver in the civil wor, Shat men might fee themselves from the bondoge of ignorance and the degraching the of showing to conclitions me have established on great echication insitutions, and our furthing with all former of our might the work of cleaning away still war the limitation of life which fold men entitualled with in the oferation of mere wateral lovers, that mere might be freed from the suferstituins down in ation of an authrily in their religions life, they have become martyrs, they have devied the authrily of the church, they have denied the authrity of the Bible. they have derived are derying the authrity of the Christ of theology, and have relied total and afor their our individend experiences, sufflemented and confirmed by the experience of the fast. Beneath all the conflexition of this quent

nation of ours, this I that idea The O preaching speak in us, is the soll formulation upon which we rest. as we fare the steam · duty of carting off the ontwin institution of the fast, this is the one great question which must be faced and answered, Do you believe in humm wature, du you believe in humm fredom, Do you believe that were is anything greater the ame ba from which he has evoluced ?. Do you think that anything has been accomplished in this great fiveer of Evolution ! you aid we have I are believe, or how I do. ware en behine in human freedom as they do, when you are fresent to we the astrunding enidence of science That we the live wat in a world of preclim, but in a writel of absolute and uncomforming low, the voice of nature speaketer us of low, of orcher, of four, ferreling so far as on

unceasing investigations en show us, the intervent Time to be the Muinene, that me having to be true, But the voice of wow speaks to us of freeding, out freedom from the low, but Jucken under the low, preclime to use, and control, and wohe subservient to his needs the two forrer and from which and form to the lows under which the Justime he finds his preadure, Parting you this faith that the voice of win spohn not only of further, and order, but of freedom inder the lives of truth Gerchien, and beauty , im has transformed the forest of the field whit his flure of chuelding he has token the rock of the earth and work it whit a temple for his goel, he has tohen the lightening from the chroch, and brought it unler his control, to to seave his nearly, to minister to his even incearing

wants. The milel and uncontrollable master which he firsts in fire and he has now worke his hundle and obechint servent. Beneath energy activity of human life, there comes, This voice of won fivelaining his mighty former of freechow much the hur, to subjugate, and direct the great ever forces which of the minune. But was the Thit even, almost every activity speaks of the firmer of word freedom, that there are loves of right conclust, lows which should goven on daily life, that was has a former former to shore between the lower and higher, that was is worally reference: ble for his conclust, and if he does right, he is show wrong he is amenduble. Nofen this fundamentel faith all history rests. Afou this faith at every act of our life, ane which distinguishes us from the anivol serts. There before

dick a farfle flace so much surferi's upon upon the word responsibility of conshirt on to shy. The faith that we are wrock respiritle for our curchent, for the is only another my of saying that preaching speaks in us. the stone speaks to us of former and low: the tree spoke to us of former, and how, and gurnting life, the ariund feats to us of former, and low, favel guning life, and activity, touched by the sold implacions former of mind, but was speak of all there, former, absolute low, and growing life and activity truched by the greatier of a reasoning mind, and over and above them all it sources the clarin my for freedow uncles the for, This is the weltimate basis ofen which the whole fortie of on fre watin rest. as such it is one of the great ideals Fort only of our folitable, but also

would to day. But why do we believe in freechow, in the sufremacy, and the intrinsic with of the inclinicable to sky, why is it that with in the last one hunched and To years, we have achined from Edwards correction of the total defearity of war, of though channings conception of The Dignity of wor, and Parker curreftin of whility of un to Emerine englin of the Divisity of war, in whom the voice of freedom speaking fivelanin? ing the wonderfre truth, that the voice of much wer which spake of freeching is the for voice of God. Do me behine this because me have submitted to it to as a truth revealed by a sufernatural church. or a sufernativel Bible, or a sufervot= mol Churt? Che the certary me

have come to believe it because 10 me have demiced the authinty of all alleged sufernatural revelation, and have timed to search out the secrets of woris notice, and listen to the voice of Gorl on he speaks to us in the voice of wor. and fivelains the mystaring trutts of the human soul, We have some to accept this givent truth of the freedow of human votine, of its inherent climinity, and its infrinche fouri bribities, because just Far we have timed any firm the une of the of speculative doguro, to the healthy investigation of notice and heard the voice of notice years to us of lim. fine, gunth. and wogesty, so we have timed away from the uncolitas of Dogunatic A theology, and between to the voice of

war, and he show spoken to us! of freedom, of word serform bility, of duty of live, he has afoher to in of deep inner the longings hofer, and arfination, which are inversively greater; and work worder ful this, any coufleted with, a vistor Hugo has stucked the sime met servets of a fear bolgean, and belock hi has shiremend in the en hitered, and revengiful golley sline, the sure of a chint. a dickens has reached the devolate chamber of an allel dronge, and formal these the the sort, which could regard to the time wogie truch of himmen kinchen, and blow into hearty. How there has searched the secrets of a Herter Prime, and under his deep humon symplifie to touch bas

lead us to see the outword symbol of 12 impurity transformed into the ficture of a long and glowing very by which a sond way come to good, and wrhibily. We way understruck the word of Serves haither ele I condern thee, go and sin vo wor. of there is one vote which has been struch were there any other It is the great literature of the last hunched and Surgeon, it is this, that have wature is not defeared, but uncompletel, that it is chinine, the A How Robert huns twickes the heart to dry. and this is essentially the key note of his wintings, Robert Benning to the sweet suftle delicote song of Rife, as she foren, for claiming that Goli in his heaven, all's right mit Chu oun great fort of new Englind the wold. how they have sung of the quatures,

the slifth, the infinite fourthibites, of humonity, inferfect, but giving ofter wichen touth, greater life, as the voice of Goal bich in the great and one fruting conviction that fucloy featsings. In an fast bearing liver of human notice, lover vot became me con finel here and there a saint or a chuit, but be same we are find in the golly sline, a Jen Volgeon, a in an old Scinger, a given of cher, a m avelie a Therlet Prime, a someet, but ingined child of God, meng beneath its root of scarlet, a heart as five, and white, and clean, on even timed towards good in frayer, he are becoming lover of huncer votre became me en read

such a book a of from slovery, or [14, the working of an american, but became me un see were and better and smuter things in human life, and the human some, then men have seen before the geving, defering bodening the for hummily, for the sure of won, which is not only fundomental in our life to kly, but is cowing to have a deep mide and war fermanent flare in bje that it for ever for hoper, rests wat ofen ignorance of mon not upen milpel closing of the eyer to his indufections, First you overlooking, or denying the wort hideous and revolting enideres of the survival of the aniwal water in the un of freeching and workal duty, but rother it rests of a defer

a wors searching, a wors fare through kowledge of his inner wature, Llongh bur knuledze, though our offeriation me are coming to see not the total defeating, but the downing dowinity emerging from the fiery formace of exferience, as the gold everyes from the blost from the growing Jath in humm from the chorn the growing Jath in humm from the chorn the is the fiftening growing from and ein mite is the fiftening from symothetic love of the human sore, is the second great characteristic of the uligeins ideals of worken life, It is the truth firelained to us by the voice of wow spoking of in when yeah Freeching, what relation closer the religion of Jerus been to this truth ! And long for that def faithour for We have already seen that much of four truth wor the puil-of his keen and sympothetic officiation of notice

It his said of him the he spoke af ar 16 one having authrity, and wat as the scribes, Their have feculated, and derised every for the reason in the world, tot they have few but they have ferrictantly required to see the simple natural one. They have clothed him with the authority of some faculian sufer notival by they have even declared that it was very good him . self, but they have failed to volice the the authily with which he spoke wor the anthrily of experience. Jour Turched the heart of worn, wit became he spoke with any great sofemation authrity, not to to became he spoke or first, but because he afoke as won, because in every severance that he attend he was sending book into their hearts since truthe the he had gleaved from Their lines The Reeven that the fine in heard would be flined, and that they world see Just, because he

back seen it-formed. Blench me they which du hunger and thirt often rightensvers. for they shall be field," There so vo eroteric authily for such a statement and it is the fochier of experience, the you see the mider range of his ofrewaters when you glawce Throught his worels, and water, in addition to his references to watere, how he touches fith activities of life. There are the fishermen, the services, Rhanzees, the Publicus, and the simme, the centurion, the rich young me, the somen, the harvesters, the mire miguis, the probilingin, the faithful stimoles, the and, the firstigol sore, the form, the sick, the told, the blind, the work of sin, the freign friend, and countles other tinches, that till in flainer The works con devoir be, that the serve of Jens tuits, the volichty of his authority wor the experience which he had had in every life, if one thing see men agree

that the ensure of his gorfel is whent, to love ford, and to love um, wit if ye convet love we when ye have seen, for anye are god when ye have not seen,

Jesus, The Lover of Human Nature

Earl C. Davis

Pittsfield, MA

1906

II. In Series of Sermons on the Religion of Jesus and its Relation to the Religions Ideals of Modern Life

In speaking last Sunday of the Religion of Jesus from the point of view of Jesus as a man, and its relation to the Religious Ideals of Modern Life, I tried to point out the fact [that] Jesus is in close sympathy with one of the great ideals of today, that to Jesus the voice of nature spoke, telling him of the power and manifestations of God in the world. I based this statement upon the evidences found in his reported sayings, wherein he uses the symbolism of nature in teaching the truths of life, because those truths had come to him as nature spoke to him. Again I found evidence of this keen sympathetic love for nature which Jesus had by the fact that in the mountains, in the fields, and by the Sea of Galilea he did the most of his teaching. Furthermore that in the great critical moments of his life he went apart to commune with God, not in the temple, not at the alter, but upon the mountainside and in the Garden of Gethsemane. All these I regarded as evidences of the fact [that] nature was a source of truth and a foundation for Jesus' Religious faith. In this respect he is peculiarly related to the spirit of modern life, which by its scientific and its poetic, not to say religious, interest in nature, believes profoundly that nature speaks to us.

But in this love and sympathy for nature which Jesus manifested, there is something of vitality and activity which we need in many quarters today to give body and worth to the love of nature. That power which is present in Jesus' message from nature to man is this, that every word from nature points towards man. Every truth which nature speaks has its application in the life of man. Every hour of communion with God in nature is for the purpose of gaining new strength, new power, new courage, new truth, which one may carry into human life. The hand of nature points towards man. We are led to ask then, what is the attitude of the Religion of Jesus towards man? God speaks to him in nature, does he also speak to him in man? If God does speak to him in man, does that have any relation to the religious ideals of our own times?

We say reason to believe that the first of the three fundamental ideas of Emerson, that nature speaks to us, is especially characteristic of our life, that Emerson had really touched one of the life-giving springs, at which the man of today, thirsty and worn by toil, may come to quench his thirst. The second of the underlying ideas of Emerson's conception of life is this, that "Freedom speaks in us."¹

No one will deny that this idea that freedom speaks in us is characteristic of an American life. When we recall the history of our country, and its beginnings, this is the one great undercurrent that has born us on since first the Pilgrims, for freedom's sake, left the home of their birth and found their way to these bleak New England shores, up to this very day, when men are still chaffing under the restraints of old-time authority. For religious freedom the Pilgrims came. For political freedom we fought the great war of independence. For the freedom of another race, and the defense of a Government of the people, for the people and by the people, no less than three hundred thousand men gave up their lives in the civil war. That men might free themselves from the bondage of ignorance and the degrading ties of slavery to conditions, we have established our great educational institutions, and are pushing with all power of our might, the work of clearing away still more [of] the limitations of life which hold men enthralled within the operation of mere natural laws. That men might be freed from the superstitious domination of an authority in their religious life, they have become martyrs, they have denied the authority of the church, they have denied the authority of the Bible, they are denying the authority of the Christ of theology, and have relied upon their own

¹ Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) important American writer, leader of the transcendentalist movement. This does not appear to be a direct quote from Emerson. But Emerson did speak frequently of the importance of freedom.

individual experiences, supplemented and confirmed by the experience of the past. Beneath all the complexities of this great nation of ours, this idea that freedom speaks in us, is the solid foundation upon which we rest. As we face the stern duty of casting off the outworn institutions of the past, this is the one great question which must be faced and answered. Do you believe in human nature? Do you believe in human freedom? Do you believe that man is anything greater than the amoeba from which he has evolved? Do you think that anything has been accomplished in this great process of evolution?

I do.

You ask me how I can believe, or how we can believe in human freedom as they do, when you can present to me the astounding evidence of science that we live not in a world of freedom, but in a world of absolute and uncompromising law. The voice of nature speaks to us of law, of order, of power, pervading so far as our unceasing investigations can show us the inmost limits of the universe, that we know to be true. But the voice of man speaks to us of freedom, not freedom from the law, but freedom under the law, freedom to use, and control, and make subservient to his needs the forces and forms which conform to the laws under which he finds his freedom. Resting upon this faith that the voice of man speaks not only of law, and order, but of freedom under the laws of truth goodness and beauty, man has transformed the forests of the field into this place of dwelling, he has taken the rocks of the earth and made it into a temple for his God, he has taken the lightening from the clouds and brought it under his control to serve his needs, to minister to his ever-increasing wants. The wild and uncontrollable master which he finds in fire, he has now made his humble and obedient servant. Beneath every activity of human life, there comes this voice of man proclaiming his mighty power of freedom under the law to subjugate and direct the great forces of the universe.

But more than that even, almost every activity speaks of the power of moral freedom, that there are laws of right conduct, laws which should govern our daily life, that man has a power to choose between the lower and higher, that man is morally responsible for his conduct, and if he does wrong he is amendable. Upon this fundamental faith all history rests. Upon this faith, every act of our life which distinguishes us from the animal, rests. Never before did a people place so much emphasis upon the moral responsibility of conduct as today. The faith that we are morally responsible for our conduct is only another way of saying that freedom speaks in us.

The stone speaks to us of power and law; the tree speaks to us of power and law, and growing life; the animal speaks to us of power, and law, and growing life, and activity, touched by the mysterious power of mind; but man speaks of all these, power, absolute law, and growing life and activity, touched by the greatness of a reasoning mind, and over and above them all it sounds the clarion cry for freedom under the law. This is the ultimate basis upon which the whole fabric of our free nation rests. As such it is one of the great ideals not only of our political, but also of our religious world today.

But why do we believe in freedom, in the supremacy, and the intrinsic worth of the individual today? Why is it that within the last one hundred and 50 years, we have advanced from Edwards'² conception of the total depravity of man, up through Channing's³ conception of the Dignity of man and Parker's⁴ conception of the nobility of man to Emerson's conception of the Divinity of man, in whom the voice of freedom speaks proclaiming the wonderful truth that the voice of man which speaks of freedom is the voice of God. Do we believe this because we have submitted to it as a truth revealed by a supernatural church, or a supernatural Bible, or a supernatural Christ? On the contrary we have come to believe it because we have denied the authority of all alleged supernatural revelations, and have turned to search out the secrets of man's nature, and listen to the voice of God as he speaks to us in the voice of man, and proclaims the mysterious truths of the human soul.

 $^{^2}$ Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) important $18^{\rm th}$ century New England Calvinist preacher.

 $^{^3}$ William Ellery Channing (1780-1842) foremost Unitarian preacher in the United States in the early $19^{\rm th}$ century.

⁴ Theodore Parker (1810-1860) American transcendentalist and reforming minister of the Unitarian church.

We have come to accept this great truth of the freedom of human nature, of its inherent divinity, and its infinite possibilities, because just as we have turned away from the unrealities of speculative dogma, to the healthy investigations of nature and heard the voice of nature speak to us of law, power, growth, and majesty, so we have turned away from the unrealities of dogmatic theology and listened to the voice of man, and he has spoken to us of freedom, of moral responsibility, of duty, of love, he has spoken to us of deep inner longings, hopes and aspirations, which are immeasurably greater and more wonderful than any completed work. A Victor Hugo has studied the inner secrets of a Jean Valjean and behold he has discovered in the embittered and revengeful galley slave the soul of a Christ.⁵ A Dickens has reached the desolate chamber of an Old Scrouge, and found there the soul, which could respond to the magic touch of human kindness, and blossom into beauty.⁶ Hawthorne has searched the secrets of a Hester Prynne, and under his deep human sympathetic touch, has led us to see the outward symbol of infinity transformed into the picture of a long and gloomy way by which a soul may come to God, and nobility.⁷ We may understand the words of Jesus, "Neither do I condemn thee, go and sin no more."8 If there is one note which has been struck more than any other in the great literature of the last hundred and 50 years it is this, that human nature is not depraved, but uncompleted, that it is divine. How Robert Burns touches the heart today, and this is essentially the keynote of his writings.⁹ Robert Browning makes the sinful world respond to the sweet subtle delicate song of Pippa as she passes, proclaiming that "God's in his heaven, all's right with the world."10

⁵ Victor Hugo (1802-1885); reference to his 1862 novel Les Miserables.
⁶ Charles Dickens (1812-1870); reference is to his story, "A Christmas Carol," published in 1843.
⁷ Nathanial Hawthorne (1804-1864); reference is to his 1850 novel, The Scarlet Letter.
⁸ John 8:11.
⁹ Robert Burns (1759-1796); important Scottish poet.
¹⁰ Robert Browning (1812-1889); important English poet and playwright. The quotation is from his 1841 poem "Pippa Passes."

Our own great poets of New England, how they have sung of the greatness, the depth, the infinite possibilities, of humanity, imperfect, but growing and expanding, and reaching out after richer truth, greater life, as the voice of God bids in the great and overpowering conviction that freedom speaks in us. We are fast becoming lovers of human nature, lovers, not because we can find here and there a saint or a Christ, but because we can find in the galley slave, a Jean Valjean, or in an Old Scrooge, a giver of cheer, and in a Hester Prynne a sweet, but injured, child of God, moving beneath its coat of scarlet, a heart as pure and noble and clean as ever turned towards God in prayer. We are becoming lovers of human nature because we can read such a book as Up from Slavery¹¹ or The Making of an American, 12 because we can see more and better and sweeter things in human life, and the human soul, than men have seen before. The growing, deepening, broadening love for humanity, for the soul of man, which is not only fundamental in our life today, but is coming to have a wider and more permanent place in life than it has ever had before, rests not upon ignorance of man, not upon willful closing of the eyes to his imperfections, not upon overlooking, or denying the most hideous and revolting evidences of the survivals of the animal nature in the man of freedom and moral duty, but rather it rests upon a deeper, a more searching, a more thorough knowledge of his inner nature. Through our knowledge, through our appreciation, we are coming to see not the total depravity, but the dawning divinity emerging from the fiery furnace of experience, as the gold emerges from the blast furnace, purified and freed from the dross. The growing faith in human nature and love for it, is the referring fruit of experience.

This I say, this deepening, broadening sympathetic love of the human soul, is the second great characteristic of the religious ideals of modern life. It is the truth proclaimed to us by the voice of man in whom speaks

¹¹ Up from Slavery is the 1901 autobiography by Booker T. Washington (1856-1915).
¹² The Making of an American is the 1901 autobiography of Jacob Riis (1849-1914). Freedom. What relation does the Religion of Jesus bear to this truth?

We have already seen that much of Jesus' truth was the fruit of his keen and sympathetic appreciation of nature. It is said of him that he spoke as "one having authority and not as the scribes."¹³ Men have speculated and devised every possible reason in the world, but they have persistently refused to see the simple natural one. They have clothed him with the authority of some peculiar supernatural buy; they have even declared that it was very God himself, but they have failed to notice that the authority with which he spoke was the authority of experience. Jesus touched the heart of man, not because he spoke with any great supernatural authority, not because he spoke as priest, but because he spoke as man, because in every sentence that he uttered he was sending back into their hearts some truths that he had gleaned from their lives. He knew that the pure in heart would be blessed, and that they would see God, because he had seen it formed. "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled."14 There is no esoteric authority for such a statement. It is the product of experience.

You see the wider range of his observations when you glance through his words and note in addition to his references to nature, how he touches upon the activities of life. There are the fishermen, the scribes, Pharisees, the publican and the sinner, the centurion, the rich young man, the sower, the harvesters, the wise virgins, the foolish virgins, the faithful {???}, the prodigal son, the poor, the sick, the deaf, the blind, the woman of sin, the foreign prince, and countless other touches that tell us plainer than words can describe that the source of Jesus' truth, the validity of his authority was the experience which he had had in everyday life.

Of one thing all men agree that the essence of his gospel is to love God, and to love man, but if ye cannot love man

¹³ Matthew 7:29.

¹⁴ Matthew 5:6.

whom ye have seen, how can ye love God whom ye have not seen? $^{\rm 15}$

¹⁵ See 1 John 4:20, "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen."