

THE CLOUD

Justin Martyr
7.31.2022



THE JOURNEY
CHURCH

SCRIPTURE:

Matthew 22:37

RECAP:

We are resuming our annual tradition this week and beginning our 5th year of The Cloud series. In a reference to the verse we just read a few moments ago in **Hebrews 12:1**. The Hebrews writer says, ***“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.”*** The writer says we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. What is the writer referring to? They are referring to the Christians who have lived and died before us, whose witness teaches us and instructs us about how to live the Christian life too.

Over the years we've learned about: Polycarp, Perpetua, Martin Luther, C.S. Lewis, William Carey, George Mueller, Abraham Kuyper, Augustine, Ambrose, Tertullian, Lottie Moon, Adoniram Judson, Saint Patrick, Elisabeth Elliot, Charles Spurgeon, Athanasius, Boniface, John Newton, William Cowper, and George Liel. This year we are covering: Justin Martyr, Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, C.T. Studd, and Corrie Ten Boom.

Scripture Exegesis:

Matthew 22:37 -- *And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”*

Most people think about love as purely a feeling. Love certainly involves feelings, but we almost exclusively see it as that. We almost see love as a turning off of the head/mind and a following of the heart. But the Scriptures teach us to engage our minds to know and understand the truth. Christianity teaches constantly about knowledge, understanding, truth, and wisdom. It also speaks of the fool. The mind is given to engage and to understand the truth. But what is the goal and outcome of knowing and understanding more of the truth? To love God even more. In other words, our minds love for, and consumption of the truth, should lead us to greater love of God. And in some ways, is in itself an act of loving God.

This passage is Jesus answering the question about what the greatest command is. So this is a vital aspect of obeying and pleasing God. We've been given a mind, and "with all your mind" you are to love God.

Now "with all your mind" is not emphasized very often in Christian teaching today. One of the issues we have in our culture is the shallow depths most Christians have because of watered down preaching and discipleship. We haven't challenged people to love the Lord your God with all of your mind. We've settled for a lot less than that over the last several hundred years of Christianity in the western world (Europe and America). Christian philosopher, J.P. Moreland, captures it well when he says, "But their overall effect was to overemphasize immediate personal conversion to Christ instead of a studied period of reflection and conviction; emotional, simple, popular preaching instead of intellectually careful and doctrinally precise sermons; and personal feelings and relationship to Christ instead of a deep grasp of the nature of Christian teaching and ideas."

Moreland says one of the problems that has put us in this position is we've focused so much on getting souls saved and giving your heart to Jesus that we've failed to grasp what it means to give him our minds also. We fail to learn the Scriptures, understand the covenants, and grasp doctrine. As a result, our bologna detectors are weak, or non-existent, and many get lured into all sorts of bad teaching from charismatic personalities that prey off our ignorance.

One of our church members lives in Gallatin and he's in a small group with a collection of believers from all over Sumner County. He joined the group to have some fellowship on that side of town and to help disciple these believers. But what he quickly discovered is that none of the people in the group are interested in actually understanding theology in the passages they are reading or discussing. Everything quickly dovetails into personal application or some kind of "here's what it means to me." When he pressed them on actually having a proper doctrinal and theological understanding, he heard it said back to him, "Oh, I'm not interested in theology." This is why the State of the Church in America is weak and vulnerable to enemy attack.

A recovery of rich, doctrinal teaching is badly needed in churches today. We need a return to loving the Lord with all our mind. This leads us to our individual we are learning about today: Justin Martyr.

Biographical Sketch:

Justin the Philosopher, as he was known, later to be called Justin Martyr, was born in 100 AD in Samaria. He was born of a Greek father by the name of Priscus, who with his wife was sent by the Roman emperor Vespasian, along with a large number of Roman citizens, to settle in Flavia Neopolis, a town formerly known in Bible times as Shechem about 25 miles south of Samaria. It is now known as Nablus and is under Palestinian rule, a disputed territory with Israel on the West Bank.

He was raised by pagan parents, meaning they followed the religious moors of their time and culture, and believed in multiple gods and goddesses that ruled the world. Keep in mind, Justin's entrance into the world was only 67 years after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. By 100 AD, the gospel message had made its way around the Roman Empire through the apostle Paul and the other disciples of Jesus.

Justin was brilliant. As he aged, he wrestled with deep questions: What is man's relation to God? How is it established? What must one expect from it? He sought answers to these questions in the religions and philosophies of his day. The pagan gods did not satisfy his questions and the deep longing in his soul. He tried stoicism. Stoicism believed that virtue was based on knowledge, and that emotions were to be controlled, but didn't worry much about the question of God. His first teacher was a Stoic who Justin said, "knew nothing of God and did not even think knowledge of him to be necessary." After that he spent a few weeks with an itinerant philosopher that he said seemed to care more about getting paid than teaching anything. Then came a Pythagorean, but his required course of music, astronomy, and geometry seemed far too slow. Finally, Justin dove into Platonism, though intellectually demanding, it proved unfulfilling. He was hungry for something and he couldn't find what it was. Nothing he sought satisfied him.

At around the age of 30, Justin was in Ephesus, the city where the apostle Paul had planted a church several decades earlier. While giving himself over to his meditations by the seaside, an old man met him and began a conversation with him. The old man was a Christian. Justin argued vehemently with the old man in the defense of his pet philosophy and received very little argument in return. But finally the old man cut him off: "You are a mere dealer in words, but no lover of action and truth; your aim is not to be a practicer of good, but a clever disputant, a cunning sophist." And when finally Justin put the question to the old man: "Where then is the truth?" the old man replied, "Search the Scriptures and pray that the gates of light may be opened to thee, for none can perceive and comprehend these things except God and His Christ grant them understanding."

The brilliant Justin was brought to his need by a simple old man. He recognized something in this man that he had been searching for. Another witness the Lord used in Justin's life was the persecution he had witnessed over the years of Christians in the Roman Empire being tortured and killed for their faith. He often wondered what sort of fortitude and strength that allowed them to remain faithful under such circumstances. All of this, brought Justin to saving faith in Jesus and conversion to Christianity.

He recalls, "A fire was suddenly kindled in my soul. I fell in love with the prophets and these men who had loved Christ; I reflected on all their words and found that this philosophy alone was true and profitable. That is how and why I became a philosopher. And I wish that everyone felt the same way that I do."

It wouldn't take long before Justin began a teaching ministry that began in Ephesus. He eventually found himself in a dispute with a Jew named Trypho about the true interpretation of Scripture. This turned into a book called Dialogue with Trypho in which Justin tries to prove the truth of Christianity to a learned Jew by demonstrating that a new covenant has superseded the old covenant of God, that Jesus is both the Messiah announced by the Old Testament prophets and the preexisting logos through whom God revealed himself in the Scriptures, and that the Gentiles were the new Israel.

Later Justin moved to Rome, founded a Christian school, and wrote two bold apologies (i.e., defenses—from the Greek apologia). Justin's First Apology, addressed to Emperor Antoninus Pius, was published in 155 and attempted to explain the faith. Christianity was not a threat to the state, he asserted, and should be treated as a legal religion. He wrote "on behalf of men of every nation who are unjustly hated and reviled."

Justin argued that Christians are, in fact, the emperor's "best helpers and allies in securing good order, convinced as we are that no wicked man ... can be hidden from God, and that everyone goes to eternal punishment or salvation in accordance with the character of his actions." He further showed that Christianity is superior to paganism, that Christ is prophecy fulfilled, and that paganism is actually a poor imitation of the true religion.

Justin's Second Apology was written soon after Marcus Aurelius became emperor of Rome in 161. In these writings, Justin tried to show that the Christian faith alone was truly rational. He taught that the Logos (Word) became incarnate to teach humanity truth and to redeem people from the power of the demons. He also argued that the Christians are being unjustly persecuted by Rome.

Four years later, Justin and his disciples were arrested for their faith. The prefect (magistrate), Rusticus, asked him to denounce his faith by making a sacrifice to the gods. Justin replied, "No one who is rightly minded turns from true belief to false." Rusticus then pronounced the sentence, saying, "Let those who have refused to sacrifice to the gods and to yield to the command of the emperor be scourged, and led away to suffer the punishment of decapitation, according to the laws."

Justin responded, "If we are punished for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, we hope to be saved." They were taken out and beheaded. This is how Justin the Philosopher became known as Justin Martyr. He died in Rome in AD 165.

Application/Take-aways:

1. Salvation comes by the power of God and the testimony of faithful witnesses.

Remember the old man. He was a faithful witness. Justin was probably smarter and more intelligent than him. But the old man had something Justin didn't: the truth. God was working on Justin. He put eternity in Justin's heart, so he was seeking and looking for the truth. The faithful witness of this old man was used by God to bring Justin to saving faith in Jesus. God can use any of us in this way as well. We should be willing servants to speak what we know is true, and leave the converting of men to the power of God.

2. Reason and intelligent thinking is not antithetical to Christianity.

What I'm driving at with this point is that Christianity is not merely some sentimental, feelings based religion. Christianity is rooted and grounded in rational thinking. We believe Christianity is logical. It comports with reality. You do not have to suspend your brain or ability to think in order to become a Christian.

Justin was a prime example of this. His Second Apology was a defense that Christianity alone was truly rational. Christianity is a comprehensive worldview. It believes in propositional truth, and claims that correspond to reality. We don't just believe in a few spiritual tenets or practices. We think Christianity explains why everything works. You may ask, "In what way?" Let me take a moment just to highlight a few examples of this. Without Christianity, there is no such thing as beauty. An atheist, materialistic view of the world can enjoy beauty, but it cannot account for beauty. After all, where do you get beauty in a world supposedly random, accidental, and meaningless. Think about it. Why does music work? Why does it sound good? Why can untrained ears detect off-notes? Because there is an order, a symmetry, a design to music. Where do you get that kind of

order, harmony, and beauty in a world without the Triune God? You don't. Beauty exists because God is beautiful. Music has order because it has a design and purpose. It stirs our hearts because it is transcendent.

Without Christianity, there is no such thing as math or numbers. Like music, there is an order to math. The universe is a composite of precise math and symmetry. We didn't invent math and slap it onto the world, we discovered it and found the universe was a massive mathematical wonder. Now check it, numbers are not things you can hold, taste, touch, weigh, or see. They are concepts. They are an idea. But they are real. They are immaterial things. But in a materialistic universe all that exists is material. But numbers aren't material. Yet oneness is real. Twoness is real. You don't get that in an accidental world. You get that in a world created by a God with an incredible mind and wisdom.

Without Christianity, there are no laws of logic. Logic is the same way. It is immaterial. In a materialistic universe, you can't account for logic. Logic is immaterial, yet real. It is universal in all places, unchanging over time, and absolute. Where do you get something universal, absolute, and unchanging in a world that is accidental, random, and meaningless? You don't. Logic comes from the Triune God who is eternal, unchanging, absolute, and universal. Logic is a reflection of the mind of God.

Without Christianity, there is no such thing as love. Love exists because God is love. It is the nature of the Triune God. Now check this out, only the Eternal Triune God can be said to be love. God didn't create the world in order to give or experience love. No, the love of the Triune God is experienced from eternity between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in perfect unity. Muslims can't say that. Jews can't say that. Hindus can't say that. Only Christians. Our God is love from all eternity without ever needing to create the world. And we love because we are made in His image. The atheist can't account for love. No doubt the atheist experiences love, but he cannot account for love. I remember asking an atheist friend once (who's now a Christian) about tucking his daughter in at night. I asked him if he ever pulled the blankets up to her, gave her a kiss, and told her "I love you." "Of course," he said. So I asked him, "Why don't you tell her the truth? Why don't you tell her that your survival instincts are sending a chemical reaction to your brain to preserve your offspring? Why don't you tell her that you have no choice in the matter, it's all survival instincts doing their job?" He saw my point. Because the atheist is just a bag of chemicals acting on impulses programmed in over millions of years. He isn't making real decisions or feeling anything independent of his programming. His love for his daughter is nothing but "brain fizz" by his own description of reality. Yet he doesn't live that way. He lives as if

the Christian worldview is true. Why? Because it intellectually grounds the world we actually live in.

Without Christianity, there is no such thing as justice. In a world of the atheist, where the strong eat the weak, there are no rights or wrongs, there is only what is. There is no "ought to" or "ought not to's" there is only what is. Only the Christian faith can account for morality and justice. There is a standard of morality and justice because there is a God who is holy and righteous, and calls His creation to abide by this standard. Violation of it is sin. Apart from God, there are no morals. The atheist doesn't live this way though. This is what upset the German philosopher Fredrich Nietize so bad. His argument was "if God is dead, then quit reviving Him by living as if He existed." Quit being moral. Do what you want. Succeed at all costs. Sleep with who you want. Don't take responsibility, even that is an illusion imposed by Christianity.

This is what Justin was driving at. And this is what Christians today must understand as well. Loving God with all of your mind means to understand more and more of the God who is, His world, and His gospel. These are things as 1 Peter says, "angels long to peer into and understand." But they've been given to us.

3. Study the Scriptures to develop knowledge and wisdom.

Once Justin became a Christian, he read and studied the Scriptures like crazy. He loved the Old Testament, and the writings that we now know as the New Testament. From the Scriptures he emphasized lots of different theological points.

- The transcendence and unchangeableness of God
- God's divine plan in history and process of salvation structured by God
- Worship that accords with Scripture (communion, baptism, and proclamation of the Word)

Justin's descriptions of early Christian gatherings are a helpful source for understanding the early church. He also mentions Matthew, Mark, and Luke in his writings, including the letters of Paul, 1 Peter, and Acts. This shows how extensively the New Testament books were already circulating in the 2nd century throughout the world.

Here is his description of an early church gathering. This is fascinating history here: On the day called Sunday there is a gathering together in the same place of all who live in a given city or rural district. The memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits. Then when the reader ceases, the president in a

discourse admonishes and urges the imitation of these good things. Next we all rise together and send up prayers.

When we cease from our prayer, bread is presented and wine and water. The president in the same manner sends up prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people sing out their assent, saying the 'Amen.' A distribution and participation of the elements for which thanks have been given is made to each person, and to those who are not present they are sent by the deacons.

Those who have means and are willing, each according to his own choice, gives what he wills, and what is collected is deposited with the president. He provides for the orphans and widows, those who are in need on account of sickness or some other cause, those who are in bonds, strangers who are sojourning, and in a word he becomes the protector of all who are in need.

For our own help, we are reminded that our thinking, lifestyle, and worship should all accord with God's Word. We don't get to tailor-make our own way. We can't even rely upon traditions. We must seek to follow the Scriptures as closely as we can. Justin was a warrior for the truth in his lifetime. His example inspires us today to keep making a habit and practice of studying the Scriptures. That study of the Scripture becomes kindling for loving God with our mind to burn hotter.

I'll close this message with another quote from J. P. Moreland:

"The church is safe from vicious persecution at the hands of the secularist, as educated people have finished with stake-burning circuses and torture racks. No martyr's blood is shed in the secular west. So long as the church knows her place and remains quietly at peace on her modern reservation. Let the babes pray and sing and read their Bibles, continuing steadfastly in their intellectual retardation; the church's extinction will not come by sword or pillory, but by the quiet death of irrelevance. But let the church step off the reservation, let her penetrate once more the culture of the day and the ... face of secularism will change from a benign smile to a savage snarl."

Not us, friends. Let's not be the kind of church that stays quiet on the modern reservation. Let's imitate the actions of our Lord Jesus who spoke truth to people who didn't want to hear it. Let's imitate the actions of Justin who sought to show the intellectual rationality of Christianity. Let's speak the truth to our world today, who desperately needs to hear it,

and let's embrace whatever that brings with it, even if it's persecution. We have a faithful heritage of people like Justin Martyr to spur us on.

QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why do you think Jesus gave this response in Matthew 22:37 when asked what the greatest commandment was?
- 2) What are some ways we love God with all our mind?
- 3) What are some dangers of not loving God with all our mind?
- 4) What are some ways that Justin loved God with all of his mind?
- 5) Read Matthew 4:18-20. What has to happen in our mind in order to follow Jesus? What happens to our mind after we start following Jesus?
- 6) How was the simple old man from the story a fisher for men?
- 7) Do you see yourself as a fisher of people? If so, are you actively doing that? If not, what is holding you back?