Articles by S. Lewis Johnson

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Bethlehem Becoming the House of Bread

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S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.

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Dr. Johnson’s thorough exposition of Micah 5:2 is Christ-exalting and appropriate in anticipation of another Christmas season.

Introduction

Religious disorder and spiritual chaos characterize our day. The church of Jesus Christ is no longer “the little flock,” meeting in Jesus’ Name to worship the Father according to the Holy Scriptures under the oversight of godly elders. Generally the church has become a large worldly organization meeting in the name of a unitarian God to canvass modern religious views according to the latest “discoveries” of human reason under the oversight of organizational puppets trained and handled from secularized and politicized headquarters. The words are strong, and that is why I have used the word, “generally.” I believe, however, that the sentiments are true although, I am happy to say, not universally true.

Fifteen years ago a well-known Baptist minister, at one time minister of the First Baptist Church of Charleston, South Carolina, wrote, “We are living in a day of hazy standards of right and wrong. The old line of

demarcation has practically disappeared from modern thinking (he did not know the chaos that would produce in the 80s). A prominent minister said: 'The delineation of sin has undergone a transformation somewhat similar to that which has taken place in the world of painting. The old clear-cut lines have given way to an impressionistic indefiniteness, the black and white contrasts to low-toned grays. The churches have adopted a hush policy on the doctrine of depravity and a rotarian gospel takes the place of repentance.'

"I like his reference to painting. There was a time when you could look at a picture and tell what it was. Today black and white have become gray. Someone has said: 'The religion of China is Confucian; the religion of America is confusion.' A country schoolteacher, applying for a job, was asked, 'Do you teach that the earth is round or flat?' 'Which way do you want it taught?' was the reply. 'I can teach it either way.' Something like that is the attitude of many a pulpit today."

How limpid and lucid is God's Word! Even its prophecies are not vague and hazy as those of modern false prophets, such as Edgar Cayce and Jeanne Dixon. The promises of the Redeemer to come illustrate the point. They narrow systematically in the Old Testament revelation. The first of them declares that the Redeemer shall come from mankind, being the Seed of the Woman (cf. Gen. 3:15). Then the Scriptures foretell Him as coming from the Semetic division of mankind (cf. 9:26), and next the Abrahamic family line (cf. 12:3), and then from Judah's tribe (cf. 49:10), and then from David's family in Judah (cf. 2 Sam. 7:1-29; Isa. 11:1-5), and finally born of a virgin mother in the town of Bethlehem of Judah (cf. Isa. 7:14; Mic. 5:2).

Bethlehem was the place of Rachael's death, the scene of the love affair of Boaz and Ruth, and the birthplace of David but, while its name means house of bread, it never was the "House of Bread" until He, the Messiah, was born there. The prophecy of His birth is found in Micah 5:2, the text to which we now turn.

The Description of the Place

(Mic. 5:2a)

The context (cf. 4:9-13). Micah, an eighteenth century B.C. contemporary of Isaiah, Hosea, and Amos, ministered to his land in the days of their departure from the Word of God and the consequent moral decline. Morals were low (cf. 1:7), the government was decadent (3:9), the courts were corrupt (3:11), religion was formalistic (2:11; 3:11). The nation had lost its integrity. Assyria had captured the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C. and resumed the deportation of its people. About twenty years later in 701 B.C., the southern kingdom, Judah, was also overrun by the Assyrians, although Jerusalem was spared. Around this time and in these circumstances Micah uttered the prophecy of the Messiah's birth in Bethlehem.

If the occasion of the prophecy is the seige of the city by Sennacherib, Micah may well have spoken this great prophecy at the time to which the proud Assyrian king refers in his boast of his seige of Jerusalem and King Hezekiah in 701 B.C. Sennacherib in his account said that he beseiged "Hezekiah the Jew … I shut him up like a caged bird." He says nothing, however, of God's miraculous deliverance of Judah and his defeat by the hand of the Lord(cf. 2 Kings 19:32-37). Herodotus describes the defeat as caused by a multitude of field

mice devouring during the night the Assyrians' quivers and bows and the straps by which they held their shields.

A well-known Old Testament scholar once said that Isaiah foretold the Messiah's virgin birth, while Micah foretold His village birth. One might also add that Isaiah is the first prophet cited in our New Testament, while Micah is the second, one speaking of His birth and the other of His place of birth.

The opening verse of the fifth chapter of Micah opens with the kingdom facing a desperate condition. The city is addressed and commanded to prepare itself for a seige by the enemy. Her king is to be treated in humiliating fashion. It was the custom for the king, when acting as judge, to strike with his sceptre wrongdoers. Now, however, cooped up in his capital, the king himself, "the judge of Israel," is to be struck with a soldier's club. To be struck on the cheek was a deep insult (cf. Job 16:10; Lam. 3:30).

The astonishing divine design. The present humiliation for city and king is not the end. Discipline may be necessary, but the future is surprising but glorious. The prophet writes, "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah." The forcefulness of the prophecy is seen in the method of address. It is direct, "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah." And the words suggest the comfort of the promise, for they mean house of bread, fruitfulness, suggesting things far different from the present situation. As Allen says, Hezekiah, the figure of failure, stands over against the Davidic Ruler, the figure of majesty. From the rack and ruin of a disciplined Judah shall come Abraham's

Seed and David's Son, the King. The covenants still stand! Yahweh remembers them in everlasting love. With Him even lowly shattered Bethlehem can produce the King of kings and Lord of lords. It is not strange that God called His Man from such a lowly source. He wishes it to be known that, "He can take acorns and turn them into mighty oaks." As a matter of fact, He does not even need an acorn to do the trick! As Paul puts it, He "calleth those things that be not as though they were" (cf. Rom. 4:17). He takes a Gideon, a self-confessed, "the least in my father's house" (Jude 6:15), and conquers 132,000 Midianites.

One other thing calls for notice here. The prophecy concerns "Bethlehem Ephratah." Now there were two Bethlehems, one in Judah and one in Zebulun. God had need, like the Delphic Oracle, to phrase His prophecies carefully so that they might be fulfilled in many ways just to increase the odds against failure. His are definite. The Bethlehem in Judah is meant, as the "Ephratah," the district in which Bethlehem lay, indicates.

The Description of God's Purpose

(Mic. 5:2b)

Still speaking to Bethlehem, the prophet describes the purpose of God in this way, "yet out of thee shall He come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel." Initially God had told Samuel to visit Jesse, David's father, "for I have provided me a king among his sons" (cf. 1 Sam. 16:1). Still another, long after David's death, is to come and be God's ruler in Israel.

I think it is rather important to note that God promises that the ruler will be a ruler "in Israel." This prophetic

promise seems to demand that there exist at the time of His coming and service an “Israel,” the ethnic people, for that is the sense of the term here. In other words, the promise secures the people’s future existence and blessing.

In the New Testament the text from Micah is cited by the chief priests and scribes, who reply to Herod’s question about where the Messiah was to be born (cf. Matt. 2:6). Matthew gives their reply in these words, “And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the leaders of Judah, for out of you shall come forth a ruler, who will shepherd my people Israel.” The words “for me,” found in Micah, appear to be expanded into the clause, “who will shepherd my people Israel,” taken probably from 2 Samuel 5:2, where they are the Lord’s promise to David.

The saintly Bishop Lancelot Andrewes (1555-1626) in a touching sermon on the text from Matthew took the New Testament citation to say that He would be our Guide and, therefore, inclusive of His three offices of prophet, priest, and king. Now He is our great Prophet who guides our feet in the way (cf. Deut. 18:18; Luke 1:79), our meditating Priest who feeds us (cf. Heb. 5:1; Mic. 5:4, “feed”), and our exalted King who guards us in the way (cf. Jer. 30:21). However, the text clearly lays the principal stress upon His royal office of Ruler, and the context makes it plain that that sense receives the emphasis. He is the Ruler who inherits the Davidic throne.

The note of the royalty of our Lord is often neglected in the church today. Gentle Jesus, meek and mild, is the syrupy stress of the pulpit today. Horton Davies, in a

book on the varieties of English preaching, describes the preaching of Leslie Weatherhead in this way, “In a Christmas sermon he speaks of the strangeness of the gifts of the three Magi for the Christ child, and then continues: ‘I do not mean to be in the least irreverent, but did no one give Him in a soft wooly, cuddly toy, the ancient equivalent of a teddy-bear? Did no one give Him a rattle? Did no one treat Him as a little baby thing? Here R. W. Dale’s rebuke would be apt — that this is to ‘forget that Christ is King, that He is not to be fondled but to be reverenced.’” We must not, as Davies adds, in our references to Christ allow pathos to degenerate into bathos.

The wise men from the East, when they came to Jerusalem, asked about the One, “who has been born King of the Jews” (cf. Matt. 2:2). To be born a king is rather unusual; in fact, it may be unique. “Very few have ever been ‘born king,’” Spurgeon remarks. “Men are born princes, but they are seldom born kings. I do not think you can find an instance in history where any infant was born king. He was the Prince of Wales, perhaps, and he had to wait a number of years, till his father dies and then they manufactured him into a king, by putting a crown on his head; and a sacred chrism, and other silly things; but he was not born a king. I remember no one who was born a king except Jesus; and there is emphatic meaning in the verse that we sing—

‘Born Thy people to deliver;

Born a child, and yet a King.’”

The Description of the Person

(Mic. 5:2c)

The prophet concludes his striking prophecy of the King to come with the words, “whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting” (2c). Paul’s words come to mind here, “Great is the mystery of godliness,” for the final words have been understood in different ways. Some have seen a reference to the eternity of the Messianic King in the words, “from of old, from everlasting.” The usage of the terms in the original text argues against that interpretation. The expression translated, “from of old,” for example, is found in Nehemiah 12:46, rendered by, “of old,” and there it plainly is used of the age of David.

Further, the expression translated, “from everlasting,” is found also in Micah 7:14 and refers there to a historical time, not to eternity. In fact, elsewhere it is always found in historical contexts (cf. Isa. 63:9, 11; Amos 9:11; Mal. 3:4). It, therefore, seems better to refer the phrases here to the distant historical past, the glorious time of the beginning of the dynasty of David.

The words are meant to encourage the nation in its difficult times by assuring them that the election of David and his dynasty for future glorious national blessing through a divine unconditional covenant still holds. As God said of the Davidic dynasty in the 89th Psalm, “Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David. His descendants shall endure forever, And his throne as the sun before Me. It shall be established forever like the moon, And the witness in the sky is faithful” (vv. 35-37). The ancient glory shall return, only magnified, to the glory of the Triune God.

“Out of thee shall He come forth unto me” is, then, a declaration that the royal house established by the

Messiah in the future has its root in the ancient city of David and the covenant established with its famous historical king.

The final words state that the Messiah to come has hereditary right to the throne, being of kingly Davidic lineage. In His human veins there flows royal blood, for he is not only David's Lord. He is also David's Son and Heir.

There may be some doubt about whether Micah's words in verse two refer to a divine Messiah, but the following context makes it quite clear that the majestic Shepherd-King who is to come and deliver Israel is more than a man. To Him shall come universal empire (cf. v. 4) as the prophesied Davidic sovereign, whose deity is explicitly declared by our Lord in His incarnate ministry (cf. Matt. 22:41-46).

Conclusion

Bethlehem means house of bread, but only on the night of His birth did the village reach its potential. Then she truly became the house of bread when the Bread of Life was born there in the manger (cf. John 6:35), having first come down from heaven (v. 51).

Israel tried Sinai and Moses' Law but, while it is holy, just, and good, it cannot save sinners from their sin. Bethlehem and her Davidic Shepherd-King can alone feed His people with the bread of life. He is no blind guide to heaven and eternal life, for he has been there and has that life eternal with the authority to convey it to the ones given Him by the Father (cf. John 17:2).

Why will we not be led, guarded, and fed by Him? Is it, as in the inn-keeper's case, who assigned the royal

family to the stable and manger, that we are ignorant of who He is, when He should come, and for what purpose He should submit to crucifixion? The Scriptures are clear when they say, “But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” (Gal. 4:4-5).

Let us abandon the liberal unitarian gods of fallible human reason that cannot save and the false views of human self-righteousness that keep us from fleeing to Micah’s Shepherd-King and God’s divine Son. Let us throw off the little gods of our day and give ourselves to our majestic Savior God, the Lord Jesus Christ, to whom all power in heaven and in earth has been given.

Some years ago the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, meeting in Edinburgh, heard Sir Bernard Lovell speaking on the immensities of the world of astronomy. Professor Burleigh, the Moderator of the Church, thanked the astronomer for a fine address, but concluded with the telling words, “But we believe that our God rules over all your worlds.” It is this Father-God who has given to His Son authority to give eternal life to those who trust Him and His saving sacrifice. May the Lord enable us to recognize our sin and need and cast ourselves upon Him for time and for eternity.

Christ And Divorce

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Scripture Reading: Matthew 19:1-12

Introduction

The twentieth century has been called The Age of Adultery, and its citizens have been called The New Adulterers. Now, of course, adultery is not new, nor is the philosophy of the New Adulterers new. The latter is as old as the history of philosophy itself. And the practice has been as universal as human nature itself. Adulterers have been young and old, poor and rich, crude and cultured, male and female, kind and cruel, brutish and gentlemanly, and religious and irreligious. They have been Catholic, Protestant, Jewish and Pentecostal. They have been business men, business women, doctors, and preachers. Some repent, and some do not. What, then, is different about the present practice of the sin? It may well be the arrogance and the proud self-indulgence of the practitioners. In this respect, as a famous old American League baseball umpire used to put it, we have seen “the dawn of a new area!”

It is popular to write articles and books on alternatives to marriage. In these the New Adulterers proclaim their "freedom." "Margaret Mead," John White has written, "has for years suggested that we accept the alternative of 'serial monogamy.' And now, with equal seriousness, Alvin Toffler proposes in his best seller, Future Shock, that mobile executives in large corporations may in the future stop moving their families with them when promotion demands a cross-country switch. Family units and homes should remain as 'plug in' facilities for executives on the move. Instead of finding him a suitable house, the company should find him a suitably matched house-family-unit facility, with similar wife and children to the old unit he just unplugged from."1 What is more detestable about the New Adulterers is their perverted use of the English language and their arrogant concept of "freedom." While honesty ordinarily refers to refraining from lying, cheating, or stealing, or to being trustworthy and fair, with them the word has come to mean to strip away false fronts, to let people see us as we really are. That's not too bad, but when this becomes a cover for selfishness, crudeness, and immorality, that is another matter. And that is what it has become. Proudly they say, "Yes, we are living together outside of wedlock. We believe we should be honest and forthright in these things." It is usually claimed that this relationship is "healthy," contributing to "personal growth," "increased personhood," or the like. I think I agree with the Canadian Christian psychiatrist who says, "Those who use such arguments remind me of Paul's scathing words: 'They glory in their shame' (Phil. 3:19)."2 Our Lord's words on marriage and divorce, and related questions, have, therefore, a special relevancy. The things that He says about the matter, if pondered

and followed, would go a long way toward improving the quality of life in this confused society.

The occasion of His teaching on marriage and divorce in the Gospel of Matthew was the enmity of the Pharisees, who sought to cause Him to stumble as He engaged in His Perean Ministry. There was a continuing dispute among the Jews over what Moses had taught concerning the problem of divorce. The text at issue was Deuteronomy 24:1-4, and the point at issue was the meaning of the phrase, “some uncleanness in her” (v. 1). According to one well-known lexical authority, the expression means probably, “indecency, improper behaviour.”3 That does not help much, and it is not surprising that the School of Shammai took the reference to mean unchastity or adultery, while the School of Hillel, the broad brethren, took it to refer to insignificant wifely failures. According to Hillel and his followers, a bill of divorcement could be written for such flimsy reasons as serving her husband burnt food, or for talking so loud that the neighbors could hear her. From the tenth verse it might be argued that the disciples favored this broader interpretation. It is obvious that the question put to the Lord would, indeed, put Him on the horns of a dilemma, that is, if He were a politician seeking to please all His constituency. It is possible that the recent divorce of Antipas and his marriage to Philip’s wife complicated the matter, for his answer might have political repercussions, just as the Baptist had discovered.

The passage that we now study, then, is one with great ethical significance. In a simpler society no doubt most of the questions that developed found answers in our Lord’s and Paul’s words (cf. 1 Cor.7:10-16). In ours, due

to the complicated tangles into which men get by the laxity of modern society, there are many situations concerning which Scripture does not seem to speak directly. That makes decisions difficult, but Scripture is sufficient for life, and we must, then, be willing to infer solutions from the principles unfolded in the word.

The Setting for the Teaching on Divorce

Having left Galilee the Lord Jesus journeys to the Judean district east of the Jordan. He continues His healing ministry, still affirming thereby the Messianic office that was His. In this part of the land the Pharisees come to Him with their question.

The Question of the Pharisees

The Pharisees had evil intent in posing the question, as the words “testing Him” indicate (cf. v. 3). Their question was designed to make Him declare Himself, and they thought that any answer would cause Him to lose part of His following.

Their question is, “Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?” And the Lord’s answer is not immediately or directly answered. I think, however, that Tasker has hit upon the sense of the answer. He says, “The subsequent narrative implies that in effect the answer of Jesus is ‘If you mean for any cause, My answer is Yes; if you mean for every cause, my answer is No.’ First, He reminds them of the truth known to every reader of Scripture that the purpose of the creation of two sexes was that the solidarity, the continuance and the happiness of the human race might have as its foundation the physical union of man and woman. Such union is an essential part of the Creator’s plan, and

attempts to thwart it, either by indulging in promiscuous sexual intercourse, or by asceticism and enforced celibacy, or by unnatural vice, or by attempts to break up marriages where the unity that God has in mind is being realized, are all contrary to the divine will (6).”4 Their question is based upon the passage in Deuteronomy 24:1-4, and essentially, then, they are asking what He thinks the words, “Some uncleanness in her” (v. 1), mean.

The Answer of The Lord

There are several things that we must notice in His answer. In the first place, it is clear that our Lord has complete confidence in the historicity and relevancy of the Genesis record. For Him that record is the infallible and inerrant Word of God. In fact, as many Bible students have noticed, the Lord’s use of Genesis 2:23-24 here indicates that for Him the whole of the written Old Testament is the Word of God. The citation of Genesis 2:24 in verse five is said to have been spoken by the One “who made them at the beginning,” that is, by God. Notice the wording of verses four and five carefully, “Have ye not read that HE WHO MADE THEM AT THE BEGINNING, made them male and female; AND SAID, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.” The One “who made them at the beginning” is He who “said” the following words. Now, when one turns to the Old Testament and reads Genesis 2:24, it becomes clear that the one who spoke the words was not God directly, but Moses! What, then, is our Lord’s reasoning? Anything that MOSES wrote GOD may be said to have written. In other words, for our Lord the words of the

Old Testament are the words of God. It is no wonder that He accepted the Old Testament as the inerrant Word of God. Incidentally, this attitude toward the Old Testament finds many other examples in the New Testament use of the Old Testament (cf. Heb. 1:15 with Psa. 2:7; 2 Sam. 7:14; Heb. 1:6 with Deut. 32:43 [LXX]; Heb. 1:7 with Psa. 104:4; Heb. 1:8-9 with Psa. 45:6-7, etc.).

He would have agreed with Augustine's words, which He put into the mouth of God, "Indeed, O man, what my Scripture says, I say."5 And I think I can hear Him in praise and worship of the Father saying, "And now, O Lord God, Thou art God, and THY WORDS ARE TRUE" (cf. 2 Sam. 7:28).

Second, our Lord, then, confirmed the Genesis record, and in the following words of explanation He confirmed the teaching of that record on marriage and divorce. From Genesis He makes the point that marriage is RECEIVED by man from God. It is a divine institution. In fact, God officiated at the first wedding ceremony. The union between man and the woman is a purposeful one, having as its goals the abolishing of isolation ("it is not good for the man to be ALONE," Gen. 2:18), as well as the propagation of the race. It is clear, too, that God intended the relation to be a monogamous one (cf. Gen. 2:24, "one flesh"). And finally, Genesis points to the permanence of the relationship, for the word "cleave" suggests, as someone has put it, the adhesiveness of intimacy. The Greek word means literally to glue or cement together. Erasmus rendered it by agglutin-abitur. Thus, the indissoluble character of marriage is the ideal set before the reader. And this is also seen in the use of the word "joined together" in verse six, for it means to yoke together. And it is "God" who has joined

them together. In other words, marriages ARE MADE IN HEAVEN, and they are made for permanence. So then, our Lord's words confirm and accent the Genesis account. Marriage is a permanent, divine institution.

The point of all this is that one should not be so concerned over the questions of divorce and forget the original intent of the Creator in creating the male and the female. Hendriksen puts it well, "Why all this talk about the possibility of divorce, as if to say, 'If this marriage does not work out I can always divorce my wife'? Why not go back beyond Deut. 24 to God's marriage ordinance recorded in such passages as Gen. 1:27 and 2:24?"6

The Pharasaic Objection

It is clear that the Pharisees understand that the Lord is making a case for an ideal, namely, that marriage is a permanent, monogamous, purposeful relationship. Thus, they ask a supplementary question, "Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?" In other words, they infer that, if His analysis is correct, then Moses was guilty of an infringement of the original intention of God in permitting divorce. And, of course, since this could not be so, it is plain that this self-anointed Messiah is really arguing contrary to the Word of God. In plain words they say, "You're contradicting Moses!"

The Pointed Correction of the Lord

The Mosaic permission (19:8). On the contrary, Jesus says, "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, PERMITTED you to put away your wives, but FROM THE BEGINNING IT WAS NOT SO" (v. 8). The divine

institution of marriage involved an indissoluble union, a union until death parts the two parties, according to the original purpose of God. Actually, Moses' words are designed to uphold the divine intention. Many marriages at the time he wrote were not fulfilling the divine aim, and the Mosaic injunction was designed to bring the ideal nearer to practical realization. Polygamy had been common, and men had thought it a light matter to obtain a divorce. Any reason might do, it seemed. Thus was the natural outgrowth of the wickedness of man's heart. Thus, the unions were not realized in the sense intended and, in fact, marriage had become too easy, since divorce was easy. Thus Moses' words really strengthened the practice of marriage.

In fact, the Pharisees were far more interested in the concession of Deuteronomy 24:1-4 than in the divine institution of Genesis 1:27 and 2:24. So, the Lord points back to the original intention again.

We must note carefully the word, "permitted" (v. 8). That is, divorce was tolerated by the Mosaic Law. Now, it is plain that by the use of the word, "permitted," that the thing tolerated was not intrinsically right. Divorce, even in the words of Moses that permitted it, is seen as intrinsically wrong. Moses does not abandon the sense of Genesis. If divorce was right, one would expect to see it commanded. It is not; it is permitted.

Moses permitted divorce "because (lit., with reference to) of the hardness of your heart." Even the divine permission is not the ideal. It is a concession to the wickedness of the human heart, which often made and makes life intolerable to an offended marriage partner.

In such cases relief is granted to the offended party. Cf. Gen. 3:1-24.

It should be noted, before we pass on, that Moses does not obligate the offended party to seek a divorce. It is not commanded. It is only permitted, or tolerated.

The Messianic precept (19:9). The Lord goes on to say, “And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery; and whosoever marrieth her who is put away doth commit adultery.” It is plain from these words that the Lord puts Himself on the side of the stricter Shammai school. Divorce is permitted if there is fornication. And the converse is true, namely, that to divorce when there is not fornication is sin.

The famous exceptive clause, “except it be for fornication,” is surely genuine here (and in 5:32). That it is omitted in Mark and Luke is of no consequence so far as its genuineness here is concerned. All the truth on a subject is not necessarily found in every passage in which the subject is discussed. Marital unfaithfulness is an attack on the very nature of the marriage bond, and it is grounds for divorce, in fact, the only ground that our Lord ever mentioned (cf. 1 Cor. 7:10-16).

What is the meaning of “fornication?” The word is a very broad term, broader than adultery. The latter term has to do with illicit fornication involving married persons. The former term refers to the sexual act, and its significance is found in the context in which it is used. Here it clearly refers to the unfaithfulness of a wife, that is, to adultery.

It has sometimes been said that the word refers to unfaithfulness during the period of betrothal. If so, then

the Lord would not be permitting any grounds for divorce. But the passage rests upon the Old Testament passage in Deuteronomy 24, and there the subject has to do with the marriage relationship clearly. The same fact militates against the view that the Lord is referring to the marriage of too near relatives (cf. Lev. 18:6-8), or marriage within the prohibited Levitical degrees. Why, then, would Moses warn that, if divorce took place, and the wife was subsequently remarried to another, the original husband could not take her again to be his wife? That would be totally superfluous, if marriage within the prohibited degrees was in mind.

The Pharisees are defeated, and by an appeal to the one they had sought to cite against Him, that is, Moses. They disappear from the scene, but questions still remain.

Modern Questions Concerning Divorce

What about incompatability? It is clear that incompatability, whatever that means, is not a Biblical ground for divorce.

What about remarriage? Does our Lord say anything about remarriage? No, He does not, but the implication of the text is that, if the divorce is a legitimate one (for fornication), then remarriage is permitted (cf. 19:9).

What about the influence of the regeneration of unbelievers and divorce? Little is said that would touch this. One must admit that we can only grope for a solution to this question. I am inclined to think that God forgives the guilt of an unbiblical divorce, but that does not necessarily wipe the past consequences clean. We often must suffer physically for sins of the body,

although the guilt of the sin has been forgiven through the atonement of Christ.

The Paragraph on Celibacy

The strict words of our Lord had evidently come as a surprise to the disciples, and they say, “If such is the case of a man with respect to his wife, it is better not to marry” (v. 10). In other words, if we can divorce only on the grounds of adultery, it is not expedient to marry! Their reply is totally selfish.7 The Lord replies that the celibacy they suggest is something that is “given” by God. Other commentators suggest that the “given” refers to the divine institution of marriage, that is, a man cannot live up to that ideal without divine enablement. That is, of course, true but the statement of verse eleven probably refers to the immediately preceding words, rather than to the earlier part of the chapter.8 The section closes with three examples of abstinence from the married state. There are individuals whoare not to marry. That state is theirs by divine providence or by divine guidance. It is an admirable state. In fact, Paul appears to speak of it as “better,” although marriage is good and “honorable,” and, we might add, the normal state (cf. 1 Cor. 7:1-40). Rome’s error consists in erecting a rule for all upon the gift for some.

Conclusion

Our Lord’s words, then, are a compellingly impressive treatment of the inviolability of the divine institution of marriage, and they speak with great condemning force to the Age of Adultery.

And they also speak with compelling force and pleading urgency to believers and their spouses, to the end that they may remember the holiness of the relationship into which they have entered. May we give heed to them.

1 John White, Eros Defiled: The Christian and Sexual Sin (Downers Grove, 1977), pp. 76-77.

2 Ibid., p. 78.

3 Brown, Driver, and Briggs, p. 789.

4 Tasker, pp. 179-80.

5 Confessions, xiii. 29.

6 Hendriksen, p. 174.

7 Ibid., p. 717.

8 Tasker, however, may be right in referring the expression “this saying” to the Genesis passage cited in verse 5.

Criticism Censorious And Sensible

Criticism Censorious And Sensible

Lewis Johnson, Jr.

Is it right to judge and be critical of others? This study from the pen of Dr. S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., of Dallas, Texas, provides invaluable counsel from God's Word on this important subject.

Scripture Reading: Matthew 7:1-6

Forbear to judge, for we are sinners all.

Close up his eyes, and draw the curtain close;

And let us all to meditation."

—Shakespeare, King Henry VI

"Judge not your neighbor till you've been in his place."

—Rabbie Hillell, Mishna: Abot, 2.4.

"Why all the souls that were were forfeit once;

And He that might the vantage best have took,

Found out the remedy. How would you be,

If He, which is the top of judgment, should

But judge you as you are?"

—Shakespeare, Measure for Measure

"Judge not the preacher, for he is thy Judge;

If thou mislike him, thou conceiv'st him not:

God calleth preaching folly: do not grudge

To pick out treasurers from an earthern pot:

The worst speaks something good; if we all want sense,

God takes a text, and preacheth patience."

George Herbert, The Temple.

Introduction

There are not many texts in the Bible that are more familiar than, "Judge not, that ye be not judged" (Matt. 7:1), the opening verse of our passage. It is a text that is often cited by those who stand outside the Christian faith, and it is often misunderstood by them. It is taken to mean that one must always think the best of other people. And it is also taken to mean that any judgment of others is forbidden by the Word of God. As we shall see, this is a serious error, and, under certain circumstances, this misunderstanding of the Word of God may open the door to heresy and false doctrine that might mean the destruction of the testimony of the local church.

Of course, I do not want to be understood as suggesting that believers ought to increase the fervency of their criticism of the brethren. We do enough of that already, and I fully concur with the sentiment expressed by Paul in another context, translated by Moffatt as, "Let us stop criticising one another" (cf. Rom. 14:13). There was a brother who once said to another believer as they were discussing spiritual gifts, "I think God has given me the gift of criticism. What do you think I should do with it?" The other gently replied, "I doubt that you have that gift. As far as I know there is no such gift, but, if you should have it, I would go out and bury it at once!"

As a matter of fact there are several kinds of criticism mentioned here by the Lord. He asks His disciples to

avoid spiteful criticism (vv. 1-2), but to exercise self-criticism (vv. 3-5). And then He concludes with some words that point the lesson of responsibility for spiritual discernment, or sensible criticism (v. 6).

We Must Avoid Spiteful Criticism

The request (7:1). The opening prohibition in verse one has been rendered, due to the construction of the original text, “Stop, judging.” There is no indication in the context, however, that this type of judgment was taking place, and therefore, it is better to render it as the Authorized Version has done.

The Lord Jesus is not suggesting that we should abandon the use of the critical faculty of our minds, given us by God. What he has in mind is the “habit of censorous and carping criticism.”1 In other words, it is not Scriptural criticism, but censorious, spiteful criticism. What is in the mind of the Lord is that which He expressed in the Fourth Gospel in this way, “Judge not according to the appearance, but JUDGE RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT” (John 7:24).

Tolstoy construed the exhortation to mean, “Pull down your law courts!” But it is private judging that the Lord has in mind, not public judgment. “This is a warning to ‘gently scan your brother man’: not because (as Burns says) ‘to step aside is human’, but because we all stand exposed to the divine judgment, and we must not expect mercy from God if we are not ready to be merciful to our fellows,” so Hunter says.2 The reasons (7:2). The reasons for avoiding judging of the brethren follow. There are other reasons besides the ones mentioned, but the ones mentioned are telling. “Criticism is a bludgeon,” King claims, “it is also a boomerang — it has

a nasty habit of coming back and hurting the person who throws it at others."3 We see this in the Lord's counsel.

1. First, there is the boomerang from God. The expression in verse one, "that ye be not judged," probably has reference to Him. It is He who shall judge us for our carping criticism of others" (cf. Psa. 18:25-26). Again, the principle is found in one of Paul's utterances concerning self-judgment at the Lord's Supper. "For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged (cf. 1 Cor. 11:31).

2. Second, the boomerang from men. The words of verse two are thought by the majority of commentators to refer to judgment by our fellow-men, or fellow-believers (cf. Rom. 2:1). There is a mutual reciprocity in judgment; if we are consorious and critical of others, that is the way we shall be treated by them (cf. 6:14-15). "Do you remember Ishmael, in Genesis xvi. 12," King asks, "whose 'hand (was) against every man', and with this inevitable consequence, 'every man's hand against him'. Do you remember Adoni-bezek, in Judges 1:6-7, whose enemies 'cut off his thumbs and his great toes', and why so? Because, on his own confession, he had treated seventy other kings in exactly the same way. Do you remember Haman, in Esther vii. 10 —'they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Modecai.' As Shakespeare would say, he was 'hoist with his own petard'."4

3. Third, our judgement is fallible. That is suggested by the adverb "clearly" in verse five. The hypocrite is blinded by the failure to exercise self-judgment. And then, of course, it is rare that we know all that is

involved in matters requiring or affording opportunity for judgment. There are two sides to most questions, and we rarely have heard both of them. It is sadly possible for all of us to be as blind to our own faults as David was to his guilt and sin, as Nathan told him a story that illustrated his crime. As David listened his anger against the perpetrator of the crime was “greatly kindled,” and he cried out, “As the Lord liveth, the man who hath done this thing shall surely die; And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.” And then, like a thunderbolt, came Nathan’s blow to the heart and conscience of the king, “Thou art the man” (cf. 2 Sam. 12:5-7). The fallibility of our judgment and understanding should warn us against carping criticism of the saints. The lesson is that of the Fifth Beatitude, “Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy” (5:7).

We Must Exercise Self-Criticism

For our good (7:3). At this point the Lord introduces what has been called the Parable of the Mote and the Beam, or “The Sawdust and the Plank.”5 Moffatt refers to the Splinter and the Plank. Lying back of these suggestions is the fact that the word translated “mote” is a Greek word that means a twig, or splinter, and the word translated “beam” means a beam. The picture is very humorous. Imagine a man with a plank protruding from his eye trying to extract a splinter from the eye of someone else! I am sure the illustration drew a chuckle from the audience. The lesson is plain: Apply one’s criticism to oneself before others. Only then will we be able to see.

For others' good (7:5). It is possible to be critical in an approved sense. The words, "then shalt thou see clearly to cast the mote out of thy brother's eye," certainly suggest this. The words of Galatians 6:1 point to this, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, YE WHO ARE SPIRITUAL (they have removed the plank!) restore such an one IN THE SPIRIT OF MEEKNESS (that is fitting for those who may be judged themselves), CONSIDERING THYSELF (does this equal removing the beam?), lest thou also be tempted" (cf. Psa. 51:10-12, then 13).

We Must Employ Sensible Criticism

The command (7:6a-b). "The sixth verse is very curious," King comments, and then continues, "Whatever it teaches, it certainly does make the necessity for Christian folk to discriminate between people, to discern character, and that involves a certain reasonable criticism."6 But what is meant by "dogs" and "swine"? When we remember that these were two typical unclean animals, it becomes evident that the Lord uses the terms to refer to those who do not appreciate holy things.

Unbelievers are referred to, it would seem. The "dog" is found elsewhere of unbelievers, such as in Revelation 22:15, where we read, "without are dogs," and in Philippians 3:2, where the apostle writes, "beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision." The context of the latter passage definitely suggests that unbelievers are in view. In 2 Peter 2:22 we have a reference to a sow, and there, too, the reference is to an unbeliever.

Then what is the point of the exhortation? It is plain: The disciples are to be uncritical, but not undiscriminating.

Specifically, the point is this: Do not set a table filled with the beautiful and holy truths of God before people who have no love of the truth. “But the natural man,” Paul has said, “receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (cf. 1 Cor. 2:14). The Lord Jesus preaches discrimination in the work of evangelism. This is a lesson rarely, if ever, taught in evangelism, for the common teaching leads one to believe that it is always proper to share “The Four Spiritual Laws.” Our Lord did not teach this, and He did not practice it. When He stood before Herod, Herod was “exceedingly glad; for he was desirous to see him for a long time, because he had heard many things of him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by him” (Luke 23:8). One might have thought that this was a great opportunity for evangelism, since Herod was so delighted to see Jesus. Evidently our Lord did not think so, for He did not whip out any gospel materials at all. In fact, although Herod asked Him questions “in many words,” Jesus “answered him NOTHING” (v. 10). In Herod’s case, having rejected light previously given to him, the Lord did not give him further light. His heart had become hardened. Herod was a “dog.”

This difficulty meets the preacher in every age. There are people to whom it is impossible to impart truth. Something has to happen to men before they can be taught, and that something is the enlightening ministry of the Holy Spirit. And if men fail to respond to the convicting ministry of the Spirit, retributive judgment follows. They, then, cannot respond to truth (cf. Mark 4:12; Matt. 13:13-15).The holy things of God are not for them, and the believer must exercise judgment in

discussing spiritual things with them. As Bishop Gore used to say, “We are not to shriek the highest truths of religion at the street corner.” The pearls are for the responsive.

Incidentally, this admonition was used by the early church in relation to the Lord’s Supper. They were very careful about whom they admitted to the Eucharist. In some of the earliest rituals the Lord’s Supper began with, “Holy things are for holy people.” Theodoret cites what he thought was an unwritten saying of Jesus, “My mysteries are for myself and for my people.” In other words, there was a fencing of the Table against all but genuine Christians. In the Didache, the first book of church order, it is written, “Let no one eat or drink of your Eucharist except those baptized into the name of the Lord; for, as regards this, the Lord has said, ‘Give not that which is holy unto dogs.’” One can see that the text was used as a basis for the exclusiveness of the partaking of the elements at the Lord’s Table.

The cause (7:6c-d). This prohibition against indiscriminate broadcasting of truth is supported by the claim that it often leads to increasing antagonism on the part of those who are unprepared for the truth. It has sometimes been said, “want of common sense does great harm to religion,” and our Lord’s words here would seem to support this (cf. 10:13; Luke 10:6).

Gutzke’s comments illustrate the truths very aptly, “Only a person who has lived on farm can understand the reference to swine. Pigs get very hungry; rapacious is the word for it. When they want to be fed, they let you know. They squeal and push and shove and squeal some

more. When you throw in the food, they care nothing about Emily Post manners.

“If the pigs were to come to you and you spread pearls before them, they would think that these gems were gravel and would trample them underfoot. Pearls wouldn’t mean anything to them as pearls. ‘They woud turn again and rend you,’ means they would still be hungry and bite at you. They would come after you for more food.”7

Conclusion

First, it is helpful to remember, as Oswald Chambers put it a long time ago, that “The only person who can criticize human beings is the Holy Spirit.” In the final analysis, judgment is ordinarily best left to Him. Our judgment is more fruitfully turned in upon ourselves, and, when carried out under the Spirit’s guidance, leads to developing holiness of life and fruitfulness in divine service. This, in turn, leads to fellowship with God and helpfulness to the saints. “If I have let God remove the beam from my own outlook by His mighty grace,” Chambers also said, “I will carry with me the implicit sunlight confident that what God has done for me He can easily do for you, because you have only a splinter, I HAD A LOG OF WOOD!” Well said!

Second, this is not to disparage, however, the necessity for discriminating judgment with reference to doctrine and life. The perils of heresy and failure to exercise church discipline have led to the death of many an assembly, and the elders, as well as the saints over whom they have the oversight, must be eternally vigilant in detecting the “dogs” and the “swine” and in slaying them with the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God.

1 Tasker, p. 79.

2 Hunter, p. 82.

3 King., p. 97.

4 Ibid.

5 Hogg and Watson, p. 84.

6 King, p. 101.

7 Gutzke, p. 61.

Discipline In The Church

Discipline In The Church

S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.

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Scripture Reading: Matthew 18:15-20

Introduction

It is exceedingly rare to find a subject upon which the entire evangelical community agrees, outside of the basic facts of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. Within that community of believers there are those who are premillenarians and there are amillenarians. In policy there are congregationalists, episcopalians, presbyterians, and others.

There are non-charismatics and charismatics. There are intellectually-minded believers who love Biblical doctrine, and there are emotionally stirred believers who love “devotional” truth. There are Calvinists and, sad to say! Arminians. And this is not to mention that we frequently disagree over such questions as civil disobedience, capital punishment, divorce, abortion, evolution, and other ethical matters.

There is one thing, however, upon which almost all of us agree. It is that the church today stands in desperate need of spiritual growth. The standards of life found in too many of our churches are not distinguished by Biblical holiness. Say what one will about the Puritans,

they had yearnings for holy living that mark them out as a different breed from their spiritual descendants. “I have had a deep conviction for many years,” the godly Bishop Ryle wrote some time ago, “that practical holiness and entire self-consecration to God are not sufficiently attended to by modern Christians in this country.”1 The bishop wrote about Great Britain, but the same condition surely prevails here.

Bishop Ryle traced the lack of holiness to politics, controversy, party-spirit, and worldliness, and these are important conditions of the present spiritual malaise. I would like to suggest another problem, the problem of the neglect of church discipline. We have lived through a half-century of racing apostasy in many of the large religious bodies that profess the faith of Christ. The apostasy has been able to proceed at such a rapid pace largely because the believers, when the ugly departures from the faith first raised their heads like serpents in gardens of Eden, did nothing about it. Failing to exercise Biblical discipline, they have had to learn by sad experience the truth of the apostolic admonition, “A little leaven leaveneth the WHOLE lump” (Gal. 5:9). There is hardly a major denomination in the country that is not a living illustrations of this. And the unfortunate experience has been repeated in countless individual local churches. If discipline had been exercised at the first signs of departure from the faith, the purity of the body might have been continued.

And this is all the more remarkable in the light of the great emphasis that the Scriptures place upon church discipline. In addition to the present passage, there are important contributions to the subject in Romans sixteen, 1 Corinthians five, 2 Corinthians two, Galatians

six, 1 Thessalonians five, 2 Thessalonians three, 1 Timothy five, Titus one and three, Hebrews thirteen, 2 John, 3 John, and others. The very volume of Biblical instruction on the point is itself a strong and vivid warning to the church of the importance of discipline. It is, therefore, with a solemn sense of the gravity of the topic that we turn to Matthew eighteen, verses fifteen through twenty, which contains the initial teaching of the New Testament on the subject.

The Procedure of the Offended

The private rebuke (18:15). The Lord has just warned the world not to offend one of the little ones who believe in Him, promising to such as do a judgment far worse than physical death (cf. v. 6). He has further admonished them not to “despise” one of them, for they are the objects of angelic care, of the Good Shepherd’s seeking and saving love, and of the Father’s determinate will that they not perish (cf. vv. 10-14).

But, is it not possible that the one who offends one of the little ones is a believer? Why yes, of course. In that case, then, great care must be taken not to treat them as reprobates. The believers have responsibilities of discipline toward erring brothers. That seems to be the connection between the preceding section and this new one. Here is the way we are to respond when wronged by a fellow believer.

The first step in response to a trespass against a believer is the private conference between the two parties involved. As the Germans put it, the discussion is to take place uter vier Augen (lit., under four eyes)! This is excellent advice, for it is so easy for the offended to sin by gossip and to fall by rejoicing over a brother’s

misfortune. As Paul puts it, “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye who are SPIRITUAL restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, CONSIDERING THYSELF, lest thou also be tempted” (Gal. 6:1). Thus, the rebuke is to be private. And the subject of it is the believer’s sin, not our suffering by virtue of it.

It should be private, too, because it will be more likely at this stage to win the brother over. That would seem to be the point of the remainder of the verse (cf. Jas. 5:20).

The plural rebuke (18:16). If the private rebuke does not produce repentance, the Lord instructs the offended one, “take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.” The order is based upon the principle set forth in Deuteronomy 19:15, a passage referred to several times in the New Testament.

The public rebuke (18:17). Finally, if there is a refusal to listen, then the matter must be referred to the church. The word “church” must refer in this instance to the local church, since the informing of the invisible, universal church is beyond the capacity of the offended and the witnesses!

The use of the term “church” is the second time we have seen it in the Gospel of Matthew (cf. 16:18). In what sense is the church to be apprised of the matter? In a public meeting? Privately in the presence of the elders alone, as representatives of the church? The Lord does not specify, and we can only reason on the basis of the general teaching of the New Testament. For example, when at the so-called Jerusalem Conference a decision was finally reached over the question of circumcision and salvation, Luke speaks of it in this way, “Then it

pleased THE APOSTLES AND ELDERS (note the order), with the WHOLE CHURCH (note the subordinate relationship suggested here), to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas…" (Acts 15:22). It would seem from this that decisions in the local church were reached by the apostles and elders, and that they were made known to the whole church, who identified themselves with the mind of their leaders. In other words, the "authorities," to use Hendriksen's word,2 took the lead. In my opinion, our Lord's words, "tell it unto the church," mean that the matter is to be referred to the elders for their considerations.

The decision, having being reached, should be made known publicly to the church, in order that there may be unity of action against the of-fender by the whole body. The rebuke here, then, is an official one. The penalty is expulsion from assembly privileges. Expulsion from assembly privileges is not excommunication from membership in the local church. That would be contrary to Biblical teaching, and out of harmony with the doctrine of the security of the believer. It would imply that one may be saved and then lost. No, the expulsion is from the privilege of partaking of the elements at the Lord's Supper, the visible representation of the unity that exists in the body of Christ.

That the offender should be treated "as an heathen man and a tax collector" does not contradict Paul's words in 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15, "And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother."

The latter passage has to do with the first step in discipline, the personal one.

It should be emphasized that the spirit in which the discipline is to be carried out is the spirit of love, with the prayer upon our lips, “Lord, speak to me, that I may speak In living echoes of Thy tone.”

The passage in 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15 is an important parallel passage, and it must form a part of any complete doctrine of discipline. The “withdraw” of verse six is defined by the two terms of verse fourteen, “note that man” and “have no company with him.” Apparently involved in the first word, “note,” is a public naming of the individual who is being placed under discipline. The second word, “have no company with,” does not mean to ignore the brother, but rather to refuse to have free intercourse with him, which surely includes the Lord’s Supper. It occurs again in 1 Corinthians 5:9, 11, where it is strengthened by further prohibition.3 Finally, the personal appeals, suggested by the words of the apostle in verse fifteen, characterize the continuing attitude of the believers toward the brother under discipline. Restoration is always the aim of discipline, not excommunication from the fellowship (cf. v. 14, “that he may be ashamed”).

The Power of Discipline in the Church

The Godward side (18:18). The opening words of verse eighteen, “verily I say unto you,” indicate that the Lord regards discipline to be a We come here again to the “binding” and “loosing” of matters upon the earth (cf. 16:19). The terms, as we have noted previously are technical terms used by the Jews for the teaching of the

rabbis. To bind was to forbid, and to loose was to permit (cf. 23:4).

The plural “ye” (cf. 18:1), in contrast to the singular of the preceding verses, directs attention to the body of believers in their disciplinary pronouncements. The point of the verse is that the judicial decrees of the church, when carried out in harmony with the directions from the Word of God, have the support of heaven. Hendriksen comments, “Note in verse 18 and again in verse 19 the combination ‘earth… heaven.’ In both cases there is perfect harmony between that which by a conscientious church is done on earth and that which takes place in heaven, the former action preceding the latter.”4 There is a beautiful illustration of the application of this procedure in 1 Corinthians 5:3-5. The case is that of the person guilty of the wicked sin of incest. The Corinthian church had failed to take disciplinary action; in fact, they had continued in their proud condition (cf. vv. 1-2). The Apostle Paul, in view of their failure to exercise discipline, writes that he had in spirit carried out disciplinary action. His words are, “For I verily, as absent in body but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath done this deed” (v. 3). Then, in words reminiscent of the Matthaean passage, he speaks of being gathered together in the name of the Lord Jesus (cf. Matt. 18:20), “with the power of the Lord Jesus Christ,” words closely related to the promise of Matthew 18:20, “there am I in the midst of them.” It would appear from a comparison of the two passages that Paul was thinking of the direction of our Lord in Matthew 18 as he in spirit acted out the disciplinary requirements of the Lord. He speaks of gathering in His name and of His

presence in power. And he writes as if he thinks that heaven stands behind the action of delivering the offender to Satan for the destruction of the flesh that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. To sum up, when discipline is necessary, it should be carried out (1) in the name of the Lord, (2) with all assembled together, and (3) the assembly may count on the power of the Lord being present for the effectiveness of the disciplinary judgment.

The manward side (18:19). This statement merely emphasizes the human side of the carrying out of discipline. Agreement on earth in harmony with the Word finds support in heaven. The Father assumes responsibility for the effectiveness of the discipline.

The Presence of the Lord the Source of Power

The twentieth verse has often been thought to be a definition of a local church. That is, when two or three are gathered together in the name of the Lord, there is a church, since He is present. But, is this really true? The local church is a congregation of professing believers in Jesus Christ, meeting regularly in one locality under the oversight of elders, with deacons, and gifted men, observing the ordinances and continuing in the apostles' doctrine.

The twentieth verse, in the light of the context, has to do with church discipline. The Lord is simply emphasizing the fact that, when the church meets to carry out discipline according to the requirements of the Word of God, they may count upon the support of heaven in the judgments that are pronounced.

There may, of course, be some general applications of the verse that are appropriate to informal gatherings of believers for study of the Word of God, for prayer, or for worship, but the principle point has to do with church discipline.

The text certainly represents the proper attitude of the church when they gather on Sundays to meet for ministry and for worship. We do not meet in the name of any human leader or minister of the Word; we meet in the name of the Lord, that is, under His direction and protection and with the impartation of His strength and consolation.

The expression, “there am I in the midst of them,” is a beautiful promise. It suggests that, regardless of our feelings, if we meet in His name, He is there. His presence does not depend upon our attitude, but simply upon whether we meet “in His name.” “The Jews,” Tasker points out, “believed that the Shekinah or divine presence rested upon those who were occupied in the study of the law. Christians are here given the assurance that Christ is present with those who are diligently concerned with understanding His mind and will.”5

Conclusions

First of all, we mention again the relevance of this teaching for the church today. If we are to continue in the faith, discipline must be exercised when departures from the faith, either in doctrine or practice, appear among the saints. It constitutes a warning for the saints also, emphasizing that they must keep close to the Lord, cleaving to Him and His Word, that we may not have need of discipline.

H. A. Ironside has told the story of a man who wanted to hire a coachman. He lived in a mountainous region, and the road to his house ran along a steep precipice. A number of men applied for the position.

To one of them he said, “Tell me, are you adept at handling fractious horses?”

“Yes, I am,” he said.

“Can you drive a six-horse team?” “Yes.”

“How near can you drive to the edge of the cliff without going over?” “I have a steady hand and my eye is pretty true; I can get within a foot of it and not go over.”

“You step outside,” said the man, and he called another and asked him the same questions. He said, “I am an expert at handling horses; I can drive right along the edge and not go over.”

“Step outside,” and he called another and asked the questions.

“If you want a man to drive on the edge of the precipice,” said the last man, “you do not want me. When I drive, I keep as far away from the edge as I can.”

“You are the man I want. I will take you,” said the employer.

Dr. Ironside added, “Christian, be careful of the edge of the precipice.”6 That precipice is both a moral and doctrinal one, we might add. Finally, let us never forget in all our talk about discipline that the aim of discipline is not judgment, but (1) restoration to fellowship (cf. Gal. 6:1; 2 Cor. 2:5-11), (2) the maintenance of the purity of the church (cf. 1 Cor. 5:6-8; Gal. 1:6-9; 3 John 9), and (3) the maintenance of the testimony of the church to the

world within (cf. Acts 5:11) and without (cf. 1 Thess. 4:9-12).

May the Lord help us, as individual believers and as an assembly of the Lord, to keep the importance of holiness in thought and life before us constantly.

1 J. C. Ryle, Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots (Westwood, NJ, n.d.), p. vii.

2 Hendriksen, p. 701.

3 J. B. Lightfoot, Notes on Epistles of St. Paul from Unpublished Commentaries (London, 1904), p. 134.

4 Hendriksen, p. 702.

5 Tasker, p. 177.

6 H. A. Ironside, Addresses on the First Epistle to the Corinthians (New York, 1946), pp. 165-66.

From Bethlehem To Egypt To Nazareth

From Bethlehem To Egypt To Nazareth

Lewis S. Johnson, Jr.

Dr. S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., a regular contributor to FOCUS, is a teaching elder at Believers Chapel in Dallas, Texas. His expository study on Matthew 2:13-23 provides many instructive insights on a passage less known and emphasized than the more popular first half of Matthew 2.

Scripture Reading: Matthew 2:13-23

Introduction

It has been said by one of our leading evangelical scholars, the author of a commentary on Matthew, that "The apologetic aim of the evangelist can be summed up in the sentence 'Jesus is the Messiah, and in Him Jewish prophecy is fulfilled.'"1 That is certainly in harmony with the section of the gospel to which we turn in this study.

There are three short narratives that make up the section. There is, first, the account of the flight into Egypt (vv. 13-15). And, then, Matthew speaks of the massacre of the children at Bethlehem (vv. 16-18). And, finally, he describes the settlement of our Lord at Nazareth (vv. 19-23). Each of the sections concludes with a statement that in each narrative a passage from the Old Testament Scriptures is fulfilled (vv. 15, 17-18, 23). The same verb, pleroo, meaning to fulfill, is used in each section, and two of them begin with, "an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream" (vv. 13, 19), all

of which gives the impression that the sections are written with great care and a definite purpose. And that purpose seems to be to show that the events recorded are events foretold in Scripture. They, therefore, add to the growing testimony that Jesus is the Messiah, and that in Him Jewish prophecy is fulfilled.

There is another level of truth to which we should call attention here. Matthew's attachment to the fulfillment of prophecy in the life of Christ has led him to lay great stress on the providence of God in prophecy and history. God is not simply an omniscient spectator at the great events of the divine redemption. When He inspired His prophets to write, and when He worked to bring about the consummation of what they wrote in the ministry of Christ, He demonstrated that He is the supreme mover, not only in prophecy, but also in history. He interfered to prevent the Magi from returning to Herod. He interfered to prompt Joseph to fly into Egypt. He interfered to direct the return of the family of our Lord out of Egypt. He interfered to lead them to settle in Galilee. And, perhaps, all of this was able to be done because He interfered to provide for the poor family of Joseph, through the gifts of the Magi, means to live and journey as they fled from Herod and Archelaus. In fact, to sum it all up, it is plain that the evangelist thinks that His God is a God "who works all things after the counsel of his own will" (Eph. 4:11).

"It is comforting to know," Hendriksen says, "that in the history of redemption everything proceeds according to God's eternal plan. Hence, salvation rests upon a firm foundation."2 It is exceedingly fearful, however, to remember that our destiny rests upon our reaction to this God who acts in sovereign self-determination. The

obedience of Joseph leads to infinite blessing; the rebellion of Herod leads to everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord. “The dreaded Infant’s hand” proves more powerful than the mailed fist of Herod the king. Christ lives and grows, and they who are His; Herod rots and dies.

The Sojourn Into Egypt (2:13-15)

The sojourn (2:13-14). The appearance of the angel of the Lord evidently followed soon after the departure of the Magi. Joseph, the head of his family, is told to flee to Egypt for the protection of his wife and child from Herod’s vicious enmity.

Hardly has the infant been honored by the wise men from the distant lands than the royal family is told to flee for their lives. “How strangely blended in our Lord’s life from the very dawning,” Maclaren points out, “are dignity and lowliness, glory and reproach! How soon His brows are crowned with thorns! The adoration of the Magi witnesses to Him as the King of Israel and the hope of the world. The flight of which that adoration was the direct cause witnesses no less clearly to Him as despised and rejected, tasting sorrow in His earliest food, and not having where to lay His head.”3 Why did He flee into Egypt? Principally because Egypt was relatively near, and many Jews were living there. There would be friends upon whom they could call for help. Further, Egypt was outside Herod’s domain. From the divine standpoint, however, it appears that the fulfillment of prophecy was paramount in the mind of heaven.

Joseph’s obedience is immediate, as the expression “by night” indicates. When there is no hesitation, no

reluctance, and no delay in the carrying out of the divine commands, divine blessing follows.

The Scripture (2:15). Matthew sees in the return of our Lord from Egypt the fulfillment of Hosea 11:1. The passage in the historical context is a reference to the initial calling by God of Israel out of Egypt at the time of the Exodus. In what way does Matthew apply it to Christ?

In the first place, since the prophetic statement refers to a historical fact, it can only be a typical prophecy of Christ. There can only exist a correspondence between the action of God in the Exodus of Israel and the action of God in the exodus of the Son from Egypt. Augustine, you may remember, wrote that in the Old Testament the New Testament LIES CONCEALED, and that in the New the OLD LIES REVEALED.4 In the light of this it is not surprising to find that Israel is a type of Christ, and that her experiences are recapitulated in the experiences of Christ. Israel is God's national son, just because she included in herself the SEED through whom God does all that He does for Israel. Their covenant and promises were theirs because He was theirs. When Israel came out of Egypt, He the coming Seed came out of Egypt. Their promises could not have been fulfilled if He had remained in Egypt. In other words, He and Israel stand together, identified by origin and nature (cf. Rom. 1:3-4; 2 Tim. 2:8).5 As Gundry puts it, "Jesus is the representative Israelite in whose individual history the history of the whole nation, apart from its sin and apostasy, is recapitulated and anticipated."6 We conclude, then, that the ancient statement finds its anti-typical fulfillment in the return of the Son of God from

Egypt. What Israel was intended to be, but failed to be, He, the true Servant of God, was.

In later years the enemies of Jesus said that He went into Egypt to learn the magic and sorcery by which He was able to perform His miracles. The Talmud says, “Ten measures of sorcery descended into the world; Egypt received nine, the rest of the world one.” Celsus, the pagan philosopher and foe of Christianity, claimed that Jesus was brought up as an illegitimate child, that He served for hire in Egypt, coming to the knowledge of powers by which He later proclaimed Himself God. This is simply the slander of a twisted mind.

The truth is that His brief stay in Egypt served the very same purpose in His life which Israel’s stay served in their life. It sheltered Him from His enemies, and it gave Him room to grow stronger. The history of the past is a shadow of the future, for it is God who controls history, molding it to His purposes.

The Slaughter Of The Infants (2:16-18)

The slaughter (2:16). Herod, inflamed because He saw that he had been tricked, angrily orders a massacre of children in the village of Bethlehem and its vicinity. He really should have been angry with himself, for his own trick had simply boomeranged. His pride, however, was at stake. So the king order the slaughter of the children.

How foolish sin makes rebellious men! To think that the earthly king imagines that he is able to thwart the purpose of the heavenly King. Does he not realize that the God who sent the Magi home another way will cause his second attempt to overthrow the divine will to fail also? As Maclaren says, “What a contrast between the

king de jure, the cradled infant; and the king de facto, going down to his loathesome death, which all but he longed for! He may well stand as a symbol of the futility of all opposition to Christ the King."7 The slaughter of the children, obviously within the will of God, raises serious questions, the answers to which in their fullness lie hidden in the secrets of the will of God. It is evident that evil may have good issues, and, for the moment at least, we shall leave it at that.

"The fate of these few infants is a strange one. In their brief lives they have won immortal fame. They died for the Christ whom they never knew. These lambs were slain for the sake of the Lamb who lived while they died, that by His death they might live for ever. These 'Little flowers of martyrdom, Roses by the whirlwind shorn,'

head the long procession of martyrs, if not in intent, yet in fact, and, we may be sure, are now amongst the palm-bearing crowd, 'being the first-fruits to God and the Lamb.' 'O happy little ones!' says St. Augustine, 'but just born, not yet tempted, not yet struggling, already crowned.'"

Maclaren concludes these beautiful comments by adding, "Even in His infancy, Christ came to bring not peace, but a sword, and the shadow of suffering for Him already attended the brightness of His rising."8 It should be added that, due to the size of Bethlehem at the time, the estimated number of children slain is usually put at about twenty. The parallell of the incident with that of Pharaoh and the Exodus is clear (cf. Exod. 1:15-2:10).

The Scripture (2:17-18). Matthew sees in the incident a fulfillment of Jeremiah 31:15.9 To understand Matthew's

point it is necessary to understand the context of Jeremiah. In it Jeremiah is picturing the people of Jerusalem being led away captive into exile. The picture is that of vivid poetic imagery, based upon the fact that Rachel had been buried near Ramah, which, in turn, was near Bethlehem (cf. 1 Sam. 10:2-6; Gen. 35:19-20). The inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judah had been collected together in chains first at Ramah in Benjamin. Rachel was ideally the ancestress of Israel, the favorite wife of Jacob and a favorite with the nation (cf. Ruth 4:11). She died a pathetic and premature death, making a deep impression on the nation.

Thus, the evangelist in poetic imagery, too, pictures the mourning of the citizens of Bethlehem as being like that of the mourning of the captivity. Both took place under the very eyes of the mater dolorosa of the Old Testament, Rachel, who died in giving birth to Benjamin, and who still weeps over the sorrow of the exiles.

There exists, then, simply an analogy between the two passages. Both of them are highly poetic in their force, and Matthew has used the text to beautifully describe a similar situation in New Testament times.

One final point may be noted. In the Jeremiah passage the following context points out that the sorrow of the Babylonian exile shall be followed by the deliverance of a disciplined and revivified nation. Perhaps Matthew has the same idea in mind, too. A. C. Hebert has written, “Deeper meanings are suggested here: Rachel is the mater dolorosa of the Old Testament, who dies in giving birth to Benjamin, and is pictured by Jeremiah as still weeping over the sorrow of the exile. But the continuation of the passage is, that the children are to

return from the land of the enemy; present sorrow is not the end of God's purpose."10 It is very fitting that there should follow in Jeremiah's context the unfolding of the New Covenant, the basis of all of God's promises of deliverance and forgiveness (cf. Jer. 31:31-37).

The sorrow of the bereaved mothers, then, is destined in the divine providence to result in great reward, the salvation of the people of God through the preservation of the Lord Jesus for this saving ministry.11

The Settlement At Nazareth (2:19-23)

The settlement (2:19-23a). In the remainder of chapter 2 the evangelist recounts the return of Joseph and the Babe to the land. Herod died in 4 B.C. in his 70th year at Jericho, ravaged by foul and fatal diseases, which neither his physicians nor warm baths could help. Josephus has summed up his life in the words, "He was a man of great barbarity toward all men equally, and a slave to his passion."

The angel of the Lord appeared again to Joseph to give him guidance at the necessary time. His words, "they are dead who sought the young child's life," are a vivid reminder of the real Sovereign of the land. In fact, the words sum up in short sentence the failure of the attempt on the life of the Messiah, and they remind one of the words given Moses to encourage him to return in Egypt, "All men are dead which sought thy life" (Exod. 4:19).

They are "like an epitaph cut on a tombstone for a man yet living —a prophecy of the end of all succeeding efforts to crush Christ and thwart His work."12 Archelaus (cf. v. 22) was a chip off the old block, and it is

no wonder that Joseph feared him. Josephus says that he inaugurated his rule with the massacre of 3,000 people. As a result Joseph and the Babe find their way back to Galilee (cf. Isa. 9:1-7), to the city of Nazareth. In this city the Lord Jesus lived and grew into maturity.

The Scripture (2:23b-c). Again, Matthew is reminded of a prophecy, or prophecies, from the Old Testament Scriptures. “He shall be called a Nazarene” cannot be found in the Old Testament, and the problem has plagued biblical scholars for centuries. Alford concludes his discussion with, “I leave it, therefore, as an unsolved difficulty.”13 Plummer is no less uncertain, saying, “The difficulty about the prophecy quoted in verse 23 is one which our present knowledge does not enable us to solve.”14 I am sure it seems rash to suggest a solution in the light of these typical comments, and, while I shall offer a solution to the problem, I wish it to be understood that the suggestion is put forth with some hesitancy It has been suggested by some that the reference is to passages in prophetic books now lost. Others have made a very close connection with the word netser (AV, “Branch”) in Isaiah 11:1. Since that word suggests the lowliness of the Messiah, the suggestion is not implausible, although it is difficult to trace the word, “Nazarene,” to that Hebrew word. Others have suggested a reference to the Nazarite (cf. Jud. 13:5), but our Lord was not a Nazarite (cf. Matt. 11:18-19) and the terms are really different.

Finally, it has long been held that the evangelist refers here to no single text, but to the GENERAL TENOR of the Old Testament, namely, that He would be despised of men. The view assumes that a “Nazarene does refer to someone from the village of Nazareth (the identity is not

certain). There may also be some connection with the netser of Isaiah 11:1 and the thought of lowliness there.

The advantages of the last-named interpretation are that it suits the plural, “prophets,” the absence of a verb of saying, as in other citations (cf. vv. 15, 17), and the implicit connection with the passage in Isaiah 11:1. If this is the meaning of Matthew, then he is simply saying that the Lord’s residence is the fulfillment of Scripture in that the general tenor of the Old Testament is that the Messiah shall be despised by men and lowly in status (cf. Isa. 53:24; Psa. 22:6-8; 69:11, 19). Nathanel’s words are then, understandable, “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46). “The name,” Maclaren points out, “was nailed over His head on the cross as a scornful reductio ad absurdum of His claims to be King of Israel.”15

Conclusion

Again, we note as we conclude our study that the evangelist places a heavy emphasis again upon the divine initiative in the story of the infancy of Christ. It is the angel of the Lord who warns Joseph to flee and, thus, to escape the hands of Herod. It is the angel of the Lord who appears to Joseph to command him to leave Egypt. It is the angel of the Lord who directs Joseph to Galilee by another dream. And, pre-eminently, it is the evangelist’s great purpose in the section to show that all of this history is divinely intended to harmonize with the written prophecies of the Old Testament record. The history of redemption is the history of the working of a sovereign and predestinating God, who is carefully moving all things forward to the time when they shall be gathered together in Christ (cf. Eph. 1:10).

And, finally, from Joseph's experience we learn that they who patiently wait for the divine guidance, not moving until the cloud moves, are never disappointed, nor left undirected. The text of Scripture, "I will guide thee with mine eye" (Psa. 32:8), is sufficient.

1 Tasker, p. 18.

2 Hendriksen, p. 192.

3 Maclaren, I, 31.

4 Augustine, Quaestiones in Hept., ii. 73.

5 James Morison, A Practical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew (London, 1902), p. 21.

6 Gundry, p. 210.

7 Maclaren, I, 33.

8 Ibid.

9 In view of the fact that Matthew uses the particle tote here, which means simply then, rather than hina, meaning in order that, it would seem that the idea of intent or design in the fulfillment is played down.

10 A. G. Hebert, The Authority of of the Old Testament (London, 1947), p. 229.

11 Hill, p. 86.

12 Maclaren, I, 35.

13 Henry Alford, The Greek Testament (London, Oxford, and Cambridge, 1874), I, 18.

14 Alfred Plummer, An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel of S. Matthew (Grand Rapids, 1953) p. 18.

15 Maclaren, I, 36.

God And Mammon Or Advice To Fortune Hunters

God And Mammon Or Advice

To Fortune Hunters

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Scripture Reading: Matthew 6:19-24

Introduction

Poor Howard Hughes! His assets in one brief moment went from $2,000,000,000 to $.00! And to make the ignominy of it all the worse, only sixteen persons were at his funeral, which consumed a total of eight minutes. Oh, his assets are still here. That's not the problem. The problem is that Howard Hughes is no longer still here. Thomas Fuller, one of the old Puritans, once said, "Riches may leave us while we live, we must leave them when we die," and "Riches are long in getting with much pain, hard in keeping with much care, quick in losing with more sorrow."

One might get the wrong impression from the words of our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth," He said. One might think that the Lord is speaking against the possession of money. Does He not say, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth"? But that can hardly be right, for His great apostle has written, "For the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the PARENTS FOR

THE CHILDREN" (cf. 2 Cor. 12:14). In order for the parents to "lay up" (the word is literally, treasure up, the same word that is used in our text in Matthew) for the children, it is necessary that they obtain and save money for their sons and daughters. It would appear that the Lord's words, then, do not prohibit the possession of money for certain purposes. Perhaps the stress rests upon the words, "for ourselves." Money, it seems, is a kind of trust; it is to be held and used for others. In the Parable of the Rich Fool He has God saying to the fool, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee; then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure FOR HIMSELF, and is not RICH TOWARD GOD" (cf. Luke 12:20-21). Now, we are beginning to see the point. Riches are fine, if they are "in heaven," and to be rich is praiseworthy, if we are rich "toward God." And earthly riches are also good, if one remembers that they are a trust, bestowed by God for the benefit of others. What a difficult lesson that is for mortals!

One might even get the impression from the New Testament that the possession of private property is wrong. But that would be to obtain a false impression. For example, the eighth commandment says, "Thou shalt not steal" (cf. Exod. 20:15). The command, however, while it tells me not to take that which belongs to another, also tells others not to take from me. The story of Ananias and Sapphira, told in the fifth chapter of the Acts, confirms this. Peter said to Ananias, "Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back part of the price of the land? While it remained, WAS IT NOT THINE OWN? And after it was sold, was it not IN THINE OWN POWER? Why hast thou

conceived this thing in thine heart? Thou hast not lied unto men but unto God" (cf. Acts 5:3-4). These words clearly teach that heaven recognizes the right of private property. Contrary to the claims of many socialists and the communists, the biblical teaching does not demand that a Christian dispose of his property. It does demand, on the other hand, that he recognize its true owner.

The connection with the preceding context seems to be along this line: the Pharisees had the common view of life that riches are the result of righteousness. That view of things is not an ancient view alone. It pervades the thinking of the world. The rich man must be blessed, for how else can he be so fortunate? And this type of reasoning is also characteristic of some sub-Christian preaching, often propounded by radio preachers of limited training and spiritual understanding. "God never intended his saints to be poor," so the line goes. "He wants us all to be rich and prosperous. He does not intend that we dress shabbily, eat poorly, and drive an old Ford. He wants us to dress well, have plenty and drive a new Cadillac. To learn how to prosper, send for my book, entitled, "How to be Rich, Though a Christian," enclosing $2.00 for postage and mailing costs." Such teaching leads inevitably to avarice, and it is against this that our Lord speaks.

The Exhortation

Negative: treasures upon the earth (6:19). The section begins with exhortation, and the exhortation is first of a negative type and then of a positive type.

The references to moth, rust, and thieves call to mind the three great sources of wealth in Palestine and the great dangers that were faced. First of all, the moth

suggests clothes. One thinks immediately of “a certain rich man, who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day” (cf. Luke 16:19). It is foolish, of course, to set one’s heart upon fine clothes, for, when they are put away and not in use, moths infest them and destroy both their beauty and their value.

Second, Jesus refers to the corruption of “rust.” The word translated “rust” is a word that means literally eating away. It is used a number of times in the New Testament and always refers to the eating of food (cf. Rom. 14:17; John 4:32). Since corn and grain, stored in large barns, was often the principal source of a man’s wealth, the eating away that destroyed the grain was often that of mice, rats, and other vermin. There was no permanence in possessions subject to such infestation.

Finally, the Lord Jesus refers to the thieves who stole by breaking through the walls of houses. Since the houses in the land of Palestine were often made of nothing stronger than baked clay, it was not uncommon to return home to find that thieves had dug through the walls to steal the gold or other precious possessions hidden away. And, of course, there could be no permanence to such treasures; they were at the mercy of enterprising thieves. The purpose of this admonition is to impress upon the minds of the disciples the transitory and uncertain character of material things. There is a familiar little couplet, which goes like this, “Wise bees save honey, Wise men save money.”

It has to be true because it rhymes! But it is not. According to Jesus, what does the wise man get from saving money? Three nervous breakdowns — moths, mice and marauders!

Positive: treasures in heaven (6:20). If in our Lord's day the normal thing was to put one's wealth in a house or in the field, in our day it is to put it in banks or in securities, hoping for mammoth increases in the Dow Jones averages. "Every boy remembers," Morgan comments, "that he has often been told that the miser says coins are flat and that they may rest; and the spendthrift says they are round that they may roll."1 The Lord teaches something different from the wisest of human wisdom. It is this: Wealth is that which we store in heaven, and it comes from spending our material things from heavenly ends. What we invest in ministering to others is the true capital, laid away in God's heavenly bank.

One might ask, "What are the heavenly treasures?" From the general context of the Sermon on the Mount it would seem that they must be the Christian rewards, the natural result of souls won to God, of work done that leads to the edification of the body of Christ, of money spent for the progress of the preaching of the gospel.

The Jews were familiar with the phrase "treasure in heaven," and they identified it with deeds of kindness and with character. Barclay's illustration makes the point, "In the days of the terrible Decian persecution in Rome, the Roman authorities broke into a Christian Church. They were out to loot the treasures which they believed the Church to possess. The Roman prefect demanded from Laurentius, the deacon: 'Show me your treasures at once.' Laurentius pointed at the widows and orphans who were being fed, the sick, who were being nursed, and poor whose needs were being supplied, 'These,' he said, 'are the treasures of the Church.' The Church has always believed that 'what we keep, we lose,

and what we spend, we have'."2 The Mohammedan Koran has it, "When a man dies men ask how much he has left behind; angels how much he sent before him." And the futility of building a giant estate here for oneself is grimly parodied by the Spanish proverb, "There are no pockets in a shroud."

Is it, then wrong to make provision for future physical needs? Is all profit-making wrong? Is it wrong to care for one's family? Are all rich people reprobates? No, of course not. Did God condemn Joseph for advising Pharaoh to store up grain for future use (cf. Gen. 41:33-36)? Were Solomon and Agur wrong in pointing to the ant as an illustration of the common sense revealed in providing during the summer for the needs of winter (Prov. 6:6; 30:25)? Business and banking are encouraged by implication in our Lord's parable (cf. Matt. 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-23). And it is surely right to lay up for the needy (cf. Eph. 4:28), and one must care for those of his own house, or he is properly called an infidel (cf. 1 Tim. 5:8). Even our Lord received help from the Happy Ladies who ministered to him of their substance (Luke 8:3).3 One must remember through all of this that money can be a great blessing, if it is not made the end, but the means to the end, namely, to help the saints and one's own family, and to encourage the work of the preaching of the Word (cf. Phil. 4:15-17; 1 Tim. 5:17-18).

The Argumentation

The "for," which begins verse 21 provides the connection with the preceding. It explains the reasoning that lies behind the previous exhortations. A man's interests are where his investments are.4 They draw his heart like a magnet. "If his treasure is God," Hunter

points out, “then his heart, like ‘poor Susan’s’ in the poem, ‘will be in heaven,’ even while he walks the dusty ways of earth. If it is money, it will be, like Scrooge’s, in his miser’s hoard, absorbing ‘all thoughts, all passions, all delight’.”5 “If everything that a man values and sets his heart upon is on earth, then all his interest will be upon earth, and he will have no interest in any world beyond this world. If all through his life a man’s eyes are on eternity, then he will evaluate lightly the things of this world. If everything which a man counts valuable is on this earth, then he will leave this earth reluctantly and grudgingly; if a man’s thoughts have been ever in the world beyond, he will leave this world with gladness, because he goes at last to God. Once Dr. Johnson was shown through a noble castle and its grounds; when he had seen round it he turned to his companions and said, ‘These are the things which make it difficult to die’.”6 These words of Professor Barclay are true, with one stricture. When the time comes for us to die, God takes the difficulty out of it!

Put in Scriptural language it is this, “For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he” (cf. Prov. 23:7).

The Illustrations

The single eye (6:22-23). In the first illustration of the teaching that He has just given the Lord refers to the “single eye.” What does He mean? Barclay explains, “The eye is regarded as the window by which the light goes into the whole body. The colour and state of a window decide what light gets into a room. If the window is clear, clean, and undistorted, the light will come flooding into the room, and will illuminate every corner of it. If the glass of the window is coloured or

frosted, distorted, dirty, or obscure, the light will be hindered, and the room will not be lit up. The amount of light which gets into any room depends on the state of the windows through which it has to pass. So, then, says Jesus, the light which gets into any man's heart and soul and being depends on the spiritual state of the eye through which it has to pass, for the eye is the window of the whole body."7 The eye, it seems to me, stands for the mind of the believer. Our spiritual minds determine the spiritual health of the whole man.

The word translated "single" in the Authorized Version probably should be rendered "generous," a meaning that the root often has (cf. Rom. 12:8; 2 Cor. 9:13; Jas. 1:5). It is the generous eye, the generous mind, that our Lord commends. A similar thing may be said concerning the word translated "evil" in verse twenty-three. While evil is the normal meaning of poneros, the Greek word, yet it also in certain contexts means niggardly, ungenerous, such as in the Greek Old Testament text of Deuteronomy 15:9 and Proverbs 23:6 (cf. 28:22). Most likely that is the meaning here, for it forms a proper contrast with the preceding verse.

Our Lord, then is recommending a generous spirit in the believer and promising a blessing for the whole man. On the other hand, for the ungenerous spirit there is only darkness, loss of communion and loss of reward. Spiritual astigmatism occurs.

The single service (6:24). Dr. South said, "Mammon has enriched his thousands and damned his tens of thousands." It is true. William Hendriksen puts it this way, "The man with the misplaced heart (verse 21) and misdirected mind (verses 22 and 23) also suffers from a

misaligned will, a will not in line with God's will (verse 24)."8 "Mammon" was the Aramaic word for gain, and it stands for money as a master in the sense of a competitor with God for the worship of men. It is Paul who speaks of covetousness as idolatry (cf. Col. 3:5), as that which competes with God for man's proper response to Him in worship. The Lord contends, "No man can serve two masters." One might debate this, for can we not have a gardener who serves us on Mondays, and then serves others on the other days of the week? Yes, but that sense of the word "serve" is not the sense of the Greek word used by our Lord. It meant to serve as a slave, and no man in New Testament times could serve two men as a slave. A slave could only be the slave of one man. To the one man he belonged completely. There was no room for a divided heart and a divided service.

But what does the expression "hate the one" mean? It has the sense in the New Testament of to respect a rival claim in certain contexts (cf. Rom. 9:13; Luke 14:26). In the relationship to God, there is no possibility of giving Him His proper place and at the same time serving Mammon as a slave. We cannot have two masters. We cannot please God by compromising as those in 2 Kings 17:33, who "feared the Lord and served their own gods." That is an impossible situation.

This passage has great relevance for Christians who live in our affluent society with its many pressures and temptations to conform to the money-seeking society of which we all are a part. Our covetousness has often become idolatry. May God deliver us from it! As Richard Baxter said, "God is your safest purse-bearer." May we allow Him to control the strings of our purses!

Conclusions

Is wealth, then, wrong? No, but the "love" of it to the extent that it becomes covetousness is. It is Paul who writes, "For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil, which, while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (1 Tim. 6:10). The text seems to refer to Judas, whose love of money led to his own destruction (cf. Acts 1:18), but it is a warning for all in the family of God (it must not be forgotten that the words of our passage are addressed to disciples!). It is a clarion call for us to set proper priorities for guidance in the handling of our monies, to remember that our money belongs to Him and is ours only as a trust, and to regard greed and covetousness as spiritual idolatry.

Wealth, then, is a trust, not a treasure for ourselves, a means, not an end. Therefore, "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations (Luke 16:9).

For the rich Thomas Watson has a warning, "It is hard to carry a full cup without spilling, and a full estate without sinning." But our Lord's words are for the poor, too. "As sick men used to love health better than those that never felt the want of it; so it is too common with poor men to love riches better than the rich that never needed. And yet, poor souls, they decide themselves, and cry out against the rich, as if they were the only lovers of the world, when they love it more themselves though they cannot get it," Richard Baxter wisely has noticed. The fact that we are poor does not allow us to

escape the temptation to love that which we cannot obtain.

There is an old story of a little boy who was given two nickels by his father and told that one was to go into the Sunday School collection plate, for it was the Lord's nickel, while the other may be used for an ice cream cone (yes, they used to cost only 5c!). Hastily the youngster ran from his father's presence down the street to the local ice cream emporium. On the way, however, as he was passing a street corner he dropped one of the nickels and was horrified to see it roll down the sewer. Nevertheless, he went on to the store and bought his cone and returned to his home. He told the story of the accident to his father, who promptly asked, "Why, then, did you buy the cone?" The boy replied, "Well, Dad, it was the Lord's nickel that rolled down the sewer!" It does seem that it is always the Lord's nickel that is lost. May He give us the grace to remember that all we have is His, and may He direct us in the use of it.

1 Morgan, p. 64.

2 Barclay, I, 244.

3 King, p. 82.

4 Hunter, p. 77.

5 Ibid.

6 Barclay, I, 245.

7 Ibid.

8 Hendriksen, pp. 347-8

Healings, The Atonement, And The Implications Of Discipleship

Healings, The Atonement, And

The Implications Of Discipleship

S. Lewis Johnson. Jr.

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Scripture Reading: Matthew 14:8-22

The sweetest sounds to mortals given

Are heard in Mother, Home and Heaven.

—W. G. Brown, - “Mother, Home, Heaven.”

“Before we were married, you said mother could stay with us whenever she pleased.”

“Yes, but she hasn’t pleased yet.”

Introduction

What a change takes place when mothers become mothers-in-law! Or, so we claim, although for most of us the jokes do not really carry conviction. Many of us who are married owe more to them than we commonly acknowledge. In my case, a great part in the chain of events that led to my conversion is traceable to the Christian witness of my mother-in-law. I can, therefore, appreciate this very tender and human story of the healing of Peter’s mother-in-law, and I can thoroughly understand how, when she has been healed, she arose and ministered to the Lord Jesus. It is a beautiful and

instructive story of healing that illustrates the great realities of sin, salvation, and service.

The healing of Peter's mother-in-law is the third of the miracles of healing (cf. Matt. 8:1-17), which precede the miracles of power (8:18; 9:17), and of restoration (9:18-34). The miracles, which follow the great Sermon on the Mount, in which the King expounds the precepts of the Kingdom of God, display His credentials. They mark Him out as the Sovereign King of Kings and Lord of Lords. They do not "prove" His Messianic right, for only the Holy Spirit can do that, but they do identify Him as the one promised by the Scriptures (cf. Isa. 29:18-19; 35:5-6; Matt. 11:1-6). This is probably the chief reason that Matthew includes them in his work.

The account we have just read has another point of interest. The question of whether healing is in the atonement is raised by the public healings of many others and Matthew's comment that follows their description, "That it might be fulfilled which was spoken Isaiah, the prophet, saying, He himself took our infirmities, and bore our sickness" (v. 17). Is it true, as many of the "faith healers" say, that physical healing is in the atonement of Jesus Christ? Can we say that, because Jesus Christ died for the sins of sinners, physical healing is one of the blessings we may claim from His death? And can we claim such healing now, before the resurrection of the body? We shall address this question in a moment.

It is not surprising that the miracles and wonders performed by the Lord Jesus should have a profound effect upon the observers, and so we are not surprised to read that a scribe came to Jesus and said, "Master, I

will follow thee wherever thou goest" (v. 19). We are a little surprised, however, at least at first reading, to hear our Lord repressing the willing disciple. And in a moment we hear Him stimulating another disciple, this one a rather sluggish and unwilling one. And we, therefore, learn from the incidents following the miracles the two ways in which Jesus deals with men who face the highest of all commitments, commitment to the service of the Son of God. He bridles the one and tries to stir up the other, but He is stern with both. The service of the Lord Jesus is no lightly undertaken work. More shall be said about this later.

The Private Healing Of Peter's Mother-In-Law

The characters (8:14). The Lord, according to a synopsis of the parallel accounts, performed this miracle on the Sabbath day. Having come from the synagogue, He healed the demon-possessed man (cf. Mark 1:21-28) and then the centurion's servant on the way home. Entering Peter's home, He no doubt hoped for some moments of rest following His busy day, but it was to be denied Him. Upon entrance into the home "they besought him for her" (cf. Luke 4:38). Simon's mother had a great fever, probably a form of malaria. We are, therefore, introduced to several of the characters of the account. The disciples James, John, Andrew, and Peter were there (cf. Mark 1:29), and the woman was there.

That she was Peter's mother-in-law must be noted. From this we know that the Apostle Peter was married. Imagine that! the "first pope" married! The Apostle Paul confirms the amazing fact in 1 Corinthians 9:5. And another thing! It is evident that Peter really loved his mother-in-law, for "they," a word that surely includes

him, “besought him for her.” According to our modern attitudes, as represented by our jests about mothers-in-law, we would think that Peter should have urged Him to leave well enough alone! Or, we might at least imagine him having mixed emotions about her healing! Perhaps you have heard the definition of mixed emotions, —”Your mother-in-law driving your new convertible over a cliff!”

Other characters in the account include the Lord Himself, the Great Physician, and the wife of Peter. Peter must have had a good natured wife. He was bringing home four extra guests for supper, and we do not hear a single complaint from her.

The cure (8:15). Responding to their call upon Him, the Lord Jesus “touched her hand and the fever left her.” Appeals to Him always produce healing (cf. vv. 2, 5-6), and this is no exception. The malaria left her with His touch and rebuke (cf. Luke 4:39). And again the cure was immediate.

The consequences (8:15). There are many suggestive things in this account. For example, it is one of the few wonders that He performed on members of the group of His more immediate followers. The healing and restoration of Lazarus is another. And then, too, this miracle was performed in a home in privacy. And, finally, the recipient of the blessing was a woman. It all suggests the ennobling effect of the ministry of the Lord Jesus upon the home and family. Domestic life never finds its true meaning and purpose until it has settled into relationship to Jesus Christ.

The one thing, however, that I would like for you to note is the effect of the healing upon Peter’s mother-in-law. The text says that “she arose, and MINISTERED unto

him." What this service was is not given in any of the accounts, but after a long, tiring day of "unwearied mercy,"' to use Maclaren's phrase, it is easy to imagine some of the things that it included. And since the evangelist puts the verb "ministered" in the imperfect tense, suggesting continued service, we are probably to understand that it continued through the duration of his stay in the home at the least. Her service is said by Luke to have begun "immediately" (4:38), another testimony to the difference between the divine healings and modern ones, so-called.

The entire incident pictures to us the saving effects of Christianity, for His miracles are always parables of spiritual truth. The weakness of the malaria suggests the great text of Paul, "For when we were yet WITHOUT STRENGTH, in due time Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom. 5:6). The weakness that men have, when without Christ, results in an inability to serve their creating and redeeming God. The contact with Jesus Christ is a manifest suggestion of the only source of spiritual strength, His redeeming mercy (cf. Tit. 3:4-5). And the following service reminds us of our responsibility to serve Him after redemption. The hackneyed statement, "we are saved to serve," is, nevertheless, true and correct, although not the whole story (cf. 1 Pet. 2:9; 1 Thess. 1:9-10). And will you also notice that the motive for her service was not a legalistic attitude of seeking to gain merit by works, but an attitude of devotion and appreciation produced by grace. How true it is that, "He breaks the power of cancelled sin, He sets the prisoner free!"

One final comment on the initial miracles of healing performed by the King. He begins with the unfit

according to the nation’s view of things. The first to be healed is a leper, the second is a Roman centurion, and the third is a woman (cf. Luke 15:2).

(to be continued)

Is Peter The Rock?

Is Peter The Rock?

S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.

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Scripture Reading: Matthew 16:13-18

Introduction

The Lord has led His disciples into a quiet part of the land, and there in Caesarea Philippi He is engaged in teaching them in greater depth that which lies before them. He has taught them by example and by word that His ministry, while directed to the nation Israel, also encompasses the Gentiles. He has also warned them of the false doctrine of the religious leaders, the Pharisees and Sadducees. From this point on He will lead the apostles into a deeper knowledge of His identity, showing them that He is not only the Messiah, but also the Son of the living God. Further, His ministry on earth will come to an end in the passion of Jerusalem and the cross. The quiet of Caesarea Philippi, where they were free from the danger of interference from the partisans of Herod, afforded them an opportunity to consider these important matters.

Two questions are directed to the apostles by the Lord, and they were designed to stir them to reflection upon His person and work. The first raised the question of the views that the people had of the Lord Jesus. The second

is more personal, and by it He draws from them a confession of their convictions about Him. “And you — who do you say that I am?,” is His query.

The answer of Peter, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16), is, of course, remarkable. It was not, however, the first time that one of them confessed His Messiahship, When Andrew first found Peter, he said, “We have found the Messiah,” and Philip and Nathaniel shortly after this express a similar faith (cf. John 1:41-51). It is, thus, likely that the important part of the confession is the acknowledgment of Christ as, “the Son of the living God.” I think I agree with Tasker’s words, “It would seem clear, as the same writer goes on to say (he refers to Dom John Chapman), that it is the confession by Peter of Jesus as the Son of the living God, repeating the witness of the heavenly voice at the baptism and re-echoing the words of the disciples after the walking on the sea (see iii. 17 and xiv, 33), that is now accepted by our Lord as a revelation, coming from the lips of Peter but inspired by the Father, that the time has now come for Him to initiate them into the mystery of His forthcoming passion and resurrection. This confession of Peter had been made quietly and deliberately in answer to a specific question, and in this respect it was different from the words uttered perhaps somewhat impulsively by the disciples in a tense situation after Jesus had come to them walking on the sea.”1 The statement of verse twenty-one, “From that time forth began Jesus to show unto His disciples, how He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day,” supports the correctness of this exegesis. He is the Son, not John the

Baptist, Elijah, or Jeremiah, but the unique Son of the living God.

Barclay does not exaggerate at all when he says, “This passage is one of the store-centres of New Testament interpretation. It has always been difficult to approach it calmly and without prejudice, for this passage is the Roman Catholic foundation of the position of the Pope and of the Church. It Is taken by the Roman Catholic Church to mean that to Peter was given the keys which admit or exclude a man from heaven, and that to Peter was given the power to absolve or not to absolve a man from his sins.”2 Further, that the Church has argued that Peter ultimately became Bishop of Rome, and that his power as bishop of the Christian church has descended to all the succeeding bishops of Rome, that is, the Popes. Thus, the present Pope is the bishop of the true Christian church. Is that true? We shall see.

The Situation

The place (16:13). The revelation to Peter took place “in the borders of Caesarea Philippi,” that is, about 24 miles north of Bethsaida Julias. The town, named in honor of Caesar Augustus and called Caesarea Philippi in honour of its enlarger and beautifier, Philip the tetrarch, and to distinguish it from the far more important seaport town of Caesarea, is located in what is now southwestern Syria. It is presently occupied by Israel. It is situated near one of the sources of the Jordan River and just below majestic Mt. Hermon, a year-round snow-covered peak of over 9,000 feet. A beautiful place, it was ideally situated for the purpose of instruction and quiet reflection on the course of the ministry of the Messiah, as well as for the exercise of prayer (cf. Luke 9:18)

The persons (16:13). The text calls His companions, “disciples,” but from the accounts it appears that the revelation and the teaching given at this time were given only to the apostles.

The Apostle Peter (16:16). Playing an important role in the ministry here is Peter, who has been called “the American of the apostles,” no doubt because he was always putting his foot in his mouth! We are inclined to think of the great apostle as a colossal blunderer (cf. 17:1-11, 24-27; 18:21-22; John 13:1-10), but we must remember that it is our Lord who said to him, “Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona” (v. 17), and then emphasized that his name meant rock, a term with much favorable Biblical connotation. The term was applied by the rabbis to Abraham, and the Bible applies it most significantly to God Himself (cf. Deut. 32:4, 31; 1 Sam. 2:2; 2 Sam. 22:2; Psa. 18:31). To call anyone a rock was a great compliment, and Peter shall always have the remarkable distinction that Jesus called him a rock.

The Interrogation

The general question (16:13-14). The opening question of the paragraph is one addressed to the disciples, but one that asks for the evaluation that men in general have placed upon the identity of the Lord Jesus. It is, “Who do MEN say that I, the Son of man, am?”

The answers are probably to be understood as “three specimen answers,”3 typical of the kinds of answers that were being given by those who, unlike the leaders, were trying to put Him in the context of the Biblical revelation in a serious way.

The first was the view that He was John the Baptist, risen from the dead, a view that Herod had also espoused. There were important similarities between John and Jesus, for both had official positions in the Messianic program, but there the likeness fades, and the superiority of the Son becomes evident. And that superiority was recognized most definitely by John himself. John was the ambassador, but Jesus was the King. John could prepare men, but only He could really enable them to come to repentance and faith.

The second suggestion also points to certain similarities between the great prophet Elijah and Jesus. He was a prophet, too, as a matter of fact the greatest of a great line of messengers for God. They were both men of prayer, men of miracles, and warriors for the truth in conflict with false prophets. Elijah, however, wavered in his faith, but Jesus never did. Elijah won many of his victories by shedding the blood of others, but Jesus won His by shedding His own blood.

The third suggestion is not surprising, and it is the opinion of more than one that Jeremiah, of all the Old Testament prophets, was most like the Lord Jesus. He was a living example of patient endurance and of suffering for the truth that he proclaimed. And he came to be known as “the weeping prophet.” The picture he presented reminds one of the Suffering Servant of Jehovah, the Lord Jesus, of whom Isaiah speaks in this way, “He is despised and rejected of men, A MAN OF SORROWS, and ACQUAINTED WITH GRIEF” (53:3). A true likeness existed between them, but there it ends, with a likeness. For, while Jeremiah has prophesied of a New Covenant to come, it was the Man of Sorrows who

inaugurated that New Covenant in His blood, obtaining the forgiveness of sins for His people.

The individual question (16:15-16). General answers do not suffice for Him, and so He replies, “But who say YE (the word is emphatic in the Greek text) that I am?”

Peter gives the only adequate answer to the question, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (v. 16). Peter knew that He was not just another of the prophets, important though they were. He sensed that He was the Messiah, and that that Messiahship was grounded in an even deeper relationship to Jehovah. He was the Son of the living God, who knew the inmost thoughts and purposes of the Father and possessed His essential nature.

This insight probably did not come to Peter like a bolt from the blue, it would seem. Tasker puts it this way, “Jesus was well aware that this great confession was not made by Peter on the spur of the moment as if he had been ‘stung by the splendour of a sudden thought.’ Nor was he voicing a second-hand opinion learned from some other creature of flesh and blood. On the contrary, ever since the day when he stood before Jesus and felt compelled to say ‘Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord’, and yet in spite of that reluctance had found himself irresistibly led to respond to Jesus’ call and leave his nets and follow Him, during all the time that he had witnessed his Master’s mighty works and listened to the words of eternal life that fell daily from his lips, the living God, the God who acts and intervenes in the affairs of men, had been leading him to see that Jesus was indeed His Son. Jesus therefore pronounced him highly favoured, addressed him directly as Peter, the

man of rock, and made it clear that the faith that was expressed by him was the rock upon which he would build His Church, the Church of the living God, which the forces of death would never be able to overcome."4

The Revelation Regarding the Church

The foundation of the church (16:17-18). At this point we come to the important part of the statement of our Lord, one in which He unfolds new truth concerning the church, following His commendation of Peter and the tracing of the apostle's words of confession to the revelation of the Father in heaven.

As we have said above, this passage is basic to the position of the Roman Church. They have affirmed three things. First, Christ founded a church. That is true (cf. 1 Cor. 3:11; Eph. 2:19-22). Second, that church has been given power to govern and teach all mankind. That is a half-truth (cf. Rom. 13:1-7). Finally, the Roman Catholic Church is that church. This we shall see is false. The importance of this to the Roman Church is illustrated by the fact that the 18th verse is found written around the interior of the dome of the basilica of St. Peter's Church in Rome.

The problem of the passage centres around the question, "Who or what is 'this rock'?" The answers have been many, although the following are the principal ones.

(1) First, many Romanists, although not all, regard this as an open and shut case. Peter is the rock. It is difficult, however, to imagine the church of Jesus Christ being built upon a man, particularly in the light of our Lord's statements concerning man (cf. John 2:24-25).

Aside from this, however, there are other objections to this view. If the words referred to Peter, it would be more natural for the Lord to say, “thou art Peter, and upon thee I will build my church.” Further, there is an interesting change in the words of the Greek text, which cannot be reconciled very easily with this interpretation. In the original text the word for “Peter” is the Greek word Petros, while the word for “rock” is petra, a related word but not an identical one. Why the change if Peter is the rock? Finally, the word petra, an Old Testament word, too, is never used of men in the Old Testament.5 It might be thought that, since so much for the Roman Church hinges on this text, their interpreters would be agreed on this interpretation. Such is not the case, even though they have traditionally told us that the Bible ought to be interpreted according to the unanimous tradition of the Church Fathers. Of course, the first thing we learn when we study the Fathers is that they were hardly ever, if ever, unanimous on any thing! A Roman Catholic scholar some years ago counted the interpretations of this verse in the Fathers and discovered that 17 believed Peter was the rock, 8 believed the apostles were meant, 44 believed Peter’s statement was the rock, and 16 believed that Christ was the rock! For example, Chrysostom, one of the greatest of the Fathers, wrote, “on this Stone, that is to say on the faith of this confession I will build my church.” He identifies the confession as, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Fifty-fifth Homily on Matthew 16). And Augustine, the greatest of the early Fathers, wrote, “What is the meaning of this saying of Jesus Christ? It is this: I will build My church on this faith, on what has just been said, to wit, ‘Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God’” (on the First Epistle of John).

Jerome, the greatest scholar among the Fathers, said simply, “The rock is Christ” (commentary on St. Matthew).

Even if the Roman view were correct, the Romanists would still have to demonstrate that Peter’s authority was transmissible. That contention is a dogmatic castle in the air. Further, it would have to be shown that Peter’s authority was transmitted to the bishops of the Roman Church, another impossibility. Of course, if the church really was built upon Peter, that might explain it all — her blunders and failures through the centuries!

(2) Second, a number of leading Protestants have also taken the view of the Romanists in measure, at least to the extent that “this rock” is said to be Peter. It is their contention that Peter was the first believer in the Messiahship and Sonship of Christ and, therefore, he became the first member and the foremost member of the church.6 These scholars have not followed the Roman Church in its views of the transmission of that authoritative place to the Roman bishops, however. The leading exponent of the view is the renowned Oscar Cullman, a Swiss scholar.7 The objections mentioned above still obtain.

(3) Third, others have contended that the apostles are referred to, Peter supposedly acting as their representative in his confession and in his reward from the Lord. Why, then, did He not say clearly, “You (plu.) are Peter, and upon you (plu.) I will build my church”? He did use the plural in verse fifteen, and plural here would be understood easily.

(4) Fourth, still others see the great confession of verse sixteen as the rock. As a rule, however, the word rock

refers to persons, rather than to things. The view, however, is not far from the truth, providing we remember that the confession is a statement about a person.

(5) Fifth, it seems best to take the rock to be Christ Himself as revealed in the confession of Peter. It has the advantage of preserving the distinction in the Greek words, for petros refers to the pebble, the loose rock, while petra is a mass of live rock, a cliff, or a cave.8 The latter would be a vivid way of distinguishing the little pebble, Peter, from the massive Rock, the Lord, Jehovah-Jesus Himself (cf. Deut. 32:4). Further, this appears to have been the view of Peter (1 Pet. 2:4-8) and the apostles (cf. Rom. 9:33; Eph. 2:19-22). Finally, as we noted above, it is the view of the leading Catholic interpreters, too, including Chrysostom, Augustine, Ambrose, and Jerome.

As for the objection sometimes raised, namely, that our Lord spoke in Aramaic, and such a distinction in words for rocks does not exist in that tongue, we reply that we have to do with inspired words here, not conjecture. There is no proof that our Lord spoke in Aramaic alone; in fact, the trend of present scholarship is the other way. Further, there is no proof that He could not engage in some Grecising when desirable, nor is there any absolute proof that Aramaic could not make this distinction. Why is Peter mentioned by the Lord in the statement? He would indicate, by a play on words, the way in which he may truly become what his name proclaimed he was, a rock (cf. Luke 5:6).

The identification of the church (16:18). The “church” is that which came into existence on the Day of Pentecost

(cf. 18:17 / the only other time the word is found in the gospels / Acts 5:11; Eph. 1:22-23; 1 Cor. 12:13).

The exaltation of the church (16:18, “prevail”). The momentous statement concludes with a prophecy and assurance of the ultimate victory of the church. There are different ways of interpreting the last clause, but the most likely is that He is promising that the powers of evil and death shall never overcome the Church of Jesus Christ. As our Lord said elsewhere, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, if a man keep my saying HE SHALL NEVER SEE DEATH” (John 8:51). The government of Hades is powerless before the one who has overcome death in resurrection and conveys that same overcoming life to others who trust in Him as their divinely appointed representative.

May God enable us, if we never have, to pray with the psalmist, “From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed; LEAD ME TO THE ROCK THAT IS HIGHER THAN I” (Psa. 61:2).

1 Tasker, p. 159.

2 Barclay, 11 153.

3 Tasker, p. 157.

4 Ibid., p. 158.

5 Morison, p. 281.

6 Barclay, II, 155.

7 Oscar Cullman, Peter: Disciple —Apostle — Martyr, trans. Floyd V. Filson (Philadelphia, 1953), pp. 155-238.

8 Cf. Abbott-Smith, p. 359.

Israel and the Divine Purpose— Present and Future (Part 3)

Israel and the Divine Purpose

— Present and Future

Part 3

S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.

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This is the third of Dr. Johnson's series of studies on Romans 11.

God's Purpose in Israel's Fall

Introduction

In surveying the Scriptural ground that lies before us in this study, namely Romans eleven, verses eleven through sixteen, Paul's principal points emerge quite plainly. As the apostle sees the future, the ultimate goal of God is the salvation of His people, composed of both his ancient covenant people Israel and the predominantly Gentile church that shares in the covenant promises made to the patriarchs (cf. vv. 17, 25-27, 28-32; Isa. 49:1-7).

The method by which God will accomplish this is also clear. He will accomplish His purpose — He is no frustrated deity — by the present Gentile salvation, which shall finally through Jewish jealousy bring ethnic

Israel to Him (cf. 10:19; 11:11, 14; Deut. 32:21). And the result of that remarkable return of His ancient people to Himself shall be boundless world blessing (cf. vv. 12, 15). It is truly an extraordinary view of the times to come.

Is there not, however, a note of the fantastically improbable about this scheme of things? With the history of 1900 years now can we imagine the Jews jealous of the church by reason of their possession of Jesus, the Palestinian Jew who claimed to be the Messiah?

There are things happening in Judaism, however, that might represent tentative steps along the way. I am not referring to such recent movements as “Jews for Jesus,” although the successes of such movements in the evangelization of Jewish people are significant and have received widespread publicity.1 I am speaking of the Jewish movement to reclaim Jesus as their own but without, of course, the acknowledgment of His claims of Messianic authority. In fact, the phenomenon has been given a name in German literature regarding the matter, “die Heimolung Jesu,” or the bringing home of Jesus. 2Many well-known names among Jewish scholars are among those who have shown deep interest in Jesus the Jew, such as Claude Montefiore, Israel Abrahams, Joseph Klausner, David Flusser, Samuel Sandmel, Geza Vermes, and Pinchas E. Lapide. There are many others. Jacob Jocz, a Jewish Christian scholar for many years Professor of Systematic Theology at Wycliffe College, University of Toronto, just a few years ago wrote, “The most remarkable development in Jewish culture is the increasing acceptance of Jesus the Jew.”3 One must not, however, become overly optimistic about the present. In

1979 many were startled to read in Time that Pinchas Lapide, an Israeli Jew teaching in the University of Goettingen, was willing to accept the resurrection of our Lord as an historical event. It turned out, however, that He was only resurrected as other biblical figures of the Bible and Talmud, that is, restored to life to die again finally. In other words, amid the reclamation of Jesus by modern Jews there is not yet a significant admission of His unique authority as the promised Messiah of Israel and Saviour of Gentiles, and thus Lord of both.

Is, then, this Jewish interest in Jesus a step along the way to that of which Paul writes in Romans 11:12, 15? No one really knows the answer to that interesting question, but with it in mind we turn to the next section of Romans eleven in our studies.

The Second Time: The Pauline Interrogation

(11:11a-b)

The connection. Paul's opening words, "I say then," are clearly related to verse one of the chapter, where we have the same paragraph opening. He has shown that Israel's rejection is not complete; it is only partial. He will now show that it is not final; it is only temporary.

The question. In the course of making the point that the rejection is only partial, however, he has very plainly pointed out that the majority who stumbled were hardened by God. It is natural, then, to expect the question, "I say, then, Have they stumbled that they should fall?" (AV). He has modified the question of verse one, "Hath God cast away his people?," by making it clear that a remnant remains in a saving relationship with God. Now in the following verses of the chapter he

will answer it. He will show, as Cranfield puts it simply, "the exclusion of the great majority of Jews is not permanent."4 It is helpful to remember that the subject of the verb, "stumbled," is "the rest" of verse seven, or the mass of the nation who rejected their Messiah. Further the verb, "fall," is in a tense that indicates that it most likely refers to an irrevocable fall. Thus, Paul's question which, due to the grammar of the original text, expects the answer, "no," means essentially this: "I say then, the mass of the nation has not stumbled that they might fall irrevocably, have they?"

But we still have a further question to deal with. Without attempting to settle the question of whether the clause, "that they might fall irrevocably," is a purpose or result clause, we still must ask ourselves, is the apostle speaking simply of the purpose or result of the permanent rejection of the nation, or is he looking on to the ultimate, final, and essentially gracious purpose of God in His dealings with Israel? We might simply say that what Paul has in mind is the denial that the nation irrevocably fell. That would be in harmony with the context that follows, for he surely denies Israel's irrevocable fall (cf. vv. 23-27). But, one might reply, "Did not those who stumbled fall with terminal consequences?" (cf. vv. 7, 22, "fell"). Therefore, it seems better to think of the apostle as referring to the ultimate purpose of Israel's definite fall. That is, Israel's fall was real, and it had the most serious consequences. However, the ultimate purpose of God was that through Israel's fall salvation might come to the Gentiles. That, too, has a further design, the provoking of Israel to jealousy and salvation and a following world blessing (cf. vv. 12, 15, 25). As Murray says, "This development is

exemplified in Jesus' prediction and in the history of the apostolic era (cf. Matt. 8:12; 21:43; Acts 13:46; 18:6; 28:28)."5 "Unbelief," as Kaesemann asserts, "has its reverse side."6 So then, Israel stumbled and fell, but the divine purpose lying back of their fall was not that they should remain forever "lying on the ground," to use Godet's phrase,7 but should ultimately through Gentile salvation be returned themselves to their covenantal promised blessings.

The Pauline Explanation

(11:11c-15)

The apostolic reasoning (11c). The apostle's answer to the question is a threefold one. First, the thought of Israel's ultimate fall is unthinkable and blasphemous. "God forbid!" What about God's faithfulness, then (Acts 3:1-8)?

The divine plan (11d-e). And, second, the stumbling and falling of Israel, according to the divine plan, has eventuated in Gentile salvation, a state of things designed to provoke Israel to jealousy. In other words, as Gifford says, "Their recovery and not their fall was His aim."8 And as the commentator we cited in an earlier study suggested, there is a damper on joy in the Father's house as long as the elder brother refuses to come in.

It would certainly be expected that a student of the situation in the largely Gentile church today would declare that there seems to be little in Christendom as we see it to provoke Israel to jealousy. One section of the church has returned to the weak and beggarly elements of the Law, while another faction preaches in huge

sanctuaries built by strenuous financial appeals from evangelical con men the glories of “prosperity theology” and “the gospel of self-esteem.” I cannot see a thinking Israelite made very jealous by what he sees.

Back in the early days of the church, as the New Testament shows, men were either offended or attracted through the Spirit to the Messiah as the New Testament presents Him, that is, as a divine Son who redeems His people through a penal substitutionary sacrifice. But, as William Temple, a former Archbishop of Canterbury, once said of those who were preaching a different Christ, “Who would bother to crucify the Christ of liberal Christianity?” The weak, sentimental, faceless, goody-goody — “the amiable carpenter” of much liberalism, would neither offend nor attract. It is no wonder that Israel is not interested by and large.

In verse eleven the word “fall” (lit., trespass) refers to the stumbling of the majority. Even the rejection of Christ by Israel has prophetic significance, since it leads to the Gentile mission and ultimately, against its ancient will, to its own salvation. “The reversal of earthly relations,” Kaesemann comments, “is for its part simply a stage on the divinely planned path whose end remains bound up in a special way, and against all appearances, with the destiny of Israel,”9 The last clause of verse eleven is an allusion and application of Deuteronomy 32:21, previously cited in 10:19. In that great passage, “Moses’ Swan Song,” containing what one Old Testament scholar called, “A Divine Forecast of the Whole History of the Jewish People,” the patriarch outlines the judgments that will fall upon the perversity of the nation. Included is the prophecy that Yahweh will bring the Gentile world into covenant with Him (cf. Eph.

2:11-13), but the ultimate goal is Israel's return to Him and to the land (cf. Deut. 32:43). So, Israel failing in its mission to the Gentile world (cf. Isa. 43:10-12) and suffering divine disciplinary judgment, shall in the end, though unwilling to work in making Him known, wind up being saved through those to whom they were to witness!

The place of the Gentiles in the plan (12-15). The third of Paul's answers to the question, "I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall?," is grounded in the logic of the situation, namely, that the blessing of the Gentiles by Jewish stumbling, in the light of the unconditional promises of the Abrahamic Covenant to the nation and their certain recovery, leads inevitably to even greater world-blessing, in fact, something like life from the dead (cf. vv. 12-15). The blessing of the Gentiles is important, but their salvation is subordinate to a more ultimate and far-reaching purpose.

In verse twelve there is a contrast between "diminishing" and "fullness." The diminution of the nation to a remnant of believers is the meaning of the first, and the return of the nation as a whole to belief is the meaning of the latter. The one is the status of the nation in the present age, while the other looks on to the future national conversion. The threefold "them" must be given the same sense (important for later studies) and refers to the majority of the nation, or the nation as a whole. It is clear from this text itself that Israel's restoration is the Lord's instrument for world blessing (cf. Gen. 9:24-27; Psa. 677:1-2). Perhaps this is why Godet speaks of "this mysterious decree of rejection."10 It is also clear that "world" here refers to the world of Gentiles generally; it is defined in the context by the

word “Gentiles.” Nor does it mean here every single individual Gentile; it means the Gentiles as a whole, a truth important for the understanding of this passage and others as well.

“Now (the AV’s “for” is incorrect) I speak to you Gentiles,” Paul says in verse thirteen, evidently seeking to clarify his position. The Gentiles might think that he was not interested in Israel now. It is not so. He labors as the apostle to the Gentiles, but the ultimate reach of his ministry includes his brethren, too. In fact, the more he makes of his apostleship, the more jealous the Jews, leading finally to their restoration. And that, too, in turn means ever greater blessing for Gentiles and the world. Incidentally the Authorized Version’s rendering of the Greek word diakonia by “office” is misleading. Apostleship was a spiritual gift (cf. Eph. 4:11; 1 Cor. 12:27-31), and the word in the text here should be rendered by the English word ministry.

The word “some” in verse fourteen indicates that the apostle did not expect that all of Israel, or the nation as a whole, would be saved in his day. As the following context indicates that is future (cf. vv. 25-26). Kaesemann may be right in affirming that “apocalyptic is the driving force in Paul’s theology and practice.”11 The “for” of verse fifteen explains why he labors for Gentiles to provoke Israel to jealousy, for their ultimate world-wide blessing depends upon Israel’s restoration. The argument, as in verse twelve, is a fortiori one, that is, a conclusion that follows with even stronger reason. For example, if one is unwilling to trust another with his bicycle, then a fortiori he must not let him use his automobile. Thus here, if Israel’s rejection has led to such general Gentile blessings as is now evident, then

what tremendous blessing must be coming from Israel's future restoration!

Several different opinions have been held of the meaning of the phrase, "life from the dead." First, some have seen in the phrase a reference to a general resurrection, as is taught in many Christian creeds. At the second coming of Christ, it is said, there shall be a general resurrection of all the dead, followed by a general judgment of all men. This is the view of Black, Barrett, Bruce, Cranfield, Kaesemann, and others.

Second, Shedd refers the phrase strangely to spiritual life blessings for the Jews. The obvious parallel between verses twelve and fifteen make it likely that the spiritual benefits belong to the Gentiles rather than the Jews.

Third, other commentators, such as Godet, think the phrase is to be interpreted figuratively, but closely related to the previous phrase, "the reconciling of the world." Something stronger than that is demanded, or in other words something like Murray's "unprecedented quickening for the world in the expansion and success of the gospel."12 If the bodily resurrection were meant, why did not Paul use the common term resurrection? Further, if he intended to refer to the bodily resurrection, why did he not use the article before "life"? "The life from the dead" would seem clearer, if resurrection were meant. A startling revolutionary conversion of Gentiles seems to be Paul's point, perhaps inclusive of the spiritual and material blessings of the kingdom age (cf. 8:8-12).

The Biblical Foundation of Israel's Restoration

(16)

Verse sixteen, introduced by a transitional now (AV, “for”), gives the reason for the expectation of Jewish restoration. They were the recipients of the unconditional Abrahamic promises, God’s elect nation. The two figures of the verse represent this with variations. To understand them it will help to begin with what we know. The following context identifies the branches as the nation Israel (cf. vv. 17, 19, etc.).

Thus, the lump also probably refers to them. This latter figure is derived from Numbers 15:17-21, where it is stated that the presentation of a cake from the dough of the first-ground flour from the threshing floor hallowed the whole baking. The word “holy” means in this context consecrated to God for His blessing, that is, Abrahamic Covenant blessing. The basic idea of both figures is that the consecration of the first-fruits, or root, is communicated to the lump, or the branches.

But what are the first-fruits and the root? While some have attempted to identify them with Christ Himself, it seems better to identify them with Abraham and the patriarchs (cf. v. 28; 9:5; Jer. 11:16; Hos. 14:6). The point is clear: The initial consecration to God of the patriarchs by the choice of Abraham, making them and their descendants the natural branches, is the basis of the expectation of the restoration of the nation (Deut. 7:8-9; Luke 1:55). Put in another way, the consecration of the Patriarch Abraham extends to his seed, whether believing or not, for the attainment of the blessing depends ultimately upon the sovereign good pleasure of God who has promised that the blessings of the covenant shall belong finally to the nation as a whole. One important proviso, however. Individuals shall share in the blessings only if they believe in the patriarchs’

Redeemer and Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Rom. 4:11-12;. 9:6-8).

Conclusion

We conclude, then, that there is justification for a Jewish reclamation of Jesus for, unless this takes place, there is no inheritance of the Abrahamic Covenant blessings by the nation. The reclamation, however, must be based upon an acknowledgment of the uniqueness of Jesus the Messiah, Son of God and Divine Saviour of men, both Jew and Gentile. As Nathaniel, the Israelite indeed in whom there was no guile, said of Him, “Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel.” Israel’s hope rests upon this confession. May it come soon!

1 Cf. Time, June 13, 1972; Jakob Jocz, The Jewish People and Jesus Christ After Auschwitz (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), pp. 140-51.

2 Donald A. Hagner, The Jewish Reclamation of Jesus (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), P. 9.

3 Jocz, p. 9.

4 Cranfield, II, 553.

5 Murray II, 76.

6 Kaesemann, p. 304.

7 Godet, Commentary on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, trans. by Rev. A. Cusin (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1882), II, 234.

8 E, H. Gifford, The Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans (London: John Murray, 1886), p. 194.

9 Kaesemann, p. 304.

10 Godet, II, 236.

11 Kaesemann, p. 306.

12 Murray, II, 84.

Israel and the Divine Purpose—Present and Future (Part 1)

Israel and the Divine Purpose

—Present and Future

Part 1

S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.

Is There Jewish Christianity Today?

Introduction

The question of Israel's place in the divine purpose has rarely been as relevant to life on this planet as it is today. Standing at the critical center of the political and military uncertainties and anxieties of the nations is the nation Israel.

Theologians of different persuasions recognize this fact. Professor G.C. Berkouwer, one of the really notable Christian theologians of the twentieth century, in his book, The Return of Christ, although denying in it that Israel the nation has an ethnic future, yet feels it necessary to explain why he must devote a chapter to the nation in his work. He finds justification for discussing Israel and the future in two things, the renewed attention given to Israel on account of the "tragic outbursts of antisemitism in our age,"1 and the rise of the Jewish state in the land of Palestine.

The issue of Israel rises constantly in our newspapers as they seek to report the life of the globe. When President Reagan visits an unde-Nazified German cemetery in a state that is not now the state of Hitler (Hitlerism

abounds in our world by another name, Communism), the issue of Israel is again highlighted before the Western world as we reflect upon the demonic evil of the Holocaust.

For the study of the divine purpose and Israel in the New Testament revelation one must first and foremost consider Paul's great chapters in Romans. It is in this letter alone that the apostle discusses thematically the future of Israel. The discussion is found in Romans nine through eleven, and the reason for it is found in the subject matter of Romans one through eight. While the entire epistle is an exposition of the gospel, chapters one through eight form the doctrinal heart of the soteriology of Paul.

The theme of the epistle is found in Romans 1:16-17, highlighted in the citation of Habakkuk 2:4, "The just shall live by faith." In other words, righteousness is the gift of God through the objective merits of the saving cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, appropriated by the exercise of faith.

Romans one through eight, developing the details of the theme, set forth an elect group, justified by faith in the Lord Jesus. A Jewish reader, however, familiar with the Old Testament revelation, would have noticed a seeming unusual thing: Israel appears to be missing from the elect group. While there is a brief mention of the problem of Israel in 3:1-8, otherwise the nation apparently has been neglected by Paul in Romans. Was not Israel God's elect people, recipients of the covenants and promises? How can any teaching have divine approval that does not reserve for Israel a preeminent place?

To the Jew the issue would seem to be this: Either Paul's gospel is true and the covenantal promises are nullified (an answer offered by a number of otherwise orthodox Christian interpreters today), or Paul's gospel is false, with Christ an imposter, and the promises still remain to be fulfilled. The apostle, as we shall see, has a surprising solution: The gospel he preaches is true AND the promises will be fulfilled. Both/and, and not either/or, is his answer to the problem.

Paul makes three points in Romans nine through eleven. First in chapters nine through ten, expounding divine sovereignty and human responsibility in Israel's history, he makes the point that Israel's failure was caused by spiritual pride and self-sufficiency. In chapter eleven, verses one through ten, Paul makes the point that Israel's failure is not total. The doctrine of the remnant makes that clear. And, third, by the skillful use of Scripture, supported by example and logic, he claims that the failure of national and ethnic Israel is not final. This is his point in verses eleven through twenty-seven.

The conclusion was foregone from his earlier intimations (cf. 3:1-4). There is coming a time when all Israel shall be saved. The glorious promises of the Old Testament regarding her destiny shall have their brilliant fulfillment.

Robert Louis Stevenson once wrote of those who see no real fulfillment of the great national promises, "I cannot understand how you theologians and preachers can apply to the Church—or multiplicity of churches—Scripture promises which, in their plain meaning apply to God's chosen people, Israel, and to Palestine; and which consequently must be still future … The prophetic

books are full of teachings which, if they are interpreted literally, would be inspiring, and a magnificent assurance of a great and glorious future; but which, as they are spiritualized, become farcical—as applied to the Church they are a comedy."2 What it ultimately comes down to is the faithfulness of a sovereign God to the promises and affirmations of His Word. Isaiah says it forcefully and beautifully in words given him by "the Lord, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure" (cf. Isa. 46:10).

With that text ringing in our minds let us turn to the text of Romans eleven, considering first the opening six verses under the title, "Is There Jewish Christianity Today?"

The Pauline Question

Its source in the context (10:21; 11: la, 2a). The question that opens the chapter is a very natural one in the light of the context. The apostle has just concluded chapter ten by saying, "But to Israel He saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people" (10:21). The words are a citation from Isaiah 65:2, and the reference, of course, is to the longsuffering patience of God with His rebellious elect people.

The condition that characterized the people in Isaiah's day still persists in Paul's day. What more natural question to ask at this point than, "I say, then, God has not cast away His people, has He?"

The connection made by Paul is important for the ensuing discussion. First, the inferential conjunction "then" makes it plain that the question arises out of the

statement in 10:21. That fact is of further importance, for it clearly indicates that the sense of the word "people" in Isaiah 65:2 and Romans 10:21 is the sense that the same word must be given in Romans 11:1-2. And the sense of the term is plainly ethnic Israel. Thus, the opening words of Paul give his readers the intimation of the major point of the following argumentation. God has not cast off His elect people, although the mass of them are at the moment abiding in unbelief. That which is suggested by the question is stated directly and positively in the words that open verse two, "God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew."

Its roots in the Old Testament. A final point should be made here also. The expression, "His people," lets the perceptive reader know what kind of reply the apostle expects. When God takes a people to Himself, it is forever. He would not call Israel "His people" in the present age, if He had indeed cast them off. And if anyone should call for further evidence, let him know that what Paul anticipates in his question, namely, that God will not cast away His people, is stated without qualification three times in the Old Testament as a fact (cf. 1 Sam. 12:22; Psa. 94:14; 95:4).3

The Pauline Answer

Direct denial (1b). The explicit answer of the apostle to his question is now given. As is customary with him, his opening rebuttal is a flat and emphatic denial, "God forbid" (cf. 3:3; 6:2, 15; 9:6). If God were to forsake His people, then He would become a liar, a covenant breaker. Can the only One who is absolutely honest and true be that?

There may have been changes in the divine economy at particular times—there are no longer blood sacrifices, the Levitical cultus, and temple worship—but there are none in the promises.

The case of Paul (1b-2a). The apostle further explains why God has not cast away His people, the "for" introducing his second answer, his own salvation. God's trustworthiness and faithfulness to His promises is proved by the Damascus Road experience. And, one might add, if God had cast away Israel, would He have chosen one of them to be His special apostle to the Gentiles?4 Paul also mentions his membership in the tribe of Benjamin, a tribe of which one scholar says, "The Benjamites were the Israelite 'aristocracy'."5 Benjamin did not follow the defection of the ten northern tribes after Solomon's death in the setting up of the schismatic altars, the alien priesthood, and the temples of Bethel and Gilgal. "Little Benjamin," as David described the tribe (cf. Psa. 68:27), was given one of the most spiritual of blessings by Moses in his song, "The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by Him; and the Lord shall cover him all the day long, and he shall dwell between His shoulders" (cf. Deut. 33:12). After the Exile, Benjamin with Judah constituted the theocratic people.

What Paul indicates by his own salvation is stated categorically in the opening sentence of verse two. The further description of God's people, "whom He foreknew," is of considerable interest doctrinally. Practically all of the sound and recent commentators on the Greek text affirm that the verb, to foreknow, is used in the Semitic sense of to choose in advance (cf. Jer. 1:5; Am. 3:2; Hos. 13:5). If the word meant simply to know beforehand, in the sense of knowing beforehand that

they would eventually believe, then the question, “Has God cast off His people?,” could not arise. “Of course,” one could say, “they are not cast off, for He knows they shall believe.” If, however, the word means to choose in advance, then the question could arise. The matter could be put this way: Yes, God did elect Israel, but Israel has fallen into unbelief. It would be natural for one to ask, “Are not the promises, then, cancelled?” It is plain, then, that to foreknow here means to foreknow in the Semitic sense of entering into intimate relations with beforehand, or to choose in love.

Arthur S. Way, the great classical scholar, who translated so many of the classic Greek and Latin works into English, translated the Epistles of Paul and Hebrews, too. At this point his translation practically equates the word foreknow with one of Paul’s other words of election, to foreordain. He renders the last clause, “… whom He marked out for His own so long ago.”6 Cf. 8:29.

God, then, is not fickle, although He has had a plan within a plan. He intends to bring Israel to her promises, but the way includes the present time of Gentile blessing also (cf. vv. 11-15).

The parallel with Elijah’s day (2b-4). As Luethi suggests, someone might say of the citing of the salvation of just one man, Paul, “One swallow does not make a summer.”7 So Paul continues his argument with an illustration from Elijah’s life and times. In his day, a day of Israel’s backsliding like the present time, apostasy was general, but not universal (cf. 1 Kings 19:10-18). That is the case today. While the prophet thought he was alone in his faith, God reminded him vividly that He had

reserved for Himself 7,000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal.

The words, “I have left for myself,” must not be overlooked. It plainly indicates that the ground for the existence of the believing remnant in Elijah’s day is “the initiative of the divine grace, God’s gracious election, and not human merit.”8 Thus, just as the existence of a remnant, the product of divine grace, indicated to Elijah that God was still active in the nation’s behalf, so in Paul’s day the body of believing Jews was a pledge of God’s continuing commitment to His ancient promises of elective grace.

The Pauline Conclusion

The conclusion stated (5). “Even so then” (NASB, “In the same way”) introduces the conclusion of the paragraph. Paul, admitting that general apostasy exists in his day, still argues from the existence of a remnant of Israelite believers for God’s continued committal to them. The unbelief of the mass does not annul His faithfulness to His Messianic promises (cf. 9:4-5), and the existence of a remnant is a testimony to His continued activity in Israel’s behalf. And the fact that it is a remnant that exists by divine grace proves the point.

The “remnant” in verse five corresponds to the 7,000 of Elijah’s day. The word in the original text was suggested by the expression, “I have reserved,” in verse four. It comes from the same Greek root.

In Galatians 6:18 Paul refers again to the remnant of Jewish believers in the present age, using the words, “the Israel of God.” In fact, “the Israel of God” still exists today in the Christian church in the form of Jewish

believers in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Messiah. In theological seminary I was taught Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic, in addition to the exegesis of the Hebrew text of the Old Testament by Dr. Charles L. Feinberg, the well-known Bible teacher and scholar and fervent believer in our Lord as Israel's Messiah. I have had the privilege of teaching one of his sons in seminary and then serving with him and his brother on the faculty of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois. They belong to "the Israel of God," true "Jews for Jesus." Cf. Acts. 21:20.

When Paul says the remnant is the result of the election of grace, he has in mind the heretical viewpoint that one may stand before God by another standard, namely, by the keeping of the Law of Moses. Paul has strongly denied this way (cf. 3:19, 27-31; 4:1-8; 7:1-12; 8:1-4; 9:30-33; 10:5-13). The principles of law and works are diametrically opposed to the way of grace and faith. The former principles contend that man can by his deeds win a just reward for them from God.

The idea of grace, however, is that God initiates the saving activity within His own divine being of love and mercy, and that He consummates the work of salvation in our hearts by effectual grace, regeneration, and faith, grounded in the merits of our Lord through His atoning work on the cross. The two ideas of law and grace, or works and faith, cannot be harmonized with the biblical teaching that, as the psalmist and Jonah affirmed centuries ago under divine inspiration, "Salvation is of the Lord" (cf. Jon. 2:9). The ultimate decision that issues in our salvation comes from the heart of God, as a thoughtful consideration of such passages as 1 Corinthians 2:14 and Romans 8:7-8 will show.

The conclusion explained (6). The sixth verse explains the negative implications of verse five. If the remnant has come into existence by elective grace, then it follows that it has not come into existence from the sinless obedience of human works, as the Law requires. If election were based upon obedience, then God's grace would no longer be unmerited favor, but justice. Who would desire to attempt to stand under that standard? What hope, then, would exist for sinners? Augustine was right in once saying, "Gratia, nisi gratis sit, non est gratia," or, "Grace, unless it should be free, is not grace." Our election and salvation, then, is not based upon works, nor even foreseen faith or works produced by us, but upon the sovereign good pleasure of God. Paul makes that clear in Ephesians 1:3-6 (cf. 2 Tim. 1:9). Otherwise grace is no longer grace, and it is by grace that we are saved.

Paul's appeal to sovereign grace as the source of all our spiritual blessings from God is not popular in our time, and unfortunately it is inadequately treated in evangelical churches. The aversion of the age to rigorous thinking, evident in so many areas of modern Western society, has found a ready ally in Christian congregations, where the shallow has replaced the substantial in the ministry of the Word.

It is not uncommon to hear believers affirm that Pauline doctrine is a bit too heavy for our day. Paul "heavy" and "unintelligible"? Listen to the sturdy Scot, James Denney, "To say that Paul is unintelligible, or that he presents Christianity in a way which does it every kind of injustice and is finally unacceptable to us, is to fly in the face of history and experience. There have always been people who found Paul intelligible and accepted

the gospel as he preached. There are such people still, if not in theological classrooms, then in mission halls, at street corners, in lonely rooms. It is not historical scholarship that is wanted for the understanding of him, and neither is it the insight of genius: it is despair (boldface type mine). Paul did not preach for philosophers; he preached for sinners. He had no gospel except for men whose mouths were stopped, and who were standing condemned at the bar of God. They understood him, and they find him eminently intelligible still. When a man has the simplicity to say, with Dr. Chalmers, 'What could I do if God did not justify the ungodly?' he has the key to the Pauline gospel of reconciliation in his hand."9 In conclusion, then, what can we say to our question, "Is There Jewish Christianity Today?" The answer is plain and Pauline, "Yes." And the existence of a number of Jewish believers today argues for God's determination to fulfill the ancient national promises made to the nation. We might add, this Israel of God professes the same faith that we Gentiles profess, and they have no difficulty, but rather joy and pleasure, in singing.

"Could my tears forever flow,

Could my zeal no languor know,

These for sin could not atone;

Thou must save, and Thou alone:

In my hands no price I bring,

Simply to Thy cross I cling."

Or, perhaps they would rather affirm their hope in their own traditional language, "My soul shall make her boast in the Lord: the humble shall hear thereof, and be

glad" (Psa. 34:2). We Gentiles, who have been saved by sovereign grace, love that, too.

1 G.C. Berkouwer, The Return of Christ, trans. by James Van Oossterom and ed. by Marlin J. Van Elderen (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), pp. 323-58.

2 Frank E. Gaebelein, The Servant and the Dove (New York: Our Hope Press, 1946), p. 33, citing "Tusitala," The Atlantic Monthly, 131:344-53.

3 The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, uses the same terminology Paul uses, suggesting that Paul was relying upon scriptural phraseology in his argument.

4 C.E.B. Cranfield, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Limited, 1983), II, 643.

5 Matthew Black, Romans (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1973), p. 141.

6 Arthur S. Way, The Letters of St. Paul (London, 1935), p. 135.

7 Walter Luethi, The Letter to the Romans: An Exposition, trans. by Kurt Schoenenberger (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1961), p. 151.

8 Cranfield, II, 548.

9 James Denney, The Christian Doctrine of Reconcilliation (London, 1917), pp. 179-80.

Israel and the Divine Purpose—Present And Future (Part 2)

Israel and the Divine Purpose

—Present And Future

Part 2

S. Lewirs Johnson, Jr.

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National Numbness—The Bequest of God

Introduction

Without equivocation the Bible affirms three important truths regarding the nation Israel. First, as Balaam in his prophecies so eloquently declared under the sovereign control of God, Israel possesses a certain pre-eminence among the nations (cf. Num. 23:10, 21, 23; Deut. 33:29). And, second, Israel enjoys a certain separateness from the nations (cf. Num. 23:9). And finally, Israel has the promise of an everlasting persistence before God through convenantal grace (cf.. Jer. 31:31-37).

These are incontrovertible truths, and that is why Paul had to write Romans nine through eleven. After the marvelous exposition of God’s glorious good news in chapters one through eight, one might have asked,

“Where is Israel? what is her place in this display of grace?” The propounder of the question would know that no exposition of divine truth can possess credibility without giving Israel her proper place, a place demanded by the ancient promises to her forefather, Abraham. Why is Israel missing from your construction of God’s salvation, Paul? Do you believe that Israel has been by her disobedience cast off like an old worn-out garment?

Almost all readers of the Bible know the basic answer to that question. Paul alluded to it earlier (cf. 3:1-8). God cannot cast off His people, for His faithfulness to unconditional promises is at stake —ultimately His divine honor. In fact, the apostle has said, there exists at the present time a remnant of believing Israelites, including Paul, left by God Himself in grace for Himself.

They have received the benefits of the promises and stand as evidence of the fact that God has not cast off His people (cf. vv. 1-6).

But what of the mass of Israelites, the nation, the “disobedient and gainsaying people” (cf. 10:21)? The picture darkens. They, it is true, have failed the test of faith-obedience (cf. 1:5, 17; 3:22; 16:26). To use Paul’s own illustration of the olive tree, which he expounds a few sentences on, they are branches that have been broken off, severed from the life of the patriarchal promises (cf. vv. 11-24). And worse, as we shall see shortly, they have been hardened in disciplinary judgment (vv. 7-10).

The section of Romans eleven before us in this study, then, becomes important for the light it throws on Israel’s past and present. It touches directly upon the

trials and tensions of the Jewish people, whether in the State of Israel or scattered throughout God's world. And it is the considered opinion of many biblical students that there is no solution to Israel's troubles other than that suggested by Moses centuries ago in Leviticus 26:40-42, "If they confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers, with their trespass (is the singular important?) which they trespassed against me, and that also they have walked contrary unto me; and that I also have walked contrary unto them, and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity: then will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land." But when that time does come, and it will, then the earth shall echo Moses' final blessing of the tribes, "Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord (cf. Deut. 33:29).

The Pauline Interrogation

(11:7a)

Since the apostle has answered his rhetorical question, "Has God cast away his people?," he now turns to consider the logical conclusion of the discussion to this point. The nation stands in a state of unbelief, but in the general spiritual corruption sovereign grace has created a genuine remnant.1 Paul's opening words in verse seven may be expanded into, "What, then, shall we say to the present situation?"

The Pauline Explanation

(11:7b-e)

The failure of the mass (7b-c). Paul's answer is clear. Viewed from the human side, what Israel seeks, namely a righteousness before God (cf. 9:31-33), she has failed to attain. The present tense in the word, "seeketh," is a vivid picture of the ceaseless and noble (although misdirected) efforts of Israel after a right standing before God.2 Our society does not seem in the least concerned about their relationship with God.

The success of the remnant (7d). On the other hand, the election has attained that status before God. And it is clear that the apostle emphasizes the divine grace in this possession of righteousness. He calls those who possess it, "the election," that is, they have their righteousness by divine selection, further defined in verse five as "the election of grace." Thus, God has not cast away His people.

There are several things to note here. In the first place, it is sometimes said that God elects only to service, and not to salvation. Here, to the contrary, the election has as its goal the possession of the righteousness of God (cf. 2 Thess. 2:13-14). Second, the use of the term "Israel" quite clearly shows that the apostle has the mass of the people of Israel, the nation, in mind. In the case of "election" he has in mind that smaller particular body of believers in the nation. In other words, the election is not simply national; it is also individual election.

John Murray makes the interesting comment on Paul's use of the abstract, "the election," rather than the concrete, "the elect," "When Paul says 'the election

obtained it' he means the elect. But he uses the abstract noun in order to lay stress on 'the idea rather than on the individuals' and thus accentuates the action of God as the reason."3 The judgment of the mass (7e). Viewed from the divine side, however, something else must be said. Paul writes, "The rest were hardened."4 The "rest" are those remaining after the subtraction of the chosen remnant. They have been hardened as a penal judgment for unbelief (cf. 9:18).

There is some question over the meaning of the word rendered, were blind" (A.V.). The verb, derived from a word referring to a callous, or a stone, is used metaphorically in the New Testament of the heart becoming hardened or callous (cf. v. 25 [the noun here); 2 Cor. 3:14). In this context, however, it may have the force of "were blinded," as the Authorized Version renders it. The following citations with their references to the eyes gives some support to this. The word relates to both the mind and the will.5 The truth that men may be hardened spiritually is a stumbling-block to the natural man, who resists both the biblical view of man and the biblical view of the divine sovereignty. That attitude we must avoid and, if puzzled or perplexed, let us bow before Scripture and await God's future clarification of the mystery.

Two mistakes have sometimes been made in handling the puzzling, "were hardened." Without proper consideration of the context some have explained the words as they hardened themselves. As Cranfield says, that misinterpretation "Can easily lead to a hard and unbrotherly attitude to the Jews on the part of Christians."6 Luther, for example, often expatiated on the hardening of the Jewish heart, forgetting that the

Gentile heart is also naturally rebellious (cf. Eph. 4:17-19).

Others have been guilty of a second mistake. They have stressed the passive voice incorrectly, as if Paul was trying to void any suggestion that God performed the hardening. In fact, it is more likely that the passive is used simply to avoid the use of the divine name, a customary Jewish practice. A simple reading of the following verse will pointedly reveal the error. Divine retribution, endorsed by our Lord Himself, cannot be wrenched from Scripture (cf. Matt. 13:10-17; Mark 4:10-12; John 12:40).7 In the discussion of such things we often forget an important truth: No one deserves the grace and mercy of God. God would be perfectly just in condemning all. The fact that He has graciously rescued His people is no basis for the charge of unfairness; it is a thrilling magnification of His love and grace. There is no evidence anywhere in Scripture that God prevents a seeking soul from coming to a saving knowledge of Him. On the other hand, there is every indication that, when one does come to Him and is saved, it is traceable to the efficacious drawing of the Father (cf. John 6:44). We rest in these truths.8

The Pauline Illustrations

(11:8-10)

From the Law and the Prophets (8). In order to nail down his argument and its conclusion, the apostle turns to specific passages from Scripture. In this case citations from the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings, the threefold division of the Hebrew Scriptures, settle the matters under discussion. The quotations are freely

woven together, and they provide a solemn and compelling climax to the section.

The citation in verse eight comes primarily from Deuteronomy 29:4, but a phrase is also borrowed from Isaiah 29:10. The borrowed phrase is an important one, “the spirit of slumber.” The apostle uses the passages in an illustrative, or typical, manner, finding a parallel between the Israel of Moses’ day and his day. Moses, reflecting on the nation’s history in the Exodus, traces their failure to the Lord’s failure in giving them a heart to perceive, eyes to see, and ears to hear up to his day. In typical Hebrew fashion he traces all their experiences to the Lord as the ultimate cause of everything. The words, of course, are intended to be an appeal to the nation to be faithful to the covenant. The condition of the people is the result of God’s “punitive inflictions.”9 Paul emphasizes this, since he modifies Moses’ negative form of statement into a positive expression of hardening.

The phrase from Isaiah 29:10, “spirit of slumber,” or stupor, is also found in a context of divine judgment upon the nation. Desiring alliances with the heathen nations rather than with the Lord God, Israel shall fall under a divinely imposed deep sleep, utterly unmoved by the glorious Messianic promises given them. Ridderbos has said it well, “Now comes the announcement of the awesome judgment that strikes at this culpable ignorance, rooted as it is in unbelief. They will not, therefore they shall not, understand. The word of God that they have rejected is still effective, if not in saving them, then in hardening them (6:10; 2 Cor. 2:16). The words ‘be stunned and amazed’ (he refers to Isa. 29:9) allude to the way they have often stared dumbly at

Isaiah as though when he preached he had uttered incomprehensible things in their presence. Thus they will also stand and stare with the astonishment of incomprehension at the word of God and the work of God in which His word goes into fulfillment."10 The effect of God's message upon the people, then, is that of men suddenly awakened from sleep and unable to read a message thrust into their hands. Why? They have no personal knowledge of the Lord they profess to honor (cf. v. 13).

Hodge is right, "It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. The strokes of his justice blind, bewilder, and harden the soul."11 Modern Israel testifies to that.

From the Writings (9-10). The apostle concludes the section with a citation from the third division of the Old Testament, the Writings, which includes the Psalms. The citation is from Psalm 69:22-23. The psalm itself is a Messianic one, and, in fact, next to Psalm 22 and 110 it is the most frequently cited one in the New Testament. It is an imprecatory one, that is, a psalm in which the author, in this case David, prays that God will bring condemnation and retribution upon his enemies, for he has been unjustly the object of their murderous ill will and slander.

Paul, as the other New Testament commentators, regards the psalm as a typical one, David's experiences finding their final fulfillment in the experiences of his greater Son. David's greater Son bore His suffering ultimately from Judas and his partners in crime and, thus, it is not surprising that Peter cites the psalm and refers part of it to Judas (cf. v. 25; Acts 1:20).

Paul follows the same methodology here. He sees in David's enemies reflections of the generation that crucified the Messiah and continues on into the apostolic age. David's opponents live on in Paul's day. And Paul responds as David did in calling down retribution upon them. Sometimes Bible students try to make the point that the God of the Old Testament, on the basis of such passages in the imprecatory psalms, is a cruel and vengeful deity and not the God of love found in the New Testament. Paul's citation indicates that the moral standards of the God of the Old Testament are not outdated standards of a warlike and vicious God, but simply express the mind of a just and holy God toward his willful enemies (Matt. 23:1-35; Gal. 1:8-9).

Several things emerge here. First, the figure of the "table" may be inclusive of their possession of the Law, in which they have delighted, yet in a mistaken fashion, and perhaps also of the Messianic promises. Their misuse of the Law, by trying to make it a way of salvation, and their neglect of the promises as the true means of salvation, Paul would have become a snare to them as a recompense for their unbelief. And second, the Authorized Version's "alway" is better rendered by continually. The bowing down is to be sustained and continuous (cf. Mark 55; Acts 2:25; Heb. 9:6), but it will not go on forever.12 The lifting of the national judgment lies in the future, for retribution is not God's last word for Israel (cf. vv. 25-27).

Conclusion

Many truths find illustration here. A man is free to accept or reject the gospel but, if he rejects it, he still sustains a relation to the rejected Savior. The rejected

message abides, and the rejected Savior becomes a stumbling-stone against which the rejector breaks himself. Just as the smallest particle of light falling on unexposed film produces a chemical change that can never be undone, so the rejection of Christ leaves its ineffaceable mark on the spirit of a man. Men do not merely neglect the gospel. There is always a response, and if rejection takes place, the man is always a worse man, after having heard. Jesus's words are solemnly true, "Whosoever falls on this stone shall be broken" (cf. Matt. 21:44). As Maclaren says somewhere, "The Gospel once heard, is always the Gospel which has been heard." And those who turn from our Lord only signify that they have "loved darkness rather than light."

All the heretics of the ages know the truth now. Just as the King of Babylon was greeted in Hades by the shades there with the words, "Ah, are ye also become weak as we? Art thou also become like one of us?" (Isa. 14:10), so have all the heretics of the past been greeted by their fellow pagans at their deaths. From Cain through Pharaoh, Balaam, Balak, Ahab, Jezebel, Goliath, Sennacherib, from Arius, Sabellius, Socinus, and in our day the existentialists, Bultmannians and other deniers of the full diety of Christ and the penal substitutionary atonement, they have all gone and shall go to the tomb to know the tragedy of a Christ-rejecting life.

Oh! the danger of becoming "gospel hardened!" "Let their table be made a snare," David said of the unbelieving Israelites of his day, who nevertheless were still offering the sacrifices. That may happen in our evangelical churches, and our services and our observances of the ordinances may become a snare to

us, if we are not exercised by them, giving them the attention of our hearts.

It was said of those around the cross, “sitting down they watched Him there” (cf. Matt. 27:36; Luke 23:35). In a sense the watch continues as Christ is preached. The four soldiers indifferently cast lots for His garment. The Sadducees and Pharisees, the intellectual and religious, blasphemed Him. The women and the crowds sincerely pitied Him, but did not really understand. Only the dying thief was touched by the despair of his lost condition, crying out, “Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingdom.” Even the saints fled out of fear and anxiety, provoking the question, “What is our attitude?”

May God move all who read this study to cry out with the thief in the despair of self-salvation, “Lord, remember me in grace and save me by thy sacrifice?”

1 Ernest Kaesemann, Commentary on Romans, trans. and ed. by Geoffrey W. Broimley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980 (trans. from 4th German ed., 1980), p. 300.

2 Cf. James Denney, “St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans,” The Expositor’s Great Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1961), II, 677.

3 John Murray, The Epistle to the Romans (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965), II, 71: cf. Cranfield, II, 548.

4 Cf. William G. T. Shedd, A Critical and Doctrinal Commentary on the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1967 [original ed., 1879]), p. 333.

5 Ibid.

6 Cranfield, II, 549. “Brotherly” is a questionable choice.

7 Cf. Black, p, 142.

8 Kaesemann thinks Paul’s predestinarian view protects justification by faith from confusion with a works justification.

9 Charles Hodge, Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1953 [orig. ed., 1886)), p. 358.

10 J. Ridderbos, Isaiah, Bible Student’s Commentary, trans. by John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985 [original ed., 1950-1951]), p. 233.

11 Hodge, p. 358.

12 Cranfield, II, 552.

Israel and the Divine Purpose—Present And Future (Part 4)

Israel and the Divine Purpose

—Present And Future

Part 4

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This is Dr. Johnson's fourth article in his series of detailed studies on Romans 11.

The Gentiles Warned

Introduction

Temple University's Paul van Buren has said Christians should thank God that the Jews have said, "No," to the church and faith in Christ, for "if there were no more Jewish people, we would have lost the most enduring sign of God's faithfulness."1 Van Buren's views are far from Paul's (cf. Rom. 9:3; 10:1), but in one respect he has highlighted a genuine point. The remnant of Israel in the church, brought to grace by the Holy Spirit, is an enduring proof God has not cast away His people.

Paul has made a startling point in verses eleven through fifteen. The fall of the mass of Israel will result in their ultimate blessing through Gentile salvation. World-wide

blessing is the final end of the divine purpose, or such a thing as “life from the dead” (cf. v. 15).

On what basis can we hope for Israel’s return? Paul turns to that question in verses sixteen through twenty-four. The promises made to Abraham centuries ago are the key, promises centering finally in Christ, the Divine Seed of the patriarch (cf. Gal. 3:16). He will demonstrate his point by an illustration, the figure of the olive tree (vv. 16-24).

Edith Schaeffer has written a book with the intriguing title, Christianity Is Jewish. And Paul Achtemeier in a recent commentary on Romans has said that, if we wish to share in God’s blessing for all peoples, then “we are going to have to get it through Abraham or we will not get it at all.”2 Paul will endorse these views.

He will also show that, although there is a legitimate distinction between Israel and the church, those who speak of the two entities as having separate new covenants, separate promises, and separate destinies have missed the continuity of the divine purpose in the one people of God.

The Fundamental Principle of History

(11:16)

The figure of the firstfruits and the lump. In our last study we pointed out that verse sixteen gives the reason for the expectation of Jewish restoration to divine favor. Under two figures, that of the first-fruits and the lump and the root and the branches, the apostle contends that the unconditional Abrahamic Covenant promises belong to Israel, God’s elect nation. The figure of the firstfruits and the lump, derived from the Old Testament (cf. Num.

15:17-21), represents Abraham, the patriarchs, and their descendants. The figure of the root and the branches refers to the same entities (cf. v. 28; 9:5; Jer. 11:16; Hos. 14:6). Paul's point is clear: The election of Abraham and the patriarchs makes them and their descendants the natural branches, "holy" in the sense of consecrated to God's purposes. God's sovereign good pleasure in giving them His covenant is the basis of the hope of their restoration (cf. Deut. 7:8-9; Luke 1:55). Individuals, of course, share in the covenant only if they believe in the patriarch's Redeemer and Messiah, the Seed, the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Rom. 4:11-12; 9:6-8).

An Admonitory Perspective on History

(11:17-22)

Warning against boasting over God's covenantal love (17-18). To clarify and expound more fully his point Paul uses the second figure of verse sixteen, that of the root and branches, since it permits a distinction to be made between branches, collectively or individually, between believers and unbelievers, between Jews and Gentiles. In the exposition that follows there is a warning to Gentiles (vv. 17-22) and a fresh argument for Jewish restoration (vv. 23-24; cf. vv. 11, 15).

The figure of the olive tree represents the Abrahamic Covenant in its origin, development, and fulfillment at the end of the Times of the Gentiles in the Advent of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. v. 28). It will, therefore, be helpful to recall the nature, the terms, and the sacrifice of the covenant, so beautifully described in Genesis 12:1-3 and 15:7-21.

In Genesis 12:1-3 Moses describes the promises of the covenant in personal, national, and universal terms. There were personal promises to Abraham, guaranteeing him a great name (cf. v. 2). There has been a remarkable fulfillment of this promise, for Abraham's name is great in the three influential religions of the world: Judaism, Islam, Christianity.

Abraham was also given national promises. He was promised a land and a believing ethnic seed through whom Abraham would become the root and centre of the future history of the world (12:1; 13:14-17; 17:8).3 The great promise of the Redeemer in Genesis 3:15 receives here further delineation, and the New Testament will identify the seed as Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:16).

And, finally, Abraham was given universal promises. His seed through Christ will encompass Gentiles as well, in fact, in Moses' words, "all the families of the earth." Christ is, of course, the "in these," in whom all the families of the earth are blessed.

The ratification of the covenantal promises is described by Moses in Genesis 15:7-21. It is a most striking event, pointing unmistakably to the unilateral nature of the covenant. Three features stand out: (1) the delay and the discipline of it (vv. 11-12), suggestive of delay in God's fulfillment of the conditions and of a consummation in the teeth of opposition (satanic? cf. Matt. 13:32). (2) The terror and great darkness (v. 12), perhaps the product of a nightmare and adding a sense of gloom to the scene, suggestive, some think, of Messiah's death, the true Servant of the Lord. Only through Him is there any deliverance, and then necessarily by judgment. (3) The theophany is the third feature and surely the most

important, providing Abraham with a symbol of the glory of God for the first time since Eden (cf. vv. 11-12; Exod. 13:11-12). The darkness made the phenomena that much more distinct by the contrast. The “smoking oven” was a cylindrical fire-pot, such as was used in the house of the Eastern people. A brilliant flame, something like a fiery torch, streamed forth from the furnace. We may assume that the pieces of dead animals represented the seed of Abraham, utterly impotent in themselves, but nevertheless the objects of the divine purposes of life and blessing through the Mediator’s sufferings.

The covenantal promise is given in verses 18-21, and there is total confusion without this. Yahweh is ratifying a covenant, the visible features being symbolical of the spiritual. The ancient ceremony used by the Lord here was one to which allusion may be made in Jeremiah 34:18-20, where the prophet speaks of the ratification of a covenant by cutting a calf in two and passing between its parts (cf. v. 18).

And in history outside of the Scriptures there is an interesting example of the same custom. Immediately after the death of Alexander the Great, a dispute concerning succession to him arose. The horseguards and the rest of the cavalry under Perdiccas made up one party, while the infantry under Meleager made up the other. The dispute and strife became so fierce that it seemed that only warfare could possibly settle the matter. Finally a compromise was agreed upon, and a dog was cut in two, with the whole army passing between the pieces in vivid picture of its reunion.

The custom has also left its mark upon the Hebrew, Greek, and Mari languages. In Hebrew the phrase

signifying the making of a covenant is to cut a covenant, while in Greek it is literally to cut oaths. In Mari the expression, “to slay an ass,” was idiomatic for entering into a compact.

The most important feature of Moses’ account in Genesis fifteen is the peculiar action of God. In other covenants both parties walk between the pieces of the animals. In this instance, however, God symbolically walks between the pieces, and Abraham is not invited to follow! The meaning is clear: This covenant is not a conditional covenant in which certain duties must be fulfilled by man. It is one in which God undertakes to fulfill the conditions Himself, thus guaranteeing by the divine fidelity to His Word and by His power the accomplishment of the covenantal promises.

The fact that God alone passed between the pieces of the animals meant that God was binding only Himself to give to Abraham and His seed the promises He had made to him. One striking thing about this is that both liberal and orthodox commentators have seen this. It is not often that one can find the two viewpoints uniting in interpretation, but here they do. For example, the German liberal commentator, Grehard von Rad notes, “The ceremony proceeded completely without words and with the complete passivity of the human partner.”4 On the other hand, Herman Ridderbos, an orthodox commentator, writes, “Abraham is deliberately excluded —he is the astonished spectator.”5 To sum up, then, the Abrahamic Covenant is an unconditional covenant, depending for its fulfillment entirely upon God’s fidelity to His Word. The absence of any stated conditions in the context confirms this. What marvellous comfort that brings to believers!

Paul's figure is a parable from horticulture, but it is governed by grace (cf. v. 24).6 In nature itself it is the practice to graft a cultivated scion on a wild stock.

The warning to the Gentile believers begins in verse seventeen with the conjunctive particle, "Now" (AV, "and"; NASB, "but"). The "some" on the context refers to the mass of the nation (cf. vv. 7, 12, 14, 15). The process described is unnatural horticulturally, and that is the point he wishes to stress.7 There are two very important expressions in the verse, which have significant bearing on the relation of the covenantal promises to Israel and the church. The expressions are the prepositional phrase, "among them," and the words, "with them partakest" (lit., fellowpartaker). The expressions make it very plain that Paul believes that the Gentiles in the church share in the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant with Israel, although they remain Gentiles (cf. Gal, 3:16, 29; Heb. 2:16).

This passage makes it very difficult to maintain, as some attempt to do, that there are separate promises and destinies for Israel and the church of Jesus Christ. In fact, this text is the Achilles heel of the view that there is extreme discontinuity between Israel and the church. It suggests one body of Messianic promises for one people of God composed of two separate and distinct national entities.

In verse eighteen the apostle warns the Gentiles, for he is addressing them (cf. v. 13), against boasting over the branches that have been broken off, that is, the mass of Israel. He reminds them, the Gentile believers, that they are not self-sustaining. It is the root, the Abrahamic covenantal promises, that bears them. Incidentally, the

text is a strong warning against any form of Christian anti-Semitism, something not unknown in history.

Warning against pride of electing grace (19-22). In a kind of diatribe-like reply the Gentile is described as replying, “Branches were broken off that I (emphatic in the original text) might be grafted in.” To which Paul replies, “That is true” (lit., well), for he is thinking of the ultimate purpose of Gentile salvation (cf. vv. 11-15). He reminds his Gentile readers, however, that the Jews have fallen by reason of unbelief, and that they, the Gentiles, stand simply upon the ground of faith.

And he again warned them against arrogance and pride, for faith is not self-originated, but the gift of a gracious God (cf. Phil. 1:29; 1 Cor. 4:7; 12:3; Eph. 2:8-9).

In verse twenty-one Paul gives the reason why they, the Gentiles, should not presume upon their spiritual election. If He has not spared the natural branches, God surely will not fail to judge the unnatural branches. We see here one of the answers to the common question of those who find the doctrines of election and perseverance unpleasant. “Are there not many passages that warn of failure?,” they say. That is true. The children of God are warned against falling away as one of the means of preventing falling away. And the professing believer who has no godly fear and presumes upon his election in pride is in danger of failure. Thus, the promise of the Word of God is, “I will put my fear in their hearts, in order that they may not depart from me” (cf. Jer. 32:40).8 Verse twenty-two is a deduction from the preceding discussion. Upon the generation that rejected the Messiah has come the severity of God in divine judgment, but upon the believing Gentiles His

goodness. Paul, however, cannot continue without a final admonition. It is goodness for them, if they continue in His goodness. Otherwise they expose themselves to a cutting off from the tree.

It should, of course, be obvious from the chapter that Paul has in mind the Jews and Gentiles collectively. He is not seeking to suggest to individual believers that they are unjustified in possessing assurance of salvation (cf. 2 Tim. 1:12). At the same time Murray is right, “The conditional clause in this verse, ‘if thou continue in his goodness,’ is a reminder that there is no security in the bond of the gospel apart from perseverance. There is no such thing as continuance in the favour of God in spite of apostasy; God’s saving embrace and endurance are correlative.”9

The Proviso and the Probability of Israel’s Restoration

(23-24)

The proviso (23). The argument for Israel’s restoration, based on the figure of the olive tree, begins here. Their rejection is not final! In fact, according to Paul the only thing hindering their entrance into the covenantal blessing is their present unbelief. “And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief,” he says, “shall be grafted in: for God is able to graft them in again.” Of course, we are speaking of things from the human standpoint. On the divine plane of things there is the purpose of God to consider, and to the moment it has been His purpose to keep the door open for Gentiles in their full number to enter in. The adverb, “again,” should be noted, referring to the national reintroduction into blessing (cf. Matt. 21:43; Acts 3:19-21; 2 Cor. 3:16). He cannot only restore

Israel if they believe, He can remove their unbelief itself!10 The probability (24). The “for” introducing the twenty-fourth verse gives the ground for the apostle’s confidence of Israel’s restoration. He regards it as an easier process than that which has already occurred, the calling of the Gentiles. It is, thus, a more probable event. Israel is represented in his figure as the natural branches. They had the adoption, the glory, the covenants and all other things mentioned earlier in chapter nine, verses four and five. In particular and supremely they have the Messiah, God over all and blessed forever. The Gentiles, on the other hand, had only a dim vestige of the existence of God and a fallible conscience that generally accused them (cf. 1:18-2:16). How much more likely, then, that the natural branches would be regrafted into the tree than that the Gentiles would ever be called? It is another of Paul’s a fortiori arguments.

The last words of the verse, “their own olive tree,” emphatic in the original, are quite important. It recalls 3:1-2, where Paul makes the point that Israel still has an “advantage,” in that the nation possesses the Messianic promises of God. Murray comments, “The patriarchal root is never uprooted to give place to another planting.”11 The phrase underlines the fact that the Abrahamic Covenant promises are unconditional, certain to be fulfilled to elect Israel and elect Gentiles through the Seed, the Son of David and Abraham, the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us never forget that it is THEIR olive tree: we Gentiles share in THEIR covenantal blessing.

Conclusion

As we observe the human scene today, there is every indication that Paul's words are receiving vindication. In the first place, there is hardly any question that modern Judaism is spiritually bankrupt. It is basically an ethical system with no real redemptive program for lost sinners. Some years ago Time carried an article on Judaism, and in it was this description of its state, "For Judaism is a this-worldly rather than an otherworldly religion; its basis is action rather than dogma. Obedience to the law is far more important than belief. For the Law is truth set forth in terms of action."12 Ze'ev Chafets has just written a book about Israel with the engaging title, Heroes and Hustlers, Hard Hats and Holy Men. Mr. Chafets was an American born in Pontiac, Michigan, but he is now an Israeli after almost twenty years in Israel. He speaks in the opening pages of his first trip to Israel, when he had no real notion of the nature of the country for which he was bound. "In Pontiac, Michigan, where I was born and raised," he says, "we belonged to a Stevensonian Reform temple whose primary religious doctrines consisted of 'Be a good person,' and 'Don't forget to say hello to Aunt Mae after services.'"13 Sad to say, that is also theology typical of perhaps the majority of Protestant churches today. Paul would have been quite unhappy with that analysis of the Law of Moses and salvation.

Mr. Chafets also makes a statement concerning the land in the early pages of his book with which, I believe, the biblical writers would have expressed profound disagreement. He calls the place "a country like any other."14 It is true that the country possesses a uniquely evocative geography and history. It also, however, is the

theme of thrilling prophecies written by holy men who by the moving of God the Spirit dipped their pens in a rainbow to record them. That land is not like any other on the face of the globe, and logic, as Paul spells it out in Romans eleven, covenantal history, and prophecy argue with divine compulsion for its future glory. We Gentiles, too, who have in grace embraced the Messiah, look forward to the day of its coming.

1 The Christian Century, January 1-8, 1986, p. 10.

2 Paul J. Achtemeier, Romans. Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Atlanta: John Knox Press,1985), p. 79.

3 Arthur W. Pink, The Divine Covenants (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), p. 115.

4 Gerhard von Rad, Genesis: a Commentary, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1972), p. 188.

5 Herman N. Ridderbos, The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1953), p. 131.

6 It is true that the engrafting of a fresh cutting from a wild tree into an olive tree for purposes of reinvigorating is not unknown, but Paul's word that he is arguing contrary to nature seems to settle the issue (cf. v. 24). For other comments see Barrett, p. 217; Black, p. 145); Bruce, pp. 217-20; Cranfield, II, 571-72: Murray, 11, p. 86.

7 Sanday & Headlam, p. 328.

8 Cf. Shedd, p. 341.

9 Murray, II, 88.

10 Gifford, p. 197.

11 Murray, II, 90.

12 Time, October 15, 1951, p. 57.

13 Ze’ev Chafets, Heroes and Hustlers, Hard Hats and Holy Men (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1986), p. 11.

14 Ibid., p. 8.

Israel and the Divine Purpose—Present and Future (Part 5)

Israel and the Divine Purpose

—Present and Future

Part 5

S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.

Israel Saved by the Deliverer from Zion

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This is his fifth study in his series on Romans 11.

Introduction

We have turned the corner toward home and the conclusion of our study of Paul and the purpose of the ages. I realize that the depth and technicality of the theme is not easy for the average student of Scripture, and I hope that it has not been too much for you.

The story that Alexander Maclaren often told comes to mind. He enjoyed telling about the old verger of St. Mary's Church, Oxford, a well-known university church where the famous Bampton Lectures are given. As the verger was taking a party of sightseers through the church he commented. "I've heard every sermon and every lecture given in this 'ere church for the past forty years, and thank God I'm a Christian still." I hope you, too, have managed to hold on to your faith as we've

investigated the story of Israel and the nations in this complex chapter.

The importance of the subject, however, demands a careful treatment. As we noted in an earlier study Professor Berkouwer excused a separate chapter on Israel in his book, The Return of Christ, for two reasons. First, he referred to the renewed attention to Israel arising from the “tragic outbursts of antisemitism in our age.” And then he pointed to the rise of the Jewish state in Palestine. This second fact, particularly, calls for an intensive treatment of the biblical chapters dealing with matters related to the State of Israel.

The theodicy of Paul in Romans nine through eleven is certainly one of the crucial sections in the Word of God that touch Israel and the purpose of God. In the theodicy, his vindication of God’s ways with the nations according to the principles of justice, Paul has made these points:

1. First, he made the point that God is sovereign in His grace and elects whom He will (9:1-19).

2. Second, since that is not the whole truth, he then explains that Israel’s own disobedience led to her downfall (9:30-10:21). Human responsibility necessarily follows divine sovereignty inseparably.

3. Third, these two points, however, are not the final word on Israel. Her fall, while real, is not total, nor is it final, and that is the substance of Paul’s message in chapter eleven (11:1-36).

The figure of the olive tree in the preceding context is designed primarily to be a warning to the Gentile believers not to presume on the Lord’s mercy to them in

the present age. But it taught the fall of Israel, the blessing of the Gentiles, and the probability of the reception of Israel again into the redemptive purpose and plan of God in grace (cf. vv. 12, 15, 23-24).

What he had shown as possible, since faith is the only thing hindering Israel's return to covenantal blessing from the human standpoint (cf. v. 23), as probable, since it is easier to believe that the natural branches shall be grafted into the olive tree than the unnatural, he now prophesies in his thrilling words, "And so all Israel shall be saved." We turn to them now.

The Hardening of Israel

(11:25)

The admonition (25a-b). One must remember in going through the section that the apostle has the nations in the foreground and individuals in the background. He is reasoning over the relation that God has established in His eternal plan between the nation Israel and the Gentiles.

The "for" with which verse twenty-five begins, introduces the fundamental ground for the hope of Israel's regrafting into the olive tree. It is found in Scripture. The apostle does not want his Gentile readers to succumb to ignorance and pride and overlook that fact.

Israel's hardening is subject to two limitations, which sum up the chapter. First, it is in part, the phrase being used extensively, not intensively. All men, including Israel, are equally depraved, but the depravity of some in Israel has been overcome by God's effectual grace in

them. He refers, of course, to the remnant of Jewish believers in this age (cf. vv. 5, 17).

And, second, the hardening is temporary, being “until” the fullness of Gentile salvation takes place. The apostle calls these things a “mystery,” that is, a divine secret, something that may be known only by divine revelation. Here it encompasses the divine program in its several steps.

Paul’s concern over his reader’s possible ignorance of these matters reminds me of one of Josh Billings’ sayings, “The trouble with most folks isn’t so much their ignorance, as knowing so many things that ain’t so.” Well, there are many who “know” Israel has no ethnic future, but it just “ain’t so,” Scripture affirms.

The description of the hardening (25c). The apostle now describes the hardening. The word Paul uses is derived from a Greek word meaning a callous. In a metaphorical sense it denotes a dullness, an insensibility, or a hardening. The Authorized Version’s “blindness” is not correct, but Paul’s word includes the sense of spiritual blindness.

The hardening has been judicially inflicted on a part of Israel, the mass, but not all. And it is the result of the rejection of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. The nation as a whole, centering their attention on the prophecies of the Messiah’s glory and the victory He would accomplish for them, failed to give proper attention to the prophecies of Messiah’s sufferings, the ground of atonement and the forgiveness of sins. Passages such as Isaiah fifty-three and Psalm twenty-two were a mystery to them, due to failure to recognize their sinful state and need of redemption from guilt.

Like the little boy, waiting in a London hospital for a visit from King George V and failing to recognize him, when he came, because he did not wear his crown as King of England, Israel, too, failed to recognize their King when He came. He did not have His crown on; He came in His suit of suffering. His crown was not golden, but of thorns! The day is coming, however, when He shall come again in His royal apparel. Then the whole world will recognize and acknowledge Him as ruler of the kings of the earth.

The culmination of her hardening (11:25d). Several important points are made by the apostle in the last clause of the verse. First, the "until" suggests an end to the hardness of hearts (cf. 1 Cor. 11:26; 15:25). And that which is implied is stated in the next verse.1 And, second, note carefully the term, "the fullness of the Gentiles." The word "fullness" usually means the full number, the whole body.2Sanday and Headlam have "the full completed number."3 The term must be distinguished from another familiar eschatological term, "the times of the Gentiles" (cf. Luke 21:24). That term covers the period of time from 605 B.C. when Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem to the second coming of Jesus Christ (cf. Dan. 2:1-45). The term in the text here is a soteriological term, referring to the time of Gentile salvation during the present age.

Paul's words, "be come in," better rendered shall have come in, refer to entrance by regeneration and faith into the community of the Lord's people signified by the olive tree. They enter into the possession of the blessing of the unconditional covenantal program of the Old Testament Scriptures (cf.. Acts 15:14; Rom. 15:16, 18; cf. 11:12).

The Salvation of Israel

(26a)

The number of them (26a). Before us now is the important statement, “And so all Israel shall be saved.” The enemies of Israel cry out still, like the enemies of Old Testament times, “Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation; that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance” (cf. Psa. 83:4). Just recently the Syrian president, Mr. Assad, boasted that when the Syrians finished with Israel the Golan Heights would be in the middle of Syria. He fails to reckon with God and His Word. They say, “Thus saith the Lord, who giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, who divideth the sea when its waves roar; the Lord of hosts is his name: If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the Lord, then the seed of Israel shall cease from being a nation before me forever” (cf. Jer. 31:35-36).

But what is meant by “all Israel”? A study of such passages as 1 Kings 12:1, 2, 2 Chron. 12:1-5, and Daniel 9:11 will show that Paul meant Israel as a national whole, not every individual Israelite. The nation as a whole, that is, its leaders and the majority of the people, will turn to the Lord in the latter days. This meaning is confirmed by the fact that in rabbinic literature “all Israel” has this force. Often cited is the statement from the Mishnah tractate, Sanhedrin (x. 1), “all Israel has a portion in the age to come,” which is followed in the tractate by a lengthy passage listing the kinds of Israelites who do not have a portion in the age to come (Sadducees, heretics, magicians, etc.)

The meaning of the term Israel. John Calvin referred the term “Israel” to “all the people of God,” drawn from both the Gentiles and ethnic Israel, although he gave to Israel “the first place” in “the whole Israel of God.”4 Cranfield comments, “That pas Israel here does not include Gentiles is virtually certain,”5 unusual confidence for a modern commentator! The evidence, however, is overwhelmingly against Calvin. Israel elsewhere always refers to ethnic Israel. The term occurs ten times previously in Romans 9-11 and always in that sense (cf. v. 28, “fathers”). Further, it surely is questionable hermeneutically to give the term a sense different from that which it has in the immediately preceding verse. Try reading verses twenty-five and twenty-six, giving Calvin’s sense to the word “Israel,” and the impossibility of the view plainly emerges. Calvin, therefore, was not always right.

The manner of Israel’s salvation (26a). We must now give attention to the warmly discussed phrase, “and so.” The phrase may be understood in several different ways.

It has been given the temporal force of and then. The rarity of the usage, however, argues against its sense here. The phrase may be taken inferentially and rendered by and thus (— therefore), but that sense is also rare in the New Testament. And, third, it may be taken correlatively with the following as in “as it is written.” The rendering would then be, and so all Israel shall be saved, (just) as it stands written (cf. Phil. 3:17).6 Finally, since the most common sense of the adverb rendered here by “so” is a comparative adverb, I think it is best to take it in that sense.7 The full significance of this will appear when we discuss the alternative interpretations of the statement shortly.

That brings us to the interpretation of the declaration as a whole. Among the views contending for acceptance are the following three.

(1) First, we may dispense with the view that Paul is referring to the salvation of “spiritual Israel,” composed of elect Jews and Gentiles together. Aside from the usage of terms referred to previously, the antithesis in the overall and immediate context between Israel and the Gentiles forbids this interpretation.

(2) Second, a view that gained a body of support among amillennial students, namely, that “all Israel” here refers to elect Jews down through the ages who are converted to Christ, demands some consideration simply by reason of the names supporting it. The view was held by Melanchthon, I believe, and it has found contemporary support among such amillennial theologians as Herman Ridderbos, G. C. Berkouwer, William Hendrikson, Anthony A. Hoekema,O0. Palmer Robertson and others. Building upon the comparative phrase, “and so,” and yet admitting that “all Israel” can only refer to ethnic Israelites, they have sought to show that the phrase can only refer to all Israelites saved through the ages — a kind of soteriological “trickle down” theory! The salvation of “all Israel” is simply the salvation of all the remnants of the past. Forgetting that Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, and that outside of Romans 9-11 Paul only uses the term Israel about six times, Ridderbos demands that Paul speak of Israel’s conversion in other places. He forgets what Paul has said in Romans 3:1-4 about their present “advantage,” what he said in 9:3-5, and how he insisted that the purpose of Christ’s coming “as a minister of the circumcision in behalf of the truth of God” was to “confirm the promises made to the

fathers" (15:8). Notable is Ridderbos' failure to handle verses eleven through fifteen, the parable of the olive tree with its future reference (cf. vv. 23-24), and the time reference of the biblical citations of Paul in verses twenty-six and twenty-seven.

Still other objections may be raised to Ridderbos' view, but I have space only for a few. First, the passage stresses the reversal of fortune experienced by Israel (cf. vv. 7, 11-12, 15, 23-24), and a change of status before God in the future. In the view of Ridderbos there is simply the continual saving experience of a minority of elect Jews through the church's history. There is no reversal of fortune at all.

(2) Further, the truth that the elect shall be saved is so obvious that one would have to ask why would the question, "God has not rejected His people, has He?," ever have arisen in the first place?

(3) The third, the "much more" (a fortiori) argument of verse twelve and the statements in verses eleven, fourteen and fifteen, taken together with the future sense of the passage, support the ethnic future of Israel. The view of Ridderbos, Berkouwer and others has no real "casting away" and "receiving," no imposition of judicial hardening and no lifting of it.

Finally, the view cannot explain why Paul is so concerned with Israel, when they are no different from anyone else.

What, then, is Paul saying? Simply that Israel's hardening is temporary, and at the same time the occasion of the opening of the door of a world-wide salvation of the Gentiles. This very exercise of mercy toward the Gentiles, however, shall result in the

salvation of ethnic Israel as a whole, for Gentile salvation shall provoke them to jealousy. It is in this manner that the mystery unfolds.

The Scriptural Attestation

(11:26B-27)

Adolph Harnack, the famous German historian, in speaking of Paul's conviction of the salvation of Israel as yet to come, said, "The Jew in himself was still too strong." And Luther, of all people — and yet the revered reformer made many exaggerated and foolish statements in his career — once said, "A Jew, or Jewish heart, is so wood-stone-iron-devil-hardened that it can in no way be turned"! And that coming from the man who got his insight into divine grace from a Jew, the Apostle Paul!

No, it was not Paul's patriotism that led him to prophecy Jewish restoration: it was the Bible. And so in the final verses of the section, in a free blending of Old Testament passages, he supports his view by the Word of God. The passages are interesting, for they are grounded in the truth of the three unconditional covenants of Israel, the Abrahamic, the Davidic, and the New.

In verse 26b the words about the Deliverer from Zion in this context of divine judgment upon the world evidently refer to the Davidic Covenant and its conquering King.

In verse 27a, the opening line of the verse, the words concerning the covenant are a renewal of the covenantal promise made by God to Abraham in Genesis 17:4. They come from the Abrahamic Covenant.

Finally in verse 27b, the final line of the merger of Old Testament texts, either Isaiah 27:9 or Jeremiah 31:33-34 are in mind, but the fact that the forgiveness of sins is in view makes it clear that the New Covenant is in Paul's mind also (cf. Isa. 59:21).

Thus, remarkable as it may seem, all the unconditional covenants pertaining to divine redemption, which find their fruition in the Second Advent, are linked by Paul with the statement, "and so all Israel shall be saved." That would seem to clearly indicate that the time reference of the statement is future.

Thus, empirical evidence in the presence of a remnant by the election of grace, divine logic as seen in the example of the olive tree, and now the prophetic Word unite in affirming the restoration of believing ethnic Israel as a whole to saving covenantal blessing. We, therefore, pray to that end.

And with the psalmist we say, "Let Israel hope in the Lord: for with the Lord there is mercy (lit., lovingkindness), and with Him is plentious redemption" (Psa. 130:7).

Conclusion

One final point may be made. Is it not significant that the restoration of Israel is traced to the favor of God as found in the ministry of the Messiah? In other words, there can be no restoration of Israel apart from the coming and cross of the Savior, for only there is found the forgiveness of sins, which underlies all of God's promises and blessings.

If one were to visit Werden, Germany, he would no doubt notice an image of a lamb carved high up on the old

church there. If one asked about it, he would be told about the worker who, while working on the structure, fell to an expected sudden death on the stones scattered on the ground below. He miraculously arose unhurt, because there had been a lamb among the stone-heaps nibbling on some tufts of grass there, and he had fallen on the lamb, which was crushed to death. The man in gratitude carved the memorial to the lamb to celebrate both his deliverance and its ultimate suggestion of the deliverance we have by the Lamb of God. We too have been delivered from judgment by the Deliverer out of Zion, who offered the saving atoning sacrifice at Golgotha, We exalt Him and sing His praises in the words of the living creatures and elders, “Thou art worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed to God by thy blood some out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation: And hast made them unto our God a kingdom of priests, and they shall reign upon the earth” (Rev. 51:9-10).

1 I find the exegesis of Palmer Robertson, who follows in other respects the views of Ridderbos, Berkouwer, Hendriksen, Hoekema, and others, quite unconvincing at this point. Cf. O. Palmer Robertson, “Is There a Distinctive Future for Ethnic Israel in Romans 11?”,” Perspective on evangelical Theology, ed. by Kenneth S. Kantzer and Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), pp. 219-21. I have the greatest respect for Dr. Robertson and his skills, but his position and that of the Dutch commentator’s mentioned above, cannot be sustained, in my opinion.

2 J. B. Lighfoot, Saint Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians and to Philomen (London: Macmillan and Company, 1890), p. 258.

3 Sanday and Headlam, p. 335.

4 Calvin, p. 255.

5 Cranfield, II, p. 576.

6 Arndt and Gingrich have suggested this correlative possibility. If correct, the meaning is: All Israel shall be saved, as the prophetic words cited show. The sense is good, and the grammar and syntax, if not Paul’s common usage, are satisfied.

7 Cf. Sanday and Headlam, p. 335; Godet,255-56.

Israel and the Divine Purpose—Present and Future (Part 6)

Israel and the Divine Purpose

—Present and Future

Part 6

S. Lewis. Johnson Jr.

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This is Dr. Johnson’s sixth detailed study on Romans 11.

Calling Immutable and Mercy Inexhaustible

Introduction

The knowledge of the divine purpose is an absolute essential for the reading, the understanding, and the living of Scripture. In most endeavours of life the knowledge of the proper, or best, plan of action is a necessity. No general would think of approaching a battle without a battle plan. No athletic coach would think of beginning a contest without a game plan. No teacher should come to a class session without a lesson plan. It is reasonable, and true to Scripture, to expect God would have a plan in accomplishing His purpose, the greatest of all plans.

The Bible states that He has such a plan. In Ephesians 3:11 Paul, in his marvellous words to the Ephesians about God’s purpose through him to bring the good

news to Gentiles, refers to “the eternal purpose (lit., the purpose of the ages) which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

The divine purpose, like any real world-view, has its beginning in creation, its stages of unfolding in the developing history of the future (cf. Gen. 1:1 — 2:4; Heb. 1:1-2; Rev. 21:1 — 22:5).

No biblical writer has unfolded all the details of the plan of the ages in his work. Rather, many authors have each made contributions in their several works. That is true of Paul, of course, and Romans eleven may be his greatest concentrated contribution to the subject. His particular stress lies in the light thrown on the relation of the nation Israel to the Gentile nations. We have been seeking to elucidate that contribution.

This study concentrates attention upon verses twenty-eight through thirty-two. The key-words in the chapter now become gifts, calling, and mercy.

The word mercy is found four times in this brief section, and perhaps a word about its sense will aid in the exposition of the verses. The verb means “to have compassion, be sorry for, show compassion, be merciful.”1 The derived noun eleemosyne referred to the act of kindness that followed compassion, and then to alms, or a contribution to the poor. We speak in English of eleemosynary institutions, such as the United Fund, the Red Cross, the Salvation Army, and the American Cancer Society. Thus, the idea of living from others came to be associated with the idea.

A story told by Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse illustrated its sense for him. “My research assistant,” Barn-house has written, “told me the following incident which illustrates

clearly our Greek word for mercy. When he was pastor of a church in metropolitan New York, he had a Scotch lady come in each Wednesday to take care of the manse for him. She always brought the children to lunch since the school was just across the street from the parsonage. Without fail, after the grace she would say, 'Eat up, it's on the pastor; we do not have to pay for it today!' This expression was but an evidence of a Scotsman's thrift. On one of these occasions my assistant said to the woman: "You know, when we say," Eat up, it's on the pastor; we do not have to pay for it today!," you make me think of a verse of Scripture from Ephesians, "But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us" (2:4). Because of His mercy, we can say, 'Eat up, it's on the Lord; we do not have to pay for it today.'"2 To make it easy to distinguish mercy from grace, we might speak of the differences in this simple way: Grace is for the guilty, while mercy is for the miserable. Both are for sinners.

Israel's Inevitable Future

(11:28-29)

The declaration of it (28). Paul has concluded his argument for the future of ethnic Israel. He has contended that the falling away of Israel that reached its climax in the rejection of the Messiah had as its ultimate purpose Gentile salvation. Further, the present opening of the door to the Gentiles had as its goal Jewish jealousy and consequent reception into God's favor which, in turn, would lead to a broader world-wide salvation of the Gentiles (cf. vv. 11-15). The parable of the olive tree illustrated the matter (vv. 16-25), and the

quotations from Scripture sealed the evidence for Israel's return to covenantal blessing (vv. 25-27).

This whole scheme of things naturally raised the question of the broad plan of God, or the purpose of the ages as that purpose affects the nation and the nations. Thus, Paul now obliges his readers in Rome by surveying the broad sweep of God's dealing with the nations (vv. 28-32). The result is Paul's greatest passage on God's plan of the ages. We look into it now.

One notices immediately in the original text the absence of the customary connecting junction or phrase, a practice very near and dear to anyone writing Greek. The Greeks habitually joined their sentences with such connectives, for they generally liked a logical flow in their argumentation. When the connectives were missing, more than likely there was a reason, such as strong feeling or an abrupt change of direction in their theme. In the present case, in the light of the apostle's personal concern with the theme of these chapters it is probable that, as Barrett comments, he writes "with care as well as feeling, and his words must be carefully marked."3 We shall pay careful attention to them.

Verses twenty-eight through thirty-two, Cranfield says, "draw out, and sum up, the implications of the preceding verses."4 The older, but excellent, commentator, William G. T. Shedd says that the verses "recapitulate" what has been said in verses eleven through twenty-seven, but with a broader sweep.5 Plainly stated it is this: Israel has been cast away, but awaits a restoration.

The section bears all the signs of careful writing on the apostle's part, and I believe that Barrett has noted this

so well that I am repeating what he has said, “The paragraph is brought to an end with two balanced sentences, each constructed on the same pattern. Each contains a pair of antithetical clauses explained by a ‘for’ clause. Thus:

A — Enemies, for your advantage (v. 28).

B — Beloved, on account of the fathers (v. 28).

C — For God does not.(v. 29).

A — You once … but now (v. 30)

B — The now … but now (v. 31)

C — For God has shut up… (v. 32)”6

Israel’s inevitable future is set before the reader in the words of verse twenty-eight, “As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers’ sakes.” The immutability of the divine choice is declared (cf. Mal. 3: 6).

In what sense are Israelites enemies now? Probably the word is used passively, that is, they are enemies in the sense that at the present they are under the divine wrath, treated as enemies. The parallelism of the verse indicates this. This enmity, however, is “for your sakes,” that is, for the sake of the Gentiles in the providential dealing of God (cf. vv. 11, 12, 15).

But while the mass of the nation at present is under His wrath, the divine election of Israel still holds (cf. vv. 5, 7). The words “the election” refer to the covenant promises as the following phrase, “on account of the fathers” indicates. The promises shall find their fulfillment in the national restoration of the nation as a

whole in the future (cf. vv. 25-27). And, needless to say, the promises are secured to Israel, not on the ground of merit, but solely on the ground of God's fidelity to His word in grace (cf. 3:3-4; 9:4-5; Isa. 66:22).

The justification of it (29). The "for" of verse twenty-nine introduces the ground of Israel's status, namely, the immutability of the divine gifts and calling. The words, "without repentance" (lit., unregrettable, perhaps "unrevocable"7), emphatic by position in the original text, stress the unchangeability of the Abrahamic promises. They are unregrettable, simply because they are irrevocable. The "gifts" are the effects of the call, representing the individual promises (cf. 9:4-5; 3:3; Isa. 66:22). The "calling" represents the particular act of election, and that is the cause of the gifts, as Shedd notes.8 Rabbi Finkelstein, in the Time article cited in a previous study, in the context of military service put it this way, "The choosing by God was like Selective Service." It is binding on all Jews to the last generation on earth.9

Mercy Inexhaustible

(11:30-32)

The declaration of it (30-31). The final balanced sentence is also a kind of "reiteration and confirmation"10 of verses eleven through twenty-seven. The "for" introduces an explanation and expansion of the argument. Paul points out that the end of the road for both Jew and Gentile is God's mercy, and for each of them the road leads to it through disobedience.11 The story of Gentile disobedience in verse thirty conies first. The apostle does not expand on the details of the period of their disobedience, and we can only survey the

Scriptures of the Old Testament for some inkling of his thinking12 One would think that the apostle probably has in mind the original fall of man in the Garden of Eden and the consequent fallen condition that has prevailed to the present. While God called Abraham out of fallen mankind and began a new work with him and his seed, the Gentiles remained in their disobedient state (cf. Acts 17:30). This diagnosis finds confirmation in the way the apostle describes the Gentile condition in chapter one, verses eighteen through thirty-two (cf. vv. 24, 26, 28).

Barrett sees the divine will working out His plan in this. “In each case,” he writes, “behind disobedience and mercy, God wills and enacts the one as he wills and enacts the other.”13 The Jewish history follows in verse thirty-one, and the apostle finds a similarity in the comparison of them in the present age with the Gentiles in the past age. They too, although still an elect people, have fallen into disobedience, climaxing in the rejection of the Messiah but continuing still in the present age. The period of time covered is from Genesis twelve up to the present age.

The apostle repeats the scheme of things in the last clause that he has been emphasizing in the earlier verses. The purpose of Gentile salvation is that “because of the mercy shown to you,”14 Israel may eventually be restored.

The “now” of the last clause has occasioned difficulty. The manuscripts differ here, some having the adverb, others not, and still others have later. Some amillennialists find the “now” to be like a line thrown to a drowning man, their last hope in affirming that Israel’s

salvation is taking place in the salvation of the remnants through the ages, or “now.”15 The textual question is discussed in an endnote, but I take the “now” to be probably genuine, although early and widespread witnesses favor its omission.16 What does it mean, then? Simply that Israel shall find their national mercy in the present Messianic age, in its concluding scenes that climax with the Second Advent.

Paul, then, has in mind a divine purpose of the ages, from man’s disobedience at the Fall through divine election of Abraham and his seed. That divinely elected nation, however, stumbled over the stumbling stone, the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, leading to the opening of the door of salvation to elected Gentiles. They, too, the New Testament Scriptures say, shall conclude their times of divine blessing in apostasy, and Israel, made jealous, delivered and blessed shall be restored to her favored place before God. As an issue of their startling return to the Lord, their witness to the nations shall finally culminate in the world-wide blessing of the Gentiles. Mercy to all is the glorious divine purpose.

The justification of it (32). The “for” of verse thirty-two confirms and explains the sentiments of verses thirty and thirty-one. God will have concluded all, both Jews and Gentiles, under sin and disobedience with the purpose of showing mercy to all. The word translated by “hath concluded” is a very vivid one, used in military contexts for the giving of people over to the sword (cf. Psa. 77:62, LXX), and metaphorically for the catching of fish in Luke 5:6. It was used of prisoners in prison, and Way renders the text here, “God shut the door on them all when they passed into the prison cell of disobedience, only with the intention of having mercy on

all."17 But, conviction is in order to conversion, Shedd points out, and that is the case here.

The clause contains two occurrences of the noun "all" that have been misunderstood by a few interpreters. Some have even sought to find in the text support for universalism, the doctrine that all without exception shall be saved ultimately, a teaching foolishly and immorally embraced by certain of the cults, and now quite popular in mainline churches.

Others, such as the Arminians and quite a few of the "Calminians (an historical designation of those who have tried to combine two irreconcilable systems of theology, Calvinism and Arminianism), have taught that God purposed to save all without exception, but man's will has defeated His purpose. That view is not only contradicted by Romans 8:29-30, 9:16, 18, and 21, but leaves us with a limited deity, a frustrated God. He then becomes one of whom it cannot be said, as the prophets did say, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure" (cf. Isa. 46:10; 44:28; Dan. 4:35, etc.).

No, the problem really has a simple solution. Paul, as often in the Bible, uses the term in the sense of all without distinction, not all without exception. That becomes clear when we remember that the chapter has to do with nations, Israel and the Gentiles. At this place Paul means that God will have mercy on all, that is, all the nations, both Israel and the Gentiles.

Cranfield, like many, has difficulty with the word, because he takes the first "all" to mean all without exception (a true teaching for all without exception are under sin), and then, of course, he has difficulty in giving "all" a different sense in the last clause.18 He

finally winds up with what he calls the view of Karl Barth, namely, that the text does not teach universalism, nor the exclusion of some from the embrace of God's mercy, a patently inconsistent position.

Oscar Wilde once said, "Consistency is the last refuge of the unimaginative," and Ralph Waldo Emerson offered this, "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds adored by little statemen and philosophers and divines." I still like it. And these men had to use it to say they disliked it!

Conclusion

Paul, then, affirms in his magnificent survey of God's plan of the ages that it shall issue in universal mercy to Israel and the Gentiles. And all the individuals who respond to God's loving offer shall have the testimony of John Allen of the Salvation Army. "I deserve to be damned; I deserve to be in hell; but God interfered!" Others who know the Lord say the same thing.

1 H. H. Esser, "Mercy, Compassion," Dictionary of New Testament Theology, ed. by Colin Brown et al (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publish ing House, 1967-1971), II, 594.

2 Donald Grey Barnhouse, God's Covenants, p. 158.

3 Barrett, p. 224.

4 Cranfield, II, 579.

5 Shedd, p. 349.

6 Barrett, p. 224.

7 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 45.

8 Shedd, p. 350.

9 Time, October 15, 1951, p. 57.

10 Shedd, p. 351.

11 Cf. Barrett, p. 226.

12 Cranfield has no discussion of the opening clause of verse 30, or the adverb — (AV, “in times past”; lit., at one time).

13 Barrett, p. 226.

14 The AV’s “through your mercy” is better rendered by by reason of the mercy shown you (cf. NASB).

15 Herman Ridderbos, Israel, pp. 57-64 trans. by Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. (den Haag: Van Keulen, 1955), p. 3 (59). Cf. Berkouwer, p. 345.

16 Early and widespread witnesses support the shorter reading without the “now.” However, the presence of the “now” can better explain the origin of the other readings, the omission, and the “superficially more appropriate usteron” (Metzer, p. 527). It is not easy to suppose an accidental insertion in the light of the external evidence (but is this certainly so?). If the “now” is genuine, the reference is to the truth of verse 23 (cf. vv. 5, 7), or to the present Messianic age. The latter possibility fully satisfies all questions of an ethnic future for Israel. There is a possibility of an accidental insertion of the adverb, but consideration of it would take us too far afield.

17 Way, p. 138.

18 Cranfield at one point does acknowledge that groups might be in view, even suggesting that the article with panats (AV, “all”) might suggest that sense.

Israel and the Divine Purpose—Present and Future (Part 7)

Israel and the Divine Purpose

—Present and Future

Part 7

S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.

The Leading Principle of All Divine Truth

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With sincere appreciation to Dr. Johnson, we publish his seventh and final study on the weighty subject matter of Romans 11.

Introduction

At this point in Romans eleven Paul seems to be caught up in the spirit of Wesley's "Love Divine," with its "lost in wonder, love and praise." What can we say, when the apostle is so overcome?

And as far as understanding what Paul has been saying is concerned, Riddle is right in saying, "we have learned Paul's meaning only when we can join in this ascription of praise."1 The marvelous truth of verse thirty-two, that God in His determinate counsel and infinite wisdom has purposed to exercise mercy to all without distinction, has forced from the beloved apostle's heart this

exclamation of astonished wonder. It is, as Gifford aptly says, “a noble conclusion to the great argument of the epistle.”2 It is striking that the wrath that Paul said in chapter one was revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness has merged now into the divine mercy that God has extended to all the nations of the earth.3 The apostle, of course, has had primarily upon his mind God’s dealings with Israel and the Gentiles in the flow of redemptive history, from the Fall on to the Second Advent. In this reflection upon it and in his exposition of it, however, there has emerged quite clearly a general and universal truth, namely, the truth of the sovereignty of the infinite God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. Perhaps we should say the truth of the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is sovereign, to be sure to stress the divine Person and not simply a truth about Him. At any rate, the God who is infinite in His knowledge, wisdom, purpose, mercy and grace has been before the reader. The climax is reached in the doxology (Rom. 11:33-36).

The doxology underlines this leading principle of all divine truth, namely, the God who is sovereign. In fact, there are few passages in the Word of God that declare as forcefully the conviction that God is all in human salvation, while man is only a helpless beneficiary of divine love and grace. This truth stands out in the four verses and confirms the appropriateness of the great titles given our Sovereign God, such as “The First and the Last,” “The Beginning and the End,” “The One Who Is, Who Was, and Is To Come,” and “The Alpha and the Omega.” The prophets and the apostles alike proclaim the blessed but humbling message, “Salvation is of the Lord” (cf. Jonah 2:9)

The Profundity and Inscrutability of the Divine Purposes

(33-35)

The exclamation (33). The short paragraph begins with a striking exclamation, “Oh, the depth of the riches and the wisdom and the knowledge of God!4 The apostle marvels at the course of the divine elective purpose as it is seen in the ages of salvation history. The three terms, “riches,” “wisdom,” and “knowledge” impress him. What do they connote?

“Riches” is the broadest of them and refers to God’s unlimited resources, and in this context particularly His mercy (cf. v. 12; 2:4; 9:23; 10:12; 2 Cor. 8:9; Eph. 2:4, etc.).

“Wisdom” is mental excellence in its highest and fullest sense, one lexicographer has said, and perhaps we may add that it often represents the means employed in the use of knowledge. God’s wisdom is the infinitely perfect use of His complete knowledge.

“Knowledge,” particularly as meant by the word used here in this context, refers to the infinite store of truth of all types in the mind of God. In this context especially it refers to the knowledge from which has come God’s purposes.

Is it necessary to note that Paul finds these qualities, infinite knowledge, infinite wisdom, and the infinite riches of mercy in God? Where else could they be found?

The following line, “how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!,” heightens the picture. His “judgments” are the purposes of God, the determinations that flow from His infinite knowledge

and wisdom, while His “ways” are His methods of procedure in accomplishing His intentions. The apostle states that His judgments are unsearchable, beyond the comprehension of man the creature, and that His ways are beyond the reach of the scientific method. The adjective, “past finding out,” is derived from a Greek verb that means to trace out by tracks. Finite human methods of inquiry terminate at the border of infinity. At this “Checkpoint Charlie” revelation alone provides light.

The explanation (justification?) (34-35). The “for” of verse thirty-four introduces the explanation of this state of things. Infinite knowledge, infinite wisdom, and infinite riches of mercy necessarily lead to human astonishment.

The words of the Scripture justify the statements of verse thirty-three. Two quotations, the first from Isaiah 40:13 and the second from Job 41:11 (Heb. 41:3), are cited to show that God’s knowledge, wisdom, and riches of mercy are beyond human reach. The Scriptural texts are in the form of questions, and they support the preceding observations in reverse order.

The opening line of verse thirty-four, “For who hath known the mind of the Lord?,” refers to the knowledge of God, the last of the astonishing infinities of the preceding verse. In the context of Isaiah 40:13, the prophet stands in the midst of the announcement of the coming redemption of the people by the exalted Person of the Lord God (cf. vv. 1-11). The questions that follow seek to give the people in exile the sense of His greatness as Creator (vv. 12-14) and Governor (vv. 15-17). In the background of the questions is the

popular current idolatry, and the prophet is contrasting the common falsehoods with the truth concerning Jehovah, the true God. The question that Paul has cited stresses Jehovah's infinite knowledge as displayed in His creative work. He needed no philosopher to inform Him regarding reality.

The second line in verse thirty-four, as in Isaiah's prophecy, has to do with wisdom. He needed no teacher, or engineer in physical sciences, to instruct Him in the the science of creation. All the earth sciences repose in His mind in perfection. The carnal mind of man, often baffled by the divine works, tends to affirm that that which surpasses our reason is impossible, but we must remember that His incomparable power and mind are inscrutable. Let us submit our weakness, rashness, and occasional insolence to His unsearchable counsel in becoming humility. "All the reason or understanding that we have," Calvin reminds us, "is mere darkness, till we have been enlightened by Christ."5 The depth of His riches of mercy finds emphasis in verse thirty-five in the citation from Job 41:11 (Heb. 41:3).6 No one has so given to Him that His benefits may be regarded as a requital for that giving. It is not that we first give to Him, and then He gives in response. All His gifts are in free grace and overflowing generosity. He, as Paul has said, "is rich unto all that call upon Him" (10:12). And they call upon Him, not to give Him something, but to receive what they cannot earn.

No doubt the apostle had Israel in mind here, for the root of the error of his generation was the self-righteous notion of earning God's blessing and favor by previous merit. The divine activity is not determined and conditioned by human calculation and action. The

creature can do nothing to put God under obligation to Him, Everything Paul has been teaching denies this — justification by the merit of Christ in grace, sanctification by the Holy Spirit and not by the power of human free will, and divine election and calling according to the divine purpose and not by the foreknowledge of faith through human free will.

The Independent Sovereignty of God

(36a)

The source. The “for” (lit., because) introduces the reason why man cannot lay God under obligation to him. God Himself is the source, the mediator, and the goal of all things. How can He be anyone’s debtor? He is the first cause of all, the agent who works all in all, and all things have Him as their final cause (cf. 1 Cor. 8:6; 12:6; Heb. 2:10). The whole process of salvation, even including its negative aspects of disobedience, wrath, and retribution, is due to God’s initiative, who performs His purposes through the Son and the Spirit.7 The mediator. The phrase,” through Him,” marks out God as the mediator of all things and is inclusive of His providential ordering, care, and preservation of them.

The goal. The entire redemptive purpose has as its goal the Lord God and the publication of His excellencies, as the final clause indicates.

These three phrases, “of Him,” “through Him,” and “to Him,” express most forcibly the independent sovereignty of God over this created universe and its intelligences and creatures (cf. Dan. 2:21; 4:35).

One might ask at this point, “What is independent sovereignty?” There is great confusion today over the

meaning of sovereignty. Almost all Christians believe in the sovereignty of God, but few are able to define the term. This is not the place to settle the matter, but perhaps a few comments will clarify it. Sovereignty, a comprehensive term, includes three elements, supremacy, independence, and optional power. A sovereign is supreme in his dominions. A sovereign has the power of independent action in both external and internal relations. And, finally, a sovereign has optional power, that is, the power to act or not in a given instance. He has the power of free alternative action. The sovereignty of God, then, denotes God's supremacy, independence, and optional power in the kingdom of God.

It is when the specifics of this power are discussed that men, and surprisingly even Christian men, fall into disagreement and disputes. If God is sovereign, then He must be sovereign in election, regeneration, and salvation. And if He is sovereign in these matters, then He must have the optional power of electing or passing by a sinner. If God has no alternative in regard to election, regeneration, and pardon, then what sovereignty has He in the salvation of a sinner? We can only say, "none." Let the offence of the doctrine fall where it may. God has decided the matter, and He has written it in both testaments. To Moses God said, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion" (Exod. 33:19). And Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, reaffirmed the sentiment and cited the text in this same epistle (cf. Rom. 9:15), adding his own imprimatur in this concluding interpretive comment, "Therefore hath He

mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth" (9:18; cf. Prov. 1:24-29).

The gospel of sovereign grace, a doctrine pervading the Word of God, has always been the object of the world's contempt, for the world is a world of self-satisfied enemies of God, confident of self-justification. Nevertheless, the Scriptures extol the grace of God who sovereignly saves those who acknowledge their need and rest in sovereign grace.

Let me summarize in a series of propositions God's sovereign grace. First, God loves in sovereign grace. Paul described the Thessalonians as "brethren beloved of the Lord" (2 Thess. 2:13). Second, He elects sinners in sovereign grace. Paul added that the Thessalonians were beloved, "because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation" (2 Thess. 2:13; II, 1:4). Third, God calls in sovereign grace, making the unwilling willing, as the apostle notes in Galatians 1:6, saying to the Galatians that God "called you by the grace of Christ" (Gal. 1:6. NASB). Fourth, God justifies in sovereign grace. In one of his greatest passages Paul writes that the Romans were "justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24). We could go on and on, but I will pass by His adopting and sanctifying grace to mention finally that God perseveres in sovereign grace, securing the eternal salvation of all His adopted family. Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish" (John 10:27-28). All His sheep shall enjoy a safe arrival in the presence of the Lord.

That is part of what is meant by, “For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things.”

The Ineffable Glory of God

(36b)

Its reference. It’s no wonder, then, that the apostle concludes on the note of the ineffable glory of God. All events are “full of God,” and that is no dry theological statement. It is a call to worship, and that Paul does with, “To Him be the glory forever. Amen.” Gifford wrote, “As the rivers return again to the place whence they came, they all come from the sea, and they all run into the seas again: so all our store as it issued at first from the fountain of His grace, so should it fall at last into the ocean of His glory.”8 Barrett puts it this way. “The sola gratia and sola fide of these eleven chapters can only issue in this soli Deo gloria. What it means to give glory to God, and how far removed this is from mere pious ejaculations, will appear in chs. xii-vi.”9 Its essence. The essence of the glory of God may be defined as all the divine perfections in full display. This we see most fully and clearly in the Person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ, for God has given the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 4:6; 1 Cor. 11:7; Heb. 2:9; Rev. 5:13).

Its endlessness. The endlessness of the manifested glory of God is a requirement of the endlessness of His eternal being. When time no longer exists as it does now the manifestation of the excellencies of God’s being shall be as fresh and striking as they were when we first came to know Him.

Conclusion. And let us not forget the application of these truths to God's beloved nation Israel, the people of whom the mad prophet Balaam prophesied, "for from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him: lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations. Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" (Num. 23:9-10). The God who preseveres His saints today shall presevere Israel as a nation for her future destiny of salvation.

"It is true," David Baron, a Christian Jew, wrote, "that the testimony which they bear while in a condition of unbelief is, for the most part, though not wholly, passive; but still it is most valuable. How thankful, for instance, we should be that in these days, when even theological professors cooly assert that it is doubtful whether Abraham was an actual personality — that there is a whole nation who, whenever they name Abraham, say 'Abraham abinu' —'Abraham, our father'; and when some who condescend to admit the existence of Moses as an historical personality confidently declare that he certainly had very little or nothing to do with the giving of the law —that to this day there is a whole people scattered through the earth who, whenever they name the name of Moses, say, 'Moshe rabbinu' —'Moses, our Teacher' — as if in solemn protest against those wild, unreasonable, and unjustifiable theories which are palmed off in the name of criticism."10 Israel the nation, it is true, is a monument of the judgment of God, but they are also a monument of the truth of God's Word and of His faithfulness to its doctrine of sovereign grace.

The doxology is a most appropriate conclusion to the doctrinal section of Romans, that wonderful epistle which probably more clearly than any other part of the Word of God presents and defends the divine plan of salvation by grace, the doctrine upon which the faithful in all ages have rested their hopes of heaven and the presence of God. Its leading principle is that of the Bible itself, namely, that of a Sovereign God, the source of all good, who elects, regenerates, and pardons fallen men, in whom there is neither merit nor ability to turn to Him, and finally in that same sovereign grace brings His own to eternal glory. “For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.”

1 Cited by Stifler, p. 212.

2 Gifford, p. 201.

3 Cf. Gifford, p. 201.

4 My rendering. The genetives are best taken as depending on the word, “depth.” The early Greek commentators and the structure favors it. And the construction is simpler. Cf. IDNT. VII. 517-22.

5 John Calvin, Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, ed. by William Pringle (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1948) p.219.

6 Paul followed the LXX in v. 34, but now the MT, since the LXX is inaccurate here (or was a different Hebrew text rendered?).

7 Cf. Gifford, p. 229.

8 Gifford, p. 203, citing Bishop Sanderson’s sermon on Romans 15:6.

9 Barrett, p. 230.

10 David Baron, “Miracle of History,” p. 4.

Jesus on the Sins of Our Age

Jesus on the Sins of Our Age

Lewis Johnson, Jr.

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Scripture Reading: Matthew 5:21-32

Introduction

If one were to single out the peculiar sins of our age, the latter half of the twentieth century, looming large in any listing would be the sins mentioned by our Lord in Matthew 5:21-32, the sins of murder, adultery, and divorce. In fact, they form a kind of epitome of the morality of our age, an abridgement of the worst form of the denial of the biblical ethic. It is the special sin of the New Morality that it makes these sins respectable in the eyes of its adherents.

The New Morality, the term given to the ethics of men such as Bishop John Robinson of Honest to God fame, Joseph Fletcher, the Lutheran Martin Marty, the Baptist Harvey Cox, and the Presbyterian Robert Wood Lynn, has taught with varying emphases and qualifications that right and wrong cannot be legislated — even by God — in a once-for-all code that fits every situation. God, according to this body of theologians, has not issued such a code; He has called for LOVE. What this simple law demands in each particular situation is right. Hence, the New Morality has sometimes been given the name of Situation Ethics. According to this “code” adultery and other sins may, if the situation is right, be

acceptable. The popularity of the New Morality is illustrated by the phenomenal success of Hugh Hefner's Playboy enterprises, which have, until just recently, grossed millions catering to the hedonistic appetite of the United States. In fact, the sexual revolution of this country has been immeasurably aided by the ethics of the New Morality.

The presuppositions of the New Morality have been defined by Joseph Fletcher as including pragmatism, relativism, and personalism. All of these principles, particularly as interpreted by the eminent theologoian are utterly opposed to the biblical presuppositions of the Christian, who rests his case upon the principle of the verbally and plenarily inspired revelation of God in the Holy Scriptures. Further, the New Morality errs in these specific ways. First, it is antinomian, at least according to Fletcher's variety (the same cannot really be said for Bishop Robinson's variety). Second, it fails in that it does not define love in a Christian way, as involving redemption and the cross of Christ. Third, it is pelagian (an ancient British monk who believed man, despite sin, could discern and do God's will with just trifling assistance from the Spirit of God), because its concept of sin is weak and erroneous. And, finally, the result is an ethics that is sub-Christian and an insult to a holy God.

In the section of the Sermon on the Mount before us we have a sure word from our Lord Jesus Christ, and it is diametrically opposed to the pagan principles of modern society's ethics. In the opening section of the instructional division of the Sermon (5:17-20). Jesus had emphasized that He was not a Lawbreaker, but a Law-fulfiller, and that the Law and the Prophets were the

abidingly authoritative and inspired Word of God. Every part of them, even to the jots and titles, shall have its complete fulfilment. And then He had stressed that, in order to enter the Kingdom of heaven, one must possess a righteousness that exceeded that of the scribes and Pharisees. That could only come as a gift from God through faith in Him. Thus, the Lord Jesus completely vindicated the Scriptural tradition.

The same, however, cannot be said for the Pharisaic and scribal tradition (5:21-48). He does not hesitate to disapprove of it and correct it, although there may be portions of it that have remained essentialy biblical. Of the latter He approves. In order to express His criticism of the tradition He sets forth six antitheses between the Pharisaic tradition and the true view of the Law. The antitheses not only correct misinterpretation, they also deepen and sharpen the true view. The six are in two pairs of three each, separated by the “again” of verse thirty-three. The characteristic expression that occurs six times here is, “but I say unto you” (cf. vv. 22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44). The first three pertain to the Decalogue, or the Ten Commandments, while the last three pertain to the Pentateuch. The great impression that steals over me is similar to that expressed by another student, “JESUS UNDERSTANDS THE OLD TESTAMENT BETTER THAN THE OLD TESTAMENT ITSELF.”1 That’s not strictly accurate for really what He does is give the real force of the Old Testament, but it seems to be true because of the traditional distortions that gained such currency in the minds of many through the years.

The Question Of Murder

The Law (5:21). The first antithesis is contained in verses twenty-one through twenty-six. It concerns murder. The tradition says, “No murder,” but I say, “No anger.”

The basis of the tradition to which Jesus refers is the sixth commandment (cf. Exod. 20:13; 21:12; Lev. 24:17). Since He uses the word “heard,” it seems clear that He is referring to the oral teaching of the rabbis. They read and taught the commandments orally in synagogues. The words, “by them,” may be more accurately rendered by to them. The remaining words of the verse confirm that our Lord is referring to Jewish tradition primarily. The introductory words of the verse, then, may mean simply, “It is an old tradition which has obtained for many ages.”2 The Lawgiver’s interpretation (5:22-26). The essence of His reply is that the commandments go beyond the overt act. They touch the inner man. For years and years the rabbis had taught that one kept the sixth commandment by avoiding murder, but our Lord probes deeper and says that one keeps it only if he both avoids murder and anger! Anger, like murder, is a crime to Him. It is possible that John’s words reflect this teaching, “Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer, and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him” (1 John 3:15). The words are to be understood within the context of the nation, it would seem, for in Jewish thought a brother was an Israelite by nation and blood, and a neighbor was an Israelite in religion and worship, that is, a proselyte.3 The word “Rata” was an Aramaic word for utter contempt, being equivalent to our bonehead, blockhead, or knucklehead. The text may be rendered, then, “whosoever shall say to his brother,

‘you knucklehead, you’!” For such the danger of hell must become real.

There is some difference of interpretation over the statements of verses twenty-one and twenty-two. Perhaps the sense is something like this: The rabbis say that murder is liable to judgment, but I say that anger is liable to divine judgment. And the rabbis say that abusive language such as rata is punishable by the local court, but I say that abusive language is punishable by the fire of Gehenna.4 Two things emerge from these opening words. In the first place, ALL UNLOVE stands condemned by the Saviour and the Law of Moses. And, in the second place, our Lord Jesus believed in hell. It is one of the striking facts of the biblical revelation that He, who spoke most penetratingly of the love of God and is often referred to by liberals as “the meek and gentle Jesus,” spoke of hell more than any other New Testament figure. If hell-fire and damnation messages are wrong (they are not, of course), then His should be condemned, but the very idea is ridiculous, as the common Christian consciousness knows.

There follow two illustrations of the principle (vv. 23-26). In the first one the point is that to obey the law of love is better than sacrifice. Therefore, postpone sacrifice rather than postpone reconciliation. Incidentally, the illustration proves that the situation the Lord has in mind occurs under the Law period when sacrifices are made. The Sermon is for those who live during the period of time while Jesus is offering the Messianic Kingdom to the nation Israel.

In the second illustration there is a reference to some contention over money matters, as the last clause of

verse twenty-six indicates. Although some Romanists have emphasized the words of verse twenty-six, “paid the uttermost farthing,” referring them to purgatory, it should be obvious to the careful student that it has nothing to do with that mythical place and process.[5]

What is the cure for this anger that Jesus points out is really murder? Looking over the section we may conclude that it is found in these things: (1) admitting that we do get angry; (2) correcting injustices (vv. 23-24); (3) do it quickly (vv. 25-26); (4) relying upon the grace of God, for it is only by His enabling grace that these things could be done.

The Question Of Adultery

The Law (5:27). The second antithesis concerns adultery, which is referred to in the seventh commandment of the Decalogue (cf. Exod. 20:14). The tradition says, “No adultery,” but I say, “No lustful thought.” The rabbis legislated only for actions, not for one’s thoughts, but the Mosaic Law in its real meaning included the latter. In the enumeration of the 613 precepts of the Law there is attached to the seventh commandment these words, “This is the thirty-fifth precept of the law, namely, That no man lie with another man’s wife.” It is clear that the rabbis interpreted it of the act alone, and that with a married woman. Perhaps this gloss was in our Lord’s mind as He interprets the meaning of the law for the heart.

The Lawgiver’s interpretation (5:28-30). The words, “to lust after her,” express the purpose of the look. It can hardly be called sin to have involuntary desire; it is sin to look in order to lust. Guy King has written, “When, on one occasion, I asked a children’s meeting, ‘What is the

difference between Temptation and Sin?' a boy replied, 'Please, temptation's when you're asked to do it, and sin's when you've done it.' Old Martin Luther had another way of putting it: 'We cannot prevent the birds flying over our heads, but we can prevent their making nests in our hair',"6 The words of our Lord have the most serious significance and relevance for our today. Hardly ever in the history of our western world has there existed such a challenge to the Christian conception of chastity before marriage and faithfulness afterward. Unbridled passions dominate our society, urged on by the mass media and professional purveyors of hedonism. James Montgomery Boice has put it this way, "The Christian ethic of faithful and monogamous marriage is also threatened in our day, perhaps even more seriously than by the mass media, by a new hedonism symbolized by the so-called 'playboy philosophy.' Hedonism is the philosophy that makes pleasure the chief goal in life; and it is as evident in the pursuit of the second home, the third car, and the right and proper friends, as it is in adultery and pre-marital sex experimentation. In fact, in the playboy philosophy the two go hand in hand. Thus, the pages of the magazine seem to imply that choosing the right kind of wine or the right stereo is almost as important as finding the right playmate, the kind of girl whom Mort Sahl identifies as folding in two places and wearing a staple in her navel."7 The final verses of the second antithesis (vv. 29-30) merely point out that, if one uses the excuse that a member is the cause of the sin, then the member is to be cut off. One does this with a physical ailment, like cancer. The purpose of our Lord is to lead the man to see that the trouble is not in the member, but in the heart. A fallacious excuse is met with a fallacious reply

to show the falsity of the excuse and lead to the true reason for lust.8 The usual symbolical interpretation of the verses is to the effect that the offending member's excision represents severe self-abnegation for the sake of purity. Both ultimately point to the need for a new heart, as well as new principles of action. "A lizard," King points out, "when you grasp it, if it suspects nefarious design in you, will unhesitantly leave its tail in your hand, and bolt out of sight … 'better lose my tail than my life,' it seems to say … You chess players will know what a Gambit is — the sacrificing of a pawn, or other piece, for the sake of the game: you may lose even your Queen, but it will be worth it if you beat your opponent."9 It is evident now that the Lord Jesus interprets the Old Testament in depth in contrast to the superficialities of the rabbinic tradition. He deepens and sharpens its obvious and outward sense. As He says, He "fulfills" it.

And, further, it is clear that Jesus concurred in the invalidity of tradition as a measure of truth, although it might contain truth. He may deepen it, as here, or revoke it, as elsewhere (cf. 15:4-6). For Him the sole final authority is the inviolable Word of God.

What is the solution to the problem that our Lord has expounded here? One thing is true, first of all. The times require a clear recognition that the appetite for sex in our day is "enormously out of proportion to its function."10 And there is another thing that must be borne in mind. For the Christian there are times when the apostolic injunction, "Flee fornication" (1 Cor. 6:18), is the wisest advice that heaven can give. In this respect Joseph is our great example, while David is an example of the negative type. And, finally, total victory requires a

philosophy of life that sees marriage as ordained by God, and also as that for which one awaits in purity and to which one remains faithful afterward.

The Question Of Divorce

The Law (5:31). The third antithesis concerns divorce. The tradition says, “Conditional divorce,” but I say, “no divorce at all, with one exception.”11 The passage in question is Deuteronomy 24:1, and it contains a problem of interpretation. What is an “unseemly thing”? One of the famous rabbis, Shammai, with his disciples took it to mean some grave offence like adultery. On the other hand, another rabbi, the well-known Hillel, with his followers held that a man could divorce his wife for no more serious a misdemeanor than letting his food burn!

The Lawgiver’s interpretation (5:32). Now, if the exceptive clausell is genuine, and I think it is, then the Lord is laying down a law that divorce is only possible for one reason. If the clause is not genuine, then our Lord is stating the original ideal, mentioned in Genesis 2:23-24 (cf. Mark 10:2-12). In both cases the teaching of our Lord is deeper than that of Moses. But, let us remember that these things cannot be applied to unbelievers. They apply to those within the kingdom of God.

There is a question about the nature of the sin referred to. Does verse thirty-two refer to the sin of the one who puts away his wife, and then to the sin of the one who has been put away? The verse should probably be rendered in this way, “But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to be stigmatized as adulterous (or, exposes her to adultery12), and anyone who marries a woman so

divorced commits adultery." Thus, the sin is only that of the person who puts away his wife (cf. 19:9; 1 Cor. 7:20, 24).

It is very evident, then, that our Lord entertained very strict principles regarding divorce, and His words have the greatest importance for our adulterous society today. It would not be so much the concern of the Christian church were it not for the fact that the actions of the world, because of their excesses, have so influenced the church. The rise of adultery and divorce in the world is matched by a similar rise of them in the life of God's people, and the resultant problem is one of epidemic proportions at this very moment. If the Church of Jesus Christ is to fulfill His will and please God in her service, she must listen to the expression of His will in this matter.

Conclusions

One of the first things that begins to appear as we listen to this Sermon comes before us again here. These sublime utterances often tend to create a sense of unworthiness in those who read them. That is not a bad thing. The Law of Moses was designed to bring "the knowledge of sin" (cf. Rom. 3:20). Is it any wonder that the new law of the King should also bring us to conviction and humility?

There are several applications of this passage to the believer who lives in the present age. In the first place, the words regarding murder find their application in 1 John 3:15, the text we have already cited. Hate for one's Christian brother is thoroughly out of harmony with the possession of true Christian life.

The second antithesis regarding adultery and lust suggests the need for “bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5; Rom. 13:14; 1 Cor. 6:9, 18).

The third antithesis reminds us of 1 Corinthians 7:20, 24 where the apostle writes, “Let every man abide in the same calling (he is speaking of marriage) in which he was called,” and, “Brethren, let every man, in whatever state he is called, there abide with God.” May God help all the saints so to abide!

1 Hunter, p. 44

2 John Lightfoot, Horae Hebraicae et Talmudicae (Oxford, 1859), II, 107.

3 Ibid., II 107-8

4 M’Neile, p. 62.

5 Lightfoot, II, 115.

6 King, p. 45.

7 Boice, p. 113.

8 Lenski, p. 227-29.

9 King, p. 48.

10 Boice, p. 115.

11 Many students have questioned the genuineness of the so-called exceptive clause,” which reads, “saving for the clause of fornication” (AV), but I see no convincing reason for doubting its genuineness. The text is supported by the weightiest of authority.

12 Hendriksen, p. 304.

Lazarus Loved and Raised

Lazarus Loved and Raised

S. Lewis Johnson, Jr

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This is Dr. Johnson's concluding study on the seven signs of our Lord Jesus Christ in John's Gospel prior to His death, burial and resurrection (see John 20:30-31).

Scripture Reading: John 11:28-45

Introduction

In this brief but arresting encounter, that between our Lord and the man who had been dead for four days, there are answers to many of life's problems.

One thinks, first of the question that has puzzled men from ages past, "Is there life beyond the grave?" Augustine once said, "Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our heart is restless until it rests in Thee." There is, many claim, an innate God-given conviction that there is such a life.

A second question naturally follows, "Can we obtain such a life?" Modern society is divided over the question, just as ancient societies have been, but Christians have always answered it in the affirmative.

And, third, "Is it possible to know that we possess such a life?" Again Christian believers contend for the affirmative, citing the prophets, the apostles, and our Lord Himself.

In fact, Jesus Christ is the only person qualified to give authoritative answers to the questions. He alone knows and has this life of which men speak. And His answer, too, like the answer of the believing Christians is a resounding, “yes!”

Some years ago Oswald Spengler wrote a strange book, entitled The Decline of the West, and in it he found the clue to history in nature. In the book, he said, “We await today the philosopher who will tell us in what language history is written and how it is to be read.”1 No, a philosopher will not do, for his knowledge is limited by human reason. We need a divine Prophet and a Divine Saviour, and in Jesus Christ we have both. He has come, spoken, and finished the work by which we may know the language in which history is written, as well as how it is to be read. It is written in the red blood of Calvary, and it is read in the inspired records preserved for us by the Triune God, the Holy Scriptures.

The greatness of Jesus Christ may be partially measured by the fact that He does authoritatively open the curtains on the life beyond the grave. John Broadus, the well-known Southern Baptist preacher and teacher, told the story of Robert Browning’s letter, published after his death, in which he cited several utterances of men of genius as to the Christian faith, and one of them was Charles Lamb. “In a gay fancy with some friends, as to how he and they would feel if the greatest of the dead were to appear suddenly in the flesh and blood once more — on the final suggestion, And if Christ entered this room?’ he changed his manner at once and stuttered out, as his manner was when moved, ‘You see, if Shakespeare entered we should all rise; if he

appeared, we must kneel.’”2Even the unbelievers sense that Lamb’s words are true.

But, He is great not only because He is God. He is great because He is also man, — truly one of us. We will highlight this aspect of the matter and its force for us in the account of the story of the resurrection of Lazarus, of which there are seven stages.

Lazarus Dead

There are four movements in the progress of thought in the section. First of all, there is the coming of the news of Lazarus’ sickness to the Lord (cf. John 11:1-6).

And, second, in the next section the disciples of the Lord seek to dissuade Him from His intention to go into Judaea again, reminding Him of the fact that, when He was last there, attempts were made on His life. He informs them that Lazarus is asleep, and that He goes to awake him from his sleep (cf. v. 11). Of course, He refers to the sleep of death, the beautiful metaphor of sleep being the characteristic Christian way of speaking of death. One who sleeps is resting, and the Christian in the presence of the Lord is resting from his earthly labors. Further, the one who sleeps is alive, and the Christian in heaven is alive. Finally, the one who sleeps in Christ will have an awaking, a spiritual one with a new body like Christ’s, just as one physically sleeping will normally experience a physical awakening (cf. Phil. 3:20-21).

And, third, there is the account of the meeting of our Lord with Martha (cf. vv. 17-28) and with Mary (cf. vv. 29-32).

Finally, John describes the miracle of the restoration of Lazarus to life (cf. vv. 33-46), with some of the attendant circumstances.

There are a couple of words that I would like to comment upon. In the first place, one should notice the "therefore" of verse six. Evidently our Lord wished to wait until Lazarus had not only died, but until there was no natural hope either in man or in tradition to expect a resurrection. Thus the abiding in the same place without beginning immediately to go to the aid of Lazarus is not a sign of Jesus' lack of concern or love for Lazarus and his sisters. It was really a sign of His desire for them to see the glory of God in the work that he would do for their brother. Restoration will come only by a new creative act, and by it they will be better able to understand the new creative spiritual act of the new birth, which our Lord as the Messiah is able to give.

And then I would like for the reader to note the clause, "Lazarus is dead" (cf. v. 14). The story of Lazarus is the climactic miracle of the seven, which say that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that there is spiritual life in Him. What more beautiful picture of the new birth to spiritual life could be given than the resurrection of Lazarus?

Naturally we are dead in our trespasses and sins. This is the word of the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 2:1. The condition is the result of the fall of Adam in the Garden of Eden, and it is the condition of all men as they are born into the life of this planet (cf. Eph. 2:1). Lazarus in the grave is a striking picture of the spiritual condition of all men without Christ. They are dead in their sins,

unable to come to the knowledge of the Lord, except by divine enablement (cf. 6:44, 65).

There was a graveyard in Ayrshire in Scotland, where once a stranger was buried. It greatly distressed the people in the parish of the church. As a result they had a notice put up in the place to the effect that, “This graveyard is reserved exclusively for the dead who are living in this parish. There are many people, including church goers, who are in the same condition. They are living in the parish, it is true, but they are spiritually dead (cf. Eph. 2:1; 1 Tim. 5:6).

Lazarus Loved

There are some interesting points in the next section, and I want to call attention to a few of them. His words in verses twenty-five through verse twenty-six are remarkable in their relation of the resurrection and life to Him. He is the resurrection. In other words, resurrection and life are ultimately found in a relation to Him in a personal way. Martha is knowledgeable in some aspects of biblical doctrine. She knows that Lazarus will rise again in the resurrection at the last day (cf. v. 24), but Jesus points her to the possibility of the present possession of life. Life is both the cause and the consequence of resurrection. And only the one who has His life has any hope of life and resurrection, for His life is the only life that has overcome our fearsome enemy, death.

With “Believest thou this?” our Lord seeks a response from Martha, and He does get one, the magnificent confession of verse twenty-seven, a confession in which she illustrates the goal that John would have all of his readers reach, “Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the

Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world."

The next few verses describe the coming of Mary out from her house to meet the Lord. Mary, too, commented to Him as Martha had, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died" (cf. v. 32).

The weeping of Mary and the weeping of her Jewish friends had its effect upon the Lord, and we read, "When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, He groaned in the spirit, and was troubled" (cf. v. 33).

The words, "groaned in the spirit, and was troubled" are not easy to fully understand. It is the opinion of Warfield that Jesus was not moved by "uncontrolled grief, but irrepressible anger."3 And why? He was angry at the violent tyranny of death, and He was advancing against it as "a champion who prepares for conflict." Gazing into the skelton face of the world, He saw the awful reign of death everywhere, and He was deeply disturbed. Morris pointed out, however, that this does not seem to be the meaning of the two other places where the word "groaned" (Gr., embrimaomai) is used of our Lord (cf. Matt. 9:30; Mark 1:43). In these cases the word seems simply to mean that He was deeply moved.4 If this is the way the word is to be taken then it refers to our Lord's "deep concern and indignation at the attitude of the mourners."5 They completely misunderstood the nature of death and the great and mighty power of the Son of God. Even Mary's thoughts are fixed on earth and not on the delivering power of the One at whose feet she had so often sat.

Matthew Black, formerly Professor of New Testament at the University of St. Andrews, has contended that the word is a Syriacism, and that it emphasizes the turmoil of emotion in Jesus, apparently a kind of violent rage, and that it is not to be overlooked. This would fit either of the two interpretations.6 We cannot be dogmatic, but War-field may be right. Death is the object of the Saviour's wrath. Its effects He will soon nullify for His sheep. The groaning expresses His natural outrage at the deep inroads of the Evil One into the lives of the saint of God. "What John does for us in this particular statement," Warfield says, "is to uncover to us the heart of Jesus, as He wins for us our salvation. Not in cold unconcern, but in flaming wrath against the foe, Jesus smites in our behalf."7 In other words, not only is His deity set out in this story, but there also in strong tones is painted a picture of the perfection of His humanity.

As our Lord came to the place of the grave He sobbed (cf. v. 35). The shortest verse of the Bible is found here, and it is a remarkable one. The verse divisions of our Bibles were made by Robert Stephanus in 1551 on a journey from Paris to Lyons while on horseback. Many scholars have said that, when Stephanus put his pen on a point of the text on a number of occasions to make the beginning or ending of a verse, the horse must have jumped a log or something, causing Stephanus to put his pen on the wrong part of the text! It is true that there are many mistakes in the marking out of the verses, for the sense is often broken by the division of the words. In fact, this has happened so often in the New Testament text that one scholar has said that the first step in interpretation is to ignore the modern verses!8 I will not dispute that, but I will say this, I can forgive Stephanus

for a number of mistakes in view of his magnificent division of the text here. “Jesus wept” is a beautiful and meaningful statement, and it is a touch of genius to give it the rank of a verse of the Bible.

“Jesus wept!” The great storm of distress in His soul over the rule of death in the lives of men subsides for the moment, and He breaks forth into a shower of sympathy for the believers and their loss. And what a magnificent picture we have of the Great High Priest who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, tempted in all points as we are, yet apart from sin (cf. Heb. 4:15).

We must not pass by the remarkable truth that this short text enshrines. In the first place, “Jesus wept” points clearly to the reality of His humanity. As one possessed of true humanity, He was born, He was fed, He grew, He worked, and He experienced physical death (voluntarily, of course).

Spurgeon’s words are appropriate, “Beloved, have a clear faith in the humanity of Him whom you rightly worship as your Lord and your God. Holding His divinity without doubt, His manhood without mistake.”9 In the second place, the Lord was not ashamed of His holy emotions. The glory of His being does not conflict with the expression of the human nature which He had assumed. His Godhead does not make Him regret His manhood.

Three times we read that Jesus in the course of life and ministry wept. He wept as Lazarus’ loving friend at his graveside. Later He wept as He looked out over His beloved city just before His triumphal entry. We might refer to that instance as the weeping of the promised

Prophet, as He reflected upon the coming judgment upon the city and the generation that turned its back upon Him. And, finally, the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, drawing upon some true tradition regarding Him, mentions His weeping in the Garden of Gethsemane. This was the weeping of the ultimate Priest of God, the true Substitute, who offers the atoning sacrifice for the people of God. On this last occasion it was appropriately the weeping of "strong crying and tears" to the One who was able to save Him out of death (cf. Heb. 5:7). Three times He wept, and on each occasion it was a solemn, touching, and deeply significant outpouring of tears.

And, finally, He wept, although Lazarus was safe in the bosom of God and eventually to be raised by God in newness of resurrection life. And He wept, although He knew that Lazarus was soon to be brought to this life again! It is truly a remarkable illustration of the deep sympathy which Jesus felt for His friends and their experiences.

It is no wonder, then, that we read in the very next verse, "Then said the Jews, behold how He loved him!" (cf. v. 36). Two misinterpretations must be avoided. This was not the love of human pity alone, nor was it frustration over the power of death, for He would deal with that soon.

Also included was the love that is eternal, that special love that He has for His redeemed. He loves as the unseen sovereign of the universe, although for a time dwelling in unglorified bodily form. Charles Wesley wrote of this instance:

“There for me the Savior stands, Shows his wounds, and spreads His hands;

God is love! I know, I feel;

Jesus weeps, but loves me still.”

Lazarus Evangelized

In the fifth chapter Jesus had said, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live” (cf. v. 25). Here is now the illustration of that remarkable claim.

Standing beside Lazarus’ grave, Jesus offers a brief petition, “Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me” (cf. v. 41-42). Then there follows the brief cry in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come forth” (cf. v. 43). Augustine made the remark that, if Jesus had not called forth Lazarus by name, all the dead people in the vicinity would have come forth at His voice!” Well, one day, they shall hear, and they shall come forth to a resurrection. Unfortunately, for some there is both a resurrection of life and a resurrection of eternal condemnation.

The command is exceedingly abrupt in the original text, and it could be rendered, “Hither, out!” Lazarus obeyed the authoritative word of the Savior God and came forth.

Lazarus Loosed

John writes, “And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him,

and let him go" (cf. v. 44). Lazarus is to have not only life, but liberty. Many Bible students have suggested that this is John's symbolic picture of the doctrine of sanctification, that is, that the working of delivery from the graveclothes of the life of death follows the return to true life, and that that work is accomplished in stages. It is probably doubtful that this was in the apostle's mind, although the truth supposedly represented is found in the Bible. After the reception of resurrection life through the new birth, there does follow the work of divine sanctification. And it is the work that touches the hands of our work for Christ, the feet of our walk with Him, and the face of our witness in His name: One thinks of the growth of Apollos under the ministry of Priscilla and Aquila (cf. Acts 18:25-26). Cf. Col. 3:8, 12.

One final comment by Hoskyns may be noted. He writes, "As the sheep hear the voice of the Good Shepherd when he calls them by name and leads them out of the cramped sheepfold (x. 30), so Lazarus is immediately drawn forth from the grave by the word of Jesus. It seems as though the author, as Basil suggested (Corderii Catena, p. 295), intends to record a miracle within a miracle. Lazarus does not walk out of the grave; he is rather drawn out tightly bandaged (for the Greek word cf. Prov. vii. 16) hand and foot (cf. xix. 40), with his face covered with a cloth (xx. 7, cf. Luke xix. 20; Acts xix. 12). Only when he has been drawn out of the tomb does Jesus command him to be loosed, in order that he may walk freely and of his own initiative. And yet the attention of the reader is not meant to rest upon a miracle once wrought by Jesus. The form of the record of the raising of Lazarus suggests the freedom that results from the mighty act of God by which the

Christians have passed from death to life."10 1 Oswald Spengler, The Decline of the West (Eng. tr., 1926-1928).

2 John Broadus, Jesus of Nazareth, p. 10.

3 Warfield, "The Emotional Life of our Lord," The Person and Work of Christ, p. 415.

4 Morris, pp. 556-57.

5 Ibid., p. 557.

6 Matthew Black, An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1967), pp. 241-43.

7 Warfield, p. 417.

8 A. T. Robertson, An Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1925), pp. 100-1.

9 Spurgeon, II, 468.

10 Hoskyns, p. 407.

Lord in Creation and Redemption

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S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.

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Introduction

One evening near the Sea of Galilee Jesus spoke to His disciples after a busy day of ministry and said, “Let us cross over to the other side.” When the multitude of people was dismissed, the disciples took their weary leader into a boat and began to make their way across the lake. But there arose a lashing storm which churned the little sea into a wet fury, and soon the boat and its occupants were in danger of being swamped. Anxiously and somewhat peevishly they turned to their sleeping companion and brusquely aroused Him with, “Master, carest thou not that we perish?,” being quite unaware of the fact that there is no sinking with the Saviour aboard. Jesus arose and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “Hush! Be still!” The wind died and a dead calm ensued. After He had rebuked them for their fear and faithlessness, they, awestruck, murmured to one another, “What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?” (cf. Mark 4:35-41).

If the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews had been present, knowing what he knew when he wrote his letter, he would have replied confidently, Why, He is the

effulgence of God's glory and the stamp of God's very being, and sustains the universe by His word of power" (cf. Heb. 1:3). Paul the Apostle might have replied, "He is the image of the invisible God; He had primacy over all created things" (Col. 1:15).

This line from Paul introduces the section of Colossians which has often been called, "The Great Christology," due to the striking information that it offers concerning the person and work of the Second Person of the Eternal Thrifty, the Lord Jesus Christ. We owe the section to the heresy which was on the verge of infecting the little church that met in Philemon's house in the city of Colosse in Asia Minor. Scholars differ over the most appropriate name for the heresy. It contained elements that are traceable to what we know of later Gnosticism and elements related to Judaism. Thus it is not surprising that the term Gnostic Judaism has been given it. We cannot be certain of its appropriateness, however.

In one respect at least we can be thankful for the heresy, because the church of Jesus Christ would be impoverished substantially if it did not possess this significant testimony to the preeminence of the Redeemer.

We turn now to "The Great Christology" and Paul's striking defense of the Lordship of Christ over the physical creation and the spiritual creation, the church. We are thankful, too, that Paul was not composing a Ph.D. thesis and being "awfully scientific" about it. He was sharing with his readers and spiritual brethren his own deep spiritual experience out of his strong desire that they have what he had and avoid the pitfalls and

perils of false teaching. That is my aim, too, for in our days we have similar perils and similar needs.

The Lord of the First Creation (Col. 1:15-17)

The essential basis of His Lordship (1:15a). Paul's defense of the Christianity he taught is a tremendous presentation of the Lordship of Jesus Christ, over the universe by virtue of who He is as revealed in His creative work and over the church by virtue of what He has done in redemption. As a result Paul finds that in all things He has the preeminence (cf. 1:18) and, in fact, is "all, and in all" (cf. 3:11).

The passage beginning at verse fifteen and continuing through verse twenty is regarded by the majority of New Testament scholars to be a Christian hymn, or credal statement, that antedated Paul's epistle. The apostle is supposed to have inserted it into the letter he was writing the Colossians.1 In spite of intensive study, however, there is no consensus of viewpoint regarding the details of the question, and it, therefore remains speculative.

One thing that is not speculative is the remarkable status given by Paul to Jesus Christ in the passage. The apostle begins "The Hymn of the Beloved Son" by speaking of Him as "the image of the invisible God" (cf. v. 15). The word, "image," and sometimes also in its diminutive form, was used for a portrait in Greek. Two ideas were associated with the word: (1) representation; (2) manifestation.2 It suggests, then, a likeness that is not accidental (such as one automobile resembling another), but derived from an archetype, or original pattern, which in this case is God. Furthermore, the word, especially in the light of the emphatic adjective

describing God (tou aoratou; AV, “the invisible”), contains the notion of manifestation. Jesus of Nazareth is the revelation of the unseen God; He is the great and final theophany. God is Christlike—can we say less or more?

When Philip asked Jesus, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us,” the Lord replied, “Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father…” (John 14:8-9). When the Pharisees asked Jesus, “Where is thy Father?,” He replied, “Ye neither know me, nor my Father: if ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also” (8:19). He is, indeed, the perfect likeness and manifestation of God. It is simply heretical, as do the cults, to deny the orthodox doctrine of the deity of Christ.

The present tense, “is,” implies that He is always and everywhere the manifestation of God (cf. John 1:18). Was it Lord Byron who said, “If God is not like Jesus Christ, then God ought to be like Jesus Christ”?

The economic basis of His Lordship (15b). Paul continues his description of Christ, speaking of Him as “the firstborn of every creature” (lit., firstborn over all creation; cf. NIV). The words might seem at first glance to teach that Christ is part of the creation, or a created being. That, of course, is not true for several reasons.

(1) First, it is inconsistent with the context (cf. vv. 16-17), which states that He existed before all things. In fact, the context states that He is the creator Himself. Jesus of Nazareth was no newcomer at Bethlehem.

In the well-known controversy between the followers of Arius, who denied the eternal sonship of Christ and,

thus, His deity, and the followers of Athanasius, who affirmed Christ's deity, the Arians drew attention to the word, "firstborn," as found in Colossians 1:15, suggesting that it denoted that Christ was less than deity. Athanasius, however, drew attention to verse sixteen, where Paul writes, "In him were all things created." And in connection with it Athanasius tellingly pointed out, "But if all the creatures were created in him, he is other than the creatures, and is not a creature but the creator of the creatures.3" The point was well made.

(2) Second, it is inconsistent with the rest of the New Testament, which often affirms His uniqueness and responsibility for creation (cf. John 1:3).

(3) Third, the word that Paul uses, prototokos (AV, "firstborn") has two connotations (perhaps derived from the fact that part of the word, protos, meaning first, may mean first in time, or first in rank, just like the English word). The two connotations are: (1) priority, and (2) sovereignty. In view of the statement of verse eighteen, that He has become preeminent in all things, it seems probable that Paul has the thought of sovereignty primarily in view. The use of the word in the Old Testament confirms this, for in Psalm 89, which is strongly Messianic, the psalmist says of Christ, "Also I will make Him my firstborn (prototokon), higher than the kings of the earth" (Psa. 89:27, LXX).4 Paul, then effectively counters any claim of the heretics that Christ was only an angelic emanation from God and part of the creation. He is creation's Lord.

(4) Fourth, there was a Greek word in usage that meant first-created, but it is significant that both the Old and

New Testament Greek texts did not use it in passages referring to the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.5 (5) Fifth, we must also mention a final fact that makes it impossible to understand “firstborn of every creature” as saying that our Lord was a creature, or created being. That is the fact that all through the Scriptures He is set forth as Savior. If our Lord were a created being, then He could not be our Savior. Only God can save sinners. Thus, the saving experience of every Christian is a testimony to the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The explicit proof of His Lordship (16-17). In verses sixteen and seventeen the apostle writes, “For in him were all things created, in the heavens and upon the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things have been created by him and for him; and he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” Two great works are described in the verses, and they are the foundation of His Lordship over the creation.

First, Paul states that Christ is the Creator of the universe. In fact, he expands the concept to include His work as architect, builder, and goal of the universe. The “for” (lit., because) introduces the reason Paul is able to say that Christ is sovereign over the whole creation. Three prepositional phrases delineate His relation to the universe The first is found in the opening clause, “In him were all things created”. The first phrase, “in him,” has been rendered in some versions by “by him” (cf. AV; NIV), but since that agency idea is found very clearly in the second phrase, “by him,” later in the verse, it seems better to render the earlier phrase by “in him.”

What would the phrase, “in him,” say that is not found in the later phrase, “by him”? If we give the phrase a local sense, which is permissible (cf. 1:17; Acts 17:28), then Paul may be looking at the Lord Jesus as the architect of the universe. As Lightfoot has put it, He is the place where the eternal ideas have their abode.6 In fact, we may have here an illuminating contribution to Pauline thought, which may be set forth most clearly by means of an illustration.

Several steps are involved in the construction of a substantial building. First, an architect at the owner’s request designs the building, preparing plans and specifications in accordance with the expressed desires of the owner. Then the plans are submitted for bids by builders or contractors, and a builder is secured to erect the structure. After the completion of the edifice, it is occupied by the owner and devoted to its intended use. Our Lord is not only the builder of the universe; He is also its architect and owner. All things have been created in Him (the plans for the creation abode eternally in His mind), by Him (He acted as builder) and for Him (the creation belongs to Him and is to reflect His glory).7 Before the indescribable majesty of the eternal Christ we are constrained to respond reverently, “Then sings my soul, My Saviour God to Thee:

How great Thou art!

How great Thou art!”

Second, the thought now passes from creation to preservation, and the apostle states that Christ is the sustainer of the universe (cf. v. 17). “All things hold together in him,” is the way he puts it. This is the second proof of His Lordship over the whole creation. By virtue

of His pre-existent person and power He continues to exercise sovereignty over all the cosmic powers of the universe.

The clause, “And He is before all things,” reminds one of the statement Christ made in the days of His flesh. Speaking to the Jews of His day in support of His claim, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad” (John 8:56), Jesus declared, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am” (v. 58). It was a clear expression of His pre-existence.

The word rendered here in the Authorized Version by “consist” (NIV, NASB, “hold together”) marks Him out as sustainer of the universe and its unifying principle of life. In Platonic and Stoic philosophy the word was used to describe the marvelous unity of the entire world, but for Paul it is Christ and His Word who is the unifier of the universe that He brought into being.8 As Lightfoot has said, “He is the principle of cohesion in the universe.”9 There is an expression that we use that comes to mind when I think of Christ as the principle of cohesion in the universe. It is the word, “unglued.” For children it is a common word, for when dolls are broken they are often glued back into good condition for further use. They may, however, become unglued.

In Charleston, South Carolina, where I lived, antique furniture is very common and prized by the people there. My family has always liked antiques, and particularly the old ones, at least the early American ones. Now they are not all that strong, and growing children learn that quite early in life. We have all rushed in to dinner in Charleston at about two o’clock in the

afternoon for the principle meal of the day, and have fallen into our chair only to hear the tell-tale crack of broken expensive antique furniture. Often such pieces must be glued again, at least in part, and for it to come unglued is not uncommon.

Now, however, we use it of people. They “come unglued,” by which we mean that they have become upset, unnerved, demoralized, reduced to jelly, or something like that! That is the opposite of Paul’s word, “hold together.” Our Lord and His mighty power is the reason the whole world does not come unglued, reduced to chaos, or nothingness again. Daniel describes Him as “the God in whose hand thy breath is” (cf. Dan. 5:23). Every breath that we draw is under His sovereign direction. In fact, the only breath of which we can be sure is the one we are drawing at this very moment in time. If, then, our trust is in Him who prevents the universe from disintegrating by His sovereign control, what need is there to push the panic button?

The practical significance of this is almost beyond comprehension. Every twinkling of the eye, every beat of the heart, every thought of the human heart is dependent upon His sovereign beneficence. His arm upholds the universe and, if His omnipotent power were withdrawn, all would fade into their original non-existence. What light this throws upon the terror of the disciples in the storm! It is no wonder that He said to them, “Why are ye so fearful? How is it that ye have no faith?” (Mark 4:40).

In the light of the things Paul has been saying, how remarkable and wonderful is the incarnation! As the devout old Scottish commentator, John Eadie, has said,

“That the creator and upholder of the universe should come down to such a world as this, and clothe Himself in the inferior nature of its race, and in that nature die to forgive and save it, is the most amazing of revelations.”10 And yet, as the professor has declared, it is most glorious truth, sealed with the precious blood of Golgotha.

The God of Genesis one is the Babe of Matthew one and two. The One of whom Isaiah said, “Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, and meted out heaven with the span and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance” (Isa. 40:12), is the same person of whom Paul said, “For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2).

The same God of whom Jeremiah said, “But the Lord is the true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting king: at his wrath the earth shall tremble, and the nations shall not be able to abide his indignation” (Jer. 10:10), is He of whom John wrote, “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14), and “Jesus wept” (11:35), and also, “After that He poureth water into a basin, and began to wash his disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded” (13:5).

And the One of whom Ezekiel wrote, “And above the firmament that was over their head was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone: and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a Man upon it” (Ezek. 1:26), is the same One of whom John wrote in his gospel, “But one of the

soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water" (John 19:34).

And, finally, He who warned ancient Israel and said, "Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves; for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day that the Lord spice unto you in Horeb" (Deut. 4:15), says at length to His own, "Behold my hands and feet that it is I myself; handle me and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have" (Luke 24:39).

Conclusion. My conclusion is simple and pointed. First, surely the one who made and sustains the universe is well able to keep that which we have committed to Him, our eternal well-being, and cannot from inability or oversight permit a trusting spirit to sink into perdition.

Second, when Ezekiel saw the vision of the Lord, Scripture says that before the dazzling theophany, the glory of a rainbow surrounding His radiance, the prophet could show his awe only by falling upon his face in the dust before his God (cf. Ezek. 1:28).

The apostles in Luke twenty-four, following our Lord's resurrection, upon seeing Him carried into heaven felt constrained in the same manner to worship Him and return to Jerusalem with great joy (cf. Luke 24:50-53). The prophets, the twelve apostles, and Paul all joined in broadcasting the great truth, "He is Lord of all." May we do nothing less.

1 Peter T. O'Brien, Colossians, Philemon, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco: Word Books, Publisher, 1982), pp. 32-37.

2 J.B. Lightfoot, Saint Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon (London and New York: Macmillan and Co., 1890), pp. 143-44.

3 Orationes contra Arianos IV. 62 (Schaaf and Wace, p. 382).

4 The thought of sovereignty is also found in the Hebrew word used by the author of the psalm.

5 Lightfoot, p. 145.

6 Lightfoot, pp. 148-49; cf. Martin Dibelius, An die Kolosser Epheser and Philemon (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1953), 12.

7 Notice should be taken of the two ways in which the Apostle looks at the act of creation. The word create occurs twice in v. 16, the first occurrence being in the aorist tense, and the second in the perfect. The aorist takes the reader back to the creation as an act, while the perfect portrays the creation as "…still remaining the monument and proof of His creative might" (John Eadie, Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistle of Paul to the Colossians (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1884), p. 54).

8 cf. O'Brien, pp. 47-48.

9 Lightfoot, p. 154.

10 Eadie, p. 57.

Master of Death

Master of Death and Man of Feeling

S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.

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Scripture Reading: Matthew 9:18-26

Introduction

Vital to the Christian faith is the doctrine of the two natures of Christ, the human and the divine. He is the MAN who stands for us, for He is one of us, and He is the GOD who saves us. He is not simply an ambassador, or emissary, sent from God, because if He is only that, we are not on the Rock. We must have a word from God Himself, if we are to be sure of our redemption. Therefore, He is more than a man, or God's prophet, as the Socinians would have it, and He is more than a superman, or God's plenipotentiary, as the Arians would have had it. He is the supernal man, the Lord from heaven, as the Athanasians contended. The church was right at Chalcedon in affirming, "Therefore, following the holy fathers, we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once COMPLETE IN GODHEAD AND COMPLETE IN MANHOOD, truly God and truly man, consisting also of a reasonable soul and body; of one

substance (homoousios) with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his manhood; like us in all respects, apart from sin; as regards his Godhead, begotten of the Father before the ages, but yet as regards his manhood begotten, for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin, the God-bearer (Theotokos); one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognized in TWO NATURES, WITHOUT CONFUSION, WITHOUT CHANGE, WITHOUT DIVISION, WITHOUT SEPARATION: the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence (hupostasis), not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ; even as the prophets from earliest times spoke of him, and our Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us, and the creed of the fathers has handed down to us" (Council of Chalcedon, Actio V, Mansi, vii. 116 f.)

The incident before us in this study beautifully illustrates the truth of the Definition cited above. In fact, it is difficult to find an incident in His life's ministry that more pointedly placards Him in his deity. He emerges from the event as the MASTER OF DEATH, our great enemy, and astonishes those who observed His ministry of restoration.

Yet this incident also broadcasts Him as a man of feeling. If He is very God of very God, He is also very man of very man. The German scholar Rothe once said, "I know no other ground on which I could anchor my whole being, and particularly my speculations, except that historical phenomenon, Jesus Christ. He is to me

the UNIMPEACHABLE HOLY OF HOLIES OF HUMANITY … and a sunrising in history whence has comes the light by which we see the world." I think we shall see this confirmed in our study, which is in reality an account of two miracles of healing, the raising of Jairus' daughter and the healing of the woman with the issue of blood.

Request of the Ruler

The ruler (9:18). The Lord Jesus was being welcomed in Galilee again when the ruler of the synagogue came to Him. The synagogue was under the rule of a board of elders, and they had the responsibility to maintain order in the synagogue meetings, among other things. The name of the man is not given by Matthew, but Mark and Luke call him Jairus. His office, that of a kind of lay administrator, was not a teaching or preaching office, but it was the responsibility of the ruler of the synagogue to appoint those who were to read and pray in the service, and to invite those who were to preach. So, Jairus was evidently a man of responsibility, trust, and power.

Jairus, now at the end of trust in the doctors, in his wife, and in himself for his ill twelve-year-old daughter, hearing of the presence of Jesus, came to Him and fell down before Him in worship. It was for him his last resort, for such a man would only come to Jesus if there was no other hope. Sooner or later most of us have to face a similar crisis in life. In early days, when things are going well, we tend to think that life is a circus, as Temple Thurston put it. Each one imagines that he or she is the master of ceremonies in the ring, clothed in broadcloth and buckskin breeches, with a silk hat and

cracking a whip. Everything seems to go our away until one day, a lion breaks out of his cage. Then, as Thurston said, “life gets up and looks at us!” It was that time for Jairus and his wife.1 The daughter (9:18). Jairus’ daughter was an only child, Luke points out (8:42), and thus the urgency and poignancy of the request is stressed. For twelve years he and his wife had enjoyed the blessing of the little life as she pattered and prattled about and in their home. She had brought the brightest of sunshine hours to them, but now all appeared lost.

The request of Jairus, “come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live,” is remarkable in that the Gospels do not give us an account of a restoration-to-life miracle by our Lord previous to this time.2 Jairus’ faith is, therefore, an unusual trust.

Jesus (9:19). Our Lord does not refuse the homage, and that, too, is a remarkable thing. When John the Apostle fell at the feet of an angel to worship him, the angel remonstrated with John, saying, “See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: WORSHIP GOD: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Rev. 19:10). The angels say that only God is to be worshipped, but Jesus permits men to worship Him! It is a magnificent claim to deity.

And, further, our Lord does not refuse the request for help from the desperate parents. In fact, there is a kind of urgent desire to do something about the situation. Matthew’s words, “And Jesus arose, and followed him,” suggests His concern.

His response appears to be immediate. Nor does He put him through the catechism first.

“All the scenes in Christ’s life in which children appear are exquisitely touching,” Stalker notes, “and it was His feeling which gave them their beauty and pathos. As you look at them, you feel that He not only knew all that is in a father’s and mother’s heart, but sank new wells in the heart of humanity and brought love up from deeper levels than it had sprung before. Ruskin has observed that there are no children in Greek art, but that they abound in Christian art — an unmistakable token that it was the eye of Christ which first fully appreciated the attractiveness of childhood.”3

The Restoration of the Woman

The woman with the issue of blood (9:20-21). As our Lord made His way to the house of Jairus, “behold, a woman, which was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years, came behind Him, and touched the hem of His garment; for she said within herself, If I may but touch His garment, I shall be whole” (vv. 20-21). Another interruption, with which our Lord was often plagued, had occurred, but with Him interruptions are only opportunities for Him to demonstrate again His saving power.

The woman’s illness was a terrible one, and even Dr. Luke confesses that the doctor’s found it incurable. He writes, “And a woman having an issue of blood twelve years, WHICH HAD SPENT ALL HER LIVING UPON PHYSICIANS, and COULD NOT BE HEALED OF ANY” (8:43). Mark’s account is even more enlightening and may even conceal a mild attack upon the Palestine Medical Association. Luke said she could not be healed, but Mark writes that she “had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and

was nothing bettered, but RATHER GREW WORSE" (5-26)!

The woman by reason of her disease was now ceremonially unclean, and it is not surprising that she did not desire to have any physical contact with Jesus. She hopes to merely touch His garment, in fact, only one of the four wool tassels which every Israelite was ordered to wear on the corners of his square, outer robe (cf. Num. 15:38; Deut. 22:12). The easiest way was to approach Him from behind and touch the tuft swinging freely from the robe. That is what she did.

The greatness of her faith consisted in the fact that she thought that only a touching of His garment would produce healing. Yet her faith is not by any means a perfect faith, for she thought a touching of His garment was necessary, and that He would not notice it.4 The healing of the woman (9:22). The Lord did notice her, and she was healed, and the accounts in Mark and Luke make it clear that the healing was immediate (cf. Mark 5:29; Luke 8:44). In one brief moment the hemorrhage stopped completely, —another healing that is so different from the so-called "healings" of modern "faith-healers." Our Lord traces the healing to the instrumentality of faith, saying, "Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole."

The delay of this incident may have pained Jairus no little, for it must have seemed to him that every moment of delay in the coming of Jesus to his house would make the restoration of his daughter more difficult. But His delays are not denials, although they may be used for our discipline. The facts are that the incident must have been used to the encouragement of Jairus' faith. If He

could heal the woman, surely He could also restore his child, thought Jairus.

The Restoration of the Daughter

Arriving at the house of the ruler, Jesus sees and hears the familiar apparatus of wailing that accompanied most oriental deaths. The flute-players and the other weepers were professionals, who were paid for their work. The music of the flute was especially associated with death, and it was calculated to touch the emotions of all present. Roman law limited the number of flute-players at any funeral to ten, because the wailing of them was so emotionally exciting. The scene presented to our Lord, then, contained these things, plus the rending of the garments and other aspects of the pandemonium of oriental grief. It is, then, very true to the common situation that our Lord rebuked them, and spoke the words of promise and hope in their presence.

The account of the restoration is highlighted by three words, or sentence, that our Lord spoke. They are most clearly in Luke, and I shall use them in describing what happened.

(1) The first is, “Fear not: believe only, and she shall be made whole” (cf. Luke 8:50). These are the words that were spoken to the ruler just before they reached his home, and just after the dreadful news of his daughter’s death had come. The Lord encourages Jairus before Jairus appeals to Him for help. Oh, the sensitiveness of Jesus! It is another beautiful picture of the MAN Christ Jesus, who volunteers the words of hope, “Let faith replace fear. Only believe.” What miracles are accomplished by faith, or trust. The tenses of the verbs

permit us to render His words paraphrastically as, “Stop fearing, only perform an act of faith.”

Vance Havner has somewhere said that faith may be spelled F-A-I-T-H and made to mean any of the following things: (1) “For all, I take Him”; (2) “Forsaking all, I take Him”; (3) “For all, I trust Him”; (4) “For all, I thank Him.” The ideas are all good, providing that we also remember that this faith that our Lord refers to is a gift from God (cf. Phil. 1:29).

(2) The second of our Lord’s words is, “Weep not; she is not dead, but sleepeth” (Luke 8:52). This provoked the laughter of scorn from those present in the house, that is, the wailers and weepers. Surrounding this statement and the circumstances of it are several things that accent His true humanity.

In the first place, we should notice His indignation over the wailers and their scornful response to His words of hope. Mark tells us that, after they laughed Him to scorn, He “put them all forth” (5:40). The entire apparatus of the ghastly mummers He rebuked and ejected from the home. Then, taking only the father, the mother, Peter, James, and John, He went into the house where the body of the maiden was. Indignation at sin and unbelief is a human emotion, and Jesus possessed it.

In the second place, we must be careful to notice the quiet grace of the Lord in the restoration. Before the healing He does not call for a PR man to announce to the media, “Healing Happening Here Today.” No offerings were “lifted” (the British term) to further the “work.” In fact, only the concerned were allowed to see the miracle. Further, in the words, “He entered in and took her by the hand” (Matt 9:25), there is additional

evidence of His sympathetic humanity. He wished to prevent any fear on the part of the little girl. And, then, when the healing was completed, “He commanded that something be given her to eat” (Luke 8:55). He lovingly provides nourishment. What a picture of the eternal Second Person of the Trinity, “God with a biscuit in His hand”! But, then, it is not really surprising, for on other occasions we see Him as God with a tear in His eye, or as God with the little children upon His lap. As the writer of the Hebrews puts it, “We have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15).

(3) The third of the words is, “Maid, arise” (Luke 8:54). Mark has, “Talitha, cumi” (Mark 5:41), an Aramaic expression which means, damsel, arise, or perhaps, little lamb, arise. It was a very touching and intimate command, and He who is the Good Shepherd has a voice that penetrates the spirit world. And immediately the damsel rose up and began to walk.

It has sometimes been said, in the light of our Lord’s use of the term “sleepeth” (v. 24; cf. Mark 5:39; Luke 8:52), that the maiden was not dead, but in a coma. It is amazing how wise we are in the twentieth century. We can diagnose medical conditions from a written record with more accuracy than the ancients could sitting by the bedside of the patient! Dr. Luke, however, adds an important note. When Jesus said, “Weep not; for she is not dead, but sleepeth,” all the accounts say that the crowd of people “laughed Him to scorn,” but Luke adds the telling words, spoken of the crowd, “knowing that she was dead” (cf. Luke 8:52-53). As far as the doctor was concerned, the maiden was dead. The parents knew

it, the apostles knew it, the crowd knew it, and apparently the only ones in the dark are the modern commentators! They have not so carefully studied the reports as they should have, and their diagnosis is faulty. There is one other note that seals the case. In verse fifty-five of the doctor's report he writes, "AND HER SPIRIT RETURNED, and she rose up immediately." Spirits do not leave during comas; they leave as death occurs.

Incidentally, if we should grant that the girl was not dead, but simply in a coma, what would that do for the miraculous nature of the cure? Absolutely nothing. Can human power abolish a coma with a word?

What, then, is the force of the word our Lord used, the word "sleepeth"? It is simply a word to describe a believer's death and, while the precise word used is not that commonly used by Paul, it is still capable of having that meaning. It stresses that fact that a believer in the Lord Jesus who has died is resting, possesses life, and awaits the awakening of resurrection of the body.

Conclusion

We conclude by reiterating some of the important points established in this study.

(1) First, He is "truly God and truly man," and as a man a genuine man of compassion, sensitivity, and delicacy. This is the Man, incidentally, who is to be seen in us (cf. 1 John 2:6), and this is produced, not by imitation, but by union.

(2) Second, He is the Master of death, and it is not surprising at all that "the fame hereof went abroad into all the land" (Matt. 9:26). This incident illustrates His powers. It illustrates the power of regeneration, for

Jairus had had only a word concerning the Lord. He believed that word, an evidence of the work of effectual grace that had been done by the Spirit in his heart.

It illustrates the power of resurrection so clearly that there is no need of exposition of it.

And, finally, it illustrates His power of bringing reunion to those who have been related and loved in this life. In fact, it is a vivid picture of all that Paul writes about in 1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18.

(3) Third, in our Lord's word, "only believe," we have vivid confirmation of the fact that the Biblical term for the reception of the gospel is simply believe. It is not surrender and make Him Lord of your life (He is that, of course). It is not believe and be baptized. It is "only believe," and, if this is "easy believism," our Lord is responsible for it. The faith He has in mind involves notitia (knowledge of the facts of the gospel), assensus (conviction that they are true), and fiducia (trust, or reliance, upon them for life).

There is a Scottish word that beautifully expresses it, the word lippen. It means to throw your whole weight upon, and it is the word used for believe in the broad Scottish translation of the New Testament. For example, John 3:16 reads something like this, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever lip-pens to Jesus should not perish, but have the life of the ages." As the Scots would put it, "Can ye nae lip-pen to Jesus?"

1 Morgan, The Great Physician, p. 162.

2 Hendricksen, p. 430.

3 James Stalker, Imago Christi (London, 1901), pp. 303-4.

4 Hendricksen, p. 432.

Paul and the Lord’s Supper

Paul and the Lord’s Supper

S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.

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This is Dr. Johnson’s fourth and final study in his instructive and edifying series on the Lord’s Supper, Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

Introduction

We have said often that the Lord Jesus left the church two ordinances to observe until He comes again. He left the church the ordinance of baptism, which emphasizes one’s initiation into the church, the body of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 12:13). And He left the church the Lord’s Supper, which emphasizes one’s continuation, or one’s life, in the body.

There is a clear parallel between the Lord’s Supper and the Passover. In the Passover we have a memorial of physical deliverance from the thraldom of Pharoah and Egypt through the blood sacrifice of the lamb. In the Lord’s Supper we have a memorial of spiritual deliverance from the power of sin and Satan by means of the blood sacrifice of the Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. In the former service we have that which was to be done until He should come in His first coming, while in the latter service we have that which was to be done until He shall come in His second coming. In both, then, there is an anticipation of the future.

The Lord's Supper, we have also said, is to be the highlight of the corporate worship of the church. In our day that place belongs ordinarily to the sermon in evangelical churches. In Troas, when the Apostle. Paul was there, pride of place seems to have belonged to the Lord's Supper. Luke describes the meeting in this way, "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow, and continued his speech until midnight" (Acts 20:7). The sermon is important on this occasion, for Paul preached to them for a lengthy time, but the purpose of the meeting is expressed as "to break bread." One gets the impression that it was primarily for this purpose that they came together in the meeting. In confirmation of this is the fact that the Lord's Supper is the only act of worship for which the Lord gave special direction.

We have in this series looked at the first and last Passover, and the first Lord's Supper. In this study we turn to consider the contribution of the Apostle Paul to the subject. That contribution is found preeminently in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34.

The Indignation of Paul

In the opening paragraph of the section the apostle expresses his indignation at the disorderly things that have taken place at the Corinthians' observance of the Lord's Supper in their church meetings. Evidently there were two distinct groups in the church, the rich and the poor and, further, the rich were sharing only some of their food with the poor in their love feasts (cf.. v. 21). In those days it was the custom to meet in homes and have a common meal together, after which they observed the

Lord's Supper as is described in 1 Corinthians fourteen. Since it is likely that there was a distinction in the quality of the food, the rich developed the habit of eating before the poor members arrived. The result was that they were well-fed and often drunk with too much wine, the common table beverage, while the poorer brethren were hungry and thirsty. It was, of course, a clear case of lovelessness for their brethren.

The apostle reproaches the disorderly ones with these words, "What? Have ye not houses to eat and drink in? Or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I praise you not" (cf. v. 22).

The Review of Past Instruction

The ceremony of the bread (1 Cor. 11:22-24). The "for" of verse twenty-three justifies his rebuke. In other words, the Apostle says, you must have forgotten what I told you about the Lord's Supper. It was the Lord who gave me instruction concerning the proper observance of that feast. You must have forgotten His Words, for your present action is contrary to them.

Paul then refers to the occasion of the first Lord's Supper, which was the night in which He was betrayed. The word translated "betrayed" in the Authorized Version is a word that means literally to hand over. The reference here is probably to the work of Judas in the betrayal of the Lord. What is striking about the Word is that it is also used of the action of the Son and of the Father in the death of Christ. For example, it is said that the Lord Jesus gave Himself over to death in Galatians 2:20. That text, of course, illustrates the fact that the death of the Lord Jesus was a voluntary death. He

handed Himself over to death in submission to the Father's will. And, further, it is also said in Scripture that the Father handed Him over. For example, in Isaiah 53:10 we read, "Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him." And in Psalm twenty-two David speaks typically of Him in the words, "Thou hast brought me into the dust of death" (v. 15). The Father is the ultimate actor in the death of Christ, just as Peter says in Act 2:23, "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." In that text we have the proper wedding of the divine foreordination and foreknowledge and human responsibility.

We often in our meetings sing a stanza that lays stress on the Father's ultimate relation to the death of Christ:

"Jehovah lifted up His rod —

O Christ, it fell on Thee!

Thou wast sore stricken of Thy God;

There's not one stroke for me.

Thy blood beneath that rod has flowed:

Thy bruising healeth me."

The death of Christ was the key event in the working out of the eternal plan of the Father for the glorification of His Name in redemption.

Paul says that He "took bread" in the night in which He was betrayed. The bread was distributed first since it emphasized the incarnation, the taking by our Lord of human nature for the performance of the will of God.

The wine emphasized the death which He died for the ratification of the New Covenant.

The breaking of the bread was designed to point on to the death that He would die.

The words, “this is my body,” are words over which a great deal of disagreement has raged. It is, of course, not possible in such a short paper as this is to deal with that adequately, but I would like to simply set out the various views that have been expressed most widely.

(1) First, there is the Roman Catholic view of the real presence of Christ in the elements of bread and wine, which is called transubstantiation. According to Roman dogma, when the priest says, hoc est corpus meum, the substance of the bread and wine is converted into the substance of the very flesh and blood of Christ. The appearances, or accidents, of the bread and wine remain (the shape, size, color, taste, etc.), but the substance is transformed, and the senses are to be denied. As Cyril of Jerusalem put it, “Judge not by the taste, but by the faith.” The Council of Trent pronounced a curse upon all who do not receive this teaching.

The principle support to which Romanism appeals is the use of the copula, “is,” and it is taken in the sense of identity of substances (cf. Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24). The verb to be, however, often means signifies, as any lexicon will indicate, and that is its meaning here. Illustrations of this usage are found in such passages as John 8:12, 10:9, Revelation 1:20, and Matthew 13:38. Further, in the very next verse, the verb is found in the clause, “This cup is the new testament in my blood,” and the “is” here is not that of identity, as good exegetical judgment indicates. And, in addition, how can our Lord with His body hold the bread and call that His body? That would indicate that there were two bodies of the

Lord there at the same time. And, finally, the Lord still calls the substance "bread" after the words of institution (cf. vv. 26-28). No, "this is my body" cannot be taken as an instance of transubstantiation.

Not all Romanists have understood the Supper as the Council of Trent. The Spanish priest Maldonado said, "Do not prepare your teeth and your belly for it, but believe in Him, and you have eaten Him" (italics mine). He understood the words in a symbolic fashion.

Rome, of course, is inconsistent in forbidding the wine to the laity in the light of their views of John 6:53, but they meet this with their doctrine of concomitance, namely, that the body and the blood are knit together. Thus, if one eats the bread, he also drinks the wine. In this way they correct and improve upon our Lord's teaching, although He expressly said that "all" were to drink of the wine (cf. Matt. 26:27). That statement seems almost providentially made to forestall the very interpretation that Rome has put upon the drinking of the wine.

(2) Second, Lutherans have contended that the true body and blood of Christ are present in, with, and under the bread and wine. Their view has been called consubstantiation. Christ's human nature was considered to be ubiquitous, and He was considered to be present with the bread and wine. The advantage of the view is that it is harmonious with the literal view of the bread and wine, but does not make necessary a change in the substance through words of institution. It, however, rests upon doctrine that is unbiblical, for our Lord's human nature is not ubiquitous, and the word "is"

can hardly mean to accompany, which the view seems to require.

Third, one brand of the Reformed have held that Christ was spiritually present, in His entire person, both body and blood, in the Supper. A life-giving and edifying influence is communicated to the partaker, who partakes in faith of the elements. There is probably an element of truth in this view, although the memorial aspect of the Supper is not stressed sufficiently, it seems to me.

Fourth, finally, another branch of the Reformed, together with others with evangelical faith, have maintained that the Supper is a memorial of the saving work of Christ. Christ is present in the Supper to the faith of the believer, and the word “is” means simply signifies. This view does more justice to the text, providing it does not stress the human side of the ceremony so much that the divine initiative in redemption is lost sight of. We must remember that the elements are pledges of the divine saving initiative in our salvation, and all of our remembrance is simply a remembrance of what He has done for us and not of what we have done. He gives always; we only receive. Our reflection in the Supper is always of that.

The two elements are a twofold parable of the saving work, and they say most emphatically, “I must die sacrificially,” is you are to have life.

The words, “broken for you” (cf. v. 24), are literally simply for you, although some of the manuscripts do read broken for you. The words broken for you would be sacrificial in sense, the breaking being that of death, not of broken bones (cf. Exod. 12:46; John 19:31-37).

The words, “this do,” are in the present tense and refer to that which is to be done constantly, or frequently. They speak of the compulsory nature of our participation, and of the fact that the Supper is to be frequently observed by the body of Christ (cf. Acts 2:42, 46). Yet there is no legalistic expression of our obligation. It is not said that it is a sin to miss the observance of the Lord’s Supper upon occasion. It should be frequently observed as an expression of gratitude and devotion to Him who loved us and gave Himself for us (cf. Jer. 2:32; Isa. 49:14; Acts 2:46, “gladness”).

The words, “in remembrance of me,” may be an allusion to Moses at the Passover. They are to forget him, but from now on remember the Lord Jesus Christ. The “Me” is a reference to Him in His character as the One who died for us (cf. v. 26).

The ceremony of the wine (1 Cor. 11:25-26). In the ceremony of the cup some of the same ideas of the divine initiative in our salvation are found. For example, we read, “After the same manner also he took the cup.” While the verb “took” is not found in the original text, it clearly is to be supplied from the preceding verse, and it connotes the same emphasis as there. The taking of the cup by the Lord suggests the voluntary action in His death.

“This cup is the new testament in my blood” is a most important statement. William Barclay paraphrases it in this way, “This cup is the new covenant and it cost my blood.”1 The words take the reader back to the promises of the New Covenant in Jeremiah 31:31-34 with their great stress on grace. In contrast to the Mosaic

Covenant with its “thou shalt,” this covenant is filled with the “I wills” of the Lord God. One covenant is to be written on stones, but the other on the fleshy tablets of the heart. The promises of the latter covenant are grounded in the promise of the forgiveness of sins, which makes them all possible.

Everything in our Lord’s ministry led up to that which procured the forgiveness of sins set out in the New Covenant, a covenant ratified in His death on Calvary’s cross. The atonement accomplished by the Lord Jesus Christ is no afterthought, but the well thought out plan drawn by the Trinity in the counsels of ages past. The cup of wine, suggestive of the bloodshedding of a violent sacrifice, is the visible token, the guarantee, the seal of “your sins and iniquities I will remember no more” (cf. Jer. 31:34). What a blessing to those whose cry is, “Woe is me, for I am undone,” to hear from the lips of the Lord Jesus Christ, “For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (cf. Isa. 6:5; Matt. 26:28). “Your sins and iniquities I will remember no more” comes to fruition in the sacrifice of God’s Lamb.

It is necessary to remind ourselves of the fact that Jesus did not partake of either the bread or the wine. In fact, according to Luke 22:17 He said, “divide it among yourselves.” All is in accordance with His deity: He needs no remedy for sins, since He had none.

It is sad to think that it is necessary to have Him ask us to do this in remembrance of Him, but it is necessary. We are so forgetful of the blessings we have received from our great Triune God. “Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire?” Jehovah asks through

Jeremiah, adding, “yet my people have forgotten me days without number” (2:32).

In the twenty-sixth verse reason is given for remembering Him in the Supper. As often as we eat the bread, and drink the cup, we proclaim His death till He comes. The Supper is, therefore, an acted sermon preached to all. The word translated “show,” in the Authorized Version is one that means to proclaim, or to preach. Thus, the Lord’s Supper is a preaching service.2 In the Supper there is truth that has past significance (cf. vv. 24-25), present significance (cf. v. 26), as well as future significance (cf. v. 26). In the Supper, then, we look back, and out, and forward!

The Application to the Corinthians

The “Wherefore” of verse twenty-seven introduces the application, a consequence of the instruction. The word “unworthily” does not refer to the person of the one partaking, but to the manner of his partaking. All are unworthy always. To a woman who was reluctant to accept the elements Rabbi Duncan, the famous Scottish preacher and professor said, “Tak’it, woman, tak’it. It’s for sinners.” To be irreverent toward the body and blood of Jesus is to eat and drink unworthily. Verse twenty-seven finds further explanation in verse twenty-nine, where “not discerning the body” is probably to be understood in the sense of “not discerning the body and blood,” and not in the sense of a reference to the church, the body of Christ.3 The proper alternative to the irreverence is self-judgment, and Paul refers to that in verse twenty-eight. Incidentally, the word “damnation” in the Authorized Version of verse twenty-nine is better rendered by judgment, as most of the

modern versions do. The important point is the necessity of preparation before participation. The reflection upon our trust in Christ, our present life in Christ, and especially our view of the meaning and significance of the elements are aspects of our meditation around the communion table. We have title to the communion table by virtue of our conversion to Christ, but our enjoyment of our right is related to our spiritual life's vitality.

Judgment had already come upon some of the believers in Corinth "for this cause," that is, for abuse of the Lord's Table. In fact, some had committed sin unto physical death and already slept in Christ (the verb koimao, "sleep," when referring to death, always refers to the death of believers (cf. John 11:11, 12; Acts 7:60; 1 Cor. 15:16, 18, 20, 51, etc.).

In the final words of the chapter the apostle points out that the preventive is to judge ourselves rightly (cf. v. 31). Even God's judgment, however, is not eternal; it is designed to be family discipline, a "chastening of the Lord," to prevent being "condemned with the Lord" (cf. vv. 31-32). In this last statement the apostle uses the strong katakrino, which does mean to condemn in an eternal sense.

The concluding words are a practical appeal to the Corinthians to remember the unity of the body in their observance of the feast. And as for the rest of the injunctions he has in mind, Paul says he will attend to them when he visits them (what were they?).

Conclusion

May I close on the following notes. First, the Lord's Supper is an observance with divine authentication,

traced to an historical inauguration by the Lord, and followed by apostolic corroboration by Paul. In the light of our Lord's moving, "do this in remembrance of Me," who would not want to give primacy to the service in which we worship and commune with him over that in which we listen to man's voices? As we sing, "Here, O my Lord! I see Thee face to face;

Here would I touch and handle things unseen;

Here grasp with firmer hand th' eternal grace,

And all my weariness upon Thee lean!"

And second, reflect upon the fact that He said, "take, eat," and "drink ye all of this," signifying that we are not only to remember, but to receive spiritual food from the communion as we meditate upon Him.

When her young relatives reached home after a communion service, an old Scotchwoman was wont to enquire of them: "Did you meet anyone in the service?" and, if on their part the attempt was made to lessen the directness of the appeal by the mention of various neighbours who had been met, she would repeat with gentle insistence, "Yes, I know about these, but did you meet anyone in particular in the service?" The aged Christian woman thought of the Lord's Supper as a trysting-place for the soul and its Lord.4 How appropriate!

1 William Barclay, The Letters to the Corinthians (Philadelphia, 1956), p. 115.

2 I. Howard Marshall, Last Supper and Lord's Supper (Grand Rapids, 1980), p. 113.

3 Ibid., p. 114.

4 R. J. Smithson, The Feast of Remembrance, p. 27.

Personal Consolation from the Resurrection

Personal Consolation from the Resurrection

S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:12-19, Matthew 28:16-20; John 11:25-17 Dr. S. Lewis Johnson, Jr. is a Bible teacher at Believers Chapel, Dallas, Texas. In this Christ-exalting and comforting article, he lends personal emphasis on what the resurrection of Christ means to him.

Introduction

My subject might just as well be entitled, “What the Resurrection Means to Me,” for it is essentially an attempt to lay stress on some of the more personal comforts that are mine when I think of the glorious event the Christian Church celebrates on Easter Sunday. I hasten to point out that the consolation of the resurrection is a very broad subject, even when the more experiential aspects only are covered. And, although I am an old man, there are new and refreshing thoughts that come to me frequently when I meditate upon the benefits derived from a Savior who lives after death. In this message I want to go over some of the most compelling of His gracious mercies to His own saints, mercies related to His triumphant emergence from the tomb centuries ago.

Now, in treating of the resurrection, there are several things to keep in mind. In the first place, when we use the term resurrection, we do not mean that Jesus’ spirit

like a good reputation still survives in the minds of men, or that life always conquers death (which it does not). We mean by the term bodily resurrection, that is, that Jesus in bodily form rose from the dead on that Sunday morning years ago. As Professor James Denney said in his great work Jesus and the Gospel, “If we cannot speak of the bodily resurrection we should not speak of the resurrection at all.”

In the second place, resurrection in this sense is peculiar to Christianity. No resurrection has ever been claimed for Abraham, the father of Judaism, nor for Buddha, who died “with that utter passing away in which nothing whatever remains behind, “nor for Mohammed, whose tomb is annually visited by devout Mohammedans at Medina. The Buddhist has a glorious temple, in which a tooth of Budda is kept. The Moslems have a coffin in which the dust of their prophet molders. We Christians have a living Saviour.

In the third place, the denial of the resurrection is a heathen viewpoint (cf. Acts 17:32-34). The laughter of the Areopagus has been echoed down through almost twenty centuries. Plato, it is true, argued for a future life beyond this one in the Phaedo, but his views were contrary to the doctrine of the resurrection of the body. For him, as for others, the body is the prison in which the soul is kept and, therefore, the doctrine of the resurrection of the body meant a return of the soul to the prison of the body. A form of denial is also found within the professing Christian body, and Paul condemns one of its manifestations in 2 Timothy 2:18.

There are many things that are implicit and explicit in the bodily resurrection doctrine, such as life after death,

the victory of the Lord over the forces of evil, the final judgment and others. How can we trust the love and power of God, if there is no resurrection of the only good man who ever lived? How can we affirm a moral universe, if Jesus, the Holy One, lived only to perish forever? The truth of the resurrection is the comforting assurance that God's enterprise, as set forth in Scripture, will ultimately succeed and flourish in the earth. Easter is the consoling interpretation of Good Friday.

The resurrection means all of these things, but in this message I want to expound in some detail several truths related to this subject, which I particularly appreciate. It is to this that I now turn.

The Resurrection Means the Assurance of the Forgiveness of Sins

The denial of Christ's resurrection (1 Cor. 15:12, 13, 16). The Apostle Paul, boldly proclaiming the certainty of the resurrection of the body in 1 Corinthians 15:1-34, points out that there are three consequences of the denial of the resurrection of the body. The first is the denial of Christ's resurrection. His argument is plain: if Christ, a genuine man, has been raised, then there is a resurrection of the body (cf. v. 12). The reverse is true, if He has not been raised (cf. vv. 13, 16).

The emptiness of the Corinthians' faith (1 Cor. 15:14-16). In this section the apostle says that, if there is no resurrection of Christ, then the apostles' preaching and the Corinthians' faith is vain. The word the apostle uses to express the consequences of no resurrection is the word kenos (AV, "vain"). It is a word that means empty, void of content. Paul means that, if Christ did not

rise from the dead, then their faith has not taken hold of a real fact. It is all a mirage.

The lost estate of the Corinthians (1 Cor. 15:17-19). The third consequence of the denial of the resurrection is the conclusion that the Corinthians are lost. In Paul's words it is, "And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain, ye are yet in your sins" (cf. v. 17). In this verse the apostle refers to their faith as "vain," but the Greek word used here is not the same as that used in verse fourteen, although the Authorized Version renders the two different Greek words by the one English word of "vain." The second is the word mataios, which refers to that which is void of useful aim or effect. The New American Standard Bible renders the word by "worthless." The thought, then, is that, if Christ has not been raised, their faith has failed to secure its end, aim, or effect, i.e., the forgiveness of sins. They are still in their sins.

Now, of course, the facts are that Christ has been raised from the dead. Therefore, we are no longer in our sins; they have been forgiven.

There is one point upon which we must be clear. It is not the resurrection that secures the forgiveness of our sins. That is done by the death of the cross. As Paul says, "Who was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for (lit., on account of) our justification" (cf. Rom. 4:25; 5:9). Our sins are paid for by the blood of the cross, but the resurrection is the evidence of the acceptance of that payment by the Father. The resurrection is evidential. When we look at the cross, we think of atonement as made, but when we look at the open tomb, we think of atonement as accepted. Or, as

someone has put it, “The resurrection is God’s ‘Amen’ to Jesus Christ’s ‘It is finished.’”

So, uniting our destiny with His, the Lord Jesus not merely survived death, He conquered it, and with that victory He demonstrated the success of the divine program for the forgiveness of the sins of the people of God. Our representative has been victorious for us through His blood, and the resurrection is a constant reminder that we are forgiven, freed from guilt and condemnation. What a glorious position!

The Resurrection Means the Assurance of an Ever-Present Guide

The prerogative of Jesus (Matt. 28:18). The Gospel of the King, Matthew, reaches its natural consummation in this beautiful last few sentences. The King has been raised to the rulership of the universe. The nation Israel and the nations of the Gentiles have repulsed Him, but a little flock has been gathered to Him to be His heralds throughout the final age. To support them he will cast around their feebleness the impenetrable armor of His perpetual, undying presence. It is fitting that the last glimpse of Him in the book should be from a mountain top. It began in the valley with the story of His birth and its gleams of the kingly dignity to come, and it ends on the highest summit, — a short flight to the royal throne.

In the final few verses there is a triplet of sayings with such a fulness of meaning that they guarantee the genuineness of them. Yes, it is true, never did man speak like this Man (cf. John 7:46).

After worship (cf. v. 17) comes witness, and in line with this the Lord unfolds to them the greatness of the

prerogatives that are now His, “All authority is given unto me in heaven and in earth.” It is a simple statement, but majestic and inexhaustible in its claim of unrestricted universal sovereignty. Human thought and human minds lose themselves in attempting to comprehend the statement. It is Swete who said, “The field of Jesus’ authority seems to grow as his ministry advances; at the outset He has authority to forgive sins on earth; as the days pass on, we read of authority to act as the final judge of all human lives, to determine the bounds of His own life, laying it down and taking it up at pleasure; on the eve of the passion He speaks of authority given to Him over all flesh, i.e., all mankind. But none of these great claims reaches the boundless magnificence of the words “All authority is given to me in heaven and on earth.”1 Knox put it this way, “He was given heaven and earth to do what He liked with them.”

The precept of Jesus (Matt. 28:19-20a). There follows the so-called “Great Commission,” namely, “Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” This ecumenical commission is supported by the ecumenical authority given to the Lord (cf. v. 18), as the “therefore” indicates. The message is to burst national bounds and bonds and go to all nations. And how is it to be done? By going, baptizing, and teaching our Lord says. And one should notice the stress on the ministry of instruction here; it is theology that the world needs!

The promise of Jesus Messiah (Matt. 28:20b). One might respond at this point in the words of Paul, “And who is sufficient for these things?” The words that follow,

according to one commentator, are the greatest conclusion to written works found in our literature. They are the great promise with which the book closes, “And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age. Amen.” They are words that are only possible because of the bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, the second of the important things that resurrection means to me is this great truth: The resurrection is the means of assurance of our possession throughout the age of an ever-present guide. But let us look at the promise in a little more detail.

In the first place, it should be noted that the Lord Jesus said, “And, lo, I AM with you,” not “And, lo, I SHALL BE with you.” He is our companion, our ally down the course of life. He is with us in the experiences of our life at the present time, whether they be good or bad. Our great Lord does not, like some generals, remain at base headquarters in heaven, pouring over reports of what is happening upon the earth and occasionally sending forth a few encouraging words to the men in the trenches. No, He left headquarters (cf. Gal. 4:1-7) and came down to us in the front-line trenches, right down to where we live. And it is this that He does today. He is with us when we are contending with our frailties, our anxieties and our feelings of emptiness and futility. There is nothing, apart from sin, that He does not share with us.

What was the secret of the staying power of the apostles? And of the church? Was it that they in their strength took up their tasks? No, they would have returned to the secular life, just as Peter and Andrew returned to their fishing after the death and burial of the Lord Jesus.

The secret of the staying power of the church and its individuals is that Christ resumes His work after the resurrection. He picks up the thread of the program. Christians do not inherit their tasks; they share it with Him. We work on as disciples under Him, for Him, with Him, as of old. And this is made possible by the resurrection.

In the second place, the Lord speaks of His presence as "always," that is, a permanent, ever-present one. The expression translated in the Authorized Version as "always' is one that means literally all the days throughout. That is, He is present with us not only upon the coming of every day, but throughout all the days as they come, — a 24-hour Guide! He is with us all of the days and in all kinds of days, whether they be days of sunshine, fog, rain, shadow, or otherwise. As Jacob said, He is "the God who fed me all my life long unto this day" (Gen. 48:15).

In the third place, the final words, "unto the end of the age," add the capstone to the promise, making it clear that there are no limits to the startling word.

To sum up, then: By virtue of the bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus we now have a continuing ever-present Guide in the course of our spiritual lives. Now this guidance is not only for the individual (here), but also for the church (cf. Rev. 2:1). In one of our Lord's great figures of His ever-living presence among the body of believers in this age He speaks of Himself as the One "who walketh in the midst of the seven golden lamp-stands (—the seven churches)" (cf. Rev. 2:1).

The resurrection, then, assures me and the church of His constant presence with us. What a difference this

makes in our lives! In 1896, Glasgow University conferred on David Livingstone the degree of Doctor of Laws. He rose to speak in reply and was received with respectful silence. Gaunt, haggard as a result of hardships in tropical Africa, his left arm, crushed by a lion, hanging helplessly at his side, he announced his resolve to return to Africa, without misgiving and with great gladness. He added, “Would you like me to tell the thing that supported me through all the years of exile among a people whose language I could not understand, and whose attitude toward me was always uncertain and often hostile? It was this, ‘Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.’ On these words I staked everything and they never failed.” The companionship of a risen Saviour is the encouragement that supports us amid the disappointments and pleasures of life.

The Resurrection is a Measurement of the Enablement Believers Possess Today

There is a magnificent passage in Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians in which he compares the greatness of the power of God toward believers with the power manifested in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and in his ascension and session. It goes this way, “And what is the exceeding greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in that which is to come” (1:19-21).

The resurrection, then, is God's new unit of measurement regarding that which He can and will do for the believer. In order to better comprehend what this means let us remember that the resurrection is the crowning miracle of the miracles, for it embraces in itself all the others. The Lord Jesus gave sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, speech to the dumb, power to palsied limbs and withered members. But have we ever realized that in His own resurrection all these were included? The eyes that were blind in death, the ears that were deaf, the limbs that were palsied received sight, hearing, and strength in one simultaneous act. Thrice dead — dead by crucifixion with pierced hands and feet, dead by the spear thrust, and dead by the temporary enswathement, which wrapped even His head and excluded breath — He nevertheless by a mighty act of God awoke, arose and emerged from the tomb with the embalming cloths about Him. And now, whenever a believer wants to know how much God is able and willing to do for him, he considers the mighty power of God as wrought in the bodily resurrection of Christ. In the Old Testament the unit of measurement of what He is able to do for His people is the deliverance of Israel from Egypt through the Red Sea (cf. Mic. 7:15).

Both measurements include three things, an exemption from death, one of the bloodstained houses and the other of God's wrath upon sinners. There was a defiance of gravitation in the making of the waters of the Red Sea a wall about Israel, and in the ascension of Christ. And finally there was the overthrow of all foes in the Red Sea and of hostile powers in Christ's session at the right hand of God.

The same comparison of the power extended to the believer and the power exhibited in Christ's resurrection is found in the great benediction of Hebrews 13:20-21, where the work of sanctification being wrought out in our lives is traced to the God of peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus. Cf. Isa. 63:11.

Thus, the resurrection means that its mighty power is that which God offers us in the accomplishing of His will in our lives. It is a divine resource that cannot be exhausted.

The Resurrection Means Resurrection For Me and Eternal Life

There is a beautiful passage in the Gospel of John to which I should like to turn now. It is John 11:25-27, and in it the Lord Jesus speaks of Himself as the resurrection and the life and offers some encouraging words about both matters. In this connection it is always proper to remind ourselves that He is the only person qualified to answer questions that pertain to life beyond the grave, for He alone knows and has that life. He by His work on the cross and in resurrection has the giant's head in His hands and has carried the witness of victory to the city of God.

The declaration regarding resurrection and life (John 11:25a). Coming to Bethany after the death of Lazarus, Jesus met Martha, Lazarus' serving sister. The "sitting sister," Mary (cf. v. 20: Luke 10:39), remained at home. When Martha came into the presence of the Lord, she complained, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died" (cf. v. 21). The ensuing conversation produced the great interchange of John 11:25-27.

The “I am” of verse twenty-five stresses the fact that it is not simply a doctrine Martha must respond to, but also a person. And, further, the tense suggests that His declaration refers to a present fact, and not simply a future prospect. He adds “life” to “resurrection,” because the wicked also have a resurrection. “Life” is the necessary complement in this instance, since He has in mind the resurrection of believers. “Life” is both the cause and consequence of resurrection. Resurrection is one manifestation of the possession of life. In other words, what our Lord affirms is that, if one expects to have resurrection to life, then one must have His life. He alone has the life that overcomes death, and to overcome death we, too, must have that life.

The explanation of the declaration (John 11:25b-26a). The two clauses of this section amplify the declaration in the order of the words of the declaration.

The application and response (John 11:26b-27). Like a good preacher the Lord asks for a response, hoping that Martha will move from adherence to a doctrine alone to confidence and trust in it. Further, the application moves from the general to the personal; it is “believest THOU this?”

The response of Martha is a beautiful statement, but the following context indicates that, while expressing genuine faith, it was one that went beyond her own comprehension in its depth (cf. v. 39).

To sum up, the resurrection of the Lord Jesus means that those who trust in Him “shall live” also (cf. v. 25); in fact, “shall never die” (cf. v. 26). Cf. John 14:19. As George Morrison put it long ago, “Death is no journey into the obscure night where the wild beasts are crying

in the dark. It is the passing for all who are in Christ into a larger and brighter room."

Edward the Confessor cried in his last words, "Weep not. I shall not die but live; and as I leave the land of the dying I trust to see the blessings of the Lord in the land of the living." They are the words of a vital faith.

Conclusion

We, therefore, have a great hope in the hope of the resurrection. We are assured of the forgiveness of sins. We have an ever-present unfailing divine Guide, both in our personal lives and in the life of the church. In His resurrection life we have the principle and pattern of the joyous life with One who has the power to still the storms, release the demons, bind up the wounds, open the graves, cancel the guilt, comfort aching hearts, and convey peace. He is the one who lives, and yet who at a point in time died for the sake of atonement. Being alive forevermore, He has the keys of death and hades, and in having them has all power. And He has offered that power to us. Finally, we look forward with great anticipation to our own resurrection and eternal life. These are some of the things that Easter means to me.

A great hope should produce a great love in response, and it does. Mr. Spurgeon's words express my feelings accurately, "Whether a man ever went insane with love to the crucified Redeemer I do not know, but I never met such a case. If I should ever go mad, I should like it to be in that direction, and should like to bite a great many more; for what a blessed subject it would be for one to be carried away with, to become unreasonably absorbed in Christ crucified, to have gone out of your senses with

faith in Jesus."2 1 H. B. Swete, The Appearances of our Lord after the Passion (London, 1912), p. 70.

2 Spurgeon, The Treasury of the New Testament, III, 154.

Queen Of The Experiences And The Everest Of Ethics

Queen Of The Experiences

And The Everest Of Ethics

Lewis Johnson, Jr.

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Scripture Reading: Matthew 7:7-12

I had rather stand against the cannons of the wicked than against the prayers of the righteous.

—Thomas Lye

The angel fetched Peter out of prison, but it was prayer fetched the angel.

—Thomas Watson

Introduction

William James once described prayer as “Intercourse with an Ideal Companion,” and the description has lingered on as a most beautiful delineation of the activity that characterizes the saints of God. Theology has been called “The Queen of the Sciences,” and if this is apt, then prayer could be called, “The Queen of Experiences.” And to these testimonies may be added that of the Apostle of Predestination, John Calvin on 1 Timothy 2:1-2 wrote, “The principal exercise which the children of God have is to pray; for in this way they give a TRUE PROOF OF THEIR FAITH.” And, whatever one may think of the strong predestination views of the great

Geneva theologian, it is evident that they did not affect his views of the place of prayer in the believer's life. In fact, the strong confidence in the sovereignty of God and His working in our world is the strongest incentive to prayer, for the simple reason that His sovereignty guarantees His ability to answer our petitions. The facts are, of course, that prayer is the very breath of the regenerate soul. And when the Lord wished to direct Ananias to the Apostle Paul after His encounter with him on the road to Damascus, He told Ananias that he could be identified in this way. "Behold, he prayeth" (Acts 9:11). Where there is life, there is breath; where there is spiritual life, there are spiritual breathings, for prayer is the speech of the soul to God.

It is, therefore, surprising to hear the testimony of a modern Presbyterian minister from a northern city concerning prayer. Not sure that he has time to both preach and pray, he wrote in Monday Morning, a magazine for United Presbyterian ministers, "Can a minister produce a weekly prayer as well as a weekly sermon and do a creative job with both? And are there not more important things we can do with our time?" With this attitude to prayer, it is not surprising to find that the pastor has solved his problem by turning over the pastoral prayer to the laymen of his congregation. Now there is nothing wrong with doing that and, in fact, a great deal that is good about it, but disinterest in prayer is hardly an acceptable motive for it.

Prayer is the only subject discussed twice in the Sermon on the Mount, and that may be a key to the value that the Lord Jesus placed upon it. Many years ago Andrew Murray wrote, "Jesus never taught His disciples how to preach, only how to pray. He did not speak much of what

was needed to preach well, but much of praying well. To know how to speak to God is more than knowing how to speak to man. Not power with men, but power with God is the first thing. Jesus loves to teach us how to pray."1 Perhaps one of the reasons that our young seminary graduates are sometimes lacking in effectiveness is that we instruct them in homiletics, but not in proseuchology!

No doubt the need of prayer is the reason that the Lord brings up the subject in the Sermon at two points. And it is certainly most appropriate in the present context. The entire sermon concerns the character of the life and ministry that the disciples of the kingdom should possess, and prayer should be an integral part of it. And, further, in the following context the subject of entrance into the kingdom will be brought up (cf. v. 14), and prayer is most appropriate in the light of that. And, finally, the immediate context, with its exhortation concerning criticism, censorious and sensible, suggests the subject of prayer, for who is sufficient for such careful discrimination in judgment? Prayer is the indispensable necessity for making biblical judgments.

The Exhortation To Prayer

The requests (7:7). As I have suggested above, the connection between the exhortation to prayer and the preceding context is probably suggested by the natural question that would come to an enlightened believer, "Where will I ever get the wisdom necessary to exercise judgment in a sensible and discriminating way?" The answer is, through prayer.

The exhortation is couched in the present tense in the case of each imperative, and that lays some stress on

the need for importunity in prayer. And further, there is a rising scale of intensity in the verbs, “Ask, seek, KNOCK.”2 As Thomas Manton said, “if we don’t receive by asking, then let us seek; if we don’t receive by seeking, then let us knock.” The asking implies a sense of humility and a recognition of need. And one gains an inkling here of the reason for the divine institution of prayer as the means for the realization of spiritual and other blessings. Through it two great hindrances to the spiritual life are combated. First, arrogant self-confidence is attacked, that attitude that is really a kind of practical Pelagianism (a system of works religion is its results. And second, prayer combats lethargic passivity, a too common condition in the lives of believers, which often results in a false quietism. This command from the Lord that we continually be asking, seeking, and knocking effectively counterattacks these perils when it is obeyed. “You should, in Tertullian’s phrase, with a holy conspiracy, BESEIGE HEAVEN,” Manton also said.

All three of the commands presuppose faith, and emphasize again the fact that prayer is the work of a believer. And faith makes the prayers warm and fervent. Thomas Brooks commented, “Cold prayers always freeze before they reach heaven.” And cold prayers do not characterize biblical praying, but parrotting.

The present imperatives, with their stress on the continual activity of prayer, raise the question of the difference between vain repetition and importunity. There are two kinds of repetition, the repetition of importunity and the repetition of formality. The latter is vain repetition, and the Sermon on the Mount has already spoken on that point (cf. 6:7). But what is the repetition of importunity, and why is importunity a

desirable thing? Well, in the first place, the verbs here do not necessarily mean asking for the same thing over and over, for the repetition may be simply the repetition of making prayer requests, that is, requests for different things. But, let us suppose that the meaning is that we are to make requests for the same things over and over. In what way can this be squared with the prohibition against "vain repetition"? Is the prescription of Trueblood the simple answer, "When the medicine fails, take more of it"?3 Hardly. The explanation of the need for importunate prayer must finally rest in what God's delays in answering our prayers do for us. First of all, they are the seed of divine discipline (cf. Heb. 12:10). And, second, they deepen the channel of our spiritual life, the prayers lifting us constantly into a fruitful relationship with our Father. And, third, they afford occasion for rising above our experiences, our emotions, and physical trials into the heavenly sphere of faith, patience, and hope under His wings. Persistent prayer is pleasing to our great Triune God.

The results (7:7). "As to the promise that is fulfilled when the command is obeyed, in each instance the correspondence between command and promise is exact: hence, ask is followed by given; seek by find; and knock by opened," Hendriksen points out.4 And then in verse eight the promises are strengthened by the use of the word "every one," and expression that emphasizes the inclusiveness of the promises. There is a strong stress, then, on the certainty of an answer to the asking, seeking, and knocking of every sincere follower of the Lord. It is as if He has signed a blank check and turned it over to us to fill in. What an incentive this is to persistent prayer! And there is no better way to pray

than to take His promises and return them to Him in the petitions, for prayer is most effective when it is the reversal of the promises, or God's Word formed into an argument and directed back to God.

The Argumentation For Prayer

The Scriptural reason (7:8). The reason for prayer is simply that it is sure to be answered. The Lord's words here are His expression of the same promise given by the Apostle John, "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us" (1 John 5:14), or by Paul, "But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19). A godly man once said, "Remember, nothing lies outside the reach of prayer except that which lies outside the will of God." And, of course, we are glad that He does not give us answers that lie outside His will, for that is best for us.

The logical reason (7:9-11). The reasoning here is very simple and pointed, teaching the lesson that our Heavenly Father is surely to be counted upon to be the equal of any earthly father. In fact, He will do more for us. If a son asks his father for bread, surely the father will not give him a stone, will he? Or, if the son asks for a fish, he surely will not be given a serpent, will he? We may, then, infer that, if evil men give good gifts to their children, a Heavenly Father, who is good, will most certainly give good things to those who ask Him. The argument hominen to ad Deum, or a minore has been called an argument for ad ad majus, from man to God or from the lessor to the Greater. Lacordaire said, "If you wish to know how the Almighty thinks of you, listen to the beating of your own heart, and add it to infinity."5

What are the “good gifts” of verse eleven? Perhaps the answer lies in the petitions that belong to the Lord’s Prayer (cf. 6:9-13). They are the things that have to do with the supplying of all the disciples’ daily needs and ultimately the blessings of the Kingdom of God, all being grounded in the full and free forgiveness of our sins through the atoning work of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

One of the things that characterized the Puritans, that godly band of Calvinistic servants of God of the seventeenth century, was the priority that they gave to secret communion with God in prayer. Speaking of this Iain Murray has pointed out that the Calvinistic Methodists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were also made of the same metal. “The surviving records of the lives of the Calvinistic Methodists, here in Wales, for a century, from Howell Harris and Daniel Rowland to John Elias and Henry Rees,” he writes, “are full of testimony to the place which prayer occupied in their lives. How far that race of men entered into the apostolic injunction to ‘pray without ceasing’! Richard Bennett in The Early Life of Howell Harris, says, ‘Prayer is interwoven with all his thoughts, and all his activities.’ Characteristic of the prayers recorded in Harris’ diary are the following: ‘Here I am with all that I possess at Thy feet. I will address Thee till my bones tire … Since Thou givest freely, I will not be content with an ordinary measure of grace. Make me as poor and as despised as Thou wilt; but give me spiritual wisdom, give me an unusual knowledge of Thyself.’”6 It is no wonder that God worked mightily by these praying men. “When we would have any great things to be accomplished, the

best policy is, to work by an engine which the world sees nothing of," said another Puritan, John Preston.

I find the use of the words; "stone" and "serpent," very interesting. The fact that He used them would seem to indicate that we do think of Him as giving us these instead of the requests that we desire. Some years ago a friend of mine was having some family problems of a very serious nature. I had encouraged her to take her problems to the Lord for Him to give the solutions. She offered a specific petition to the Lord, and it became evident in the course of time that the Lord was not going to answer her prayer in the way that she desired. She told me that in the course of her further prayers to the Lord she made reference to the previous petition, adding with reference to His failure to answer as she wished, "I knew You wouldn't do it!" I think that powerfully illustrates our lack of faith and rebellion in so many of our petitions. Our Father is a heavenly parent with all of the affection and care of an earthly parent, yet more!

There is another interesting theological insight in the eleventh verse. We hear much these days of the "dignity of man." There is a sense in which this is a biblical doctrine, for we have been made in the image of God and, while the image of God in us has been marred and distorted, it has not been destroyed. There are remnants of the divine likeness left in man, but surely the stress of the Scripture is upon the marring, and not upon the remnants. Over and over again, the Word stresses bur sin, guilt, and condemnation. It is sometimes thought that the doctrine, however, is primarily a doctrine of Paul, and not of the Lord. And this is sometimes made the basis of a claim that, since it is Paul's doctrine and

not the Lord's, we are somehow less liable to follow the teaching. We, of course, are just as responsible to obey the words of the apostles as the words of the Lord, for they all form part of the Word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit. We cannot drive a wedge between the apostles' words and the Lord's. In this case, however, the little word "evil" clearly indicates that our Lord's teaching on the sinfulness of man is in complete harmony with Paul's. "If YE then, BEING EVIL" is a telling indictment of human nature, and brings Him into perfect harmony with Paul's, "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one" (cf. Rom. 3:10).

The Everest Of Ethics7

The culmination of the didactic portion of the Sermon on the Mount is found here. It has been called, "The Everest of Ethics," and "The Golden Rule." William Barclay has commented, "This is Very probably the most universally famous thing that Jesus ever said."8 It is thought by many that this verse is the concluding verse of the sermon proper, the capstone of the discourse. It would then be opposed to 5:17-20, the opening theme verses. It would form a fitting climax, directing attention to the righteousness that exceeds that of the Pharisees and that is necessary for entrance into the kingdom. Since however, the "therefore" is not easily connected with the immediately preceding verses, it may be intended to summarize the entire sermon. At any rate, its lesson is clear.

The Golden Rule is to be contrasted with the negatives of the Jewish Rabbi Hillel, who said, "What is hateful to thee do not to anyone else," and of Confucius, who said, "Do not to others what you would not wish done to

yourself." It has often been pointed out that our Lord's rule was a positive one, while Confucius' is negative, but this distinction may be too rigorously pressed. It is true that the negative statements of Hillel and Confucius are simply statements about calculated prudence to avoid retaliation.9 There are also other differences. First, the non-Christian rules are viewed as ones which men are able to fulfill without divine enablement (cf. Rom. 7:24; 8:3-8; Phil. 2:12-13, etc.). Second, the non-Christian statements major on the relationship of man to man and overlook the more important responsibility of man to God. The one important thing in life is not the rendering of service to man; it is the love and service of God (cf. 22:37).

The last sentence gives the reason why the disciples are to do this commandment: It is the spirit of the Law and the Prophets. And with this comment we return to 5:17, "Think not that I am come to destroy THE LAW, or THE PROPHETS; I am not come to destroy, but to FULFIL."

Conclusion

First, as one reads and re-reads the verses the importance of asking becomes prominent. Five times the word ask is used, and the multiplicity of its occurrence is an invitation to do just that, — ask. The spirit desired is that of Jacob who prayed, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me" (cf. Gen. 32:26).

Second, the natural corollary follows. There is a great stress on the certainty of answers to prayer. Nine times an answer to prayer is stated or implied in the section. And we should not be surprised at the answer as Peter's friends were (cf. Acts 12:1-19). We must learn to distinguish between delays and denials, remembering

that delays are not necessarily denials. “Good prayers never come weeping home,” Joseph Hall said, “I am sure I shall receive, either what I ask for or what I should ask.” George Buttrick has told a story designed to stress the expectations of answers to prayers, “There is a cruel story of a bishop who resolved to practice what he had so often preached: he would speak to God in direct simplicity. He spoke. A Voice, gentle but holy, answered him, ‘Yes, what is it?’ The bishop was found dead on the chancel steps.”10 The one great, final, unanswerable argument for prayer is the prayer life of our Lord. Although earth’s divine and sovereign soul, HE PRAYED! May the Lord help us, who say that we abide in Him, to walk, even as He walked.

1 Andrew Murray, With Christ in the School of Prayer (Westwood, 1953), p. 19.

2 Hendriksen, p. 361.

3 Elton Trueblood, A Place to Stand (New York, 1969), p. 83.

4 Hendriksen, p. 362.

5 Hunter, p. 85.

6 Iain Murray, “Prayer anr Revival,” The Banner of Truth, Issue 132 (September, 1974), p. 27.

7 Barclay, I, 276.

8 Ibid.

9 Hunter, p. 86.

10 George Arthur Buttrick, Prayer (New York and Nashville, 1942), p. 253.

Speaking In Tongues

Speaking In Tongues

Lewis Johnston Jr.

Through the gracious permission of Dr. John Walvoord, Editor, Bibliotheca Sacra, we are able to make available to our readers this article by Dr. Lewis Johnston (Dallas Assembly) which appeared first in that periodical. The article presents the problem relative to speaking in tongues and indicates a proper biblical approach. We trust that other articles in future numbers will provide help that some feel necessary in this matter.

Introduction

Speaking in tongues is a phenomenon that appeared sporadically in the apostlic age. There are at least three references to it in the book of the Acts of the Apostles. According to Luke the phenomenon occurred on the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit baptized the believers into the Church, the body of Christ, and inaugurated the age of the Church. The details are given in Acts two. Then again in Cornelius' house, when he and others believed and were baptized into the body of Christ, there occurred this astonishing manifestation. The last clear reference to tongues in the Acts is found in chapter nineteen, when the disciples of John the Baptist were baptized again by Paul at Ephesus. They responded by speaking in tongues and prophesying.

The only other certain references to tongues occur in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, chapters twelve through fourteen. In these chapters the manifestation is

defined as a spiritual gift, and instruction is given the Corinthians regarding the nature, the purpose, and the regulation of the gift in the local church meetings. It is evident that the gift was exercised not only in Corinth, but also by the Apostle himself in his ministry.

The so-called “Tongues Movement,” which purports to represent a recovery of the historic manifestation, is a comparatively recent phenomenon. It has been asssociated generally with small denominations of a so-called “Pentecostal” character, among whom there are, no doubt, many genuine, if misguided, Christians.

In recent months the movement has taken a new turn. It has begun to make inroads into the larger and more influential denominations, and it now claims adherents in such denominations as the Episcopal, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Methodist, Dutch Reformed and Baptist churches. Clergy, as well as laity, are speaking of “a new dimension in life,” “a definite enrichment in spiritual life,” or “an added, and rewarding method by which to praise and pray.” It has been claimed that, when the experience of speaking in tongues comes, “people begin tithing almost automatically; they begin reading the Bible with new understanding; they have more love and charity; heavy drinkers stop drinking.”

In days of decaying faith and spiritual unrest there often intrudes a predispostion to superstition and to miracle-working. This is reflected in the New Testament, and particularly in Acts, in individuals such as Simon Magus and Elymas the sorcerer. There also comes with general spiritual deadness a desire on the part of some for reality in the spiritual life. No doubt this accounts for the interest of many in the tongues movement today.

Genuine Christians might well rejoice in the evidence of interest in the things that concern our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, although we cannot accept some of the evidences of concern as Biblically correct. Experiences must always come under the judgment of the Word of God, and that which is not in harmony with the Bible must be renounced and abandoned. A well-known Bible teacher said many years ago that there could be no authentic experience of the Holy Spirit which was not "wedded to the words of the Bible." And with this surely we must concur.

The questions that conern students of the Word in connection with speaking in tongues are these: (1) What is the nature of the gift of speaking in tongues? (2) What is the purpose of the gift? (3) What is the validity of speaking in tongues today?

It is the purpose of this discussion to focus attention upon the relevant passages in the Bible, which set forth in some detail the various aspects of the Biblical gift of speaking in tongues. In conclusion there will be a brief review of the gift in history.

The first passage to come under discussion is the passage in which the greatest amount of detail is given, 2 Corinthians fourteen. There will follow a treatment of the thirteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians, and a consideration of the light that comes from the Acts.

The Baptism of The King

The Baptism of The King

S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.

Scripture Reading: Matthew 3:13-17

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Have you ever had questions about the significance of Christ's baptism in the Jordan River by John the Baptist? If so, this choice study not only answers the foregoing question but provides the reader with many other interesting and instructive thoughts centering on the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Introduction

From its opening stages to the eve of its close the cross casts its shadow over the ministry of Christ. This has been tellingly caught in the great painting of Holman Hunt, "The Shadow of Death." The day is fast ebbing away, and the golden rays of the setting sun are slanting in through an open door. The weary toiler at the carpenter's bench, having just straightened Himself from His stooped and cramped position, stretches Himself for a moment. The sun, catching the outraised arms, throws on the wall behind Him the dark lines of a cross. It is Hunt's forceful way of stressing the fact that even in the hidden years of obscurity His decease at Jerusalem was inevitable.

The baptism of Jesus Christ, with its vision of the dove and the heavenly voice in the words traceable to the

great Servant of Jehovah section of Isaiah, also points on to the baptism of His death (cf. Mark 10:38; Luke 12:50). The accents are not so heavy as they shall become later, but they are definitely there. Ultimately the cross shall so possess Him that it can be said that "his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:53), a text which Sangster used for a sermon so movingly entitled, "His Destination is on His Face." Yet the lineaments are already forming at the baptism.

The narrative of the baptism, as that of the temptation, created acute difficulties for the early church. It seemed to say, at first glance, that Jesus underwent a "baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (Mark 1:4). Were they not, then, His sins? How could He, the Son of God, occupy a position such as this? Furthermore, as Edersheim points out, "Nowhere in Rabbinic writings do we find any hint of a Baptism of the Messiah, nor of a descent upon Him of the Spirit in the form of a dove."1 The embarrassment is itself the strongest evidence of the genuineness of the accounts. The church surely would not invent an incident which raised so many questions about its Lord.

The Hidden Years

The baptism, the second crisis in the Greatest Life, is referred to in all four of the gospels. Intervening between the birth and the baptism are the so-called "hidden years," years of which we have little information regarding the life of Christ. There are hints and suggestions in the records, but in the final analysis they yield us only a whisper of His obedient existence.

His infancy (Luke 2:21-39). His circumcision is a rite that marked Him out as an heir of the Abrahamic

Covenant blessings (cf. Romans 4:9-12). There begins in the sphere of His flesh life's progress from holiness to obedient holiness (Hebrews 5:8).

His childhood (Luke 2:40, 41-51). As Morgan says, "The whole story of the childhood of Jesus from infancy to His religious coming of age is contained in one verse."2 The text reads: "And the child grew, and waxed strong, filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon Him" (Luke 2:40). The word grew is the broad term Luke uses for His growth, while the remaining words of the verse spell out the details. The "waxed strong" refers to the physical, while "filled with wisdom" and "the grace of God was upon Him" refer to the mental and the spiritual. There was a beautiful harmony in this man's development, touching all the facets of His being.

His youth (Luke 2:52). In the final verse of the chapter, Luke condenses the youth of God's Second Man into one brief statement, "And Jesus was advancing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men." The word wisdom includes His intellectual and moral growth, while stature refers to His physical development. That He could advance in them attests the complete humanity of the Lord's Messiah. He was perfect at each stage for that stage.

His land and home (Luke 2:51). Our Lord's home for the eighteen years until His manifestation to Israel was Nazareth. It has sometimes been thought that Jesus lived in "the sticks" of His day, a kind of back-water of history. That is far from the case. Nazareth was well within the sound of the reverberation of world events. At the crossroads of highways leading from the east to the west and from the north to the south, as being near

Sepphoris, a Roman colony and for many years Herod's capital, the little village was an interested spectator at the march of empire.

His occupation (Mark 6:3). It is Mark who writes, "is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon?" He learned His trade, that of His father, becoming master of the tools and skills of this craft.

His physical appearance. The only portrait of Jesus found in the New Testament is that given John in Revelation one, and that one is symbolic in nature. Since there is no description of Him, it is likely that He had the appearance of a normal Palestinian Jew. It is true that the Rabbis had high standards for the outward appearance of a proper Jew, especially a teacher. They could criticize very harshly if the standards were not met. One of them was the claim that the reflection of the divine presence could only descend upon a man of tall and powerful stature. Evidently He measured up to their standards, for we read of no criticism of Him in this way. His outdoor life and frequent journeys by foot over the land would attest to the ruggedness of His physique. Thus, while Jesus may not have been able to make the Dallas Cowboys as linebacker, as some popular youth speakers suggest, He must have been a man's man.

His knowledge and understanding (John 7:15). Joseph undoubtedly taught his son the Torah from a very early age, as custom dictated. He probably studied in the village schools also. He was able to speak Aramaic and Greek, the languages of ordinary intercourse, and He could also read the Hebrew Bible (cf. Luke 4:16-22). When teaching in Jerusalem the Jews marvelled, saying,

“How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?” (cf. Acts 26:24). David said, “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant” (Psalm 25:14), and never man feared as He!

The Account Of The Baptism Of The King

The reluctance of John (Matthew 3:13-14). Our Lord had been born in Bethlehem of Judaea about 6 B.C. in the reign of Emperor Augustus and while the Pax Romana girdled the globe. He grew up, as we noted above, in Nazareth of Galilee. When Augustus died in 14 B.C., He was about 20 years of age. A decade or so later the voice of prophecy rang out in the ministry of John after years of silence, and Jesus knew that the beginning of His ministry had come. He, therefore, went down from Galilee to the Jordan “… to begin a Ministry in which he would proclaim a Kingdom mightier than the Roman and tell of a world saved not by man who became God (like Augustus or Tiberius) but by God who became man.”3 When Jesus arrived and submitted Himself for baptism, John strenuously attempted to hinder Him. An inner conviction of the unique character of the One before him had come to John; whether from their relationship (cf. Luke 1:36), the peculiar circumstances at Mary’s visit to his mother (1:43-46), or his own fine spiritual insight (Matthew 3:7), it is not said. At any rate, the Baptist seems to mean by his remonstrance, “I have need of your Spirit and fire baptism, and are you coming to my water baptism?”

The reply of Jesus (3:15). With Jesus’ first words in Matthew, the opposition of the Baptist is overcome. The King must fulfill all the righteous requirements of the

Law (cf. 5:20; 6:1). It was proper for Him as Son of Man to identify Himself with the nation in its preparation for the coming of the King (cf. Isaiah 40:1-11).

The reaction of heaven (3:16-17). Following the visible act of baptism the heavens were torn apart, and there followed the vision and the voice. Important clues to the meaning of Jesus' baptism are found in the vision and the divine voice.

The vision of the Spirit descending upon Him as a dove is the fulfillment of the words regarding the Servant of the Lord, "I have put my Spirit upon him" (Isaiah 42:1). It is His anointing, as our Lord realized and the apostles preached. He could hardly make it plainer that this signified His inauguration into the office of Messiah than when He stood and read Isaiah 61:1 with its, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me," and then added, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4:18, 21). The Spirit's coming was His anointing, and His anointing is His induction into the office of Messiah, the ordination of the Servant of the Lord. Since the dove is the bird of sacrifice, it is fitting that the Spirit came upon Him in this form. It is by the Spirit's enablement that He will carry out His ministry of atoning suffering and death.

The voice from heaven, the confirmation of the vision, is a kind of coronation formula for the Suffering Servant. The voice is a combination of Psalm 2:7, the psalm of the messianic king, and Isaiah 42:1, a reference to the Suffering Servant. The force of the words is to inform Him that He is "born to suffer, born a king."4 They become a preview of His destiny, a synthesis of ruling and suffering of incomparable value.

We close the section by noting that the whole Trinity is involved in the scene. How transcendently important it must be! Incidentally, the voice from heaven is the seal of approval upon “the hidden years.” “He sets the seal of perfection upon the hidden years. We want to know no more. We ask for no details; it is enough.”5 The King is now installed in the Messianic office, but the anointing is not only for preaching, it is also for passion.

The Theological Significance Of The Baptism

To most Christians the baptism of Jesus Christ is as much an enigma as it proved to John the Baptist. This is reflected in the almost absurd statements about it. For example, in urging believers to be baptized in testimony to salvation it is common to hear the expression, “follow the Lord in baptism,” as if our baptism is a carbon copy of His. It is doubtful if there is a single passage in the New Testament in which a biblical writer connects the baptism of Christ with Christian baptism. But the baptism of Christ does have important theological significance, as the following things indicate.

Christ’s baptism is His identification with Israel (3:15). John’s baptism was founded upon the redemptive work of the Lamb to come, and precisely for this reason it seems to be the exclusive responsibility of those who are the recipients of the work of redemption. How, then, can He who needs no redemption personally be baptized? The answer He gave to John is our clue. “To fulfill all righteousness” bears a close relationship to Paul’s, “born of a woman, born under the law” (Galatians 4:4). It refers to the fulfilling of all the righteous requirements of the Law. He must be circumcised, although there is no necessity to put away.the body of

the flesh in His case (cf. Colossians 2:11). He must be presented in the temple, although He does not need deliverance from the house of bondage in Egypt (cf. Luke 2:22). The baptism signified not only the removal of sins; it also pointed to a positive preparation and dedication of heart to the coming King and His kingdom. He, too, belongs to this people, although He is their King, and must demonstrate His willingness to do the will of God. The baptism, then, is a phase of His humiliation under the Law, just as the circumcision and the presentation.6 He acknowledged John's authority at this stage in the unfolding of the program of divine revelation. He went, then, to the baptism as a representative person, convinced that this was a divinely imposed duty for every Israelite.

Christ's baptism was His inauguration into the Messianic office. We have already set this forth, but it should be emphasized here that this involved not only the work of redemption, but also the accompanying work of judgment (cf. Matthew 3:11-12). This our Lord has yet to do.

Christ's baptism is the illustration of the goal of His ministry.

When Jesus descended into the waters of the Jordan and then emerged from them, it seems most likely that this was intended to be a figure of His death. When we turn over in the pages of Matthew to verse twenty-two of chapter twenty and find Him describing His death as a "baptism," this becomes most likely. In fact that verse may well be Jesus' own interpretation of baptism; it has to do with death. Thus, John's baptism foreshadows His death. Calvary is His baptism in death, the Great

Commission is a charge to preach with a view to uniting men with His death, while Paul in Romans six explains the subject in detail theologically. John's baptism, then, mirrors the event of the cross.

It is true, we now see, that the cross casts its shadow over the ministry of the Messiah from the beginning. When we remember that the Lord Jesus did not accept Calvary easily, the greatness of His sacrifice becomes more meaningful. He hated death; this was one of the powers He came to destroy. And yet, from the very beginning He struggled with that power because He loved men and His Father's will more. Luther said somewhere, "Every Christian is a Crucian!" But Jesus. Christ is the greatest Crucian of them all.

One final note may be worthwhile. It concerns the divine initiative in the work of salvation. The four words of verse fourteen, "comest thou to me," are a kind of summary of the divine initiative of the Christian good news. Will we ever really get over the fact that He laid the foundations and made the first move? He spoke in His Son when men did not really wish to hear from Him. And when they were wandering and going astray the Good Shepherd sought and saved them.

It is a well-known fact that the Jewish scholar Claude Montefiore set himself to discover if there was anything really new in the teaching of Jesus, anything which no Jewish prophet or rabbi had said before Him. At the conclusion of his investigation he singled out one thing as distinctive — the picture of the Good Shepherd going out into the wilderness in search of the lost sheep. The picture of God as not merely receiving those who turn to Him, but as taking the initiative in seeking the ones who

have turned from Him he found new. Montefiore called this “a new figure” and “one of the new excellencies of the gospel.”

We would disagree with Montefiore in this respect: the thought of the divine initiative in salvation is one that pervades the entire Word of God, from its opening word to Adam, “Where art thou?” (Genesis 3:9), to the words of the Lord Jesus Himself, “For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which is lost” (Luke 19:10). But we would most assuredly and emphatically affirm that it is one of the glorious excellencies of the gospel of Christ.

1 Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah (Grand Rapids, 1953 / orig. ed. 1886/), I, 285.

2 G. Campbell Morgan, The Crises of the Christ (London, 1905, p. 86.

3 Archibald M. Hunter, Introducing New Testament Theology (Philadelphia, 1957, p. 10.

4 Ibid., p. 15

5 Morgan, Matthew, p. 28.

6 G.C. Berkouwer, The Person of Christ, trans. by John Vriend (Grand Rapids, 1965), p. 246.

The Feeding of the Fifteen Thousand

The Feeding of the Fifteen Thousand

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This is the fourth in his series of studies on the seven signs of our Lord Jesus Christ recorded in John's Gospel prior to His death, burial and resurrection (see John 20:30-31).

Scripture Reading: John 6:1-14

Introduction

This incident in the ministry of the Lord Jesus, usually entitled, "The Feeding of the Five Thousand," may just as well, perhaps better, be called, "The Feeding of the Fifteen Thousand." In the Matthaean account of the incident we read concerning the number of people who were there, "And they that had eaten were about five thousand MEN, besides women and children" (cf. 14:21). The use of the Greek term andres, rendered "men," confirms the fact that there were well over five thousand people there. The term andres refers to men as males, and the mention of the women and children also makes it plain that there were probably at the least about fifteen thousand individuals present for this magnificent instance of the miracle-working power of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The miracle is the only miracle of the Lord Jesus that is recorded in all four gospels. One might justifiably

conclude from this that it is in the mind of the Holy Spirit, the author of Scripture, an important sign.

Further, in the Johannine account the sign is followed by a sermon, dealing principally with the spiritual significance of the feeding of the fifteen thousand. And in the sermon there is the mention of one of John's famous "I am" statements of the Lord. In verse thirty-five we read, "And Jesus said unto them, I am the Bread of Life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst." One may say, then, without fear of contradiction that the sign and the sermon touch on some of the great and tremendous claims for deity and divine revelation that Jesus made.

Many liberal views of Christ have been espoused in the last century or so. There is Renan's "Amiable Carpenter," Tolstoi's "Spiritual Anarchist," Albert Schweitzer's "Imminent Cataclysmist," Joseph Klausner's "Unorthodox Rabbi," and Rudolph Otto's "Charismatic Evangelist." None of these views approach the view of Scripture, which set Him forth as the Son of God. William Temple many years ago wrote some devastating words concerning liberal interpretations of Jesus. Speaking in connection with the prejudices of scholars against the deity of Christ, he wrote, "It was held that the simple preacher of love towards God and man could be discerned behind the Marcan, Lucan and Matthaean narratives. (Why anyone should have troubled to crucify the Christ of Liberal Protestantism has always been a mystery.) But this view is now almost everywhere abandoned. It is now recognized that the only Christ for whose existence there is any evidence at all is a miraculous Figure making stupendous claims."1 The phrase, "after these things," which opens chapter

six of the gospel, includes events not mentioned in the Gospel of John, such things as the beheading of John the Baptist (cf. Matt. 14:1-14), and the mourning and the meditation over it (cf. 14:13-14; Mark 6:30-31).

Thus, the context is close in time to the great feast that Herod gave. To pass from that feast to the feast that Jesus gave the fifteen thousand forms a remarkable and startling contrast. “At the one,” Maclaren points out, “the heavy air reeked with the fumes of wine and blood; and lust, drunkenness, and murder were guests. At the other, the cool evening breeze from the lake played round the companies on the sweet springing grass. The fare was coarse and wholesome, the eaters awed into some dim recognition of the Giver, and He Himself revealed as lovingly careful of humblest needs, as divinely able to justify these, and as, in deepest truth, the Bread of the world.”2 We might add that Herod’s feast led from sumptuousness to sin and, finally, the divine wrath. It is said that the feeding of the five thousand occurred in a “desert place” (cf. Matt. 14:13), but the real desert was in Herod’s palatial dining room.

The Situation of the Sign

The place (John 6:1, 3). We have noted that “after these things” refers to the tragic martyrdom of John the Baptist. After this sad event, Jesus, realizing that the beginning in earnest of His ministry has come and wishing to be alone for meditation, withdrew to the other side of the Sea of Tiberias. There he went up to the higher part of one of the hills about the lake and sat down with His disciples.

The multitude (John 6:2). John writes, “And a great multitude followed him, because they saw His miracles

which He did on them that were diseased." The principal verbs of the text "followed," "saw," and "did" are in the imperfect tense, which indicates continual action in past time. The picture is of men and women on the move, and they kept coming to Him because of the miracles which He kept doing.

The time (John 6:4). The time was the time of the Passover feast, and there is a definite connection with that feast. In that feast a significant part of it was the eating of the bread (cf. the Lord's Supper and the Last Passover). It is not, then, surprising that the sign will suggest His ability to give the bread of life to men. A further comparison with the feeding of the children of Israel with the manna during the wilderness journey will be made (cf. vv. 32, 33, 51). He, the Lord Jesus, will give the true bread from heaven, giving to men what the mazzah, or unleavened bread of the Passover feast, as well as the manna, could never provide. He is, as Paul says, "Christ our Passover," by reason of the sacrifice that provides life for believers (cf. 1 Cor. 5:7).

The Conversation With the Disciples

The question of the Lord (John 6:5-6). John continues, "When Jesus then lifted up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? And this he said to prove him: for he Himself knew what he would do."

There are several things that Matthew has in his account that John omits. He does not speak of the sense of compassion that Jesus had when He saw the multitude (cf. 14:14). It is likely that he asked Philip the question soon after He had arrived and saw the multitude approaching. Seeing them, He did not say, "I

came up here for a rest, go home," but rather, as Matthew says, "His heart went out to them." They were longing for a true shepherd, and that true shepherd was the Lord Jesus (cf. Psa. 121:3-4). What a picture of the true humanity of the Lord Jesus. God with a sigh of compassion, God with a tear over the diseased, and God with a groan at the devastation of death characterized Him.

Two things are indicated by the fact that He took the initiative in talking to His men. In the first place, it is God who makes the move to provide bread, thus illustrating the divine grace which first moves toward its objects, causing them to seek the dispenser of grace.

And, second, it is clear from the account that the Lord knows that His resources are ample for the needs of the multitude.

The aim of the Lord in asking the question, "Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?," is said to be "to prove them." He knew what He would do. In other words, they must come to know their inability in order to fully appreciate His great ability. The principle is one that touches all the areas of our lives. In fact, many of the experiences which we have are just situations in which the Lord puts us to teach us what He is able to do in them. The trials, the stresses, the problems of life are occasions in which we are forced to learn of Him and His sufficiency for our needs.

The reply of Philip (John 6:7). Someone has called Philip the "Statistical Pessimist."3 He replies, "Two hundred denarii's worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little." From our Lord's parable in Matthew twenty (cf. v. 2) we can say that a

working man's daily wage was a denarius. In today's currency it would probably equal at the minimum about $40.00, that being something of a working man's wage today. Thus two hundred denarii would be the equivalent of about $8000.00. In other words, Philip says that $8000.00 would not even provide such a multitude a small snack! Of course, he has not taken into consideration the infinite resources of the Lord Jesus (cf. Phil. 4:19).

A second thing may be said about Philip's reply to the Lord. Jesus had asked, "Whence shall we buy food?" Philip's answer, however, is not to a "where," but to a "how much." He was too busy calculating to remember that the real issue turned on the source of a large amount of food for the multitude. Perhaps if he had thought seriously about the source, his thoughts may have drifted to the infinite well of blessing standing in his presence. Jesus' words in Matthew 14:18 in response to the news of the little lad's possession of loaves and fishes reveal the true source of the bread of life, "Bring them hither to me."

It is likely that at this time the other disciples came and suggested to the Lord that He send them away into the villages to buy food, (cf. Matt. 14:15).

The reply of Andrew (John 6:8-9). Andrew said to the Lord, "There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?" Was he suggesting that the Lord was a bit careless of the needs of the crowd?

Two things are unfolded here. In the first place, it is clearly seen that one of the first requisites for the reception of the riches of Christ is to realize our own

poverty. And this is also one of the first requisites for success in the ministry of the Lord. We ought to take stock of our resources, laying bare our poverty of mind and heart for the work, and begin to lean upon Him. “The knowledge of our own unfitness is the first condition of fitness,” MacLaren comments.4 In the second place, it becomes clear from the incident that a little is a lot, if God is in it. It was with this impossibly small store that about fifteen thousand people were fed and satisfied. As the psalmist has said, “He turneth the wilderness into a pool of water, and dry ground into water springs” (107:35). Incidentally, the loaves that they ate were flat and hard, and the fishes were probably cured, thus being similar to our hors d’oeuvres of today.

The Multiplication of the Food

The Lord feeding (John 6:10-11). After the men and women were told to sit down by the Lord on the grass, He took the food and gave thanks for it. He then distributed it to the disciples, who, in turn, gave it to the people. They did these things with both the loaves and the fishes. What took place is an illustration of grace abounding over unbelief.

It is interesting to study the incident carefully with a view to investigating the anatomy of a miracle. One notices that the accompaniments of the miracle are described, that is, the seating, the praying, and the serving, but the essential manner of the Lord in performing the miracle is omitted. Perhaps those participating did not themselves understand what was happening, so far as the manner of the performance of the miracle was concerned.

Notice, too, that the guests were seated before the table was spread with the food. Can you not imagine that there was considerable surprise over this, perhaps a good bit of ridicule? The incident was, indeed, a trial of faith, a trial of the faith of all who participated, and particularly the trial of the twelve (cf. v. 6). What took place was multiplication of food by His touch, but dispensed by their agency. Is this not a perceptive picture of the ministry of the servants of the Lord? It is He who is responsible for the food dispensed, but at the same time it is dispensed by the agency of His servants, and what a privilege it is to be a part of His ministry in this way!

The multitude filled (John 6:12-13). After the filling of the multitude, Jesus said, “Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.” The result was that twelve baskets were filled with the fragments of the loaves. What happened, then, might be described as multiplication by subtraction. It was “Omnific omnipotence,” as someone has called it, a clear illustration of His all-creating ability, flowing from His full deity. It is amusing to read Barclay’s attempt to explain away the miracle. He suggests that there are three ways to understand the event. First, we may understand it as a simple multiplication of loaves and fishes. This would be something unique, he admits, but then says that we should not be critical and condemnatory of others who must find another explanation. Second, others may understand the miracle as a kind of sacrament. Actually each individual only received the smallest morsal of food, which strengthened them for their journey, and they were content. They were really eating the spiritual food of

Christ, as we do at the Lord's Table. Third, we may understand it this way: The people really had food with them, but they were selfish and could not bring themselves to share what they had with others. They kept their food in their boxes and bags, until the Lord and His disciples began to share what they had with others. Then all began to share, and, before they knew what was happening, there was enough for all! Thus, the miracle was not the multiplication of the loaves and fishes; it was the transformation of selfish people into generous people at the touch of Christ! He concludes, "It was the miracle of the birth of love in grudging hearts. It was the miracle of changed men and women with something of Christ in them to banish the selfishness of their hearts. If that be so, then in the realest sense Christ fed them with Himself (why does Barclay capitalize the pronoun, if Christ is only a man?), and sent His Spirit to dwell within their hearts."5 None of the explanations of the modern critics that deny the supernatural are satisfying. The inadequacy of Barclay's view is seen if we note that upon the occurrence of the miracle the men present were so impressed with it that they said, "This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world" (John 6:14), and then they sought to make him a king (6:15).

The men interpreting (John 6:14). John concludes his account with, "Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world." It was clear to our Lord that the thoughts of the people were leading to the conviction that He was the Messianic King, but their thoughts only included a political leader who would restore the leadership of the nation to Israel. That is

why He immediately “constrained” His disciples to get into a boat, and to go before Him to the other side of the lake. They wished to install Him as a political sovereign. Would that be the response of a multitude which had only been influenced by the unselfish example of Jesus and His disciples? The very thought lays bare the emptiness of the specious logic of Barclay.

Conclusion

First, the miracle shows plainly that Jesus Christ is the Messiah of Israel, and that He has the right to sit on David’s throne.

Second, it is a beautiful lesson on the sufficiency of the Lord for our personal needs. It is clear from the sermon that follows that He claims to be “the bread of life,” or the bread of spiritual salvation (cf. 6:35). Bread is made by the cutting down of the grain in the fields, the bruising of it to separate the grain from the chaff, and then by the baking of the grain in the oven. One has only to read such passages as Isaiah 53:8, where the Messiah is said to be “cut off out of the land of the living,” and 53:5, where it is said that He “was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities,” and 53:4, where it is said that He was “smitten of God, and afflicted,” to see that He was put into the oven of divine judgment for sin, finally crying out, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46), as He became the sin offering and bore the punishment of sinners.

He also is sufficient for our continuing sustenance in the faith. The work that He began is continued by Him through the agency of the indwelling Spirit, who constantly continues the work of our sanctification,

concluding it only when we are finally conformed to the Lord (cf. Rom. 8:28-30).

Third, there is also a lesson here for seeking souls. The manner of the appropriation of the divine blessing is shown in the word “eaten” (cf. v. 13; Matt. 14:20). Eating, as the context will show, is a figurative way of saying coming, or believing. They are synonyms (cf. v. 35, 53-56, etc.)’

As Augustine said, crede et manducasti, or, “Trust and you have eaten.”

Do we have the Bread of Life? Perhaps a reference to Dante’s great work will help. In the 24th Canto of the Paradiso of his Divine Comedy, Dante has a beautiful passage in which he envisions himself being questioned by St. Peter as to his possession of faith.

“Good Christian, speak and manifest thyself: what thing is faith?” And Dante answers, “Whereat I followed on: ‘Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the argument of things which are not seen,’ and this I take to be its essence.”

Then Peter replies, “Right well hath now been traversed this coin’s alloy and weight; but tell me if thou hast it in thy purse.”

Then Dante replies, “Whereupon I: Yea, so bright and round I have it that for me there is no perhaps in its impression.”

That is a wonderful place to come to be, and I hope it becomes the place of all who have read the story of the feeding of the fifteen thousand. He is the Bread of Life and provides a complete personal salvation from the penalty and guilt of sin for all who come to Him to

receive it as a free gift in grace. Come now, while there is still opportunity.

1 Temple, p. xxiv

2 Maclaren, Expositions of Holy Scripture, St. Matthew, II, 1-2.

3 I believe Tenney said this, but I do not have documentation for it.

4 Maclaren, II, 6.

5 William Barclay, The Gospel of Matthew, II, 114-15.

The First Lord’s supper

The First Lord’s supper

S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.

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Not all of our readers will necessarily agree with Dr. Johnson’s strong Calvinistic position reflected in this article. While it is not the purpose of this publication to engage in controversy, the editor urges you to read this excellent and edifying study with an open Bible along with an open heart and mind. Questions and/or comments which may express a different point of view are welcome. However, no responses will be acknowledged or published which are not presented in a context of Christian love and courtesy.

Scripture Reading: Mark 14:22-25

Introduction

We have said before that atonement may well be the most important word in Christian theology. Derived from the preposition at and the old Middle English word onement, meaning union, it is that which Jesus Christ did in His death. Through atonement He restored the shattered relationship between sinners and a holy God. The price of His death was the means for the accomplishment of this. Thus, the Saviour’s death as a sacrifice is of the essence of Christianity.

Liberal Christianity has always resented this and has sought to keep the word Christianity and the word redemptive, but eliminate the historic Christian

conviction that Jesus Christ the Son of God, in His sacrificial death on the cross, wrought the reconciliation of men with God. For faith in a crucified Redeemer whose life is a ransom for sinners they have substituted a Christlike attitude, or a religious feeling, or even membership in "the redemptive community." It has been said that Liberal Christianity lacks the power to originate a church and can only exist as a parasite, growing upon some sturdier stock.1 I believe this to be true, but whether it is true or not, there is no doubt but that Liberal Christianity is not Christianity at all. The man who believes that he is redeemed by the blood of a divine Saviour dying for him upon a cross is of a totally different character from the man who thinks that he may redeem himself by a Christ-like attitude wrought out from within his own being. "There is indeed no alternative," Professor Warfield wrote, "The redeemed in the blood of Christ, after all is said, are a PEOPLE APART. Call them 'Christians,' or call them what you please, they are of a specifically different religion from those who know no such experience."2 There are a number of passages that express very clearly Christ's own teaching on His death, such as Matthew 20:28 (cf. Mark 20:45) and John 10:11, but none are clearer than the passage to which we now come in our study of the Lord's Supper, Mark 14:22-25 (cf. Matt. 26:26-29). In Mark 10:45 He taught that His death was a voluntary propitiatory ransom price paid vicariously for culprits under judgment. With that important revelation He overthrew all so-called "Moral Influence" theories of the atonement. In this passage He contends that His death is the voluntary, penal sacrifice that established a covenant providing for its recipients the remission of sins (the remission of sins is specifically mentioned in

the Matthaean parallel passage). There is church-founding and building power in these great truths.

The institution of the Lord's Supper took place at the time of the observance of the last Passover by the Lord and His apostles. The Passover ritual involved a preliminary course, with a word of blessing by the Paterfamilias spoken over a first cup of wine. The preliminary dish consisted of green herbs, bitter herbs, and a sauce made of fruit puree, set on a table containing also a bowl of salt water to remind them of the tears shed while they were slaves in Egypt. Then the meal proper was served, but not yet eaten. A second cup of wine is put on the table, while the second part of the ritual, the explanation of the meaning of the Passover by the Paterfamilias, takes place. The first part of the Hallel, Psalms 113-14, is sung here. At that time the third feature of the ritual, the partaking of the dinner itself, takes place. Grace is spoken by the Paterfamilias over the unleavened bread, the aphikomen (half a cake of unleavened bread). It is probably at this point that our Lord instituted the Lord's Supper. The meal itself consisted of the paschal lamb, the bread, bitter herbs dipped in sauce, the charoseth, and the lamb wrapped together. After prayer a third cup of wine was drunk. It is this third cup that is most likely the cup of the Lord's Supper, for it was called by the Jews, just as Paul calls the Christian cup, "the cup of blessing" (cf. 1 Cor. 10:10). Finally, the service was closed over a fourth cup, amid praise and the singing of the remainder of the Hallel, Psalms 115-18. It is against this background that Mark gives his account of the last passover and the first Lord's Supper, to which we turn now.3

The Ceremony of the Bread

Mark begins his account of the supper with, “And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them, and said, Take, eat; this is my body” (14:22). “Two lines meet in the guest chamber where Jesus is seated,” Schilder declares, “that of the Old and of the New Testament. Now the switch is thrown over. Fleshly Israel will no longer go up to celebrate the Passover according to the old law. Instead, spiritual Israel will rise from the table presently, will go out to celebrate a better Passover of fulfillment, the Holy Supper.”4 The altars of the Old Covenant ritual are now to be supplanted by the table of the New. The blood sacrifices will no longer be offered, for the blood sacrifice of the Lamb of God will be offered once and for all. Up to this time every believing eye looked forward to the coming of the Lamb of God. From now on believing eyes will look forward to the atoning work that shall shortly be accomplished.

For a moment think of the thoughts that crossed the minds of those who participated in this ritual. For the apostles, as they took the lamb, they reflected upon the deliverance that Israel experienced from the bondage to Pharaoh and the Egyptians. Perhaps they also reflected upon the bondage to sin and the freedom from its penalty they would enjoy by the suffering of the Antitype, although there is no clear evidence that they, as yet, understood very well what He would do. They, however, did reflect upon freedom from bondage. In our Lord’s case, however, all was different. When He took the lamb, He knew that it pointed to His soon death. In fact, the lamb condemned Him to death as the condition for the purchase of their freedom. They reflected upon

freedom and life, He upon the bondage of their sin and His death for them.

The opening words, “Jesus took bread,” are significant. The bread is taken first since the bread represents the body of Christ, and the body was the necessary means to the incarnation and the work He was to do (cf. Heb. 10:5). The bread is normally broken before it is eaten, and the breaking of it points to His death.

After taking the bread, blessing it, and breaking it, Jesus gave it to the disciples. The actions of our Lord indicate in themselves the divine initiative in all the saving work. He “gave it to them.” Like a good surveyor, who must place his transit-compass at the right point, or all of his measurements will be askew, so in all the discussion of spiritual things we must begin with God. Sin has brought disorder and chaos in the world, and, if we are to find the right place to begin in the matter of salvation, we must begin with God. Even H. G. Wells said, “Until man finds God, and is found of God, he begins at no beginning and comes to no ending.” In the Bible, theology begins with God, and salvation begins with his initiative in His provision of atonement and application of it to elect sinners. Jesus took bread, and Jesus gave it to them. We are not saved because we want God, but because He wants us and comes to us by the Son and the Spirit.

In the expression, “this is my body,” we have that which has been a theological battleground for centuries, as any student of the Reformation will know. We shall not have time to discuss the doctrines of transubstantiation, consubstantiation, and of the spiritual presence of Christ in the elements. There is much that can be said for the

view that Christ is spiritually present in the elements, but the overriding force of the words of our Lord to Paul has to do with the remembrance of Him in the supper. A memorial view, providing it does not suggest that the benefits of the supper are traceable to our work of remembering apart from the divine activity of enabling us to remember and receive the blessing from that remembering, appears to be most congenial with the Old Testament teaching and Paul's New Testament exposition. One thing is certain: Our Lord did not teach that the bread was literally His body. In the Council of Trent it is said, "if anyone shall say that in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist there remains the substance of bread and wine together with the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and shall deny that marvelous and unique conversion of the entire substance of wine into His Blood, while the species of bread and wine alone remain, a conversion which the Catholic Church most fittingly terms transubstantiation, let him be anathema." It is the conviction of this church that, while the appearances, or accidents (to use the technical terms), remain, such as the shape, size, color, and taste of bread remain, the senses are to be denied. "Judge not by the taste, but by faith," Cyril of Jerusalem affirmed.

The copula, "is," is not that of identity, but of symbolic relationship, — a common usage, both in Greek and in English. It is the usage found in Matthew 13:38, "the field is the world." That is, "is" is used in the sense of represents (cf. John 8:12; 10:9; 1 Cor. 10:4; Rev. 1:20). "How could it mean anything else when Christ sat there in His body, and His blood was in in His veins?"5 MacLaren asks.

Very interesting questions are raised by transubstantiation, some arising out of the fact that the Sacrament of the Eucharist was often celebrated in old cathedrals plentiful with rats and mice. The question inevitably arose, “If a mouse should come out while the service was in progress and eat of the bread, did the mouse eat the body of Christ?” When asked about this, Thomas Aquinas, the theologian of the Roman Church, was very consistent. He said that they did eat His body!

The “this” of “this is my body” includes the idea of the breaking of the bread. In other words, the full meaning of “this” is “this (broken) bread) is my body.” It, therefore, contains a reference to the sufferings and death of our Lord, and, as M’Neile says, “virtually includes the to huper humon (lit., which is for you) of S. Paul.”6 In the Lukan account the Lord adds the words, “this do in remembrance of me” (22:19), It is my opinion that this is implied in the other accounts. He says, “this is MY body.” What is most remarkable about the words is the fact that He was telling these young Jewish men that they should no longer celebrate the God-appointed festival of the Passover and substitute in its place a remembrance of Him! Do not think of Moses; think of Mel It must have been a staggering thing to them, if they thought upon the transformation of the ceremony, from Passover to Lord’s Supper. And, the fact that He made this significant demand of them, and the fact that they accepted this startling change of ceremony tell us much of the authority and dignity of the King. It was a plain statement to the effect that He was the true passover lamb, that His death is the real atoning sacrifice, and that His blood is the genuine spiritual safety of the believer. Marvelous indeed!

The Ceremony of the Cup

The background of this part of the ceremony is Exodus twenty-four and the ratification of the Old Covenant, a conditional covenant that had to do with the responsibility of the nation to obey the Mosaic Law. The ratification of the covenant was by means of a blood sacrifice. When Moses took the blood of the sacrifice and sprinkled it upon the people, he said, “Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words” (Exod. 24:8). It is the statement that our Lord alludes to in His ratification of the New Covenant here.

The opening words of verse four, “This is my blood of the new testament,” are probably the most important statement of the section on the doctrine of the atonement. The word, “blood,” is important and stresses the fact that the death He would die was a violent death by sacrifice (cf. Num. 35:33). “Blood” means more than simply death; it signifies violent death. It was that kind of death that Jesus must die. It must be a sacrificial death.7 The term, “new covenant,” is, of course, a reference to Jeremiah 31:31-34, referring to the promise of the Lord to provide the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the forgiveness of sins. It was an unconditional covenant, that is, the promises contained within it were unilaterally to be fulfilled by God. They had no work to do to inherit them. It was wholly of grace. This covenant included within it not only the true believing national seed of Abraham, the remnant according to the election of grace, but also all of the believing Gentile seed of Abraham, for the latter were also included in the covenantal program (cf. Gen. 12:1-3; Rom. 4:9-25; 11:1-36; Gal. 3:1-29, etc.).

Covenants were concluded by sacrifices, so the statement of our Lord is to be understood as referring to a New Covenant grounded upon a new and final sacrifice.

The term, “shed,” is also important. First, notice that it is “shed,” not “spilled.” The reference is to the shedding of the blood of a sacrifice. A violent death is again in the foreground. It could hardly be stressed more that there can be no special relationship between God and His chosen people apart from an atoning, substitutionary shedding of the blood of a sacrifice (cf. Heb. 9:22). And in this case the price of our redemption is the highest price ever paid for anything in this universe. Not one drop of it can be wasted, an incidental reason why the death of our Lord and the intent of the sacrifice was directed toward a particular people, His elect. It is for them that the blood was shed. Universal redemption founders at this point, for ultimately, if it does not fail by crashing against the Scylla of universalism, it is swallowed up in the Charybdis of its doctrine of a frustrated deity. Sovereignty, thus, becomes a mockery, as one of the poets put it:

The universe He fain would save,

But longs for what He cannot have;

We therefore worship, praise, and laud

A DISAPPOINTED, HELPLESS GOD.8

The words, “for many” (Gr., huper pollon), include all the elect, being taken from Isaiah 53:11-12 and, thus, are inclusive of elect Israel and all who form part of the Abrahamic Covenant. As the Apostle Paul indicates in Romans eleven, we elect Gentiles partake of the

covenant promises by grace. Thus, the words refer to the definite company of God's elect, but we should note that He says, "many." We are not to think of the elect as a small company, as if our God is a little God. The number of the redeemed is innumerable (cf. Rev. 7:9-17). If, as many believe, the term "many" is a Hebraic way of saying all — and there is good support for this view —then, of course, the reference is to all without distinction, not all without exception.

The practical importance of the doctrine of unconditional election and of particular redemption is emphasized by George Whitefield in one of his characteristic statements," This is one reason, among many others, why I admire the doctrine of election, and am convinced that it should have a place in gospel ministrations, and should be insisted on with faithfulness and care. It has a natural tendency to rouse the soul out of its carnal security, and therefore many carnal men cry out against it; whereas universal redemption is a notion sadly adapted to keep the soul in its lethargic, sleepy condition; and therefore so many natural men admire and applaud it."9 The preposition, "for," probably indicates substitution, the sense of the passage apparently demanding it (cf. Matt. 26:28).10 The phrase, "for the remission of sins," is found in Matthew 26:28, but omitted here. It refers to the goal of the sacrifice. The covenant blood is shed for the oblivion of the sins of His people. The end of the death is pardon, extended on the ground of the death. Remission is the remitting of merited punishment and, therefore, it is a judicial term. His death is a penal sacrifice; it is a payment for the penalty of sin. The "many" bear the penalty in their substitute and go free. Thus, in this

passage, as in Matthew 20:28 and Mark 10:45, there is a reference to the voluntary, penal substitutionary death of the Lamb of God. We are sometimes told that Christ did not teach the doctrine of the atonement but, if He established the Lord's Supper (and no one denies it), then what did He mean by these symbols but that His death was an atonement for sin?

The Lord's Supper and the Great Supper

The exaltation of Christ (Mark 14:25). This saying converts the memorial into a prophecy of the second coming and the Messianic Kingdom. The New Covenant is to issue in a new day. And the first implication of His words is that He shall survive His death and reach by resurrection His exalted state and position of King (cf. Luke 22:16, 18, 19: cf. Mark 14:9).

The consummation of the Kingdom (14:25). Luke uses the term, "fulfilled" (22:16), stressing that the program of redemption climaxes in the Kingdom festival. He said that they were to never forget His death, implying that the power of His death had eternal meaning. The Supper, would, therefore, be a standing expression of His mistaken estimate of Himself and His work, if it were not to find its full perfecting in the life beyond the grave.

The convention of the redeemed (14:25). The phrase "with you" is added to "drink it" of this verse in the Matthaean version, and it marks the participation of the redeemed in the fulfillment of His work's purpose. The cross and the communion lead on to the coming and kingdom. Good Friday via Easter leads on to Epiphany. In the meantime we meet often and feed on the bread and wine of our salvation.

Conclusion

First, there is written unmistakably on the Supper, then, the teaching of Jesus Christ on His death. He not only wishes it to be kept in thankful remembrance, rather than His life, His miracles, and His ethics, but He desires one aspect of it to be held high above everything else. It is this: He is the true passover lamb, whose blood sacrifice under punishment establishes a New Covenant with the forgiveness of sins for His people (cf. Matt. 1:21). He put aside the ancient festival and substituted His own, an act either of extreme arrogance and rebellion or of the calm consciousness that He was the one to whom it pointed. A genuine believer can have no doubt about the right answer to that question.

Second, Christ's teaching was given to believers, men who had found virtue in His blood that was to be shed, in the full atonement that would be made. They, like you who believe, had come to admire His justice in the demand that there be a full payment for sin, and to love Him for His love in the provision of the payment, the costly sacrifice of the Son of God's love, the Lord Jesus Christ. May that be the response of all who hear or read of Him.

1 Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, "The Essence of Christianity and the Cross of Christ," The Person and Work of Christ, ed. by Samuel G. Craig (Philadelphia, 1950), p. 530.

2 Ibid.

3 Cf. Joachim Jeremias, The Eucharistic Words of Jesus (London, 1966), pp. 57-60; Edersheim, II, 490-512.

4 Schilder, p. 157.

5 Maclaren, II, 176.

6 Alan Hugh M'Neile, The Gospel According to St. Mattew (London, 1952), p. 382.

7 Leon Morris, The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross (Grand Rapids, 1955), p. 114.

8 Peter H. Elersveld, "The Divine Initiative," If I Had Only One Sermon to Preach, ed. by Ralph G. Turnbull (Grand Rapids, 1966), p. 51.

9 George Whitefield, "Why Preach Electing Grace?," a letter from George Whitefield to John Wesley, December 24, 1740 (Eldon College, N.C., n.d.), p. 8.

10 William L. Lane, The Gospel According to Mark: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes (Grand Rapids, 1974), p. 507. Speaking of "many," Lane writes, "The 'many' are the redeemed community who have experienced the remission of their sins in and through Jesus' sacrifice and so are enabled to participate in the salvation provided under the new covenant" (ibid.).

The First Passover

The First Passover

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This instructive and edifying article is the first of four studies on the Lord's Supper.

Scripture Reading: Exodus 12:1-13

Introduction

The Lord Jesus left the Church two ordinances to observe until He comes again. First, He left the church baptism in water, which emphasizes one's entrance into the church, the body of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 12:12-13). Second, He left the church the Lord's Supper, which emphasizes one's continuance in the body, or life in it.

An ordinance is a symbolic rite that sets forth primary facts of the Christian truth and is universally obligatory among believers, for they could not be understood by others. If one who had never believed were to come upon a baptism in water, particularly one in a river or similar body of water, it would be difficult for him to see it as anything other than a swimming party, or perhaps a game. And if one were to come into an observance of the Lord's Supper with no knowledge of the Christian faith, it would seem to him to be nothing more than a common meal, although he might marvel at how little the individuals ate and drank! Ordinances are understood in their spiritual meaning by those who have some

conception of Christian truth, usually believers. Full understanding could only be the possession of believers.

The Roman Catholic Church claims that there are five other ordinances: ordination, confirmation, matrimony, extreme unction, and penance, but Protestants have refused to accept these rites as ordinances, since they lack Biblical support.

In the New Testament and in common practice various terms are used for the Lord's Supper, such as the "communion" (cf. 1 Cor. 10:16), the "Lord's Table" (10:21), the Eucharist (11:24; the term refers to the thanksgiving that accompanied and characterized it), used the "breaking of bread" (cf. Acts 2:42). Perhaps the most commonly used term is the Lord's Supper," a term that stresses that He is the host, and we believers are His guests.

The Lord's Supper should be the highlight of the corporate worship of the church. In the description of the meeting at Troas on Paul's Third Missionary Journey Luke wrote, "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to BREAK BREAD, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart the next day, and continued his speech until midnight" (Acts 20:7). From this passage it seems clear that the primary purpose of the meeting was not Paul's preaching, although that was important, but the observance of the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. In our day we are inclined to reverse the matter and make the sermon the pre-eminent thing in our meetings. It should also be noted that Paul and his friends waited for seven days in Troas to observe the Supper with the saints. Evidently he considered it important. That, too, is contrary to quite a bit of

contemporary church practice, the Supper being observed generally on a monthly or quarterly schedule. It is, however, the only act of worship for which the Lord gave special direction.He regards it seriously, and one can only deplore the neglect of the ordinance in our churches.

The roots of the Supper extend back into the Old Testament to its parallel, the Passover Feast. The Passover was a memorial of a physical deliverance through sacrifice, the deliverance being from Egypt's bondage by means of the slain Passover lambs, whose blood was put on the doorposts and lintels of the houses of the children of Israel to escape the death of their firstborn sons by the destroying angel. The Lord's Supper corresponds in a real way to the Passover, for it is the memorial of a spiritual deliverance from the bondage of sin through the slain Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, who suffered on the cross at Calvary. The Passover was an anticipation of the future fulfillment in the coming of the Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus. It was observed "till He should come." The Lord's Supper is also an anticipation of a future fulfillment in the second coming and kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. It, too, is observed "till He should come." The parallel is clear, and one sees how fitting it is to begin the study of the Lord's Supper with a review of the Passover Feast of Israel. And we begin with a review of the background.

The Preparation of a Deliverer

The birth of Moses: supernatural preservation (cf. Exod. 2:1-10). The parallel of Moses' life with our Lord's is set out by Stephen in his great speech before the Sanhedrin (cf. Acts 7:35-37). The two were deliverers, and Stephen

sees clearly that Moses adumbrates the greatest of the deliverers, the Lord Himself.

The birth and supernatural preservation of Moses is described in Exodus 2:1-10, a passage that underlines the faith of his parents (cf. Heb. 11:23). It is an encouraging story of how insignificant Hebrew slaves become significant (cf. Exod. 6:20; 1 Cor. 12:12-27). Divine favor rests upon the child Moses, and he is remarkably preserved and, in fact, providentially brought up in the household of the great world ruler himself, the Pharaoh. By this he was given invaluable training in preparation for his life's work. What an illustration of divine providence that Moses should be raised in the home of the rich and powerful, where he could obtain the finest of education and experience in leadership! And that he should be nursed by his own mother, contrary to the expressed will of the ruler of the land is truly a miracle of divine power (cf. Exod. 1:22).

The preparation of Moses (Exod. 2:11-25). There were two stages in the preparation of Moses for his talk of deliverance. The first might be called the Egyptian preparation, for Moses was brought up in the house of Pharaoh. As Stephen says in his famous sermon, "And Moses was learned in all wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds" (Acts 7:22). It would seem from this that Moses attained to great heights in philosophy, in statesmanship, and in leadership. In fact, there is some tradition to the effect that the expression, "mighty in deeds," refers to military prowess. Josephus says that, while Moses was still a relatively young man, the Ethiopians invaded Egypt and routed the army sent against them. They then threatened Memphis, and in the panic that followed the leaders consulted the oracles,

and on their recommendation Moses was given command of the royal troops. He went into combat, surprised the Ethiopians, defeated them and conquered their principal city, Meroe. He returned to Egypt a hero, burdened with the spoils of the victory.

But all of this Moses abandoned for identification with the people of God. As the writer of Hebrews puts it, “By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharoh’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward” (Heb. 11:24-26). It was renunciation far greater and more significant than our worldly ones, such as Edward’s VIII’s for “the woman I love.”

The second stage of Moses’ preparation may be called the desert preparation, for he found it necessary later to flee to the backside of the desert and remain there for forty years, before he began his work of deliverance. Bible teachers have often called attention to the three periods of Moses’ life of one hundred and twenty years. In the first forty years spent in Egypt it is said that we learn that God can do nothing with a man trying to be somebody. In the second forty years, spent in the desert, we learn that He can do nothing for a man trying to be nobody. While in the last forty years we learn what God can do with a man who has learned the first two lessons.

The commission of Moses (cf. Exod. 3:1 — 4:31). The story of the commissioning of Moses by Yahweh at His theophany is well-known. He is told, “Go, and gather the elders of Israel together, and say unto them, The Lord

God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared unto me, saying, I have surely visited you, and seen that which is done to you in Egypt. And I have said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt unto the land of the Canaanites, and Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, unto a land flowing with milk and honey. And they shall hearken to thy voice; and thou shalt come, thou and the elders of Israel, unto the king of Egypt, and ye shall say unto him, The Lord God of the Hebrews hath met with us: and now let us go, we beseech thee, three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God" (Exodus 3:16-18).

The Contest With Pharaoh

Thus, the contest began. We do not have the time or space in this study to recount the struggle with Pharaoh waged by Moses for the Israelites. We know that Moses overcame the reluctant king by performing by the power of God thirteen miracles. The miracles were in the form of judgments upon the Egyptians.

The struggle is a Biblical illustration of the overthrow of the Satanic kingdom by our Lord Jesus Christ, with Pharaoh an example of the opposition of Satan to the will of God to deliver His people. One thinks of all the great New Testament passages that deal with the struggle between our Lord Jesus Christ and the devil (cf. Col. 2:15; Heb. 2:14-15; 1 John 3:8; Mark 12:29). Our Lord by His death on the cross overcame the hold of the devil over man through sin. There the strong man was bound, and the people of God have gone free.

The climactic miracle and judgment is that of the Passover rite and the resulting death of the firstborn sons in the homes that were not protected by the Lord from the destroying angel on account of the blood on the two side posts and the lintel of the doors of the houses. As a result of the judgment the Egyptians finally determined to let the children of Israel go, Pharaoh saying, “Rise up, and get you forth among my people, both ye and the children of Israel; and go, serve the Lord, as ye have said. Also take your flocks and your herds, as ye have said, and be gone; and bless me also.” And Moses, in writing about it later, adds, “And the Egyptians were urgent upon the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste; for they said, We are all dead men!” (Exod. 12:31-33).

The Ceremony of Israel’s Deliverance

The description of the lamb (Exodus 12:1-10). The account of the Passover lamb is a beautiful picture of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world. As Paul puts it, “For even Christ, our passover, is sacrificed for us” (cf. 1 Cor. 5:7). The ceremony was for Israel the beginning of the year, for what it pictures, divine redemption, is the beginning of life for us. It is out of this great type of the sufferings of the Messiah and His consequent salvation that all the following Biblical pictures of the lamb as the animal of sacrificial deliverance come (cf. Isa. 52:13 —53:12; John 1:29; 1 Pet. 1:18-19; Rev. 5:1-14, etc.).

We shall only comment on a few of the leading features of the illustration. In the first place, the lamb of sacrifice was to be one “without blemish,” a phrase that ultimately marks the sinlessness of the Lord Jesus Christ

(cf. 1 Pet. 1:18-19). Only a sinless Son of God can be an effectual sacrifice for other men. Otherwise He must die for his own sins. Jesus, however, was without sin and, thus, qualified on the human level to be our sacrifice. Of course, His sacrifice must also have infinite value, and that infinite value flows from the fact that He was not only fully man, but also completely God.

The lamb was to be kept from the day of its choice, the tenth day, to the fourteenth day, evidently that they might be sure that it was, indeed, without blemish. The delay suggests to us the time of our Lord's earthly life, by which He demonstrated His sinlessness and qualifications for His saving work. He was at His baptism approved by God in the voice from heaven, which said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (cf. Matt. 3:17). Further, men approved His character as one that was without spot. Pilate said of Him, "I find in Him no fault at all" (cf. John 18:38). The dying thief said of Him, speaking to his companion, "Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we, indeed, justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds. But this man hath done nothing amiss" (cf. Luke 23:40-41). Even Judas said, "I have sinned in that I betrayed innocent blood" (cf. Matt. 27:4). And, to cap it off, the demons cried out, "What have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? Art thou come to destroy us? I know thee, who thou art, the Holy One of God" (Mark 1:24).

And finally, let us just note this point. The children of Israel were told to "kill" the passover lamb in the evening (cf. Matt. 16:21). It was not the life that Jesus lived that saves men; it is the death that He died. Thus, the passover sacrifice must be slain. There is no spiritual

life available for men apart from the shedding of blood (cf. Heb. 9:22).

The deliverance of the Lord (Exod. 12:12-13). In the twelfth and thirteenth verses the Lord gives Moses instruction concerning His actions in the deliverance of Israel from the Egyptian bondage. He informs Moses that He intends to “pass through” Egypt and smite the firstborn in the land, both of man and of beast. It will be an execution of judgment against all the gods of Egypt and their people. There will be death in every house (cf. v. 30), either the death of the firstborn or the death of a lamb. What a meaningful fact! The spiritual counterpart of the event is clear. All must die because of sin. And all do die, either in their sins under the judgment of God personally, or in the person of their Representative, the Lord Jesus Christ. The unsaved die in their sins; the saved die in their Substitute. And further, having died in their Substitute, heaven has no further claims against them. They are free forever. What a magnificent salvation we have through the Substitute provided through grace! Oh! may He have our gratitude and loving service forever.

In the thirteenth verse God says, after reminding Moses that the blood is to be put on the door posts and the lintel, “And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt.” The verb translated here by, “pass over,” is not a word of omission, but of protection. It is not that the Lord will skip over the houses with the blood to those that do not have it. The Hebrew word pasach is not easy to define, for its usages are not numerous. It has been given the

meaning of to limp (cf. 1 Kings 18:21) or to leap over. I think the clue to its meaning is found in Isaiah 31:5, where it refers to the protection of Jerusalem by Yahweh. He is compared to birds that hover over their young with outspread wings, to protect them. The idea is set out in more detail in verse twenty-three where we read, “For the Lord will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when he seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts, the Lord will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come into your houses to smite you.” Since the destroying angel exists under God’s control, he cannot enter the houses under the protecting hand of God. One is reminded of Peter’s words in the same chapter in which he refers to the Lord Jesus as the Lamb without blemish and spot, “who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (cf. 1 Pet. 1:5).1 There are some important spiritual truths illustrated here. In the first place, it is clear that the safety of the Israelites depended upon the blood shed and sprinkled on the doorposts. It did not depend upon their sense of sin (a savior in part, then), nor upon the possession of certain graces, nor upon any spiritual experiences they may have had. It depended upon the blood. With the blood in the proper place they were safe. And our spiritual salvation depends upon the blood of the cross alone. With that sprinkled upon the doorposts of our hearts we are as safe as a prophet or an apostle. It is the blood of the cross that is the foundation of our salvation.

In the second place, the certainty of their salvation depended upon the Word of God. It was he who promised that, if they would put the blood on the door, He would pass over them. So, while their safety

depended upon the blood, their certainty, or assurance of safety, depended upon the faithfulness of God to His Word and their confidence in Him. It was entirely possible for some, who had put the blood on the door, to still be in a state of anxiety over their safety. Their safety, however, did not depend upon their state of mind, but simply upon the presence of the blood upon the doorpost. So, in our salvation our safety depends upon the blood of Christ, shed on the cross, but our assurance of safety depends upon our confidence in the Word of God.

The duty of the people (Exod. 12:21-23). The duty of the Israelites is summed up in the words of verse twenty-two, “strike the lintel and the two side posts with the blood that is in the basin.” The act corresponds to the act of faith in New Testament salvation, for that is the means of the application of the blood of Christ to the heart.

Conclusion

This is, then, the root of the Lord’s Supper, for it is out of the Passover Supper that the Lord’s Supper came.

The Passover was the celebration of a great deliverance from Pharaoh and Egypt. The Lord’s Supper is the celebration of a great deliverance from Satan and bondage to sin, its guilt and condemnation.

Two things were essential for deliverance. First, there must be good news from God, and there was that. It was the good news of deliverance by the blood, a means provided by God. That in this age is the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, based upon the shedding of the blood of redemption.

Then, second, the good news was to be believed and applied. The Israelites had to believe Moses and apply the blood to the doorposts of their houses. It was not the lamb, nor the blood of the lamb, but the shed blood of the lamb sprinkled on the doorposts that brought deliverance. So, in the present age it is possible to believe that Christ is a Saviour, but that does not save. It is possible to believe that His blood has been shed for salvation, but that does not save. Saving knowledge is that which comprises the fact that He is the Lamb of God, that His blood has been shed for sinners, and that His blood has been shed for me. That kind of knowledge rests in the merits of a sacrificial Lamb of God for salvation, and in no human works of any kind. May the Lord enable us to see this and realize that "There is a fountain filled with blood, Drawn from Immanuel's veins, And sinners plunged beneath that flood Lose all their guilty stains."

1 Cf. R. Alan Cole, Exodus: An Introduction and Commentary (London: The Tyndale Press, 1973), pp. 108, 110; Edward J. Young, The Book of Isaiah Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1969), II, 378-79.

The First Sign: Water Into Wine

The First Sign:

Water Into Wine

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This is the first of his series of studies on the seven signs of the Lord Jesus Christ recorded in John's Gospel (see John 20:30-31).

Scripture Reading; John 2:1-11

Introduction

Webster has defined joy as, "The emotion excited by the acquisition of good." It is one of the things that we all desire. It is also one of the things that the New Testament commands believers to possess. For example, Paul the Apostle writes in the Philippian Letter these words, "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord" (3:1). And, as if that is not enough exhortation on the subject, in the very next chapter he doubles the appeal with, "Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice" (4:4).

The incident before us in the exposition of the Gospel of John, the first of the signs John has recorded in his book, the turning of the water into wine at Cana of Galilee, has been called by some teachers, "Joy in Cana." Well, that is not surprising since the incident at which the miracle took place was a wedding in that village, the village of Nathaniel, and weddings are notable for the atmosphere

of joy that pervades them. The conviviality that characterized the wedding in Cana was immeasurably enhanced and eternally emblazoned in the annals of human history by the mighty work that Jesus did for the feast. By His miracle the joy of the occasion was enlarged, for His wine was the best of that which was drunk at the wedding feast, and it was also the means for the prolonging of the celebration.

If the incident may, indeed, be called, “Joy in Cana,” it also reveals the way that joy is obtained, namely, by the activity of the omnipotent Lord, who is worthy of our personal trust. It is He who ultimately is the secret of all joy, especially spiritual joy, for eternal redemption is found in Him and in His saving work. And when men find Him a new song of joy becomes theirs. The psalmist speaks of this when he writes, “I waited patiently for the Lord, and He inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God; many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord” (40:1-3).

The futility of the world’s hopes, ideas, and principles to provide such joy indicates the superior nature of the truth of God.

The critics have sometimes been unkind to this account, calling it a “luxury” miracle, since it cannot be said to be a miracle of mercy to men, such as the works of healing and restoration that He performed continually. What was there that made it necessary for Him to supply a wedding party with wine? What lasting benefits were conferred upon those present? I think that Tasker is

right, however, when he comments, “But these are the wrong questions to ask; for none of the miracles of Jesus were kind actions to alleviate human distress and nothing more. They were, as this Gospel invariably calls them, signs displaying the glory of Jesus and the wonder of His redeeming love.”1 Since this is the first of the signs of the book, it is proper to ask, particularly of this one, what its purpose is, or what is the symbolism of the water turned into wine. There are several things that may well have been in the minds of the Spirit and of the apostle in using it in his book. In the first place, the reference to the six waterpots of stone, used by the Jews in purifying of hands and vessels, may be designed to show the inadequacy of Judaism as a means of salvation. They were empty, but Jesus filled them with that which satisfied the celebrants. What Judaism cannot do, the Son of God can.

In the second place, the wine, called in the Old Testament “the blood of grapes” (cf. Gen. 49:11), is a fitting symbol of the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, who shed His blood for the salvation of the world, of both Jews and Gentiles.

And, third, the wine is also that which “makes glad the heart of man” (Psa. 104:15}, and it is a fitting symbol of the joy that accompanies the salvation won by the sufferings of the Son of God.

But, let us now turn to the description that the Apostle John gives us of the occasion.

The Situation

John’s account of the wedding feast is given in verses one and two, “And the third day there was a marriage in

Cana, of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there. And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage." The wedding was in the town of Nathaniel, and he may have been responsible for the invitation that was given to our Lord and His company. There evidently were seven in His party, if the disciples of chapter one are intended by the word "disciples" in verse two of chapter two. Someone has suggested that the seven in the Lord's party may have been one of the reasons why there came to be a lack of wine at the feast. That, of course, is speculative.

The Sign

Mary's request (John 2:3). The apostle continues in his account, writing, "And when they lacked wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto Him, They have no wine." Why she turned to Him is not explained by John, and we can only guess what led her to turn to Him. Possibly it was the reports of the disciples on the recent events, described in John 1:19-51, particularly the incident in which He demonstrated such supernatural knowledge in telling Nathaniel that He saw him under the fig tree when He was not in his presence. Possibly, too, the Baptist had told the disciples of the strange thing that happened at the baptism of the Lord, when the Spirit of God descended like a dove from heaven and abode on Him.

Further, Mary had clear knowledge of the supernatural birth of the Lord Jesus, both from the words of the angel to her (cf. Luke 1:31-35) and from her own experience. She has gone through many years now with her life under suspicion, for few believed her story of the birth of her Son. One can appreciate what the years of

suspicion would have done to a lesser person, and one can also appreciate how much she must have yearned for vindication, both for herself and for Joseph, and then for her Son.

Thus Mary's words to the Lord, "They have no wine," were full of unexpressed yearning. We might translate between the lines and come up with, "They have no wine; therefore this is a beautiful occasion for you to prove yourself to be the promised Messiah, as I know you are."

The Lord's reply (John 2:4). The Lord's reply is abrupt, "Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come." A great deal of discussion has taken place over the proper rendering of the word translated by "woman" in the King James Version. "Woman" seems almost too harsh to us, and the tendency is to soften it in translation. But "lady" will not do either. That word may have been all right in the Middle Ages, but it is used primarily by tramps now. The word as used by the Lord is a word that does connote a slight rebuke, but it is not a personal one. It suggests that Mary does not fully understand yet the purpose of the work that He is doing, nor the timetable by which He is working. It is part of Mary's painful education, alluded to by Simeon years before, when in the temple he finally saw the Lord's Messiah, for whom he had been looking, and said to the mother of our Lord, "Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also" (cf. Luke 2:35). Mary, then, is told by the Lord that the natural relation does not hold any ground upon which to ask him to perform the sign. That time is pre-cross time. Afterwards she may call upon Him as Lord to perform mighty tasks for her and for the saints. The "hour," of course, is the time of the cross,

with the mighty change of age that shall take place then (cf. 8:20; 17:1; 20:17). At that time the saints are invited to call upon Him (cf. 14:13-14).

Mary's response (John 2:5). Mary urges the servants, "Whatever he saith unto you, do it," evidently undisturbed by our Lord's sharp comment to her. Incidentally, one notices that Mary, the virgin mother, says, "Whatever HE saith to you, do it," not, "Whatever I say unto you, do it." One gains the impression that Mary would hardly agree with the claims put forward concerning her as co-remptrix with Christ.

The Lord's reaction (John 2:6-10). The description of the size of the waterpots indicates the greatness of the gift of the wine. The waterpots together contained from sixty to one hundred and fifty gallons in all, enough for 2400 servings.

The actions of our Lord are very impressive, for there were no actions at all. Everything is accomplished by His creative word (cf. 1:1, 14). It is a visible. and contemporary reminder of the, "And God said, Let there be light, and there was light" (cf. Gen. 1:3). Mary had said, "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it," and now we see why (cf. v. 5).

The words of the governor of the feast, when he tasted the wine, are a testimony to the quality of the wine created by the Lord, "Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine and, when men have well drunk, then that which is worse; but thou halt kept the good wine until now" (cf. v. 10). There is a bit of emphasis on the words, "Every man," at the beginning of his statement, affording a perhaps unconscious acknowledgment of the fact that He is more than a man.

The Significance of the Sign

The natural significance. John concludes his account with the words, “This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana, of Galilee, and manifested forth His glory; and His disciples believed on Him” (v. 10). The word “glory” reminds us of the statement of 1:14, the miracle at Cana being one of the steps in the total manifestation that led to the conviction that He was “the only begotten of the Father.” The hour of glorification that climaxed the manifestation was the cross (cf. 17:1).

John calls the miracle a “sign,” and it is important to understand something of the sense of the term. The word used draws attention from the deed done to the doer of the deed. It is the word used for a miracle that reminds the reader that the important aspect of it is not only the manifestation of power, but also its significance in the spiritual sphere of things. A sign in John’s mind appears to be a work of power in the sphere of the creation that points to a truth in the sphere of the new creation, the sphere of redemption (cf. 6:14, 35; 9:16, 5; 12:18; 11:23-27, etc.). It is a miracle as a proof of His divine power and majesty, according to William Hendriksen.2 Now that this was a story that pointed beyond the mere physical and local aspects of things is indicated by its omissions. Who was the bridegroom? Who was the bride? What relation did Jesus have with the wedding? And what is it that accounts for the presence of Mary at the feast? Was Nathaniel the best man, and is that why they were all there? Cf. 21:2. Many questions might be put to the author, but for him everything gathers around the ministry of our Lord there. He is the important figure at the wedding. As Hendriksen puts it, “In the full light of day stands Christ;

all the rest is shadow."3 As I see it, the miracle has a natural significance, as well as what might be called a typical significance. The very first thing it sets forth, as its most obvious meaning, is the creative power of the Lord Jesus Christ. Written over the sign is the "signature of divinity," as someone has said. George Reith has cited the ancient saying, "The conscious water saw its Lord and blushed!"4 And, secondly, in the natural sphere one can note with interest that the sign is an indication of our Lord's hallowing of family life (cf. Gen. 2:18; 1 Tim. 4:3). The sacred interpenetrates the secular. The Lord participates in the festivities of human life and experience; He was truly one of us and blessed the event of the marriage with His presence and gracious power. God is pleased in the ceremonies which He has given us.

His general approval of festive times may be deduced from the event (cf. Gen. 24:27; Jud. 14:17). He is not, as some say, the "pale Galilean," a view of Christ that has done great damage to Christianity. He is not to be likened to a monk, but to a vital, living, working citizen of the community.

The typical significance. There are several things that set out the typical significance of the sign. In the first place, it seems to me that the sign is one of the inauguration of the new age. It is to be noted that, contrary to a number of the signs that follow, there is no accompanying discourse that gives the meaning of the sign. I, therefore, think that one must interpret it in the light of the gospel as a whole. Its aim is to show the inadequacy of Judaism as it existed in the time of our Lord. "They have no wine" is a vivid reminder of the status of the religion at that day.

Our Lord's reply to Mary, in which He mentions His "hour" is no whim of fancy. He wishes to make it clear that what He does has relationship to the cross, where He will pour out the wine of His blood for the salvation of the lost. It was the first miracle done in four hundred years, and it is, thus, a kind of frontispiece of the gospel. It says that the best wine is that of the new age, provided by the Lord Jesus in His saving sacrificial work. Ultimately what He is to do will be celebrated in the Lord's Supper as His people eat the bread and drink the wine.

There is also here an illustration of the new birth, in that there is a miraculous transformation of the water into wine and, further, the great majority of the guests, like the governor of the feast "knew not from whence it was," that is, the wine. But it is perhaps wise not to make too much of this, since we do not have any definite evidence that this was the intent of the sign.

There is certainly a suggestion of the fact that the Lord Jesus in His life and ministry shall give a new joy to those who partake of His provision of life (cf. Psa. 104:15; Jud. 9:13). The prophet Isaiah has spoken of Him as a "man of sorrows," and that is true, but He is also a man of joy, as this gospel plainly testifies (cf. 17:13). The world's banquet always runs out, but our Lord's gifs have the note of infinity about them. His gifts of spiritual blessing become better every day, and the very best is saved for last. In heaven itself I am sure that all of His people shall in beautiful chorus exclaim, "Thou hast kept the best wine for now." As for the world all its pleasures and occupations remind one of the words of the Book of Proverbs, spoken as a warning against

drunkenness, “At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder” (Prov. 23:32).

The personal significance. There is a personal significance that emerges from the incident, too. It is set out in verse eleven, “This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana, of Galilee, and manifested forth His glory; and His disciples believed on Him” (v. 11). One is reminded at this point of the statement of the purpose of the gospel in 20:30-31.

What happened to the other guests at the wedding feast is veiled in silence, with the silence itself perhaps indicating that the impression of the miracle left no profound or lasting impression upon them.5 Godet’s words are useful here, “What passed in the minds of the other witnesses of this scene? John’s silence leads us to suppose that the impression produced was neither profound nor lasting. And this because the miracle, in order to act efficaciously, must be understood as a sign (vi. 26), and because to this end certain moral predispostions are necessary. The impression of amazement which the guests experienced, not connecting itself with any spiritual need or any struggle of conscience, was soon effaced by the distractions of life.”6 On the other hand, perhaps they never even knew what had happened, an even more pitiful possibility.

The disciples “Believed on Him.” That is the proper result of the miracle. It touched His people. Like Sir James Simpson, the famous Edinburgh physician, who discovered chloroform’s use as an anesthetic, and who, when asked what he considered to be his greatest discovery, answered, “That I have a Savior,” these, too, made the great discovery, that they had a Savior. My

prayer for the reader is that they as well may make the greatest discovery of all, that there is a Savior from sin. His name is Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God. Come to Him and receive the forgiveness of sins!

1 Tasker, p. 55.

2 Hendriksen, I, 117-18.

3 Ibid., I, 118.

4 George Reith, The Gospel According to St. John (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1889), I, 38.

5 Godet, II, 14.

6 Ibid.

The Genealogy of Jesus Christ

The Genealogy of Jesus Christ

S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.

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Scripture Reading: Matthew 1:1-17

"To begin a Gospel with a genealogy," Maclaren comments, "strikes us modern Westerns as singular, to say the least of it. To preface the Life of Jesus with an elaborate table of descents through forty-one generations, and then to show that the forty-second had no real connection with the forty-first, strikes us as irrelevant."1 Why, then, if the author knew that Jesus was not Joseph's son, was he at such pains to draw up this elaborate genealogy? Why did he think it was so important that he must open his story with it? Two things may be said in answer to this. First, the ruling idea of Matthew's Gospel is that Jesus Christ is the promised Messiah, Son of David and Seed of Abraham. And, second, he knew that full rights to sonship were given by legal adoption just as surely as by actual descent. When Joseph took Mary and her Son into his home, he took her Son as his own, giving Him his own legal status and position.

It is also true that the Jews were very interested in genealogies. The very expression with which Matthew

opens his gospel, “the book of the generation,” was a common expression to them. It meant the record of a man’s lineage, and in the Old Testament we find frequent lists of the generations of well-known men (cf. Genesis 5:1; 10:1; 11:10, 27). The Hebrews set the greatest possible store on the purity of a man’s family tree, and it would be a fact of great significance if the pedigree of Jesus Christ could be traced back through David the great king to Abraham, their father.2 What did the evangelist desire to placard in this introduction to his work? The answer is surely found in the very first statement, “The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the SON OF DAVID, the SON OF ABRAHAM” (1:1). He is the true Messianic King, and He is the genuine Seed of Abraham, through whom the whole human race is to be blessed. Therefore, He is, as Stonehouse has beautifully expressed it, “no isolated figure, no mere innovator, but one who can be adequately measured only in terms of what has gone before.”3 To catch the full force of the Matthaean approach, it is helpful to compare it with the other gospels. In Mark there is no genealogy, for in that gospel the Lord Jesus is presented as the Servant, plunging vigorously into the work of obedience to the will of God in giving His life a ransom for many. Who would be interested in the genealogy of a servant?

In Luke there is a genealogy, traced as far back as the first man, Adam, for Luke has a universalist tone. In fact, the evangelist adds to the description of Adam the words, “the son of God” (3:38). They are to be taken in the sense of a created son of God. In this sense alone are all men the sons of God (cf. Acts 17:28-29).

John, who writes of the Eternal Son who has no beginning, has no genealogy, as one would expect. Can

one construct a genealogy of One whose existence has no beginning? As John says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (1:1). He entered history, but He had no beginning. If Luke sets Him forth as the Son of Man, John sets Him forth as the Son of God, the unique Second Person of the Eternal Trinity.

Thus, putting all the gospels together, we conclude that they are not contradictory. They are complementary, and it is the peculiar province of Matthew to give us the Royal Gospel.

The Caption Above The Genealogy (1:1)

The opening verse, which is probably a title for the genealogical table which follows in vv. 2-16, strikes the note that is to be followed through-out the entire gospel: It has its origin in prophecy in which there is the promise of the coming of the Davidic Messiah. “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem; behold, THY KING COMETH UNTO THEE; he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of an ass” (Zechariah 9:9; cf. Matthew 21: 4-5). It reaches its climax in the superscription over His cross, “This is Jesus, the King of the Jews” (Matthew 27:37).

There are three expressions that bear emphasis in the verse.

The term, Jesus Christ.” Jesus, which probably means O Lord, save, is the personal name of the Lord. It links Him with history. He is one of us, although the Eternal Son. The term Christ, meaning the Anointed One, refers to His office. In Old Testament times the prophets were

anointed, the priests were anointed, and the kings were anointed. He is the anointed Prophet (Deuteronomy 18:15), the antitype of Moses. He is the anointed High Priest after the order of Melchizedek, a royal priest (Psalm 110:4). And He is the anointed Messianic King who shall subdue the nations and bear universal rule (Psalm 2:6).

The term, “Son of David.” The Davidic Covenant, described in 2 Samuel 7:1-17, is one Of the three greatest covenants made by God with men. With the Abrahamic Covenant and the New Covenant, it is the foundation of the biblical hope that God intends to establish an earthly kingdom in the future, in which all the ancient promises are that David shall have a royal Seed (cf. Genesis 49:10). He shall have a throne that shall endure, as well as a kingdom that shall include a world-wide realm. This great covenant is confirmed in the gospels (cf. Luke 1:2.6-33), in the Acts (cf. Acts 15:13-18), and the epistles (cf. Romans 15:7-13). In fact, the final description that our Lord gives of Himself links Him with David, of whom He is both root and offspring (cf. Revelation 22:16). The term is a reminder that His people should never forget their destiny.

The term, “Son of Abraham.” The Abrahamic Covenant is the fundamental historical covenant, unconditional in character and broad in its sweep, touching “all the families of the earth.” Genesis 12:1-3 (cf. 15:7-21) gives its terms. To Abraham and to his seed were given personal promises, national promises, and universal promises. Through them Abraham, Israel, and the Gentiles were to be blessed. These promises find their fulfillment in Christ, Abraham’s Seed (cf. Galatians 3:16). In Him by virtue of His cross and second coming

Israel and the Gentiles shall have their kingdom blessings. Thus, the two terms, “Son of David” and “Son of Abraham,” mean that His connection with the Hebrew race is both royal and racial, and the ultimate reach of His ministry is universal.

The Contents Of The Genealogy (1:2-16)

The contents of the genealogy are arranged in three sections, and the three sections are related to the three great stages of Jewish history. Matthew must have had a tidy mind. He loves to set forth his teaching in groups of threes and sevens. He divides the genealogy into three groups of fourteen names, the purpose of which may be to facilitate memorization. Further, it may be remembered that the Hebrews did not possess separate signs for numbers. The letters of the alphabet did duty for numbers, so that A was used for 1, B for 2, and so on. Quite interesting is the fact that the consonants for the name David in Hebrew are D W D. Since D stands for 4 and W for 6, the name David adds up to 14. Perhaps Barclay is right in saying, “This genealogy is meant to prove that Jesus was the son of David, and it is so arranged as to make it easy for people to memorize it, and to carry it in their memories.”4 The first group of names: the origin of David’s house (1:2-6a). In the first section of the genealogy we are shown the origin of David’s house. Beginning with Abraham’s family it attained royalty in the Shepherd King.

There is an interesting addition to Judah in verse 2. The words, “and his brethren,” are added. Why? Was not Rueben the first-born of Jacob? Were there not three brothers older than Judah? With several other possible ancestors, still Judah was chosen. Of course, prophecy

had already indicated the line of which Messiah would come. Jacob had prophesied, “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be” (Genesis 49:10). But why the precise character of the prophecy? An important lesson lies here. It is plain that the inclusion in the line is not determined by age, nor by human merit (cf. vv. 8-10). The sole cause of His choice is always His sovereign, distinguishing, electing gracious will. As the apostle puts it, “So, then, it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy” (Romans 9:16).

The second group of names: the rise and decline of David’s house (1:6b-11). The second section takes the story of the history of the nation down to the exile to Babylon. It is the story of decline, not only of spiritual decline, but also of political and material decline. This sad new stage in Israel’s life is full of significance for Western nations today, particularly those who have had a strong Christian witness, such as our own.

The depths of the degradation is reached in Jeconiah, or Coniah, upon whom a curse of Immense proportions and importance is pronounced (cf. Jeremiah 22:24-30). None of his seed are to prosper, sitting upon David’s throne. Had our Lord been the natural son of Joseph, who was a descendant of Joconiah, He could never reign upon David’s throne. But, since He was of David’s seed physically only through Mary, our Lord did not come under the curse. And being the legal son of Joseph, He could inherit the throne. Thus, only by the virgin birth could the Messianic promises find their prophesied

fulfillment. O the amazing precision of the purposes of God and the Scriptures that record them!

The third group of names: the eclipse of David's house (1:12-16). The third section, which takes the story to our Lord, is the history of eclipse, but not extinction. The "tabernacle of David" (cf. Acts 15:16) falls into ruins. The tree of the Messianic program has been cut down, but, like a sturdy oak, life may spring from the roots and sprout in the future. As Isaiah has put it, "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots" (11:1; cf. 6:13). It is the task of the Davidic King to return and rebuild the tabernacle of David. While the foundation of this rebuilding is laid in the cross, the completion is reserved for the second advent.

There are two expressions that deserve attention in the 16th verse. The first is, "Joseph, the husband of Mary." The change in the style and language should be noted. The author does not write, 'and Joseph begat Jesus'! There is no male act of begetting in the birth of the Son of God. This change in style marks a separation in the account between the foregoing births and the following one, explained in vv. 18-25. Campbell Morgan puts it tellingly, "Thus on the first page of the gospel Jesus is presented as connected with a race which nevertheless could not produce Him. He came into it, was of it; and yet was distinct from it."

The second expression is this, "of whom was born Jesus." The relative pronoun "whom" is feminine in gender, the reference being to Mary, the mother of our Lord's human nature. The virgin birth, here only implied, will be spelled out in precise detail in the

following section. Thus, our Lord is legally of Joseph and, therefore, the heir to the throne of David. That fact was never disputed by the Jews when our Lord was in their midst. If His claim were not valid, it would have been a simple matter to overthrow His Messianic claims. This they never attempted, for they were not able to dispute it.

Physically He was of Mary, yet without sin (cf. Luke 1:35).

There are several variant readings in the manuscript tradition of verse 16, which are of interest. In the Sinaitic Syriac manuscript there is a reading which created quite a stir when it was discovered in 1892. The text reads, “Joseph, to whom was betrothed Mary the virgin, was the father of Jesus called the Messiah.” Aside from the relatively inferior character of this manuscript, it is evident that the Syriac translator misunderstood the force of the word “begot,” used throughout the section. It means primarily legal descent, for Matthew is giving the line of the throne. Of course, such a reading contradicts the context of the chapter. In the immediately following section our Lord is presented as born of a virgin. Further, if Joseph had really been our Lord’s father, then why would he wish to divorce Mary (cf. v. 19)?

Another interesting variant, found in an important group of Greek manuscripts and reflected in some manuscripts of the Old Latin versions, is, “Jacob begat Joseph to whom Mary the virgin, having been betrothed, gave birth to Jesus who is called Christ.” This reading is an attempt to bring out even more strongly than the

ordinary text the virginity of Mary at the time Jesus was born.

The ordinary text, represented in our English versions, is much to be preferred.

The Conclusion Of The Section (1:17)

In the final verse of the section the record of ancestry of our Lord is summarized. It is well known that there are some omissions in the list of names in our Lord's genealogy, but such omissions were common in the Old Testament genealogies (cf. 2 Chronicles 22:9). A direct line of descent is all that it is the purpose of Matthew to express. The word "all," therefore, is to be interpreted in the light of the context. It refers to all the generations covered in this line of descent.5

Conclusion

There are some very interesting features of this record of ancestry that bear mention and emphasis.

First, the universal thrust of the genealogy calls for discussion. It must not be forgotten that, while Matthew has been called by some the Jewish gospel, it describes a ministry that reaches to all the nations. This is suggested by the relation of the Messiah to Abraham (1:1). It is not surprising, then, to find the gospel ending on this note with its concluding words, "Go ye, therefore, and teach ALL NATIONS, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age. Amen" (28:19-20).

Second, one of the most surprising and significant features of the ancestry is the inclusion of five women within it. And what a collection of women they are! Barclay points out, “It is not normal to find the names of women in Jewish pedigrees at all. The woman had no legal rights; she was regarded, not as a person, but as a thing.”6 In the regular morning prayer the Jew prayed, “O God, I thank Thee that Thou has not made me a Gentile, a slave, or a woman!” And, when we see who these women were, their inclusion is amazing. There is Thamar, the deliberate seducer and adulteress, considered a Gentile (cf. Genesis 38:1-30), Rahab, the Gentile harlot of Jericho (cf. Joshua 2:1-7), Ruth, the Moabitess (cf. Ruth 1:4; Deuteronomy 23:3), and Bathsheba, the woman David seduced treating her husband with unforgettable cruelty (cf. 2 Samuel 11:1 - 12:31). The fifth is the virgin Mary.

Why do we have the inclusion of these incredible ancestors of our Lord? It has been suggested that their inclusion is meant to disarm Jewish criticism of our Lord’s birth, for it showed that irregular unions were characteristic of the Messianic line.7 Or, it has been suggested that the reference to them would put Jewish pride in its place for having falsely accused Mary.8 Or, does their inclusion simply indicate that divine providence works in unexpected ways, and therefore, one should not be surprised at God’s unusual working in the birth of Christ through Mary?9 One thing is certain: A Jew would never have used such a genealogy unless tradition compelled him to do so. The inclusion of the women is a tribute to the genuineness of the ancestry. And, further, it is a testimony to the true humanity of our

Lord, for these are His ancestors. He is truly one of us, apart from sin.

Finally, the genealogy beautifully underscores the evangelist's conviction that our Lord's coming was "NO UNPREMEDITATED ACCIDENT."10 In the providence of God, in the fulness of time, by the determinate counsel of a sovereign God, who does according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, "What doest Thou?," He came! Prophecy and history converge in the coming of the Messiah, Son of David and Son of Abraham, in whom alone there is salvation from sin.

1 Alexander Maclaren, Expositions of Holy Scriptures, Gospel of St. Matthew (Cincinnati and New York, n.d.), I, 1.

2 William Barclay, The Gospel of Matthew (Philadelphia, 1958), I, 2.

3 N.B. Stonehouse, The Witness of Matthew and Mark to Christ (Philadelphia, 1944), p. 124.

4 Barclay, I, 3.

5 William Hendriksen, Exposition of the Gospel according to Matthew.

6 Barclay, I, 7.

7 R.V.G. Tasker, The Gospel according to St. Matthew, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, 1961), p. 32.

8 John F. Walvoord, Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come (Chicago 1974), p. 19.

9 Floyd V. Filson, A Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Matthew. Harper's New Testament Commentaries (New York, 1960), pp. 52-53.

10 David Hill, The Gospel of Matthew, New Century Bible (London, 1972). p.74.

The Gift of Tongues in the Book of Acts

The Gift Of Tongues In The

Book Of Acts

Lewis Johnston Jr.

Through the gracious permission of Dr. John Walvoord, Editor, Bibliotheca Sacra, we are able to make available to our readers this article by Dr. Lewis Johnston (Dallas Assembly) which appeared first in that periodical. The article presents the problem relative to speaking in tongues and indicates a proper biblical approach. We trust that other articles in future numbers will provide help that some feel necessary in this matter.

The teaching discernible from the Acts appears to be in thorough harmony with that which we learn from 1 Corinthians. The gift of tongues is the gift of speaking in a known language for the purposes of confirming the authenticity of the message of the apostolic Church.

There are three distinct instances of speaking in tongues in Acts: Acts 2:4; 10:46; 19:6. It is possible that Acts 8 is a fourth occurrence of the gift in the light of v. 18 and Luke's use of the word "saw". It could conceivably refer to some outward manifestation observed by Simon. We cannot, however, be sure of this. Perhaps the simplest way to analyze the significance of the occurrences is to look at them in order.

Acts 2:4. It is quite clear and definite that the gift of tongues on the Day of Pentecost was an utterance in known languages. The terminology of Luke is convincing

at this point. In verses 4, 11 he uses the word “glossa,” which is the normal word for the tongue as the organ of speech.

It is, of course, often used in the metaphorical sense of a language, a sense which it has here. This sense is confirmed by Luke’s use of the term “dialektos,” which is rendered by the AV in 2:6 by the word “language.” This is its meaning, and it is unfortunate that it does not render 2:8 with the same word. The word “dialektos” occurs about six times in Acts, and each occurrence it refers to a known language or dialect. In other words, the sense of a known tongue in 2:4 is made definite by the description of the phenomenon as a speaking in a “dialektos” in verses 6, 8.

This force is also evident from the use of the adjective “heterais” (AV, “other”) in 2:4. The word usually although not always, refers to a difference in kind, and it is rendered more accurately by the English word different. Thus, on Pentecost the utterances were not a form of ecstatic speech but known languages as Luke implies in verses 6, 8, 11.

One other thing should be noted: The presence of Jews here confirms the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:21-22. Paul states that the gift is a sign to Jews, as prophesied in the Old Testament (cf. Isa. 28:11). The intent is to confirm the fact that God has now identified Himself with the message proclaimed by the apostles (cf. Heb. 2:3-4).

Acts 10:46. In the occurrence of the phenomenon in Cornelius’ house, Luke’s terminology is similar to that in chapter two. He uses the word “glossa,” and we have no reason to believe that he means anything other than that

which he clearly means in Acts two, known languages. Furthermore, there were again Jews present, confirming again Paul's statement regarding the intent of the gift.

Acts 19:6. This final occurrence in the Acts concerns John's disciples, who met Paul and heard from him that they had been in a half-way house between Judaism and Christianity. They were baptized by Paul and spoke in tongues in evidence of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon them. Again, the terminology of Luke is similar to that of Pentecost ("glossa" is used again), and there is no sound exegetical reason which would demand a different sense from that normally to be expected. They spoke in known languages, or tongues. As also in the other occurrences, Jews were present, and Paul's words regarding the intent of the gift are confirmed a third time.

There is one final thing that ought to be mentioned at this point. It is well known that the terminology of Luke in Acts and of Paul in 1 Corinthians is the same. In spite of this some have contended for a difference between the gift as it occurred in Acts and as it occurred in Corinth. This is manifestly impossible from the standpoint of the terminology. This conclusion is strengthened when we remember that Luke and Paul were constant companions and would have, no doubt, used the same terminology in the same sense. In fact, it is most likely that Luke learned the nature of the gift from Paul. He certainly was informed by Paul of the unique case of the disciples of John at Ephesus, and it is not unnatural to suppose that he knew of the events in Corinth through Paul, too. In other words, it is most likely that the early believers used a fixed terminology in describing this gift, a terminology understood by them

all. If this be so, then the full description of the gift on Pentecost must be allowed to explain the more limited descriptions that occur elsewhere.

So then, to summarize, the gift of tongues according to Acts was a gift which enabled its recipients to speak in known tongues, or languages, at certain times determined by the Holy Spirit in order to authenticate the message of the early Church in the presence of Jews. That it was not universally practiced by believers in the early Church is evident from its limited occurrence in the Acts period, as well as from specific statements in the epistles (cf. 1 Cor. 12:30; Heb. 2:3-4). The force of the aorist “ebebaiothe” (AV, “was confirmed”) in verse 3 is often overlooked. The author in this reference to the confirmation of the message of salvation by the sign gifts (cf. v. 4) apparently looks upon this confirmation as a thing of the past. The inference, and, of course, it is only inference, is that the miraculous gifts have ceased since the reception of the message. The use of the phrase “eis hemas” (AV, “unto us”) in connection with the author and his readers, who were Jews, is also in harmony with the evidence from the Acts and the epistles. The gift concerned Jews.

* * *

No good work is easy work. Martin Luther translated the Bible into the German language, and that translation is one of the greatest books of the world. He said: “I sweat blood and water in my efforts to render the Prophets into the vulgar tongue. How difficult it is to make these Jewish writers speak German.” Sometimes he occupied several weeks in hunting out and

meditating upon the signification of a single word. It was hard but delightful toil.

The Healing of the Blind Man

The Healing of the Blind Man

S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.

Dr. S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., is a Bible teacher at Believers Chapel, Dallas, Texas.

This is the sixth in his series of studies on the seven signs of the our Lord Jesus Christ recorded in John's Gospel prior to His death, burial and resurrection (see John 20:30-31).

Scripture Reading: John 9:1-7

Introduction

In the story of the healing of the man born blind, found in John chapter nine, we have one of the apostle's most vivid and complete portraits of the Lord's ministry. And what a colorful man the blind fellow was! He is undoubtedly one of the most interesting, arresting, and delightful characters in the New Testament.

The chapter is founded upon two things. First of all, there is the saying about light in verse five, "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." Light is one of the common figures of the Bible. It is often seen as that which exposes darkness, or in the moral sense that which exposes sin. It, therefore, is also that which presages grace, and it is in the sense of the revelation of divine grace that it is found in this chapter (cf.. 1 Pet. 2:9; John 1:11-13).

And, second, the chapter rests upon the sign of the healing of the man, and in this with the following

account of conversations with the Jews there is revealed the power of the Lord to save and to judge (cf. v. 39; 12:46-48; 3:19).

When one thinks of the overall purpose of the gospel in the light of the author's intent to set forth the Lord Jesus as the Messiah, it is clear that one of the major purposes of the chapter is to make the point that Jesus is the one toward whom the Old Testament was looking. He performs the works that the Messiah was to do when He came. For instance, in speaking of the Messianic times Isaiah wrote, "And in that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness" (29:18). And again, "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped" (35:5). The prophet also says that the purpose of the Messiah's ministry shall be "to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house" (42: 7; cf. Luke 4:18). The opening of the eyes of the blind is associated in the Old Testament with God Himself (cf. Psa. 146:8; Exod. 4:11), and the fact that our Lord performed the work is a further testimony to His deity.

My outline in this message is a rather simple one, as the reader will see. It will not be as impressive as the country preacher's who, wishing to be sure his audience got the point of the incident, said he had three points:

"I. The Man Was Blind.

II. The Man Was Stone Blind.

III. The Man Couldn't See at All"

The Circumstances of the Healing

The place and time (John 9:1). The “and” of verse one merely connects the chapters, that is, chapter nine with chapter eight. It seems clear from the statements in chapter ten, verses nineteen through verse twenty-two that the incident took place in Jerusalem and at the time of the feast of dedication. That feast commemorated the cleansing of the temple and altar by Judas Maccabaeus in 165 or 164 B.C. It resembled in its ritual features of the Feast of Tabernacles, although it differed from the great feasts in that it could be celebrated outside of Jerusalem. It is known by the Jews and most Gentiles as Hanukkah, and it is celebrated usually in the month of December.

The people involved (John 9:1). The two people singled out for special mention are our Lord and the man, who is said to have been “blind from his birth.”

One surely cannot fail to see, since this miracle is another of John’s “signs,” that his physical condition suggests the condition of the natural man, the man without Christ. As the Scriptures so plainly point out, we, too, are spiritually blind, blind from birth (cf. Eph. 2:3; 4:18; 1 Cor. 2:14).

The Conversation With the Disciples

The request of the disciples (John 9:2). Evidently the disciples of our Lord were accompanying Him when He saw the blind man, and they sought to satisfy their curiosity concerning a theological problem, which they had often pondered. They asked Him, “Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?”

The background of the question is clear. It was the Jewish view that all suffering was traceable to some specific sin. Now upon reflection it is easy to see that the fact that persons were occasionally born blind would pose a serious theological question. What was their specific sin? How could they be guilty of such?

In fact, there were current three theories regarding sin and suffering. One was reincarnation, and it was thought to have some support from ideas reflected in Matthew 16:13. A second theory had to do with the law of heredity, reflected in such passages as Exodus 20:5 and 34:6, 7. Sins of parents may be seen in the experiences of the children. The case of Job ought to have argued against too complete an application of this biblical principle. And, finally, it was argued by some that a man could sin before he was born, and Genesis 25:22 was said to reflect that. The general principle, as one can see, is that present sins have a link with the past. As Rabbi Ammi said, “There is no death without sin, and there is no suffering without iniquity.”1 There were differences of opinion among the rabbis, however. As Strachan says, “Rabbi Elisha b. Abija (c. A.D. 120) deals with the instance of a pregnant mother who enters an idol’s temple, and smells a sacrifice. The odour penetrated her body like the poison of a snake. He rules that the unborn child did not sin. The mother is responsible for her child’s later apostasy from the true faith. (S.M. II, p. 528).”2 To the disciples, then, the blind man was a subject for theological reflection and analysis, and it is quite easy to understand their desire for answers from the Lord.

The reply of the Lord (John 9:3-5). In effect, the Lord rejects all the speculations of the men of the day. He

replies to his disciples, “Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him” (v. 3). All suffering, it is true, is ultimately from sin, the sin of our parents in the Garden of Eden (cf. Rom. 5:12). But there may be other more proximate reasons for sin, some of which are not the result of specific sin (cf. 11:4; 21:19; 2 Cor. 12:9, etc.).

Sometimes suffering takes place in order that the occasion may ultimately bring glory to God by reason of that which He brings to pass through it. In the final analysis, of course, in the experiences of life we can rest on Romans 8:28 (cf. 11:36). We may not understand God’s purposes now, but we know that they are for our ultimate blessing and His glory.

Mr. Spurgeon often told of the old believer who had been born blind. When speaking one day with another believer he said, “You know, I have so much more to give thanks for than you.” The other man was astonished and said, “What! More than I? Why, I have been able to see for years.” The blind man replied, “Oh, yes; but you have had to see so many things which may have been disagreeable and distressing, so many faces which were unkind and angry and unholy, but the first face that I shall ever see will be the face of my blessed Saviour, who loved me and gave Himself for me. Thus, you see, I have so much more to be thankful for than you.”

Jesus goes on, in effect, and says that the man’s condition really calls for action and not discussion, for he continues, “I must work the works of Him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work” (v. 4). In the original text it is not “I must work,” but we must work (the older manuscripts have the plural

we). It is an illustration of grace that the disciples are included with Him, for it is He who performs the spiritual works that please God (cf. 15:5, “without me ye can do nothing”). The words are a general statement of ministry, teaching that one must be diligent in service while alive.

In the final verse of this section Jesus says, “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world” (v. 5). Cf. 8:12. This is a special statement of ministry, and it finds its illustration in the following healing action as the opening words of verse six, “When He had thus spoken,” indicate.

The Cure of the Blind Man

The means of the healing (John 9:6-7). The means that Jesus employed in the healing are described in this way, “He spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay, and said unto him, Go wash in the pool of Siloam.” Various explanations have been offered. The means was chosen, some say, to impress upon the man that the healing power came from Jesus. Since saliva was often thought to possess healing power, some think that He wished to use those healing powers. Strachan writes, “It is a very ancient belief that saliva contains and conveys something of a man’s own personality. This survives in a curious way in the phrase, ‘the spit of his father’ (cf. ‘c’est son pere toute crache’). Saliva was thought to have healing properties.”3 Still others have said that He used the method to make the man more completely blind, in order that he might appreciate the cure more deeply. And, finally, it has been suggested that the use of

the clay was designed to symbolize the fact that man was made from the dust of the earth.

William Hendrikson said, “If an answer must be given, it may be said that the Lord probably used this method in order to induce the proper attitude of heart and mind; i.e. to bring about perfect obedience, that type of submission which carries out a seemingly arbitrary command.”4 The meaning of the healing (John 9:6-7). It is possible that the clay symbolized a creative act, since it might remind the man and others of that described in Genesis 2:7, when man was made from the dust of the earth. Did it perhaps suggest the incarnation, our Lord’s taking of humanity to Himself? It is difficult to be sure of this.

The command, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam,” is easier to fathom. The spring of Siloam flows from the hill of the Temple and forms a pool at the foot of that hill. For this reason Isaiah in chapter eight and verse six of his work uses Siloam and its waters as symbolic of the blessings that flow from the temple, or the place where God symbolically resides, as over against the strong waters of the brute force of the foes of the theocracy of Israel. Its waters flowed from an ever-flowing fountain. The word Siloam, from the Hebrew Shalach, seems to mean the Sent One (cf. John 3:17, 34; 5:36, 37; 6:57; 7:19; 8:18; 26, 29, etc.). Thus, it is beautifully suggestive of the Lord Himself, and particularly as He is presented in John, where He appears so often as One sent from God. As such He is the source of divine blessing, the mediator between God and men.

Harrison comments, “The earthly life of Jesus was like the waters of the pool, well-known, visible. But his

goings forth were from eternity. The Jews could not see beyond Nazareth, and they were offended in him. Because the deity found expression through the humanity, the Jews made the mistake of seeing only the humanity. They were not willing to explore the source of the pool."5 Siloam also has figured in the famous statement of John 7:37-39, because it was on one of the days of the Feast of Tabernacles when the statement was made, and it was customary for the priests to go to Siloam, obtain water, return and pour it out at the base of the altar on each day of the celebration of that feast. By the cry of our Lord at that time He claimed to be the One of whom the water from the pool of Siloam spoke, the One who gave water to Israel miraculously at the time of the Exodus.

The resultant meaning of the command of our Lord, if we strip away the historical for the symbolical, seems to be simply this: Go, wash in the Word of the Sent One, who is the Eternal One, whose life comes from a source hidden from men, but who alone can heal. Cf. 15:3; Psa. 119:130.

Contrary to the pattern of Naaman, the Syrian, who blew his stack, when asked by Elisha to go and wash in the Jordan River seven times for the cleansing of his leprosy (cf. 2 Kings 5:1-27), the man born blind "went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing" (v. 7). As someone has said, "There was obedience when obedience was not easy; there was faith, where faith looked fantastic and grotesque."6 The climax of the sign is found in the words that conclude verse seven. The blind man "came seeing." Faith had opened to him a new world, and it will do that to all who believingly respond to the words of the Lord Jesus Christ.

How different the miracles of our Lord are from the false ones claimed by “healers” today. The “healers” and the “wonder-workers” of today are like the prophets of Baal, who cried, “O Baal, hear us,” but nothing happened. This was illustrated again a few years ago, when the followers of Harry Houdini met again in New York to see again if the famous magician, who died in 1926 on Halloween (how appropriate!), would make contact with them from the other world. He had promised that he would keep in touch with the spirit world. In November a group of magicians gathered at the Magic Towne in New York City. With fog flowing from a garbage can filled with dry ice, the magicians gathered round one another and joined hands. Dick Brooks, the editor of Hocus Pocus magazine, acted as medium and called out, “Oh Houdini, we are gathered here to ask for a sign if it is possible for you to return. Give us a sign,” he urged, perspiration beading on his upper lip. Nothing.

“Please give us a sign, oh Houdini, that you are here … One sign, one time.”

Nothing, and there never will be anything. “Oh Houdini, give us a sign,” will never have an answer. The “signs” have been given by the Lord Jesus Christ in token of His Messiahship and Saviorhood, and through them men are pointed to the only One who can save, as John expounds (cf. 20:30-31).

Conclusion

The man blind from birth is a picture of human hopelessness. He was, thus, a favorable opportunity for a divine work. He did not need new glasses, the new glasses of reformation. He did not need vision correction, the vision correction of education and

culture. He certainly had no need for the eye salve of religion. What he needed were new eyes, and they could only come by a new creative work, the creative work of the power of the Lord Jesus Christ, illustrative of the new spiritual birth which He brings to those who are the objects of the work of God in regeneration and faith. Cf. 3:3, 7. Jesus was right, we must be born again.

The chapter is a lovely picture of a seeking Savior. It was the grace of God that led to the work of healing and of redemption. The divine initiative is suggested in the fact that it was Jesus who "saw" (cf. v. 1) the man as He passed by, providing the opportunity for the questions from the disciples and the healing that followed. As one commentator said, "The Lord was interested in the man long before he was interested in Jesus."7 And, finally, the incident affords a very illuminating picture of an omnipotent Saviour, master of the fate of humans. When He touches the eyes of our blindness, we see and sing, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, That saved a wretch like me;

I once was lost, but now am found,

Was blind, but now I see!"

1 Shab. 55a.

2 Strachan, p. 217.

3 Ibid., p. 218.

4 Hendriksen, II, 75.

5 Harrison, pp. 120-21.

6 The Interpreter's Bible, VIII, 614.

7 Ironside, p. 401.

The Healing of the Helpless Man

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Helpless Man

By S. Lewis Johnson Jr.

Dr. S. Lewis Johnson, Jr. is a Bible teacher at Believers Chapel, Dallas, Texas.

This is the third in his series of studies on the seven signs of the Lord Jesus Christ in John's Gospel (see John 20:30-31).

Scripture Reading: John 5:1-18

Introduction

In the healing of the impotent man the Apostle John gives his readers a miracle, or sign, that is a kind of parable of impotence and omnipotence. It is a story of the impotence of a man, and it is also a story of the omnipotence of the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And the incident is one that provides a basis of hope for all. It tells us plainly that what we are now is not the only thing possible for us. It tells us that our cases are not closed, and that "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of faith" makes all things possible. One is reminded of the great text of the Apostle Paul in Phillippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ, who strengtheneth me."

The outline of the fifth chapter of the Gospel of John corresponds roughly to these things: We have the account of the sign in verses one through 9a. And after that there follows a sequel, which concludes with verse

eighteen. Finally, the chapter concludes with a sermon, which begins in verse nineteen and concludes in verse forty-seven.

In this study we shall emphasize the three remarks of the Lord, the first of which is a word of preparation. In the sixth verse He asks, “Wilt thou be made whole?” And, then, in verse eight there is a word of restoration, for He says, “Rise, take up thy bed, and walk.” And then comes the final remark, a word of admonition, in verse fourteen, “Behold thou art made well; sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.”

We turn now to the account.

The Word of Preparation

The characters (John 5:1, 5). It will be noticed that the exposition will not take into account verse 3b-4 as found in the Authorized Version. The textual evidence for the genuineness of the words is not strong, and we, therefore, will not consider them in the exposition.

On the location of the pool Hendriksen has written, “After much guess-work with respect to the identity of this pool, its site has finally been established to the satisfaction of most scholars. The pool (or, in reality, the reservoir which formed it) was laid bare in the year 1888 in connection with the repair of the church of St. Anne, in n.e. Jerusalem. A faded fresco on the wall pictures an angel ‘troubling’ the water. It appears, therefore, that by the early church this pool was viewed as Bethzatha. In the time of our Lord it had five porticos or covered colonnades where the sick could rest, protected from inclement weather.”1 There are two important characters in the incident, the impotent man,

and the Lord Jesus Christ, the omnipotent Master. It is stated of the man in the fifth verse, “And a certain man was there, who had an infirmity thirty and eight years.” As one commentator says, “He lived in a prison without bars.” There is some reason to believe that, naturally speaking, he was not a very lovely character. In the first place, Jesus finds it necessary to rebuke him for his sin in His final word to him (cf. v. 14). And, in the second place, it seems that no one was willing to help him into the water. That seems to reflect the fact that he was not the kind of person who drew to himself the sympathy of others. And it is particularly revealing that he had had the infirmity for thirty-eight years, and still no one had been willing to aid him. Finally, it even seems that he was not completely grateful to the Lord for what had happened to him, at least in the beginning, for, when he was asked, “What man is that who said unto thee, Take up thy bed, and walk?,” he was unable to answer. He did not even know the name of the Lord, who had made him whole!

The second of the characters in the incident is the omnipotent Master, “Jesus,” who had gone up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews (cf. 5: 1).

The account describes the pool of Bethzatha, which had five porticos, or covered colonnades for the sick in the opening verses of the chapter. In these porticos lay a large number of sick and impotent people. The impotent man was one of them.

If verses 3b-4 are not genuine, then the idea that the first man to step into the pool after the troubling of the water would be healed is not necessarily the belief of the author of the Fourth Gospel, nor the teaching of the

Holy Spirit. It is, rather, the implied opinion of the impotent man, as verse seven suggests. As Hendriksen points out, “In fact when the Lord heals this man he does not even make any use of the pool (contrast 9:7; 2 Kings 5:10, 14). And it is on this miracle that we should place all the emphasis; not on the question whether or not miracles were constantly taking place at this pool.”2 How our Lord knew of the condition of the impotent man is not stated in the text. It is possible that He knew of his condition supernaturally through the revelation of it by the Father. And it is possible that he acquired the knowledge by hearsay. At any rate He knew of his condition.

The question (John 5:6). When our Lord saw the impotent man lying beside the pool, He spoke to him, asking, “Wilt thou be made well?” The question itself might seem to be a foolish one. Surely, since the man has been there for thirty-eight years hoping that someone would put him in the water, he must want to be made well. Our Lord’s words look a bit like the world’s tantalizing gospel: walk that you may be healed (cf. Luke 10:27-28).

We should remember, however, that weakness often gains pity, other forms of aid, and the occasion for the making of excuses, and conceivably the man may have come to actually enjoy his plight. And so the question comes from our Lord, so that he might think through his real desires.

Spiritually speaking, it is the basic question that must be answered by all who are faced with the claims of the gospel of Jesus Christ, with its message that we are sinners and that Christ has died for sinners, making it

possible for sinners to receive forgiveness through His saving work. We all have to answer the question, “Wilt thou be made well?” Some in fact, the vast majority of the human race would answer, “no.” The world enjoys its relationship of separation from the God of the Bible, who punishes sin and offers forgiveness only through His Son, Jesus Christ. How have we answered this basic question?

The response (John 5:7). The response of the impotent man is given in verse seven. “Sir,” he replied to Jesus, “I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool; but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me.” It is clear that at this point he has more faith in the means of healing through the water than in the Master.

It seems that the rule for this pool was the same as one of ours, “Everyone for himself.” The cause of the water’s disturbance may have been supernatural or natural, Hendriksen says. “If natural,” he writes, “then it would seem that the sudden bubbling up was caused by an intermittent spring by which the pool was fed. In general it may be stated that it is never uncommon for people, afflicted with various illnesses, to gather around mineral springs.”3 His trust in means reminds one of the trust of our modern world, which has more faith in religion, in the preacher, in the church, in culture and education, in moral resolutions, and in good works than in the Lord Jesus Christ and His saving cross. That is the reason why the minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ today, just as in Paul’s day, must concentrate on preaching Jesus Christ and Him crucified (cf. 1 Cor. 2:2).

The Word of Restoration

The content of the word (John 5:8). The restoring word is given in verse eight, “Rise, take up thy bed, and walk.” The three imperatives are interesting and important: The first of them is an aoristic present, and the rising is presented as an event in itself, a definite and decisive act. It reminds one of the imperatives given us by our parents in our childhood days when, desiring prompt action, we were told to obey them so quickly that the act would be done, “Before you can say ‘Jack Robinson.’”

The second imperative, “take up,” is an aorist imperative, and the act is clearly understood to be a decisive one. It suggests that the healing that is to come is to be a perfect one. One of the older German commentators, J. A. Bengel, said that up to now the bed had been carrying the man, but now the man is to carry his bed.

The final imperative, “walk,” is a present imperative, expressing durative, or continuous, action. The healing will be a permanent healing. Prompt, perfect, and permanent are adjectives that express the nature of the healing ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, as well as that of the men of the New Testament who had the biblical gift of healing. I would agree with Hendriksen’s comment, “This recovery is neither gradual nor partial; now, we may well add, was the sickness faked (as some, nevertheless, have supposed). All so-called ‘faith-healers’ should make a close study of this wonderful account.”4 The consequence of the word (John 5:9a). We read, “And immediately the man was made well, and took up his bed, and walked; and the same day was the

sabbath." Leon Morris contends that there is no room for faith in the incident, for no mention is made of faith and, in fact, the impotent man did not even know the name of the Lord Jesus.5 That, of course, is largely true, although I would question whether the man did not exercise faith in healing. It would seem to me that in the nature of his response to the word of the Lord, faith was required for him to take up his bed and walk. It is true, however, that faith is not stressed in the account. Perhaps it would be a bit out of place to lay any emphasis on the fact that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (cf. Rom. 10:17). That may be, all the same, what transpired in essence in this sign.

The kind of faith that responds to the Word of God is the kind that brings salvation of a spiritual nature (cf. Acts 16:31).

The Word of Admonition

The Jews and the impotent man (John 5:9b-13). John makes the point that the action took place on the sabbath day (cf. 5:9b), and that is the reason for the discussion that follows. Evidently seeing the man carrying his pallet, the Jews said to him "It is the sabbath day; it is not lawful for thee to carry thy bed" (cf. v. 10). The sabbath day for the them was no day to move one's furniture! In fact, their prescriptions concerning the day were so minute and careful that they debated whether a man with a wooden leg could walk at all on the sabbath!

The impotent man answered, "He that made me well, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk" (cf. v. 11). Implicit in his reply is the reasoning that the man who heals in this supernatural way has the right to

command him to do anything within the moral teaching of God.

Because He had demonstrated His saving qualities in the healing, he is willing to give Him the office of the King of his life. The man is no great hero, and he does not go out of his way to defend Jesus, but his reasoning is really sound theologically.

The response of the Jews is with a tone of derision. “What man is that who said unto thee, Take up thy bed, and walk?” (cf. v. 12). The Greek would allow the rendering, who is the fellow who said, pick up your bed and walk? They do not ask, “Who healed you?” In fact, they are not at all interested in his healing, or in the mighty power of God manifest in the act. They are only interested in the fact that their theology is being violated, and that there is no place in their thought for such a miracle as this done by someone outside their company.

The section closes with the admission that the man did not even know the name of the one who had healed him. In the meantime Jesus had removed Himself from the immediate vicinity. The size of the crowd also aided in the concealing of Him from attention.

Jesus and the impotent man (John 5:14). Following the encounter Jesus was in the temple, and He found the man there also. When He saw him, He said to him, “Behold, thou art made well; sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee” (cf. v. 14). The admonition follows naturally upon the healing, and it illustrates the fact that those saved by Him are to demonstrate their new life by a conformity to His will. Putting it in simple theological terms, justification is always to be followed by

sanctification. As someone has said, “What is the value of being sound on the atonement, if the atonement does not make one sound?” Or, as a popular Bible teacher of a generation or so ago used to say, “It is either the Bible or a libel,” meaning that our lives are to conform to the Word of God or they shall bring reproach to the saving God.

The exhortation, “sin no more,” is in a construction that appears to say that his life was characterized by sinning up to this point (the tense of the imperative is present). Jesus does not refer to some sin that the man committed a long time ago, that brought him into his recent condition.

When He says, “lest a worse thing come unto thee,” he refers, it seems, to the final condition of the lost. The words refute the claim that one’s life here is the only hell that unsaved men shall experience. Here is a man who has spent thirty-eight years of torture, but Jesus says that a “worse” thing may come to him. Hell is infinitely worse than anything a man may experience here (cf. Rev. 20:11-15).

The Jews and Jesus (John 5:15-18). The man, who was, as I said, no hero, immediately went and tattled on the Lord, but he does make the point that he had been healed by Him (cf. v. 15).

The response of the Jews was to renew their attacks on the Lord Jesus. And they “sought to slay him, because He had done these things on the sabbath day” (cf. v. 16).

Jesus, however, answered them, “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work” (cf. v. 17). The tenses of the verbs in this verse express the constant activity of the two

persons. And they stress the fact that the Father is constantly working, for He neither slumbers nor sleeps.

The words of our Lord provoke further negative activity on the part of the Jews. John writes, “Therefore, the Jews sought the more to kill him, because He not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God” (cf. v. 18).

They understood fully that claim that Jesus was making when He spoke of God as His “Father.” That was a claim for deity, something many of our modern theologians find difficult to believe. They cannot believe that Jesus really claimed to be God. That would mean that we must believe Him regarding the plan of salvation, that is, that a man can only receive eternal life through faith in the Lord Jesus, and that not to believe is to remain in one’s sins (cf. 14:6).

Conclusion

We may conclude by making some simple points regarding the relationship of the incident to the plan of salvation through Christ.

In the first place, the people around the pool are a picture of men as sinners. They are described by the physical ailments as impotent, which is defined more specifically as blind (cf. Eph. 4:18; 5:8), lame (2:2), paralyzed (4:30; 5:3-6); they are unable to see, to walk, and to work, and they vividly illustrate the spiritual condition of the lost before God. And it is encouraging to see that the Lord helps such people.

If our condition is as we have pictured it, then the most important endeavor of life is to come to Christ for deliverance. But men are careless, and they take their

bodies to the health resorts and to the springs, but they leave their souls by the sewer. When we were without strength and in need of the forgiveness of sins, it is He who died for the ungodly and redeemed them from the guilt and condemnation of sin (cf. Rom. 5:6)

And, finally, in the healing of the impotent man we have a lovely illustration of spiritual salvation. He rose in the power of a new life, took up his bed with his new power, and walked off in a walk given to him by the gracious activity of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the spiritual sense that is what happens to the saints of God.

Our Lord is still seeking the impotent and, if there are any such who read this paper, there is no need to wait thirty-eight years for deliverance. Today, if you will hear His voice, not hardening your hearts, you may have the life that Jesus has brought. Respond to His invitation, “Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

1 Hendriksen, I, 190.

2 Ibid., 1, 191.

3 Ibid., I, 192.

4 Ibid., I, 193.

5 Morris, p. 304.

The Healing of The Nobleman's Son

The Healing of The

Nobleman’s Son

S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.

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This is the second of his series of studies on the seven signs of the Lord Jesus Christ recorded in John’s Gospel prior to His death and resurrection Bee John 20:30-31).

Scripture Reading: John 4:43-54

Introduction

The second of John’s signs, by which he hopes his readers will come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing might obtain eternal life, is narrated in the section that we study in this message (cf. 2:11; 20:30-31).

The occasion of our Lord’s healing of the nobleman’s son is His journey from Judaea to Galilee. He had left Judaea and had traveled through Samaria, where He had His important conversation with the Samaritan woman (cf. 4:3-4). After being there with the Samaritans for two days, He returned again to Cana of Galilee (cf. 4:43-45, 46). Cf. Isaiah 9:1-2.

There is an interesting comment in verse forty-four, “For (notice the “for”) Jesus Himself testified that a prophet hath no honor in his own country.” There is some question over the standpoint from which the comment is made. It is said by some that John writes with the

assumption that Jerusalem is His city, and thus the statement is a remark concerning His reception in Judaea. On the other hand, others think that the statement is made in view of His coming ministry in Galilee, namely, that it will demonstrate the truth of the testimony that a prophet has no honor in his own country. Morris writes, “Perhaps the ‘for’ is meant to indicate that Jesus must show that this is, indeed, the case. He had come unto His own, not under delusion that He would be welcomed, but knowing full well that He must expect rejection. This would not take Him by surprise, for it was in the divine plan. So, to fulfill all this implies, He went into Galilee.”1 It is not easy to know exactly what John had in mind. We do know that it turned out to be true that both Galilee and Judaea rejected Him.

We have a common saying, “Familiarity breeds contempt,” a statement that surely reflects man’s unwitting testimony to his own depravity, and our Lord’s testimony has sometimes been related to it. In His case the rejection of Him is not a reflection upon the object of the contempt, but upon those who are so blind as to fail to see that He, one of them in His humanity, is more than one of them in His Person.

The nobleman evidently was from Capernaum, the place by the side of the Sea of Galilee that Jesus made His center of operations for some time after He left Nazareth. Cana was about twenty to twenty-five miles distant, and it was to Cana that He had come. He had been welcomed in Galilee, for the Galileans had been in Jerusalem when He was there, and they had seen the things that He had done there (the verb translated by “received” in the AV is one that means to receive gladly,

to welcome). They were skill filled with the enthusiasm that He was a prophet, but things would change later.

We turn to the account of the miracle now.

The Men

The nobleman (John 4:46). There are three important characters in the story of the healing: the nobleman, the son, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The nobleman (lit., a king's man) served Herod Antipas, but whether in a civil or military status we do not know. Some have sought to make a connection between the steward of Herod mentioned in Luke 8:3, and others with Manaen, who had been brought up with Herod, mentioned in Acts 13:1. These suggestions are purely speculative.

One thing we do know is this: He was a nobleman, and he through his contact with the Lord Jesus passed into a new realm, becoming a nobleman in the Kingdom of God and of Christ. And, further he carried "his whole house" (v. 53) with him into that kingdom, too.

He illustrates the fact that social status is no barrier to entrance into the kingdom. Lady Huntingdon, the friend of the Wesleys and Whitefield, who took a very active part in the great spiritual movement of the wonderful days in which these men lived, used to say that she was going to heaven by an "m." When asked what she meant, she replied that she was, indeed, thankful the Bible did not say, "not any noble are called," but "not many noble." Therefore, she got in by an "m."

The son (John 4:46). The son of the nobleman does not loom large in the account. It is simply said that he was "sick at Capernaum." The tense of the Greek verb only

tells us that he was lying ill, but in the following verse it is said that he was about to die, as it is clear that his illness was a very serious and critical one.

The Lord (John 4:46). John refers to the Lord Jesus simply by the term, “Jesus” (AV; the Greek text that John wrote probably said simply He), but it is clear from what happens that He is “the Great Physician,” both physically and spiritually.

John, of course, would have us move beyond the physical in our thoughts concerning Him. “A miner,” The Interpreter’s Bible relates, “once interrupted John Hutton when he was preaching, by leaping to his feet and leading the whole congregation in the doxology. Later he explained that he had been a Christian only for some months, and that it was all so gloriously different that he could not sit still in his place. For, said he, ‘I was a bad lot; I drank; I pawned the furniture; I knocked my wife about; and now life is real life, and splendidly worthwhile.’ Asked how he fared among his fellows down in the pit, he laughed and replied, ‘Today they asked me, “you don’t seriously credit that old yarn about Jesus turning the water into wine?”’ To which, it appeared, he had made the devastating answer, ‘I know nothing about water and wine, but I know this, that in my house Christ has turned beer into furniture; and that is a good enough miracle for me!’”2 “Henry Clay said that he did not know for himself personally what the change of heart spoken of by Christians meant; but he had seen Kentucky family feuds of long standing healed by religious revivals, and that whatever could heal a Kentucky family feud was more than human,” affirmed A. H. Strong.3

The Miracle

The first test (John 4:47). The story of the healing of the son may be highlighted by the three tests that Jesus gave the nobleman. And the first test is found in the report that came to the nobleman in Capernaum that Jesus had arrived in Cana. The text says, “When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judaea into Galilee, he went unto Him, and besought Him that He would come down, and heal his son; for he was at the point of death.” In the word “heard” is concentrated the test. Would the nobleman respond, exhibiting trust in the power of Christ to heal? The response indicated that he did. Paul says that faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. The news of Jesus’ coming into the area was the occasion for the exhibition of the nobleman’s faith in His power to heal. He evidently had heard accounts of our Lord’s power, for that is what he has come to trust at this point (cf. Rom. 10:17). Like the leper he has come to rest in the power of the Lord, and he visits the Lord to see if He might be also willing to heal (cf. Matt. 8:1-4).

The second test (John 4:48-49). The second test is given to the nobleman in our Lord’s reply to his request. “Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe” (v. 48). In a sense, His words are no specific answer to the troubled man, for the second person plural, “ye,” is used by Jesus. It is something of a reflection on His part of the unwillingness of the people, both Jews and Gentiles, it seems, to believe without some accompanying miracle. The reply does afford a test for the nobleman, however, for it clearly asks whether faith shall continue in spite of the mild rebuff.

The nobleman replies, “Sir, come down before my child dieth” (v. 49). He does respond favorably to our Lord’s verbal reflection, but he is still dictating the method of the healing, for he says, “come down before my child dieth.” It has not dawned upon him that the power to heal with a word is our Lord’s, because He is the Son of God. He can heal in Cana as well as He can heal in Capernaum.

The third test (John 4:50). Our Lord’s response to the appeal that He come down to Capernaum is, “Go thy way; thy son liveth.” The answer presented the nobleman with a dilemma. He had asked, “Come down,” but Jesus had replied, “Go.” If he took Jesus at His word, the only thing he had to go on was the bare Word of God, or the word of a mighty prophet, who seemed interested in the well-being of his son. If he refused to believe Jesus, then he risked insulting Him, the one upon whom his hopes rested. In other words, he risked forfeiting whatever benefits He might be willing to confer upon him. The short and simple retort of the Lord had put the nobleman in a position where he would be compelled to act upon the faith that he had, whatever that might be.

The essence of the answer of the nobleman is seen often in the lives of believers. Do we not often say to the Lord, “Lord, please do this for me and, for your instruction, here is the way that it ought to be done”?

The response of the nobleman is described by John in the following words, “And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way.” R. C. Trench, in his well-known book on the miracles of our Lord, said, “The miracle, one might say, was a

double one —on the body of the absent child, on the heart of the present father; on cured of his sickness, the other of his unbelief."4 1 Morris, p. 285.

2 The Interpreter's Bible, VIII, 534-35.

3 Augustus Hopkins Strong, Systematic Theology (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1970), p. 815.

4 Richard Chenevix Trench, Notes on the Miracles of our Lord (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1949 [reprinted]

The Herald of the King

The Herald of the King

S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.

Dr. S. Lewis Johnson, Jr. is Professor of New Testament Literature and Exegesis at Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, Texas. This is the third of his selected expository studies in the Gospel of Matthew. If you have questions about John the Baptist relative to the man, his manner of life and ministry, and his message, this study should help answer them and enable the reader to understand and appreciate more fully this great man of God.

Scripture Reading: Matthew 3:1-12

Introduction

That John the Baptist is an important biblical character could be gleaned from just one statement of our Lord. That statement is found in Matthew 11:11, “Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.” Add to this the opening of the Gospel of Mark, in which his ministry is said to be significant for “the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ” (Mark 1:2), and the point is demonstrated clearly.1 In harmony with this is the two-fold mention of him in the Old Testament prophets (cf. Isaiah 40:3-5; Malachi 3:1)

John was a rugged type of person, a stern John Knox kind of character who thundered out “the way of the Lord” to a stiff-necked generation. His Old Testament

counterpart is Elijah, to whom he is likened (cf. Luke 1:17), and whose ministry also was filled with the announcement of judgment.

And yet this rugged and stern character, although his message was not, humanly speaking, “geared for the times,” had a tremendous influence on his contemporaries. John was popular, for the crowds flocked to hear him and receive his baptism. Campbell Morgan describes his ministry as attractive, convictive, and invective.2 John’s ministry, however, was not popular in the sense that he was successful in influencing the majority to turn to the way of the Lord. In fact, it was just the opposite. His work led to his imprisonment (cf. Matthew 4:12) and death (cf. 14:3-12). In this the servant was not above his Master.

We have been saying that Matthew is the royal gospel, presenting the King and His coming kingdom. We have looked over His genealogy, impeccable in its claim of the kingdom for the Son of Joseph. We have read of His virgin conception and birth. We have stood at the cradle of the young Infant, observing the homage of the Gentiles, the Magi, as well as the dread of the wicked Herod. And we have observed the divine providential care in the preservation of the Infant from the malevolence of the king. In the following section, that which we consider in this study, we listen to the voice of the herald of the King, John the Baptist.

John The Man (3:1-3)

His coming (3:1-2). The voice of prophecy had fallen silent for four hundred years when John began his ministry. It is now heard again through the ministry of this modern Elijah.

The opening phrase, “in those days,” maybe somewhat misleading to the casual reader. About twenty-eight years had passed since the events of the preceding chapter (cf. Luke 3:1-2). We are to take the words, then, in a very general sense.3 The likeness of the herald to Elijah is seen in the way he is introduced to the reader. “His portrait,” Maclaren aptly says, “is flung on the canvas with the same startling abruptness with which Elijah is introduced. Matthew makes no allusion to his relationship to Jesus, has nothing to say about his birth or long seclusion in the desert. He gives no hint that his vague expression ‘in those days’ covers thirty years. John leaps, as it were, into the arena full grown and full armed.”4 Matthew, thus, assumes that his readers are familiar with John. As for the modern speculation over John’s relation to the Essene community, or to the Qumran sect, known to us through the Dead Sea Scrolls, neither Matthew nor the other evangelists give us any light.

Matthew does not expatiate upon the origin of the coming of the ambassador. He simply states that he came “preaching in the wilderness of Judaea.” The Apostle John gives us the real source of his coming, for he writes, “There was a man SENT FROM GOD, whose name was John” (John 1:6). And everything about this rugged prophet confirms the truth of the statement. He preached with a conviction born of fellowship with the living God. As Richard Baxter put it, he preached as never sure to preach again, and as a dying man to dying men.

There is a one-word description of his work. It is “preaching.” The Greek word means to proclaim, and it is a very fitting word for a herald of the King. “It means

proclaiming, or acting as a herald," Maclaren says, "and implies the uplifted voice and the brief, urgent message of one who runs before the chariot, and shouts, 'The king! the king!'"5 It has none of the modern connotations of "preaching," such as long-winded tediousness and mild, bland platitudes.

The burden of John's message is set forth in striking brevity in the second verse. The details of it shall be expounded below.

The cause of his coming (3:3). Matthew relates the coming of John to Old Testament prophecy, as is his method in this work. Isaiah 40:3 is cited as being in harmony with the work of John. The words originally were a part of the consoling message given to the exiles in Babylonia, who were to return to their own land under the guidance and protection of their God in the future. And that return was related to the coming of their God for His kingdom. That return and that kingdom are to come through the ministry of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, according to Matthew. John's ministry is that of forerunner and herald of the King, and in Matthew's view the verse in Isaiah speaks of John.

John's Manner Of Life And Ministry (3:4-6)

The mantle (3:4a). One gains the distinct impression that John's manner of life was similar to that of an ascetic. If he was, it was not by reason of a desire to imitate the former prophets. He wore a robe like Elijah's, but his asceticism was the expression of his stern, severe, no-nonsense spirit, living in detachment from the worldly delights of the senses. The world of

today would probably regard him as some sort of "freak."

The meals (3:4b). In our day we have seen the fads of swallowing goldfish, and other similar things, but it is doubtful that John's diet was anything other than the simple diet of a poor man. In the Congo, I am told, they eat fried ants, and the French, with some misguided Americans, regard snails as delicacies. In John's day, the eating of locusts and wild honey simply meant that he preferred, or was limited to, the simple fare of a man with limited resources. Perhaps it would be comparable to our saying that one made his diet from grits, or oatmeal, and cornbread.

This simple food does reflect the sincerity of the message he proclaimed, and it gave a touch of reality to his heralding of thunderous judgment upon his generation. His thoughts were directed toward the heavenlies, not the earthlies. Richard Baxter said, "If a hardened heart be to be broken, it is not stroking but striking that must do it." And striking is more effective, if it is done by one whose motives cannot be questioned.

The ministry (3:5-6). John's ministry produced a kind of universal excitement and great results, so far as numbers were concerned. He moved the entire community about him. This fiery soul did not mumble the tired old cliches, the worn-out formulas of the scribes. He did not engage in the tediousness of splitting theological hairs. He spoke with conviction, and they flocked to hear him, and to hear him denounce them!

There are several questions to be answered here. First, what is the origin of John's baptism? Some have traced it to the Old Testament purificatory rites, and others to

proselyte baptism. The latter involved the circumcision of the candidate, the immersion of the candidate by the candidate himself, and an offering in the temple. John's baptism differed from this in two respects: (1) he baptized the candidates, a fact from which he derived his name, the Baptist; (2) he baptized Israelites, not simply Gentiles. It would appear safest to conclude that his baptism was a radically new thing.

Second, what was the relation of John's baptism to the forgiveness of sins? Some have contended that the rite conferred remission of sins. They would read the reference in Mark 1:4 with this emphasis, a baptism of repentance unto remission of sins, linking the "for the remission" directly to the "baptism." Such an interpretation does violence to the spirit of the entire Word of God, in which spiritual blessing is never related to a physical act. Further, it does violence to other New Testament statements regarding John's message and ministry (cf. Luke 1:77-78). As a matter of fact, in the expression that Mark uses the remission is linked to the repentance, not to the baptism. It is repentance unto remission of sins, not baptism unto remission of sins. The baptism was only the outward symbol of the inner reality of repentance. That this is John's meaning is confirmed by the charge he gives the Pharisees and Saducees, "Bring forth therefore fruit worthy of repentance" (Matthew 3:8), not worthy of baptism.

Third, was John's call for repentance, a call to the nation as a nation, or did it also have to do with individual salvation? Surely it had to do with both. There can be no real national repentance apart from the repentance of individuals in the nation. Of course, it should be remembered that the salvation that John proclaimed was

an Old Covenant salvation. The relationships to our Lord introduced by the Spirit's coming at Pentecost were not known by His disciples. This is evident from a consideration of Acts 19:1-7, which relates the experience of Paul with certain of John's disciples.

John's Message (3:7-12)

The proclamation regarding repentance (3:1-3, 7-9). We now attempt to analyze the essential characteristics of the message of John, which, incidentally, is identical with that of the Lord (cf. 3:2; 4:17). There are three terms which we must interpret.

First, what did John mean by the term repent? Perhaps it will help to note several things it does not mean. It does not mean to be sorry for one's sins. The emphasis of the word in the original text is not upon the feelings, but upon the mind or purpose of the one who repents. The Greek word means literally to have an afterthought, or to change the mind. The herald, then, was calling upon Israelites to change their minds regarding their sins and guilt, to see themselves as sinners under the judgment of the Lord for their rebellion against Him.

Nor does the word mean to promise to do better. In the Old Testament it was the common word to express the return of the people of Israel to the Lord, being the equivalent of the Hebrew word shub, or teshubah (cf. Hosea 14:1-2; Jeremiah 33:18; Ezekial 33:11). It was associated with the convenantal status in which Israel stood with Jehovah. In effect, for Israel to repent is for the nation to return to the Lord from their sinful state, to return to the covenant established between the Lord and Abraham's seed. This is the essence of the appeal of John the Baptist.

That the term repent is not very different in meaning from the term believe is seen in John the Apostle's description of the ministry of the Baptist, "The same came for witness, that he might bear witness of the light, that all might BELIEVE through him" (John 1:7). Repent stresses the negative side of the terms of salvation, while believe stresses the positive. The former is very appropriate for those who have rebelled against a previously established covenantal status.

Second, what is meant by the term the kingdom of heaven? While the term kingdom may have different forces, it is hardly to be doubted that it refers here to the Messianic kingdom, the millennial kingdom. The eternal kingdom of God was always present and could not be said to have drawn nigh in Christ. The fact that the term in the Old Testament in most of its occurrences refers to the Messianic kingdom supports this identification. Since John does not explain the meaning of the term he must intend his listeners to understand it in the common sense.

Third, what is meant by the expression "is at hand"? Simply stated, what John means is that the kingdom of God is imminent. That which was future to the Old Testament saint is now near (cf. Mark 1:15). It has come upon them (cf. Matthew 12:28). In the words and works of Jesus it has come near, for He is the king. The only thing that remains is its public manifestation in glory and power (cf. Matthew 16:28), which will take place at the time that the nation responds to its Lord (cf. Luke 19:11; Acts 3:19-21). Certain of the Jewish teachers taught that, if Israel could repent perfectly for even one day, the Messiah would come.6 The sentiment is not unbiblical.

The proviso regarding reality (3:7-10). In these verses we have a very instructive picture of the Pharisees, the ritualists of Israel, and the Sadducees, the rationalists of Israel, getting religion! The words used by John to describe them, “O generation of vipers,” are very vivid and illustrate the fearlessness of the Baptist. It is true that John is a “voice”; he certainly was no echo (cf. v. 3)! “Honeyed words were not in his line,” Maclaren points out, “he had not lived in the desert for all these years, and held converse with God and his own heart, without having learned that his business was to smite on conscience with a strong hand, and to tear away the masks which hid men from themselves. The whole spirit of the old prophets was revived in his brusque, almost fierce, address to such very learned, religious, and distinguished personages. Isaiah in his day had called their predecessors ‘rulers of Sodom’; John was not scolding when he called his hearers, ‘ye offspring of vipers,’ but charging them with moral corruption and creeping earthliness.”7 I am sure he felt these words when they took up the love offering!

A few words bear comment. The “wrath to come” (cf. Malachi 4:1-6; 2 Thessalonians 1:10) is the anger of the Lord in the eschatological Day of the Lord, the time of the judgment of the Tribulation.

The call to produce “fruit” (the word is singular in the Greek text) is a call to produce the evidence of genuine repentance. A repentance that does not issue in good works of a Scriptural nature is not genuine repentance (cf. Romans 2:17-29; James 2:14-26).

In the reference to the divine ability to raise up children to Abraham from the pebbles on the Jordan beach, or

from the loose rocks of the desert, there is a telling thrust at “the lofty structure of confidence in their descent.”8 And there may be some indication here of the ultimate reach of the gospel to the Gentiles (cf. John 8:39). It was a word especially suitable for people who said, “All Israelites have a portion in the world to come,” and that Abraham sits at the gates of Hell to turn back any Israelite who may have been sentenced to its terrors.

The immediacy of the coming judgment is suggested by the statement in verse ten. The ax lies at the root of the trees, soon to begin its work of judgment. The trees are men, and the judgment is an individualizing one, and it embraces all the unfruitful. Nothing but genuine fruit shall prevail to deliver them. What happened historically is sadly unfolded in Romans 11:16-24, where the Apostle Paul speaks in detail of the breaking off of the natural branches from the tree of the Abrahamic Covenant through unbelief of the nation.

The promise regarding a future baptism (3:11-12). In the final verses the Baptist compares his ministry with that of the Messiah, the Coming One (the term is a messianic title). His ministry is symbolic and preparatory, possessing no intrinsic vitality. His baptism is in water; the Messiah’s is in the Spirit and in fire. The reference to the baptism in the Spirit and in fire in verse eleven refers to the purifying nature of the baptism of the Spirit, not the punitive nature of it. The ultimate reference is to the Day of Pentecost, when the church came into existence (cf. Acts 2:1-4).

There is something very appalling and terrifying in the heavy refrain at the end of the three consecutive verses,

— “with fire” (cf. vv. 10-12). We have spoken of the meaning of the words in verse eleven. In verses ten and twelve, however, they clearly look on to the time of the judgment of the Day of the Lord, the apocalyptic day of judgment upon the unbelieving world. In the later chapters of the gospel further details will be given of this time (cf. 13:36-43, 47-51).

That John does not see the interval between the first coming and the second coming, presenting them both in the same context, is not surprising. In the great prophetic passages of the Old Testament there is no perspective, the first coming and the second coming of the Messiah being described in the same contexts. As Maclaren says, “The future is foreshortened, and great gulfs of centuries are passed over, as, standing on a plain, we see it as continuous, though it may really be cleft by deep ravines. He did not know ‘what manner of time’ the spirit which was in him did ‘signify.’ No doubt his expectations were correct, in so far as Christ’s coming really sifted and separated, and was the rising and falling of many; but it was not attended by such tokens as John inferred. Hence we can understand his doubts when in prison, and learn that a prophet was often mistaken as to the meaning of his message.”9

Conclusion

John has given us an important understanding of the work of the Messiah, but he has omitted a very important aspect of His work, which is essential for salvation. We find no hint of a mention of His work of sacrifice for sin. We must not however, conclude that he knew nothing of it. It is the same John who in the Gospel of John cries out, “Behold the Lamb of God who taketh

away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). This is the last and highest plateau of his message. He is the King, the bestower of the Spirit, the awe-inspiring Judge, but before all else the Passover Lamb. It is not surprising that, having uttered this, there was nothing more for him to do but to decrease.

1 I take arche (AV, "beginning") to refer to the whole gospel.

2 Morgan, p. 22.

3 Hill, p. 89

4 Maclaren, I, 23

5 Ibid., I, 24.

6 Barclay, I, 51

7 Maclaren, I, 27-28

8 Ibid., I, 29.

9 Ibid., I, 32

The Infidelity of Anxiety

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Lewis Johnson, Jr.

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Introduction

We are living in the Age of Anxiety, according to some interpreters of modern life. And, surprisingly, this sense of uneasiness and apprehensiveness is not the sole possession of the adult population. Young people, especially students, are afflicted with the feeling. Some time ago a number of them were polled by Gallup, and one of the questions asked was this one, “What is the basic feeling you have toward life?” Sixty per cent of the young people replied in shocking and surprising unanimity, “Fear.” What a strange answer from the youth of our age!

The term anxiety is derived from the Latin word angustia (usually found in the plural form angustiae), which means shortness of breath, or difficulty, distress, perplexity. When used of the mind it means narrowness, or contractedness. It suggests, then, the feeling of constriction which occurs in the greatest experiences of fear. The Latin word, in turn, is derived from the Greek word ancho, which means to press tight, to strangle, or throttle. The Latin word ango can mean to choke. It is from this word group that we have the term angina pectoris, which refers to a heart disease in which there

are spasms of pain in the chest, with feelings of suffocation, usually due to anemia of the heart muscle. Characteristic of the feeling of anxiety is the fact that the thing which makes me afraid is subordinate to the fear, and often it does not appear at all. In other words, the nature of the feeling of anxiety is that is possesses or gives an indefinable sense of being threatened.1 It is probably that this fear, or anxiety, is not to be interpreted as fear of death. Our generation is not characterized by an unusual fear of death. There are many in our day who have faced death with no obvious fears and often without any spiritual stays at all. Spiritually indifferent people, in fact, atheistic and nihilistic people, are often quite calm and composed in facing death. The protests of Hindus in Viet Nam have illustrated this, many of them voluntarily giving their bodies to a fiery death.

What appears to be the case, then, is this: The fear of our age is not the fear of death, but the fear of life. “If Luther, the medieval monk,” Helmut Thielecke said, “was filled with the anxiety of guilt in the presence of the divine Judge and this wrung from his lips the question: ‘How can I find a gracious God?’ then people today are shaken by the anxiety of fate, by fear of the appalling and unfathomable contingencies of life. Where once there stood the judging God there is now a vacuum, an empty place.”2 One wishes that the fear of Luther were the fear of our day, but unfortunately it is not. We have lost the sense of a judging God, although we have not lost the judging God! But, instead of this ultimate terror, our generation has substituted a lesser, an almost insignificant fear, the fear of the contingencies, the happenings, of this life. This has been

beautifully caught in one wag's comment, "I'm not so much afraid of the end of the world as I am of the end of the month!"

Man's attempts to deal with this dread of the future are usually of two kinds. In the first place, the question is ignored. The problem of the meaning of life is briefly discussed and then filed away, and man becomes at this point a machine, an instrument, perfunctorily carrying out the functions of life with no concern over the ultimate questions at all. But, as Thielecke points out, this is "the delusive peace of a technological Nirvana, the peace of self-renunciation, flight into superficiality."3 The other attempt to deal with this dread comes from science but, due to the fate of the world inexorably set before us by the second law of thermodynamics, this inevitably leads to the nihilism of a Jean Paul Sartre, one of the prevailing philosophies of our time. The universe is simply a transient episode, which has arisen of the eternal nothingness of the past and will disappear again someday into the absolute nothingness of the future, leaving no trace at all.

It is the Christian gospel that specializes in dealing with man's sin of unbelief and guilt. And Paul's undying words, "And by him (Jesus Christ) all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Acts 13:39), beautifully express it. And, further, it deals with the problem of anxiety. It is characteristic of the New Testament to address believers with the thrilling words, "Fear not!" This is the answer to the tranquilizers!

The passage before us is one in which the theme of the tranquility of trust is wonderfully and comfortingly

expounded. Its connection with the preceding is indicated by the word, “Therefore” (lit., for this reason). The Lord has just said in verse twenty-four, “No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.” The point, then, is simply this: If we are His slaves, then we have no worries.

It is His responsbility to provide material things for His slaves, His possessions. As surely as birds have no need to worry over feathers, and flowers over their petals, so certainly have we no need to worry over the needs of life.

The Principle Declared

Concerning what we put in (6:25). In the opening verse of the section the general principle is declared. It is this: While we must work, we must not worry.

The words of the Authorized Version, “Take no thought,” might create the wrong impression. It is possible that one might get the impression that the Lord Jesus is advocating “a reckless improvidence.”4 The words of the Greek text, from which the Authorized Version’s rendering is derived, mean simply, be not anxious, or perhaps do not worry about. While we must work, we must not worry. The Apostle Paul expresses the need to work when he writes, “If any would not work, neither should he eat” (cf. 2 Thess. 3:10). And the thought is in this passage also, for, while the Lord speaks of the Father feeding the birds of the air, it is doubtful if any being works harder than the little sparrow for sustenance.

Concerning what we put on (6:25). He continues by noting not only that God supplies His saints with food and drink, but also with clothing. The point of this is that, since He has in wonderful grace given us life through Christ's saving work, He surely will do that which is lesser, meet the daily needs of his family.

One might be tempted to think that life in Palestine must have been very easy in those pristine days before the coming of modern problems. Surely the simplicity of life then contributed to an easy trust in God. But such was not the case. "To begin with," Hunter points out, "life in the Galilee of Jesus' day was no economic idyll. With taxation totalling around 8s. in the £ the men of Galilee had economic worries hardly less than our."5 That means that the rate of taxation in Jesus' day in Palestine was 40%. Not many of us fall into that bracket, at least in the United States, although, if inflation continues, many will come to know the experience soon.

The principle, then, is not that we must abandon wise foresight in the planning of our lives, but we must abandon worrying foresight.

The Principle Argued

Argument from the logic of creation (6:25). There now follow seven arguments and defences against Christian worry. The first we have already alluded to; it is an argument derived from the logic of creation itself. The point is that God would not have created human life, with its specific needs, had He not seen to the provision of the accompanying needs for its maintenance. Having made life, He will provide for its support.

There is a sense in which this applies to all of human life, although we are doing everything in our power to make it difficult for Him to meet human needs, as the environmentalists are trying to point out in their limited way. I think, however, that the real force of the text points towards the meeting of the needs of the saints, who have been brought by Him into the possession of eternal life. Having saved us, He will surely meet the lesser, the material, needs that we have. Put in Paul's words it is, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things" (Rom. 8:32)?

The argument from nature (6:26). The skies above Palestine were full of birds, and it is no wonder that the Lord should turn to them for illustration. This he did more than once. In fact, this is one of the many evidences that our Lord was "country-bred." Palestine has been called "the cross-roads of bird-migrations."6 The argument of our Lord here is again the very simple one of from the less to the greater. If birds who cannot plan ahead, have no cause to worry, then certainly we, endowed with intelligence, who can plan for the future, have no need to feel any apprehension over our needs. If He cares for the lower creatures, then surely, He will care for those who are created in His own image and are now being re-formed into that likeness.

The passage, of course, is no incentive to idleness, as anyone who has seen birds in operation knows. It has been said that no one works harder than the average bird for a living. I can attest to that from personal observation, as well as from struggles with sparrows! Birds are the nearest thing to perpetual motion that I know. They do not sit upon branches or twigs and wait

for heaven to drop a worm or an insect into their mouth. They are constantly gathering insects, preparing their nests, caring for their young, teaching them bird culture, although they do it instinctively. They even exercise a certain degree of care, for they may move from one climate to another in anticipation of the changes of weather. Yet, they do not overdo their work of providing for their young, like the Rich Fool of our Lord's parable (Luke 12:16-21). They work, but they do not worry.

The argument from human inability (6:27). "Which of you by being anxious can add one cubit unto his stature," so the Authorized Version reads. But the word translated, "stature," may mean two things. It may refer either to age or to height (stature). Zachaeus was small in stature (cf. Luke 19:3). Sarah was long past the age of conceiving (cf. Heb. 11:11). The same Greek word is used in these passages. Now a cubit was eighteen inches, and it is ridiculous to think that anyone would ever be thinking of adding eighteen inches to his height by worrying, especially before the days of our modern basketball giants! Therefore, the much more likely meaning is that no man can add the shortest space to his life by worrying. Worry is pointless in helping man. Even if one could add a cubit, what would that mean to the life of a man? We often speak of our birthdays as mile-posts. On our seventieth birthday we are able to speak of our "seventieth mile-post." What would a cubit add to that? Practically nothing, Hendrikson concludes, "A man may 'worry himself to death'; he cannot worry himself into a longer span of life."7 Our times are in God's hands; they are best left there.

The argument from the flowers (6:28-30). The lillies of the field were the scarlet poppies and anemones. They bloomed for one day on the hillsides in Palestine, and yet their brief life possessed a beauty and glory that outshone that of Solomon, clothed in his royal raiment. His garments, put under the microscope, would be found out to be like sackcloth, but the red anemone, the closer it is observed, the more beautiful and exquisite it becomes. “These pass in a night,” King notes, “you persist through eternity — do you suppose that God is any less concerned with your necessary clothing?”8 The lesson is stated in verse thirty, and it contains a double argument, as Hendriksen points out, “a. from the less to the greater: If God provides for the short-lived grass, he will surely provide for his children, destined for eternal glory. b. from the greater to less: If God decks the wild flowers with such very beautiful garments, then he will certainly clothe his children with the ordinary garments which they need.”9 The argument from the custom of the Gentiles (6:31-32a). Worry is characteristic of the Gentiles, the Lord says. Since it is esentially distrust of God, it is understandable in Gentiles who have jealous, capricious, unpredictable gods, who lust like humans, lie, cheat, and even murder. But Messiah’s followers are different (cf. Eph. 2:11-12; 4:17-24), and they must walk a different path.

The argument from the family tie (6:32b). The believer has a Heavenly Father, and He has foreknowledge of all his needs. And, further, His knowledge is present to Him before the believer asks that they be met (cf. 6:8). And this knowledge makes it certain that He will meet the needs He is aware of (cf. Eph. 3:20-21). Would not an earthly father, possessing the necessary resources, meet

the needs of his children? How much more our Heavenly Father. As the Scriptures say, “No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly” (Psa. 84:11).

The argument from the day’s sufficiency (6:34). Worry may be defeated by the art of living one day at a time. Leave tomorrow’s burdens for tomorrow. We only double them by anticipating them.

All of this raises the question of prayer and its relation to peace and freedom from worry. It is to be noticed that the Lord does not say, “Stop worrying, pull yourself together.” That is useless for the spiritually helpless, and it is also bad psychology. It is what is called repression. And He does not say, “Stop worrying, it may never happen.” This piece of popular psychology is thought to be very wonderful by the simple-minded, but the facts are that it may happen! Job said, “For the thing which I greatly feared is come upon me” (3:25)! Our problem is that it may happen. The Christian method of dealing with problems is to take them to the Lord, and Philippians 4:6-7 expresses it beautifully and meaningfully, “Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And THE PEACE OF GOD, which passeth all understanding, SHALL KEEP your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” That remedy solves the mighty turmoil of heart and mind within us. Cf. Isa. 26:3. As the psalmist, amid his trials and troubles, said, “I laid down and slept; I awaked: for THE LORD sustained me” (3:5), so may we find the solution to life’s trials in Him.

One of the greatest of baseball’s pitchers was Satchel Paige, who still lives and promotes the game he played

so well. He is famous for his six rules for a happy life, and they humorously portray the best of the provisions of the natural man.

1. Avoid fried meats which angry up the blood.

2. If your stomach disputes you, lie down and pacify it with cool thoughts.

3. Keep the juices flowing by jangling around gently as you move.

4. Go very light on vices such as carrying on in society. The social ramble ain't restful.

5. Avoid running at all times.

6. Don't look back. Something may be gaining on you."

How much more satisfying is the Lord's recipe!

III The Principle Restated

The principle is restated in different words in verse thirty-three, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." After all, if we are His slaves, then attention to His affairs brings the assurance that He, our great Slaveholder and Master, will care for all the material needs of His own. Cf. vv. 19-21.

Conclusions

(1) First, in summing up what our Lord is saying, we must point out that worry is needless, useless, and injurious. The past is past, and the future has not come. Further, it is blind, for it refuses the lessons of history and life. And finally, it is sinful. It is not weakness; it is wickedness.

(2) Second, the secret of tranquility is trust. With His cause as our concern we may rest in His care. There is an old cliche, which is nevertheless true, “If you’re worrying, you’re not trusting, and if you’re trusting, you’re not worrying.” One of the greatest of all worriers was Peter. He worried about sinking when he was walking on the water. He worried about Jesus’ payment of taxes. He worried about Jesus betrayer. He worried about His sufferering. But, when he came to a fuller knowledge of the grace of God, he wrote, “Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you” (1 Pet. 5:7). The word “care” is from the same root that the verb translated, “take no thought” (Matt. 6:25), comes from. That’s it. The solution does not lie in, “stop worrying.” That I cannot do of myself. It lies in letting Him take my cares from me. And that He promises to do. Let your requests be made known unto God!

1 Helmut Theilecke, Christ and the Meaning of Life: A Book of Sermons and Meditations, ed. and trans. by John W. Doberstein (New York, 1962), p. 134.

2 Ibid., p.p. 133-34.

3 Ibid., pp. 135-36.

4 King, p. 89.

5 Hunter, p. 80.

6 A. Parmelee, All the Birds of the Bible (New York, 1959), p. 183.

7 Hendriksen, p. 351.

8 King, p. 92.

9 Hendriksen, pp. 352-53.

The Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven

The Keys of the

Kingdom of Heaven

S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.

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Scripture Reading: Matthew 16:19-20

Introduction

Probably most of my readers have at one time or another been informed by a friend or acquaintance that the church to which they belong is the only true church, and that forgiveness can be found only through it. Julius R. Mantey, a well-known Baptist Professor of New Testament Interpretation wrote a quarter of a century ago of such an experience: “Several years ago in Alaska, I was informed by a teen-age girl that her church was the only true church and that it alone was authorized by Christ to forgive men’s sins. Her reason was that Christ had said to Peter, ‘Upon this rock I will build my church… and I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven.’ Since that day I have often heard and read similar statements by members of that same denomination. The sweeping nature of such a claim should at least arrest one’s attention. If it can be substantiated as valid historically and scripturally, the members of the numerous other denominations are at once proved to be without the pale of God’s mercy and

pardon." I think we can all agree with Mantey's concluding words, "Accordingly we should gladly welcome any clear light that may be available upon the subject."1 In our last study we reached the conclusion that, when the Lord said to Peter, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church" (cf. Matt. 16:18), He was referring to the truth expressed in Peter's great confession of verse sixteen, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." That view is true to the change in Greek words, that is, from Petros (a pebble) to petra (a mass of living rock, a cliff). It is true to the apostles' sentiments expressed in their later letters (cf. Rom. 9:33; 1 Pet. 2:8). And, it may be surprising to some, it is true to the interpretations of many of the greatest of the Catholic interpreters. For example, Augustine in his works of the Gospel of John refers to the text in Matthew, saying, "On this rock which thou hast confessed I will build my church; for the rock is Christ." And Jerome, the greatest Biblical scholar of the early church, denied the contemporary reference of the text to the Apostle Peter, contending in his commentary on Matthew, "The rock is Christ."

In our last study we also alluded to the creed of Pope Pius IV, obligatory upon all in the Church of Rome, that the Scriptures should be interpreted "according to the unanimous consent of the Holy Fathers." It is important, however, to remember that Tertullian, the North African Church Father, points out in his Scopiace that the keys were given to the church, and in his treatise on Modesty he explicitly denies that Peter could forgive sins committed against God, saying, "For the right and arbitrament is the Lord's not the servant's, God Himself, not the priest's."

The Church Father Cyprian pointed out in his work, On the Unity of the Church, “Assuredly the rest of the apostles were also the same as Peter, endowed with a like partnership both of honor and power,” and in a letter wrote, “So that the Church is settled upon the bishops (pastors), and every act of the Church is controlled by these same rulers.” So, Peter was not a pope nor a bishop over the apostles, according to him, but an apostle among them.

The third century Alexandrian, Origen, a noted Church father, claimed that binding and loosing are exercised by all godly people whenever they give judgment in accordance with God’s Word.

It is evident, then, that there is no unanimous consent of the Holy Fathers that Peter is the rock upon which the church is built, nor that to Peter was given the ultimate authority to forgive sin.

But what of the text, “And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matt. 16:19)? Is that not what it says? Let’s look and see.

The Major Interpretations of the Verse

The Romanist view. The common Romanist view is that authority was given to Peter, the first bishop of the church in Rome, and to his successors to admit and exclude from the church. Thus, by capitalizing upon the fear of eternity the church has often used its “binding and loosing powers” as a club over individuals and nations. A classic illustration of this is found in the conflict between Henry IV of Germany and Pope Gregory VII (1073-1075), which finally led to the Pope’s

anathematizing of the king in these words, “I deprive King Henry, who has rebelled against thy church (he had addressed himself to Peter!) with unheard audacity, of the government over the whole kingdom of Germany and Italy, and I release all Christian men from the allegiance which they have sworn or may swear to him, and I forbid anyone to serve him as king … I bind him in the bonds of anathema in thy stead, and I bind him thus as commissioned by thee, that the nations may know that thou art Peter and that upon thy rock the son of the living God has built His church and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it.”

What may we say to this remarkable claim? In the first place, it seems to run counter to Matthew 9:6, in which we find these words, “But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins …” Further, the use of the term “whatsoever” lays stress not on individuals, but on things. The binding has to do with things, that is, most likely with certain teachings. Third, chapter eighteen and verse one would be inexplainable, if Rome’s claim were true. Then, too, in Revelation 1:18 it is said that our Lord has the ultimate keys, “the keys of death and hades.” And, fifth, in chapter eighteen, verse eighteen, this authority is given to the entire body in the words, “verily I say unto you (plu.), Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” Notice the plurals: the church is in view and, if so, then Peter does not have the authority.

Finally, as one reads the New Testament, he discovers there is no instance where Peter, or any other individual, possessed the sacred power to forgive. No one confessed his sins to an apostle and received his

forgiveness and absolution. In fact, just the opposite takes place. When Simon the sorcerer asked for the power of the Holy Spirit, flagrantly sinning against the Lord, did Peter forgive him? Listen to him, “Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter; for thy heart is not right IN THE SIGHT OF GOD. Repent, therefore, of this thy wickedness, and PRAY GOD, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee” (Acts 8:20-22).

The Lutheran view. According to Lutheran interpretation by this passage the Lord Jesus has given ministers the authority to pronounce forgiveness of sins according to the terms of the gospel of Christ, or otherwise to administer the gospel in the world.2 This idea may be the thought of John 20:33, but it is not the sense of the text here. The connection of the passage with 18:18 and church discipline is overlooked, and the sense of binding and loosing is missed.

Other Protestant views. Other suggestions have included such interpretations as: (1) authority is given by the Lord Jesus to Peter to open the kingdom to the Jews, as in Acts 2, and to the Gentiles, as in Acts 10. (2) Peter is given authority to be the chief among the apostles, but this authority has not been transmitted to others. Most of these views disconnect the verse, either from the immediate context or from the context of Matthew 18.

The Meaning of the Terms

“The keys of the kingdom of heaven” (16:19). We have a clue to the interpretation of the term, “keys,” in Luke 11:52, where we read, “Woe unto you, lawyers! For ye have taken away THE KEY of knowledge; ye entered not

in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered." Calvin comments, "The metaphor of 'keys' fits as well with the office of teaching, as Christ says in Luke 11:52 that the Scribes and Pharisees, as interpreters of the Law likewise have the key of the kingdom of heaven. For we know that the gate of life is only opened to us by the Word of God."3 While Calvin puts the keys in the hands of the minister of the gospel, he has hit upon an important point. The keys do pertain to the administration of the kingdom, the sphere of divine activity upon the earth. Morgan suggests that the key is the "insignia of the office of scribe, the teacher of the law of God." Here the subject of the kingdom is in view, and it reminds us of 13:52. In other words, the Lord, according to Morgan, is simply saying to Peter: You are my scribe.4 Since Peter's commission is expanded to include the entire church in chapter eighteen, we must conclude that Peter is here seen as the representative of the church of Jesus Christ, of those who have confessed His Messiahship and Sonship. To him and to them is given the authority to instruct, or to legislate, in the kingdom of heaven.

"Bind" and "loose." What do these terms mean? Among the rabbis the terms were technical terms for decisions on the Law. To bind was to forbid while to loose was to allow (cf 23:4). For example, one of their decisions reads, "To them that take a hot bath on the sabbath day, they bind (i.e., they forbid) washing, and they loose (i.e., they allow) perspiring."5 It would seem, then, that these meanings are in perfect harmony with the notion that to the church is given legislative authority over divine things. Cf. 18:18.

The tenses of the verbs. The Greek tenses of the verbs, “bind” and “loose,” are future perfect. If we are to give them their literal significance, then the rendering of Williams is correct, “and whatever you forbid on earth must be what IS ALREADY FORBIDDEN in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth must be what IS ALREADY PERMITTED in heaven.” There is some question regarding this rendering but, if it is correct, then the meaning would seem to be that Peter and the church are not to determine the truth and its application, but to ratify it. Truth has its source in heaven.

The Meaning of the Verse

The expression of it. From what has been said, it would seem, then, that the Lord Jesus, having just spoken of the foundation of the church upon His Messiahship and Sonship, moves on to the granting to Peter and to the entire church the authority to legislate according to the Word of God, that is, TO DECLARE THE TERMS OF SALVATION AND TO DEFINE PROPER CONDUCT WITHIN THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.

I am reminded of two passages which to me, at least, throw a flood of light upon this matter. In Matthew 21:43 the Lord Jesus, in the Parable of the Householder, speaks of the rejection of Himself by Israel and of a new divine initiative: “Therefore say I unto you, The Kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits of it” (cf. Rom. 11:11-12, 15, 30). The stewardship of the kingdom will be given to the Gentiles, that is, the church. In 16:19 we have advance notice of that.

The other passage is found in the writings of the Apostle Paul. In 1 Timothy 3:15 he writes, “But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, THE PILLAR AND GROUND OF THE TRUTH.” The church is to be the defence of the faith entrusted to the people of God, the bulwark in disciplinary protection of the truth.

The historical inception of it. In the historical outworking of this delegation of authority there is definite progression. On the Day of Pentecost it is Peter who declares the terms of salvation to the Jews gathered in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 2:14-36). In Acts 3:1-10 it is Peter who looses the lame man, and then he again declares the terms of salvation to the Jews (cf. 3:11-26). In the fifth chapter we read of the binding of Ananias and Sapphira (5;1-11).

And in the house of Cornelius it is Peter again who declares the terms of salvation to the Gentiles (cf. 10:34-43).

One might think that to Peter had indeed been given the supreme power among the apostles until we read on in Acts. In the later chapters it is Paul who emerges as leader of the apostles, as the gospel makes its way to the West. In Antioch it is he who declares the terms of salvation to the Jews in the synagogue (cf. 13:16-41), and in the missionary journeys. Then, in the so-called Jerusalem Conference it is the apostles and the elders, together with James, who legislate for the church. James emerges as the leader in Jerusalem, while Paul remains predominant among the Gentiles. It is plain that Peter does not have the keys to himself.

The application of it. We learn, then that, the sacerdotal claims of the Roman church are not substantiated in the text of Holy Scripture, and what has been said about the keys may also be said about such claims as the institution of prayers for the dead, the making of the sign of the cross, the adoration of Mary, the saints, the cross, images, and relics. Lent, holy water, rosary beads, the sale of indulgences, the sacrifice of the mass, auricular confession of sins to a priest, purgatory, and the infallibility of the pope are other inventions. We must stand on the Word of God alone.

On the other hand, we must keep in mind that the Church of Jesus Christ, the true believing church, not some denomination or local body, has had entrusted to her the Word of God and the responsibility of instruction and legislation under its inspiration and authority.

It is the church's responsibility to preach the way of salvation, reminding the world, "be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the NAME OF JESUS CHRIST of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by Him doth this man stand here before you well. This is THE STONE WHICH WAS SET AT NOUGHT OF YOU BUILDERS, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other; FOR THERE IS NO OTHER NAME UNDER HEAVEN GIVEN AMONG MEN, WHEREBY WE MUST BE SAVED" (Acts 4:10-12).

And it is the church's responsibility to carry out discipline in the body that is brought into being by the preaching of the Word and the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration and faith. May God enable us to be faithful to our commission!

1 Julius R. Mantey, Was Peter a Pope? (Chicago, 1949), p. 9.

2 Lenski, pp. 628-32.

3 John Calvin, A Harmony of the Gospels (Grand Rapids, 1972), II, 187.

4 Morgan, p. 215.

5 Cf. Morrison, pp. 285-86.

The King’s Supernatural Birth

The King’s Supernatural Birth

S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.

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Scripture Reading: Matthew 1:18-25 Introduction

To a world prepared politically, economically, morally, and spiritually Jesus came. “There is a tide in the affairs of men,” wrote Shakespeare, “which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune.” His time was God’s time. Paul knew this, too, for he wrote, “But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law” (Galatians 4:4).

Not only were the circumstances of the entrance of the Messiah providentially arranged, but His birth also was a miracle. Matthew, who has written the royal gospel, has taken pains to point this out. There must be no question that the words of the superscription over the cross, a climatic note in the sweep of the gospel’s thought, are true. He really was “Jesus the King of the Jews” (Matthew 27:37).

The accounts of the birth of the Messiah are written from different standpoints, but they each agree in the fact and in the manner of His birth. In the Matthaean

narrative it is stated twice that Mary's conception was "of the Holy Ghost" (1:18, 20). Luke, who gives more detail concerning the birth itself, writes, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (1:35). Both accounts unite in the affirmation that He was "conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary" (Apostles' Creed). While Mark does not expressly assert the virgin birth, his gospel is in harmony with it. He opens his narrative by referring to Jesus as "the Son of God" (1:1). Later one comes across the term "son of Mary," but Mark never calls Him "son of Joseph, although He may be called that legally. John, too, agrees, for we hear our Lord saying, "Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world" (John 8:23; cf. 1:1, 14).

The Objections To The King's Supernatural Birth

The Mythological objection. It has been asserted by some that the miraculous birth of Christ was a story invented by the early Christians to dramatize the origin of their Lord. If this were so, then it is doubtful if the church succeeded very well in its intentions. One also wonders how an account in which a babe is born in a manger in the presence of a carpenter and a few shepherds could have survived the competition with the story of the birth of Pallas Athena who, born by no mother, sprang out of the head of Zeus, full-grown and in full armour.

The biological objection. With some the chief problem of the virgin birth is its violation of natural processes. But,

if we accept the inspiration and authority of the Word of God, we must be prepared to face the contravention of the natural, or the fact of the supernatural. Adam and Eve were both born without human parents. Is the creation or the virgin birth the greater miracle?

The Scriptural objection. There are certain biblical phrases upon which unbelievers have laid hold in order to cast doubt upon the virgin birth. For example, in Luke 2:33 we have the words, “Joseph and his mother,” and in 2:48, “thy father.” In Matthew 13:55 the question is asked, “Is not this the carpenter’s son?” There is, however, no difficulty with these clauses and phrases if we simply bear in mind that Joseph was indeed the father of Jesus in the purely legal sense. Joseph bowed to the miracle of God, took Mary into his house as his lawful wife, legitimizing and admitting Jesus in a formal, legal sense to the house of David.

The Account of The King’s Supernatural Birth

Joseph’s realization of Mary’s condition (1:18-19). In the days of Augustus Caesar, the man whom some wished to make God, two Hebrew men contracted a marriage between a young carpenter, a son of David, and a pious maiden, also of David’s family, from whom would come the God who became man. Some time after the engagement, which was legally binding, knowledge came to the young man that the maiden was pregnant. A struggle began within the mind and heart of the man. But if Joseph was in doubt over the origin of the maiden’s pregnancy, the Scripture is not. Twice Matthew says that the child was “of the Holy Spirit” (vv. 18, 20), a phrase which refers to a secret we can never really fathom, only adore. As Campbell Morgan put it, it

is “the Holy Mystery — the touch of God upon the simple life that made it forever sublime.”1 Finally, Joseph made up his mind and determined to divorce Mary privately, with the minimum number of two witnesses.2 The angel’s revelation to Joseph (1:20-23). During a restless night Joseph was visited by the angel of the Lord, who informed him of the divine origin of the maiden’s child. We shall have no problem with the divine conception if we remember at least these things. In the first place, the Lord Jesus did not have common human parentage, although He was completely human. He had no human father; He possessed divine nature as well as human nature. In the second place, He was not a new, original creation, a kind of hetero-human. We must not fall prey to any kind of Docetism by which the divine nature of Christ overshadows and overpowers the human. His humanity was not a camouflaged humanity. He possessed no phantom body.

A great deal of stress is laid upon the name Jesus in Matthew’s account. The angel informs Joseph that this is to be His name. Jesus, the Greek form of the Hebrew Joshua, means O Lord, save!, or Yahweh is salvation, or simply Yahweh saves.3The name itself was a message. Every time Mary and Joseph called His name the gospel was proclaimed. And that name suggested His calling. He is the second Joshua who will lead Israel into the promised land of salvation and the kingdom.

The name pointed to the fact that the real problem of the people of Israel was not political, the problem of Roman domination, economic, or social. The real problem was sin, as it is in our Western civilization, which is disintegrating in red ruin because we have not recognized and bowed to the doctrine of original sin.

That doctrine was slain by human contempt, but the truth has lived on to document itself in subsequent history. And that we should have replaced this relevant and revealing teaching by the brainless babble of a Coue' is a colossal marvel.4 There is no idiotic imbecility beyond the ability of great modern psychologists and philosophers to believe. Man's greatest need is not human engineering, nor time, but salvation. This salvation our "Yahweh saves" came to provide by the blood of Golgotha.

The simplicity of the name of the Saviour is also remarkable. Men call their world rulers by names which make extravagant claims for them as, for example, Alexander the Great, Charles the Bold, and Richard the Lion-Hearted. How different is the simple Jesus! Genuine believers however, revere none of His names and titles more than this one, which so definitely underlines the office He holds. In the twenty-second verse we are introduced to the first of the quotations avowedly introduced by the author of the gospel with the impressive formula, "This is come to pass that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophet." There are ten of the "fulfillment quotations," which, if isolated, tell us considerable about the author's purpose in writing the gospel.5 But the principal point the evangelist wishes to make here is that the birth of Jesus was the subject of Isaiah's great Immanuel prophecy. The child born of the virgin, to be called Immanuel, would come into the midst of the degradation of His people Israel (cf. Isaiah 7:10-16) but ultimately overcome all His enemies (9:6-7). The sweep of Isaiah's argument demanded that the "child" of 7:14 be the "son" of 9:6. Although born of a lowly virgin in Israel (cf.

9:6, “unto us”), He would be Immanuel, “the Mighty God,” and the government would be upon His shoulder. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that Matthew links the prophecy with the history of the birth of Mary’s son, because each of these elements is found in the history also. Of all the elements, however, the greatest stress lies upon His deity, or upon Immanuel. He is with us by virtue of the virgin birth, but let one never forget that He is God with us.

The response of Joseph (1:24-25). Joseph, then, following the angel’s appearance, obediently brought Mary home, publicly acknowledging her as his wife and formally legalizing the connection of her son with the Davidic line. But normal marriage relations awaited the birth of the infant.

He was given the name Jesus, the best, truest, and most appropriate name for Him in the days of His flesh, since it was divinely ordered and expounded. And, when believers plead this name, they bring back to God His own name for Him. It is the name that identifies Him with His people and the name which indicates His principal work. Think of knowing Shakespeare, but not as an author, or Bacon, but not as a philosopher, and Jesus, but not as Saviour. This is the sad situation of those who profess to know the Lord Jesus Christ as Master, or Teacher, but not as Redeemer.

The Importance Of The King’s Supernatural Birth

In contrast with the opinion of William Barclay, a noted Scottish professor, who claims that the virgin birth is a “crude fact,” and that it is a doctrine that his church does not compel him to accept in any literal sense,6 it

has been the view of orthodoxy down through the centuries that the supernatural birth of Jesus Christ is an important teaching. I think orthodoxy is correct in this view. It is an important teaching.

In relation to the Word of God. In the prologue to Luke's gospel the evangelist claims that he, possessing "perfect understanding of all things from the very first," writes that Theophilus might know the "certainty" of the things in which he had been instructed (cf. Luke 1:1-4). The evangelist then proceeds to relate the accounts of the unusual birth of John the Baptist and the virgin birth of Christ. Now, suppose he is wrong on the very first important matter investigated? What confidence can we place in the remainder of the story? One can see that the account of the virgin birth is directly related to the trustworthiness of God's Word.

In relation to the Son of God. In the first place, the virgin birth is necessary for a sinless Son (cf. Luke 1:35). If He had received Mary's nature, He would not be able to save, for He, too, would have a nature under divine condemnation.

Further, if we accept the historicity of the gospel accounts, the choice that faces us is that of a virgin birth over against an illegitimate birth. It is clear from the record in Matthew that Joseph knew he was not the father of Jesus. In other words, the virgin birth is a refutation of illegitimacy.

In relation to the salvation of God. The virgin birth has ultimate connections with the cross. Helmut Thielecke has said, "Crib and cross are both of the same wood."7 In a different context we may say that, if Jesus possessed Joseph's nature, He possessed his sin. And, if He

possessed his sin, He could not become our Saviour by the blood of Calvary. He would have needed a Saviour Himself.

In relation to the kingdom of God. Great stress is laid in both Matthew and Luke upon our Lord's right to sit upon the throne of David in the kingdom of God (cf. Matthew 1:1, 17; 2:2; Luke 1:31-35). It is sometimes not realized that this right is directly related to the doctrine of the virgin birth. Jesus received legal title to the throne through Joseph and Solomon, but upon his ancestor Jecconiah, or Coniah, had been pronounced a curse of great magnitude. Jeremiah wrote, "Thus saith the Lord, Write ye this man (Coniah) childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days: for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah" (22:30, italics added). While not deprived of legal title, the direct line of descent was smitten with a curse. The line could hand on to another that from which it could not profit, and this vacant title had passed on down from Jeconiah to Joseph. It might have seemed impossible to solve the problem that faced the fulfillment of the Davidic promises. Its resolution lay in the wisdom and power of God. Jesus, genuinely a son of David through Mary according to the flesh (cf. Romans 1:3), by reason of the virgin birth and nonparticipation in the seed of Joseph, qualifies to receive the title without coming under the curse. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out" (Romans 11:33).

To this day He alone possesses the right to the throne of David, and the only remaining and reliable genealogies of the Jews are those of Matthew and Luke, and they

validate His claim. The superscription of the cross, “This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews,” flashes its light over the centuries and proclaims far and wide that He was God’s King. In this Man, this Davidic Man, also Immanuel, God is moving to the throne of royal, universal sway over the affairs of men. And, as Isaiah says, “The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this” (9:7).

Ultimately, our response to the teaching of the virgin birth will hinge upon our view of Christ’s uniqueness. If we regard Him as a mere man, or even as Primus inter pares, we shall probably reject the virgin birth. But if we by God’s Spirit sense that He is unique – unique in history, unique according to His own consciousness in His relation to God and man, and unique in His redemption, will we not reason that it is credible that He be unique in His origin? We will concur with Denney, “He came from God, all the apostles believed, in a sense in which no other came: does it not follow that He came in a way in which no other came?”8 Would a word of appeal be considered in bad taste? Have we noticed and reflected upon His name Immanuel, – God with us? Is this personally true? Surely Phillips Brooks was right when he wrote the familiar carol:

“O little town of Bethlehem,

How still we see thee lie!

Above thy deep and dreamless sleep

The silent years go by;

Yet in thy dark streets shineth

The everlasting Light;

The hopes and fears of all the years

Are met in thee tonight!”

Yet the great preacher also emphazised the need of personal appropriation. Is He really God WITH US, with ME? Does the last stanza represent a prayer that we have made in the first person singular?

“O holy Child of Bethlehem

Descend to us, we pray;

Cast out our sin, and enter in—

Be born in us today!

We hear the Christmas angels

The great glad tidings tell—

Oh, come to us, abide with us,

Our Lord Immanuel!”

1 Morgan,/p.14.

2 Cf. Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud and Midrasch (3rd ed.; Munchen, 1961), I, 45-47. The verbs suggest that Joseph had reached a decision, but was hesitating to carry it out. Knox renders verse 20, “But hardly had this thought come to his mind, when an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, and said, Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take thy wife Mary to thyself, for it is by the power of the Holy Ghost that she has conceived this child” (The New Testament, New York, 1954, p.2).

3 Strack and Billerbeck, I, 45-47.

4 Emile Coué, French psychotherapist, best remembered for his formula for curing by optimistic

autosuggestion, “Day by day, in every way, I am getting better and better.”

5 Cf. Robert Horton Gundry, The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew’s Gospel (Leiden, 1967), and others.

6 Barclay,/I, 10,13.

7 Helmut Thielecke, Christ and the Meaning of Life (New York, 1962), p. 23.

8 James Denney, Studies in Theology (London, 1902), p. 64.

The Last Passover

The Last Passover

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Scripture Reading: Mark 14:12-21

Introduction

The Apostle Paul wrote, "For even Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us," and forever established the ultimate meaning of the many passovers Israel has celebrated through the centuries. They have been spiritual services designed to point to the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world. No treatment of the passover that fails to see that can possibly tell the true story of the ancient rite. That is something that we must keep before us as we continue our study of the Lord's Supper.

In our last study we looked at the first passover, and in this study we shall concentrate on the last (valid) one. That this was the last authorized passover is clear, for the rite now stands fulfilled in the death of the Lamb of God. That is what Paul means by his words in 1 Corinthians 5:7, cited above.

There is an interesting question concerning the time of the celebration of the Last Passover and Supper. It is the contention of many commentators and students that the

chronology of the Synoptics and of John cannot be reconciled. The Synoptics regard the last supper as a passover meal, while John seems to think that the crucifixion itself took place on the day the passover was eaten. Many attempts have been made to harmonize the two traditions, and probably none of them are entirely satisfactory. It is not at all certain, however, that there is any contradiction in the accounts, as Tasker has pointed out.1 There is some evidence that there was a dispute over the precise date of the passover in the time of the Lord Jesus. According to this view, the Pharisees rightly celebrated the passover on the Thursday night before the crucifixion, while the Sadducees celebrated theirs on the Friday of the day of the crucifixion. The latter was the view of the official leaders, it is claimed. There are many complications and questions concerning the problem, and a plethora of interpretations have been offered. In a recent book I. Howard Marshall, Professor of New Testament in the University of Aberdeen, Scotland, after a rather detailed discussion, has concluded that something like this is probably right. He says, “Our conclusion, then, is that Jesus held a Passover meal earlier than the official Jewish date, and that He was able to do so as the result of calendar differences among the Jews.”2 Now, if these things are historically true, there would be a remarkable fulfillment of the Old Testament record. For, at the very time when the passover lamb was to be eaten, He was being crucified.

Thus, in His death He was the passover lamb, and the leaders were fulfilling Scripture ironically in their murder of Him! It is tellingly true, “Surely the wrath of man shall praise Thee!” (Psa. 76:10).3 The two important characters of the opening part of the account

are Jesus and Judas, and the Lord utters one of His most significant sentences in the dialogue between the two when he solemnly declares, “The Son of Man is betrayed! It had been good for that man if he had not been born” (Matt. 26:24; cf. Mark 14:21). The statement is filled with important theological content, affirming the sovereignty of God, the responsibility of man, and the everlasting punishment of the finally impenitent. It is a word for our times, for the doctrines of the sovereignty of God and of eternal punishment have fallen upon evil days, even among the companies of those who maintain that they belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. We shall say more on this later.

Some Introductory Considerations

The New Testament ordinances. We have commented on the use of terms for the Lord’s Supper and have suggested that the term the Lord’s Supper is probably the most common one, and that it is a good term for the event, stressing the fact that in it He is the host, and we are the guests.

The importance of the Lord’s Supper. In the early church the Lord’s Supper was the highlight of the corporate worship of the church (cf. Acts 20:7). Its was “to break bread” that they came together in Troas when Paul met with the church there (cf. Acts 20:7). It is the only act of worship for which the Lord gave special direction. Even the very term used for the ordinance, deipnon (AV, “Supper”; 1 Cor. 11:21-22), really means dinner, not supper, and this underscores the importance of the ordinance. Dinner was the most important meal of the day for the ancients, who often had little breakfast and

took their midday meal of a few scraps of food wherever they happened to be at the time.

G. C. Berkower, the most widely known Reformed theologian of our day, has pointed out that the ordinance of the Lord's Supper is of great importance because it is "a divinely ordained act in which God stengthens our faith."' Further, he has pointed out that the church has spoken unanimously about this 4institution throughout the centuries, a fact that is to be explained by the "great clarity with which Scripture speaks of this institution."5 The roots of the Lord's Supper. The roots of the Lord's Supper, we have pointed out, extend back into the Old Testament to its parallel observance, the passover, as the historical conjunction of the two in the present passage indicates. There is a very clear parallel between the two observances. The passover was a memorial of a physical deliverance from the land of Egypt by means of a penal, substitutionary sacrifice, the passover lamb (cf. Exod. 12:1-36). The Lord's Supper is a memorial of a spiritual deliverance from bondage to sin and the world by means of the penal, substitutionary sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, the antitypical Passover Lamb (cf.. 1 Cor. 5:7). The passover was an anticipation of a future fulfillment in the first coming of the Messiah. It was to be observed "till He come" (cf. 1 Cor. 11:26). The Lord's Supper is also an anticipation of a future fulfillment in the second coming of the Messiah. It, too, is to be observed "till He comes" in His kingdom (cf. Mark 14:25).

The Preparation For The Passover

The disciple's question (Mark 14:12). There are three movements in the section. There is, first, the

preparation of the passover (vv. 12-16; cf. Matt. 26:17-19). Then, second, there is the celebration of the passover (vv. 17-21; cf. Matt. 26:20-25). And, finally, there is the institution of the Lord's Supper (vv. 22-25; cf. Matt. 26:26-29). The Markan account, which we are following, has a slightly fuller treatment of the event.

There is no real difficulty in the opening words of verse twelve, in which the disciples on "the first day of unleavened bread" ask where the passover shall be eaten. The feast of Unleavened Bread followed immediately after the passover, but there is evidence that the 14th Nisan, the day of sacrificing of the lambs, was loosely referred to as "the first day of the unleavened bread."6 The Lord's commission (Mark 14:13:15). According to the Lukan account the two disciples the Lord sends to complete arrangements for the room are Peter and John (cf. Luke 22:8). They were to enter the city amid the gay crowds and travellers' tents during the festive celebration of Israel's birthnight and meet a man with a jug of water. The thing of note in our Lord's words is the reference to a "man," for normally the woman carried the water in jugs. Contrary to the comments of some, there is no evidence that this was anything other than an instance of the supernatural foresight of the Lord. It was the providence of God that the man, not a woman, should be in the right place at the right time. "It is God who induces the man, particularly predestinated for the purpose before time began," Schilder declares, "to leave home with the pitcher at exactly that moment, and to cause him to return at a similarly appointed hour. God makes him stop for a few seconds at the specific corner where he is arrested by Peter and John. GOD HIMSELF SPREADS

THE CLOTH OVER THE TABLE AT WHICH THE SON OF MAN WILL LIE TO PARTAKE OF THE LAST SUPPER" (capitals mine).7 The incident may be contrasted instructively with the incident of chapter eleven, verses two and three, in which two disciples requisitioned an ass and her colt for the Lord to make His entry into Jerusalem. Here He asks, but there He demanded. In the one He acts as King, in the other as Mediator. In the one He displays His wealth, in the other His poverty. In the one He claims His right to the royal city, in the other He acknowledges that he does not have a place to lay His head. In the one He is the Son of David, but in the other He is the Son of man. Between the two poles of glory and humiliation He must live His life. At His entrance into our existence His parents hunted for a place for Him to be born, for the House of David was in ruins. And now at His death time He is asking for favors from His friends. Or, is this really a demand, for does He not say that they should say to the owner of the house, "the MASTER saith"?

Edersheim points out that the Lord had only asked for a kataluma (AV, "guest-chamber"), a word that meant an inn, or a guest room, where beasts of burden were unloaded and dusty garments and burdens were put down. Cf. Luke 2:7. However, the owner would show them an anagaion (AV, "a large upper room"), a word that referred to the best room in the house. He added that it would be "furnished and prepared," words that stress that the large upper room was fit for a king.8 The word "my" in verse fourteen, which is omitted in the AV's "the guest-chamber," would seem to indicate that the Lord had made previous arrangements with the

owner. Tradition has suggested that he was Mark's father, but of this there is no evidence.

The conclusion of the mission (Mark 14:16). In this short verse in brief compass is contained the visit to the house, the visit to the temple for the slaughter of the Lamb, and the return to the house for the roasting of it.

The Celebration of the Passover

The revelation of the betrayer (Mark 14:17-18). The second movement of the account begins here. As our Passover prepares to eat His Passover, disciples and demons are with Him. Judas, Satan's man, is right by His side.

In the early chapters of the Gospel of Matthew the Lord Jesus had said that He must "fulfill all righteousness" (3:15). That is beautifully seen in this paragraph. He, the Fulfiller of the Law of Moses, must execute all its demands to the smallest detail. The passover observance, therefore, must be authentic in every way. All that Moses wrote must be so accurately carried out that there is no flaw in anything. "The birthroom of the Holy Supper must be kept immaculately pure," Schilder wonderfully comments, adding a few lines later, "He may not and He does not wait to give us the New Testament until the Old is legally fulfilled. Precisely where the switch is laid, the rails must be most true. Nothing can be out of line there, or the place becomes one of disaster. Nothing is wrong. Christ obeys the law perfectly. He prepares the Passover according to all the rules the law prescribes for Him. Neither an ultra-fastidious Jew nor an eager angel can detect the slightest departure from the law in Him. The Gospel of the New Testament enters the hour of its

birth; but the law of the Old Covenant prepares the chamber."9 In Mark's description of the scene we have the words, "And in the evening He cometh with the twelve. And as they sat and did eat" (AV). This statement of the physical position of the Lord and the disciples is misleading. The text should be rendered, and while they were reclining and eating. The custom was to recline around a low table and eat from that position. The table was a rectangular table, and the guests reclined on their left sides around it. On the left side in the first position was John, who then would be reclining on the breast of the person in the next position, that of the host. In that place, of course, was our Lord, for John did recline on His breast and He was the host. Next to our Lord was Judas, so that He was reclining on his breast. Peter evidently was on the right side of the table, opposite the Apostle John.

These positions would explain how John alone heard the reference to the sign of the betrayal. If Peter had heard it, Judas would not have left the room alive! This explains why the Lord handed the sop to Judas first, since he was in the position of the chief guest at the table. It explains how Judas can ask if he is the betrayer, and no one else be able to hear our Lord's affirmative reply. It would also explain why Peter, after the dispute over who was the greatest, should take the lowest seat at the table, perhaps hoping that his magnanimous show of humility would gain for him later the position of the greatest (cf.. Luke 22:14-30)! And it would explain how Peter could beckon to John across the table, asking John to inquire about the identity of the traitor (cf. John 13:24).

The ritual of the passover meal was in four parts. First, there was a preliminary course, which began with a word of blessing spoken by the Paterfamilias (in this case, our Lord) over a first cup of wine. Then, second, the liturgy was given, the Paterfamilias explaining, in answer to a question from the youngest son, the meaning of the service. Would it not have been thrilling to hear our Lord's exposition? A second cup of wine was drunk at this point in the ritual. The main meal followed as the third part of the service, with grace spoken over the unleavened bread. It is probable that the words of institution were spoken at this point in the service. The supper itself began with the eating of the sop, and after this Judas left, his back receding into the darkness. A third cup, with a prayer, was drunk at this point in the ritual, this cup being the cup of blessing, as the Jews called it, and the cup of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 10:10). Finally, the passover concluded with the singing of the second part of the Hallel psalms, the first part having been sung at the beginning of the service. Final praise was expressed over a fourth cup.

The atmosphere of the festive meeting is shattered by our Lord's words, "Verily I say unto you, One of you who eateth with me shall betray me" (cf. v. 18). The reference of the words, "who eateth with me," is to Psalm 41:9, and it suggests that our Lord sees Judas as the ultimate reference of the words of the psalmist (cf. John 13:18). Our Lord was not taken by surprise by the betrayal (cf. Acts 2:23-24).

The disciples' response (Mark 14:19). One by one, grieved, they replied, "It isn't I, is it, Lord?" When Judas' turn came he exclaimed, "It isn't I, is it, Rabbi?" The difference in Judas' words recalls the statement of the

Apostle Paul, “no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Spirit” (cf. 1 Cor. 12:3). It is one of the many statements to the effect that faith is a gift of God, and that effectual grace is necessary for our salvation. Salvation begins with God, not man. It is also an indication that Judas was not a genuine believer, although an apostle of Jesus Christ. It is also an illustration of how close a man may be to Jesus Christ, and yet be lost. He certainly had the apostles fooled, too. Judas is a message for the church of Jesus Christ, for those within the body externally. A solemn thought!

The Lord’s answer (Mark 14:20-21). The identification of the traitor can be found in the act of the dipping of the sop, our Lord says. It was the custom of the host to take a piece of bread and dip it into the common dish, using it to take out of the dish a choice morsel of the meat. This was handed to the honour guest as a token of courtesy. The Lord said that the act would identify the traitor. Shortly afterward this is what He did (cf. John 13:26), but evidently even then Judas was not recognized. The act itself was a gracious act, the Lord offering Judas a last chance to change his mind, but it failed. Instead of receiving the Saviour, he received Satan (cf. John 13:27)! How could Judas desert Christ? How could Adam desert God (cf. Rom. 3:10-12)? Men are sinners. The other day our president, Ronald Reagan, said, “Men are basically good, but are prone to evil,” a self-contradictory statement. He was wrong in the first clause, but right in the second, which only goes to show that politicians are not necessarily (if ever) good theologians!

The final statement of cur Lord is a compendium of good theology, teaching the sovereignty of God, the

responsibility of man, and the reality of eternal punishment.

The sovereignty of God is taught in the opening words, “The Son of man goeth as it is written of Him.” God’s sovereign plan included the betrayal and death, and nothing can prevent its consummation (cf. Acts. 2:23).

The following words, “but woe unto that man BY WHOM (Judas is the instrument, not the author, of the betrayal), the Son of man is betrayed,” illustrate most aptly the fact that God’s sovereign work does not overrule and cancel out man’s responsibility for his sin. Judas is responsible for his instrumentality in the sovereign activity and purpose of God. He wilfully betrayed the Son for the sake of filthy lucre. The final words, “It had been good for that man if he had not been born,” one of the most poignant statements in the New Testament, makes it plain that our Lord did not know as truth the modern doctrine of universalism, that is, that everyone is ultimately going to be saved. He rather believed that the unbelieving, if finally, impenitent, spend eternity in conscious, everlasting punishment. If men ultimately find their way into the presence of God, the statement could never be made that it had been good for that man if he had not been born. As the poet has put it, “Who counts the billows, When the shore is won?”

In my notes, from a source that I have only incomplete knowledge of, there is a paragraph that solemnly presents the truth of eternal judgment. “The eternal punishment of the wicked, the eternal happiness of the righteous, and the eternity of God, as far as revelation is concerned, form the same building. The universalist has placed his shoulders against the basement pillars, and if

he succeed the whole structure falls; but he and his co-laborers may toil and sweat, and leave their bones to moulder away in the cellars, but God lives on, the righteous shout on, and the damned groan on, — throughout all eternity — O eternity!" It is a solemn fact, and may the reader settle his heart on the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ now and forever.

1 R. V. G. Tasker, The Gospel according to St. Matthew, p. 244.

2 I. Howard Marshall, Last Supper and Lord's Supper (Grand Rapids, 1980), p. 75. Many important and difficult things are discussed in this fine work (by an Armanian).

3 David Hill, The Gospel of Matthew (London, 1972), pp. 335-37.

4 G. C. Berkouwer, The Sacraments, trans. by Hugo Bekker (Grand Rapids, 1969), p. 188.

5 Ibid.

6 C. E. Cranfield, The Gospel according to Saint Mark (Cambridge, 1959), p. 240.

7 K. Schilder, Christ in His Suffering, trans. by Henry Zylstra (Grand Rapids, 1938), pp. 150-51.

8 Alfred Edesheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah (Grand Rapids, 1953, reprint of 3rd ed., 1886), II, 483-84.

9 Schilder, pp. 157-58.

The Lord’s Prayer

The Lord’s Prayer

S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.

A Primer For Prayer

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Scripture Reading: Matthew 6:9-13

Introduction

There are many prayers of the saints recorded in the Word of God. We have those of Paul, and we have even more from that great Old Testament prayer warrior, King David. We have the prayers of Moses, of Daniel, of Elijah, and of others. And, of course, we have our Lord’s great high-priestly petition in John 17, together with others of His. It is doubtful, however, that there is any prayer in all of the Bible that is more misunderstood, insofar as its interpretation is concerned, than the Lord’s Prayer of Matthew six. In the first place, it is a definitely Messianic prayer, being a petition for the coming of the world-wide earthly kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, to be introduced at His Second Advent. In the light of the biblical force of the term kingdom in previous revelation to this point, that must be the meaning of the brief petition, “Thy kingdom come” (cf. Matt. 6:10).

In the second place, it is clear from the words introducing the prayer, “After this manner, therefore, pray ye,” that the Lord’s Prayer is a model prayer, a

pattern for prayer. While there is nothing wrong in making this prayer a regular congregational prayer, provided its historical meaning is fully understood, and provided it is prayed in sincerity, it does seem a little strange that we should have made it a prayer to be repeated in our congregational meetings every Lord's Day, since the Lord has just admonished the disciples in these words, "But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do" (v. 7)! If the use of the Lord's Prayer in congregational worship has become ritualistic, its use should be abandoned. And, further, its model character must be remembered; there are other prayers that are acceptable prayers in our meetings.

The tendency of repetitious prayers to become meaningless is illustrated by a wager two men once made. One of them bet the other that he could repeat the Lord's Prayer without a mistake. The other took him up on the bet and, after the terms had been arranged and completed, the recitation began, "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. And if I die before I awake, I pray the Lord my soul to take. Amen." The other, listening intently until he had finished, said, "Well, here's your money. I sure didn't think you could say it!"

In one sense the prayer may have been misnamed. It is commonly called the Lord's Prayer, largely because He is its author. That, however, seems to be the only sense in which it is His. It may just as well be called the Disciple's Model Prayer. It certainly is not the Lord's Prayer because He prayed it. My good friend Dr. J. Vernon McGee calls it, "The Prayer Our Lord Did Not Pray," underlying the fact that it is a pattern for prayer. In fact, in the light of verse twelve, it is a prayer our

Lord could not pray. It is a prayer He gave His disciples to pray, but it is once that He could not pray since He is the divine Son of God. Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer used to tell his students that the true Lord's Prayer was the great high-priestly prayer which our Lord prayed before His crucifixion, and which is recorded in John seventeen. That is a beautiful and significant prayer, but Dr. Chafer's suggestion is fruitless, for the model prayer of Matthew six is too deeply ingrained in the Christian terminology for it to be changed. We will have to live with it.

There is one other point we must bear in mind before we turn to an exposition of the Lord's Prayer. It is a prayer that was given to guide the disciples of the King during the period of time when the King was present and offering His royal empire to the theocratic nation, Israel, according to the Old Testament promises (cf. Romans 15:7-13). That is borne out by the immediately preceding verses, as well as by its content. It has, of course, important implications for us in this age by way of application. We shall seek to point them out in the exposition.

The Petitions For God's Glory

The prayer for sanctification (6:9). The first three of the petitions have to do with God and the glory of God, while the second part of the prayer has to do with man and his need.

The emphasis of the first petition revolves around the word Father, which some have said is a compact summary of the entire Christian faith. It is a word that, for the Christian, is the right answer to Lessing's query, "Is this a friendly universe?" It settles our relationship to

the visible and the invisible worlds. The expression, “our Father,” makes this a prayer of disciples, and it reminds us of the directions in prayer that Jesus gave later, such as, “Whatever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you” (John 16:23).

The additional words, “who art in heaven,” remind us of the infinite distance between the natures of the Father and the Son, for it suggests His holiness, His separation from the sinners of this world (cf. Heb. 7:26).

The petition itself, “Hallowed be thy name,” is an extremely important one. The word to hallow means simply to sanctify, that is, to regard as different, to set apart. And the word, “name,” referred to the nature, or the character, of a person. It does not refer simply to the word by which a person is identified or called (cf. Psa. 9:10; 20:7). The petition, then, means that the nature and character of God are to be given the unique place that they deserve in the thoughts and minds of the intelligent beings of God’s universe. A full exposition of the meaning of the petition would demand a full review of the attributes and works of the Father. A study of the names and titles of God would be most helpful in elucidating this petition.

The prayer for sovereignty (6:10a). The second petition is for the coming of the Messianic Kingdom, the kingdom promised in the Scriptures. It is important to notice that the Lord does not redefine the term kingdom. That means we are to give it its common Old Testament force, that of the Messianic kingdom. Further, it could not be a reference to the eternal kingdom of God, His rule in the hearts of men throughout the ages, for that is always present. What our Lord refers to is that referred

to by John the Baptist, when he preached, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (cf. 3:2; 4:17). Its historical coming is future to us, and John the Apostle refers to that coming when he writes in the Revelation of the sounding of the seventh trumpet of judgment, “And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdom of this world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever”.(Rev. 11:15).

In the light of this, how ludicrous is the use of the Lord’s Prayer as a liturgical exercise by unbelieving professing Christians in our churches! And how pathetic that they are not taught the meaning of their petitions by their ministers. An example of this failure to understand is seen in Professor William Barclay’s contention that the next statement of our Lord, “Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven,” is a petition parallel with “Thy kingdom come” and means the same thing.

The tense of the verb translated, “come,” is aorist in Greek, and this suggests that the coming is a definite event, which is in harmony with the view that the Lord is speaking of the Second Advent and the divine inauguration of the kingdom of God (cf. Dan. 2:1-45).

The prayer for submission (6:10b). The final petition of the first part of the prayer has to do with the will of God. There are two wills in theological thinking, God’s decretive will and His preceptive will. His decretive will has to do with His decree by which He determines all that is going to come to pass. Daniel refers to His decretive will when he writes, giving the enlightened words of Nebuchadnezzar, “And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; and HE DOETH

ACCORDING TO HIS WILL in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?" (Dan. 4:35). Paul refers to the decretive will when he writes that God "worketh all things after the counsel of his own WILL" (Eph. 1:11). There is no way that men can frustrate the accomplishment of God's decretive will. He is a sovereign God.

His preceptive will is that which pleases Him, and His preceptive will is recorded for us in Holy Scripture in its account of the things that please and displease our Father.

In the light of this it is evident that the petition has to do with the preceptive will of God. By it we pray that God may hasten the day of the advent and the consequent kingdom, in which the citizens shall obey the will of the Ruler, our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a prayer that righteousness and peace may come to this troubled globe, and it is a prayer that it may come accompanied by the joy and submission of the disciples of the King. A man may utter the words, "Thy will be done," in a mood of bitterness and rebellion, but that is not the spirit of this petition. "Swineburne," Barclay comments, "spoke of men feeling the trampling of the iron feet of God. He speaks of the supreme evil, God. Beethoven died all alone; and it is 'said' that when they found his body his lips were drawn back in a snarl and his fists clenched as if he were shaking his fists in the very face of God and of high heaven. A man may feel that God is his enemy, and yet an enemy so strong that he cannot resist. He may therefore accept God's will, but he may accept it with bitter resentment and smouldering anger."1 It should be evident that this is not the spirit of this petition.

To sum up this opening part of the prayer, there is a request, made to the Father, that His Name be given its rightful place in the hearts of men and angels, that His Kingdom come, with its submission of men's wills to His one perfect will. What wonderful and encouraging petitions! And especially encouraging is our Lord's affirmation of the Fatherhood of our great God, a fatherhood over the spirits of those who belong to the family of faith. And how wonderful to realize that our Father is also the sovereign God, separate from us in His holiness and in His omnipotence. I am reminded of a story of a man who was offering a lengthy prayer to God, but going all around Robin Hood's barn in expressing his requests. Finally, an elderly female saint, exasperated at his failure to come to the point, called out, "Call Him 'Father,' and ask Him for something!" That's not a bad practice at all, and in the light of the character of our God, we're sure we'll have an answer.

The Petitions For Man's Need

The prayer for provision (6:11). If the emphasis in the first set of petitions is upon the Father, the emphasis in the second set is upon the family. And the first of the second set is, "Give us this day our daily bread." Someone has said, "It is "daily bread', not daily cake," and it is true that this promise is not that we shall have the luxuries of life, but that we shall have the necessities of life. The Apostle Paul refers to this when he writes the Philippians and says, "But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (4:19). The God who met Elijah's needs through the ravens (cf. 1 Kings 17:6), and then through the widow (cf. 17:16) supplies the needs of His people,

although by means opposed to human reason upon occasion.

There is a very delightful story concerning God's provision for one of John Wesley's friends. One of his associates, Samuel Bradburn, was a very fine preacher, an excellent man, and highly esteemed for his work. At one time when he was in desperate need, Wesley sent him a five pound sterling note, with the following letter: "Dear Sammy: 'Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.' Yours affectionately, John Wesley." Bradburn promptly replied: "Rev. and Dear Sir: I have often been struck with the beauty of the passage of Scripture quoted in your letter, but I must confess that I never saw such useful expository notes on it before. I am, Reverend and Dear Sir, your obedient and grateful servant, S. Bradburn."

The word translated "daily" was until recently of doubtful meaning. Until just a short time ago, there was no other occurence of this word in the whole Greek literature, so far as we knew. Not very long ago, however, it turned up on a papyrus fragment, which was a woman's shopping list. And against an item on the list was the word epiousios, the word found here. It was a note to remind her to buy supplies of a certain food for the coming day. Thus, the text means, "Give me what I need for this coming day," and the implication is that that is just what God will do.

The prayer for pardon (6:12). The first petition of this second section of the prayer had to do with the present and the Father. This one has to do with the past and the Son. "Give" is followed by "forgive," it has been said.2

The petition has raised a question due to the apparent conditional nature of the petition. The solution suggested by the notes in the New Scofield Reference Edition of the Authorized Version is generally acceptable, it seems to me. The note reads, “The problem raised by the conditional nature of this petition for forgiveness may be explained as follows: In the fully developed doctrine of Christian salvation there are two areas of divine forgiveness. The first area is that of the forgiveness that comes to the sinner at the time of justification, and deals with the guilt of his sins in a total sense (Eph. 1:7). To this forgiveness there is attached but one condition, i.e. to receive it once for all by faith in Christ (Rom. 4:5-8). The second area of forgiveness covers the relation of the divine Father to those who have become His children and deals specifically with the matter of fellowship whenever it is broken by sin. To obtain such forgiveness we must confess and forsake the sin (1 Jn. 1:9; cp. Ps. 66:18 and Prov. 28:13). The forgiveness mentioned here in verse 12 belongs in this second area, because it occurs in a prayer given to disciples of Christ (5:2) who could call upon God as their Father (6:9, 26). The ultimate motive for forgiving our debtors is based upon the grace of God, and appears later in the progress of revelation (Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13).”3 In other words the text has to do with paternal forgiveness, not judicial forgiveness (cf Acts 10:43).

The prayer for protection (6:13). This petition has to do with the future, and perhaps with the Spirit of God since guidance is mentioned. The word translated “temptation” really means trial, or testing. It is a request to be delivered from testing. In addition, the word translated “evil” is probably masculine in gender instead

of neuter (the forms in the original language are the same) and, thus, it should be rendered, The Evil One. The reference is to Satan.

The petition, then, is a request that one not be brought into testing, and particularly into that which concerns Satan. No Christian should desire to be tested by the power of evil, although it often falls his lot to experience it. One of the famous incidents of testing is described in Genesis 22:1, where we read, “And it came to pass that God did tempt (the word is really test in the original text) Abraham.” Cf. Matt. 3:1.

Fortunately for us the Apostle Paul has something very comforting to say about testing in 1 Corinthians 10:13, “There hath no temptation (the same word as is that found in Matt. 6:13) taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not permit you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will, with the temptation, also make the way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.” That is very comforting for saints who are experiencing the fiery darts of the Evil One, as well as the other types of trials that come upon mortals.

The Apostle also speaks of a specific case of deliverance in his swan song, 2 Timothy, for he writes, “Notwithstanding, the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, that by me, the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear. And I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord SHALL DELIVER ME FROM EVERY EVIL WORK, and WILL PRESERVE ME until his heavenly kingdom, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen” (4:17-18).

Conclusions

There are two simple lessons that stand out in this model prayer. In the first place, it is a prayer characterized by brevity and shortness. It is not one full of “vain repetitions” (cf. v. 7). In fact, it can be recited in a matter of seconds.

And, second, its fitness is impressive. The interests of God come first, and the interests of man come second, which is as it always should be. In a moment the idea will be expressed specifically, for we shall soon read, “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you” (6:33).

1 Barclay, I, 213-14.

2 Plummer, p. 101.

3 The New Scofield Reference Bible, PP. 1000-1.

The Possibility of the Impossible

The Possibility of the Impossible

S. Lewis Johnsan, Jr.

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Scripture reading: Matthew 14:22-36.

Introduction

Many years ago L.S. Rao, a noted exponent of yoga, tried to live up to an announcement that he would walk on water, without even getting his feet wet. Some 600 spectators from as far as New Delhi paid $20 to $100 each to watch him do it in Bombay. Rao warmed up by swallowing what he said were steel tacks and nitric acid and walking over hot embers. Then he walked up to a steel tank filled with water. He placed a foot on the surface of the water—and sank straight to the bottom. As angry spectators demanded their money back, Rao explained that he had slipped on the Saturday previous and, because of the injury, could not achieve a state of levitation. He invited them to come back and watch him try again. No doubt few accepted the invitation.

In one of the national magazines at about the same time there appeared a cartoon of a man walking on water in a swimming pool of a luxury hotel, hands outstretched balancing himself. The caption under the cartoon came from a person sitting in a beach chair under an umbrella to another person by the side of the table, “Amazing! It’s

been years since that's been done really well!" So it has. In fact, it has only been done twice, once by the Lord Jesus and once by Peter. The first instance was not really surprising, considering the identity of the Person who performed the feat, but the second instance was truly amazing.

Can you walk on the land? Of course, that's easy, for the land is your natural habitat, your proper element. The real test of metal is this: Can you walk on the water? Well, no, only the Lord can do that. But did not Peter do it also? Not in his own strength, that's true, but did he not walk on the sea also? Yes, he did, through the enabling power of the Lord Jesus. And does not that tell us something important about the Christian life? I think it does, as we shall see in the following study.

The Christian life is the impossible life. That can stand some emphasis. The Christian life is not hard and difficult; it is impossible, just as impossible as Peter's walking on the sea. In fact, that great feat is a beautiful and instructive illustration of the life of union with Christ.

Men have ways of reducing the Christian life, the humanly impossible life, to the insipidly possible. For example, there are those who identify it with the religious life. Public prayers uttered primarily with the lips alone, church attendance, human good works, being kind (or just sickeningly sweet), giving (that may make the minister do handstands, but apart from the divine motivation it is largely worthless), teaching Sunday School classes, ushering at the services, and similar things are equated with the Christian life. But anyone

can do these things, even those without a changed heart issuing from the new birth.

Still others identify the Christian life with the legalistic Christian life, characterized by its negatives, or even its positives. The taboos become the important things in the negative stress that is often made prominent in these views. We are exhorted concerning smoking, drinking, dancing, wearing apparel, and other activities. Occasionally the positive things become the important things. Bible study, prayer and witnessing are made the keys to the Christian life, but these good things are emphasized in such a way that the impression is conveyed that they are to be followed in order to obtain merit before God. One makes points with God by means of the activities and, in fact, a kind of spirituality by good works is taught.

The genuine Christian life has a distinctive element about it, the element of the supernatural, for it is produced and sustained by the life of the risen Lord, as it flows through disciples united to Him in the Spirit (cf. Rom. 6:1-14). We see this kind of life in the saints of the Old and the New Testaments. There is scheming Jacob who learns to rest in faith, a supernatural achievement for the supplanter, made possible only by the power of God. There is the Apostle John who is transformed from a son of thunder to an apostle of love. And there is Paul, a persecutor of the faithful, who becomes a preacher of the faith he once sought to stamp out. These are genuine portraits of the life that may be called Christian.

The Situation

It was the day of the feeding of the five thousand, and the Lord Jesus “constrained” His disciples to get into a

boat and go over to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. It seems clear from the Johannine account (cf. 6:14-15) that He hurried them away from the multitude that had just been fed in order that they might not catch the contagion of the crowd, which sought to make Him their kind of political king.

After He had sent the multitudes away, He went up into a mountain by Himself to pray. When the evening came, He found Himself there alone. It is a beautiful picture of the "man, Jesus Christ," as Paul puts it (cf. 1 Tim. 2:5). Someone has said, "No great discovery was ever made on a crowded street." That is true. And it was characteristic of the Lord Jesus to spend much of His time in prayerful communion with the Father, and it is out of these experiences that there came the mighty events and the telling teaching of His ministry. How much more it ought to be true of us.

Is it not interesting also that the Lord Jesus never prays with His disciples, although he prays much for them. The model prayer of the Sermon on the Mount was given by Him, but it was never used by Him. Even in His prayer life He is the unique Son of God.

The Storm

As the disciples made their way across the water, the light breezes turned to heavier ones. The stars had been shining, for it was night, but soon they were gone behind the clouds. As the winds became stronger and more blustery Peter took command, and one can imagine him, holding the tiller with his powerful arm, his beard annointed with the white foam of the raging waves, issuing commands to lower the sail, trim the ship, and make ready the oars. The earlier calm had

become confusion, and, as was often the case, the Sea of Galilee had become a boiling caldron. As Matthew puts it, “But the boat was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves, for the wind was contrary” (v. 24). Peter and the others were learning the important lesson that storms come, even in the path of duty (cf. v. 22). Like a loving mother-bird thrusts her fledglings from the nest, so they were being thrust from their spiritual nests by His side that they might learn to fly.

The Sight of the Lord

In the fourth watch of the night, which was from three o’clock in the morning to six o’clock, the Lord, looking out over the lake, saw the disciples “toiling in rowing,” as Mark puts it. So, He came to them, walking upon the sea. The disciples, however, would no doubt have claimed that His coming to them was worse than His delay in coming, for they were troubled and cried out in fear. I can imagine Peter, seeing Him coming, saying, “Look! what is that?” And they shrieked (as the Greek text has it) “It’s a ghost!” (14:26).

We who live in the twentieth century smile when we read an account like this, for we do not believe in ghosts. It is doubtful, however, if that other invisible, hidden world has ever lost its power over this world. Our rationalism, our scientism, our infidelity and unbelief do not seem to matter. In the times of stress there are many who still believe in ghosts.

The disciples had been worried about perishing in the storm, although they were seasoned and experienced fishermen. Now, something worse than the storm was coming to them. After all, fisherman can fight a storm and have some hope of success, but what can one do

against a water-demon, a ghost? Their next destination surely would be Davey Jones' locker!

Jewish popular belief often recounted the appearances of unusual apparitions on the sea, for the Jews were people of the land, not the water, so the idea of water-ghosts was one that was common in the speech and thought of the ordinary people.1 But, instead of some ancient evil and familiar spirit it was the Lord! And is it not often true that God's answers to our trials and tragedies seem to be as bad as ghosts, when really they are ministrations from a loving heavenly Father. His delays are not denials; they are part of His loving discipline. "It is the belief that God cares," J.W.C. Wand wrote, "that marks off Christianity from all other religions, which under all varieties of form are occupied with the task of MAKING GOD CARE."2 The liberal view of the walking on the water is that Jesus was really walking on the sea shore and the disciples mistook Him for walking on the water when really He was wading through the surf near the hidden shore.3 Would not our Lord have corrected their mistake?4 Why, then, were they "sore afraid"? Did Peter, when he walked on the water and sank into its depths, really sink down into the sand? John may be interpreted in this fashion more easily than the other gospels. Matthew and Mark make it plain that they understood the event as a miracle, a real walking on the water (cf. 14:25-26; Mark 6:48). That is what it was.5

The Sermon

It is said, "All good sermons have three points." By this questionable standard our Lord's sermon to the disciples, which He preached upon the water, was a

good one. It had three points. The first was, “Be of good cheer.” That is an excellent exhortation and, coming from Him, needs little shoring up, but ordinarily exhortations are only as good as the enabling foundation of them. This one has the soundest foundations and offers the greatest of hopes, for it rests upon the second point of the sermon, the affirmation of His deity. The words, “it is I,” are sufficient to uphold us in any of the circumstances of life. It is the equivalent of the Old Testament affirmation by which Jehovah encouraged Israel in her deepest moments of need, “I am He” (cf. Isa. 43:2; Deut. 32:39, etc.). That was the great theophanic formula, used at the important feasts of Jehovah, and it was used in the Passover liturgy. This event occurred at the time of the Passover (cf. John 6:4), and the Passover liturgy glorified God as the God who rules the waters. It is as if His coming on the water is to remind them that He is that God, the Old Testament convenant-keeping Sovereign who makes good all His Word to His own. It said, in effect, where I am, there God is, there God lives, speaks, calls, acts, loves, forgives and helps. Nothing bolder or more significant can be said.

Therefore, the third point of the sermon follows naturally, “be not afraid.” How can they be afraid, when this profoundest of divine declarations has fallen upon their ears to encourage them. Another historical epiphany of God, the final one, has taken place in Jesus Christ, and He has pledged Himself to care for His people. What comfort!

The Sinking of Peter

We are not surprised to hear Peter speak up amidst the storm, “Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water” (14:28).

The answer of the Lord to Peter’s request is, “Come” (v. 29). And Peter climbed out of the boat, put his feet upon the water and began to walk towards Jesus. His walking, an amazing thing in itself, illustrates both man’s strength and weakness. Peter’s walking illustrates his strength when in harmony with the mind of the Lord, or when acting in communion with Him. Evidently Peter walked quite a distance on the water before he, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me” (v. 30), for the Lord had only to put forth his hand to catch the sinking fisherman. Then they walked back to the boat together! Now observe that, while Peter kept his eye on the Lord Jesus, he did just what Jesus did. He walked on the water. The moment, however, that he took his eye off the Lord and saw the boisterous wind and the raging waves, he lost all power to walk on the water and began to sink. Here, then, is both the strength and weakness of redeemed man.

“Holy living,” Arthur T. Pierson has noted, “is as much a miracle to the natural man as is walking on the water, which presents no proper foundation for our feet, having neither stability nor equilibrium, and especially when tossed up and down and driven to and fro by the wind. The secret of Peter’s power to triumph over what was otherwise impossible was this, that he was in touch with Jesus by faith and had Christ’s power in him: and the secret of his sinking is equally plain—he lost touch with Jesus and became as any other impotent mortal, unable

to cope with the difficulties of the situation. But what we need to emphasize is that one moment he was strong TO DO THE IMPOSSIBLE and the next moment UTTERLY WEAK and sinking. So a human soul can be strong one moment and weak the next, omnipotent or impotent, and it all depends on the touch of faith which brings virtue out of Christ."6 That is the point of verse 31.

One wonders if this incident is the source of the great statement of the Apostle in 1 Peter 1:5, "Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

The brevity of Peter's prayer for deliverance should not be overlooked, and it is a lesson to us. Long and flowery prayers are not always proper, and, if Peter had been disposed to offer one of them, he would have been six feet under water before he reached the heart of his petition!

The Sequel to the Storm

Matthew continues his account of the incident by writing, "And when they were come into the boat, the wind ceased" (v. 32). The historical facts described here seem to point beyond the literal event to spiritual principles. The solution to the riddles and troubles of life lies in the relationship of communion with the Lord Jesus. Contrary elements yield to the divine presence; to receive Him into the ship is to find the answer to our questions and needs.

He is, by the feeding of the five thousand, the Lord of bread, and now, by the walking on the water, He demonstrates that He is also Lord of the billows. He can multiply the one and mollify the other.

When He entered the boat with Peter, the others came and worshipped HIM (not Peter, who also had walked on the sea). It is fitting that this incident should end in worship, for the highest function of the redeemed soul is just that—worship, not service. Life is a relationship which, through supernatural experiences, leads to Him.

The expression of their worship centers in the confession that Jesus is, “the Son of God” (v. 33). This is the first time that men call Him the Son of God and, no doubt, this is one of the reasons that Matthew has given us this incident. The consciousness of the Messianic position and the divine nature of the Lord Jesus is gradually being developed in the minds of the apostles by the Holy Spirit. He is the Messiah, they had come to see, but now that vision is broadening to embrace the concept of a divine Messiah, a Messiah who is also Son of God.

Thus, again, in the account we are face to face with the mystery of the divine Son, possessed of two natures, one human and one divine, a Son of God who prays (v. 23) and commands the elements (vv. 25, 32). The combination of utter lowliness and transcendent loftiness pervades the entire life and history of our Lord Jesus Christ. This strange combination of elements could never have been invented and portrayed through a lengthy series of events so harmoniously by poets of the greatest genius or authors with the skills of an Aeschylus or a Shakespeare. The only explanation of the riddle of the composition of the four gospels, in which the total lowliness and absolute loftiness of the Son of God are so beautifully blended, is that the “gospel writers” were in reality only reporters, who originated nothing and imagined nothing, but simply observed

everything and described what they saw. The reconciliation of the two things found its explanation in the One who was both the Man of Sorrows and at the same time the Eternal Son of God.

The Significance of The Sign

The event may be considered from three standpoints: (1) history; (2) prophecy; (3) parable.

1. First, from the standpoint of history the walking on the water is another of the mighty Messianic signs which identify the Lord Jesus as the Davidic Messiah.

2. From the standpoint of prophecy the incident is a revealing event that provides us with some insight into the present ministry of the Son of God. While the disciples are toiling away on the Sea of Galilee in obedience to His commands, He is in the mountain praying. The picture is suggestive of the present high priestly ministry of the Lord Jesus at the right hand of the Father where “He ever lives to make intercession for them” (cf. Heb. 7:25; Rom. 8:34).

3. Third, from the standpoint of parable, remembering that all our Lord’s miracles are in measure parables in the sense that they illustrate truth, we have here an example of how He meets the needs of serving and suffering saints. Storms are often in the path of duty, but there is always safety in our Immanuel, who amid the storms comes with His sovereign and calming presence, “So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me” (Heb. 13:6). That great promise rests upon an equally great one, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (13:5).

Conclusion

So then, in conclusion, let me ask the question again, “Can you walk on the sea?” You said, “no,” in your heart. But I ask it again, pointing you to Peter and to the Lord for the answer. Peter told us a great truth. With eyes upon Christ, we can walk on the sea, and He invites us do to so, and this is the glory of the Christian life—life from the virtue, from the power of the risen Son to whom we are united. In the final analysis only Christ can live the Christian life (cf. Phil. 1:21; Heb. 12:1-3).

1 Strack and Billerbeck, I, 691.

2 J.W.C. Wand, The General Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude, p. 125.

3 Taylor, Mark, p. 327.

4 Cranfield, Mark, p. 226.

5 R.H. Strachan, The Fourth Gospel (London, 1955), p. 182.

6 Arthur T. Pierson, Shall We Continue in Sin?, pp. 42-43.

The Power of the Son of Man

The Power of the Son of Man

S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.

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Scripture Reading: Matthew 9:1-8

Introduction

John Chrysostom, one of the greatest of the early expositors of Holy Scripture, in explaining the domiciles of our Lord during His ministry upon earth, said, "Bethlehem bare Him, Nazareth nurtured Him, Capernaum had Him continuously as an inhabitant." When Matthew says that "He came into his own city" (Matt. 9:1), he refers to Capernaum. Mark confirms the point, for he writes, describing the same incident, "And again he entered into Capernaum after some days" — (cf. Mark 2:1). So, it is at Capernaum that this remarkable healing occurred, which so beautifully illustrates the power of the Son of Man.

Matthew's Gospel, as many have noted, contains a carefully wrought out plan and purpose. There are no loose ends in his purpose of presenting the Lord Jesus as the Messiah, the King of Israel. And in this chapter there is further evidence of this. It is here that one begins to notice official opposition to the ministry of the King, and we have the first hint of the legal charges that will be preferred against Him. "And behold, certain of the Scribes said within themselves, THIS MAN BLASPHEMETH" (v. 3), is the clue to this. In the twenty-

sixth chapter is the climax. There the Lord Jesus confesses His Messiahship before the Sanhedrin, provoking the high priest to tear his clothes and cry out, “HE HATH SPOKEN BLASPHEMY! What further need have we of witnesses? Behold, now ye have heard HIS BLASPHEMY” (Matt. 26:65). Thus, in the charge of blasphemy in this chapter we have the anticipation of the final charge that led to His death.

In fact, there are four charges made against the Lord Jesus in this chapter, according to some commentators. First, as we have said, He is accused of blasphemy. And then, second, He is accused of immorality (cf. 9:10-13), for he sits with tax-gatherers and sinners. Third, He is accused of laxity in piety, for it is noticed that He does not fast as John’s disciples (cf. vv. 14-17). And, finally, He is accused of being in league with the devil when He cures the dumb demoniac (cf. vv. 31-34). These charges constitute the beginning of the organized campaign against the Lord. “The slanderers are at work; the whispering tongues are poisoning truth; the wrong motives are being ascribed. The drive to eliminate this disturbing Jesus has begun,” Barclay contends.1 The healing of the paralytic is a story with several lessons. In the first place, it provides us with an example of our Lord giving before we ask, for His first words to the paralytic are, “Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee” (v. 2). It is after this word that He heals him.

In the second place, we are provided with an example of acclamation turning to opposition, as Scroggie points out, “Here dawn gives way to morning, and acclamation to opposition. The day is progressing, but the temperature is lowering. Hosanna soon turns to crucify.

The people who said of Paul and Barnabas, 'the gods are come down to us in the likeness of men,' almost immediately 'stoned Paul, and drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead.' That's the way of the world, and the Church is not without stain. And yet, when we come to think of it, the friendship and goodwill of the world is not an honour. We cannot have JESUS AND BARABBAS FOR FRIENDS AT THE SAME TIME."2 But the greatest lesson of the incident has to do with the Messianic power of the Son of Man. It is here that we learn that without question He has the power to forgive sins. That divine prerogative is His.

1. The Presence of the Lord

The people (cf. Luke 5:17). It is Luke who tells us most plainly that there were present Pharisees, scribes, and the multitudes (cf. Matt. 9:8). In fact, Mark tells us that the crowds were so large about the door of the house in which the Lord was ministering that no one could enter. And, when the four came bearing the paralytic on a pallet; it was necessary for them to uncover a portion of the roof and let the man down through the roof before the Lord (cf. Mark 2:2-4).

The Person (Matt. 9:1-2). Where He is present there is power, and this occasion was no exception, as Luke says, "and the power of the Lord was present for him to heal them" (5:17). Mark says that "He preached the word unto them" (2:2). In the light of the message of the Lord during the early days of His ministry we may assume that it corresponded to the message reported by Matthew, "Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens is at hand" (4:17). It was the message of the coming Reign of

God, the Messianic Age, which was near at hand for the King is now present with Israel.

The Paralytic and Companions

Impotence in the presence of omnipotence. Both Luke and Mark give the details of the bringing of the paralytic to the Lord through the agency of four companions. Finding it impossible to reach Him by way of the door, they ingeniously let him down into the presence of the Lord by removing tiling from the roof of the house. The New Testament prescribes no one way to bring men to Christ, and this incident seems to substantiate the use of a variety of methods, providing they do not contradict the principles of the Word of God. As Scroggie puts it, “If conventionality does not succeed, then try originality.”3 And it is true that there is no ingenuity quite like that of earnestness and genuineness in the love of the lost.

The impotence of the paralytic, who cannot come of himself to the Lord, beautifully illustrates the truth that we, are dead in our sins, unable to come to Him in our own strength. But impotence finds its fullness in the omnipotence of the Son of Man. What we cannot do, He can do for us.

Originality instead of conventionality. We have already commented upon this, but perhaps we may also note that the four men who carried the paralytic evidently had experienced His healing and forgiving ministry beforehand. At least, they had heard of Him and His work. In the earnestness of their evangelistic ministry they remind us of Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. John, describing his desire to see Peter find the Messiah, writes, “He FIRST findeth his own brother, Simon, and

saith unto him, We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ" (cf. John 1:41). And there follows the touching words, "And he brought him to Jesus," the greatest thing that one man can do for another.

III. The Pardon of the Lord

The condition of the paralytic (9:2). The Lord's words to the paralytic, "be of good cheer, child," appear to imply that the man knew the guilt and burden of sin and despaired of hope to some extent.

The means of the pardon (9:2). The means of the healing of the paralytic is clearly faith, but whose faith? The text says, "Jesus, seeing THEIR faith." Barclay contends, "Here is a wonderful picture of a man who was saved by the faith of his friends."4 That seems highly unlikely to me. Why must we limit the pronoun "their" to the four? Is it not more natural to refer it to the five, the four who brought the paralytic and the paralytic himself? "Their," Scroggie points out, "would seem to refer to the faith of all five, for the four would not bring the paralytic against his will."5 I think he's right.

The story, then, is in harmony with the uniform teaching of the New Testament, namely, that faith is the instrumentality of God's bestowal of His blessings, particularly that of salvation (cf. Rom. 3:21-26; 4:1-8).

The manner of the pardon. The declaration of forgiveness comes in the form of a statement from the Son, "thy sins be forgiven thee" (9:2). It is by the Word of the Son that the pardon comes (cf. Jas. 1:21).

IV. The Pharisees' and Scribes' Reaction

It was the belief of the times that all sickness was caused by sin, and perhaps this is the reason that Jesus began to deal with the sins of the paralytic before He. healed him. Otherwise one might have expected the physical healing first. Our Lord's actions seem to confirm the view that He traced the man's physical condition to sin.

"There is always a fly in the ointment," Scroggie says. "There never was a congregation where there was not a critic and, too often, criticism comes from those who might be expected to rejoice."6 The students of Scripture object to the course of events. They "reasoned" (cf. Mark 2:6) within themselves over the meaning of the Lord's words, regarding His claim to forgive sins as blasphemy, "who can forgive sins but God only" (2:7)? But the premise of the scribes was wrong. It is true that God alone forgives sins, but it was not necessarily true that this man was blaspheming. Suppose He were God! Robertson puts it this way, "It was, they held, blasphemy for Jesus to assume this divine prerogative. Their logic was correct. The only flaw in it was the possibility that Jesus held a peculiar relation to God that justified his claim."7 Sometimes, dependence upon human reasoning is not the sign of intellectuality, but of a shrivelled soul. Human reasoning has been affected by sin, and it cannot be trusted if it is not dependent upon the illumination of the Spirit of God.

Jesus, being omniscient, knows their thoughts and responds to them, "Why think ye evil in your hearts? (v. 4).

V. The Problem Proposed

At this point, in order to expose the faulty reasoning of the unbelieving scribes, Jesus suggests a test. The proposal of the Lord is a masterpiece. They were saying within their hearts, “It’s one thing to say sins are forgiven, it’s quite another to really forgive them. Only God can do that.” So, to settle the matter, the test in the physical realm is proposed to show the power of the Son of Man in the spiritual. He could only perform the physical miracle of healing, if God were with Him. He could never perform it if God were against Him, and if His claims were false. Therefore, He asks, “For which is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins (then saith he to the sick of the palsy), Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house” (Matt. 9:5-6).

Actually the correct answer is: Neither are easier. Both are impossible with men and easy with God. Of course, it is easier to say superficially, “Thy sins are forgiven thee.”

VI. The Power Healing

At the Lord’s words, “Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house” (v. 6), the paralytic arose and departed to his home. As Bengel said a long time ago, “The bed had borne the man, now the man was bearing the bed.” The pallet brought the paralytic, but it is he who is now carrying it away (cf. Mark 2:12). And this mighty miracle is only a sign of what He is able to do for all who call upon him for spiritual healing.

I would imagine that, while no room had been made for the men to bring the paralytic to Jesus, after the miracle room was made for him to go!

This is now the second time that Matthew has used the expression, “Son of Man” (cf. 8:20). A word about its significance is in order. It is commonly thought that it is simply an expression designed to emphasize the humanity of the Lord Jesus, just as the term, “Son of God,” stresses His diety. That is only partially true. The Messianic King of Israel is a man, but He is more than a man, so it is not surprising to learn that the term Son of Man has its origin in the Messianic passage of Daniel 7:13. There it refers to the Son of Man who comes to the Ancient of Days to receive dominion, and glory, and A KINGDOM, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him; His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away (cf. Dan. 7:13-13). Thus, the term is really a royal term, marking him out as the Messianic King. It is very fitting that it should be used of Him before He receives the kingdom, for that is the picture in Daniel. So we are not surprised to learn that this is Jesus’ favourite term for Himself. After the cross, resurrection, and ascension it practically disappears from the New Testament, for the expression is used of Him as He ministers in the light of the coming kingdom.

It is, therefore, by His own right as the King that He forgives sins. He has AUTHORITY to do that in his realm. When Nathan, the prophet, forgives sins, it is, “The LORD hath put away thy sin” (2 Sam. 12:13), for Nathan is only a man. With Jesus it is altogether different.

The term, after Caesarea Philippi, is combined with the thought of the Servant of Jehovah and, therefore, the idea of suffering becomes associated with the idea of sovereignty. It is as the Suffering Servant of Jehovah that the King accomplishes His task of redemption and prepares to rule.

This thought of authority and power is confirmed by the fact that the term “power” is found twice in the closing words (cf. vv. 6, 8).

VII. The Product of the Power

The first conflict with the hierarchy concludes with the paralytic walking away under his own power, testifying to the mighty power of the Son of Man. Luke writes, “And immediately he rose up before them, and took up that on which he lay, and departed to his own house, GLORIFYING GOD” (5:25).

Further, the multitudes also “glorified God” (5:26), but their glorifying was touched with fear, for they had become partakers of the revelation of the mighty authority of the Messianic King. They were saying, “We have seen strange things today” (5:26). The word rendered, “strange,” is the Greek word paradoxos, which means marvelous, or incredible. It is the word from which comes our English word paradox, which refers to a statement that seems contradictory, unbelievable, or absurd, but that may actually be true in fact.

Conclusion

The great lesson that shines through the healing of the paralytic is the power and authority of the Son of Man to FORGIVE SINS, and the amazing work of power, the

healing of the paralytic, was done to confirm His claim to forgive sins. That power is still His today, as all the apostles affirm. Peter's "Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee well; arise, and make thy bed" (Acts 9:34), Paul's "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Rom. 10:13), and John's, "the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7), all testify to the saving power. May God bring us all to the experience of this mighty, amazing, and astonishing power!

1 Barclay, I, 332.

2 W. Graham Scroggie, The Gospel of Mark, Study Hour Commentaries (Grand Rapids, 1976 (reprinted), pp. 46-47.

3 Ibid., p. 48.

4 Barclay, I, 333.

5 Scroggie, p. 48.

6 Ibid., p. 49.

7 Robertson, 1, 268.

The Resurrection of Christ—And Christianity

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And Christianity

S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.

Scripture Reading: Matthew 27:62 -28:15

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Introduction

The bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ is peculiar to Christianity. The father of Judaism, Abraham the patriarch, died around 1900 B.C., but no claim of a resurrection for him has ever been made. In fact, the tomb of the patriarch has been carefully preserved for almost 4000 years, according to tradition, and is covered with a Mohammedan mosque, located in Hebron in southern Palestine.

The sources for the life of Buddha never claim a resurrection for him. Indeed, the earliest records of his death, namely, the Mahaparinibbana Sutta, say that when he died it was “with that utter passing away in which nothing whatever remains behind.”

Mohammed died on June 8, 632 A.D. at the age of sixty-one in Medina, and his sepulcher is visited annually by thousands of devout Mohammedans, but no claim is made of a bodily resurrection.

There is a well-known story about Talleyrand, a bishop turned skeptic at the time of the French Revolution,

which illustrates the pivotal significance of the bodily resurrection. Following the revolution and the revolt against Christianity, which was a part of it, there was a movement afoot to invent a new religion that might take the place of Christianity. One of the Bishop's friends was speaking of the difficulty of doing this in his presence. The friend commented that, even if its doctrines were doctrines of good works, it was still almost impossible to create the new faith. "Surely," said Talleyrand with a smile, "surely, it cannot be so difficult as you imagine." "What do you mean?" said the friend. "Why," said the heretical former ecclestiac, "the matter is simple. All you have to do is to get yourself crucified, or put to death in some way, and then at the precise time of your prediction of it rise from the dead in bodily form. You will then have no difficulty in creating the new faith."

Not only is the bodily resurrection peculiar to Christianity, it is also essential to it. There could not be an Easter faith without the Easter fact of the resurrection from the dead of the Founder of Christianity. In fact, Stalker is quite right in saying, "As Christ rose from the dead in a transfigured body, so did Christianity."1 Further, while the resurrection of Christ is affirmed by the Christians and believed by the Christians, so far as the world is concerned it is an "alleged resurrection." The resurrection of Christianity, however, is not simply alleged. It is an indisputable fact, and it is one of the incontestable proofs of the genuineness of the apostles' confessions to the saints.

We stress, too, that the resurrection of Jesus Christ must be proclaimed as a bodily resurrection. It was not a spiritual resurrection, meaning simply that the influence of Jesus still lives on in the world, nor is it a simple

testimony to the fact that life always conquers death. It must not be compared to Spring, as if that is the time that nature celebrates its resurrection with triumphant reaffirmation of imperishable life. “This view is shockingly mistaken,” Thielecke points out. “There is no resurrection in nature. We may just as truly say that everything is as grass which blooms and quickly fades. Every spring carries within it autumn, every birth death. It is simply a matter of mood or temperament whether we emphasize the one side or the other.”2 The bodily resurrection, then, is misunderstood by its friends. It is also attacked by its enemies. H. G. Wells once said that the resurrection was like a happy ending tacked on to an essentially tragic story. Eugene Carson Blake, while president of the National Council of Churches, in an Easter message for 1957, said, “With more or less imagination we hear the angel speak, ‘Why look ye for the living among the dead? He is risen. He is not here!’ So we half believe and half doubt the miracle.”

A. M. Ramsey, who later became the Archbishop of Canterbury, claimed that the resurrection accounts were “embellished” with unjustified additions. “Such as an editor’s embroidery of his source,” he -wrote of Matthew’s allusions to the earthquake, the descent of the angel, and the paralysis of the guard, “and if elaboration of the tradition took place in the written stage it is reasonable to think that it took place in the oral stage, too.”3 Let’s turn to the accounts themselves and see for ourselves what the apostle claimed and measure for ourselves the credibility of the record.

The Sealing of the Sepulcher

Pilate had visitors on the day following the crucifixion, members of the chief priests and Pharisees, who requested that he make the tomb of our Lord secure, so there would be no question of a resurrection such as He had promised. They say that, if that should happen, “the last error shall be worse than the first” (cf. Matt. 27:64). “The last error,” in their minds, was evidently the claim for a resurrection, while “the first” was probably the claims of divine Sonship and Messiahship.

Pilate replied, “Ye have a watch; go your way, make it as sure as ye can” (27:65), thus throwing the responsibility for the security of the body on the Jewish leaders themselves. And this responsibility they willingly assumed, for “they went, and made the sepulcher sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch” (cf. 27:66).

God makes the wrath of men to praise Him, so one of the psalms says, and that is the case in this instance, for the elaborate precautions of the leaders only increase the testimony to the startling fact of the resurrection. Now the soldiers know the truth, too (cf. 28:4, 11).

The Resurrection Fact

The occasion (Matt. 28:1). The resurrection accounts in the Scriptures are remarkable for the indirect and discreet manner in which they describe the resurrection events. There is no propaganda, no sensationalism, and no glamorizing of the most remarkable event in human history. “What takes place around this tomb is all bathed in an indirect and puzzling light,” Thielecke says, adding, “We are not really told about the resurrection as such. No sensationalism, no curiosity tries to tear aside

the veil of mystery. We see only the reactions and effects of this tremendous event on the disciples and the women."4 The expression, "in the end of," is probably to be rendered here by after.5On Sunday morning then, the mother of James and John (cf. 27:56, 61) and Mary Magdalene came to the sepulcher. The women had seen His death and His burial, and now it shall be their privilege to see His resurrection.

It is not really strange that it is the women who come to the tomb first. The men, shattered and disappointed over what had happened, had skulked off to their dens like wounded beasts. The plaintive words of the Emmaus disciples were expressive of their feelings, "but we hoped that it had been He who should have redeemed Israel" (cf. Luke 24:21). Jesus had made the enormous claim that He was the One who stood between men and God, "The way," and that through Him alone men could come to the Father. But now, — how different it all seemed. The Romans and the Jews had slain Him and thrown His body to the grim earth. If He had only brought teaching, or advice, concerning God, it would not have been so terrible. But this Man had made the astounding claim that He was the Word, the very voice of God, and the Son, one with the Father, and Israel's longed-for King, who would fulfill the ancient promises made to the patriarchs. How could death and the grave be the end of such a divine life? But that is what it seemed had happened. With the men so deeply confused, it is not surprising at all that the women are first on the road to Calvary.

Of course, we are not to think that they made their way out to the sepulcher exulting in a risen Saviour. None of them really believed He had risen. The only thing that

moves them is the mundane question, “Who shall roll away the stone for us from the door of the sepulcher?” (cf. Mark 16:3). Even when they find out that He has risen as He promised, they are so little prepared for it that they are amazed and flee from the sepulcher, their panic and their joy all mixed up together in physical flight. They had gone out to the tomb in the spirit of modern worshippers on Good Friday, but they finally attain to the joy of Easter’s risen Lord by the pathway of blended fright and delight.

I once asked my wife the question, “Why did the Lord have the women come to the tomb first?” She replied, “Was it because He knew they would broadcast it?” That, of course, is what they did, and we are thankful they did.

The earthquake and the angel (Matt. 28:2-7). According to the Matthean account, as the women approached the tomb there occurred a great earthquake, which, in effect, meant, “Listen, the Lord speaks.”6 The angel that had come with the earthquake had removed the stone over the entrance to the grave and, removing it from its groove, had turned it over on its side. He was sitting upon it. The little word, “for,” indicates that the coming of the angel was the cause of the earthquake, and we must presume that God wished to speak through Him. That is what followed. One of the old commentators said, “The earth, which-trembled with sorrow at His death, leaped for joy at His resurrection.” The removal of the stone, it is clear, did not take place in order that Christ may rise, but rather in order that the women and the men enter the tomb and see the evidence of His resurrection.

There are many witnesses to the resurrection, and we cannot expound them all in a single sermon. Furthermore, it must be said most plainly that, although the evidence for His resurrection is compelling and convincing to an enlightened mind, it is not to an unbelieving person. The effects of sin have left man's mind in blindness, and he cannot respond to the light of God apart from the invincible grace of the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 2:14; 2 Cor. 4:3-4; Rom. 8:7-8; Eph. 4:17-19, etc.) Further, even in the case of the believing man it is ultimately the testimony of the Holy Spirit that gives certainty in divine things through the Word of God. As Calvin said, the evidences are a help to the unbeliever in that they often sweep away false hindrances to faith, and to the believer in that they confirm him in his already given faith.

In this context there is, first, the witness of the displaced stone. This ton-sized stone could not possibly haved been removed by anyone before an armed guard, even if they had fallen asleep.

The watch was utterly unnerved by what happened and, with hearts heaving in fear, they collapsed like so many sacks of meal. In fact, it appears that the earthquake so shook them that they ceased to be an organized body of men, because in verse eleven it is said that only "some" of the watch came into the city and told what had happened.

The message of the angel, "Fear not; for I know that ye seek Jesus, who was crucified. HE IS NOT HERE; for he is risen, as he said" (cf. vv. 5-6), confirms the witness of the displaced stone and becomes itself the witness of the empty tomb. This witness is extremely important, and it

is interesting that the gospels contain neither the first or only account of it. In fact, even in the second century the controversy over the empty tomb was still alive. Justin Martyr, it appears, cites an official letter of the Sanhedrin, in which it is mentioned that the tomb was empty, although it was the contention of the council that the disciples were responsible for it.7 We may reject the witness of the empty tomb, but, if we do, the burden of proof rests upon us to explain the belief of the early church. It is plain and indisputable that they believed the tomb was empty because He had indeed been raised from the dead. In fact, the change that came over them after the resurrection is one of the most compelling of the evidences that He did rise from the dead and appeared to them.8 The stolen body theories founder over hard facts. The enemies of our Lord wanted above all for Him to remain in the grave, so they could not have removed His body. And as for His friends, they did not know He would rise and, when it happened, it completely surprised them (cf. John 2:22; 20:8-10; Mark 16:8). Further; it would mean that these holy men, who suffered the loss of everything material, worldly, and carnal, were only imposters. It is so hard to believe this that even Joseph Klausner cannot accept the consequences and rejects the thought that they were imposters.

Still others, such as Kirsopp Lake, have sought to show that the women, with tear-dimmed eyes, went to the wrong tomb. The Bible almost studiedly prepares for this conjecture, for it mentions that the women were eye-witnesses of the burial (cf. 27:61). Further, was the angel also confused? He said to them, “He is not here;

for he is risen, as he said. Come, SEE THE PLACE WHERE THE LORD LAY"!

Finally, others have had recourse to swoon theories. He did not really die; He only swooned. Modifications of this theory surface in modern times from time to time, and Hugh Schonfield's recent book is an example of this. Could a weak, emaciated man, who promised resurrection and did not rise, stagger out of a tomb and inspire His followers to preach Him and His cross as the only way of salvation for men, giving their all for Him and His message? It is on the face of it incredible.

The statement of the angel in verse six, "Come, see the place where the Lord lay, implies the witness of the grave clothes, a witness that John most fully expounds. Otherwise, the words would have little meaning. It would be impossible to see "the place" where He had lain (cf. John 20:5-8).9

The appearance of the Lord

(Matt. 28:8-10). Finally, we have the witness of the personal appearances of the Lord. What a wonderful patience He showed them in their doubts! That very patience and longsuffering, prominent in the case of Thomas but clearly shown to all the apostles, indicates that, although His bodily appearance was different, He was still the same Lord in His heart and spirit. They saw Him, they touched Him, and they heard Him. Upon at least ten occasions over a forty day period of time He appeared to them. Klausner suggests that they were simply hallucinations. Did five hundred brethren have them at once (cf. 1 Cor. 15:6)? Why did they stop in {six weeks? Why so far as we know, were the appearances undisputed twenty-five years later (15:5-8)?

The Bribing of the Soldiers

When the watch came into the city with their report to the chief priests, after counselling with the elders, the leaders gave “large money” to the soldiers as a bribe that they might keep quiet about what happened. Instead, the theory was circulated that the disciples of the Lord “came by night, and stole him away WHILE WE SLEPT” (cf. v. 13). The leaders promised the soldiers protection in case the report of their sleep came to the procurator. That failure of duty might mean death for them. There is an irony in this arrangement. It took only a small amount of money, thirty pieces of silver, to buy an apostle (cf. 26:15), but for pagan soldiers it took a large sum.

The theory of the leaders is patently impossible. By what kind of twisted reasoning could it be thought that soldiers could accurately tell what happened WHILE THEY SLEPT! Can you imagine what a defense lawyer would do to that theory in court!

The author of the gospel to the Jews, then, begins and ends His story by giving the lie to the Jewish fables, the one regarding the virgin birth of the Messiah, and the other of the resurrection of the Messiah. We can only conclude that the angel was right, “He is not here; for He is risen, as He said.”

Conclusion

First of all, we conclude by contending that the resurrection is a fact, and not a fancy. But, is it important? It is, and for the following reasons.

1. First, it is the proof of the defeat of death and of the forgiveness of sins (cf. Rom. 4:25). He was raised on

account of our justification, and with that resurrection testimony was borne to the fact that our faith is not groundless. We have the forgiveness of sins (cf. 1 Cor. 15:12-19). By the cross we know that atonement has been made, and by the resurrection we know that atonement has been accepted. Uniting our destiny with His, He did not merely survive death, He conquered it.

2. Second, it is the principle and pattern of a joyous life with One who can still the storms, release the demons, bind up the wounds, open the graves, cancel guilt, comfort aching hearts, and convey peace. It is as the risen Savior that the Apostle Paul bids us to remember Him (cf. 2 Tim. 2:8). And in the eternal future it is in the power of His resurrection life that we shall live, learn, and grow throughout all eternity.

3. Third, it is the pledge of judgment to come, being the assurance of God that He will one day judge the world in righteousness by Jesus Christ (cf. Acts 17:31). There shall be a second Easter of His coming again, but the consequences will be terrible for the lost.

And second, let us not leave the subject without emphasizing that, while the resurrection is true, it must become a personal fact for each one of us individually. When the Lord Jesus had unfolded the marvellous truth that He was the resurrection and the life, and had explained it further, He concluded with a word of personal application to Martha of Bethany, “Believest thou this?” (cf. 11:25-26). In the power of the Spirit’s enabling she beautifully responded, “Yea, Lord; I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, who should come into the world.” Oh, Lord, may that be the response of all who read these words.

1 Stalker, p. 142.

2 Thielecke, p. 85.

3 A. Michael Ramsey, The Resurrection of Christ (Philadelphia, 1946). pp. 61-62.

4 Thielecke, p. 80.

5 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 332.

6 Hendriksen, p. 988.

7 Stauffer, Jesus and His Story, pp. 144-45.

8 Cf. Stalker, pp. 142-43.

9 Merrill C. Tenney, The Reality of the Resurrection (New York, 1963), pp. 117-18.

The Temptation of The King

The Temptation of The King

S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.

Dr. S. Lewis Johnson, Jr. is Professor of New Testament Literature and Exegesis at Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, Texas. This is the fourth of his selected expository studies in the Gospel of Matthew. Have you ever entertained questions about the impeccability and tempt-ability of Jesus Christ? If so, this study will provide you with some thoughtful and practical teaching on these vital issues.

Scripture Reading: Matthew 4:1-11

Introduction

Against the backdrop of the wilderness, with its “wild beasts” (cf. Mark 1:13), two solitary figures wrestle for a gigantic prize, the kingdom of God and the souls of men. One is subject to the Spirit of God, the other is the infernal spirit, Lucifer himself. The one, the Last Adam, must retrace the history of Adam the first. Paradise lost must become paradise regained. It was Augustine, following Paul, who said that the entire moral and spiritual history of the world revolved around two people, Adam and Christ. The temptation is a decisive movement in history.

The circumstances of the temptations of the first Adam and the Last Adam are in sharp contrast. For example, Adam was tempted in a garden, while Christ was tempted in the desert, “that great and terrible wilderness” (cf. Deuteronomy 8:15), as Moses described

it. Adam the first was well prepared for the tempter physically; he was strong and food was plentiful. But Adam the Last, having fasted for forty days, was weak and hungry. Finally, Adam the first was the object of Satan's initial seduction in the history of man, but Christ was attacked after His opponent had had four thousand years of practice. The odds were all on the side of a fall, humanly speaking.

Many questions come before us as we meditate upon our Lord's conflict in the desert. They are theological questions, and they cry out for discussion and solution. The principal question is this one: Is Jesus Christ impeccable? We are not asking: Is He sinless? This is generally admitted by students of Scripture, of course. The holiness, however, of the God-man is more than sinlessness.

The real question is: Was He UNABLE to sin? Was He not only able to overcome temptation, but also unable to be overcome by it? The answer, of course, has to be, "yes". It is not that He is able not to sin, but He is not able to sin.

If we remember that Jesus Christ is a divine person, we shall have no problems. He is not a human person raised to the power of deity by virtue of the incarnation, because He existed before that incarnation (cf. Micah 5:2; John 1:1). He is a divine person who at a point in time took to Himself human nature as an additional nature. His impeccability is guaranteed by the union of the divine and human natures in one the anthropic person. As Shedd says, He is "as mighty to overcome Satan and sin, as his mightiest nature is."1 The temptation account, since the temptation was not

observed by any other person than our Lord, is a bit of intimate autobiography told the apostles by its subject, Jesus Himself.

The occasion of the relating of the experience is more difficult to find, but an appropriate occasion is found in chapter sixteen of this gospel when, after Peter's confession of His Messiah-ship, the Lord Jesus begins His instruction concerning the necessity of His death and resurrection. Immediately Peter rebukes Jesus and receives this stinging reply, "Get thee behind me, Satan: thou are a stumbling-block unto me: for thou mindest not the things of God, but the things of men (16:23). At this very point, it seems to me, it would have been most fitting for Jesus to remind the apostles that the attitude of Peter was strikingly similar to that of Satan as reflected in the temptation, and to relate and expound the force of that wilderness experience.

The Personal Temptation

The request (4:1-3). The baptism of John the Baptist had marked the inauguration of the Messianic ministry of Christ. By this the Lord's conviction was confirmed that He was "born to suffer, born a king." The voice from heaven had been the coronation formula of the King, while the vision had been the visible counterpart of the voice. The Spirit's coming had identified Him as the King (cf. Isaiah 42:1, 61:1), and the form of the dove had reminded Him of His suffering work.

All three of the tests are variations of the one great temptation to remove His Messianic vocation from the guidance of His Father and make it simply a political calling. Manson in essence is right, "It may be put in this way, that what Jesus rejects in the Tempttations are

methods of ‘bringing in’ the kingdom of God: (a) the economic with all that apparatus so well known to us in these days of ‘five year’ plans and the like; (b) the game of political intrigue backed by military force; (c) propaganda which would eventually create an artificial nimbus for the national leader.”2 And yet there are different emphases in the tests. The first has to do with the body, the second the soul, and the third the spirit. The first looks at Christ as the Son of God, the second as the Son of David (not out of harmony with the divine sonship), and the third as the Son of Abraham. The first test is directed toward the lust of the flesh, the second toward the pride of life, and the third toward the lust of the eyes (cf. 1 John 2:16).

The “then” of verse one, one of Matthew’s favourite particles, makes the connection with the preceding account of the baptism. As Scroggie said, “After the testimony the test; and after the Dove, the devil.”3 Shortly after the baptism Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness for the temptation experience. Thoroughly weakened physically he faced the arch-enemy of His vocation, Satan.

The opening question of the tempter is related to the words that came from heaven at the baptism. We might paraphrase it in this way, “If, for the sake of argument, as the voice at your baptism intimated, you are the Son of God, then demonstrate your Messianic office by providing a kingdom of bread” (cf. v. 3). The test was a very shrewd thrust. Is it really true, Satan asked, that the God who said, “Thou art My Son” (cf. Psalm 2:7), has also said, “Thou shalt not eat” (cf. Genesis 3:1)? A hungering Son of God! Could this be of God, especially when one remembers that one of the features of the

kingdom the Messiah will bring is that of the Messianic banquet (cf. Luke 14:15; 22:29-30)?

There are some interesting things about this first temptation which bear brief comment. Satan, it will be noted, does not begin with a point-blank denial of the truth. That would be too obvious. As in much of our contemporary theology, the unbelief is more subtle and deceptive. The virgin birth is not denied; it is simply considered an unnecessary doctrine. The deity of Christ is not rejected openly; it is explained away. Jesus is not the object of our faith, but its founder and classic example. As Forsyth remarked of these apostates, “We must learn to believe not in Christ, but with Christ, we are told.”4 But if we take only one aspect of His teaching, we immediately see that this theology is bankrupt. He affirmed, “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (cf. Luke 13:3, 5). Search His religious experience as deeply as one will, and there is no trace of repentance in it. The fact is that the church has always known, and rightly so, that Jesus is not only a man, but more than a man. He is “my Lord and my God,” as Thomas affirmed. He does not ask only for devotion to His example, His actions, or His words; He demands devotion to Himself. The contemporary unbelief, spearheaded by the passing fancies of “process theology,” “revolutionary theology,” and other heresies, is simply an echo. of the ancient serpent’s skeptical query, “Yea, hath God said?” (cf. Genesis 3:1).

The reply (4:4). The reply of our Lord, a quotation from Deuteronomy, as is each reply, alludes to the manna. He proves His Sonship by a reply worthy of a son! Man (notice the word) lives by God, not by food alone.

The National Temptation

The request (4:5-6). That this request is slanted toward the national aspect of the Messianic ministry is indicated by the mention of “the holy city” (Jerusalem; cf. 27:53), “the temple,” and the quotation of the Messianic Psalm ninety-one. The Lord is urged to demonstrate His Messiah-ship by a spectacular sign, a thing the Jews loved (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:22). And Satan has learned something from the first test, namely, the importance of Holy Scripture to the Lord Jesus. So, this time he supports his request by the use of Scripture. But, in so doing he makes several mistakes.

1. First, there is the mistake of tempting Jesus to presumption, or the forcing of God’s hand. The promises of Scripture ate valid always, but they are valid for us only at God’s time. It is always wrong to put God to the test at our time.

2. Second, there is the mistake of opposing Scripture to Scripture. Psalm 91:11-12, Satan’s citation, probably is a Messianic passage and may refer properly to the Lord, but the text must not be used in such a way that it contradicts other valid passages. One must compare Scripture with Scripture, not oppose Scripture to Scripture. The latter is Satan’s method here, for in our Lord’s answer He cites Deuteronomy 6:16 and uses it to contradict Satan’s use of the Psalms passage. Scriptura ex Scriptura explicanda est! Scripture is to be explained by Scripture. The devil puts Scripture against Scripture, not beside Scripture. So does the Lord here —but against Satan’s!

Now, we must not overlook an important spiritual point here. Satan is very knowledgeable in Holy Writ, knowing

far more of the text apparently than many of the saints. His ministers also know Scripture. They pose as "ministers of righteousness" (cf. 2 Corinthians 11:15). As Morgan wrote, "Every false teacher who has divided the Church, has had an 'it is written' on which to hang his doctrine. If only against the isolated passage there had been the recognition of the fact that 'again it is written,' how much the Church would have been saved!"5 Every Christian who has had to deal with representatives of the false cults knows the truth of this. The heretical teachings of baptismal regeneration, soul sleep, universalism, and denial of eternal punishment, to name a few, are all supported by their adherents with the misuse of the Word of God. Acts 2:38 is wrenched from its context and made to bear the weight of entire denominations, without even a cursory examination of its related passage in Acts 10:34-48. Oh! if they would just remember, "it is written again"!

The reply (4:7). The reply of our Lord indicates that He will not pander to the Jews' love of a sign, nor will He burgle the house of a man's soul. He will realize His Messiahship by dependence upon God, not by force. He will not dazzle into submission by carnal sensationalism.

The Universal Temptation

The request (4:8-9). The third test has universal aspects, relating to the Abrahamic promises of world-wide blessing apart from the cross. Question has sometimes been raised over this offer by Satan. It has been thought that he had no real right to offer the kingdoms to Jesus Christ. Billy Bray used to say, in his quaint way, that the devil was wrong, adding, "The old rascal, to offer Christ the kingdoms of the world, why he never possessed so

much as a ‘tater skin.’” But, as Denney points out, “This saying, which in Luke is put into the lips of Satan, is not meant to be regarded as untrue. There would be no temptation in it if it was untrue.”6 The right apparently belonged to him by virtue of his victory over man, the rightful heir to creation, in Eden.

The reply (4:10-11). If Satan thought he would be successful, he was sadly mistaken. Our Lord is not a Jesuit; the end does not justify the means. He will not sue the world, nor its methods, to attain His destiny. He must not become the Messiah of the world, nor of Satan, but of God. As Horatius Bonar wrote:

“The Kingdom that I seek

Is Thine; so let the way

That leads to it be Thine.”

The reply, a third citation from Deuteronomy (6:13), is the final thrust of the sword of the Spirit. The citadel is held, and the foe is vanquished. But does our Lord march from the battlefield as other conquerors? Let us listen to Thielecke’s answer, “By no means; how different is this victory from those of men! He rises to his feet, and immediately sets forth on his via dolorosa. He, too, goes forth into the world. Once again he will have to contend with the powers of evil which rise against him. He goes through this world, which is a theatre of war and a battlefield between God and Satan. By winning his first victory he has entered this world. Christ will fight for the souls of the men he meets, whether men, working-class men or lords of industry, the hungry and thirsty or well-fed and safe — he will fight for the souls of all these men alike, and he will die for all of them.

Thus does the victor in this fight take his way hence (Matthew 26:46), going straight towards his cross, as though God had forsaken him (Mark 15:34).

“Is he not after all really the loser —a bankrupt king who has gambled away his crown — as he sets forth on his path from the desert to the cross? Has he not won a Pyrrhic victory? He travels the path beset with pain which leads to the cross, and not the way of glory and triumph which is also the way of God (for how can God’s progress be other than triumphal?).

“Perhaps this contest in the desert was after all a drawn game. Perhaps in the long run the dread opponent will prove to have won the victory and regained his power over the world. Is there any man alive in the twentieth century who does not think that all the evidence points in this direction?

“But something more happens in the desert when the two go their ways: ‘The angels came and ministered unto him’ (Matthew 4:11). He must after all have won the victory.”7 There is one practical lesson that we must not miss. It is the supreme need of a knowledge and use of God’s Word. Jesus defeated the devil by the application of Scripture to his temptations. The three fold “it is written” highlights the victory, and points the way to victory for the saints. And, it must not be overlooked that His citations were from a book that is often overlooked in Bible study, Deuteronomy. How many texts from this section of Scripture have been hidden in the hearts of the saints? If victory depended upon its use, would the prize be gained?

We shall conclude this study with several general observations concerning the doctrinal significance of the

temptation. In the first place it is important to observe that the temptation marks Jesus Christ out as one perfectly qualified morally to be the promised Davidic sovereign. Manson comments, “In the Temptations the Messiah is being invited to take the centre of the stage in one role or another. It is significant that each time the response of Jesus puts God in the centre of the stage in one role or another. It is significant that each time the response of Jesus puts God in the centre of the stage; and each time the implication is made perfectly clear: even the Messiah is only God’s servant —indeed, just because he is Messiah he must be pre-eminently God’s servant.”8 This victory is one in a series that shall find a thrilling consummation in this book in the exultant declaration, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth (28:18). And that, too, is a further step in the process that shall be crowned with the climactic utterance of the voices in heaven at the sounding of the seventh trumpet of the Apocalypse, “The kosmos-kingdom of our Lord and His Messiah has come, and he shall reign unto the ages of the ages (Revelation 11:15).

In the second place, in the experience of the victory of the temptation Jesus Christ is seen to be perfectly qualified morally to be the Savior. The cross was anticipated in this conquest. Milton indicated this by concluding Paradise Regained at this point. In the temptation there was, then, a pledge of the crucial victory of Golgotha, which Paul describes in these words, “And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it” (Colossians 2:15).

Finally, in the wilderness experience Jesus Christ is seen to be perfectly qualified to be a sympathetic high priest.

This is the principal use which the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews makes of the incident. He writes, “For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted (2:18). And again, “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (4:15). To those related to this High Priest there is no more appealing note upon which to conclude a study of the temptation than the exhortation which naturally follows, “Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (4:16).

1 William G.T. Shedd, Dogmatic Theology (Grand Rapids, n. d. [reprint of 2 T.W. Manson, The Servant-Messiah (Cambridge, 1953), p. 56.

3 W. Graham Scroggie, The Gospel of Mark, The Study Hour Series (New York and London, n. d.), pp. 29-30.

4 P.T. Forsyth, The Person and Place of Jesus Christ (Grand Rapids, n. d. (reprint]), p. 35.

5 G. Campbell Morgan, The Crises of the Christ (London, 1905, p. 155.

6 James Denney, Jesus and the Gospel (London, 1908, p. 189.

7 Helmut Thielecke, Between God and Satan, p. 2.

8 Manson, p. 57.

The Walking on the Water

The Walking on the Water

S. Lewis Johnson. Jr.

Scripture Reading: John 6:15-21

Introduction

Two signs engage the Apostle John in the sixth chapter of his gospel, the Feeding of the Five Thousand and the Walking on the Water. The two signs teach that our Lord is both the source and the support of life, both the giver and the guide of life.

It has often been pointed out by Bible teachers that the miracles, or signs, of the Lord Jesus are parables, parables in the sense that His miracles, particularly those in John, are designed to point beyond the evidence of supernatural power to the spiritual truths bound up in them. In the feeding of the multitude of the people Jesus demonstrates that He is the Bread of Life. As He will later say, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you” (cf.. vv. 53, 56).

In the walking on the water to deliver the disciples from the storm that raged over the Sea of Galilee He demonstrated that He is also the Guide of Life. The former sign had in view unbelievers, pointing them to the source of life in Christ. That is evident from the fact that it specifically concerned “His disciples’ (cf. v. 16), thus indicating that it was designed especially for those who were already believers. He is, then, the giver of life

to the unbelievers and the guide and sustainer of life for the believers.

There is an old proverb, “Man’s extremity is God’s opportunity,” and it is a good and true one. Campbell Morgan has suggested that it might be revised to read something like this, “Man’s extremity is man’s opportunity for finding God.” That, too, is true, for it is in the hour of greatest need that we usually find Him. The apostles in the boat on the way to Capernaum learned that truth in a most heart-throbbing, but exciting way. In the midst of the storm and facing death they learned in a fresh way what Jesus Christ can do for His own.

The Situation

It was the day of the feeding of five, or fifteen thousand. Due to the stupendous nature of the miracle the men of the multitude exclaimed, “This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world” (John 6:14), evidently alluding to the prophecy of the Messianic prophet that Moses gave in Deuteronomy 18:15-18.

The mood of the multitude, however, did not satisfy the Lord Jesus, for He perceived that they wanted to come and take Him by force, to make Him a king. That might have seemed to be the accomplishment of the goal of His ministry. After all, was not one of His primary purposes in His ministry to show that He was the true Messianic king? Well, yes, it was, but only if the men of His day also recognized that, in order to become the Messianic king, He must also first accomplish the atonement for sinners by the ratification of the new covenant in His blood. To seek to make Him a king with no recognition of His ministry as the Servant of Jehovah

offering the atoning sacrifice was to make Him a political king alone. He must, however, be a spiritual king as well as a political king, one who rules by virtue of the finished work of redemption (cf. Luke 24:25-27).

Perceiving this false understanding of the meaning of His miracles and ministry Jesus “constrained” (cf. Matt. 14:22; Mark 6:45) His disciples to get into a boat and go over to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. He evidently hurried them away (the Greek word rendered by “constrained” means something like compelled, indicating that some persuasion was necessary for Him to get them to leave the scene) in order that they might not catch the contagion of the crowd, which sought to make Him their kind of political king.

After He had sent the multitude away, He went up into a mountain by Himself to pray (cf.. Matt. 14:23). When the evening came, He found Himself there alone. It is a beautiful picture of the “man, Christ Jesus,” as Paul puts it (cf. 1 Tim. 2:5). Someone has said, “No great discovery was ever made on a crowded street.” That is likely to be true; it certainly is true to my experience of little discoveries! It was characteristic of the Lord Jesus to spend so much of His time in prayerful communion with the Father. Out of this activity came His great ministry of miracle and teaching. How much more ought we, the weak disciples, to occupy ourselves in prayer.

The disciples, in the meantime, had gone down from the hillside to the sea and had entered a ship. They began to make their way over the sea to Capernaum, which lay on the north side of the sea. John adds in verse seventeen, “And it was now dark, and Jesus was not come to them.”

The Storm

John's simple words of verse eighteen tell a big story, "And the sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew." The light breezes had turned to heavier ones. The stars had been shining, for it was night, but soon they were gone behind the clouds. As the winds became stronger and more blustery Peter took command, and one can imagine him, holding the tiller with his powerful arm, his beard anointed with the white foam of the raging waves, issuing commands to lower the sail, trim the ship, and make ready the oars. The earlier calm had become confusion and, as was often the case, the Sea of Galilee had become a boiling caldron. As Matthew puts it, "But the boat was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves, for the wind was contrary" (Matt. 14:24).

In an earlier incident the Lord Jesus had calmed another of the storms that had arisen on that same sea (cf. Matt. 8:23-27), provoking amazement and fear by the contemplation of the fact that even winds and waves obeyed Him. That occasion found Him remaining with them in the boat, but on this occasion He has put them forth into danger on their own, just like some loving mother-bird thrusts her fledglings from the nest, that they may find their own wings and learn to use them.

I saw an interesting illustration of this in my own backyard just a few days ago. Hearing a lot of shrill squawking sounds from some blue jays, I went out to see what was happening. I found about six of them in a large holly bush squawking at a young blue jay that was just beginning to fly on its own. Evidently they were hoping to scare away anything that might harm the young bird,

or perhaps they were just shouting their own words of encouragement, like “go, you jay, go!”

Alexander MacLaren has commented on the need that we have to launch out on our own, and that we should not be surprised that we have to face the difficulties of life, the tragedies, and the disappointments. “Nor are we to mourn or wonder,” he has written, “for the purpose of the appointment, so far as we are concerned, is to make character, and to give us ‘threstling thews that throw the world.’ Difficulties make men of us. Summer sailors, yachting in smooth water, have neither the joy of conflict not the vigour which it gives.”1

The Sight of the Lord

In the fourth watch of the night (cf. Matt. 14:25), which was from three o’clock in the morning to six o’clock, the Lord, looking out over the lake, saw the disciples “toiling in rowing,” as Mark puts it. So, He came to them, walking upon the sea. The disciples, however, would no doubt have claimed that His coming to them was worse than His delay in coming, for they were troubled and cried out in fear. I can imagine Peter, seeing Him coming, saying, “Look! what is that?” And they shrieked (as the Greek text has it), “It’s a ghost!” (14:26).

We who live in the twentieth century smile when we read an account like this, for we do not believe in ghosts. It is doubtful, however, if that other invisible, hidden world has ever lost its power over this world. Our rationalism, our scientism, our infidelity and unbelief do not seem to matter. In the times of stress there are many who still believe in ghosts.

The disciples had been worried about perishing in the storm, although they were seasoned and experienced fishermen. Now, something worse than the storm was coming to them. After all, fishermen can fight a storm and have some hope of success, but what can one do against a water-demon, a ghost? Their next destination surely would be Davey Jones' locker!

Jewish popular belief often recounted the appearances of unusual apparitions on the sea, for the Jews were people of the land, not the water, so the idea of water-ghosts was one that was common in the speech and thought of the ordinary people.2 But, instead of some ancient evil and familiar spirit it was the Lord. And is it not often true that God's answers to our trials and tragedies seem to be as bad as ghosts, when really they are ministrations from a loving heavenly Father? His delays are not denials; they are part of His loving discipline. "It is the belief that God cares," J. W. C. Wand wrote, "that marks Christianity from other religions, which under all varieties of form are occupied with the task of MAKING GOD CARE."3 The liberal view of the walking on the water is that Jesus was really walking on the sea shore and the disciples mistook Him for walking on the water when actually He was wading through the surf near the hidden shore.4 Would not our Lord have corrected their mistake?' Why, then, were they "sore amazed in themselves beyond measure, and wondered" (cf. Mark 6:51)? Did Peter, when he walked on the water and sank into the depths, really sink down into the sand? John may be interpreted in this fashion more easily than the other gospels, but Matthew and Mark make it plain that they understood the event as a miracle, a real walking on the water (cf. Matt. 14:25-26;

Mark 6:48).That is what it was.5 What they learned may be put in two ways. First, they learned what the psalmist had learned, “Thy way is in the sea” (cf. Psa. 77:19), for He had made it, and they learned also that the God of eternity is also the God of the hour. At any moment of peril He can be depended upon to be our Companion.

The Sermon of the Lord

It is said, “All good sermons have three points — or seven!” By this questionable standard our Lord’s sermon to the disciples, which He preached upon the water, was a good one. It had three points. The first was, “Be of good cheer.” That is an excellent exhortation and, coming from Him, needs little shoring up, but ordinarily exhortations are only as good as the enabling foundation of them. This one has the soundest of foundations and offers the greatest of hopes, for it rests upon the second point of the sermon, the affirmation of His deity. The words, “it is I,” are sufficient to uphold us in any of the circumstances of life. It is the equivalent of the Old Testament affirmation by which Jehovah encouraged Israel in her deepest moments of need, “I am He” (cf.. Isa. 43:2; Deut. 32:39, etc.). That was the great theophanic formula, used at the important feasts of Jehovah, and it was used in the Passover liturgy. This event occurred at the time of the Passover (cf. John 6:4), and the Passover liturgy glorified God as the God who rules the waters. It is as if His coming on the water is to remind them that He is that God, the Old Testament covenant-keeping Sovereign who makes good all His Word to His own. It said, in effect, where I am, there God is, there God lives, speaks, calls, acts, loves,

forgives, and helps. Nothing bolder or more significant can be said.

Therefore, the third point of the sermon (only the second in John, which does not have, “Be of good cheer”) follows naturally, “be not afraid.” How can they be afraid, when this profoundest of the divine declarations has fallen upon their ears to encourage them? Another historical epiphany of God, the final one, has taken place in Jesus Christ, and He has pledged Himself to care for His people. What comfort!

The Sinking of Peter

We are not surprised to hear Peter speak up amidst the storm, “Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water” (cf. Matt. 14:28).

The answer of the Lord to Peter’s request is, “Come” (v. 29). And Peter climbed out of the boat, put his feet upon the water and began to walk towards Jesus. His walking, an amazing thing in itself, illustrates man’s strength and weakness. Peter’s walking illustrates his strength when in harmony with the mind of the Lord, or when acting in communion with Him. Evidently Peter walked quite a distance on the water before he, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me” (cf. Matt. 14:30), for the Lord has only to put forth His hand to catch the sinking fisherman. Then they walked back to the boat together! Now observe that, while Peter kept his eye on the Lord Jesus, he did just what Jesus did. He walked on the water. The moment, however, that he took his eye off the Lord and saw the boisterous wind and the raging waves, he lost all power to walk on the water and began to sink. Here, then, is both the strength and the weakness of redeemed man.

“Holy living,” Arthur T. Pierson once said, “is as much a miracle to the natural man as is walking on the water, which presents no proper foundation for our feet, having neither stability nor equilibrium, and especially when tossed up and down and driven to and fro by the wind. The secret of Peter’s power to triumph over what was otherwise impossible was this, that he was in touch with Jesus by faith and had Christ’s power in him; and the secret of his sinking is equally plain — he lost touch with Jesus and became as any other mortal, unable to cope with the difficulties of the situation. But what we need to emphasize is that one moment he was strong TO DO THE IMPOSSIBLE and the next moment UTTERLY WEAK and sinking. So a human soul can be strong one moment and weak the next, omnipotent or impotent, and it all depends on the touch of faith which brings virtue out of Christ.”6 That is why Jesus said to Peter as He saved him, “O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” (cf. Matt. 14:31).

One wonders if this incident is the source of the great statement of the apostle in 1 Peter 1:5, “Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”

The brevity of Peter’s prayer for deliverance should not be overlooked, and it is a lesson to all of us, particularly to those of us who often lead in public prayer. Long and flowery prayers are not always proper and, if Peter had been disposed to offer one of them, he would have been six feet under water before he reached the heart of his petition!

The Sequel to the Storm

The reception into the boat (John 6:21a). John concludes his account with, “Then they willingly received Him into the ship: and immediately the ship was at land whither they went.” Matthew continues his account by writing, “And when they were come into the boat, the wind ceased” (Matt. 14:32). The historical facts described here seem to point beyond the literal event to spiritual principles. The solution to the riddles and troubles of life lies in the relationship of communion with the Lord Jesus.

The results that followed (John 6:21b; Matt. 14:32). The results just mentioned include these things. In the first place, the wind ceased, indicating that contrary elements yield to the divine presence.7 To receive Him into our ship is to find the answer to our questions and needs, for He is as one Bible teacher said, “Lord of both the bread and the billows.”8 In the second place, when He entered the boat with Peter, the others came and “worshipped Him” (cf. Matt. 14:33). It is fitting that this incident should end in worship, for the highest function of the redeemed soul is just that — worship, not service. Life is a relationship which, through supernatural experiences, leads to Him.

The expression of their worship centres in the confession that Jesus is, “the Son of God.” This is the first time that men call Him the Son of God and, no doubt, this is one of the reasons that Matthew gives this incident in his gospel. The consciousness of the Messianic position and the divine nature of the Lord Jesus is gradually being developed in the minds of the apostles by the Holy Spirit. He is the Messiah, they had

come to see, but now that vision is broadening to embrace the concept of a divine Messiah, a Messiah who is also the Son of God.

Thus again, in the account we are face to face with the mystery of the divine Son, possessed of two natures, one human and one divine, a Son of God who prays (cf. Matt. 14:23) and commands the elements (vv. 25, 32). The combination of utter lowliness and transcendent loftiness pervades the entire life and history of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This strange combination of elements could never have been invented and portrayed through a lengthy series of events so harmoniously by poets of the greatest genius or authors with the skills of an Aeschylus or a Shakespeare. The only explanation of the riddle of the composition of the four gospels, in which the total lowliness and absolute loftiness of the Son of God are so beautifully blended, is that “the gospel writers” were in reality only reporters, who originated nothing and imagined nothing, but simply observed everything and described what they saw. The reconciliation of the two things found its explanation in the One who was both the Man of Sorrows and at the same time the Eternal Son of God.

And, finally, something should be said about John’s “and immediately the ship was at the land whither they went” (cf. John 6:21b). In the light of the several accounts it can scarcely be doubted that John does not mean that the ship touched shore the moment Jesus entered the boat. The apostle is speaking in something of a figuratively, or even mystical, fashion, as is upon occasion his custom. It certainly seemed to him that the

ecstatic moments that followed the glorious experience of the past minutes came to an end suddenly, too suddenly perhaps for him to savor them more, when they touched land. I would suggest that all who are in love know the meaning of this. The moments that we share together with ones we deeply love seem to pass all too quickly, especially if there must come a time of parting. John the lover, the mystic, the beloved apostle who rested on Jesus' bosom, has given us a bit of an insight into his feeling heart.

The Significance of the Sign

From the standpoint of history. The event may be considered from three standpoints, history, prophecy, and parable.

First, from the standpoint of history the walking upon the water is another of the mighty Messianic signs which identify the Lord Jesus as the Davidic Messiah.

Second, from the standpoint of prophecy the incident is a revealing event that provides us with some insight into the present and future ministry of the Son of God. While the disciples are toiling away on the Sea of Galilee in obedience to His commands, He is in the mountain praying. The picture is suggestive of the present high priestly ministry of the Lord Jesus at the right hand of the Father where "He ever lives to make intercession for them" (cf. Heb. 7:25; Rom. 8:34).

Such thoughts as our Lord's departure from the earth (cf. Acts 1:9-10), His session (Rom. 8:34), the church amid the nations serving Him (cf. John 17:14-18), His return in "the fourth watch of the night" (cf. Acts 1:11; Matt. 14:25), their failure to recognize Him (cf. Mark

6:49-50; Tit. 2:12-13), and the stilling of the storm (cf. 1 Thess. 4:13-18; Rev. 11:15) come to mind.

Third, from the standpoint of parable, remembering all our Lord's miracles are in measure parables in the sense that they will illustrate truth, we have here an example of how He meets the needs of serving and suffering saints. Storms are often in the path of duty, but there is always safety in our Immanuel. Slow going is often within His will, help and safety are sure with Him on board. His sovereign and calming presence enables us to affirm with the writer of Hebrews, "So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me" (Heb. 13:6). That great promise rests upon an equally great one, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (13:5).

Conclusion

Thus, it is true, "Man's extremity is God's opportunity," as the proverb has it, and it is also true that "man's extremity is man's opportunity for finding God." In the midst of the storms let us not forget that. They will come, and there may be much toiling in rowing amidst them, but they will inevitably lead His saints to Him.

Our Lord's search in it all finds its consummation in Matthew's words, "Then they that were in the ship came and WORSHIPPED HIM." John has already told us of Jesus' words, "But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: FOR THE FATHER SEEKETH SUCH TO WORSHIP HIM" (4:23). Come, let us do that. It is there that we find the peace that passes all understanding.

"At the heart of the cyclone tearing the sky,

And flinging the clouds and towers by,

Is a place of central calm.

So here in the roar of mortal things,

I have a place where my spirit sings—

In the hollow of God’s palm.”

1 Alexander Maclaren, The Gospel of St. Matthew, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1892), II, 12.

2 Strack and Billerbeck, 1, 691.

3 J. W. C. Wand, The General Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude, p. 125 4 Vincent Taylor, The Gospel According to St. Mark (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1953), p. 327.

5 Strachan, p. 182.

6 Arthur T. Pierson, Shall We Continue in Sin?, pp. 42-43.

7 Westcott, p. 99.

8 W. Graham Scroggie, The Gospel of Mark (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976 (reprint), p. 124.

The Word in History and Among Believers

The Word in History and Among Believers

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One of the great themes of Scripture is the incarnation of Christ. Here is a splendid study of this crucial doctrine that will enable the reader to more fully appreciate our wonderful Lord and Saviour.

Scripture Reading: John 1:14-18

Introduction

The Gospel of John was written that men might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that in believing they might have life through His name (cf. 20:30-31). It is, therefore, a propaganda document in the purest sense, and it has been eminently successful in accomplishing its aim.

There is a lovely story, told by Wilbert W. White of Biblical Seminary in New York City, that illustrates the point. There was an exceptionally intelligent student who had come to accept the general views of men such as Darwin, Huxley, and Spencer, and who considered himself an agnostic. One day he made up his mind that he would examine fairly the strongest presentation of Christian truth. He was advised to study the Gospel of John, and he read it through from beginning to end, taking it simply as a book and without examination of

outside evidence of its genuineness. When he finished he said, “The one of whom this book tells us is either the Saviour of the world, or he ought to be!” Because of the claims of the book, he was ready to respond and did respond to Him who said, “If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink,” and “He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness.” He followed the Light of the world and became a shining testimony to the saving power of the Son of God.

With the third paragraph of the prologue (vv. 14-18) we study the incarnation, the assumption by the Second Person of the Trinity of human nature. It is one of the ultimately mysterious facts of the faith, as Paul points out. He wrote, “Great is the mystery of godliness: God (or He) was manifest in the flesh” (cf. 1 Tim. 3:16). Luther said that, if we wished to properly set forth the incarnation, we would have to have new tongues.

The importance of the incarnation is manifold. It was necessary, in the first place, for the Son of God to be able to die (cf. Heb. 2:14). In the second place, He must become incarnate, if He is to be able to be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, or to be our great High Priest (cf. 4:15). And, in the third place, the incarnation is necessary, if He is to be able to leave us an example to follow (cf. 1 Pet. 2:21; 1 John 2:6). There are other significant facets of the doctrine as well, although we do not have the space for a full development of them.

We turn now to the text and its exposition.

The Incarnation of the Word

The fact of it (John 1:14a). The opening words of the paragraph set forth the incarnation, “And the Word was

made (lit., became) flesh." The One who is said to be "with God" in verse one is now "with us," the apostle says. He has just been speaking of the new creation (cf. 1:12-13), and it is his purpose to show that it, too, like the first creation (cf. 1:3) is the consequence of the activity of the Word. He became flesh and as a result of this a new birth is possible for men.

Leon Morris in his fine commentary writes, "But in one short shattering expression John unveils the great idea at the heart of Christianity that the very Word of God took flesh for man's salvation."1 What is meant by the clause? Perhaps a few points may clarify it. First of all, John does not have in mind a form of transubstantiation, as if to say that the Word is no longer the Word by taking human nature. The Word did not cease to be God, when He became man by taking an additional nature, a human one, to Himself. He was just as much God after He became man as before (cf. 2:9).

Nor does the statement suggest some alteration within the Trinity, so that the Trinity no longer exists as a Trinity. The One God still subsists in three persons. The middle person, however, is now a God-Man, but there has been no change in the divine essence, nor in the divine personalities. Only an additional nature has become the property of the Second Person.

In other words, there has been a modification of the manner of existence of the Word. Although He has not entered into a new existence, He has entered into a new form of existence. He is not God and man, nor God in a man, nor a man-God, but the God-Man, one person with two natures as expressed in the great Symbol of Chalcedon. "We, then, following the holy Fathers," the

creed reads, “all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood … to be acknowledged in two natures inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each one Person and One Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ; as the prophets from the beginning have declared concerning him, and the Lord Jesus Christ himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy fathers has handed down to us.” The church since 451 A.D., the date of the statement, has held to its teaching as in harmony with the Word of God.

The significance of the one Person and the two natures is excellently illustrated in our Lord’s encounter with the Woman of Samaria, as Shedd has explained it. “A man can have two forms of consciousness, yet with only one self-consciousness. He can feel cold with his body, while he prays to God with his mind. These two forms of conscious experience are wholly diverse and distinct. He does not pray with his body, or feel cold with his mind. Yet this doubleness and distinctness in the consciousness, does not destroy the unity of his self-consciousness. So, also, Jesus Christ as a theanthropic person was constituted of a divine nature and a human nature. The divine nature had its own form of experience, like the mind in an ordinary person; and the human nature had its own form of experience like the body in a common man. The experiences of the divine nature were as diverse from those of the human nature, as those of the human mind are from those of the human

body. Yet there was but one person who was the subject-ego of both of these experiences. At the very time when Christ was conscious of weariness and thirst by the well of Samaria, he also was conscious that he was the eternal and only-begotten Son of God, the second person in the trinity. This is proved by his words to the Samaritan woman: 'Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life. I that speak unto thee am the Messiah.' The first-mentioned consciousness of fatigue and thirst came through the human nature in his person; the second mentioned consciousness of omnipotence and supremacy came through the divine nature in his person. If he had not had a human nature, he could not have had the former consciousness; and if he had not had a divine nature, he could not have had the latter. Because he had both natures in one person, he could have both."2 The result of it (John 1:14b). The result of the incarnation was that the Word "dwelt among us." The word rendered "dwelt" is a word that means to tabernacle literally and is probably an allusion to the ancient tabernacle of Israel, for it was there that God met with His people (cf. Exod. 25:8). God dwelt in the Son of God among men, for in Him there dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, Paul tells us (cf. Col. 2:9).

And, just as true worship was offered through the services of the tabernacle, so true worship is offered through the Son of God now (cf. Heb, 7:25). "By Him," the writer of Hebrews says, "let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name" (cf. Heb. 13:15).

The human attestation of it (John 1:14c-e). The apostle concludes the statement of verse fourteen with “and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” The sight of the Lord as incarnate becomes a point of departure for faith, Hoskyns claims.3 The glory is described as that of “the only born of the Father.” The word translated as “only begotten” (lit., only-born) is a word that means unique. For example, it is used of Isaac, but Abraham had other sons than Isaac. Isaac, however, the child of promise, was Abraham’s unique son, the only one of the kind (cf. Heb. 11:17). The words suggest that the Lord was an eternal Son, since He is the Son of an eternal Father. If we have difficulty in comprehending this we should remember Augustine’s words, “Show me and explain to me an eternal Father, and I will show to you and explain to you an eternal Son.”

The glory is defined as “full of grace and truth.” The words are parallel to the “life” and “light” of verse four, for grace is the principle upon which life comes and truth is that which brings light. The word “grace” seems to refer particularly to the signs that He performed, which John selected for inclusion in the gospel he authored. In his words is the “truth” seen, and John may have in mind the discourses that he will include in his work. Both grace and truth lead on to the cross, for it is there that there is a perfect manifestation of both grace and truth (cf. John 19:35).

The Confirmation of the Incarnation

Confirmation by the Baptist’s words (John 1:15). In the following verses there is a corroboration of the things said in 1:14. Here we have further evidence for the fact

that He, the Word, is the “Only-Born,” the unique Son of the Father.

John makes the rather amazing statement that, although Jesus came after him in time, He was to be preferred before him, because He was before him in time. In other words, the words “after” and “before” are of time, not dignity. John is finite, but He is infinite; John is a lamp, but He is the light (cf. 5:35). John’s existence is temporal, but His is eternal.

As Morris says, “This is a noteworthy statement, for in antiquity it was widely held that chronological priority meant superiority.”4 In this case, however, physical chronological priority did not mean superiority. Actually, of course, our Lord was prior to John, for He, the Eternal Son, existed before John was concieved or born.

Confirmation by the disciples’ experiences (John 1:16). The opening “for” of verse sixteen is preceded, it seems to me, by an ellipse in thought. What is meant is something like this, “We, too, testify to His uniqueness, for of His fullness we all have received, and grace for grace (or, grace in place of grace).” The apostle claims that he and others with him have drawn on His inexhaustible resources of grace and truth, the grace of perfect redemption and the truth of a perfect revelation (cf. vv. 17, 18). This implies, of course, that the Word, who became flesh, has also completed a work of redemption, because we could never enjoy His fullness, if we had not been redeemed. Otherwise, we could only experience His rejection and judgment.

Alexander Maclaren has expressed this beautifully, I think, “In order that the divine fullness might belong to us there was needed that the Word should be made

flesh," he writes, adding, "and there was further needed that the incarnation should be crowned by sacrifice, and that life should be perfected in death. The alabaster box had to be broken before the house could be filled with the odour of the ointment. If I may so say, the sack, the coarse-spun sack of Christ's humanity, had to be cut asunder in order that the wealth that was stored in it might be poured into our hands. God came near us in the life, but God became ours in the death, of His dear Son. Incarnation was needed for that great privilege —'we beheld His glory'; but the Crucifixion was needed in order to make possible the more wondrous prerogative: 'Of His fulness have all we received.' God gives Himself to men in the Christ whose life revealed and whose death imparted Him to the world."5 The expression rendered in the Authorized Version by the words, "and grace for grace," is capable of different senses. The Greek text is literally grace instead of grace, giving the preposition anti its common meaning. One of the leading Greek grammarians has suggested the rendering grace in exchange for grace.6It may be rendered by grace after grace. The ideas of replacement, accumulation, and correspondence have all been taken to be here and argued well by commentators.7 Grace upon grace in the sense of accumulation makes sufficiently good sense to me. It suggests the figure of a gardener watering a plot of ground on which are his plants. He pours water upon the ground, waits for it to sink in the earth, and then continues his watering until the plant is properly watered. Thus, the experience of grace is that of the accumulation of blessings to the end that we are properly blessed by the Lord God.

Confirmation by the Lord's ministry (John 1:17). The next statement, "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ," is very significant. John Calvin has some interesting words here. He writes, "But we must notice the antithesis in his contrasting of the law to grace and truth; for he means that the law lacked both these."8 Calvin does not mean that there was no grace at all in the Old Testament, because there was. Nor does he mean that the gift of the Law to Israel was not a gracious gift, in the sense that it was to be through the Law that Israel was to come to their spiritual senses and realize their sinfulness. He means that the Law was a system of possible, or hypothetical, salvation dependent upon a perfect obedience to its requirements. Such, of course, was not possible to men. Thus, the Law served as preparation for the grace and truth that came through Jesus Christ. Putting it as follows: The Law was preparation, while grace is provision. The Law gives the knowledge of sin, while the grace of the Son puts away (cf. Rom. 3:20; 4:15; 5:20; Gal. 3:19; Rom. 8:1-4). The Law commands and demands, but grace offers and gives. The Law, further, is a shadow, while grace provides the true substance of the new age (cf. Col. 2:16; Heb. 10:1, 5-10). The Old Testament system pointed to grace, gave beautiful suggestions of it in illustrative fashion, but was powerless in itself. In the legal age a man was saved by grace outside the Levitical cultus through the promises given concerning the Redeemer.

"What is the use of standing beside a lame man, and pointing to a shining summit, and saying to him, 'Get up there and you will breathe a purer atmosphere'?" Maclaren asks. He continues, "He is lying lame at the

foot of it. There is no help for any soul in law. Men are not perishing because they do not know what they ought to do. Men are not bad because they doubt as to what their duty is. The worst man in the world knows a great deal more of what he ought to do than the best man in the world practices. So it is not for want of precepts that so many of us are going to destruction, but it is for want of power to fulfill the precepts."9

The Revelation of His Coming

The limitation of man (John 1:18a). Having expounded the fullness of grace, the apostle now turns to the fullness of truth seen in His incarnation. There one can see the perfect revelation of God.

Does not the Bible, however, say that certain people did see God (cf. Exod. 24:9-11)? Well, yes, but there are different ways of seeing God. One may speak of seeing God visibly as God, of seeing God visibly as in a theophany, or of seeing God spiritually as God in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Of the first two of these ways we must say:

"Jesus, these eyes have never seen

That radiant form of Thine;

The veil of sense hangs dark between

Thy blessed face and mine."

Of the last we may say that we may see God as God spiritually in the person and work of Jesus Christ, for He has revealed Him (cf. Col. 1:15).

The qualifications of the Son (John 1:18b). Some of the ancient manuscripts read, "the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father," a reading that is

harmonious with the style of John and with his usage in other places. If we were to take this reading as genuine, then we would say that the other principal variant (there are other minor variations in the text) is an unintentional error in the text, done by a scribe who confused the word for son with the word for God. In their abbreviated forms in the Greek they differ in only one letter. On the other hand, if we take the reading of the most ancient manuscripts, “the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father,” then we must explain the reading with “Son” as an intentional correction, since “only begotten God” is a unique reading, not found elsewhere. It may simply be a phrase that John derived from verses one and fourteen, because in the former verse the Word is said to be God, while in the latter He is said to be the Only-begotten of the Father. Fortunately, regardless of the text deemed genuine at this point both teach the deity, the eternity, and the intimacy with the Father of the Son. And this is the basis of His qualification for the revealing of the Father to the world. What we seem to have here is a picture of a Son leaning on the bosom of a father, and thus privy to all the inmost thoughts and purposes of the father.

The interpretation of the Father (John 1:18c). In the final clause of the verse John says that it is the Son, or the Only-begotten God who has revealed the Father. The word rendered, “declared,” in the Authorized Version is the word from which we get the word exegesis, which means interpretation. The Son is the interpreter of the Father both in His person and in His work. And God is seen through the life of Jesus Christ as God with a tear upon His face, God with a child upon His lap, God uttering cries of anger at the suffering caused by death

by the side of Lazarus' grave, God touching the untouchable leper in compassion, and God rejoicing in divine election (cf. Luke 10:20-21). In the mystery cults it was the Mystogague who revealed to the initiates the secrets of the cult, and this root was used to describe the action. The Lord Jesus is the genuine Mystagogue who had laid open the breast of God to us! We know the Father when we know Him. What an incentive to learn of Him (cf. Matt. 11:21-30).

Conclusion

One notices the stress on the necessity of appropriation throughout the passage. We read, "we beheld," "we have received," and implied in verse eighteen, "we have seen" (cf. vv. 14, 16, 18). May we respond by receiving Him.

So, to the perplexed we offer Him who is full of truth, revealing the Father. To the guilty we offer Him who is full of grace, redeeming His people. And to all we commend a Savior who saves to the uttermost. Come to Him.

1 Morris, p. 102

2 William G.T. Shedd, Dogmatic Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d. (reprint of 1888 ed.). II, 307-8.

3 Hoskyns, p. 149.

4 Morris, p. 108.

5 Maclaren, I, 24-25.

6 Moulton, Prolegomena, I, 100.

7 See Brown, I, 16.

8 Calvin, I, 24.

9 Maclaren, I, 33-34.

Two Ways, Two Trees, Two Houses

Two Ways, Two Trees,

Two Houses

S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.

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Scripture Reading: Matthew 7:13-29

And unto this people thou shalt say, Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I set before you THE WAY OF LIFE, and THE WAY OF DEATH."

Jeremiah, the Prophet

"For the preaching of the cross is to THEM THAT PERISH foolishness; but unto US WHO ARE SAVED it is the power of God."

Paul, the Apostle

Introduction

We are drawing near the end of the Sermon on the Mount, and it is not surprising that the note of exhortation becomes more prominent. In the very intensity of the ideas and the massive force of the argumentation there is found a compelling call for decision. It is not, however, the outward call for a show of hands, the signing of a decision card, or prostration at the "mourner's bench." It is none of these things that are so characteristic of much of modern evangelism, practices that so easily become tawdry and cheap, diminishing the dignity of the appeal of Christ. "Have we made it all too cheap?" Guy King asks. "Have we, some

of us, been included to stampede our audiences into a hasty, hectic, almost hilarious, ‘decision’ —on the ground that it is such a jolly thing to be a Christian? The Master never hesitated to present the enquirer with the stark realities of the case: this is a Hard thing, but this is the Right thing, therefore Do it!”1 In all truthfulness, it is my opinion that we have often made the solemn and sober call of God in the gospel a cheapened message in our garish and gaudy embellishments.

In our expression of distaste with modern methods we must not abandon the need for a verdict itself. The Scripture, both in the Old and in the New Testaments, stresses this.

Coming to the conclusion of the great Palestinian Covenant Moses presented Israel with the crucial need for a decision. “I call heaven and earth to record this day against you,” he cried, “that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore, CHOSE LIFE, that both thou and thy seed may live” (Deut. 30:19). That must have impressed Joshua, because years later, when laying down the reins of leadership over the nation, he, too, called for decision, “And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, CHOOSE you this day whom ye will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the river, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Josh. 24:15).

The decision to be made was a decision of faith in the King as He began His ministry of confirming the promises made to the fathers regarding the Messianic Kingdom. Trust in Him qualified one for entrance into the Kingdom; unbelief disqualified one and led inevitably

to the “furnace of fire” and “wailing and gnashing of teeth” (cf. 13:42). It underlies the entire concluding section in which Jesus discusses the two ways, the two trees, and the two houses. Inexorably we are forced to see that there are also TWO KINDS OF PEOPLE. To which body do we belong?

The Two Ways

The broad way (7:13). Suddenly, almost violently, comes the appeal, after the capstone of the sermon has been laid by the Golden Rule. The Greeks ordinarily used connectives to join their sentences together, but there is none here. It is a bold and frontal appeal, “Enter!”

The figure of the way, or road, is a familiar one in the Bible. One is reminded of the Psalmist’s, “For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous; but the way of the ungodly shall perish” (1:6). Its most familiar use is that of our Lord who said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). It is not surprising, then, to learn that Christianity came to be called by those who were exposed to it in its earliest history, “the Way” (cf. Acts 9:2).

It is an apt figure, for a road has a beginning, a pathway, and an end, and each of these things pertains to the Christian life and, in fact, every life. It is the point of our Lord’s words that we must be careful to enter the right gate, in order to make our journey on the right way. Alexander Maclaren has said, “The main thing about a road is, after all, where it leads us.” Therefore, the destination of the way is the primary thing. Of the wrong road the Lord says that it leads to “destruction,” a disconcerting surprise to its travellers. Three things characterize it: (a) it is entered by a wide gate; (b) it is

broad and roomy, a many-laned expressway; (c) it has upon it many travellers.

And no doubt, too, it is filled with beautiful scenery and lovely accommodations. The only trouble with it is that it leads to such a devilish place, — destruction! There comes to mind the significant warning text from Proverbs," There is a way which seemeth right UNTO A MAN, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (14:12). There can be no hesitation about the meaning of this statement of the Lord. It is a direct admonition that there is only one way to the Father in heaven, and it is not the easy way that lies in the imaginations of the worldlings. The only way is that which has been built upon the sufferings, cross, and resurrection of the God-man, and it is entered through Him who said, "I am the door; by me if any man, enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in-and out, and find pasture" (Jn.10:9).

In the light of this it is most remarkable that William Barclay, in a chapter entitled, "Life at the Cross-Roads," expounds our Lord's words here without any reference to the means by which one enters this life nor any stress on the perils that await one who chooses the wrong road.

The narrow way (7:14). The narrow way is narrow because it can only be entered by the new birth, its narrow gate. It is also narrow because its path is the new life, and its travellers are few in number.

They are the Enochs, who walk with God, the Noahs, who find grace in the eyes of the Lord, and the Davids who sing, "Salvation belongeth to the Lord" (cf. Psa. 3:8). It is, at least at the present time, a little flock, a

remnant, but a minority only in appearance. “I verily believe,” Guy King said, “that the unseen ‘horses and chariots of fire’ are still round about the Lord’s ‘little flock’. And besides — how many will you count Him for? The famous Duke of Wellington once surprised a company of his soldiers, disturbed and dispirited, one cold, wet night, around their camp fire. Next morning they were to encounter the enemy — but they were so terribly outnumbered that the result was a foregone conclusion: so few of them, so many of the French. It was hopeless! At that point in the conversation, the Iron Duke revealed his presence, and intervened, with the question, ‘And how many do you count me for?’ Their great General was a host in himself; and they won the battle that next morning. So by the side of His minority, stands, unseen, their Mighty Lord: how many shall we count Him for? Someone has said, ‘One with God is a majority’.”2 The idea that the road is narrow and has few passengers has often been slandered by unbelievers who resent the divine conditions for salvation and satirically recite, “We are God’s chosen few, All others will be damned;

There is no room in heaven for you;

We can’t have heaven crammed.”

The words about the “few” are from our Lord and represent His evaluation of the situation, and the response of the rebellious only confirms the truthfulness of His claims. The gate and road, nevertheless, are open for all who come in repentance and faith. Come!

The Two Trees

The admonition (7:15). The connection of this section with the preceding is caught very nicely by Tasker, who writes, “What makes the narrow way hard to find is the existence of numerous false teachers who have their own formulas for man’s welfare, and who cry aloud (in the days of Jesus ‘from the housetops’ and in the streets, and in our own time from the pages of newspapers, novels and journals) “This is the true way, walk in it’.”3 Never has this been more true than today. We are surfeited with almost every conceivable deviation from the genuine theology of the Word of God. We have Process Theology, the Theology of Revolution, NeoOrthodox Theology, Death of God Theology, Theology of Hope theology, Secular Theology, Teilhard’s “Cosmic Evolution,” in addition to the ever-present theologies of Judaism, Roman Catholicism, and Arminianism. In new forms error continues to assert itself and evidently will continue to do so until the Second Advent.

The Bible is full of warnings against the false prophets, and it is not astonishing at all to hear Jesus denouncing them (cf. Deut. 13:1-5; Ezek. 8:1-15). In our day they come with their false teachings of universalism, as the false prophets and priests of Jeremiah’s time did with their message of “Peace, peace; when there is no peace” (6:14). To them Jehovah promised only judgment, as our Lord’s words also intimate.

He says that they are dressed “in sheep’s clothing,” and the figure is also apt, for often the false teachers appear to be courteous, kindly, considerate, affectionate, helpful, distinguished, and learned in the wisdom of the

world, if not in the Scriptures. And, if one is not acquainted with the doctrine of common grace, the explanation of their apparent goodness and yet heterodoxy poses a problem. The Apostle Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 11:13-15 are a help here, for he shows that it is quite possible for Satan's men to appear to be "angels of light." He writes of the men who were causing the Corinthians and him so much trouble, "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into THE APOSTLES OF CHRIST. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into AN ANGEL OF LIGHT. Therefore, it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as THE MINISTERS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, whose end shall be according to their works."

The recognition (7:16-20). But how shall we know the "ravening wolves," when they look so much like sheep? The answer is found in these verses, and they teach that they are to be known by their works, just as a tree is to be judged by its fruit. The point of the verses is simply this: evil doctrines, such as those proclaimed by the false prophets, always produce a perverted morality. Belief and practice, creed and conduct cannot be separated. What we do ultimately is a reflection of what we think, and never is this more true than in theology of the Christian brand. Luther said, "It is not good works which make a good man, but a good man who does good works."

There are some general principles that may help to guide the simple in their discovery of the false prophets and teachers, for the wolves are characterized by certain distinguishable traits. In the first place, they are often seen by their self-interest, manifested in that they

teach for material gain, for prestige, and for the propagation of their own personal ideas. It was said of John Brown of Haddington that he used to pause from time to time in his preaching, as if he was “LISTENING FOR A VOICE.” And it is certainly characteristic of a genuine minister of God’s Word that he preaches God’s truth, not his own thoughts. “For we are not as the many, who corrupt the word of God,” Paul claimed, “but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ” (2 Cor. 2:17; cf. 4:2).

False teaching also produces a system of religion that majors on the externals, on the negatives, and on the divorce of truth from life. Like the false prophets of the Old Testament they heal the wounds of sinners slightly (cf. Jer. 8:11), and they prophesy “smooth things” (cf. Isa. 30:10), inventing easy ways to heaven and regard the exhortations and imperatives of the Christian life lightly. As Pink has pointed out, “There is nothing in their preaching which searches the conscience and renders the empty professor uneasy, nothing which humbles and causes their hearers to mourn before God; but rather that which puffs up, makes them pleased with themselves and to rest content in a false assurance.”4 The examination (7:21-23). False teachers make it difficult to find the narrow way. That is true, but other difficulties also exist. It is possible to be self-deceived, fondly imaging that we are on the right path when we are not. It is possible for professing believers to use the believer’s vocabulary. to perform believer’s activities, while reciting the believer’s creed, and still be lost. The expression, “not every one,” is thought by some to mean it is not the people who SAY.5If so, the stress rests upon the saying without the doing. The time will come when

many will say, “Lord, Lord,” in profession that they belong to Him. They will even prophesy in His name and cast out demons through Him, but that will not avail. In that day He will “profess” (the Greek word is related to the word for say, used in verse 21, and means literally, say openly) unto them, “I never knew you.”

The test of reality is the doing of the will of the Father in heaven (cf. v. 21). It is the same thing that He says later in the Upper Room Discourse, “If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them” (John 13:17).

James puts it bluntly, “Therefore, to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin” (Jas. 4:17). In other words, then, it is possible to be members of Christian churches, attend the meetings, observe the ordinances, even write commentaries and preach splendid sermons, and still be lost. The test of relationship is the obedience that springs from saving faith. It is not obedience that saves, but obedience must follow the faith that saves, (cf. Tit. 3:8, Eph. 2:8-10).

The Two Houses

The house of the wise man (7:24-25). False guides suggest false following, and that underscores the necessity of doing things that are heard. In the mind of the Lord, no doubt, is the Messianic Kingdom, as is stated in verse twenty-one. The kingdom is to come through Him, not through the false messiahs. But one must be real. The Lord is now striking for a verdict, and the appeal of the lesson of the parable that follows is telling.

The Parable of the Two Houses is a vivid appeal for better housing! The house of the wise man, described in

verses twenty-four and twenty-five, is built upon a rock. The word petra, later used in this famous passage in 16:18, in which the Lord Jesus responds to Peter's confession of Him as "the Christ, the Son of the Living God," with, "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father, who is in heaven, and I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter (Petros, a small rock, a pebble), and upon this rock (petra, a great mass of rock, a cliff) I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it," certainly suggests the Lord Jesus. He is the foundation Stone, the true rock, and upon Him alone may one's life be built (cf. 1 Cor. 3:11; 1 Pet. 2:4).

The hymn says it beautifully,

"On christ the solid Rock I stand,

All other ground is sinking sand."

The house of the foolish man (7:26-27. The house of the foolish man is distinguished from that of the wise man only in its foundation. One is built upon rock, the other upon sand. Outwardly the two houses are the same. It is when the rains, the floods, and the winds come that the difference between them becomes manifest, but, when they do come, the difference is as wide as the foundations of Venice and New York.

The instability of the sand and the immovability of the rock are revealed by the storms, just as it is in the stresses of life that true faith in Christ is revealed, — in the tragedies of bereavement, illness, disappointment, the sneers of the wise, and other sufferings. All sunshine makes a desert," someone has said. The apostles found it out, for in that small group hardly a one escaped great

storms. Many were martyred, but the Rock did not fail them.

In the description of the fall of the house in verse twenty-seven great stress rests on the adjective “great,” for it is reserved for the end of the sentence in the original text. Thus, the sermon ends with, “and the fall of it was great.” “The whole audience is left with the crash of the unreal disciple’s house sounding in their ears,” Plummer notes.6 What a solemn picture!

Conclusion

The Sermon on the Mount closes with an acknowledgment by the hearers of the unique character of the doctrine of Christ. They were “astonished” at His theology. He did not teach as the scribes, whose language was, “Rabbi this said so-and-so; Rabbi that said such-and-such.” He spoke on His own authority as a legislator, not as a commentator. He commanded, prohibited, repealed, and promised on His own bare word. Specifically, He (a) claimed authority over all former revealers (5:17-20); (b) claimed His life was the embodiment of the Law of Moses (5:17); (c) claimed to be the reality of the hopes of the godly through the ages, for He fulfilled the Prophets, too (5:17); (d) claimed a unique relation to their Father, never using “our” with the word; (e) claimed authority over the destinies of men (7:21-23); (f) claimed the right of absolute obedience from men, a claim resting upon His deity and sacrifice; (g) claimed to be the final Judge (7:23). Can we then say, “Give me the Sermon on the Mount, and keep your doctrinal theology for yourselves,” as so many have done?

Finally, authoritative teaching demands action. May the Holy Spirit guide our minds and hearts into a trust in Him that transforms our lives.

1 King, p. 111

2 Ibid., p. 113.

3 Tasker, p. 82.

4 Pink, p. 339.

5 Tasker, p. 84.

6 Plummer, p. 119.

When Bethlehem Became the House of Bread

When Bethlehem

Became The House Of Bread

S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.

Following 30 some years of faithful service at Dallas Theological Seminary, Dr. S. Lewis Johnson, Jr. resigned his professorship earlier this year. As an elder at Believers Chapel in Dallas, he continues an effective teaching ministry.

In this study we are shown that apart from the Lord Jesus, Bethlehem is “the house of bread” in name only. Do you have questions about Herod the Great and the Wise Men? If so, this article may serve to fully answer them.

Scripture Reading: Matthew 2:1-12

Introduction

It might seem quite strange for Matthew, the gospel of the King with its distinctively Jewish coloring, to give us an account of the visit of the wise men from the East. It might appear more appropriate for the Gospel of Luke, for that gospel delights in the note of universality. The gathering of the nations to the Light of Israel, however, is an essential part of true Judaism, and it is very fitting that the gospel that sets forth the glories of the Messianic King should contain it. And that gathering of the nations to Christ is beautifully portrayed in the visit of the magi, or wise men. In fact, it would seem to be the

chief purpose of the evangelist in this section to point out the acknowledgement of the young Son of David by representatives of the non-Jewish world. They, as well as Israel in the persons of His immediate family, worship Him as the King of the Jews and the Lord of the nations.

How different from the symbolism of this beautiful account is the reality of our day! Our days are days of religious disorder and spiritual chaos. It is not surprising that Israel does not acknowledge Him. They still abide in the blindness of rebellion (cf. Romans 9:25). And the nations are still raging in defiance of Him who sits in the heavens (cf. Psalm 2:1-3). It is shocking, however, to see the church in spiritual decadence. It is no longer "the little flock," meeting in the name of Jesus to worship the Father by the Scriptures in the Spirit. Its shepherds are not longer experienced, concerned, and faithful. The great doctrines of sin, redemption, and holiness are rarely proclaimed.

"We are living in a day of hazy standards of right and wrong," Vance Havner has pointed out. "The old line of demarcation has practically disappeared from modern thinking. A prominent minister said: 'The delineation of sin has undergone a transformation somewhat similar to that which has taken place in the world of painting. The old clear-cut lines have given way to an impressionistic indefiniteness, the black and white contrasts to low-toned grays. The churches have adopted a hush policy on the doctrine of depravity and a rotarian gospel takes the place of repentance.'

I like his reference to painting. There was time when you could look at a picture and tell what it was. Today black and white have become gray. Someone has said:

‘The religion of China is Confucian; the religion of America is confusion.’ A country schoolteacher, applying for a job, was asked, ‘Do you teach that the earth is round or flat?’ ‘Which way do you want it taught?’ was the reply. ‘I can teach it either way.’ Something like that is the attitude of many a pulpit today.”1 It was in Bethlehem that the Eastern pilgrims from Gentile lands came to worship Him. Bethlehem means the house of bread, and since the village stood in a fertile countryside, it was a fitting name. It was a lovely place with a lengthy history. It was there that Jacob buried Rachel. It was there that Ruth and Boaz met and lived out their beautiful and meaningful romance. It was there that the first news of the temple was proclaimed. And, above all, Bethlehem was the home and city of David the King. And how fitting it is that prophecy should state the David’s Greater Son should be born there! It was only then that Bethlehem truly became the house of bread. It is one of the purposes of Matthew to spell this out in the account of the visit of the wise men.

The Arrival Of The Wise Men (2:1-2)

“There is something extremely striking and stimulating to the imagination in the vagueness of the description of these Eastern pilgrims,” Maclaren says. “Where they came from, how long they had been in travelling, how many they were, what was their rank, whither they went, —all these questions are left unsolved. They glide into the story, present their silent adoration, ‘and as silently steal away.’ The tasteless mediaeval tradition knows all about them: they were three; they were kings. It knows their names; and, if we choose to pay the fee, we can see their hones today in the shrine behind the

high altar in Cologne Cathedral. How much more impressive is the indefiniteness of our narrative! How much more the half sometimes is than the whole!”2 The identity of the wise men (2:1). The magi were men with a lengthy and somewhat uncertain ancestry. They had become by this time the teachers and instructors of the Persian kings. They were men who were skilled in philosophy, in medicine, and in natural science. And, on top of this, they were soothsayers and interpreters of dreams. In later times their name came to refer to common fortunetellers, sorcerers, magicians, and other similar charlatans.3 It has been thought that there were three of them who came to Jerusalem, due largely to the mention of the three kinds of gifts, but we do not know their number or their place of origin.

Why should they set out for the West looking for a king? The answer is not hard to find. Testimonies are available from several sources to the fact that in the world at that time there was a strange state of expectancy, a sense of anticipation of a coming king from Judea. Suetonius could say, “There had spread over all the Orient an old and established belief, that it was fated at that time for men coming from Judaea to rule the world” (Life of Vespasian, 4:5).

The interrogation of the wise men (2:2). The question of the magi is beautifully pointed, but the response is revealing and tragic. They traverse the streets of the city of the Great King, but seem to find none to answer their query. And, further, it seems that no one wanted to know the answer. Incidentally, the expression “in the east” (v. 2) is better rendered in its rising. The reference apparently is to some remarkable astrological phenomenon which occurred in their homeland and

which convinced them that the time was ripe to travel westward to find the expected ruler.

The Alarm Of Herod And Jerusalem (2:3-8)

The reaction of Herod (2:3-4). The Herod here is Herod the Great, called by Robertson, “The Great Pervert.”4 Born in 73 B.C., Herod was half Jew and half Idumean. Edomite blood was in his veins. He was related to Esau, and the connection is significant. An insanely suspicious man, although a very gifted ruler, he was now in his last days. Someone has called him, “a murderous old man,” and the words are no exaggeration. His wife Mariamne and her mother Alexandra he had murdered. His eldest son, Antipater, and two other sons were assassinated by him. Caesar Augustus, playing upon the Greek words for pig (hus) and son (Huios), said bitterly that it was safer to be Herod’s sow than his son.

It is easy to see, then, that the announcement of the arrival of another king was sure to provoke the interest and the hostility of this implacable foe of truth. The significant thing is that the Jewish leaders do nothing about investigating the truth that may be contained in the news from the magi. Herod’s concern is understandable. As Bruce says, “The foreigner and usurper feared a rival, and the tyrant feared the rival would be welcomed.”5 The people’s terror was caused by Herod’s. When he was in a rage, anything could happen and often did. But pagans, sad to say, are more interested in the Messiah than His own people (cf. John 1:11-12)!

The religious experts are now called in, and a theological question is put to them. “Where is the Messiah to be born?,” is the query.

The response of the chief priests and scribes (2:5-6). The authorities do not hesitate. Bethlehem of Judaea is the place. The answer is not put in their mouth by Matthew. It is their answer, although Matthew then freely cites from Micah's great prophecy to establish the truthfulness of the reply. The text must be awfully clear in its meaning, for there is a remarkable unanimity in the context. The star (v. 9), the Jews (vv. 5-6), and the evangelist (vv. 1,6) all affirm that Bethlehem is the right answer. And Scripture sets its seal of approval upon our Lord's birth as the fulfillment of Micah's prophecy in that from the time of David to the time of the birth of Christ no other birth in Bethlehem of Judaea is recorded in it.

The definiteness of the prophecy of Micah is most telling and relevant. There were two Bethlehems in the Old Testament record (cf. Joshua 19:15), one in Judaea and the other in Zebulon. But contrary to the vague and indefinite and ambiguous prophecies of the Delphic Oracle and modern counterparts, such as Jeane Dixon and Maurice Woodruff, the inspired prophecies of the Word are specific.

To Be Continued (Editor's Note: Some of our readers have questioned a statement by Dr. S. Lewis Johnson, Jr. which appeared in his study, "The Herald of the King," in the March-April issue of Focus. Dr. Johnson has kindly replied as follows:

The sentence that has been questioned is the one that contains these words, "the words originally were a part of the consoling message given to the exiles in Babylon who were to return to their own land under the guidance and protection of their God in the future." This

sentence was spoken in the section of the article in which I was discussing the quotation from the Isaiah passage in Matthew 3. The word “originally” is written from the standpoint of the New Testament, not from the standpoint of the Old Testament. When I say that the words were originally part of the consoling message I mean of course that in Isaiah they are a part of the consoling message given to the exiles in Babylon. In the New Testament they are placed in a different context. I hope this clarifies the problem which some have had with reference to the statement. I do believe that Isaiah the prophet wrote all of the sixty-six chapters of the book of Isaiah.)

1 Vance Havner, Jesus Only (Westwood, 1969), p. 24.

2 Maclaren, I, 19-20.

3 Cf. Barclay, pp. 16-17.

4 Archibald Thomas Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament (New York, 1930), I, 15.

5 Alexander Balmain Bruce, “The Synoptic Gospels,” The Expositor’s Greek Testament (Grand Rapids, 1961), I, 71.

When Bethlehem Became The House Of Bread (Part 2)

When Bethlehem Became

The House Of Bread (Part 2)

S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.

The prophecy of Micah is a beautiful portrayal of the work of the Messiah. He is to be a “Governor,” a title that involves three things:

First, He shall be the Messianic Prophet, who shall guide His people in the way (cf. Luke 1:79).

Second, He shall be the Messianic Priest, who shall feed His people by virtue of the sacrifice He shall offer (cf. Micah 5:4, “feed”). They shall be led and fed.

Third, He shall be the Messianic King, who shall guard His people in the way (cf. Jeremiah 30:21). All of these functions are in the realm of His humanity, for it is “out of thee,” that is, the earthly Bethlehem, that He comes.

But, lest we think of Him only as an earthly sovereign, the prophecy in Micah adds the final description of Him, “whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.” “Out of thee” points to His earthly side, but this points to His heavenly side. He is David’s Son, but He is also David’s Lord.

Some years ago a moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, after listening to Sir Bernard Lovell tell the assembly of the astronomer’s immensities, thanked him at the conclusion of his lecture, adding, “But we believe that our God rules over all your worlds.”

How true that is. Herod may, indeed, be called, “the king” (v. 1), but the royal child rules his world.1 The council of the theologians illustrates the difference between orthodoxy and life. They know the Scriptural answers, but have no interest at all in the realities of the King, His person and work. And as for Herod, he is a dangerous, but ludicrous illustration of the irrationality of malevolent unbelief. “He believes the Messiah is to be born in Bethlehem,” as Maclaren points out, “and yet he determines to set himself against the carrying out of what he must, in some sense, believe to be God’s purpose. ‘If this infant is God’s Messiah, I will kill Him,’ is surely as strange a piece of policy gone mad as ever the world heard of.”2 The request of Herod (2:7-8). After the meeting with the Sanhedrin the scheming king called a second secret meeting with the wise men, in which he concealed his real intention, the murder of the King. He feigned a deep interest in the things that interested the wise men, assuring them that he wished to worship Him, too. The wise men, thus, become unwittingly the CIA, the spies, of the wicked despot. But the God who rules over all His worlds will overrule the enmity of this little puppet.

The Adoration Of The Wise Men (2:9-12)

The guidance of the star (2:9-10). The reappearing star becomes again the guide of the dedicated seekers, and the end of the search is near at hand. A great deal of discussion has taken place over the nature of this guiding star, but the statement of verse nine seems to say that the guidance of the star was miraculous. It truly did guide them, although they were given help from Herod through the answer of the chief priests and

scribes. In fact, special revelation (Micah's prophecy) and general revelation (the star) unite in pointing to Bethlehem.

"There is a lovely legend," Barclay reminds us, "which tells how the star, its work of guidance completed, fell into the well at Bethlehem, and that it is still there and can still be seen sometimes by those whose hearts are pure."3 The gifts to the King (2:11-12). Discovery leads to adoration and offering. The depth of the faith of the wise men is not explicitly told. It is common to say that they could hardly have come to a knowledge of His true character. On the other hand, having been in the city of Jerusalem in contact with many of the chosen nation, and probably with many of their Scriptural experts, it would not be incredible that, guided by the Holy Spirit, they should have come to a faith in the greatness of the Messiah whom they had been discussing, and with whom they had been involved for so many months.

At any rate, having entered the house — evidently some weeks had elapsed since the birth and the babe had been removed from the manger to a more substantial dwelling4 — they finally see Him. The child is mentioned first, customary in this narrative (cf. vv. 11, 13, 14, 20, and 21), for He is the object of the main interest, the center of attraction.

The gifts are laid before Him in token of esteem and worship, and the scene is suggestive of all the great prophecies of the Old Testament which speak of the worship by the Gentiles of the great Messianic King at the inception of His future kingdom (cf. Psalm 72:10, 11, 15; Isaiah 60:6). The meaning of the gifts is not ascertainable with any certainty. Commonly they have

been thought to represent His royalty, His divinity, and His mortality as seen in His sufferings for our redemption. If the meaning of the myrrh is related to His death, then the shadow of the cross is already falling over His face.

Conclusion

As we bring this study to a close, several thoughts come before us.

In the first place, we reiterate one of our opening remarks. Bethlehem means the house of bread, but only by the coming of the Child does it attain to the significance of its name. Then, finally, she becomes Bethlehem through Him who later shall say, “I am the living bread that came down from heaven; if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world” (John 6:51; cf. vv. 27,35). We have tried Sinai, with its “thou shalt’s,” and “thou shalt not’s,” but the Law cannot give life. It can only condemn. Bethlehem, however, satisfies through Him. Brooks was right.

“The hopes and fears of all the years

Are met in thee tonight.”

And the aim of the evangelist is accomplished in the setting forth of the acknowledgement of Christ as King by both Jew, through the royal family, and Gentile, through the learned Eastern pilgrims. He is revealed, as Paul, too, puts it, “to the humble and untaught first, and then to the honorable and learned, to the poor first, and then to the rich, to the West first, and then to the East.5 In the second place, the response and reaction of Herod, the chief priests and scribes, and the wise men illustrate

three common reactions to the Son of God today. There is, first, the reaction of Herod, the man who believes, evidently against his will, and sets himself to erase the testimony to the King, if at all possible. It is the insane reaction of a man who suppresses in unrighteousness the truth that he has.

There is, second, the response and reaction of the chief priests and scribes. It is the response of superior knowledge, but complete indifference. They are quite sure, as Maclaren indicates, “where Messiah is to be born; but they do not care to go and see if He is born.”6 And, third, there is the reaction of the wise men, the reaction of adoring worship. Spiritual knowledge comes to its climax in the bowing of the head and heart in the presence of the King. May we respond in the same spirit, in the spirit of the Christmas hymn, “O come, let us adore Him, O come, let us adore Him, O come, let us adore Him, Christ, the Lord.”

But can the Babe really grant us the life that is life indeed? Can He bestow the bread that satisfies? Is the giving of eternal life within His power? There is a clue to the answer to the question in the last lines of the prophecy of Micah. His goings forth have been “from of old, from everlasting.” He is no newcomer to the human scene. In the theophanies of the Old Testament He ministered to His ancient people that they might be prepared for and not surprised by His incarnation.

“Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;

Hail th’ Incarnate Deity.”

He is no blind guide into the unfathomable abyss of the Beyond. He has been there! He can be trusted.

1 Tasker for discussion of the use of the Old Testament passage here (p. 39).

2 Maclaren, I, 24.

3 Barclay, I, 22.

4 Cf. Tasker, p. 38.

5 Ibid., p. 40.

6 Maclaren, I, 24.

Who Was Jesus Christ? (Part 1)

Who Was Jesus Christ?

Part 1

S. Lewis Johnson. Jr.

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This article is the first of four studies on “Who Was Jesus Christ?”

In the question itself, “Who was Jesus Christ?,” one faces a dilemma. Shall we phrase it, “Who was Jesus Christ?,” or “Who is Jesus Christ?” As a believing Christian I must say that what Jesus Christ was, He is, and what He is, He was. The unknown author of the Epistle to the Hebrews reminds us that He is “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and for ever” (Heb. 13:8).

However, for our study I shall phrase it, “Who was Jesus Christ?”

Christians believe that it may be the most important question that a mere man could frame, for ultimately the destiny of every living person, and dead person for that matter, hangs upon the answer given to it. The answer the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament give is one that leads to eternal life, while answers that deny the conviction of the prophets and apostles are answers that lead one along the broad way that terminates in destruction.

The question is by no means a new question. It was asked by the Lord Himself. At Caesara Phillipi, when it had become quite evident that the nation would not receive His message, as part of the preparation of the disciples for the message of His coming death He asked, “Who do men say that I, the Son of man, am?” (Matt. 16:31). At this juncture in His earthly career the Apostle Peter, answering for the disciples by divine illumination, exclaimed, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:18). It was a memorable statement, striking in the fact that it was made just at the point when it seemed that everything was going wrong, and disaster must soon follow. In his words Peter has spoken for Christ’s men and women down through the centuries.

And again, at a later point in His ministry He threw out the biblical challenge, “What think ye of the Christ? whose son is He?” (Matt. 22:42). And when the Jewish leaders answered correctly, “The son of David,” He asked a further question, “How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?” (vv. 43-45). The question is unanswerable except by an affirmation of a divine-human Son of David, the Messiah.

Answers to the question are still being offered, and they are remarkable largely in their diversity. Papini saw him as the Poet, while Bruce Parton saw Him as the Man of Action. Lord Beaverbrook saw Him as “the Divine Propagandist,” not surprising for a newspaperman. Middleton Murray marvelled at His imagination and

portrayed Him as “the man of the future,” possessed of the imagination of a genius.

Philip Schaaf, the well-known church historian, said, “The life and character of Jesus Christ is the holy of holies in the history of the world.” H. G. Wells said that, judged by a historian’s standards, “Jesus stands first” in history. Why, then, do history texts devote only passing references to a humanistic Jesus whose life could never seriously affect, much less change, the course of history? Perhaps part of the answer is that modern theologians, dominated by anti-supernaturalism, have a generally lower view of Him. For example, in the major article, entitled “Jesus Christ,” in the latest edition of the major German reference work on religion, Professor Hans Conzelmann comes to the conclusion that Jesus never called Himself Son of God or Son of man. He was only a great teacher and miracle-worker.

On the other hand, it is surely remarkable that in Judaism today there is much interest in Jesus of Nazareth, in fact, much interest in claiming Jesus for the Jews. We shall deal with this later in these studies, but listen to the words of Rabbi Maurice Nathan Eisendrath, “Who can compute what Jesus has meant to humanity; what he might yet mean for our sorely distracted and desperate day?”

If one wishes to really come to know a person, is it not best to hear those who have the closest access to him? If this is only partially so, then it is of great importance to listen to those who knew Jesus Christ. And, if we may assume that His apostles wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, then from them we may have an

authoritative interpretation of the person of Christ, one that we can rely upon. So, let us listen to them.

The Testimony of Matthew

In Matthew the tax-gatherer's account of Jesus' birth there occur these words, "And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us" (Matt. 1:21-23).

It is the angel of the Lord who has announced the birth of Jesus to Joseph, but it is the evangelist Matthew who has interpreted what has happened as the fulfilment of the prophecy of a virgin birth in Isaiah 7:14.

Now differences of opinion exist among the interpreters over the precise sense of Isaiah 7:14. Some see the prophecy as a typical prophecy, referring first to Isaiah's family, God providing the prophet with a sign for the nation. The birth would be a sign of God's undergirding of the nation in its time of crisis. Only ultimately does the sign point on to the coming of the Son of God, the paramount source of support for Israel.

Others see the prophecy as directly prophetic of the Son of Mary, the virgin. The supernatural sign of the virgin birth of the Messiah, who would be called Emmanuel, or God with you, would assure Israel of the faithfulness of the Lord God of the Abrahamic promises.

We shall not attempt to settle the question of interpretation here, and it is doubtful if anyone can

settle it, but we simply note that by either view the full sense of the words relates ultimately to Jesus Christ. And, if so, then the word Emmanuel explains the nature of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. He is very God of very God. In other words, Matthew the Jew stands on the side of those who affirm the full diety of Jesus of Nazareth.

There is sound evidence that Matthew was a competent student of Isaiah, for in chapters seven through twelve of the book, which scholars have called the Book of Emmanuel, there are further indications of the full deity of the virgin's Son (cf. 8:8; 11:1-5). This is particularly evident in the famous prophecy of 9:6, "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, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." The full deity of the figure to whom Isaiah refers is patent.

The Testimony of John

In John's Gospel there are several texts that bear on the question, "Who was Jesus Christ?" And they provide an answer to another related question that has interested scholars, namely, "Can we call Jesus God?"

(1) The first of the texts is that magnificent statement that opens John's Gospel, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). This is without doubt one of the most majestic statements in all of Scripture. The opening phrase, "in the beginning," is an allusion to Genesis 1:1, but the "was" of the text in John takes the reader back beyond the creation. It says, in effect, at the tie of the creation the Word was already in existence. John, as Calvin says, takes his readers back to "the eternal

sanctuary of God" in thought. The opening clause, then, "In the beginning was the Word," stresses the eternity of the Word. Arius, the fourth century Alexandrian heretic, whose views were condemned at the Council of Nicea in 325, said of Christ, "there was a time when he was not." The council followed the apostolic teaching, denying Arius' views, which have lingered on in many cultic groups, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons, who deny the eternity of the Son and the divine Trinity.

The second clause, "and the Word was with God," stresses the Son's community of interest with the Father. The words describe in brief the eternal communion of the Son and the Father, suggestively referred to in verse eighteen where John says that the Son is "in the bosom of the Father."

The final clause declares the deity of the Word, "and the Word was God." Many attempts have been made by the heretics to deny that John affirms our Lord's deity here. A few, from ignorance of the Greek language, have contended that, because the definite article is missing before the word "God," the clause should be translated, and the Word was a God. But the article is missing simply because John wished to make it plain that the Word was not the only one to whom the word God was applicable. If John had said, "the word was the God," then he would have implied that the term God applied only to the second person of the Trinity, manifestly false teaching. The term, of course, refers also to the Father and the Spirit.

John's purpose in the omission of the article, then, is to lay stress on the nature of the being of the Word. And

the Word was such a being as God is not an incorrect paraphrase of his thought. If I were to say, “Men must be redeemed by a man, and Jesus is the man,” I would be identifying Jesus with the requirement. If, however, I were to say, “By man came death, and by man also must come the resurrection of the dead, and Jesus was man,” then I am classifying Jesus as a man. That is the force of “and the Word was God.” The second Person is properly classified as a divine being.

By opening his gospel in this fashion John wants us to read his gospel in the light of the deity of the Son. His mighty signs and words, as recorded in this gospel, are the miracles and words of God. If this is not so, then the book is blasphemous.

The Son, then, is the eternal God, yet distinct from the Father in personality.

(2) Second, there is another passage in John’s prologue, which bears on the matter of Christ’s deity. Some of the oldest manuscripts of John 1:18 read, “No one has ever seen God, but God the only (Son), who is at the Father’s side, has made him known” (NIV). If we could be sure that John wrote this, then we could be sure that John taught Christ’s deity plainly from this passage. The text, however, is uncertain in the manuscript tradition, and it is not possible to be sure it means anything other than the Son-ship of Christ.

(3) Third, in the midst of our Lord’s final public testimony at the Feast of Dedication there is an interesting statement bearing upon the essential unity of the Father and the Son. It is found in the statement of verse thirty of chapter ten. In the context Jesus says, “I and the Father are one.” The word “one” here is neuter

in gender, or literally one thing. While it may not be John's intention to assert oneness of essence between the Father and the Son, a deep unity is meant. And it certainly seems to mean more than oneness of will, for would the Jews have thought such a claim was blasphemy (cf. 10:33)? What our Lord means, it seems, is an absolute unity. And if that is meant, then His deity is involved, for it is impossible to think of any person being perfectly at one with God in the exercise of the divine prerogatives, which are infinite, if he were not one with Him in essence.

That this is the correct sense of the text is plain, when we look at the marvelous promises of verses twenty-seven through thirty. Only God could say and guarantee these claims, "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one."

(4) Fourth, there is one text over which there is no doubt that it asserts the deity of Christ. It concerns Thomas, the disciple to whom less than full justice has usually been done by the commentators. He is known as Doubting Thomas, or even Thomas the Skeptic. It is he who bravely said, when the other disciples protested that it was foolish to go up to Jerusalem, "Let us also go, that we may die with him" (John 11:16). If he doubted, it was not the doubt of rebellious skepticism. In fact, it is striking that "Doubting" Thomas is the apostle who uttered the finest confession of faith in the New Testament. At the climax of this gospel he, as one of my old teachers said, fought his way through the mists to the light of truth, sweeping the midnight of doubt from his soul, crying out triumphantly, with his hands at Jesus' side, "My Lord and my God!"

About this confession of Christ's deity there can be no doubt, although one commentator reminds us, "that this is not the verdict of a theologian but the reaction of the loving heart." The fact that John not only cites Thomas' confession, but makes it the climax of the argument of the gospel, is the strongest indication that the apostle who wrote the book sided with Thomas. To the theologian who could argue that John did not think Thomas was uttering truth we can only offer our Lord's words to Thomas, "be not faithless, but believing" (v. 27).

Those who, like Thomas, are convinced of His godhood, sing, "O that, with yonder sacred throng, We at His feet may fall, Join in the everlasting song, And crown Him Lord of all."

The Testimony of Paul

It is clear that Paul thought that Jesus was God. We look at two texts, although there are many other references that might be turned up.

(1) First, there is the statement in the great "Kenosis" passage, which gives important insight into the union of the two natures in the one person, or the hypostatic union, to use the common theological term. There Paul says that Jesus was "in the form of God" (Phil. 2:6). The term form refers to the unchangeable essential nature of a thing. If one says that a person is in the form of man, then what is meant is that he has the essential nature of manhood. A robin, a sparrow, a mockingbird, and a woodpecker have the same form; they are all birds. They have different outward characteristics (the Greeks had another word to express these things), but they each have the same form. Thus, if Jesus is "in the form of

God," then He has all the essential attributes of deity, or all those characterizing qualities that make God God. He who is "in the form of God" is God.

What Paul says in the paragraph is that Jesus did not surrender His divine attributes, but the voluntary use of them. He surrendered the glories of deity, the prerogatives of deity, but not the deity itself. The reasons for the laying aside of what Milton called, "the blaze of majesty," lie in the necessity of performing the Messianic mediatorial work in the power of the Holy Spirit as the God-man. It was a necessary part of His humiliation.

(2) Second, another of Paul's texts that indicate that he thought of Christ as God is Titus 2:13, where we read of the believer's hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." The rendering of the Authorized Version obscures the sense of the Greek text, but it is caught clearly in the New International Version, "while we wait for the blessed hope — the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ." That is as clear and definite as it can be put.

There are other passages to which we might turn, such as Hebrews 1:8 and 2 Peter 1:1, in both of which the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ is plainly affirmed.

Nathaniel Micklem in a book called Ultimate Questions made the astonishing claim that the assertion, "Jesus is God," is a shocking heresy. On the contrary, it is shocking heresy to deny it, and it is shocking to read such things from professing Christians. In the Nicene Creed, accepted as Christian doctrine by Christian churches, the church has confessed its faith "In one

Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten from the Father, only-begotten, that is, FROM THE SUBSTANCE OF THE FATHER, GOD FROM GOD, LIGHT FROM LIGHT, TRUE GOD FROM TRUE GOD, BEGOTTEN NOT MADE, OF ONE SUBSTANCE WITH THE FATHER, through whom all things came into being, things in heaven and things on earth, who because of our salvation came down and became incarnate, becoming man, suffered and rose again on the third day, ascended to the heavens, will come to judge the living and the dead."

Summary. The evidence of the Scriptures is that the Son possesses undiminished deity. Otherwise, we can only conclude with many that He was either deceived, a meglomaniac afflicted with folie de grandeur, as J. B. Phillips put it, or a wicked deceiver. Those who have believed in Him and enjoy the salvation He gives have never been in doubt over this trilemma.

There is a marvelous statement from P. T. Forsyth that bears repeating. "Is it not equally true," he wrote, "that he thought of himself as in a category distinct from other men, whether we regard his relation to God or to the world? Where he came salvation came — as to Zacchaeus by his very presence. He stood between men and God, not with men before God. A word spoken against him was comparable, however different, to a sin against God's Holy Spirit. For both were against God. They are not like sins against men. That is to say, he has to make his historic personality parallel with the Holy Spirit before he can set up the contrast, which is only effectual between beings ejusdem generis. He was greater than the temple, he said — as no prophet could be. In the parable of the vineyard he is the only son, the

beloved, distinct from the messengers besides. He never prays with his disciples, much as he prays for them; and the Lord's prayer was given by him but not used by him. There is a line between him and them, delicate but firm, 'often as fine as a hair but always as hard as a diamond.'"

So, from Ignatius of Antioch, who wrote just after the New Testament was concluded and spoke of "one Physician, who is both flesh and spirit, born yet not born, who is God in man," to Charles Wesley, who taught us to sing, "Amazing love! how can it be That Thou MY GOD, shouldst die for me?"

we preach Him as Thomas confessed Him, "my Lord and my God," unique, supreme, and sufficient.

Dr. John Mott, commenting upon an exhaustive survey of the great non-Christian faiths done just before the World Missionary Conference in Jerusalem in 1928, said, "It was overwhelmingly proved that the more open-minded, honest, just, and generous we were in dealing with the non-Christian faiths, the higher Christ loomed in His absolute uniqueness, supremacy, and universality."

"There is no one else," a prominent Hindu said to E. Stanley Jones, "who is seriously bidding for the heart of the world except Jesus Christ. There is no one else on the field."

So, we close with the challenge, "What think YE of Christ?" And, echoing the words of the Roman procurator, we add, "What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ?" The two questions hound and haunt us until we respond.

Who Was Jesus Christ? (Part 2)

Who Was Jesus Christ?

Part 2

S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.

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Introduction

“Who was Jesus Christ?” It is the timeless question, as fresh today as it was almost two thousand years ago. We sense its importance, even when we do not understand precisely why. To a theologian the answer is easy, at least on paper. We realize thae what He is is basic to what He did, and does, for that matter. If He is truly God’s Son, then what He did has immense significance for fathoming the purposes and concerns of God for men. In other words, what He did in securing the forgiveness of sins for His people is an open door into the college of the knowledge of God. And conversely, the exalted nature of His being lends infinite credibility and value to the work of the cross by which He secured such blessing for men.

It is not an idle, or groundless, claim that men sense the importance of the question. Hugh Anderson pointed out in one of his works on our Lord that even liberal theologians were so engrossed in the study of the life of Christ that they produced within the space of a few

generations 60,000 biographies of the Man from Nazareth.

The Apostle John considered this the question of human life, and he devoted his gospel to its answer. His conclusion was that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God, and that one might have the knowledge of God and eternal life through Him. He wrote of Jesus Christ as the revelation of God in the words, “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him (John 1:18). In fact, John rings the changes on this theme through his work. Among the passages that stress the Son as the revealer of the Father and His glory is John 1:14, “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth.”

And then one thinks of the words spoken to Philip in answer to his timid request, “Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us.” With an apparent bit of disappointment Jesus replied, “Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Phillip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father?” (John 14:8-9).

It was such texts as these that lend support to the comment of Bishop William Cannon of the Methodist Church, “Jesus of Nazareth is all we know of God, and yet all we need to know.” The statement is not altogether correct, but it is not far wrong.

There is, however, a danger Christians must avoid. In their just defense of the deity of Christ, they must not make of Christianity a “Jesus cult.” Our Lord constantly reminded His men that He was through His mediation

bringing believers into union and communion with the Father. And, as Augustine said, it is through the man Christ that you proceed to the God, Christ. “Throughout his work,” Hoskyns says of John’s Gospel, “the writer is careful to emphasize that Christianity is not an independent cult of Jesus, but the revelation of the Father and the worship of God.”

Up to this point we have looked at some of the specific texts that teach that Jesus of Nazareth, insofar as one aspect of His being is concerned, is truly God. The texts are clear and plain. There is other Scriptural testimony, however, that supports and elucidates the texts, giving us a combined testimony of great weight and credibility. It is to this type of testimony that we turn in the remainder of this study.

The Testimony of the Miracles

The miracles that Jesus Christ performed witness to His deity. Now, of course, it is a well-known fact that prophets and apostles performed miracles, and deity is not claimed for them. But there is a sense in which our Lord’s miracles throw the activities of other men of God into the shade. Notice the following things about His work.

(1) First, the impressiveness of His commands. He speaks to the leper in response to his request for healing in words of sovereign authority, “I will, be thou clean” (Matt. 8:3). He performed the most difficult of miracles, nature miracles, saying to the raging waters of the storm on the Sea of Galilee, “Peace, be still,” and immediately a great calm came (Mark 4:39). And to the daughter of the ruler of the synagogue, whose name was Jairus, it is simple and direct, “Talitha cumi,” or “Maid,

arise." One is reminded of Genesis' "Let there be light, and there was light" (Gen. 1:3).

Even more impressive seem the passages in which He conveys such power and authority to His men, saying, "As ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand; heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils; freely ye have received, freely give" (Matt. 10:7-8).

The power of others who performed works of healing was derivative entirely. Even Peter, the first pope in the minds of some, must call on the Lord for power. In Lydda, where he found a certain Aeneas sick of the palsy, Peter exclaimed, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole; arise, and make thy bed" (Acts 9:34).

It might be said that He only did His works by the power of God. There is a genuine sense in which that is true, and I would not dispute it. The fact that He was able to have complete and continuous communion and dependence on the Father is itself a testimony to the fact that He, although truly man, is more than simply a man. The miracles of our Lord, however, frequently conveyed overwhelming impressions of the presence of God beyond that of miracles of others (cf. Acts 14:8-12).

One is reminded of the stilling of the storm again, and the tremendous sense of the numinous that fell upon men in the little skiff. Mark describes the sense of mystery in this way, "and they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" (Mark 4:41).

Again on the Sea of Galilee, the scene of so much of His work and ministry, after a night of fruitless toil by Peter and his partners, Jesus performed the miracle of the

mighty haul of fish. When the weight of the fish became so great that the boats began to sink, there exploded within Peter the conviction that the Lord God of Israel was with him in the boat. He fell down at Jesus' knees, crying out, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5:8).

So I sum up this testimony with our Lord's own words, uttered in the Upper Room Discourse, namely, that He did works among them "which none other man did" (cf. John 15:24).

The Testimony as the Supreme Revealer of Truth

There are many sayings of our Lord in which He appears as the supreme and unique revealer of truth. The greatest of the prophets of the Old Testament preface their words with, "Thus saith the Lord," but Jesus characteristically introduces His with, "Verily I say unto you." The expression occurs thirty times in Matthew, thirteen times in Mark, six times in Luke, and twenty-five times in John, who characteristically doubles the word, making it "Verily, verily." As Professor Bruce Metzger of Princeton Theological Seminary has said, this use of "verily" indicates a finality and an authority in his message that is unparallelled elsewhere. He adds, "The entire range of Jewish literature knows of no example of a scribe or rabbinical teacher prefacing his remarks with the expression, 'Verily (amen), I say to you…" It is no wonder, then, that Matthew says the people who heard His sermon on the Mount "were astonished at his doctrine: For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Matt. 7:28-29).

And this accounts for the officer's words on another occasion, "Never man spake like this man" (John 7:46).

The Testimony as Sovereign Over Men's Affairs

There are sayings in which the Lord lays sovereign claims upon the lives and consciences of men. "Follow me" was the daily language of Jesus.

"There is nothing like it elsewhere," Arthur John Gossip contends concerning His claim to be the light of the world, "Budda believed he had a marvelous and beneficial gospel to offer men, but for himself he claimed to be only the rediscoverer of an old and forgotten path; and urged his followers not to think of him, but to concentrate upon the teaching. Confuscious, with a winsome humility, declared that as often as he walked with others three abreast he was sure to find a teacher; and asked, 'How dare I lay claim to holiness or love? A man of endless craving, who never tires of teaching, I might be called, but nothing more.' Mohammed, with all his lofty claims, once, covering his head, cried out that unless God cast the cloak of his mercy over him, there was no hope for him at all. 'This he said thrice.' And indeed these mighty spirits have been in part left behind, both in teaching and in conduct; have in places become out of date and obsolete. But Jesus Christ is still the light of the world, and whoso follows him does not walk in darkness, but can see to find his way."

Furthermore, woe to that man who refused the call to follow Him, for Jesus can say, "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever

shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 20:32-33).

The Testimony to the Forgiveness of Sins

The Scriptures make it plain that the forgiveness of sins is the prerogative of God alone. One of the most striking cases of the exercise of that power by the Lord Jesus Christ is found in Mark 2:1-12. It had to do with the forgiveness of sins and healing of the man with the palsy, who had been brought to Jesus on a pallet by four other concerned friends. When Jesus saw the faith of the men, He said to one who was sick of the palsy, "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee" (Mark 2:5).

The scribes, sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, were very unhappy and, after affirming the truth that only God could forgive sins, they accused Him of blasphemy. Our Lord's reply to them is a model of empirical proof. One might pretend to forgive, of course, because forgiveness belongs to a realm beyond the sphere of human observation. Jesus, therefore, said that He would do something within human observation and verification, which He could not do, if He was capable of lying. God would not honor the word of a lying man. If, then, His words did take effect in the visible sphere, that would prove that it had truly taken effect in the invisible world.

So, He spoke to the scribes in this way, "Why reason ye these things in your hearts? Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (He saith to the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into

thine house" (Mark 2:8-11). Mark records the triumphant conclusion, "And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion" (v. 12).

Now in response to this magnificent demonstration of power it has been said that Jesus did not really imply supernatural power in His words, for did He not subsequently empower the apostles to do the same thing? Obviously, however, the forgiveness of sins by the apostles rested on His authority. It was purely declaratory and ministerial in their case.

But it might be said that His forgiveness was nothing more than the declaration that God had forgiven. Jesus, however, did not say this. He claimed He had power to forgive sins while He was on earth in His mediatorial ministry. And, what is conclusive, He claimed He had the power even when accused of blasphemy and might by such an explanation and defense have escaped the charge. As Stalker says, "The natural sense of His words undoubtedly is, that the authority rested in His own person."

The Testimony of the Reception of Worship

For the sake of time and space a brief reference to other indirect testimony to the deity of Christ is appropriate. Thus, fifth, we must note that Jesus received and accepted the worship of men and women. It is ultimately inconceivable that Jesus should accept such worship, if He were not in reality worthy of it. And, while scholars may debate quite legitimately the matter of the universal usage of the term, in the context of the

Scriptures it cannot be doubted that it has the sense of to render homage due a deity.

One sees this dramatically in the Book of Revelation. In the chapters in which the magnificent vision of the throne of God the Father and of the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Lamb of God, reaches its climax with the declaration that the Lamb has finished the work of redemption that restores world dominion to Him and His redeemed people, all heaven it seems, the four beasts, the twenty-four elders, myriads of angels, in fact, every creature in heaven, earth, and under the earth, excluding only the Father and the Spirit, proclaim the praises of the Lamb. And John concludes the account with the words, “And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever” (cf. Rev. 5:1-14).

Almost at the end of the book when the angel comes to the conclusion of the revelation, John is overwhelmed. He describes his response in this way, “And I John saw these things and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things. Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God” (22:8-9). Now, is it not striking that the angel tells John not to worship him, but to worship God, but in the account of the vision of chapters four and five the angels worship the Lamb! The implication is obvious. They tell John to worship only God, but they worship the Lamb.

The Testimony to Varied Divine Prerogatives

There are many other scattered statements that testify to our Lord's deity. One is almost bewildered to read, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16: 18-19). With such fantastic claims in every line here it is no wonder that some deny authenticity to the statement, but their exalted and magnificent assurance fit Him well.

Or, what shall we make of this statement, made when Mary of Bethany had anointed His head with the "ointment of spikenard very precious," "Verily I say unto you, Wherever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her" (Mark 14:9)? He assumes with divine certainty that His death is not the end of the movement!

And of Matthew 28:18-20, in which we have such mighty claims as, "All power is given unto me in heaven and earth," and "lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world?" As Stalker says of these words, "Many attempts have been made to define and confine these extra-ordinary words, but, like Samson's strength, they burst the withes of definition; and those only know what they mean who, in prayer with their fellow-Christians, have felt the personal nearness of Him, whom, having not seen, they love."

Horace Bushnell once said, "Take the range if you will, of all the great philosophers and saints, and choose out one that is most competent. Or, if, perchance some one

of you may imagine that he is himself about upon a level with Jesus … let him come forward in this trial and say, “Follow me’ — ‘be worthy of me’ — ‘Behold a greater than Solomon is here.’ Take all these transcendent assumptions and see how soon your glory will be sifted out of you by the detective gaze, and darkened by the contempt of mankind! Why not? Is not the challenge fair? Do you not tell us that you can say as divine things as He? Is it not in you too, of course, to do what is human? Are you not in the front rank of human developments? Do you not rejoice in the power to rectify many mistakes and errors in the words of Jesus? Give us then this one experiment, and see if it does not prove to you a truth that is of some consequence; viz., that you are a man, and that JESUS CHRIST IS MORE!”

Conclusion. We come again to that with which we began. John the Apostle makes the profound and prodigious claim that the knowledge of Jesus the Messiah is the knowledge of God (cf. John 1:14, 18; 8:19; 14:9). The only begotten Son, eternally resting upon the bosom of the Father in closest communion, John says, “has made Him known.” Only God can make God known.

Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, in custody on his way to martyrdom in Rome just a few years after John’s Gospel was written, wrote of Christ as the Word “which came forth out of silence” (Magnesians 8:2). The idea originated in Judaism, being linked with Genesis 1:3, where we read, “And God, said, Let there be light: and there was light.” The rabbis asked, “What was there before God spoke?” Their answer was, “God’s silence.” Silence became a token of God’s inexpressible majesty. Even in the Hellenistic world silence became a symbol of the highest deity. There is even a prayer to “Silence” in

a fourth century papyrus, “Silence, Silence, Silence … take me under thy wings, Silence.”

In the ancient world God is “Silence,” hidden, speechless, and distant. Into that world the message of the Lord and His apostles rang out. God is not silent. He has spoken in a divine Son, “whom He appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the world; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Heb. 1:2-3). Come to Him, God’s supreme Word to us, and rest in His atoning death for the forgiveness of sins!

Who Was Jesus Christ? (Part 3)

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S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.

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This is Dr. Johnson's third study in his series on "Who Was Jesus Christ?"

Introduction

New Testament scholars — and I have been one for over twenty-five years — occasionally say things that the average Christian believer finds it hard to comprehend. For example, a few years back a world-famous New Testament scholar said, "We can, strictly speaking, know nothing of the personality of Jesus." One might want to reply, "Has he not been reading the Bible? The scholarly literature? Where has he been studying, — in Togo, or the 'Lower' Volta?"

A contemporary Catholic scholar, the well-known Hans Kung, in seeking to answer the question, "Who was Jesus Christ?," has concluded that Jesus did not assume any titles implying messianic dignity, such as Messiah, Son of David, Son of God, or even Son. All these titles were given to Him afterwards by the Christian community. This is amazing, especially since there is no record of the church giving Jesus of Nazareth any title beyond the days of the early church, but the title Redeemer. Did the church give Him the many titles

recorded in the New Testament and then suddenly suspend the practice? It is not surprising that the Roman Catholic Church has stripped Professor Kung of his status as a Catholic theologian.

Jesus asked His disciples at Caesarea Philippi the question we are interested in, “Who do men say that I the Son of Man am?” (Matt. 16:13). Later he asked the Jewish leaders the same question, “What think ye of Christ? whose son is he?” (22:42). Strikingly, both gave Scriptural answers, although that coming from the disciples is the more memorable one. Peter, speaking for them, said, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (16:16).

I have concluded from the previous two studies that Peter’s answer is correct. Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Messiah, the divine Son of the living God. The reasons that support this conclusion are these:

(1) First, the texts of the New Testament support the doctrine. We have seen this from the first of our studies.

(2) Second, the indirect evidence supports the doctrine. This type of evidence is of the greatest importance, because it does not represent an ideological attempt to “prove” Jesus’ deity. It is the necessary outcome of the everyday life and language of our Lord and of the disciples’ response to Him and His words. It reaches its climax in their worship of Him. As a fine scholar wrote not long ago, “The basic fact which lies behind all the theological terms and titles is the worship of the carpenter.” This fact becomes even more remarkable when we remember the strictly unitarian monotheism in which the disciples had been brought up. Their pietistic Judaism would have caused them to rebel against the

worship of our Lord naturally, but they felt compelled to do so. It was an irresistible compulsion from within through the Holy Spirit that forced them to bow before Him. To account for it led the Church to the acknowledgment of His full deity. We continue in their steps and affirm it, too.

(3) Third, church tradition, then, confirms the textual and indirect evidence. We cited Nicea's famous statement, that He was "God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the father, through whom all things were made." We recognize and acknowledge that the creeds are not divinely revealed statements, but they represent the combined testimony of a Spirit-guided church.

But surely, one might say, Arius and other early churchmen, while judged heretical by the church, were intelligent men. They claimed adherence to the Bible. They must have had some basis for their differences, must they not? And to this we answer, certainly. Let us look at some of the texts to which they appealed, and at some to which any objector might appeal.

The Problem of Mark 10:18

The context of the passage. The passage is found in Mark 10:17-27 and concerns the Rich Young Ruler. It is a misunderstood passage, some finding in it salvation by good works, others Unitarianism, and still others a confession of sin by Jesus. It really says none of these things.

Many Christians, however, find it difficult to explain our Lord's words to the young man. In fact, a friend of mine now with the Lord, the first president of Grace

Theological Seminary in Winona Lake, Indiana, used to say that earlier in his study of Scripture he used to hurry past the passage as one does past a graveyard!

Another interpreter has said that the passage contains three surprises. First, that there could be a man who, as Jesus claimed, lacked only "one thing" (cf.v.21). Second, that, if his opinion of himself was valid, that he lacked anything! And, third, the surprise that he was ever surprised after its study.

The young man was rich, young, prominent, as well as "clean, keen, and reverent." In fact, he was the kind of man a mother might desire for her daughter! He seemed to have everything, wealth, influence, religion, and uprightness. All the keys of life were hanging at his girdle. His question to our Lord was, "Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life" (Mark 10:17). Our Lord's reply brings us to the problem. He responded to the young man, "Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God" (v. 18). Now what did He mean by that reply?

The interpretation of the text. There have been different interpretations of our Lord's reply. First, there is the one espoused by the Arians, who denied the full deity of Christ. They contended that our Lord repudiated the predicate "good," thus rejecting full deity. Modern Arians have contended that his reply was a confession of sin. He was only seeking to lead men to the perfect worship of God, they have said. The context argues against this view. In fact, verse twenty-one, with its "follow me," leads in quite a different direction. If He was confessing sin, how could He say, "follow me"?

One of the most respected twentieth century interpreters propounded a second interpretation. He contended that our Lord did not intend any contrast at all between God Himself by the use of the pronoun "me." He was simply telling the young man that he could find the answer to his question, if he went to God and His published law for the answer. God is good, and the answer lies in His Word.

A third view is much more convincing to me. The use of the pronoun "me" does raise the question of the ruler's perhaps inadequate knowledge of the Lord. Why use the term "me" at all, if Jesus is not pointing the young man to a deeper consideration of Himself? Further, the initial question of the rich young ruler indicates an erroneous doctrine of salvation. He seems to think life comes from doing something, a Pelagian attitude. He apparently does not really understand that, apart from divine enablement, he cannot do anything that will please God (cf. Rom. 8:7-8). And so our Lord will point him to the Law of Moses, specifically the second table of that law, designed by God to bring men under it the knowledge of their sin (cf. Rom. 3:20; 7:7-12).

I, therefore, think the early church fathers, such as Ambrose, Athanasius, the two Gregorys, Chrysostom, Jerome, Augustine, and others, including many modern commentators, were right in saying that our Lord's question is designed to incite the young man to further inquiry, and particularly to a deeper consideration of the person of the Lord Himself. The young man had addressed Him as "Good Master" (lit., good teacher). Since the ruler seems to regard Him as a mere teacher, Jesus questions the application of the adjective "good," to Him. The adjective belongs only to God. Thus, to call

Jesus “good,” if He were simply an ordinary teacher, is to misuse the adjective.

The Lord, then, stirs the young man to consider Him and the terms that he was using of Him. If he had replied to our Lord’s response with, “But Lord, you are God,” then Jesus could have replied to him, “Believe in Me, and you shall inherit eternal life.” The text turns on the proper sense of the word “good” and the young man’s understanding of the true nature of the person he had approached.

An illustration or so might help in grasping the point of the encounter. It is said that the Emperor Joseph II of Germany often went incognito on extensive tours through his lands of Hungary, Bohemia, France, Spain, and Holland with his true identity unsuspected. Now, it is plain that if he, while in disguise, his true position unknown, were to be offered by a subject of his realm the homage due only to the emperor, it would be an encouragement of treason. The fact that the person in disguise was really the emperor would not make the homage a loyal act while the subject was ignorant of his true identity. If on such occasions as the emperor’s tours, officers of state had breathed state secrets to him, they could have been arraigned for treason against the empire. Thus, as long as the rich ruler did not know that Jesus was truly God, it was really blasphemy to call Him “good.”

In a moment He demands of the young man, “follow Me” (v. 21). That is the prerogative of God alone. No prophet ever presumed to say, “follow me.” Even the great Samuel, remarkable for his integrity, did not suggest that others should follow him as his disciples. In

fact, in that very passage in which his unshakeable integrity is described, he calls upon Israel “to turn not aside from following the Lord” (v. 20). In the Old Testament the concept following in a spiritual sense has as its object God Himself. When Jesus called upon His fellow-Israelites to “follow” Him, the implication is plain: He was claiming deity.

It is clear, then, that Mark 10:18 is no denial of our Lord’s deity, nor is it a confession of sin on His part. This conclusion is strengthened by a closer look at Jesus’ words. He did not say, “There is none good but one, that is, the Father,” but “God.” Jesus is not the Father. If He had said that, the “good” would not be applicable to Him. He said, “God.” “Good” is properly applied to the Lord Jesus Christ, when the user of the word knows who He really is, for He is God.

The Problem of Mark 13:32

The context of the text. At the conclusion of the Olivet Discourse, that great prophetic treatment of the last days of the age and the second coming of the Lord, Jesus told a parable concerning a fig tree to alert His hearers to the signs of the events to come and to exhort them to watch expectantly for the consummation (cf. Mark 13:28-33). In the midst of the parable are the words that have puzzled many, “But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father” (v.32).

The interpretation of the text. First, the statement does not stand alone, but is related to others in which He, or others, underline the genuine humanity of the Son. Ultimately, the answer to the puzzle of the text is found in a theological question, since Jesus did not explain His

words. The question is phrased by Stalker correctly, “How can the omniscience of the Second Person of the Trinity be reconciled with the ignorance of Jesus?

The answer, of course, lies in the self-humbling of the Second Person (cf. Phil. 2:7). A careful reading of the statement will show that our Lord implies that He is not simply an ordinary man. Notice that His words distinguish four planes of knowledge, that of men, angels, the Son and the Father. The order is an ascending one, and he puts Himself above men, and above angels, the highest of created beings. Now if one should attempt to take the position that the Son is an intermediate being between angels and the Father, that impossible position is shown to be erroneous by the baptismal formula (cf. Matt. 28:19).

But is there not some sense of subordination suggested by the order of terms? Well, yes. The subordination is that of mediatorial mission in which Jesus is engaged when He utters the statement. For that work and during that time He does subject Himself to the Father’s will (cf. John 5:19, 30; 6:38; 1 Cor. 15:24-28). As Vincent Taylor has said, “… self-limitation is an essential form of the divine manifestation. God is God when he stoops no less than when He reigns.”

The Problem of John 14:28

The context of the text. In the Upper Room Discourse Jesus prepares His men for the time when He will be no longer in the midst physically. It is filled with comfort, consolation, instruction, and exhortation. In chapter fourteen, verses twenty-five through thirty-one, He dwells on Hits return to His Father, He tells the apostles that His departure is the condition of His return to them

through the indwelling Spirit. Further, He wishes them to realize what it means for Him, too. He is returning to the Father, which means for Him the resumption of the divine glory (cf. 17:1-5). He appeals to their love for Him. Given that, they should be rejoicing for Him over His return to the Father.

The interpretation of the text. In the midst of this tender paragraph is found the strange and puzzling clause, “for my Father is greater than I” (v. 28). In the light of this statement did the church overstate itself in claiming that Christ was co-essential with the Father? Is subordinationism, perhaps, right after all? “Does not the idea of pre-existence overstress Christ’s having come and neglect somewhat his being sent?,” Berkouwer asks. Cf. John 5:19-20, 30 (but note v. 23, “even as”); 11:42-43; 12:44, 49-50.

Now there are several things to bear in mind here. First, comparisons are properly made between things of the same nature. What kind of comparison can be judiciously made of apples and lawnmowers? Comparisons are made between things of the same species and, if that is so, then in this case the comparison Jesus suggests is itself an indication of a unity of essence with the Father.

But, second, and more significantly, let us remember what status Jesus had at the point of time that He made the statement. The superiority of the Father is mentioned while our Lord is involved in the messianic mediatorial work of offering the atoning sacrifice. The Son in His humiliation will through suffering make His way to the Father for glorification. Thus, like the Arians, modern objectors to the deity of Christ often ignore the

historical context of the statement. His time of mediatorial humiliation was a time when He was in submission to the Father. At that time it could be said correctly, as our Lord did say, “my Father is greater than I.”

Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, twentieth century theologian par excellence, wrote concerning the text, “Obviously this means that there was a sense in which He had ceased to be equal with the Father, because of the humiliation of His present condition, and in so far as this humiliation involved entrance into a status lower than that which belonged to Him by nature. Precisely in what this humiliation consisted can be gathered only from the general implication of many statements. In it He was ‘a man’: ‘A man who hath told you the truth, which I have heard from God’ (vii. 40), where the contrast with ‘God’ throws the assertion of humanity into emphasis (cf. x. 33)… Only one human characteristic [I would prefer to say, “one post-fall human characteristic”] was alien to Him: He was without sin: ‘the prince of the world,’ He declared, ‘hath nothing in me’ (xiv. 30; cf. viii. 46). Clearly our Lord, as reported by John, knew Himself to be true God and true man in one indivisible person, the common subject of the qualities which belong to each.”

Third, it is sometimes said that the statement relates to the humanity of the Lord alone. There is an element of truth in this, for our Lord did surrender the voluntary use of His divine attributes in the days of His flesh, but there is more to the matter than that. More to the point is it to say that the Son does not speak of His essence in the statement, but of His office, namely, that of Messiah. He is the Mediator, subordinate to the Father for a time

(cf. 1 Cor. 15:20-28). The Father, Jesus means, is greater in office and position. Confirming this is His careful use of terms. He says, “for the Father is greater than I,” not “for God is greater than I.” The language is that of the kenosis, the self-humiliation of the Servant of the Lord until the mediatorial work is accomplished.

If this is true, our Lord might well have added, “When I return to the Father, and when the Messianic mission is finally completed in all its parts, then I will be greater than I am now, namely, as great as the Father.”

From this we learn that absolute equality and relative inequality may co-exist. One might imagine a business, owned equally by three brothers, yet with mutually agreed delegated responsibilities. The brothers are equal in blood, relationships, and in stock ownership of the firm. They participate equally in the profits from the business, but by mutual consent one assumes the executive responsibilities, another the administrative or technical responsibilities, and the third the sales responsibilities. In this case there is absolute equality and relative inequality, and there is no contradiction. Similarly, in the relations between the Father, Son, and Spirit in the carrying out of the mediatorial mission, there is absolute equality and relative inequality, and no contradiction.

Conclusion

Almost ten years ago John Hicks edited a book written by a number of British scholars entitled, The Myth of God Incarnate. It was a sensational, but blatantly heretical, book. Now this is not the place to review the book and its weaknesses. Let us content ourselves with a bit of reflection on the consequences resulting from

the discovery that the incarnation, the assumption of human nature by the Eternal Son, the Second Person of the Eternal Trinity, and His entrance into our world and life to accomplish our redemption is not true.

Among the many consequences I will refer to just three, but they are appalling to ponder. First, we should have no knowledge of God. Only God can certainly make God known. From The Lord Jesus we have learned, as Michael Ramsey put it, “God is Christlike, and in him is no unChristlikeness at all.” Why should we not turn to one of the Hindu avatars, someone has said. But the Word of God says, “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, HE HATH DECLARED HIM” (John 1:18). Hallelujah!

The Second, we should have no atonement, for there would be no cross with the Son of God bearing the penalty for the sins of sinners. We thought that Paul was right when he wrote, “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself,” but if there was no incarnation, Jesus was a phantom, and His story is a myth.

Finally, there is no hope of the resurrection of the body and of the defeat of death. We are of all men most miserable, if Jesus is not the incarnate Son who rose from the dead. Bertrand Russell would have been right in saying that belief in fairy tales is pleasant.

If, however, He is the incarnate Son of God, true God of true God, then we have the knowledge of God, and an atonement that removes our sin’s eternal judgment, with a glorious hope of the resurrection of the body and life everlasting. The words of the divine Son in the inspired Scripture, the one John Hick smugly called, “a ‘man of

universal destiny',” cheer and gladden the hearts of the saints, “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die” (John 11:25-26).

It would not be right to conclude without Jesus' own stirring appeal to Lazarus' sorrowing sister, following His claim that He was the resurrection and the life. He said to Martha, “Believest thou this?” His appeal is my appeal to you who are reading. May the Lord in enabling grace cause you to respond as that remarkable and believing woman did. “Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world” (John 11:27).

Who Was Jesus Christ? (Part 4)

Who Was Jesus Christ?

Part 4

S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.

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With sincere appreciation to Dr. Johnson, we commend to your careful reading this fourth and final study on the theme of “Who Was Jesus Christ?”

Introduction

We have completed our study of the deity of Jesus Christ, and we have seen that the evidence overwhelmingly points to the fact that Jesus of Nazareth is God incarnate. And if Christians are asked, “Why do you Christians assert that Jesus Christ alone is the Redeemer?,” there is no need for us to stutter in our reply.

Christians affirm that Jesus Christ is their Savior from the penalty of sin and the judgment of eternal death. That in itself demands a conviction that Jesus Christ is God, for only God can save from sins (cf. Isa. 43:11). In fact, one might say simply that the doctrine of the deity of Jesus Christ is the theological expression of the evangelical experience of redemption.

The Council of Chalcedon, convoked in 451 A.D., affirmed our Lord’s true humanity. And, further, that the

deity and humanity exist “without confusion, without change, without division, without separation.” The two natures coalesced in one person (prosopon) and one substance (hyposatasis). As to His deity our Lord was of the same nature as the Father, but as to His humanity of the same nature with us. He is like us in all respects apart from sin.

It might seem strange to twentieth century religious men and women to hear that the true humanity of Christ has been denied. In the early periods of the history of the church, however, at times there was little doubt of the deity of Christ, but serious questions existed concerning the humanity of Christ. It has been necessary for the church, therefore, to defend His humanity also.

Some errorists have denied His true humanity altogether, such as the Docetics of the first two centuries of the Christian era. They conceived of the incarnation as something of an illusion. In one form of the heresy it was said that the divine Christ descended upon Jesus of Nazareth at His baptism and left Him at the cross. The real Son of God simply used the human Jesus for His purposes. This denial of the incarnation and true humanity of our Lord is reflected in the New Testament in such passages as 1 John 4:2-3, “Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come: and even now already it is in the world.” Cf. 2 John 7. Some of the Docetics denied the real flesh of our Lord’s body, thinking of it as made of psychic substance, as something of a phantom. Our Lord, then,

would be similar to a divine being walking the earth in disguise.

Others denied the humanity of Christ in part, such as the Arians, who denied His soul, Apollinaris, who denied that He possessed a rational human soul, or spirit, and the Monothelites, who said He had no human will.

In the light of these views of the humanity of our Lord let us now turn to the Bible for its view of the matter.

The Testimony of the Biblical Texts

(1) First, we turn to John 1:14, where in his prologue to his gospel the apostle writes, “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.” Here is one of the great texts on the incarnation of the divine Son. “In one short, shattering expression,” Leon Morris says, “John unveils the great ideal at the heart of Christianity that the very Word of God took flesh for man’s salvation.” The One who had been “with God” is now “with us.” It is no wonder that Luther said that we need “new tongues” to set the event forth properly. I think it was Dorothy Sayers who said, “If this is not exciting, then what in heaven’s name is exciting?”

The term “flesh” is a very strong, almost crude, way of referring to human nature. The immutability of the Son, as well as His deity, is not compromised by the text. The being of the Word does not have a new existence, but He does with the assumption of a human nature in addition to His divine nature enter into a new form of existence.

There is a remarkable contrast between verse one and verse fourteen in John’s prologue. In verse one we read,

“The Word was (en)”, which contrasts with verse fourteen’s, “The Word became (egeneto)”. Second, in verse one we read that the Word was “with God,” while in verse fourteen the Word came to be “with us.” And finally, in verse one we have, “The Word was God,” while in verse fourteen we have, “The Word became flesh.” The eternal being stands in contrast with the temporal becoming.

We conclude, then, that John 1:14 is a clear statement of the fact that the divine Son became man.

(2) Second, John 8:40 is one of our Lord’s plain statements of His true humanity. There we read that He said to the men of Jerusalem, “But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham.”

(3) Third, the Apostle Paul’s opening words to the Romans contain a text about our Lord’s humanity. He wrote to the Romans and stated that he was an apostle separated unto “the gospel of God,” adding, “Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead” (Rom. 1:3-4).

(4) Fourth, in Romans 9:5 there is another reference to His humanity. The text has been hotly debated with respect to its statement of our Lord’s deity, and I believe that it plainly does affirm His deity, but there is no debate over its substantiation of His humanity. Paul is speaking of the people of the Messiah, and the text reads, “Whose are the fathers, and of whom as

concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen."

(5) Fifth, in Philippians 2:6-8 there is another Pauline confession of His humanity. Listen to the passage, "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

(6) Sixth, in the second chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews there are two texts that suitably form a conclusion to this section of the paper. The reality of the human nature of our Lord is emphasized in the first passage, "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same: that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil" (2:14). Two verbs represent the concept of sharing in the verse. The first, rendered by the words, "are partakers," suggests the idea of nature that human beings possess. The tense of the verb suggests that they have always shared this common lot.

The second verb, rendered by "took part," referring to our Lord's incarnation, suggests that the nature He took was an additional nature for Him, something with which by nature He had nothing in common. The tense underlines the historicity of the assumption of the nature. However, while the connection with humanity remains, the connection with humanity under the condition of transitoriness, that is, in the form of blood and flesh, was historical. Marvelous is it to reflect upon

the fact that He betrothed Himself to the human race, — for better, for worse, and forever. There is no place here for a Docetic phantom Son of God!

(7) Seventh, a few lines on in the same chapter is the final text. The author writes, “Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people” (v. 17). The phrase, “in all things,” puts the capstone on the edifice of His genuine humanity. Chalcedon was right. He is “truly God and truly man.” And the Anthanasian Creed (likely composed after Chalcedon) is also correct in adding, “yet he is not two, but one Christ; one, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh: but by taking (assumption) of the manhood into God.”

Indirect Scriptural Evidence of Christ’s Humanity

(1) First, a human name is given our Lord. In the opening of Matthew’s Gospel the author in setting out His genealogy writes, “The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the Son of Abraham” (Matt. 1:1). A few verses later in the account the angel of the Lord instructs Joseph to give the Son the name “Jesus,” a human name, the Greek equivalent of the Old Testament Joshua. In 1 Timothy 2:5 Paul writes, “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,” clearly linking His name and title, Messiah, with humanity.

(2) Second, the Scripture presents Him as having a human descent. In the Matthean genealogy to which we have just referred the genealogy of Jesus Christ is

traced by the author to human persons, David and Abraham (cf. 1:1-17). At the conclusion of the birth narrative He is described as the offspring of Mary (cf. v. 25). Cf. Rom. 9:5.

(3) Third, the biblical description of His conception and birth describes it as a human, though miraculous, conception (cf. Luke 1:35, 42).

(4) Fourth, our Lord possessed the constituent parts of a human personality and anatomy. He is said to have had a body, a soul, a spirit, hands, feet, vocal cords, and a will (cf. Matt. 26:38; Luke 22:42; 23:46; 24:39; John 2:21).

(5) Fifth, the Scriptures picture Him as exercising human emotions. He is seen at times as angry (Mark 3:5) and as sorrowful (14:34).

(6) Sixth, He is portrayed as having human physical wants, such as hunger (Matt. 4:2), thirst (John 19:28), and weariness (4:6; Luke 8:23).

(7) Seventh, and to climax it all, He is most fully portrayed as experiencing human suffering and death. It is hard to see how His humanity might be described more clearly and definitely.

The Resultant Person

His make-up. Our preceding studies have shown that the Bible portrays Jesus Christ as both God and man. One might ask at this point, “In what ways was He different from other men, for surely He is seen as different?” We might answer it theologically and say that He was different in three ways, although the three ways do not in any way contradict His full deity or complete manhood. First, He had a supernatural conception (Luke 1:35; Matt. 1:18, 20). Second, He was the sinless Son of

God (Luke 1:35; 2 Cor. 5:21). There is a universal saying that no man is a hero to his valet, but in the case of our Lord the situation is unparalleled. “The Jesus of the gospels,” McDonald points out, “knew more about sin than anyone; yet He Himself never betrayed the least consciousness of it. Sin in others He saw, He rebuked, He forgave; He grieved over it, He suffered for it; He knew what was in man yet could issue the challenge, ‘Which of you convinceth me of sin?’ (John 8:46). With Him there was no memory of sin’s defeat, no trace of sin’s scars, no shame of a bad conscience.”

Third, Jesus Christ was different in a final way: He assumed an impersonal human nature (enupostasia). His personality was His divine and eternal personality, His two natures being united in one undivided and indivisible person. That follows from the incarnation, for He did not assume then a human person, but only human nature (anupostasia). The human nature was received into the person of the Logos.

To sum up His make-up, then, He is not God indwelling man, nor man raised to the power of deity, or deified, but the God-man. “In Him,” as Paul put it, “dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Col. 2:9). To repeat: He is not God in man, nor God and man, but one person, the God-man.

The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Anglican Church has it nicely put, “The Son… took man’s nature in the womb of the Blessed Virgin, of her substance: so that two whole and perfect natures, that is to say, the Godhead and Manhood, were joined together in one Person, never to be divided” (Article II).

Perhaps this seems to admit of no rational explanation. We should not be surprised. That is what we expect of the infinite. In fact, its very insolubility is compatible with its divine source.

The human imagination can only rearrange known facts. In our study of mythology we remember reading of such fabled creatures as the centaur, the faun, and the mermaid. The centaur was a monster, half man and half horse, said to have inhabited a part of Thessaly. But such creation involves an anatomical absurdity. The arms of the man correspond to the forelegs of the horse, but a compound like this involves a double set of bones and muscles and organs, like those that pertain to the upper part of the trunk. All such inventions are preposterous. So, when man tries to create, even a fanciful being, by combining things that do not exist together, he blunders into grotesque nonsense.

His meaning. G. Campbell Morgan in a book of a generation ago said that man's need was threefold: He is distanced from God by sin, he is ignorant of God through sin, and he is unlike God in sin. The glory of gospel of Jesus Christ, the God-man, and His atoning mediatorial work, is that God finds Himself in this person and is with men, for He is man, and man finds himself in this person and is with God, for He is God. Thus, he who was distanced from God by sin is restored to God by the gift of righteousness. He who was ignorant of God through sin comes to the knowledge of God through Christ. And he who was unlike God in sin shall come to be like Him in Christ.

Job spoke long ago of the need of a Mediator. He, reflecting upon his unworthiness to approach God in his

sin, cried, “For He is not a man as I am that I may answer Him, That we may go to court together. There is no umpire (AV, “daysman”; NIV, “someone to arbitrate”) between us, Who may lay his hand upon us both” (9:32-33, NASB). Jesus Christ, being the God-man, qualified and has accomplished the work of union. He has borne the separating penalty of sin for His people, and He as the infinite sin-bearer has satisfied the claims of God the Holy One. Through union with Him, who has represented us in the atoning work, we are brought near by Christ, know Him through Christ, and shall be like Him in Christ. Job’s Daysman has been found (cf. Matt. 20:28; Acts 4:12).

The message to us. We may best illustrate this by looking at our Lord’s life and ministry. Who is this at Lazarus’ tomb? One moment we read, “Jesus wept” (John 11:35). That is Jesus the man. At the next moment we read that Jesus cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come forth,” and the man dead for four days came forth from the dead (vv. 43-44). That is Jesus the God-man.

In Jerusalem He had preached, “Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down,” — any mere man could say that, “and I have power to take it again,” — only God could say that. “This commandment have I received of my Father” (John 10:17-18).

The leper who came to Jesus at the mountain’s foot was convinced of His power, for he worshipped Him, saying, “Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.” That was an expression of confidence in His deity. Jesus then put

forth His hand, and touched him, saying, “I will; be thou clean.” Immediately the leprosy left the man (Matt. 8:1-4). Will you notice that Jesus “touched” the leper. Lepers were not touched, nor are they easily touched today. They were unclean ritually, and the disease was thought to be very infectious. Jesus did not have to touch the man; He often healed with only a word. But, to let the man and others know that there is a love back of His power, He touched him, saying, “I will; be thou clean.” That is Jesus the God-man. And in the light of both His deity and humanity we sing, “He saw me ruined in the fall, Yet loved me notwithstanding all.”

Conclusion

What shall we say, then, as we close our study of the question, “Who was Jesus Christ?” The Scriptures have spoken plainly and clearly: He is the God-man, the divinely promised Mediator sent to save the people of God. That is what the angel intimated to Joseph, “thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21). And this is what those closest to Him in His earthly ministry confessed. Said Peter, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16). “My Lord and my God,” said Thomas (John 20:28). He is “our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,” Paul said (Tit. 2:13)

When Christ asked His disciples at Caesarea Philippi, “Who do men say that I the Son of man am?,” He received some significant answers that revealed quite a bit about the way His contemporaries felt regarding His person. Our Lord, however, was more interested at the moment in what His own apostles thought, and so He followed with the probing question, “But who say ye that

I am?" It is then that Peter offered his great confession, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). That is the question that we must all face, and to which we all must give response. It cannot be dodged, avoided, shunned, or evaded.

Many years ago I read an account of a well-known American scholar, who in his early ministry preached a course of sermons on the resurrection, in which he stated and tested the various arguments to the fullest extent of his power. There was present in his audience an eminent lawyer, the head of the legal profession in the city. He listened to the preacher Sunday by Sunday as he marshalled proofs, weighted evidence, considered objections, analyzed the stories of the Gospels, and stated the case for the resurrection. At length he drew the conclusion that Christianity must be true, because God raised Jesus from the dead.

At the close of the last sermon the lawyer went to see the minister and said, "I am a lawyer; I have listened to your statement of the case. I consider it incontrovertible, but this case demands a verdict. This is no mere intellectual conflict; there is life in it. If Jesus Christ rose from the dead, His religion is true, and we must submit to it." W. H. Griffith Thomas, to who I am indebted for the incident, said that the lawyer was as good as his word and became a Christian. That is my prayer and hope for those who have read these studies.

“Jesus is no Ordinary Person,” — The Demons.

“Jesus is no Ordinary

Person,” — The Demons.

S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.

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Scripture Reading: Matthew 8:28-34

Introduction

“There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils,” C.S. Lewis has said. “One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors, and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.”1 For years the devils have been hailing the materialists, for our Western world has largely ignored the devils until quite recently.

Now, however, matters have changed. We are seeing a most amazing resurgence of interest in the occult, in superstition and spiritism and Satanism. Baudelaire said that the devil’s strategy in the modern world was to get men to so concentrate on the forked tail and cloven hoofs that they could easily deny the devil’s existence.

Then, Baudelaire contended, the devil could do his work more efficiently as an undercover agent.2 If Baudelaire was right, then Satan will have to change his strategy, for the contemporary world has swung to an extreme interest in the Evil One.

Why the sudden return to this curious occupation with the occult world? A number of factors have been suggested, such as the death of rationalism, the increasing recognition of mystery in modern physics, the results of current psychic and parapsychological research, the scepticism towards the supernatural in liberal theology (many seeking reality were forced to seek it outside the sceptical church), the influence of Eastern religions, the chaos of modern culture, and the conviction of the orthodox that the unseen world of angelic and demonic spirits does exist.3 William Peter Blatty's novel, The Exorcist, and the film made from it have multiplied reports of witchcraft, Satan-worship, and demon possession. Not only have the cults taken up with the subject, but the Roman Catholic Church has become involved. Several exorcisms were performed in the church shortly after the film reached a crest of popularity. Satanic worship and marriages have become commonplace. What does Scripture say about such things?

Whatever we may say about this "age of Aquarius," of which we are supposedly a part, and the ouija boards and horoscopes, there is no doubt that the Bible validates the existence of the world of Satan and his demons. Furthermore, and this is very important, the very heart of Christianity, the saving death of Christ, is from the beginning of the Book of Genesis to the conclusion of the Book of Revelation closely related to

the Old Serpent. One of the oldest explanations of the atonement of Christ, the so-called “classic theory,” conceived of the work of Christ as terminating upon Satan (cf. Gen. 3:15; Col. 2:15).

John the Apostle expresses this plainly when he writes, “For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that HE MIGHT DESTROY THE WORKS OF THE DEVIL” (cf. 1 John 3:8). In other words, Jesus Christ was manifested in order that He might undo the works of the Deceiver. He who has the keys of death and Hades has overcome the occult. He is both Lord of the upperworld and Lord of the underworld!

The incident to which we come in this section illustrates the victory of the Son of God over the Serpent, adumbrating the crushing of the Serpent’s head. He overcomes disease (cf. 8:14-17), demons (8:28-34), and death itself (9:18-26).

The location of the incident of the casting out of the demons has been disputed, and the texts of the accounts in the Synoptic Gospels are in some doubt. Matthew places the event in the country of the Gadarenes, the country of the Gerasenes, or Gergesenes. Gerasa was a town thirty-six miles inland and can hardly be the location. Gadara was a town only six miles inland from the shores of the lake, and the town burying-place and pastures would naturally be some distance from the town. Further, a small village with the name of Khersa has been discovered on the lake shore, and its physical features suit the description given in the accounts. If the larger town of Gadara may be said to have given its name to the whole district, then the locality could have been described by either the term Gadarenes or

Gerasenes, just as a Dallasite may be said to be both a Dallasite and a Texan. The differences in the copies of the text are no doubt due to the fact that the scribes who copied them did not know Palestine well enough to be sure where the incident occurred, and thus confusion arose.

The Encounter

The condition of the men (8:28; cf. Luke 8:27-29). Having reached the other side of the lake after the stilling of the storm Jesus encountered two demon-possessed men, who dwelt in the tombs of the burial caves, for they were the natural places for demons to live. Mark and Luke mention only one demoniac, but perhaps they stressed the confrontation of the Lord with the leader and spokesman of the two. The men were not maniacs, but demoniacs. That is, they were possessed men.

The ancient world believed in the existence of demons with great conviction and intensity. “The air was so full of these spirits that it was not even possible to insert into it the point of a needle without coming against one,” Barclay comments.4 It was estimated that there were 7,500,000 of them, 10,000 on one’s right hand, and 10,000 on one’s left. All were anxious to do harm to men, living in unclean places where no cleansing water was to be found.

They were especially dangerous, so men thought, to the lonely traveller, the woman in childbirth, children out after dark, and to voyagers by night. They were particularly dangerous in the midday heat, and between sunset and sunrise. It is obvious, of course, that most of these beliefs are mythical, but the essential thing is that

men accept the existence of demons. And that is a valid belief according to the Holy Scriptures.

The demons were falsely held to be responsible, not only for diseases like epilepsy and mental illness, but also for other ailments. They lurked beside a man while he ate, and they gained entry into his body by settling on his food. Granted these beliefs, it is not surprising that the New Testament records contain accounts of our Lord's dealings with the demonic world.

The demons of the Bible were originally part of the angelic hosts, and most Bible students think that the demons are those spirit beings that fell with Satan when he fell from his exalted place in the angelic hierarchy before the time of the creation of the heavens and the earth. The Scripture, however, does not have a great deal to say about their origin. That they were fallen angels is likely (cf. Matt. 25:41; Rev. 12:4, 7). They were created as spiritual beings with an intellectual and moral nature (cf. Matt. 8:16, 29 [they know Him!]; 10:1; Luke 8:27). They form part of an elaborate organization under Satan, each having a particular rank within it (cf. Matt. 12:24; Dan. 10:10-14). The free demons inhabit the earth and the air (cf. Matt. 8:29; Eph. 2:2). and their ultimate doom is the Lake of Fire (cf. Matt. 25:41). Untiringly and unflaggingly they pursue their work under their head (cf. 1 Pet. 5:8; Matt. 12:26; 13:39; Acts 10:38).

Their existence is something that a believer accepts by faith, because of the teaching of the Word of God, but it is remarkable that demonic manifestations largely cease with the coming of the Word of God to a land through evangelism. Perhaps this represents a change in the

method of the archenemy of the souls of men. He is able to deceive men today far more easily and successfully as an angel of light than in the form in which our fathers portrayed him, replete as he was with horns and hoofs. In Marie Corell's book, The Sorrows of Satan, he appears as a cultured person, emerging from the House of Commons! At least he was coming out!

The demoniacs dwelt in the tombs, Matthew tells us, while Luke adds that the leader, at least, wore no clothes, — an ancient streaker! They were generally furious and dangerous men, and our Lord showed unusual courage in stopping to carry on a conversation with them.

The cry of the men (8:28-31). An amazing thing happens; they who struck terror in the hearts of other men with whom they have come into contact are terrorized by Jesus! They who are feared fear! It was the brother of our Lord who wrote, "The devils also believe, and tremble" (cf. Jas. 2:19), and the words have their most pointed application here.

There are two important things to be noted in their cry. (1) First, the demoniacs recognize the deity of the Messiah. They address Him as, "Jesus, thou Son of God" (v. 29). And that very fact reveals a great deal about the modern cults and religions that call themselves Christian and yet refuse to acknowledge Him as the divine Son of God, "begotten of the Father before all the ages, Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father, through whom all things were made" (Nicene). Now notice these facts. God the Father recognized Him as truly God. The angels recognized Him as truly God. His

foes recognized Him as truly God. And even the demons acknowledge His true deity. In the light of this, can Unitarianism be called Christian? Can Mormonism be called Christian? Can Jehovah's Witnesses be called Christian? Some years ago a friend of mine had a conversation with a local Unitarian. She asked the Unitarian if she found that her religion met her needs. The Unitarian replied, "I have no needs." Undaunted, my friend asked, "What do you teach in Sunday School?" The Unitarian replied that the previous week the children were given a lesson in astronomy. The teachers took the children outside and showed them the sun, the sky, and the other wonders of God's creation. My friend then asked, "And then do you tell the children that God created all these things to tie it in with the Bible?" "Why, no," the Unitarian answered, "we let them (children, mind you) draw their own conclusions." Such is the poverty and shallowness of a religion that fails to deal with the question of Christ as the divine Son of God and creator of all things.

(2) Second, the demoniacs recognize their own destiny and that it rests in His hands. They scream out, "Art thou come to torment us before the time?" (v. 29). It would appear from this that they both know that they face a final judgment of an unfriendly nature, that Christ is Himself their great Antagonist, and they seem to sense the difference between the first and second coming of the Lord, a fact not always fully understood by His own disciples (cf. 11:1-6).5 Seeing a herd of many swine feeding a good way off, the demoniacs asked permission of the Lord Jesus to enter into the herd. "If thou drive us out, send us into the herd of swine" (v.31).

The Explusion

The command of Jesus (8:32). In response to the request of the demoniacs Jesus permits the demons to leave the men for the herd. His simple reply is, “Go”.

The consequences (8:32). With His permission the demons depart from the men and enter into the herd. The result of this new possession is that “the whole herd of swine ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished in the waters.”

Two further questions arise from this action, thought by many to be incredible and bizarre.

(1) First, how can spirit beings enter into and possess animals? Huxley referred to the incident somewhat contemptuously as, “The Gadarene Pig. Affair,” thinking little of the truthfulness of the story. But our ignorance of such matters is so great that it is doubtful if anyone of us has enough intelligence to know IF there is a problem here!

(2) The second question is more relevant perhaps. How can one explain the wanton destruction of about 2,000 animals (cf. Mark 5:13)? Is it not a heartless act on the part of the Lord?

William Barclay avoids the question entirely. He suggests that the shouting and shrieking of the demoniacs alarmed the pigs. In their terror they took flight and plunged into the lake. Water was fatal to demons, it was believed, so Jesus, taking advantage of the opportunity of this event, cried out to them, “Look, at these swine; they are gone into the depths of the lake and your demons are gone with them for ever.” Only in this way could He convince them that they were cured.

So, He did not deliberately destroy the herd; He used their stampede to aid the two poor sufferers to believe in His cure!6 Of course, this can only be believed on the presupposition that the biblical account is not factual.

What shall we say? Well, in the first place, it is well to remember that the Creator is sovereign in His creation, and He has the right to do what He wills (cf. Rom. 9:14-23). And what He wills to do is right.

It has been suggested, in the second place, that the destruction of the swine was necessary in order that all might be convinced of the completeness of the cure of the demoniacs.

Finally, the swine were most likely permitted to suffer destruction in order that a very needed lesson might be taught the people of the area. That lesson is that people are of more value than pigs. The healing of the demoniacs by the Lord Jesus was a noteworthy act of great mercy. It is a remarkable thing that the people of the area urge our Lord to leave their borders rather than express gratitude for the healings. They care more for their livestock than they do for the men. Material values surpass human values in their eyes. It was the purpose of the Lord to teach the lesson that pigs are of no account in comparison with precious souls. The action of the Lord in permitting the demons to possess the swine, then, was not a wanton and heartless act. It was an act of mercy and insight.

“There is such a thing as being over-fastidious,” Barclay points out. “T. R. Glover spoke of people who think they are being religious when in fact they are being fastidious. Surely we could never compare the value of a herd of swine with the value of a man’s immortal soul. It

is unlikely that we refuse to eat bacon for breakfast or pork for dinner. Our sympathy with the pigs does not extend far enough to prevent us eating them; are we then to complain if Jesus did restore sanity to two men's minds at the cost of a herd of pigs? No one need say that this is to encourage or even to condone cruelty to animals. It is simply to say that we must preserve a sense of proportion in life."7 He came to save men and women, and only men and women.

The Effects

On the man (cf. Luke 8:35). Luke writes, "Then they went out to see what was done; and came to Jesus, and found the man, out of whom the demons were departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind; and they were afraid" (8:35). Sitting, they were no longer restless wanderers. Clothed, they were no longer naked (cf. Gal. 3:27). Sober, they were no longer like raging maniacs (cf. 2 Tim. 1:7). And, finally, they were at His feet in thankfulness and fellowship (cf. Luke 8:38). It was a beautiful picture of the effects of the ministry of the Messiah among His people.

On the multitudes (Matt. 8:33-34). It was quite a different matter with the crowds. While the demoniac wanted to be with Him, they wanted Him to depart. In fact, they preferred to possess their own swine than to possess the Savior of sinners. He was ready to sacrifice the less important of God's creatures in the interests of the highest, but they were ready to sacrifice the exalted Son of God for their swine!

That awful clause, "they besought him that he would depart from their borders" (v. 34), down through the corridors of time has proclaimed to the world that MEN

REFUSE JESUS BECAUSE THEY PREFER THEIR PIGS! It is a humanism at its worst.

Conclusion

This incident has a message for both the non-Christian and the Christian.

To the pagan unbeliever it preaches in the ministry of Jesus the Messiah the death-knell to the forces of evil. It says, in the words of the Apostle John, that Jesus came to undo the works of the devil (cf. 1 John 3:8). In the words of Paul, “having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it” (Col. 2:15). The world of Satan and his demons has been overcome by the blood of the cross. The legal release has been presented to the jailor, Satan, and sinners are delivered from sin and death. The Savior has the giant’s head in His hand and has carried the witness of victory to the city of God. We are free from guilt and condemnation. The whole occult world is a defeated world.

To the believer there is a pressing call to return to men from the Savior’s saving presence with a call to turn to Him. Jesus said the men, “Return to thine own house, and show what great things God hath done unto thee” (cf. Luke 8:39). That message was a message of “great things,” and it was a message of a personal deliverance, as the “unto thee” indicates.

Luke adds a word of his, or their, obedience. “And he went his way, and published throughout the whole city what great things JESUS had done unto him” (v. 39). And will you notice the word, “Jesus.” The Lord had told him to publish the great things “God” had done for him.

He spoke of the great things “Jesus” had done. This man, enlightened by the Holy Spirit and the recipient of the saving ministry of Christ, felt that, in praising JESUS, he was praising GOD! He was right. May God help us to do the same.

1 C.S. Lewis, The Screwtape letters and Screwtape Proposes a Toast (New York, 1962), p. 3. The citation comes from the first work.

2 William J. Wolf, No Cross, No Crown: A Study of the Atonement (New York, 1957), p. 57.

3 Os Guinness, Encircling Eyes (Downers Grove, 1974; chapter 8 of The Dust of Death [1937), revised), pp. 11-16.

4 Barclay, I, 327.

5 Hendriksen, p. 414.

6 Barclay, I, 329.

7 Ibid., I, 330.

“Late In Time Behold Him Come”

“Late In Time Behold Him Come”

S Lewis Johnson, Jr.

Dr. S. Lewis Johnson, Jr. is a Bible teacher at Believers Chapel, Dallas, Texas. In this expository study of Hebrews 1:1-4 he provides us with a glorious Christmas message.

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 1:1-4

Introduction

There are many unanswered questions about the anonoymous Epistle to the Hebrews, that sublime treatise which has been called by a recent author, “the most extensively developed and logically sustained piece of theological argumentation in the whole of the New Testament.”1 We are not certain about the date of the epistle, the addressees of the epistle, the place of origin of the epistle, nor of its author. The answers of the ancients and the moderns have included the Apostle Paul, Barnabas, Apollos, and even Pricilla, the wife of Aquila.2 Bible teachers of the male gender have sought to be humorous about the last suggestion, often saying, “The letter could not have been written by a woman, because the author says in the last chapter, ‘But I urge you, brethren, bear with this word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly’ (13:22), and what woman would write ‘briefly’?” One of my seminary students some years ago blasted a hole in this opinion by saying to me after a class in which the matter was brought up, “But, Dr. Johnson, isn’t that just what a woman would

do? Would she not write thirteen chapters and then say that she had written ‘briefly’?” The reasoning seemed cogent to me!

However, we do have a statement from the author that eliminates feminine authorship. For those unimpressed with the above arguments, and I presume all of my readers are, it will be profitable to turn to 11:32, where the author writes, “And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets.” The Greek participle, translated by the words, “if I tell,” and which modifies the pronoun, “me,” is masculine in gender. Thus, while we still do not know the author of the letter, we do know that he was not a woman.

On the other hand, while the authorship of the letter is in doubt, there is no doubt at all that in the letter we have the authentic voice of God. In fact, that may be one of the reasons why the Holy Spirit guided the author in his omission of his name. It was thought desirous to leave upon the reader’s mind a strong conviction that in these last days it is God who has spoken in His Son (cf. 1:2). That is enhanced by the statement in 12:25, in which stress upon the voice of God in His Word is found again, “See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking.” And, finally, when one remembers that in this great letter, in which the Scriptures of the Old Covenant are cited so often, there is no mention of the names of human authors, as is customary in Paul and other New Testament authors, then the conviction steals over one that the author wished to let us know most strongly that, when we listen to his words, we are listening to the Lord God.

Many years ago the well-known Bible teacher, Arthur T. Pierson, made the striking suggestion that perhaps the subject of our Lord's discourse on the Emmaus Road (cf. Luke 24) was that which is now contained in the Letter to the Hebrews. There is, of course, no support for this, but the two discourses are, no doubt, of similar eloquence.

The letter itself is marvelously relevant to a church that is living in Standstillsville. Contented and smug in the possession of salvation, such a church knows little of the heavenly life that He came to bring. Lulled into a comfortable, but crippling, slumber by the drives of the flesh, the power of the world, and the strategems of the devil, she needs to know Him better. And what better time to rethink our spiritual conditions and regroup for progress than the Christmas season, when we are reminded so often of the source of all spiritual life, the Lord Jesus Himself? It is He through whom God has spoken, and it is through Him that God would have us listen and learn of our Triune God.

The Final Revelation

The method of revelation (Heb. 1:1). The opening sentence of the epistle is a sonorous rhetorical sentence, worthy of a Scriptural Demosthenes. As one author has put it, "A great thought demanded a great dress."3 And the thought into which he plunges with such alacrity is a great one, namely, the uniqueness and the finality of the revelation of God in His Son, Jesus Christ. The method is that of contrast, and in the opening verses he contrasts the two great revelations, that in the prophets and that in the Son. That the second is superior to the first is implicity in the elaborate statement of the qualifications

of the Son for revealing divine truth. He is the revealer of God par excellence (cf. vv. 3-4).

“In many portions” refers to the revelation that came from the prophets, the priests, and the kings of the Old Testament. The “many ways” refers to the prophecies, the events, the institutions, the dreams, the visions, and the other means by which God spoke in the Old Testament times.

The men of the revelation (Heb. 1:1-2a). God spoke in the prophets, but now He has spoken in such a person as a Son.4 Like the prophets the Son spoke the Word of God, but unlike the prophets He is the Eternal Word who became flesh and spoke in His life and words. The uniqueness of the final revelation is seen in the superiority of the Son to the prophets. None of them was a son; He is in an entirely different category from them. Further, there are many prophets, but only one Son. That which was communicated in parts, sections and fragments can only be imperfect and provisional. Thus, in the Son the partial and the piecemeal became final and complete.

And yet there is a unity in the revelation, for it is God who speaks in both ages.

The prophets were men of one theme in many cases. For example, Amos has been said to be a cry for social justice, while Isaiah is the preacher of the holiness of God. Hosea is the prophet of divine love. Thus, each of the prophets grasped a fragment of the truth of God, but finally there came One who was the epitome of the whole truth, as He affirmed, “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me” (cf. John 14:6). It is He who led the Father forth into

full revelation (cf. 1:18). The prophets were like men listening to a clock striking in the night. They were always getting nearer to the truth, but they had to wait until it stopped to know where they really were. All the streams of the great river of divine revelation have finally merged in one voice, the voice of many waters (cf. Rev. 1:15), through whom the final truth has come.

The expression, "in His Son," is without the article in the original text, being literally in Son. The rendering of the English versions, "in His Son," stresses the identity of the Son, but it is the character of the sphere of the revelation that is important to the author. It is a Sonwise revelation that is the final one. A Son, one possessed of the nature of the Father, is best able to reveal the Father, and it is in such a Son that God has spoken. As Dods says, "A Son who can be characteristically designated a son, carries in Himself the Father's nature and does not need to be instructed in the purposes which are also and already His own, nor to be officially commissioned and empowered to do what He cannot help doing" (italics mine).5

The Unique Organ Of The Final Revelation

There follow seven facts which elucidate the greatness of the supreme revelation in the Son, and in them we move from His past glory through the incarnation on to the majesty of His exaltation after the successful culmination of His earthly task. These seven facts about the Son illustrate His supremacy over all the categories of created beings, and they underline His ability to effectively and finally reveal the Father.

(1) First, the author says that the Son has been "appointed heir of all things" (1:2). The word

“appointed” by virtue of its position in the series of facts that antedate the exaltation of the Son is timeless in force, and refers to His appointment in virtue of His eternal Sonship. The author has Psalm 2:8 in mind, which deduces from the filial relation of the King of Zion to God that universal dominion is the Son’s by inheritance. Sonship and heirship naturally go together. In fact, only members of a family may inherit. Others may receive bequests, but only sons and daughters, or other members of a family, may inherit. Thus, the Son partakes of the nature of the Father and is, thus, His heir to all things. The expression reminds us of the great text in Matthew 11:27, the text that Professor Karl von Hase, professor of church history over a century ago at the University of Jena and, I believe, the great grandfather of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, called, “a meteor from the Johannine sky,” alluding to the similarity of its teaching to that of the Gospel of John. The teaching is also found here.

The entrance upon the inheritance by the Son awaits the future (cf. Heb. 2:8; Rev. 11:15), that is, the second advent of the Messiah.

(2) The second statement, “through whom also He made the world” (1:2), concerns the ages.6 The word aion, rendered by “world” here, refers to all that exists in the world under the conditions of time. The thought of the author is that the Son is the Lord of History, operating and managing the universe throughout its successive time periods (cf. 1 Tim. 1:17). Because He is the Lord of History, He is able to reveal the Father (cf. Mic. 5:2), a work that He performed often in the days of His flesh (cf. Matt 11:13). In this connection Hughes writes, “The implication of this doctrine, here and elsewhere, is the

priority of Christ to the whole created order, and therefore his pre-existence and coexistence with the Father. Thus Athanasius explains that ‘when the sacred writers say that “he is before all ages” and that “through him he created the world,” they proclaim the eternal and everlasting being of the Son and thereby designate him as God.’”7 (3) The third statement, “And He is the radiance of His glory” (1:3), looks at the co-essentiality of the Son with the Father. The noun, rendered here by “radiance,” has both an active sense (effulgence, radiance) and a passive sense (reflection) in its usage, but here the active sense is more appropriate. The Son flashes forth, or radiates, the glory of the Father (cf. Col. 1:15; John 1:14, 14:9). The word is a Philonic term, and thus the author is uttering “unborrowed truths” in borrowed terms. The present tense of the verbal form (a participle in the original text) denotes his eternal nature, according to many interpreters.8 (4) The fourth statement, “the exact representation of His nature” (1:3), has been thought to set forth the true personality of the Son, but it more likely refers to the same idea as the preceding expression, but with a different emphasis. In the former it is His deity outwardly expressed, but here it is His deity inwardly expressed. He is the exact replica of the essence of God. Only “a virtuoso in exegetical evasion,” to use a phrase of Denney’s, could hope to avoid the conclusion that the Son possesses the very essence of God.

When our Lord was in the midst of the storm on the Sea of Galilee and was roused by the disciples to still the storm, after seeing the mighty miracle, the Bible says, “And they became very much afraid and said to one another, ‘Who then is this, that even the wind and the

sea obey Him?'" (Mark 4:41). If the author of Hebrews had been in the little boat and had known then what he knew later, he would have replied, "It is no wonder that He stills the storm, for He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature."

We are inclined in our shallow age to think that the preaching of solid theological doctrine is boring and impractical. Thus, we often hear the words, "We are not to be interested in doctrine, but in life." How foolish! Why, even that statement is a doctrine, although a very bad one. The knowledge of the supreme glory of the Son is of the greatest ethical significance, for it leads to a trust in Him. One so great not only merits, but also can stand up under the greatest calls upon His provision in life. A dwarfed and elfin theology leads to a stunted faith, while a full-grown and mature theology leads to a broad and resourceful trust that brings glory to God. Finally, it is none other than Benjamin B. Warfield who wrote, "We cannot preach at all without preaching doctrine; and the type of religious life which grows up under our preaching will be determined by the nature of the doctrines we preach."9 (5) The fifth claim is that He "upholds all things by the word of His power" (1:3). This marks Him out as the Governor of the Universe, or the Lord of Prophecy. The word translated by "upholds" is literally bearing. "Upholds" might imply the passive support of a burden, but the Son is not an Atlas, holding up the dead weight of the world.10 In its usage the word refers to movement, or progress, toward an end, and the present tense intensifies the thought. The sense is that the Lord is bearing the universe along an appointed course; He is its Governor, guiding all things toward the consummation (cf. Rev. 11:15). As Moses sought to bear

Israel along under the guidance of God (cf. Num. 11:14, which has the same word in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint), so He leads the universe along to its appointed goal. Thus, He is no arrogant diviner, like a Jean Dixon, nor a groping philosopher, nor a hazy-eyed prophet, but He is the Son, the divine and glorious Governor of the Universe.

(6) The sixth statement, “When He had made purification of sins” (1:3), is very important. The previous revelation concerning the Son has been magnificent but, if one does not know Him as Redeemer, then the other knowledge is futile, for provision must be made for human sin. The word “made” emphasizes that the act of purification has taken place, contributing a note of finality to the description of the Son and His work. The middle voice of the Greek word, a participle in form, also emphasizes the personal interest of our Lord in the work. It may be rendered, when He had BY HIMSELF made a purification of sins. Incidentally, the word rendered by, “purification,” is a priestly word and foreshadows the work of Christ as High Priest, in fact, sets forth the foundation of all priestly activity, the sacrifice for sin. The purification is of sins, not from sins, for the totality of the sin of those for whom He died is in view. It is surprising, but upon first thought only, that our author is not nearly so much interested in what Jesus taught as in what He did.11In this he is in harmony with Paul.

(7) The seventh statement, “He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (1:3), is the climax and looks at the finished character of His work. The important word is the word, “sat down.” The tense, an ingressive aorist, may be translated, He took His seat,

and it suggests the formal, solemn act of assuming a position of dignity and authority after sin has been dealt with (cf. 10:11-12; Psa. 110:1). The meaning of the verb anticipates the subject matter of the book, for there is an implied contrast with the Levitical priests, who never sat down, because their work was never finished.

He is, then, the Prophet through whom God has spoken finally and completely, the Priest who has offered the last and sufficient sacrifice, and the King who sits in the authority of enthroned omnipotence, — a transcendent Person who represents the transcendent finality of Christianity. In Him the perfect relationship of God has been established and is maintained. Two characteristic words of the epistle serve to emphasize this. One is the word better, often used by the author in comparing Christianity with other religions and their representative figures (cf. 1:4; 7:19, 22; 8:6; 9:23; 12:24). The other is the word eternal, which is used to characterize the new dispensation. And this word adds something that is very significant. It is not only that Judaism is surpassed by the new age in its truth, but the word eternal stresses the fact that the truth of the new age can never be surpassed. Thus, as Denney says, “It is the eternal, final, perfect form of man’s relation to God; in the strict sense of the term it is incomparable; and it depends for its very being on Christ, and on our faith in what He is and has done for us. It is in this conviction that he speaks of the ‘eternal’ salvation of which Christ is author to all who obey him (59); of the ‘eternal’ redemption which He won by His own blood (912); of the ‘eternal’ spirit—the final revelation of divine love —through which He offered Himself without spot to God (914); of the ‘eternal’ inheritance promised to those who hear His

voice (915); of the ‘eternal’ covenant established in His blood (1320). When we recognise what these expressions mean, we see that for the writer of the epistle Christ has the same absolute significance which He has for Paul.”12

The Supremacy Of The New Revealer

The fourth verse is a transitional one, the author moving on to the consideration of the superiority of the Son to the angels, His enthronement indicating supremacy over the Old Testament mediators of revelation. The participle, “having become,” indicates that the writer is moving in the orbit of the Son’s humanity. As God the Son it is impossible for Him to become. What was proposed in the eternal counsels (cf. v. 2, “appointed”) is realized in His resurrection and ascension. His inheritance of the title of Son is by the Father’s eternal appointment, but He entered into the full experience of it at the resurrection. In that sense, that is, as Mediator He entered into His inheritance of Sonship. And the name Son is a measure of His superiority to angels, who are merely messengers (cf. 1:14).

Conclusion

First of all, speech is the vehicle of fellowship, and God’s speaking to us indicates that He believes we are capable of fellowship, and that He longs to enjoy it with us. And as for the words of God, who can fully explain what they ought to mean to us?

Second, the fact that He has spoken points also the divine initiative in revelation, for He stoops in love to our frailty, darkness, and sin. As the Divine Shepherd He goes out into the wilderness to seek lost sheep; He does

not wait for them to return to Him. Our God is a seeking God; otherwise we should all be lost, for there is none that seeketh after Him.

Third, the message that God speaks is a simple unitary one, — the Son, on the cross once in the past, and now on the throne saving to the uttermost those that come unto God by Him. To know Him on the cross means the forgiveness of sins, and to know Him on the throne means the experience of the presence of God in joy, strength, and worship. It is to move from lethargy in life to the vitality of the heavenly life. Oh, may He plant a longing in our hearts to know His message, the Son!

1 Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews (Grand Rapids, 1977), p. 35.

2 Harnack, the famous German Church historian, is the source of the suggestion that Aguila and Priscilla wrote the epistle, with Priscilla being the primary author. A contemporary female has tried to revive the hopeless suggestion. Cf. Ruth Hoppin, “A Female Author of Scripture,” unpublished lecture given at the Claremont (Calif.) School of Theology, April 2, 1974.

3 William Barclay, The Letter to the Hebrews (Edinburgh, 1957), p. I.

4 Cf. 3:6; 5:8; 7:28.

5 Marcus Dods, “The Espistle to the Hebrews,” The Expositor’s Greek Testament (Grand Rapids, 1961), IV, 249.

6 Hughes, p. 40.

7 Hugh Montefiore, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews (New York, 1964), P.34.

8 Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, “The indispensableness of Systematic Theology to the Preacher,” Selected Shorter Writings, -II, ed. by John E. Meeter (Nutley, 1973), P. 286.

9 Brooke Foss Westcott, The Epistle to the Hebrews (London 1892), p. 14.

10 James Moffatt, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews (Edinburgh, 1924, p. 8.

11 James Denney, Jesus and the Gospel, pp. 40-42.

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