

The Expositor's Bible

Marcus Dods, D.D.

Gospel of John Part 1

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The Expositor's Bible

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THE GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN.

Part 1

BY
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Gospel of John Part 1

Introductory Note

INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

In order to read the Gospel of St. John with some intelligence, it is necessary to understand its purpose and its plan. For in the whole range of literature there is no composition which is a more perfect work of art, or which more rigidly excludes whatever does not subserve its main end. From the first word to the last there is no paragraph, sentence, or expression which is out of its place, or with which we could dispense. Part hangs together with part in perfect balance. The sequence may at times be obscure, but sequence there always is. The relevancy of this or that remark may not at first sight be apparent, but irrelevancy is impossible to this writer.

The object which the Evangelist had in view in writing this Gospel we are not left to find out for ourselves. He explicitly says that his purpose in writing was to promote the belief that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (chap. xx. 31). This purpose, he judges, he will best accomplish, not by writing an essay, nor by framing an abstract argument in advocacy of the claims of Jesus, but by reproducing in his Gospel those manifestations of His glory which elicited faith in the first disciples and in others. That which had produced faith in his own case and in that of his fellow-disciples, will, he thinks, if fairly set before men, produce faith in them also. He relates, therefore, with the utmost simplicity of language, the scenes in which Jesus seemed to him most significantly to have revealed His power and His goodness, and most forcibly to have demonstrated that the Father was in Him. At the same time he keeps steadily in view the circumstance that these manifestations had not always produced faith, but that alongside of a growing faith there ran an increasing unbelief which at length assumed the form of hostility and outrage. This unbelief he feels called upon to account for. He feels called upon to demonstrate that its true reason lay, not in the inadequacy of Christ's manifestations, but in the unreasonable and unspiritual requirements of the unbelieving, and in their alienation from God. The Gospel thus forms the primary apologetic, which by its very simplicity and closeness to reality touches at every point the underlying causes and principles of faith and unbelief.

The object of the Gospel being kept in view, the plan is at once perceived. Apart from the Prologue (chap. i. 1–18) and the Appendix (chap. xxi.), the body of the work falls into two nearly equal parts, chaps. i. 19–xii., and xiii.–xx. In the former part the Evangelist relates, with a singular felicity of selection, the scenes in which Jesus made those self-revelations which it was most important that men should understand, and the discussions in which their full significance was brought out. Thus he shows how the glory of Christ was manifested at the marriage in Cana, in the cleansing of the Temple, in the conversation with the Samaritans, in the healing of the impotent man, in the feeding of the five thousand, in the cure of the man born blind; and how, through these various signs or object-lessons, Jesus makes Himself known as the Life, the Light, the Judge of men, or, in one word, as the Son doing the Father's works, manifesting the Father's presence, disclosing in His various words

and deeds “the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

These manifestations culminate in the raising of Lazarus, recorded in the eleventh chapter. This final sign, while in “many of the Jews” (xi. 45) it produced faith, aggravated at the same time the unbelief of the authorities, who “from that day forth took counsel together for to put Him to death” (xi. 53). The twelfth chapter, therefore, holds a place by itself. In it we have three incidents related, and all related for the same purpose, namely, to demonstrate that there was now no further need of such manifestations of the glory of Jesus as had already been given, and that all things were now ripe for the catastrophe. The incidents in which this became apparent were Mary’s anointing of Jesus, His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and the enquiry of the Greeks. By introducing these three incidents together at this point, John wishes to show (1) that Jesus was now embalmed in the love of His intimate friends, (2) that He had found in the untutored instincts of the people a response to His claim, and (3) that even in the still wider circle of the outlying nations His name was known. He may, therefore, now safely finish His self-revelation. It has done its work. And the completeness of its result is seen, not only in this widely-extended impression and firmly-rooted attachment, but also in the maturity of unbelief which now took active steps to take Jesus and put Him to death.

This part of the Gospel therefore appropriately closes with the words: “These things spake Jesus and departed, and did hide Himself from them” (xii. 36). The public manifestation of Jesus is closed.

Between the first and the second part of the Gospel there is interposed a paragraph (xii. 37–50), in which John briefly points out that the rejection of Jesus by the Jews was no more than had been predicted by the prophet Isaiah, and that it reflects no suspicion on the manifestations of His relation to the Father which Jesus had made. He then sums up in one or two sentences the significance and consequences of receiving and of rejecting Jesus.

In the second part of the Gospel the writer is still guided by the same purpose of showing how Jesus manifested His glory. This is obvious not merely from the contents of this second part, but also from the fact that in the language of John the death of Jesus is constantly referred to as His glorification, being the “lifting up” which was an essential step to, or part of, His glorification. Before entering upon the last scenes, which are described in chaps. xiii.–xix., Jesus is assured that in His death the Father is to glorify His Name (xii. 28); and in the prayer recorded in the seventeenth chapter, which closes the explanations which our Lord Himself made of His work, it is still the manifestation of His glory that is in His thoughts. The characteristic which distinguishes this second part of the Gospel is, that Jesus no longer manifests His glory to the people in signs of manifest power, but now, in chapters xiii.–xvii., further discloses His glory privately to the Twelve; and in chapters xviii. and xix. passes triumphantly through the ultimate trial which still lay between Him and the final consummation of His glory. That this final glory has been achieved is witnessed by the Resurrection, the record of which, and of its results in faith, occupies the twentieth chapter. De Wette has the credit of being the first to discern that the entire Gospel is held together by this idea of the manifestation of Christ’s glory, and that “the glory of our Lord appears in all its brightness in the second part of the narrative (xiii.–xx.), and that (a) inwardly and morally in His sufferings and death (xiii.–xix.), and (b) outwardly and sensibly, in the triumphant event of the Resurrection.”

The best tabulated division of the Gospel with which I am acquainted is that which

the Rev. A. Halliday Douglas, M.A., of Huntly, has printed for private circulation. By the kindness of the author I am allowed to publish it here.

THE DIVISIONS OF ST. JOHN'S GOSPEL.

THE PROLOGUE OR INTRODUCTION. Chap. i. 1–18.

PART I. *The Manifestation of Christ's Glory in Life and Power.* Chap. i. 19–xii. 36.

1. Christ's Announcement of Himself, and the Beginnings of Faith and Unbelief. Chap. i. 19–iv.
2. The Period of Conflict. Chap. v.–xii. 36.

THE EVANGELIST'S PAUSE FOR REFLECTION, AND REVIEW OF CHRIST'S TEACHING. Chaps. xii. 36–50.

PART II. *The Manifestation of Christ's Glory in Suffering and Death.* Chaps. xiii.–xx.

1. Moral Victory in Suffering:—
 - a. In Anticipation. Chaps. xiii.–xvii. [*Faith* finally settled in the disciples, and *unbelief* cast out from among them.]
 - b. In the Actual Struggle. Chaps. xviii., xix. [Unbelief apparently victorious, faith scarcely saved.]
2. Actual Victory over Death. Chap. xx. [Faith proved right, and unbelief condemned.]

THE EPILOGUE OR APPENDIX. Chap. xxi.



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Gospel of John Part 1

Chapter 1

THE INCARNATION.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that hath been made. In Him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in the darkness; and the darkness apprehended it not. There came a man, sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for witness, that he might bear witness of the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came that he might bear witness of the light. There was the true light, even the light which lighteth every man, coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and they that were His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, to them gave He the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on His name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth. John beareth witness of Him, and crieth, saying, This was He of whom I said, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for He was before me. For of His fulness we all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses; grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. 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 i. 1–18.

In this brief introduction to his Gospel John summarises its contents, and presents an abstract of the history he is about to relate in detail. That the Eternal Word, in whom was the life of all things, became flesh and was manifested among men; that some ignored while others recognised Him, that some received while others rejected Him,—this is what John desires to exhibit at large in his Gospel, and this is what he summarily states in this compact and pregnant introductory passage. He briefly describes a Being whom he names “The Word;” he explains the connection of this Being with God and with created things; he tells how He came to the world and dwelt among men, and he remarks upon the reception He met with. What is summed up in these propositions is unfolded in the Gospel. It narrates in detail the history of the manifestation of the Incarnate Word, and of the faith and unbelief which this manifestation evoked.

John at once introduces us to a Being whom he speaks of as “The Word.” He uses the term without apology, as if already it were familiar to his readers; and yet he adds a brief description of it, as if possibly they might attach to it ideas incompatible with his own. He uses it without apology, because in point of fact it already had circulation both among Greek and Jewish thinkers. In the Old Testament we meet with a Being called “The Angel of the Lord,” who is at once closely related, if not equivalent, to Jehovah, and at the same time manifested to men. Thus when the Angel of the Lord had appeared to Jacob and wrestled with him, Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, for, said he, “I have seen God face to face.”^[1] In the apocryphal books of the Old Testament the Wisdom and the Word of God are

poetically personified, and occupy the same relation to God on the one hand, and to man on the other, which was filled by the Angel of the Lord. And in the time of Christ “the Word of the Lord” had become the current designation by which Jewish teachers denoted the manifested Jehovah. In explaining the Scriptures, to make them more intelligible to the people, it was customary to substitute for the name of the infinitely exalted Jehovah the name of Jehovah’s manifestation, “the Word of the Lord.”

Beyond Jewish circles of thought the expression would also be readily understood. For not among the Jews only, but everywhere, men have keenly felt the difficulty of arriving at any certain and definite knowledge of the Eternal One. The most rudimentary definition of God, by declaring Him to be a Spirit, at once and for ever dissipates the hope that we can ever see Him, as we see one another, with the bodily eye. This depresses and disturbs the soul. Other objects which invite our thought and feeling we easily apprehend, and our intercourse with them is level to our faculties. It is, indeed, the unseen and intangible spirit of our friends which we value, not the outward appearance. But we scarcely separate the two; and as we reach and know and enjoy our friends through the bodily features with which we are familiar, and the words that strike upon our ear, we instinctively long for intercourse with God and knowledge of Him as familiar and convincing. We put out our hand, but we cannot touch Him. Nowhere in this world can we see Him more than we see Him here and now. If we pass to other worlds, there, too, He is concealed from our sight, inhabiting no body, occupying no place. Job is not alone in his painful and baffling search after God. Thousands continually cry with him, “Behold, I go forward, but He is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive Him: on the left hand, where He doth work, but I cannot behold Him: He hideth Himself on the right hand, that I cannot see Him.”

In various ways, accordingly, men have striven to alleviate the difficulty of mentally apprehending an invisible, infinite, incomprehensible God. One theory, struck out by the pressure of the difficulty, and frequently advanced, was not altogether incompatible with the ideas suggested by John in this prologue. This theory was accustomed, although with no great definiteness or security, to bridge the chasm between the Eternal God and His works in time by interposing some middle being or beings which might mediate between the known and the unknown. This link between God and His creatures, which deemed to make God and His relation to material things more intelligible, was sometimes spoken of as “The Word of God.” This seemed an appropriate name by which to designate that through which God made Himself known, and by which He came into relations with things and persons not Himself. Vague indeed was the conception formed even of this intermediary Being. But of this term “the Word,” and of the ideas that centred in it, John took advantage to proclaim Him who is the manifestation of the Eternal, the Image of the Invisible.^[2]

The title itself is full of significance. The word of a man is that by which he utters himself, by which he puts himself in communication with other persons and deals with them. By his word he makes his thought and feeling known, and by his word he issues commands and gives effect to his will. His word is distinct from his thought, and yet cannot exist separate from it. Proceeding from the thought and will, from that which is inmost in us and most ourselves, it carries upon itself the imprint of the character and purpose of him who utters it. It is the organ of intelligence and will. It is not mere noise, it is sound instinct with mind, and articulated by intelligent purpose. By a man’s word you could perfectly know him, even though you were blind and could never see him. Sight or touch could give you but little fuller

information regarding his character if you had listened to his word. His word is his character in expression.

Similarly, the Word of God is God's power, intelligence, and will in expression; not dormant and potential only, but in active exercise. God's Word is His will going forth with creative energy, and communicating life from God, the Source of life and being. "Without Him was not any thing made that was made." He was prior to all created things and Himself with God, and God. He is God coming into relation with other things, revealing Himself, manifesting Himself, communicating Himself. The world is not itself God; things created are not God, but the intelligence and will that brought them into being, and which now sustain and regulate them, these are God. And between the works we see and the God who is past finding out, there is the Word, One who from eternity has been with God, the medium of the first utterance of God's mind and the first forthputting of His power; as close to the inmost nature of God, and as truly uttering that nature, as our word is close to and utters our thought, *capable of being used by no one besides, but by ourselves only.*

It is apparent, then, why John chooses this title to designate Christ in His pre-existent life. No other title brings out so clearly the identification of Christ with God, and the function of Christ to reveal God. It was a term which made the transition easy from Jewish Monotheism to Christian Trinitarianism. Being already used by the strictest Monotheists to denote a spiritual intermediary between God and the world, it is chosen by John as the appropriate title of Him through whom all revelation of God in the past has been mediated, and who has at length finished revelation in the person of Jesus Christ. The term itself does not explicitly affirm personality; but what it helps us to understand is, that this same Being, the Word, who manifested and uttered God in creation, reveals Him now in humanity. John wishes to bring the incarnation and the new spiritual world it produced into line with the creation and God's original purpose therein. He wishes to show us that this greatest manifestation of God is not an abrupt departure from previous methods, but is the culminating expression of methods and principles which have ever governed the activity of God. Jesus Christ, who reveals the Father now in human nature, is the same Agent as has ever been expressing and giving effect to the Father's will in the creation and government of all things. The same Word who now utters God in and through human nature, has ever been uttering Him in all His works.

All that God has done is to be found in the universe, partly visible and partly known to us. There God may be found, because there He has uttered Himself. But science tells us that in this universe there has been a gradual development from lower to higher, from imperfect towards perfect worlds; and it tells us that man is the last result of this process. In man the creature at last becomes intelligent, self-conscious, endowed with will, capable to some extent of meeting and understanding its Creator. Man is the last and fullest expression of God's thought, for in man and man's history God finds room for the utterance not merely of His wisdom and power, but of what is most profoundly spiritual and moral in His nature. In man God finds a creature who can sympathise with His purposes, who can respond to His love, who can give exercise to the whole fulness of God.

But in saying that "the Word become flesh" John says much more than that God through the Word created man, and found thus a more perfect means of revealing Himself. The Word created the visible world, but He did not become the visible world. The Word created all men, but He did not become the human race, but one Man, Christ Jesus. No doubt it is true that all men in their measure reveal God, and it is conceivable that some individual should fully illustrate all that God meant to

reveal by human nature. It is conceivable that God should so sway a man's will and purify his character that the human will should be from first to last in perfect harmony with the Divine, and that the human character should exhibit the character of God. An ideal man might have been created, God's ideal of man might have been realized, and still we should have had no incarnation. For a perfect man is not all we have in Christ. A perfect man is one thing, the Word Incarnate is another. In the one the personality, the "I" that uses the human nature, is human; in the other, the personality, the "I," is Divine.

By becoming flesh the Word submitted to certain limitations, perhaps impossible for us to define. While in the flesh He could reveal only what human nature was competent to reveal. But as the human nature had been created in the likeness of the Divine, and as, therefore, "good" and "evil" meant the same to man as to God, the limitation would not be felt in the region of character.

The process of the Incarnation John describes very simply: "The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us." The Word did not become flesh in the sense that He was turned into flesh, ceasing to be what He had previously been, as a boy who becomes a man ceases to be a boy. In addition to what He already was He assumed human nature, at once enlarging His experience and limiting His present manifestations of Divinity to what was congruous to human nature and earthly circumstance. The Jews were familiar with the idea of God "dwelling" with His people. At the birth of their nation, while they were still dwelling in tents outside the land of promise, God had His tent among the shifting tents of the people, sharing all the vicissitudes of their wandering life, abiding with them even in their thirty-eight years' exclusion from their land, and thus sharing even their punishment. By the word John here uses he links the body of Christ to the ancient dwelling of God round which the tents of Israel had clustered. God now dwelt among men in the humanity of Jesus Christ. The tabernacle was human, the indwelling Person was Divine. In Christ is realized the actual presence of God among His people, the actual entrance into and personal participation in human history, which was hinted at in the tabernacle and the temple.

In the Incarnation, then, we have God's response to man's craving to find, to see, to know Him. Men, indeed, commonly look past Christ and away from Him, as if in Him God could not be satisfactorily seen; they discontentedly long for some other revelation of the unseen Spirit. But surely this is to mistake. To suppose that God might make Himself more obvious, more distinctly apparent to us, than He has done, is to mistake what God is and how we can know Him. What are the highest attributes of Divinity, the most Divine characteristics of God? Are they great power, vast size, dazzling physical glory that overpowers the sense; or are they infinite goodness, holiness that cannot be tempted, love that accommodates itself to all the needs of all creatures? Surely the latter, the spiritual and moral qualities, are the more Divine. The resistless might of natural forces shows us little of God till we have elsewhere learned to know Him; the power that upholds the planets in their orbits speaks but of physical force, and tells us nothing of any holy, loving Being. There is no moral quality, no character, impressed upon these works of God, mighty though they be. Nothing but an impersonal power meets us in them; a power which may awe and crush us, but which we cannot adore, worship, and love. In a word, God cannot reveal Himself to us by any overwhelming display of His nearness or His power. Though the whole universe fell in ruins around us, or though we saw a new world spring into being before our eyes, we might still suppose that the power by which this was effected was impersonal, and could hold no fellowship with us.

Only, then, through what is personal, only through what is like ourselves, only

through what is moral, can God reveal Himself to us. Not by marvellous displays of power that suddenly awe us, but by goodness that the human conscience can apprehend and gradually admire, does God reveal Himself to us. If we doubt God's existence, if we doubt whether there is a Spirit of goodness upholding all things, wielding all things, and triumphant in all things, let us look to Christ. It is in Him we distinctly see upon our own earth, and in circumstances we can examine and understand, *goodness*; goodness tried by every test conceivable, goodness carried to its highest pitch, goodness triumphant. This goodness, though in human forms and circumstances, is yet the goodness of One who comes among men from a higher sphere, teaching, forgiving, commanding, assuring, saving, as One sent to deal with men rather than springing from them. If this is not God, what is God? What higher conception of God has any one ever had? What worthy conception of God is there that is not satisfied here? What do we need in God, or suppose to be in God, which we have not in Christ?

If, then, we still feel as if we had not sufficient assurance of God, it is because we look for the wrong thing, or seek where we can never find. Let us understand that God can best be known as God through His moral qualities, through His love, His tenderness, His regard for right; and we shall perceive that the most suitable revelation is one in which these qualities are manifested. But to apprehend these qualities as they appear in actual history we must have some sense for and love of them. They that are pure in heart, they shall see God; they who love righteousness, who seek with lowliness for purity and goodness, they will find in Christ a God they can see and trust.

The lessons of the Incarnation are obvious. First, from it we are to take our idea of God. Sometimes we feel as if in attributing to God all good we were dealing merely with fancies of our own which could not be justified by fact. In the Incarnation we see what God has actually done. Here we have, not a fancy, not a hope, not a vague expectation, not a promise, but accomplished fact, as solid and unchangeable as our own past life. This God whom we have often shunned, and felt to be in our way and an obstacle, whom we have suspected of tyranny and thought little of injuring and disobeying, has through compassion and sympathy with us broken through all impossibilities, and contrived to take the sinner's place. He, the ever blessed God, accountable for no evil and sole cause of all good, accepted the whole of our condition, lived as a creature, Himself bare our sicknesses, all that is hardest in life, all that is bitterest and loneliest in death, in His own experience combining all the agonies of sinning and suffering men, and all the ineffable sorrows wherewith God looks upon sin and suffering. All this He did, not for the sake of showing us how much better a thing the Divine nature is than the human, but because His nature impelled Him to do it; because He could not bear to be solitary in His blessedness, to know in Himself the joy of holiness and love while His creatures were missing this joy and making themselves incapable of all good.

Our first thought of God, then, must ever be that which the Incarnation suggests: that the God with whom alone and in all things we have to do is not One who is alienated from us, or who has no sympathy with us, or who is absorbed in interests very different from ours, and to which we must be sacrificed; but that He is One who sacrifices Himself for us, who makes all things but justice and right bend to serve us, who forgives our misapprehensions, our coldness, our unspeakable folly, and makes common cause with us in all that concerns our welfare. As while on earth He endured the contradiction of sinners, and waited till they came to a better mind, so does He still, with Divine patience, wait till we recognise Him as our Friend, and humbly own Him as our God. He waits till we learn that to be God is not to be a

mighty King enthroned above all the assaults of His creatures, but that to be God is to have more love than all besides; to be able to make greater sacrifices for the good of all; to have an infinite capacity to humble Himself, to put Himself out of sight, and to consider our good. This is the God we have in Christ; our Judge becoming our atoning Victim, our God becoming our Father, the Infinite One coming with all His helpfulness into the most intimate relations with us; is this not a God to whom we can trust ourselves, and whom we can love and serve? If this is the real nature of God, if we may always expect such faithfulness and help from God, if to be God be to be all this, as full of love in the future as He has shown Himself in the past, then may not existence yet be that perfect joy our instincts crave, and towards which we are slowly and doubtfully finding our way through all the darkness, and strains, and shocks that are needed to sift what is spiritual in us from what is unworthy?

The second lesson the Incarnation teaches regards our own duty. Everywhere among the first disciples was this lesson learned and inculcated. "Let this mind," says Paul, "be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." "Christ suffered for us," says Peter, "leaving us an example." "If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another" is the very spirit of John. Look steadily at the Incarnation, at the love which made Christ take our place and identify Himself with us; consider the new breath of life that this one act has breathed into human life, ennobling the world and showing us how deep and lovely are the possibilities that lie in human nature; and new thoughts of your own conduct will lay hold of your mind. Come to this great central fire, and your cold, hard nature will be melted; try in some sort to weigh this Divine love and accept it as your own, as that which embraces and cares for and carries you on to all good, and you will insensibly be imbued with its spirit. You will feel that no loss could be so great as to lose the possession and exercise of this love in your own heart. Great as are the gifts it bestows, you begin to see that the greatest of them all is that it transforms you into its own likeness, and teaches you yourself to love in the same sort. Understanding our security and our joyful prospect as saved by the care of God, and as provided for by a love of perfect intelligence and absolute resource; humbled and softened and melted by the free spending upon us of so Divine and complete a grace, our heart overflows with sympathy. We cannot receive Christ's love without communicating it. It imparts a glow to the heart, which must be felt by all that comes in contact with the heart.

And as Christ's love became incarnate, not spending itself in any one great display, apart from the needs of men, but manifesting itself in all the routine and incident of a human life; never wearying through the monotonous toil of His artisan-life, never provoked into forgetfulness in His boyhood; so must our love derived from Him be incarnated; not spent in one display, but animating our whole life in the flesh, and finding expression for itself in all that our earthly condition brings us into contact with. The thoughts we think and the actions we do are mainly concerned with other people. We are living in families, or we are related as employer and employed, or we are thrown together by the hundred necessities of life; in all these connections we are to be guided by the spirit which prompted Christ to become incarnate. Our chance of doing good in the world depends upon this. Our review of life at the close will be satisfactory or the reverse in proportion as we have or have not been in fact animated by the spirit of the Incarnation. We must learn to bear one another's burdens, and the Incarnation shows us that we can do so only in so far as we identify ourselves with others and live for them. Christ helped us by coming down to our condition and living our life. This is the guide to all help we can give. If anything can reclaim the lowest class in our population, it is by men of godly life living among them; not living among them in comforts unattainable by them, but living in all points as they live, save that they live without sin. Christ had no money to give,

no knowledge of science to impart; He lived a sympathetic and godly life, regardless of Himself. Few can follow Him, but let us never lose sight of His method. The poor are not the only class that need help. It is our dependence on money as the medium of charity that has begotten that feeling. It is easy to give money; and so we discharge our obligation, and feel as if we had done all. It is not money that even the poorest have most need of; and it is not money at all, but sympathy, which all classes need—that true sympathy which gives us insight into their condition, and prompts us to bear their burdens, whatever these are. There are many men on earth who are mere hindrances to better men; who cannot manage their own affairs or play their own part, but are continually entangled and in difficulties. They are a drag on society, requiring the help of more serviceable men, and preventing such men from enjoying the fruit of their own labour. There are, again, men who are not of our kind, men whose tastes are not ours. There are men who seem pursued by misfortune, and men who by their own sin keep themselves continually in the mire. There are, in short, various classes of persons with whom we are day by day tempted to have no more to do whatever; we are exasperated by the discomfort they occasion us; the anxiety and vexation and expenditure of time, feeling, and labour constantly renewed so long as we are in connection with them. Why should we be held down by unworthy people? Why should we have the ease and joy taken out of our life by the ceaseless demands made upon us by wicked, careless, incapable, ungrateful people? Why must we still be patient, still postponing our own interests to theirs? Simply because this is the method by which the salvation of the world is actually accomplished; simply because we ourselves thus tax the patience of Christ, and because we feel that the love we depend upon and believe in as the salvation of the world we must ourselves endeavour to show. Recognising how Christ has humbled Himself to bear the burden of shame and misery we have laid upon Him, we cannot refuse to bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the *law* of Christ.

[1] See also Gen. xvi. 13, xviii. 22; Exod. iii. 6, xxiii. 20; Judges xiii. 22.

[2] For the need of intermediaries, see Plato, *Symposium*, pp. 202–3: “God mingles not with men; but there are spiritual powers which interpret and convey to God the prayers and sacrifices of men, and to men the commands and rewards of God. These powers span the chasm which divides them, and these spirits or intermediate powers are many and divine.” See also Philo (*Quod Deus Immut.*, xiii.): “God is not comprehensible by the intellect. We know, indeed, that He is, but beyond the fact of His existence we know nothing.” The Word reveals God; see Philo (*De post. Caini*, vi.) “The wise man, longing to apprehend God, and travelling along the path of wisdom and knowledge, first of all meets with the Divine words, and with them abides as a guest.”



The Expositor's Bible

Marcus Dods, D.D.

Gospel of John Part 1

Chapter 2

RECEPTION CHRIST MET WITH.

JOHN 1. 1-18.

In describing the Word of God, John mentions two attributes of His by which His relation to men becomes apparent: "All things were made by Him," and "the life was the light of men." By whom were all things made? what is the originating force which has produced the world? how are we to account for the existence, the harmony, and the progress of the universe?—these are questions which must always be put. Everywhere in nature force and intelligence appear; the supply of life and power is unfailling, and the unconscious planets are as regular and harmonious in their action as the creatures that are endowed with conscious intelligence and the power of self-guidance. That the whole universe is one does not admit of a doubt. Far as the astronomer can search into infinite space, he finds the same laws and one plan, and no evidence of another hand or another mind. To what is this unity to be referred? John here affirms that the intelligence and power which underlie all things belong to the Word of God: "without Him was not anything made which was made."

"In Him was life." In this Divine Being, who was "in the beginning" before all things, there was that which gives existence to all else. "And the life was the light of men." That life which appears in the harmony and progress of inanimate nature, and in the wonderfully manifold and yet related forms of animal existence, appears in man as "light"—intellectual and moral light, reason and conscience. All the endowment possessed by man as a moral being, capable of self-determination and of choosing what is morally good, springs from the one fountain of life which exists in the Word of God.

It is in the light of this close relationship of the Word to the world and to men that John views the reception He met with when He became flesh and dwelt among us. This reception forms the great tragedy of human history. "In Agamemnon returning to his palace after ten years' absence, and falling by the hand of his unfaithful spouse, we have the event which is tragical *par excellence* in pagan history. But what is that outrage when compared with the theocratic tragedy? The God invoked by the nation appears in His temple, and is crucified by His own worshippers." To John it seemed as if the relationship borne by the Word to those who rejected Him was the tragical element in the rejection.

Three different aspects of this relationship are mentioned, that the blindness of the rejecters may more distinctly be seen. First, he says, although the very light that was in man was derived from the Word, and it was by His endowment they had any power to recognise what was illuminating and helpful to their spiritual nature, they yet shut their eyes to the source of light when presented in the Word Himself. "The life was the light of men.... And the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness apprehended it not." This is the general statement of the universal experience of the Eternal Word, and it is illustrated in His incarnate experience summarily related in

verses 10 and 11. Again: “He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not.” So little had men understood the source of their own being, and so little had they learned to know the significance and purpose of their existence, that when their Creator came they did not recognise Him. And thirdly, even the narrow and carefully-trained circle of the Jews failed to recognise Him; “He came unto His own”—to everything which had pointedly and of set purpose spoken of Him, and could not have existed but to teach His character—“and His own received Him not.”

1. “The light shineth in the darkness; and the darkness apprehended it not.” As yet John has said nothing of the Incarnation, and is speaking of the Word in His eternal or pre-incarnate state. And one thing he desires to proclaim regarding the Word is, that although it is from Him every man has such light as he has, yet this light is commonly rendered useless, and is not cherished. As it is from the Word, from God’s uttered will, that all men have life, so it is from the same source that all the light which is in reason and in conscience is derived. Before the Word appeared in the world, and shone out as the true light (ver. 9), He was in all rational creatures as their life and light, imparting to men a sense of right and wrong, and shining in their heart with some of the brightness of a Divine presence. This sense of a connection with God and eternity, and this moral faculty, although cherished by some, were commonly not “comprehended.” Evil deeds have been suffered to darken conscience, and it fails to admit the true light.

2. “He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not.” When our Lord came to earth the heathen world was mainly represented by the Roman Empire, and one of the earliest events of His life on earth was His enrolment as a subject of that empire. If we had been invited before His coming to imagine what would be the result upon this empire of His appearance, we should probably have expected something very different from that which actually happened. The real Sovereign is to appear; the Being who made all that is, is to come and visit His possessions. Will not a thrill of glad expectancy run through the world? Will not men eagerly cover up whatever may offend Him, and eagerly attempt, with such scant materials as existed, to make preparations for His worthy reception? The one Being who can make no mistakes, and who can rectify the mistakes of a worn-out, entangled world, is to come for the express purpose of delivering it from all ill: will not men gladly yield the reins to Him, and gladly second Him in all His enterprise? Will it not be a time of universal concord and brotherhood, all men joining to pay homage to their common God? “He was in the world, and the world was made by Him”—that is the true, bare, unvarnished statement of the fact. There He was, the Creator Himself, that mysterious Being who had hitherto kept Himself so hidden and remote while yet so influential and supreme; the wonderful and unsearchable Source and Fountain out of which had proceeded all that men saw, themselves included,—there at last He was “*in the world*” Himself had made, apparent to the eyes of men, and intelligible to their understandings; a real person whom they could know as an individual, whom they could love, who could receive and return their expressions of affection and trust. He was in the world, and the world knew Him not.

Indeed, it would not have been easy for the world to show a more entire ignorance of God than while He was upon earth in human form. There was at that time abundance of activity and intelligent apprehension of the external wants of men and nations. There was a ceaseless running to and fro of the couriers of the empire, a fine system of communications spread over the whole known world like a network, so that what transpired in the most remote corner was at once known at the centre. Rome was intelligent to the utmost circumference through all its dominions; as if a

nervous system radiated through the whole of it, touch but the extremity in one of the remotest colonies and the touch is felt at the brain and heart of the whole.^[3] The rising of a British tribe, the discovery of some unheard-of bird or beast, the birth of a calf with two heads—every scrap of gossip found its way to Rome.^[4] But the entrance of the Creator into the world was an event of such insignificance that not even this finely sympathetic system took any note of it. The great Roman world remained in absolute unconsciousness of the vicinity of God: they registered His birth, took account of Him as one to be taxed, but were as little aware as the oxen with whom He shared His first sleeping-place, that this was God; they saw Him with the same stupid, unconscious, bovine stare.^[5]

3. But in this great world of men there was an inner and specially trained circle, which John here designates “His own.” For although the world might be called “His own,” as made and upheld by him, yet it seems more likely that this verse is not a mere repetition of the preceding, but is intended to mark a deeper degree of insensibility on the part of Christ’s rejecters. Not only had all men been made in God’s image, so that they might have been expected to recognise Christ as the image of the Father; but one nation had been specially instructed in the knowledge of God, and was proud of having His dwelling-place in its midst. If other men were blind to God’s glory, the Jews at least might have been expected to welcome Christ when He came. Their temple and all that was done in it, their law, their prophets, their institutions, their history and their daily life, all spoke to them of God, and reminded them that God dwelt among them and would come to His own. Though all the world should shut its doors against Christ, surely the gates of the Temple, His own house, would be thrown open to Him. For what else did it exist?

Our Lord Himself, in the parable of the Wicked Husbandmen, makes even a heavier accusation against the Jews, intimating, as He there does, that they rejected Him not because they did not recognise Him, but because they did. “This is the Heir. Come, let us kill Him, that the inheritance may be ours.” In any case their guilt is great. They had been definitely and repeatedly admonished to expect some great manifestation of God; they looked for the Christ to come, and immediately before His appearance they had been strikingly awakened to prepare for His coming. But what was their actual state when Christ came? Again and again it has been pointed out that their whole thoughts were given to the schemes which usually distract conquered nations. They were “tossing in unhelpful and inefficacious sedition,” resenting or paying hollow homage to the rule of the foreigner, looking uneasily for deliverance, and becoming the dupes of every fanatic or schemer that cried, “Lo here!” or “Lo there!” Their power of discerning a present God and a spiritual Deliverer was almost as completely gone as that of the heathen, and they tested the Divine Saviour by external methods which any clever charlatan could have satisfied. The God they believed in and sought was not the God revealed by Christ. They existed for Christ’s sake, that among them He might find a home on earth, and through them be made known to all; they believed in a Christ that was to come, but when He came the throne they raised Him to was the cross. And the suspicion that perhaps they were wrong has preyed on the Jewish mind ever since, and has often pricked them on to a fierce hatred of the Christian name, while sometimes it has taken almost the form of penitence, as in the prayer of Rabbi Ben Ezra,—

“Thou! if Thou wast He, who at mid-watch came, By the starlight, naming a dubious name!
And if, too heavy with sleep—too rash With fear—O Thou, if that martyr-
gash Fell on Thee coming to take Thine own, And we gave the Cross, when we owed
the Throne,—Thou art the Judge.”

It is the detailed history of this rejection which John presents in his Gospel. He tells the story of Christ's miracles, and the jealousy they excited; of His authoritative teaching and the opposition it aroused; of His unveiling His Divine nature, His mercy, His power to give life, His prerogative of judgment, His humble self sacrifice, and of the misunderstanding which ran parallel to this manifestation. He tells how the leaders strove to entangle Him and find Him at fault; how they took up stones to stone Him; how they schemed and plotted, and at length compassed His crucifixion. The patience with which He met this "contradiction of sinners" was a sufficient revelation of His Divine nature. Though rudely received, though met on all hands with suspicion, coldness, and hostility, He did not abandon the world in indignation. He never forgot that He came, not to judge the world, not to deal with us on our merits, but to save the world from its sin and its blindness. For the sake of the few who received Him He bore with the many who rejected Him.

For some did receive Him. John could say for many, along with himself, "We beheld His glory," and recognised that it was Divine glory, such as none but an Only-begotten in the image of His Father could manifest. This glory dawned upon believing men, and gradually encompassed them in the brightness and beauty of a Divine revelation, by the appearance among them of the Incarnate Word, "full of grace and truth" (ver. 14). Not the works of wonder which He did, not the authority with which He laid the angry waves and commanded the powers of evil, but the grace and truth which underlay all His works, shone into their hearts as Divine glory. They had previously known God through the law given by Moses (ver. 17); but coming as it did through law, this knowledge was coloured by its medium, and through it God's countenance seemed stern. In the face of Jesus Christ they saw the Father, they saw "grace," an eye of tender compassion and lips of love and helpfulness. In the law they felt that they were seeing through a dimmed glass darkly; they became weary of symbols and of forms in which often they saw but flitting shadows. What must it have been for such men to live with the manifested God; to have Him dwelling among them, and in Him to handle and see (1 John i. 1) the "truth," the reality to which all symbol had pointed? "The law was given by Moses; grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."^[6]

And to those who acknowledge in their hearts that this is Divine glory which is seen in Christ, the glory of the Only-begotten of the Father, He gives Himself with all His fulness. "As many as received Him, to them gave He the right to become children of God." This is the immediate result of the acceptance of Christ as the Revealer of the Father. In Him we see what true glory is and what true sonship is; and as we behold the glory of the Only-begotten, sent to declare the Father to us, we acknowledge the unseen Father, and His Spirit brings us into the relationship of children. That which is in God passes into us, and we share in the life of God; and this through Christ. He is "full" of grace and truth. In all He is and does, grace and truth overflowingly manifest themselves. And "of His fulness have all we received, and grace upon grace."^[7] John read this off his own experience and that of those for whom he could confidently speak. What they had seen and valued in Christ became their own character. The inexhaustible fulness of grace in Christ renewed in them grace according to their need. They lived upon Him. It was His life which maintained life in them. By communion with Him they were formed in His likeness.

The presentation of Christ to men now divides them into two classes, as at the first. There are always those who accept and those who reject Him. His contemporaries showed, for the most part, a complete ignorance of what might be expected of God, a native inability to understand spiritual greatness, and to relish it when presented to them. And yet Christ's claims were made with such an air of authority and truth, and

His whole character and bearing were so consistent, that they were half persuaded He was all He said. It is chiefly because we have not a perfect sympathy with goodness, and do not know its value, that we do not at once and universally acknowledge Christ. There is in men an instinct that tells them what blessings Christ will secure to them, and they decline connection with Him because they are conscious that their ways are not His ways, nor their hopes His hopes. The very presentation to men of the possibility of becoming perfectly pure reveals what at heart they are. By the judgment each man passes on Christ he passes judgment on himself.

Let us stir ourselves to a clearer decision by remembering that He is presented to us as to His contemporaries. Time was when any one going into the synagogue of Nazareth would have seen Him, and might have spoken with Him. But the particular thirty years during which this manifestation of God on earth lasted makes no material difference to the thing itself. The Incarnation was to be some time, and it is as real having occurred then as if it were occurring now. It occurred in its fit time; but its bearing on us is not dependent on the time of its occurrence. If it had been accomplished in our day, what should we have thought of it? Would it have been nothing to us to see God, to hear Him, perhaps to have had His eye turned upon us with personal observation, with pity, with remonstrance? Would it have been nothing to us to see Him taking the sinners place, scourged, mocked, crucified? Is it conceivable that in presence of such a manifestation of God we should have been indifferent? Would not our whole nature have burned with shame that we and our fellow-men should have brought our God to this? And are we to suffer the mere fact of Christ's being incarnate in a past age and not in our own, to alter our attitude towards Him, and blind us to the reality? Of more importance than anything that is now happening in our own life is this Incarnation of the Only-begotten of the Father.

[3] See Isaac Taylor's *Restoration of Belief*.

[4] See Pliny's *Letters to Trajan*, 23, 98.

[5] Cp. Faber's *Bethlehem*.

[6] The first introduction in the Gospel of the name of Jesus Christ.

[7] This expression means a succession of graces, higher grace ever taking the place of lower.



The Expositor's Bible

Marcus Dods, D.D.

Gospel of John Part 1

Chapter 3

THE BAPTIST'S TESTIMONY.

“There came a man, sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for witness, that he might bear witness of the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came that he might bear witness of the light.... John beareth witness of Him, and crieth, saying, This was He of whom I said, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for He was before me. For of His fulness we all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses; grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him. And this is the witness of John, when the Jews sent unto him from Jerusalem priests and Levites to ask him, Who art thou? And he confessed, and denied not; and he confessed, I am not the Christ. And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elijah? And he saith, I am not. Art thou the prophet? And he answered, No. They said therefore unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself? He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said Isaiah the prophet. And they had been sent from the Pharisees. And they asked him, and said unto him, Why then baptizest thou, if thou art not the Christ, neither Elijah, neither the prophet? John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: in the midst of you standeth One whom ye know not, even He that cometh after me, the latchet of whose shoe I am not worthy to unloose. These things were done in Bethany beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing. On the morrow he seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world! This is He of whom I said, After me cometh a Man which is preferred before me: for He was before me. And I knew Him not; but that He should be made manifest to Israel, for this cause came I baptizing with water. And John bare witness, saying, I have beheld the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven; and it abode upon Him. And I knew Him not: but He that sent me to baptize with water, He said unto me, Upon whomsoever thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and abiding upon Him, the same is He that baptizeth with the Holy Spirit. And I have seen, and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.”—JOHN i. 6–8, 15–34.

In proceeding to show how the Incarnate Word manifested Himself among men, and how this manifestation was received, John naturally speaks first of all of the Baptist. “There came a man, sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for witness ... that all might believe through him.” The Evangelist himself had been one of the Baptist’s disciples, and had been led to Christ by his testimony. And to many besides, the Baptist was the true forerunner of the Messiah. He was the first to recognise and proclaim the present King. John had come under the Baptist’s influence at the most impressible time of his life, while his character was being formed and his ideas of religion taking shape; and his teacher’s testimony to the dignity of Jesus had left an indelible print upon his spirit. While his memory retained anything it could not let slip what his first teacher had said of Him who became his Teacher and his Lord. While, therefore, the other Evangelists give us striking pictures of the Baptist’s appearance, habits, and style of preaching, and show us the connection of his work with that of Jesus, John glances very slightly at these matters, but dwells with emphasis and iteration on the testimony which the Baptist bore to the Messiahship of Jesus.

To us, at this time of day, it may seem of little importance what the Baptist thought or said of Jesus. We may sympathise rather with the words of the Lord Himself, who, in allusion to this witness, said, "I receive not testimony from man." But it is plain that, at any rate from a Jewish point of view, the witness of John was most important. The people universally accepted John as a prophet, and they could scarcely think him mistaken in the chief article of his mission. In point of fact, many of the most faithful adherents of Jesus became such through the influence of John; and those who declined to accept Jesus were always staggered by John's explicit indication of Him as the Christ. The Jews had not only the predictions of prophets long since dead, and descriptions of the Christ which they could perversely misconstrue; they had not merely pictures of their Messiah by which they might identify Jesus as the Christ, but of which it was also quite possible for them to deny the likeness; but they had a living contemporary, whom they themselves acknowledged to be a prophet, pointing out to them another living contemporary as the Christ. That even such a testimony was to a large extent disregarded shows how much more the inclination to believe has to do with our faith than any external proofs.

But even to us the testimony of a man like John is not without importance. He was, as our Lord bore witness, "a burning and a shining light." He was one of those men who give new thoughts to their generation, and help men to see clearly what otherwise they might only dimly have seen. He was in a position to know Jesus well. He was His cousin; he had known Him from His childhood. He was also in a position to know what was involved in being the Messiah. By the very circumstance that he himself had been mistaken for the Messiah, he was driven to define to his own mind the distinctive and characteristic marks of the Messiah. Nothing could so have led him to apprehend the difference between himself and Jesus. More and more clearly must he have seen that he was not that light, but was sent to bear witness of that light. Thus he was prepared to receive with understanding the sign (ver. 33) which gave him something more than *his own personal surmises* to go upon in declaring Jesus to the world as the Messiah. If there is any man's testimony we may accept about our Lord it is that of the Baptist, who, from his close contact with the most profligate and with the most spiritual of the people, saw what they needed, and saw in Jesus power to give it; the business of whose life it was to make Him out, and to arrive at certain information regarding Him; a man whose own elevation and force of character made many fancy he was the Messiah, but who hastened to disabuse their minds of such an idea, because his very elevation gave him capacity to see how infinitely above him the true Christ was. Seen from the low ground the star may seem close to the top of the mountain; seen from the mountain-top it is recognised as infinitely above it. John was on the mountain-top.

Of John's person and work nothing need here be said save what serves to throw light on his witness to Christ. Going from the comfortable home and well-provided life and fair prospects of a priest's family, he went to the houseless wilderness, and adopted the meagre, comfortless life of an ascetic; not from any necessity, but because he felt that to entangle himself with the affairs of the world would be to blind him to its vices, and to silence his remonstrance, if not to implicate him in its guilt. Like thousands besides in all ages of the world's history, he felt compelled to seek solitude, to subdue the flesh, to meditate undisturbed on things Divine, and discover for himself and for others some better way than religious routine and the "good wine of Mosaic morality turned to the vinegar of Pharisaism." Like the Nazarites of the earlier times of his country, like the old prophets, with whose indignation and deep regret at the national vices he was in perfect sympathy, he left the world, gave up all the usual prospects and ways of life, and betook himself to a

life of prayer, and thought, and self-discipline in the wilderness. When first he went there, he could only dimly know what lay before him; but he gathered a few friends of like disposition around him, and, as we learn, "taught them to pray." He formed in the wilderness a new Israel, a little company of praying souls, who spent their time in considering the needs of their fellow-countrymen, and in interceding with God for them, and who were content to let the pleasures and excitements of the world pass by while they longed for and prepared themselves to meet the great Deliverer.

This adoption of the *rôle* of the ancient prophets, this resuscitation of their long-forgotten function of mourning before God for the people's sin, and addressing the nation authoritatively as God's voice, was outwardly shown by his assumption of the prophet's dress. The rough skin for a cloak; the long, uncared-for hair; the wiry, weather-beaten frame; the lofty, calm, penetrating eye, were all eloquent as his lips. His whole appearance and habits certified his claim to be the "voice" of one crying in the wilderness, and gave him authority with the people. Slightly altering what has been said of a great modern, we may much more truly say of the Baptist,—

"He took the suffering human race,
He read each wound, each weakness clear:
He struck his finger on the place,
And said, 'Thou ailest here, and here.'
He looked on (Isr'el's) dying hour
Of fitful dreams and feverish power,
And said, 'The end is everywhere,
(Christ) still has truth, take refuge there.'"

He was listened to. It is so always, in our own day as in others; the men who are unworldly and have the good of their country or of any class of men at heart, the men who are saintly and of few desires, these are listened to as the commissioned messengers of heaven. It is to these men we look as the salt of the earth, who preserve us still from the corrupting, disintegrating influence of doubt. To these men, no matter how different they be from us in creed, we are forced to listen, because the *Holy Spirit*, wherever He is, is the Spirit of God; and all men instinctively acknowledge that those who are themselves in the kingdom of God have authority to summon others into it, and that those who are themselves unworldly have alone a right to dictate to worldly men. There is no power on earth like the power of a holy, consecrated life, because he who is leading such a life is already above the world, and belongs to a higher kingdom. There is hope for our country, or for any country, when its young men have something of John's spirit; when they school the body until it becomes the ready instrument of a high and spiritual intention, fearless of hardship; when by sympathy with God's purposes they apprehend what is most needed by men, and are able to detect the weaknesses and vices of society, and to bear the burden of their time.

But the Baptist's equipment for the most responsible office of proclaiming the Messiahship of Jesus was not completed by his own saintliness of character and keen perception of the people's needs, and knowledge of Jesus, and incorruptible truthfulness. There was given to him a sign from heaven, that he might be strengthened to bear this responsibility, and that the Messiah might never seem to be only of the Baptist's appointing and not of God's. Some degree of disappointment may be felt that external signs should have intruded on so profoundly spiritual and real an occasion as the baptism of Christ. Some may be ready to ask, with Keim, "Is it, or was it ever, the way of God, in the course of His spiritual world, above all upon the threshold of spiritual decisions affecting the fate of the world, and in contradiction to the wise economy of revelation pursued by His supreme ambassador Himself, to take away from seeking and finding souls the labour of deciding their own destiny?" But this is to suppose that the signs at the baptism of Jesus were mainly for His encouragement, whereas John describes them as being given for the

certification of the Baptist. "I knew Him not"—that is, I did not know He was the Messiah—"but He that sent me to baptize with water, He said unto me, Upon whomsoever thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and abiding upon Him, the same is He that baptizeth with the Holy Spirit. And I have seen, and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."

The baptism of Jesus was, in fact, His anointing as the Messiah; and this anointing by which He became the Christ was an anointing, not with a symbolic oil, but with the Divine Spirit (Acts x. 38). This Spirit descended upon Him "in a *bodily* shape" (Luke iii. 22), because it was not one member or faculty or power which was communicated to Jesus, but a whole *body* or complete equipment of all needful Divine energies for His work. "God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto Him;" there is no gauge, no metre checking the supply. Now for the first time can the whole Spirit be given, because now for the first time in Jesus is there room to receive it. And that the Baptist may confidently proclaim Him as King the sign is given,—not the outward sign alone, but the outward sign accompanying and tallying with the inward sign; for it was not said to the Baptist, "Upon whomsoever thou shalt see a dove descend," but, "upon whomsoever thou shalt see the Spirit descend."

This anointing of Jesus to the Messiahship occurred at the moment of His truest identification of Himself with the people. John shrank from baptizing One whom he knew to be already pure, and to have no sins to confess. But Jesus insisted, identifying Himself with a polluted people, numbered with transgressors. It was thus He became true King and Head of mankind, by identifying Himself with us, and taking upon Him, through His universal sympathy, all our burdens, feeling more shame than the sinner's self for his sin, pained with the suffering in all their pain. It was the Divine Spirit of universal love, attracting Him to all sorrow and suffering, which identified Him in the mind of His first confessor as the Christ, the Son of God. This to the Baptist was the glory of the Only-begotten, this sympathy which felt with all, and shrank from no sorrow or burden.

Thus equipped, the Baptist gives his testimony with confidence. This testimony is manifold, and uttered on several occasions,—to the Sanhedrim's deputation, to the people, and to his own disciples. It is negative as well as positive. He repudiates the suggestions of the deputation from Jerusalem that he himself is the Christ, or that he is in their sense Elijah. But the most remarkable repudiation of honours which could be rendered to Christ alone is found recorded in chap. iii. 22–30, when the growing popularity of Jesus excited the jealousy of those who still adhered to the Baptist. Their complaint was the occasion of calling up clearly in the Baptist's own consciousness the relation in which he stood to Jesus, and of prompting the most emphatic enunciation of the unrivalled dignity of our Lord. He says to his jealous disciples, "If I do not gather a crowd of followers while Jesus does, this is because God has appointed to me one place, to Him another. Beyond God's design no man's destiny and success can extend. What is designed for me I shall receive; beyond that I desire to receive and I can receive nothing. Least of all would I covet to be called the Christ. You know not what you say in even remotely hinting that such a man as I could be the Christ. It is no mere unworldliness or purity which can raise a man to this dignity. He is from above; not to be named with prophets, but the Son of God, who belongs to the heavenly world of which He speaks."

To make the difference between himself and Christ clear, the Baptist hits upon the happy figure of the Bridegroom and the Bridegroom's friend. "He that has and keeps the Bride is the Bridegroom. He to whom the world is drawn, and on whom all

needy souls lean, is the Bridegroom, and to Him alone belongs this special joy of satisfying all human needs. I am not the Bridegroom, because men cannot find in me satisfaction and rest. I cannot be to them the source of spiritual life. Moreover, by instigating me to assume the Bridegroom's place you would rob me of my peculiar joy, the joy of the Bridegroom's friend." The function of the bridegroom's friend, or paranymp, was to ask the hand of the bride for the bridegroom, and to arrange the marriage. This function the Baptist claims as his. "My joy," he says, "is to have negotiated this matter, to have encouraged the Bride to trust her Lord. It is my joy to hear the glad and loving words that pass between Bridegroom and Bride. Do not suppose I look with sadness on the defection of my followers, and on their preference for Christ. These crowds you complain of are evidence that I have not discharged the function of paranymp in vain. To see my work successful, to see Bride and Bridegroom at length resting in one another with undisturbed, self forgetting confidence, this is my joy. While the Bridegroom cheers the Bride with His voice, and opens to her prospects which only His love can realize, shall I obtrude myself and claim consideration? Is it not enough for one life to have had the joy of identifying the actually present Christ, and of introducing the Bride to her Lord? Has not that life its ample reward which has been instrumental in achieving the actual union of God and man?"

Probably, then, the Baptist himself would think we waste too much emotion over his self-sacrifice and magnanimity. After all, it not being possible to him to be the Messiah, it was no small glory and joy to be the friend, the next, to the Messiah. The tragic character of the Baptist's death, the despondent doubt which for a time shook his spirit during his imprisonment, the severe life he had previously led, all tend to make us oblivious of the fact that his life was crowned with a deep and solid joy. Even the poet who has most worthily depicted him still speaks of

"John, than which man a *sadder* or a greater Not till this day has been of woman born."

But the Baptist was a big enough man to enjoy an unselfish happiness. He loved men so well that he rejoiced when he saw them forsake him to follow Christ. He loved Christ so well that to see Him honoured was the crown of his life.

Besides this negative repudiation of honours that belonged to Jesus, the Baptist emits a positive and fivefold testimony in His favour, (1) to His dignity (vv. 15, 27, 30), "He that cometh after me *is preferred before me*;" (2) to His pre-existence (vv. 15, 30), which is adduced as the reason of the foregoing, "for He *was* before me;" (3) to His spiritual fulness and power (ver. 33), "He baptizeth with the Holy Ghost;" (4) to the efficacy of His mediation (ver. 29), "Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world;" (5) to His unique personality (ver. 34), "this is the Son of God."

1. Three times over the Baptist declared the superiority of Jesus; a superiority so immense that language failed him in trying to represent it. The Rabbis said, "Every office which a servant will do for his master a scholar should perform for his teacher, except loosing his sandal-thong." But this exceptionally menial office the Baptist declares he was not worthy to perform for Jesus. None so well as the Baptist himself knew his limitations. He had evoked in the people cravings he could not satisfy. There had gathered to him a conscience-stricken people, longing for renewal and righteousness, and demanding what he had no power to give. Therefore, not merely his explicit enouncements from time to time, but his entire ministry, pointing to a new order of things which he himself could not inaugurate, declared the

incomparable greatness of Him that was to come after him.

2. This superiority of Christ was based on His pre-existence. "He was before me." It may appear unaccountable that the Baptist, standing on Old Testament ground, should have reached the conclusion that Jesus was Divine. But it is at any rate evident that the Evangelist believed the Baptist had done so, for he adduces the Baptist's testimony in support of his own affirmation of the Divine glory of the Incarnate Word (ver. 15). After the wonderful scene at the Baptism, John must have talked closely with Jesus regarding both His work and His consciousness; and even if the passage at the close of the third chapter is coloured by the Evangelist's style, and even by his thought, we must suppose that the Baptist had somehow arrived at the belief that Jesus was "from above," and made known upon earth the things which He, in a pre-existent state, had "heard and seen."

3. The Baptist pointed to Jesus as the source of spiritual life. "He baptizeth with the Holy Ghost." Here the Baptist steps on to ground on which his assertions can be tested. He declares that Jesus can communicate the Holy Ghost—the fundamental article of the Christian Creed, which carries with it all else. No one knew better than the Baptist where human help failed; no one knew better than he what could be effected by rites and rules, by strength of will and asceticism and human endeavour; and no one knew better at what point all these become useless. More and more they seemed to him but a cleansing with water, a washing of the outside. More and more did he understand that, not from without, but from within, true cleansing must proceed, and that all else, save a new creation by the Spirit of God, was inefficacious. Only Spirit can act upon spirit; and for true renewal we need the action upon us of the Divine Spirit. Without this no new and eternal kingdom of God can be founded.

4. The Baptist pointed to Jesus as "the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world." That by this title he meant only to designate Jesus as a person full of gentleness and innocence is out of the question. The second clause forbids this. He is the Lamb that takes away sin. And there is only one way in which a lamb can take away sin, and that is, by sacrifice. The expression no doubt suggests the picture in the fifty-third of Isaiah of the servant of Jehovah meekly enduring wrong. But unless the Baptist had been previously speaking of this chapter, the thoughts of his disciples would not at once turn to it, because in that passage it is not a lamb of sacrifice that is spoken of, but a lamb meekly enduring. In the Baptist's words sacrifice is the primary idea, and it is needless to discuss whether he was thinking of the paschal lamb or the lamb of morning and evening sacrifice, because he merely used the lamb as the representative of sacrifice generally. Here, he says, is the reality to which all sacrifice has pointed, the Lamb of God.

5. The Baptist proclaims Jesus as "the Son of God." That he should do so need not greatly surprise us, as we read in the other Gospels that Jesus had been thus designated by a voice from heaven at His baptism. Very early in His ministry, not only His disciples, but also the demoniacs ascribe to Him the same dignity. In one sense or other He was designated "Son of God." No doubt we must bear in mind that this was in a rigidly monotheistic community, and in a community in which the same title had been freely applied to Israel and to Israel's king to designate a certain alliance and close relation subsisting between the human and the Divine, but of course not suggesting metaphysical unity. But considering the high functions which clustered round the Messianic dignity, it is not unlikely that the Messiah's forerunner may have supposed that a fuller meaning than had yet been recognised might be latent in this title. Certainly we are safe in affirming that by applying this title to our

Lord, the Baptist intended to indicate His unique personality, and to declare that He was the Messiah, God's Viceroy on earth.

Whether we can add to this testimony the thoughts contained in the closing paragraph of the third chapter may be doubted. The thought of the passage moves within the circle of ideas familiar to the Baptist; and that the style is the style of the Evangelist does not prevent us from receiving the ideas as the Baptist's. But there are expressions which it is difficult to suppose that the Baptist could have used. The preceding conversation was occasioned by the growing popularity of Jesus; was this, then, an occasion on which it could be said, "No one receives His testimony"? Is this not more appropriate to the Evangelist than to the Baptist? It would seem, then, that in this paragraph the Evangelist is expanding the Baptist's testimony, in order to indicate its application to the eternal relations subsisting between Jesus and men generally.

The contents of the paragraph are a most emphatic testimony to the pre-existence and heavenly origin of Christ. In contrast to persons of earthly origin, He is "from heaven." He "cometh" from above, as if His entrance into this world were a conscious transition, a voluntary coming from another world. His origin determines also His moral relationships and His teaching. He is "above all," in dignity, in authority, in spirit; and He speaks what He has seen and heard. But in the thirty-fourth verse a new idea is presented. There it is said that He speaks the words of God, not directly, because He is from above, and speaks what He has seen and heard, but "because God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto Him." What are we to understand by this double Divine inhabitation of the humanity of Jesus? And what are we to understand by the Spirit being given without measure to the Incarnate Word?

In the Old Testament two ideas present themselves regarding the Spirit which illustrate this statement. The one is that which conveys the impression that only a limited amount of spiritual influence was communicated to prophetic men, and that from them it could be conveyed to others. In Numb. xi. 17 the Lord is represented as saying to Moses, "I will take of the Spirit which is upon thee, and will put it upon them;" and in 2 Kings ii. 9 Elisha is represented as praying that the eldest born's portion, the two-thirds of Elijah's spirit, might be bequeathed to him. The idea is a true and instructive one. The Spirit does, in point of fact, pass from man to man. It is as if in one receptive person the Divine Spirit found entrance through which He might pass to others. But another idea is also frequent in the Old Testament. The Spirit is spoken of rather as conferring a gift here and a power there than as dwelling wholly and permanently in men. One prophet had a dream, another a vision, a third legislated, a fourth wrote a psalm, a fifth founded an institution, a sixth in the power of the Spirit smote the Philistines, or, like Samson, tore a lion in pieces.

In Christ all powers are combined—power over nature, power to teach, power to reveal, power to legislate. And as in the Old Testament the Spirit passed from man to man, so in the New Testament Christ first Himself receives and then communicates to all the whole Spirit. Hence the law noticed at a subsequent stage of this Gospel that "the Spirit was not yet given; because Jesus was not yet glorified" (vii. 39). We cannot see to the bottom of the law, but the fact is apparent, that until Christ received into every part of His own humanity the fulness of the Divine Spirit, that Spirit could not fill with His fulness any man.

But why was the Spirit needed in a personality of which the Word, who had been with God and known God, was the basis? Because the humanity of Christ was a true

humanity. Being human, He must be indebted to the Spirit for all impartation to His human nature of what is Divine. The knowledge of God which the Word possesses by experience must be humanly apprehended before it can be communicated to men; and this human apprehension can only be arrived at in the case of Christ by the enlightenment of the Spirit. It was useless for Christ to declare what could not be apprehended by human faculty, and His own human faculty was the measure and test of intelligibility. By the Spirit He was enlightened to speak of things Divine; and this Spirit, interposed, as it were, between the Word and the human nature of Jesus, was as little cumbrous in its operation or perceptible in consciousness as our breath interposed between the thinking mind and the words we speak to declare our mind.

To return to the direct testimony of the Baptist, we must (1) acknowledge its value. It is the testimony of a contemporary, of whom we know from other sources that he was generally reckoned a prophet—a man of unblemished and inviolable integrity, of rugged independence, of the keenest spiritual discernment. There was no man of larger size or more heroic mould in his day. In any generation he would have been conspicuous by his spiritual stature, his fearless unworldliness, his superiority to the common weaknesses of men; and yet this man himself looks up to Jesus as standing on quite a different platform from his own, as a Being of another order. He can find no expressions strong enough to mark the difference: “I am not worthy to loose His shoe latchet;” “He that is of the earth” (that is, himself) “is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: He that cometh from heaven is above all.” He would not have used such expressions of Isaiah, of Elijah, of Moses. He knew his own dignity, and would not have set so marked a difference between himself and any other prophet. But his own very greatness was precisely what revealed to him the absolute superiority of Christ. These crowds that gathered round him—what could he do for them more than refer them to Christ? Could he propose to himself to found among them a kingdom of God? Could he ask them to acknowledge him and trust in him for spiritual life? Could he promise them His Spirit? Could he even link to himself all kinds of men, of all nationalities? Could he be the light of men, giving to all a satisfying knowledge of God and of their relation to Him? No; he was not that light, he could but bear witness of that light. And this he did, by pointing men to Jesus, not as a brother prophet, not as another great man, but as the Son of God, as One who had come down from heaven.

It is, I say, impossible that we can make nothing of such a testimony. Here was one who knew, if any man ever did, spotless holiness when he saw it; who knew what human strength and courage could accomplish; who was himself certainly among the six greatest men the world has seen; and this man, standing thus on the highest altitudes human nature can reach, looks up to Christ, and does not only admit His superiority, but shrinks, as from something blasphemous, from all comparison with Him. What is the flaw in his testimony, or why are we not accepting Christ as our light, as able to take away our sins, as willing to baptize us with the Holy Ghost?

But (2) even such testimony as John’s is not sufficient of itself to carry conviction to the reluctant. None knew better than John’s contemporaries that he was a true man, not liable to make mistakes in a matter of this kind. And his testimony to Christ did stagger them, and often held them in check, and no doubt threw a kind of undefined awe over the person of Christ; but, after all, not many believed on account of John’s testimony, and those who did were not influenced solely by his testimony, but by his work as well. They had become concerned about sin, sensitive to defilement and failure, and were thus prepared to appreciate the offers of Christ. The two voices chimed, John’s voice saying, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” the voice of their own conscience crying for the taking away of sin. It is so still. The sense of sin, the

feeling of spiritual weakness and need, the craving for God, direct the eye, and enable us to see in Christ what we do not otherwise see. We are not likely to know Christ until we know ourselves. What is the man's judgment regarding Christ worth who is not conscious of his own littleness and humbled by his own guilt? Let a man first go to school with the Baptist, let him catch something of his unworldliness and earnestness, let him become alive to his own shortcomings by at last beginning to strive after the highest things in life, and by seeking to live, not for pleasure, but for God, and his views of Christ and his relation to Him will become satisfactory and true.



The Expositor's Bible

Marcus Dods, D.D.

Gospel of John Part 1

Chapter 4

THE FIRST DISCIPLES.

“Again on the morrow John was standing, and two of his disciples; and he looked upon Jesus as He walked, and saith, Behold, the Lamb of God! And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. And Jesus turned, and beheld them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? And they said unto Him, Rabbi (which is to say, being interpreted, Master), where abidest Thou? He saith unto them, Come, and ye shall see. They came therefore and saw where He abode; and they abode with Him that day: it was about the tenth hour. One of the two that heard John speak, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He findeth first his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messiah (which is, being interpreted, Christ). He brought him unto Jesus. Jesus looked upon him, and said, Thou art Simon the son of John: thou shalt be called Cephas (which is by interpretation, Peter). On the morrow he was minded to go forth into Galilee, and he findeth Philip: and Jesus saith unto him, Follow Me. Now Philip was from Bethsaida, of the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found Him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. And Nathanael said unto him, Can any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see. Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him, and saith of him, Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile! Nathanael saith unto Him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee. Nathanael answered him, Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God; Thou art King of Israel. Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee underneath the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these. And He saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye shall see the heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.”—JOHN i. 35–51.

In the prosecution of his purpose to tell how the Incarnate Word manifested His glory to men, John proceeds to give one or two instances of the eagerness with which prepared souls welcomed Him, and of the instinctive perception with which true and open minds confessed Him Son of God and King of Israel. This paragraph is the continuation of that which begins at ver. 19 with the general title, “This is the witness of John.” We are now introduced to some of the results of John’s witness, and are shown that Christ is King, not only by official proclamation, but by the free choice of men. These instances here cited are but the first among countless numbers who in every generation have felt and owned the majesty of Christ, and who have felt irresistibly drawn to Him by a unique affinity. In the spell which His personality laid upon these first disciples, in the uninvited yet cordial and assured acknowledgments of His dignity which they felt drawn to make, we see much that is significant and illustrative of the allegiance He evokes from age to age in humble and open-minded men.

In proceeding to gather to Himself subjects who might enter into His purposes and loyally serve Him, Jesus shows a singularly many-sided adaptability and inexhaustible originality in dealing with men. Each of the five disciples here introduced is individually dealt with. “The finding of the one was not the finding of the other. For John and Andrew there was the talk with Jesus through the hours of

that never-to-be-forgotten evening; for Simon, the heart-searching word, convincing him he was known and his future read off; for Philip, a peremptory command; and for Nathanael, a gracious courtesy disarming him of prejudice, assuring him of a perfect sympathy in the breast of the Lord. Thus there are those who seek Christ, those who are brought by others to Christ, those whom Christ seeks for Himself, those who come without doubts, and those who come with doubts.”^[8]

The two men who enjoyed the signal distinction of leading the way in owning the majesty and attaching themselves to the person of Christ were Andrew and probably John who wrote this Gospel. The writer, indeed, does not name himself, but this is in accordance with his habit. The suppression of the name is an indication that he himself was the disciple spoken of, since had it been another he could have had no scruple in mentioning his name. We know also that the families of Zebedee and Jonah were partners in trade, and it was likely that the young men of the families would go in company to visit the Baptist when the fishing was slack. These two young men had already attached themselves to the Baptist; had not merely passed through the fashionable ceremony of baptism, and returned home to talk about it, but were laid hold of by John’s teaching and character, and had resolved to wait with him till the predicted Deliverer should appear.

And at length the day came when the master whom they trusted as God’s prophet suddenly checked them in their walk, laid his hand breathlessly upon them, and gazing at a passing figure, said, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” There in actual bodily presence was He for whom all ages of their people had longed; there within sound of their voice was He who could take away their sin, lift off the burden and the trouble of life, and let them know the blessedness of living. We are ever ready to think it was easy for those who saw Christ to follow Him. Could we read His sympathy and truthfulness in His face, could we hear His words addressed directly to ourselves, could we ask our own questions and have from Him personal guidance, we fancy faith would be easy. And no doubt there is a greater benediction pronounced on those who “have not seen, and yet have believed.” Still, the advantage is not wholly theirs who saw the Lord growing up among other boys, learning His trade with ordinary lads, clothed in the dress of a working man. The brothers of Jesus found it hard to believe. Besides, in giving the allegiance of the Spirit, and forming eternal alliance, it is well that the true affinities of our spirit be not disturbed by material and sensible appearances.

These two men, however, felt the spell, and “followed Jesus”—representatives of all those who, scarcely knowing what they do or what they intend, are yet drawn by a mysterious attraction to keep within sight of Him of whom they have ever been hearing, and whom all ages have sought, but who now for the first time stands clear before their sight. Without a word to their teacher or to one another, silent with wonder and excitement, they eagerly follow the passing figure. So does enquiry begin with many a soul. He who is much spoken of by all, but of whom few have personal knowledge, suddenly assumes a reality they scarcely were looking for. It is no longer the hearing of the ear, but now, whispers the soul, mine eye seeth Him. The soul for the first time feels as if some action were demanded of it; it can no longer just sit and listen to descriptions of Christ, it must arise on its own account, and for itself seek further knowledge of this unique Person.

“Then Jesus turned and saw them following,”—turned probably because He heard them following, for He suffers none to follow in vain. Sometimes it may seem as if He did; sometimes it may seem as if the best years of life were spent in following, and all to no purpose. It is not so. If some have spent years in following, and cannot

yet say that Christ has turned and made them conscious that He is responding to their search, this is because in their path lie many obstacles, all of which must be thoroughly cleared away. And no man should grudge the time and the toil that is spent on honestly clearing away whatever prevents a perfect cohesion to this eternal Friend.

The question put by Jesus to the following disciples, "What seek ye?" was the first breath of the winnowing fan which the Baptist had warned them the Messiah would use. It was not the gruff interrogation of one who would not have his retirement invaded, nor his own thoughts interrupted, but a kindly invitation to open their minds to Him. It was meant to help them to understand their own purposes, and to ascertain what they expected in following Jesus. "What seek ye?" Have you any object deeper than mere curiosity? For Christ desires to be followed intelligently, or not at all. At all times He used the winnowing fan to blow away the chaff of the great crowds that followed Him, and leave the few immovably resolute souls. So many follow because a crowd streams after Him and carries them with it; so many follow because it is a fashion, and they have no opinion of their own; so many follow experimentally, and drop off at the first difficulty; so many follow under misapprehension, and with mistaken expectations. Some who came to Him with great expectations left in shame and sorrow; some who thought to make use of Him for party ends left Him in anger when they found themselves unmasked; and one who thought skilfully to use Him for the gratification of His own selfish worldliness, discovered that there was no surer path to eternal ruin. Christ turns away none for mere slowness in apprehending what He is and what He does for sinful men. But by this question He reminds us that the vague and mysterious attraction which, like a hidden magnet, draws men to Him, must be exchanged for a clear understanding at least of what we ourselves need and expect to receive from Him. He will turn from none who, in response to His question, can truly say, We seek God, we seek holiness, we seek service with Thee, we seek Thyself.

The answer which these men returned to the question of Jesus was the answer of men who scarce knew their own minds, and were suddenly confused by being thus addressed. They therefore reply, as men thus confused commonly reply, by asking another question, "Rabbi, where dwellest Thou?" Their concern was about Him, and so far the answer was good; but it implied that they were willing to leave Him with only such information as might enable them to visit Him at some future time, and so far the answer was not the best. Still their shyness was natural, and not without reason. They had felt how the Baptist searched their soul, and of this new Teacher the Baptist himself had said he was not worthy to loose his sandal-thong. To find themselves face to face with this greatest person, the Messiah, was a trying experience indeed. The danger at this point is hesitation. Many persons fail at this point from a native reluctance to commit themselves, to feel pledged, to accept permanent responsibilities and bind themselves with indissoluble ties. They are past the stage of merely keeping Christ in view, but very little past it. The closer dealings they have had with Him have as yet led to nothing. Their fate hangs in the balance.

Out of this condition our Lord delivers these two men by His irresistible invitation, "Come and see." And well for them it was that He did so, for next day He left that part of the country, and the mere knowledge of His lodging by the Jordan would have availed them nothing; a warning to all who put themselves off with learning more about salvation before they accept it. An eagerness in acquiring knowledge *about* Christ may as effectually as any other pursuit retard us in making acquaintance with Him. It is mere trifling to be always enquiring about One who is Himself with us; the way to secure that we shall have Him when we need Him is to

go with Him now. How can we expect our difficulties to be removed while we do not adopt the one method God recognises as effectual for this purpose, fellowship with Christ? Why enquire longer about the way of salvation, and where we may find it at a future time? Christ offers His friendship now, "Come with Me, now," He says, "and for yourself enter My dwelling as a welcome friend." Can the friendship of Christ do us harm, or retard us in any good thing? May we not most reasonably fear that hesitation now may put Christ beyond our reach? We cannot tell what new influences may enter our life and set an impassable gulf between us and religion.

Sixty years after, when one of these men wrote this Gospel, he remembered as if it had been yesterday the very hour of the day when he followed Jesus into His house. His whole life seemed to date from that hour; as well it might, for what could mark a human life more deeply and lift it more surely to permanent altitude than an evening with Jesus? They felt that at last they had found a Friend with human sympathies and Divine intelligence. How eagerly must these men who had of late been thinking much of new problems, have laid all their difficulties before this master-mind, that seemed at once to comprehend all truth, and to appreciate the little obstacles that staggered them. What boundless regions of thought would His questions open up, and how entirely new an aspect would life assume under the light He shed upon it.

The astonished satisfaction they found in their first intercourse with Christ is shown in the bursting enthusiasm with which Andrew sought out his brother Simon, and summarily announced, "We have found the Christ." That is how the Gospel is propagated. The closer the tie, the more emphatic the testimony. It is what brother says to brother, husband to wife, parent to child, friend to friend, far more than what preacher says to hearer, that carries in it irresistible persuasive power. When the truth of the utterance is vouched for by the obvious gladness and purity of the life; when the finding of the Christ is obviously as *real* as the finding of a better situation and as satisfying as promotion in life, then conviction will be carried with the announcement. And he who, like Andrew, can do little himself, may, by his simple testimony and honest life, bring to Christ a Simon who may become a conspicuous power for good. The mother whose influence is confined to the four walls of her own house may lodge Christian principle in the heart of a son, who may give it currency in one form or other to the remotest corner of the earth.

The language in which Andrew announced to Simon his great fortune was simple, but, in Jewish lips, most pregnant. "We have found the Christ!" What his people had lived and longed for through all past ages, "I have found" and known. The perfect deliverance and joy which God was to bring by dwelling with His people, this at last had come. Taught to believe that all evil and disappointment and thwarting were but temporary, the Jew had waited for the true life of man—a life in the presence and favour and fellowship of the Highest. This was to come in the Messiah, and Andrew had found this. He had entered into life—all darkness and shadow were gone; the light shone round him, making all things bright, and piercing into eternity with clear radiance.

The words with which Jesus welcomes Simon are remarkable: "Thou art Simon, son of John: thou shalt be called Cephas." This greeting yields its meaning when we recall the character of the person addressed. Simon was hot-headed, impulsive, rash, unstable. When his name was mentioned on the Lake of Galilee there rose before the mind a man of generous nature, frank and good-hearted, but a man whose uncertainty and hastiness had brought him and his into many troubles, and with whom, perhaps, it was well to have no very binding connection in trade or in the family. What must the thoughts of such a man have been when he was told that the

Messiah was present, and that the Messianic kingdom was standing with open gates? Must he not have felt that this might concern others,—decent steady men like Andrew,—but not himself? Must he not have felt that instead of being a strength to the new kingdom he would prove a weakness? Would not that happen now which so often before had happened—that any society he joined he was sure to injure with his hasty tongue or rash hand? Other men might enter the kingdom and serve it well, but he must remain without.

Coming in this mood, he is greeted with words which seem to say to him, I know the character identified with the name “Simon, son of John;” I know all you fear, all the remorseful thoughts that possess you; I know how you wish now you were a man like Andrew, and could offer yourself as a serviceable subject of this new kingdom. But no! thou art Simon; nothing can change that, and such as you are you are welcome; but “thou shalt be called Rock,” Peter. The men standing round, and knowing Simon well, might turn away to hide a smile; but Simon knew the Lord had found him, and uttered the very word which could bind him for ever to Him. And the event showed how true this appellation was. Simon became Peter,—bold to stand for the rest, and beard the Sanhedrim. By believing that this new King had a place for him in His kingdom, and could give him a new character which should fit him for service, he became a new man, strong where he had been weak, helpful and no longer dangerous to the cause he loved.

Such are the encouragements with which the King of men welcomes the diffident. He gives men the consciousness that they are known; He begets the consciousness that it is not with sin in the abstract He takes to do, but with sinners He can name, and whose weaknesses are known to Him. But He begets this consciousness that we may trust Him when He gives us assurance that a new character awaits us and a serviceable place in His kingdom. He assures the most despondent that for them also a useful life is possible.

As Andrew, in the exuberant joy of his discovery of the Messiah, had first imparted the news to his own brother Simon, so Philip, when invited by Jesus to accompany him to Galilee, sought to bring with him his friend Nathanael Bartholomew (son of Tolmai). This was one of the devout Jews who had long been wondering who that mysterious Personage should be of whom all the prophets had spoken, and for whom the world waited that He might complete it. The news that He was found seemed only too good to be true. He had come too easily and unostentatiously, and from so unlooked-for a quarter, “Can any good come out of Nazareth?” Good men, as well as others, have their narrow views and illiberal prejudices, and mark off in their own minds as hopeless and barren whole religions, sects, or countries out of which God determines to bring that which is for the healing of the nations. To rise above such prejudices we must refuse to accept current rumours, traditional opinions, proverbial or neat dicta which seem to settle a matter; we must conscientiously examine for ourselves,—as Philip says, “Come and see.” He instinctively knew how useless it was to reason with men about Christ’s claims so long as they were not in His presence. One look, one word from Himself will go further to persuade a man of His majesty and love than all that any one else can say. To make Christ known is the best way to prove the truth of Christianity.

The shade of the fig-tree is the natural summer-house or arbour under which Eastern families delight to take their meals or their mid-day rest. Nathanael had used the dense foliage of its large and thick leaves as a screen behind which he found retirement for devotional purposes. It is in such absolute seclusion, retirement, and solitude that a man shows his true self. It was here Nathanael had uttered himself to

his Father who seeth in secret; here he had found liberty to pour out his true and deepest cravings. His guilelessness had been proved by his carrying into his retirement the same simple and unreserved godliness he professed abroad. And he is astonished to find that the eye of Jesus had penetrated this leafy veil, and had been a witness to his prayers and vows. He feels that he is known best at the very point in which he had most carefully contrived concealment, and he recognises that no one is more likely to be the fulfiller of his prayers than that same Person who has manifestly been somehow present at them and heard them.

To the man of prayer a suitable promise is given, as to the man of uncertain character a promise fitting his need had come. Under his fig-tree Nathanael had often been in sympathy with his forefather Jacob in his great experience of God's attentiveness to prayer. When Jacob fled from home and country, a criminal and outcast, he no doubt felt how completely he had himself fallen into the pit he had digged. Instead of the comforts of a well-provided household, he had to lie down like a wild beast with nothing between him and the earth, with nothing between him and the sky, with nothing but an evil conscience to speak to him, and no face near save the haunting faces of those he had wronged. A more miserable, remorseful, abandoned-looking creature rarely lay down to sleep; but before he rose he had learned that God knew where he was, and was with him; that on that spot which he had chosen as a hiding, because no one could find him, and scarcely his own dog track him to it, he was waited for and met with a loving welcome by Him whom he had chiefly wronged. He saw heaven opened, and that from the lowest, most forlorn spot of earth to the highest and brightest point of heaven there is a close connection and an easy, friendly communication. If Jesus, thought Nathanael, could reopen heaven in that style, He would be worthy of the name of King of Israel. But he is now to learn that He will do far more; that henceforth it was to be no visionary ladder, swept away by the dawn, which was to lead up to heaven, but that in Jesus God Himself is permanently made over to us; that He, in His one, visible person, unites heaven and earth, God and man; that there is an ever-living union between the highest height of heaven and the lowest depth of earth. Profound and wide as the humanity of Christ, to the most forgotten and remote outcast, to the most sunken and despairing of men, do God's love and care and helpfulness now come; high and glorious as the divinity of Christ may the hopes of all men now rise. He who understands the Incarnation of the Son of God has a surer ground of faith, and a richer hope and a straighter access to heaven, than if the ladder of Jacob stood at his bed-head and God's angels were ministering to him.

[8] See Mr. Reith's rich Handbook on *The Gospel of John* (Clark).



The Expositor's Bible

Marcus Dods, D.D.

Gospel of John Part 1

Chapter 5

THE FIRST SIGN—THE MARRIAGE IN CANA.

“And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there: and Jesus also was bidden, and His disciples, to the marriage. And when the wine failed, the mother of Jesus saith unto Him, They have no wine. And Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come. His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it. Now there were six waterpots of stone set there after the Jews’ manner of purifying, containing two or three firkins apiece. Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. And He saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the ruler of the feast. And they bare it. And when the ruler of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and knew not whence it was (but the servants which had drawn the water knew), the ruler of the feast calleth the bridegroom, and saith unto him, Every man setteth on first the good wine; and when men have drunk freely, then that which is worse: thou hast kept the good wine until now. This beginning of His signs did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed on Him.”—JOHN ii. 1–11.

Having recorded the testimony borne to Jesus by the Baptist, and having cited instances in which the overmastering personality of Jesus elicited from simple-hearted and godly men the acknowledgment of His majesty, John now proceeds to relate the homely incident which gave occasion to the first public act in which His greatness was exhibited. Testimony comes first; inward and intuitive recognition of the greatness declared by that testimony second; perception that His works are beyond the reach of human power comes last. But in the case of these first disciples, while this order was indeed maintained, there was no great interval between each step in it. It was but the “third day” after they had in their hearts felt His impressiveness that He “manifested forth His glory” to them in this first sign.

From the place where they first met Him to Cana of Galilee was a distance of twenty-one or twenty-two miles.^[9] Thither Jesus repaired to be present at a marriage. His mother was already there, and when Jesus arrived, accompanied by His new-found friends, all were invited to remain and share in the festivities. Owing probably to this unexpected increase to the number of the guests, the wine begins to fail. Among the minor trials of life there are few which produce more awkwardness than the failure to provide suitable entertainment for a specially festive occasion. Mary, with the practised eye of a woman whose business it was to observe such matters, and perhaps with a near relative’s charge and liberty in the house, perceives the predicament and whispers to her Son, “They have no wine.” This she said, not to hint that Jesus would do well to retire with His too many friends, nor that He would cover the lack of wine by brilliant conversation, but because she had ever been accustomed to turn to this Son in all her difficulties, and now that she sees Him acknowledged by others her own faith in Him is stimulated.

Considering the simple manner in which He had walked in, and taken His place among the other guests, and partaken of the refreshment, and joined in the conversation and mirth of the day, it would seem more likely that she should have

had no definite expectation as to the way in which He would extricate the host from his difficulty, but only turned to Him on whom she was accustomed to lean. But His answer shows that he felt Himself urged to action of some kind by her appeal; and her instructions to the servants to do whatever He ordered indicates that she definitely expected Him to relieve the embarrassment. How He would do so she could not know, and had she definitely expected a miracle she would probably have thought the help of the servants unnecessary.

But though Mary did not anticipate a miracle, it had already occurred to our Lord that this was a fit occasion for manifesting His kingly power. His words grate somewhat on the ear, but this is partly due to the difficulty of translating fine shades of meaning, and to the impossibility of conveying in any words that modification of meaning which is given in the tone of voice and expression of face, and which arises also from the familiarity and affection of speaker and hearer. In His use of the word "Woman" there is really no harshness, this being the ordinary Greek term of address to females of all classes and relationships, and being commonly used with the utmost reverence and affection. The phrase "What have I to do with thee?" is a needlessly strong translation, although it might be difficult to find a better. It "implies a certain resistance to a demand in itself, or to something in the way of urging it;" but might be quite sufficiently rendered by such an expression as "I have other thoughts than thine." There is nothing approaching angry resentment at Mary's inviting His aid, nothing like repudiation of any claim she might have upon Him, but only a calm and gentle intimation that in the present instance she must allow Him to act in His own way. The whole phrase might be rendered, "Mother, you must let Me act here in My own way: and My time for action is not yet come." She herself was perfectly satisfied with the answer. Knowing her Son well, every gleam of His expression, every tone of His voice, she recognised that He meant to do something, and accordingly left the matter in His hands, giving orders to the servants to do whatever He required.

But there was more in the words of Jesus than even Mary understood. There were thoughts in His mind which not even she could fathom, and which had He explained them to her then she could not have sympathized with. For these words, "Mine hour is not yet come," which she took to be the mere intimation of a few minutes' delay before granting her request, became the most solemn watchword of His life, marking the stages by which He drew near to His death. "They sought to take Him, but no man laid hands on Him, because His hour was not yet come." So again and again. From the first He knew what would come of His manifesting His glory among men. From the first He knew that His glory could not be fully manifested till He hung upon the cross.

Can we wonder, then, that when He recognised in His mother's request the invitation from God, though not from her, that He should work His first miracle and so begin to manifest His glory, He should have said, "My thoughts are not yours; Mine hour is not yet come"? With compassion He looked upon her through whose soul a sword was to pass; with filial tenderness He could only look with deep pity on her who was now the unconscious instrument of summoning Him to that career which He knew must end in death. *He* saw in this simple act of furnishing the wedding guests with wine a very different significance from that which she saw. It was here at this wedding feast table that He felt Himself impelled to take the step which altered the whole character of His life.

For from a private person He became by His first miracle a public and marked character with a definite career. "To live henceforth in the vortex of a whirlwind; to

have no leisure so much as to eat, no time to pray save when others slept, to be the gazing-stock of every eye, the common talk of every tongue; to be followed about, to be thronged and jostled, to be gaped upon, to be hunted up and down by curious vulgar crowds; to be hated, and detested, and defamed, and blasphemed; to be regarded as a public enemy; to be watched and spied upon and trapped and taken as a notorious criminal”—is it possible to suppose that Christ was indifferent to all this, and that without shrinking He stepped across the line which marked the threshold of His public career?

And this was the least of it, that in this act He became a public and marked character. The glory that here shed a single ray into the rustic home of Cana must grow to that dazzling and perfect noon which shone from the cross to the remotest corner of earth. The same capacity and willingness to bless mankind which here in a small and domestic affair brought relief to His embarrassed friends, must be adapted to all the needs of men, and must undauntedly go forward to the utmost of sacrifice. He who is true King of men must flinch from no responsibility, from no pain, from no utter self-abandonment to which the needs of men may call Him. And Jesus knew this: in those quiet hours and long, untroubled days at Nazareth He had taken the measure of this world's actual state, and of what would be required to lift men out of selfishness and give them reliance upon God. "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me"—this was even now present to His mind. His glory was the glory of absolute self-sacrifice, and He knew what that involved. His kingship was the rendering of service no other could render.

The *manner* in which the miracle was performed deserves attention. Christ does all while the servants seem to do all. The servants fill in the water and the servants draw off the wine, and there is no apparent exercise of Divine power, no mysterious words of incantation uttered over the waterpots, not so much as a command given that the water should become wine. What is seen by the spectators is men at work, not God creating out of nothing. The means seem to be human, the result is found to be Divine. Jesus says, "Fill the water pots with water," and they *filled* them; and filled them not as if their doing so were a mere form, and as if they would leave room for Christ to add to their work; no, they filled them up to the brim. Again He says, "Draw out now, and bear to the governor of the feast," and they *bore*. They knew very well they had only put in water, and they knew that to offer water to the governor of a marriage feast would be to insure their own punishment; but they did not hesitate. There seemed every reason why they should refuse to do this, or why they should at least ask some explanation or security that Jesus would bear the evil consequences; but there was one reason on the other side which outweighed all these—they had the command of Him whom they had been ordered to obey. And so, where reasoning would have led them to folly, obedient faith makes them fellow-workers in a miracle. They took their place and served, and they who serve Christ and do His will must do great things; for Christ wills nothing that is useless, futile, not worth doing. But this is how we are tried: we are commanded to do things which seem unreasonable, and which we have no natural ability to do. We are commanded to repent, and are yet told that repentance is the gift of Christ; we are commanded to come to Christ, and are at the same time assured that we cannot come except the Father draw us; we are commanded to be perfectly holy, and yet we know that as the leopard cannot change his spots, nor one of us add a cubit to his stature, so neither can we put away the sins that stain our souls and walk uprightly before God. And yet these commands are plainly given us, not only to make us feel our helplessness, but to be performed. We feel our inability, we may say it is unreasonable to demand from us what we cannot perform, to require that out of the thin and watery substance of our human souls we should produce wine that may be poured out as an offering

on the holy altar of God; but this is not unreasonable. It is our part in simplicity to obey God; what is commanded we are to do, and while we work He Himself will also work. He may do so in no visible way, as Christ here did nothing visibly, but He will be with us, effectually working. As the will of Christ pervaded the water so that it was endowed with new qualities, so can His will pervade our souls, with every other part of His creation, and make them conformable to His purpose. "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it;" this is the secret of miracle-working. Do it, though you seem to be but wasting your strength and laying yourself open to the scorn of onlookers; do it, though in yourself there is no ability to effect what you are aiming at; do it wholly, up to the brim, as if you were the only worker, as if there were no God to come after you and supply your deficiencies, but as if any shortcoming on your part would be fatal; do not stand waiting for God to work, for it is only in you and by you that He performs His work among men.

The significance of this incident is manifold. First, it gives us the key to the miracles of our Lord. It has become the fashion to depreciate miracles, and it is often thought that they hamper the gospel and obscure the true claim of Christ. It is often felt that so far from the miracles verifying Christ's claim to be the Son of God, they are the greatest obstacle to His acceptance. This is, however, to misunderstand their significance. The miracles unquestionably formed a most important element in Christ's life; and, if so, they must have served an important purpose; and to wish them away just because they are so important and make so large a demand upon faith seems to me preposterous. To wish them away precisely because they alter the very essence of the religion of Christ, and give it that very power which through all past ages it has exerted, seems unreasonable.

When the Jews discussed His claims among themselves or with Him, the power to work miracles was always taken into account as weighing heavily in His favour. He Himself distinctly stated that the crowning condemnation of those who rejected His claims arose from the circumstance that He had done among them the works which none other man had done. He challenges them to deny that it was by the finger of God that He wrought these works. After His withdrawal from earth the miracle of the Resurrection was still appealed to as the convincing proof that He was all He had given Himself out for. There can be no doubt, therefore, that the power of working miracles was one great evidence of the Divine mission of Christ.

But though this is so, we are not on that account warranted in saying that the only purpose for which He wrought miracles was to win men's belief in His mission. On the contrary, we are told that it was one of His temptations, a temptation constantly resisted by Him, to use His power for this object without any other motive. It was the reproach He cast upon the people that except they saw signs and wonders they would not believe. He would never work a miracle merely for the sake of manifesting His glory. Whenever the unsympathetic, ignorant crowd clamoured for a sign; whenever with ill-concealed dislike they cried, "How long dost Thou make us to doubt? Show us a sign from heaven, that we may believe," He was silent. To create a mere compulsory consent in minds which had no sympathy with Him was never a sufficient motive. Was there a sick child tossing in fever, was there a blind beggar by the roadside, was there a hungry crowd, was there even the joy of a feast interrupted: in these He could find a worthy occasion for a miracle; but never did He work a miracle merely for the sake of removing the doubts of reluctant men. Where there was not even the beginning of faith miracles were useless. He could not work miracles in some places because of their unbelief.

What then was the motive of Christ's miracles? He was, as these first disciples

owned Him, the King of God's kingdom among men: He was the ideal Man, the new Adam, the true Source of human goodness, health, and power. He came to do us good, and the Spirit of God filled His human nature to its utmost capacity, that it might do all that man can do. Having these powers, He could not but use them for men. Having power to heal, He could not but heal, irrespective of the result which the miracle might have on the faith of those who saw it; nay, He could not but heal, though He straitly charged the healed person to let no man know what had been done. His miracles were His kingly acts, by which He suggested what man's true life in God's kingdom should be and will be. They were the utterance of what was in Him, the manifestation of His glory, the glory of One who came to utter the Father's heart to His strayed children. They expressed good-will to men; and to the spiritual eye of a John they became "signs" of spiritual wonders, symbols and pledges of those greater works and eternal blessings which Jesus came to bestow. The miracles revealed the Divine compassion, the grace and helpfulness that were in Christ, and led men to trust Him for all their needs.

We must, therefore, beware of falling into the error that lies at either extreme. We must neither, on the one hand, suppose that Christ's miracles were wrought solely for the purpose of establishing His claim to be God's Viceroy on earth; nor, on the other hand, are we to suppose that the marvels of beneficence by which He was known did nothing to prove His claim or promote His kingdom. The poet writes because he is a poet, and not to convince the world that he is a poet; yet by writing he does convince the world. The benevolent man acts just as Christ did when He seemed to lay His finger on His lips and warned the healed person to make no mention of this kind act to anyone; and therefore all who do discover his actions know that he is really charitable. The act that a man does in order that he may be recognised as a good and benevolent person exhibits his love of recognition much more strikingly than his benevolence; and it is because the miracles of Christ were wrought from the purest and most self-denying compassion that ever explored and bound up the wounds of men, that we acknowledge Him as incontestably our King.

2. In what respects, then, did this first miracle manifest the glory of Christ? What was there in it to stir the thought and attract the adoration and trust of the disciples? Was it worthy to be the medium of conveying to their minds the first ideas of His glory they were to cherish? And what ideas must these have been? The first impression they must have received from the miracle was, no doubt, simple amazement at the power which so easily and unostentatiously turned the water into wine. This Person, they must have felt, stood in a peculiar relation to Nature. In fact, what John laid as the foundation of his Gospel,—that the Christ who came to redeem was He by whom all things were at first made,—Jesus also advanced as the first step in His revelation of Himself. He appears as the Source of life, whose will pervades all things. He comes, not as a stranger or interloper who has no sympathy with existing things, but as the faithful Creator, who loves all that He has made, and can use all things for the good of men. He is at home in the world, and enters physical nature as its King, who can use it for His high ends. Never before has He wrought a miracle, but in this first command to Nature there is no hesitation, no experimenting, no anxiety, but the easy confidence of a Master. He is either Himself the Creator of the world He comes to restore to worth and peace, or He is the Delegate of the Creator. We see in this first miracle that Christ is not an alien or an usurper, but one who has already the closest connection with us and with all things. We receive assurance that in Him God is present.

3. But it was not only the Creator's power which was shown in this miracle, but some hint was given of the ends for which that power would be used by Christ.

Perhaps the disciples who had known and admired the austere life of the Baptist would expect that He whom the Baptist proclaimed as greater than himself would be greater in the same line, and would reveal His glory by a sublime abstemiousness. They had confessed Him to be the Son of God, and might naturally expect to find in Him an independence of earthly joys. They had followed Him as the king of Israel; was His kingly glory to find a suitable sphere in the little family difficulties that poverty begets? It is almost a shock to our own ideas of our Lord to think of Him as one of a marriage party; to hear Him uttering the ordinary salutations, civilities, and enquiries of a friendly and festive gathering; to see Him standing by while others are the principal figures in the room. And we know that many who had opportunity to observe His habits could never understand or reconcile themselves to His easy familiarity with all kinds of people, and to His freedom in partaking in mirthful scenes and hilarious entertainments.

And just because of this difficulty we find in reconciling religion with joy, God with nature, does Christ reveal His glory first at a marriage-feast, not in the temple, not in the synagogue, not by taking His disciples apart to teach them to pray, but at a festive gathering, that thus they may recognise in Him the Lord of all human life, and see that His work of redemption is co-extensive with human experience. He comes among us, not to crush or pour contempt on human feelings, but to exalt them by sharing in them; not to show that it is possible to live separate from all human sympathies, but to deepen and intensify them; not to do away with the ordinary business and social relations of life, but to sanctify them. He comes sharing in all pure feelings and joys, sanctioning all natural relationships; Himself human, with interest in all human interests; not a mere spectator or censor of human affairs, but Himself a man implicated in things human. He shows us the folly of fancying that God looks with an austere and morose eye upon outbursts of human affection and joy, and teaches us that to be holy as He is holy we are not required to abandon the ordinary affairs of life, and that however we make them the apology for worldliness, it is not the necessary duties or relations of life that prevent our being Christlike, but these are the very material in which His glory may be most clearly seen, the soil in which must grow and ripen all Christian graces and fruits of righteousness.

This, then, was the glory Christ wished His disciples first of all to see. He was to be their King, not by drilling men to fight for Him, nor by interrupting the natural order and upsetting the established ways of men, but by entering into these with a gladdening, purifying, elevating spirit. His glory was not to be confined to a palace or to a small circle of courtiers, or to one particular department of activity, but was to be found irradiating all human life in its most ordinary forms. He came, indeed, to make all things new, but the new creation was the fulfilment of the original idea: it was not to be achieved by thwarting nature, nor by a one-sided development of some elements of nature, but by guiding the whole to its original destination, by lifting the whole into harmony with God. We see the glory of Christ, and accept Him as our Ruler and Redeemer, because we see in Him perfect sympathy with all that is human.

4. While enjoying the bounty of Christ at the marriage feast, John cannot have yet understood all that was involved in His Master's purpose to bring new life and happiness to this world of men. Afterwards, no doubt, he saw how appropriately this miracle took the first place, and through it read his Lord's own thoughts about His whole work on earth. For it is impossible that Christ Himself should not have had His own thoughts about the significance of this miracle. He had, during the previous six weeks, passed through a time of violent mental disturbance and of supreme spiritual exaltation. The measureless task laid upon Him had become visible to Him.

Already He was aware that only through His death could the utmost of blessing be imparted to men. Is it possible that while He first put forth His power to restore the joy of these wedding guests, He should not have seen in the wine a symbol of the blood He was to shed for the refreshment and revival of men? The Baptist, whose mind was nourished with Old Testament ideas, called Christ the Bridegroom, and His people the Bride. Must not Jesus also have thought of those who believed in Him as His bride, and must not the very sight of a marriage have set His thoughts working regarding His whole relation to men? So that in His first miracle He no doubt saw a summary of His whole work. In this first manifestation of His glory there is, to Himself at least, a reminder that only by His death will that glory be perfected. Without Him, as He saw, the joy of this wedding feast had been brought to an untimely close; and without His free outpouring of His life for men there could be no presenting of men to God unblemished and blameless, no fulfilment of those high hopes of mankind that nourish pure characters and noble deeds, but a swift and dreary extinction of even natural joys. It is to the marriage supper of the *Lamb*, of Him who was slain, and has redeemed us by His blood, that we are invited. It is the "Lamb's wife" that John saw adorned as a bride for her Husband. And whosoever would sit down at that feast which consummates the experience of this life, terminating all its vacillation of trust and love, and which opens eternal and unlimited joy to the people of Christ, must wash and make white his garments in this blood. He must not shrink from the closest fellowship with the purifying love of Christ.

5. His disciples, when they saw His power and His goodness in this miracle, felt more than ever that He was the rightful King. They "believed on Him." To us this first of signs is merged in the last, in His death. The joy, the self-sacrifice, the holiness, the strength and beauty of human character which that death has produced in the world, is the great evidence which enables many now to believe in Him. The fact is indubitable. The intelligent secular historian, who surveys the rise and growth of European nations, counts the death of Christ among the most vital and influential of powers for good. It has touched all things with change, and been the source of endless benefit to men. Are we then to repudiate Him or to acknowledge Him? Are we to act like the master of the feast, who enjoyed the good wine without asking where it came from; or are we to own ourselves debtors to the actual Creator of our happiness? If the disciples believed on Him when they saw Him furnish these wedding guests with wine, shall we not believe, who know that through all these ages He has furnished the pained and the poor with hope and consolation, the desolate and broken-hearted with restoring sympathy, the outcast with the knowledge of God's love, the sinner with pardon, with heaven, and with God? Is not the glory He showed at this marriage in Cana precisely what still attracts us to Him with confidence and affection? Can we not wholly trust this Lord who has a perfect sympathy guiding His Divine power, who brings the presence of God into all the details of human life, who enters into all our joys and all our sorrows, and is ever watchful to anticipate our every need, and supply it out of His inexhaustible and all-sufficient fulness? Happy they who know His heart as His mother knew it, and are satisfied to name their want and leave it with Him.

[9] Modern topography inclines to identify this Cana, not, as formerly, with Kafr-Kenna, but with Kânet-el-Jelil, some six miles N.E. of Nazareth. It is called Cana of Galilee to distinguish it from Cana in Asher, S.E. from Tyre (Joshua xix. 28).



The Expositor's Bible

Marcus Dods, D.D.

Gospel of John Part 1

Chapter 6

THE CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE.

“After this He went down to Capernaum, He, and His mother, and His brethren, and His disciples: and there they abode not many days. And the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: and He made a scourge of cords, and cast all out of the temple, both the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the changers’ money, and overthrew their tables; and to them that sold the doves He said, Take these things hence; make not My Father’s house a house of merchandise. His disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of Thine house shall eat me up. The Jews therefore answered and said unto Him, What sign showest Thou unto us, seeing that Thou doest these things? Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. The Jews therefore said, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt Thou raise it up in three days? But He spake of the temple of His body. When therefore He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He spake this; and they believed the Scripture, and the word which Jesus had said.”—JOHN ii. 12–22.

Whether the Nazareth family returned from Cana to their own town before going down to Capernaum, John does not inform us. Neither are we told why they went to Capernaum at all at this time. It may have been in order to join one of the larger caravans going up to Jerusalem for the approaching Feast. Not only the disciples, some of whom had their homes on the lake-side, accompanied Jesus, but also His mother and His brothers. The manner in which the brothers are spoken of in connection with His mother suggests that He and they bore to her the same relation. They remained in Capernaum “not many days,” because the Passover was at hand. Having come to Jerusalem, and appearing there for the first time since His baptism, He performed several miracles. These John omits, and selects as more significant and worthy of record one authoritative act.

The circumstances which occasioned this act were familiar to the Jerusalem Jew. The exigencies of Temple worship had bred a flagrant abuse. Worshippers coming from remote parts of the Holy Land, and from countries beyond, found it a convenience to be able to purchase on the spot the animals used in sacrifice, and the material for various offerings—salt, meal, oil, frankincense. Traders were not slow to supply this demand, and vying with one another they crept nearer and nearer to the sacred precincts, until some, under pretence perhaps of driving in an animal for sacrifice, made a sale within the outer court. This court had an area of about fourteen acres, and was separated from the inner court by a wall breast high, and bearing intimations which forbade the encroachment of Gentiles on pain of death. Round this outer court ran marble colonnades, richly ornamented and supported by four rows of pillars, and roofed with cedar, affording ample shade to the traders.

There were not only cattle-dealers and sellers of pigeons, but also money-changers; for every Jew had to pay to the Temple treasury an annual tax of half a shekel, and this tax could be paid only in the sacred currency. No foreign coin, with its emblem

of submission to an alien king, was allowed to pollute the Temple. Thus there came to be need of money-changers, not only for the Jew who had come up to the feast from a remote part of the empire, but even for the inhabitant of Palestine, as the Roman coinage had displaced the shekel in ordinary use.

There might seem, therefore, to be room to say much in favour of this convenient custom. At any rate, it was one of those abuses which, while they may shock a fresh and unsophisticated mind, are allowed both because they contribute to public convenience and because they have a large pecuniary interest at their back. In point of fact, however, the practice gave rise to lamentable consequences. Cattle-dealers and money-changers have always been notorious for making more than their own out of their bargains, and facts enough are on record to justify our Lord calling this particular market “a den of thieves.” The poor were shamefully cheated, and the worship of God was hindered and impoverished instead of being facilitated and enriched. And even although this traffic had been carried on under careful supervision, and on unimpeachable principles, still it was unseemly that the worshipper who came to the Temple seeking quiet and fellowship with God should have to push his way through the touts of the dealers, and have his devotional temper dissipated by the wrangling and shouting of a cattle market. Yet although many must have lamented this, no one had been bold enough to rebuke and abolish the glaring profanation.

Jesus on entering the Temple finds Himself in the midst of this incongruous scene—the sounds and movements of a market, the loud and eager exclamations of competing traders, the bustle of selecting one animal out of a flock, the loud talk and laughter of the idle groups of onlookers. Jesus cannot stand it. Zeal for the honour of His Father’s house possesses Him. The Temple claims Him as its vindicator from abuse. Nowhere can He more appropriately assert His authority as Messiah. Out of the cords lying about He quickly knots together a formidable scourge, and silently, leaving the public conscience to justify His action, He proceeds single-handed to drive out cattle and traders together. A scene of violence ensued,—the cattle rushing hither and thither, the owners trying to preserve their property, the money-changers holding their tables as Jesus went from one to another upsetting them, the scattered coin scrambled for; and over all the threatening scourge and the commanding eye of the Stranger. Never on any other occasion did our Lord use violence.

The audacity of the act has few parallels. To interfere in the very Temple with any of its recognized customs was in itself a claim to be King in Israel. Were a stranger suddenly to appear in the lobby of the House of Commons, and by sheer dignity of demeanour, and the force of integrity, to rectify an abuse of old standing involving the interests of a wealthy and privileged class, it could not create a greater sensation. The Baptist might be with Him, cowering the truculent with his commanding eye; but there was no need of the Baptist: the action of Christ awakening conscience in the men themselves was enough to quell resistance.

No doubt Jesus began His work at the house of God because He knew that the Temple was the real heart of the nation; that it was belief in God which was their strength and hope, and that the loss of that belief, and the consequent irreverence and worldliness, were the most dangerous features of Jewish society. The state of matters He found in the Temple could not have been tolerated had the people really believed God was present in the Temple.

Such an act could not pass without being criticised. It would be keenly discussed that evening in Jerusalem. At every table it would be the topic of conversation, and a

most serious one wherever men in authority were meeting. Many would condemn it as a piece of pharisaic ostentation. If He is a reformer, why does He not turn His attention to the licentiousness of the people? Why show such extravagant and unseemly zeal about so innocent a custom when flagrant immoralities abound? Why not spend His zeal in clearing out from the land the polluting foreigner? Such charges are easy. No man can do everything, least of all can he do everything at once. And yet the advocate of temperance is twitted with his negligence of other causes which are perhaps as necessary; and he who pleads for foreign missions is reminded that we have heathen at home. These are the carping criticisms of habitual fault-finders, and of men who have no hearty desire for the advancement of what is good.

Others, again, who approved the act could not reconcile themselves to the manner of it. Might it not have been enough to have pointed out the abuse, and to have made a strong representation to the authorities? Was it fair to step in and usurp the authority of the Sanhedrim or Temple officials? Was it consistent with prophetic dignity to drive out the offenders with His own hand? Even those most friendly to Him may have felt a little jarred as they saw Him with uplifted scourge and flaming eyes violently driving before Him men and beasts. But they remembered that it was written, "The zeal of Thine house will consume Me." They remembered perhaps how the most popular king of Israel had danced before the ark, to the scandal indeed of dull-souled conventionalists, but with the approval of all clear-seeing and spiritually-judging men. They might also have remembered how the last of their prophecies had said, "Behold, the Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to His temple. But who may abide the day of His coming, and who shall stand when He appeareth?"

This zeal at once explained and justified His action. Some abuses may be reformed by appeal to the constituted authorities; others can be abolished only by the blazing indignation of a righteous soul who cannot longer endure the sight. This zeal, conquering all consideration of consequences and regard to appearances, acts as a cleansing fire, sweeping before it what is offensive. It has always its own risks to run: the authorities at Jerusalem never forgave Jesus this first interference. By reforming an abuse they should never have allowed, He damaged them in the eyes of the people, and they could never forget it. Zeal also runs the risk of acting indiscreetly and taking too much upon it. In itself zeal is a good thing, but it does not exist "in itself." It exists in a certain character, and where the character is imperfect or dangerous the zeal is imperfect or dangerous. The zeal of the proud or selfish man is mischievous, the zeal of the ignorant fraught with disaster. Still, with all risks, give us by all means rather the man who is eaten up, possessed and carried away, by a passionate sympathy with the oppressed and neglected, or with unquenchable zeal for rectitude and honourable dealing or for the glory of God, than the man who can stand and be a spectator of wrong because it is no business of his to see that injustice be withstood, who can connive at unrighteous practices because their correction is troublesome, invidious, hazardous. He who lays a sudden hand on wrong-doing may have no legal authority to plead in his defence when challenged, but to all good men such an act justifies itself. It was a similar zeal which at all times governed Christ. He could not stand by and wash His hands of other men's sins. It was this which brought Him to the cross, this which in the first place brought Him to this world at all. He had to interfere. Zeal for His father's glory, zeal for God and man, possessed Him.

It was therefore no concern of Jesus to make Himself very intelligible to those who could not understand the action itself and demanded a sign. They did not understand His answer; and it was not intended they should. Frequently our Lord's answers are

enigmatical. Men have opportunity to stumble over them, if they will. For frequently they asked foolish questions, which admitted only of such answers. The present question, "What sign showest Thou unto us, seeing that Thou doest these things?" was absurd. It was to ask for a light to see light with, a sign of a sign. His zeal for God that carried the crowd before it, and swept God's house clean of the profane, was the best proof of His authority and Messiahship. But there was one sign which He could promise them without violating His principle to do no miracle merely for the sake of convincing reluctant minds. There was one sign which formed an integral part of His work; a sign which He must work, irrespective of its effect on their opinion of Him—the sign of His own Resurrection. And therefore, when they ask Him for a sign of His authority to reform the abuses of the Temple, He promises them this sign, that He will raise the Temple again when they destroy it. If He can give them a Temple He has authority in it. "Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

What did He mean by this enigmatical saying, which not even His disciples understood till long afterwards? We cannot doubt that in their resistance to His first public act, righteous and necessary, and welcome to all right-hearted men, as it was, He plainly saw the symptom of a deep-seated hatred of all reform, which would lead them on to reject His whole work. He had meditated much on the tone of the authorities, on the religious state of His country—what young man of thirty with anything in him has not done so? He had made up His mind that He would meet with opposition at every point, and that while a faithful few would stand by Him, the leaders of the people would certainly resist and destroy Him. Here in His very first act He is met by the spirit of hatred, and jealousy, and godlessness which was at last to compass His death. But His rejection He also knew was to be the signal for the downfall of the nation. In destroying Him He knew they were destroying themselves, their city, their Temple. As Daniel had long ago said, "The Messiah shall be cut off ... and the people of a prince who shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary."

To Himself therefore His words had a very definite meaning: Destroy this Temple, as you certainly will by disowning My authority and resisting My acts of reform, and at length crucifying Me, and in three days I will raise it. As by denying My authority and crucifying My Person you destroy this house of My Father, so by My resurrection will I put men in possession of God's true dwelling-place, and introduce a new and spiritual worship. "It is in Christ's person this great drama is enacted. The Messiah perishes: the Temple falls. The Messiah lives again: the true Temple rises on the ruins of the symbolical temple. For in the kingdom of God there is no simple restoration. Every revival is at the same time an advance" (Godet). A living Temple is better than a Temple of stone. Human nature itself, possessed and inspired by the Divine, that is the true Temple of God.

This sign was in two years given to them. As Jesus drew His last breath on the cross the veil of the Temple was rent. There was no longer anything to veil; the unapproachable glory was for ever gone. The Temple in which God had so long dwelt was now but a shell, mocking and pathetic in the extreme, as the clothes of a departed friend, or as the familiar dwelling that remains itself the same but changed to us for ever. The Jews in crucifying the Messiah had effectually destroyed their Temple. A few years more and it was in ruins, and has been so ever since. That building which had once the singular, wonderful dignity of being the spot where God was specially to be found and to be worshipped, and where He dwelt upon earth in a way apprehensible by men, was from the hour of Christ's death doomed to vacuity and destruction.

But in three days a new and better Temple was raised in Christ's body, glorified by the presence of the indwelling God. Forty and six years had the Jews spent in rearing the magnificent pile that astonished and awed their conquerors. They had thus themselves rebuilt more splendidly the Temple of Solomon. But to rebuild the Temple they destroyed in crucifying the Lord was beyond them. The sign of rebuilding their Temple of marble, which they scouted as a ridiculous extravagance, was really a far less stupendous and infinitely less significant sign than that which He actually gave them in rising from the dead. If it was impossible to rear that magnificent fabric in three days, yet something might be done towards it: but towards the raising of the dead body of Christ nothing could be done by human skill, diligence, or power.

But it is not the stupendous difficulty of this sign which should chiefly engage our attention. It is rather its significance. Christ rose from the dead, not to startle godless and truth-hating men into faith, but to furnish all mankind with a new and better Temple, with the means of spiritual worship and constant fellowship with God. There was a necessity for the resurrection. Those who became intimately acquainted with Christ slowly but surely became aware that they found more of God in Him than ever they had found in the Temple. Gradually they acquired new thoughts about God; and instead of thinking of Him as a Sovereign veiled from the popular gaze in the hidden Holy of holies, and receiving through consecrated hands the gifts and offering of the people, they learned to think of Him as a Father, to whom no condescension was too deep, no familiarity with men too close. Unconsciously to themselves, apparently, they began to think of Christ as the true Revealer of God, as the living Temple who at all hours gave them access to the living God. But not till the Resurrection was this transference complete—nay, so fixed had their hearts been, in common with all Jewish hearts, upon the Temple, that not until the Temple was destroyed did they wholly grasp what was given them in the Resurrection of Jesus. It was the Resurrection which confirmed their wavering belief in Him as the Son of God. As Paul says, it was the resurrection which “declared Him to be the Son of God with power.” Being the Son of God, it was impossible He should be held by death. He had come to the Temple calling it by an unheard-of name, “My Father's house.” Not Moses, not Solomon, not Ezra, not the holiest of high priests, would have dreamt of so identifying himself with God as to speak of the Temple, not even as “our Father's house” or “your Father's house,” but “my Father's house.” And it was the Resurrection which finally justified His doing so, declaring Him to be, in a sense no other was, the Son of God.

But it was not in the body of Christ that God found His permanent dwelling among men. This sacred presence was withdrawn in order to facilitate the end God has from the first had in view, the full indwelling and possession of each and all men by His Spirit. This intimate fellowship with all men, this free communication of Himself to all, this inhabitation of all souls by the ever-living God, was the end aimed at by all that God has done among men. His dwelling among men in the Temple at Jerusalem, His dwelling among men in the living Person of Christ, were preliminary and preparatory to His dwelling in men individually. “Ye,” says Paul, “are built up a spiritual house.” “Ye are builded together for a habitation of God.” “Ye are the temple of the living God.” This is the great reality towards which men have been led by symbol—the complete pervasion of all intelligence and of all moral beings by the Spirit of God.

For us this cleansing of the Temple is a sign. It is a sign that Christ really means to do thoroughly the great work He has taken in hand. Long ago had it been said,

“Behold the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His Temple; and He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver.” He was to come where holiness was professed, and to sift the true from the false, the worldly and greedy religious from the devoted and spiritual. He was not to make pretence of doing so, but actually to accomplish the separation. To reform abuses such as this marketing in the Temple was no pleasant task. He had to meet the gaze and defy the vindictiveness of an exasperated mob; He had to make enemies of a powerful class in the community. But He does what is called for by the circumstances: and this is but a part and a sample of the work He does always. Always He makes thorough, real work. He does not blink the requirements of the case. We shrug our shoulders and pass by where matters are difficult to mend; we let the flood take its course rather than risk being carried away in attempting to stem it. Not so Christ. The Temple was shortly to be destroyed, and it might seem to matter little what practices were allowed in it; but the sounds of bargaining and the greedy eye of trade could not be suffered by Him in His Father’s house: how much more shall He burn as a consuming fire when He cleanses that Church for which He gave Himself that it might be without spot or blemish. *He will cleanse it.* We may yield ourselves with gladness to His sanctifying power, or we may rebelliously question His authority; but cleansed the house of God must be.



The Expositor's Bible

Marcus Dods, D.D.

Gospel of John Part 1

Chapter 7

NICODEMUS.

“Now when He was in Jerusalem at the passover, during the feast, many believed on His name, beholding His signs which He did. But Jesus did not trust Himself unto them, for that He knew all men, and because He needed not that any one should bear witness concerning man; for He Himself knew what was in man. Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: the same came unto Him by night, and said to Him, Rabbi, we know that Thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these signs that Thou doest, except God be with Him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto Him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter a second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born anew. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the voice thereof, but knowest not whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.”—JOHN ii. 23–iii. 8.

The first visit of Jesus to Jerusalem was not without considerable effect on the popular mind. Many who saw the miracles He did believed that He was a messenger from God. They saw that His miracles were not the clever tricks of an impostor, and they were prepared to listen to His teaching and enrol themselves as members of the kingdom He came to found. Yet our Lord did not encourage them. He saw that they misunderstood Him. He recognised their worldliness of heart and of aim, and did not admit them to the intimacy He had established with the five simple-minded Galileans. The Jerusalem Jews were glad to fall in with one who seemed likely to do honour to their nation, and their belief in Him was the belief men give to a statesman whose policy they approve. The difference between them and those who rejected Christ was not a difference of disposition such as exists between godly and ungodly men, but consisted merely in the circumstance that they were convinced that His miracles were genuine. Had our Lord encouraged these men they would ultimately have been disappointed in Him. It was better that from the first they should be stimulated to reflect on the whole matter by being coldly received by the Lord.

It is always a point that calls for reflection: we have to consider not only whether we have faith in Christ, but whether He has faith in us—not only whether we have committed ourselves to Him, but whether that committal is so genuine that He can build upon and trust it. Can He count upon us for all service, for fidelity in times when much is needed? Thoroughgoing confidence must always be reciprocal. The person you believe in so utterly that you are entirely his, believes in you and trusts himself to you—his reputation, his interests are safe in your keeping. So is it with Christ. Faith cannot be one-sided here any more than elsewhere. He gives Himself to those who give themselves to Him. They who so trust Him that He is sure they will follow Him even when they cannot see where He is going; they who trust Him, not in one or two matters which they see He can manage, but absolutely and in all

things,—to these He will give Himself freely, sharing with them His work, His Spirit, His reward.

To illustrate the state of mind of the Jerusalem Jews and Christ's mode of treating them, John selects the case of Nicodemus. He was one of those who were much impressed by the miracles of Jesus, and were prepared to attach themselves to any movement in His favour. He belonged to the Pharisees; to that party which, with all its narrowness, pedantry, dogmatism, and bigotry, still preserved a salt of genuine patriotism and genuine godliness, and reared high-toned and cultivated men like Gamaliel and Saul. Nicodemus, whether a member of the Sanhedrim's deputation to the Baptist or not, certainly knew the result of that deputation, and was aware that a crisis in the national history had arrived. He could not wait for the community to move, but felt that whatever conclusion regarding Christ the Pharisees as a body might arrive at, he must on his own responsibility be at the bottom of those extraordinary events and signs that clustered round the person of Jesus. He was a modest, reserved, cautious man, and did not wish openly to commit himself till he was sure of his ground. He has been blamed for timidity. I would only say that, if he felt it dangerous to be seen in the company of Jesus, it was a bold thing to visit Him at all. He went by night; but he went. And would that there were more like him, who, whether cautious to excess or not, do still feel constrained to judge for themselves about Christ; who feel that, no matter what other men think of Him, there is an interest in Him which they cannot wait for others to settle, but must for themselves settle before they sleep.

Probably Nicodemus made his visit by night because he did not wish to precipitate matters by calling undue attention to the position and intentions of Jesus. He probably went with the purpose of urging some special plan of action. This inexperienced Galilean could not be supposed to understand the populace of Jerusalem as well as the old member of the Sanhedrim, who was familiar with all the outs and ins of party politics in the metropolis. Nicodemus would therefore go and advise Him how to proceed in proclaiming the kingdom of God; or at least sound Him, and, if he found Him amenable to reason, encourage Him to proceed, and warn Him against the pitfalls that lay in His path. Modestly, and as if speaking for others as much as for himself, he says: "Rabbi, we know that Thou art a Teacher come from God, for no man can do these miracles that Thou doest except God be with Him!" There is here neither patronizing acknowledgment nor flattery, but merely the natural first utterance of a man who must say something to show the state of his mind. It served to reveal the point at which Nicodemus had arrived, and the ground on which the conversation might proceed. But "Jesus knew what was in man." In this acknowledgment of His miracles on the part of Nicodemus, Jesus saw the whole mental attitude of the man. He saw that if Nicodemus had uttered all that was in his mind he would have said: "I believe you are sent to restore the kingdom to Israel, and I am come to advise with you on your plan of operation, and to urge upon you certain lines of action." And therefore Jesus promptly cuts him short by saying: "The kingdom of God is quite another thing than you are thinking of; and the way to establish it, to enlist citizens in it, is very different from the way you have been meditating."

In fact, Jesus was becoming embarrassed by His own miracles. They were attracting the wrong kind of people—the superficial worldly people; the people who thought a daring and strong hand with a dash of magic would serve all their turn. His mind was full of this, and as soon as He has an opportunity of uttering Himself on this point He does so, and assures Nicodemus, as a representative of a large number of Jews who needed this teaching, that all their thoughts about the kingdom must be

ruled by this principle, and must start from this great truth, that it was a kingdom into which the Spirit of God alone could give entrance, and could give entrance only by making men spiritual. That is to say, that it was a spiritual kingdom, an inward rule over the hearts of men, not an outward empire—a kingdom to be established, not by political craft and midnight meetings, but by internal change and submission in heart to God—a kingdom, therefore, into which admission could be given only on some more spiritual ground than the mere circumstance of a man's natural birth as a Jew.

In our Lord's *language* there was nothing that need have puzzled Nicodemus. In religious circles in Jerusalem there was nothing being talked of but the kingdom of God which John the Baptist had declared to be at hand. And when Jesus told Nicodemus that in order to enter this kingdom he must be born again, He told him just what John had been telling the whole people. John had assured them that, though the King was in their midst, they must not suppose they were already within His kingdom by being the children of Abraham. He excommunicated the whole nation, and taught them that it was something different from natural birth that gave admission to God's kingdom. And just as they had compelled Gentiles to be baptized, and to submit to other arrangements when they wished to partake of Jewish privileges, so John compelled them to be baptized. The Gentile who wished to become a Jew had to be symbolically born again. He had to be baptized, going down under the cleansing waters, washing away his old and defiled life, being buried by baptism, disappearing, from men's sight as a Gentile, and rising from the water as a new man. He was thus born of water, and this time born, not a Gentile, but a Jew.

The language of our Lord then could scarcely puzzle Nicodemus, but the idea did stagger him that not only Gentiles but Jews must be born again. John had indeed required the same preparation for entrance to the kingdom; but the Pharisees had not listened to John, and were offended precisely on the ground of his baptism. But now Jesus presses upon Nicodemus the very same truth, that as the Gentile had to be naturalized and born again that he might rank as a child of Abraham, and enjoy the external privileges of the Jew, so must the Jew himself be born again if he is to rank as a child of God and to belong to the kingdom of God. He must submit to the double baptism of water and of the Spirit—of water for the pardon and cleansing of past sin and defilement, of the Spirit for the inspiration of a new and holy life.

Our Lord here speaks of the second birth as completed by two agencies, water and the Spirit. To make the one of these merely the symbol of the other is to miss His meaning. The Baptist baptized with water for the remission of sins, but he was always careful to disclaim power to baptize with the Holy Ghost. His baptism with water was of course symbolical; that is to say, the water itself exercised no spiritual influence, but merely represented to the eye what was invisibly done in the heart. But that which it symbolised was not the life-giving influence of the Holy Spirit, but the washing away of sin from the soul. Assurance of pardon John was empowered to give. Those who humbly submitted to his baptism with confession of their sins went from it forgiven and cleansed. But more than that was needed to make them new men—and yet more he could not give. For that which would fill them with new life they must go to a Greater than he, who alone could bestow the Holy Ghost.

These then are the two great incidents of the second birth—the pardon of sin, which is preparatory, and which cuts our connection with the past; the communication of life by the Spirit of God, which fits us for the future. Both of these are represented by Christian baptism because in Christ we have both; but those who were baptized

by John's baptism were only *prepared* for receiving Christ's Spirit by receiving the forgiveness of their sins.

Having thus declared to Nicodemus the necessity of the second birth, He goes on to give the reason of this necessity. Birth by the Spirit is necessary, because that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and the kingdom of God is spiritual. Of course our Lord does not mean by flesh the mere tangible substance of the body; He does not mean that our first and natural birth puts us in possession of nothing but a material frame. By the word "flesh" He signifies the appetites, desires, faculties, which animate and govern the body, as well as the body itself—the whole equipment with which nature furnishes a man for life in this world. This natural birth gives a man entrance into much, and for ever determines much, that has important bearings on his person, character, and destiny. It determines all differences of nationality, of temperament, of sex; apart altogether from any choice of his it is determined whether he shall be a South Sea Islander or a European; an antediluvian living in a cave or an Englishman of the nineteenth century. But the kingdom of God is a spiritual kingdom, into which entrance can be had only by a man's own will and spiritual condition, only by an attachment to God which is no part of a man's natural equipment.

As soon as we clearly see what the kingdom of God is, we see also that by nature we do not belong to it. The kingdom of God so far as man is concerned is a state of willing subjection to Him—a state in which we are in our right relation to Him. All irrational creatures obey God and do His will: the sun runs his course with an exactness and punctuality we cannot rival; the grace and strength of many of the lower animals, their marvellous instincts and aptitudes, are so superior to anything in ourselves that we cannot even comprehend them. But what we have as our speciality is to render to God a willing service; to understand His purposes and enter sympathetically into them. The lower creatures obey a law impressed upon their nature; they cannot sin; their performance of God's will is a tribute to the power which made them so skilfully, but it lacks all conscious recognition of His worthiness to be served and all knowledge of His object in creation. It is God serving Himself: He made them so, and therefore they do His will. So it is with men who merely obey their nature: they may do kindly, noble, heroic actions, but they lack all reference to God; and however excellent these actions are, they give no guarantee that the men who do them would sympathize with God in all things, and do His will gladly.

Indeed, to establish the proposition that flesh or nature does not give us entrance into God's kingdom, we need go no further than our own consciousness. Remove the restraints which grace puts upon our nature, and we are aware that we are not in sympathy with God, fond of His will, disposed for His service. Let nature have its swing, and every man knows it is not the kingdom of God it takes him to. To all men it is natural to eat, drink, sleep, think; we are born to these things, and need to put no constraint on our nature to do them; but can any man say it has come naturally to him to be what he ought to be to God? Do we not to this hour feel drawn away from God as if we were not in our element in His presence? Flesh, nature, in God's presence is as much out of its element as a stone in the air or a fish out of water. Men who have had the deepest religious experience have seen it most clearly, and have felt, like Paul, that the flesh lusts against the spirit, and draws us ever back from entire submission to God and delight in Him.

Perhaps the necessity of the second birth may be more clearly apprehended if we consider it from another point of view. In this world we find a number of creatures which have what is known as animal life. They can work, and feel, and, in a fashion,

think. They have wills, and certain dispositions, and distinctive characteristics. Every creature that has animal life has a certain nature according to its kind, and determined by its parentage; and this nature which the animal receives from its parents determines from the first the capabilities and sphere of the animal's life. The mole cannot soar in the face of the sun like the eagle; neither can the bird that comes out of the eagle's egg burrow like the mole. No training can possibly make the tortoise as swift as the antelope, or the antelope as strong as the lion. If a mole began to fly and enjoy the sunlight it must be counted a new kind of creature, and no longer a mole. The very fact of its passing certain limitations shows that another nature has somehow been infused into it. Beyond its own nature no animal can act. You might as well attempt to give the eagle the appearance of the serpent as try to teach it to crawl. Each kind of animal is by its birth endowed with its own nature, fitting it to do certain things, and making other things impossible. So is it with us: we are born with certain faculties and endowments, with a certain nature; and just as all animals, without receiving any new, individual, supernatural help from God, can act according to their nature, so can we. We, being human, have a high and richly-endowed animal nature, a nature that leads us not only to eat, drink, sleep, and fight like the lower animals, but a nature which leads us to think and to love, and which, by culture and education, can enjoy a much richer and wider life than the lower creatures. Men need not be in the kingdom of God in order to do much that is admirable, noble, lovely, because their nature as animals fits them for that. If we were to exist at all as a race of animals superior to all others, then all this is just what must be found in us. Irrespective of any kingdom of God at all, irrespective of any knowledge of God or reference to Him, we have a life in this world, and a nature fitting us for it. And it is this we have by our natural birth, a place among our kind, an animal life. The first man, from whom we all descend, was, as St. Paul profoundly says, "a living soul," that is to say, an animal, a living human being; but he had not "a quickening spirit," could not give to his children spiritual life and make them children of God.

Now if we ask ourselves a little more closely, What is human nature? what are the characteristics by which men are distinguished from all other creatures? what is it which marks off our kind from every other kind, and which is always produced by human parents? we may find it hard to give a definition, but one or two things are obvious and indisputable. In the first place, we could not deny human nature to men who do not love God, or who even know nothing of Him. There are many whom we should naturally speak of as remarkably fine specimens of human nature, who yet never think of God, nor in any way acknowledge Him. It is plain, therefore, that the acknowledgment and love of God, which give us entrance into His kingdom, are *not* a part of our nature, are not the gifts of our birth.

And yet is there anything that so distinctly separates us from the lower animals as our *capacity* for God and for eternity? Is it not our capacity to respond to God's love, to enter into His purposes, to measure things by eternity, that is our real dignity? The capacity is there, even when unused; and it is this capacity which invests man and all his works with an interest and a value which attach to no other creature. Man's nature is capable of being born again, and that is its peculiarity; there is in man a dormant or dead capacity which nothing but contact with God, the touch of the Holy Ghost, can vivify and bring into actual exercise.

That there should be such a capacity, born as if dead, and needing to be quickened by a higher power before it can live and be of use, need not surprise us. Nature is full of examples of such capacities. All seeds are of this nature, dead until favouring circumstances and soil quicken them into life. In our own body there are similar

capacities, capacities which may or may not be quickened into life. In the lower animal-creation many analogous capacities are found, which depend for their vivification on some external agency over which they have no control. The egg of a bird has in it the capacity to become a bird like the parent, but it remains a dead thing and will corrupt if the parent forsakes it. There are many of the summer insects which are twice-born, first of their insect parents, and then of the sun: if the frost comes in place of the sun, they die. The caterpillar has already a life of its own, with which, no doubt, it is well content, but enclosed in its nature as a creeping thing it has a capacity for becoming something different and higher. It may become a moth, or a butterfly; but in most the capacity is never developed, they die before they reach this end—their circumstances do not favour their development. These analogies show how common it is for capacities of life to lie dormant: how common a thing it is for a creature in one stage of its existence to have a capacity for passing into a higher stage, a capacity which can be developed only by some agency peculiarly adapted to it.

It is in this condition man is born of his human parents. He is born with a capacity for a higher life than that which he lives as an animal in this world. There is in him a capacity for becoming something different, better and higher than that which he actually is by his natural birth. He has a capacity which lies dormant or dead until the Holy Ghost comes and quickens it. There are many things, and great things, man can do without any further Divine assistance than that which is lodged for the whole race in the natural laws which make no distinction between godly and ungodly; there are many and great things man may do by virtue of his natural birth; but one thing he cannot do—he cannot quicken within himself the capacity to love God and to live for Him. For this there is needed an influence from without, the efficient touch of the Holy Spirit, the impartation of His life. The capacity to be a child of God is man's, but the development of this lies with God. Without the capacity a man is not a man, has not that which is most distinctive of human nature. Every man is born with that in him which the Spirit of God may quicken into Divine life. This is human nature; but when this capacity is so quickened, when the man has begun to live as a child of God, he has not lost his human nature, but has over and above become a partaker of the Divine nature. When the image of God, as well as of his earthly parents, becomes manifest in a man, then his human nature has received its utmost development,—he is born again.

Of the Agent who accomplishes this great transformation there is need only to say that He is free in His operation and also inscrutable. He is like the wind, our Lord tells us, that blows where it lists. We cannot bring the Spirit at will; we cannot use Him as if He were some unintelligent passive instrument; neither can we subject all His operations to our control. The grub must wait for those natural influences which are to transform it; it cannot command them. We cannot command the Spirit; but we, being free agents also, can do more than wait,—we can pray, and we can strive to put ourselves in line with the Spirit's operation. Seamen cannot raise the wind nor direct its course, but they can put themselves in the way of the great regular winds. We can do the same: we can slowly, by mechanical helps, creep into the way of the Spirit; we can set our sails, doing all we think likely to catch and utilize His influences—believing always that the Spirit is more desirous than we are to bring us all to good. Why He breathes in one place while all around lies in a dead calm we do not know; but as for the wind's variations so for His, there are doubtless sufficient reasons. We need not expect to see the Spirit's working separate from the working of our own minds; we cannot see the Spirit in Himself—we cannot see the wind that moves the ships, but we can see the ships moving, and we know that without the wind they could not move.

If this, then, be the line on which our human nature can alone be developed, if a profound harmony with God be that which can alone give permanence and completeness to our nature, if in accordance with all that we see in the world around us some men fail of attaining the end of their creation, and lie for ever blighted and useless, while others are carried forward to fuller and more satisfying life, we cannot but ask with some anxiety to which class we belong. Good and evil are in the world, happiness and misery, victory and defeat; do not let us deceive ourselves by acting as if there were no difference between these opposites, or as if it mattered little in our case whether we belong to the one side or the other. It matters everything: it is just the difference between eternal life and eternal death. Christ did not come to play with us, and startle us with idle tales. He is the centre and fountain of all truth, and what He says fits in with all we see in the world around us.

But in endeavouring to ascertain whether the great change our Lord speaks of has passed upon us, our object must be not so much to ascertain the time and manner of our new birth as its reality. A man may know that he has been born though he is not able to recall, as no man can recall, the circumstances of his birth. Life is the great evidence of birth, natural or spiritual. We may desire to know the time and place of birth for some other reason, but certainly not for this, to make sure we have been born. Of that there is sufficient evidence in the fact of our being alive. And spiritual life quite as certainly implies spiritual birth.

Again, we must keep in view that a man may be born though not yet full grown. The child of a day old has as truly and certainly a human nature as the man in his prime. He has a human heart and mind, every organ of body and soul, though as yet he cannot use them. So the second birth impresses the image of God on every regenerate soul. It may not as yet be developed in every part, but all its parts are there in germ. It is not a partial but a complete result which regeneration effects. It is not one member, a hand or a foot that is born, but a body, a complete equipment of the soul in all graces. The whole character is regenerated, so that the man is fitted for all the duties of the Divine life whensoever these duties shall come before him. A human child does not need additions made to it to fit it for new functions: it requires growth, it requires nurture, it requires education and the practice of human ways, but it requires no new organ to be inserted into its frame; once born it has but to grow in order to adapt itself with ease and success to all human ways and conditions. And if regenerate we have that in us which with care and culture will grow till it brings us to perfect likeness to Christ. If we are not growing, if we remain small, puny, childish while we should be adult and full grown, then there is something seriously wrong, which calls for anxious enquiry.

But above all let us bear in mind that it is a new birth that is required; that no care spent on our conduct, no improvement and refinement of the natural man, suffices. For flying it is not an improved caterpillar that is needed, it is a butterfly; it is not a caterpillar of finer colour or more rapid movement or larger proportions, it is a new creature. We recognise that in this and that man we meet there is something more than men naturally have; we perceive in them a taming, chastening, inspiring principle. We rejoice all the more when we see it, because we know that no man can give it, but only God. And we mourn its absence because even when a man is dutiful, affectionate, temperate, honourable, yet if he have not grace, if he have not that peculiar tone and colour which overspread the whole character, and show that the man is living in the light of Christ, and is moved by love to God, we instinctively feel that the defect is radical, that as yet he has not come into connection with the Eternal, that there is that awaiting for which no natural qualities,

however excellent, can compensate—nay, the more lovely and complete the natural character is, the more painful and lamentable is the absence of grace, of Spirit.



The Expositor's Bible

Marcus Dods, D.D.

Gospel of John Part 1

Chapter 8

THE BRAZEN SERPENT.

“Nicodemus answered and said unto Him, How can these things be? Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou the teacher of Israel, and understandest not these things? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and bear witness of that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you heavenly things? And no man hath ascended into heaven, but He that descended out of heaven, even the Son of man, which is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth may in Him have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God sent not the Son into the world to judge the world; but that the world should be saved through Him. He that believeth on Him is not judged: he that believeth not hath been judged already, because he hath not believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil. For every one that doeth ill hateth the light, and cometh not to the light, lest his works should be reprov'd. But he that doeth the truth cometh to the light, that his works may be made manifest, that they have been wrought in God.”—JOHN iii. 9–21.

There are two great obstacles to human progress, two errors which retard the individual and the race, two inborn prejudices which prevent men from choosing and entering into true and lasting prosperity. The first is that men will always persist in seeking their happiness in something outside themselves; the second is that even when they come to see where true happiness lies they cannot find the way to it. In our Lord's time even wise and godly people thought the permanent glory and happiness of men were to be found in a free state, in self-government, lightened taxes, impregnable fortresses, and a purified social order. And they were not altogether wrong; but the way to this condition, they thought, lay through the enthronement of a strong-handed monarch, who could gather round his throne wise counsellors and devoted followers. This was the form of worldliness which our Lord had to contend with. This was the tendency of the unspiritual mind in His day. But in every generation and in all men the same radical misconceptions exist, although they may not appear in the same forms.

In dealing with Nicodemus, a sincere and thoroughly decent but unspiritual man, our Lord had difficulty in lifting his thoughts off what was external and worldly and fixing them on what was inward and heavenly.^[10] And in order to effect this, He told him, among other things, that the Son of man was indeed to be lifted up—yes, but not on a throne set up in Herod's palace. He was to be conspicuous, but it was as the Brazen Serpent was conspicuous, hanging on a pole for the healing of the people. His lifting up, His exaltation, was secure; He was to be raised above every name that is named; He was destined to have the pre-eminence in all things, to be exalted above all principalities and powers; He was to have all power in heaven and in earth; He was to be the true and supreme Lord of all,—yes; but this dignity and power were to be attained by no mere official appointment, by no accidental choice of the

people, by no mere hereditary title, but by the sheer force of merit, by His performing services for men which made the race His own, by His leaving no depth of human degradation unexplored, by a sympathy with the race and with individuals which produced in Him a total self-abandonment, and suffered Him to leave no grievance unconsidered, no wrong unthought of, no sorrow untouched. There is no royal road to human excellence; and Jesus could reach the height He reached by no swift ascension of a throne amidst the blare of trumpets, the flaunting of banners, and the acclamations of the crowd, but only by being exposed to the keenest tests with which this world can confront and search human character, by being put through the ordeal of human life, and being found the best man among us; the humblest, the truest; the most faithful, loving, and enduring; the most willing servant of God and man.

It was this which Christ sought to suggest to Nicodemus, and which we all find it hard to learn, that true glory is excellence of character, and that this excellence can be reached only through the difficulties, trials, and sorrows of a human life. Christ showed men a new glory and a new path to it—not by arms, not by statesmanship, not by inventions, not by literature, not by working miracles, but by living with the poor and becoming the friend of forsaken and wicked men, and by dying, the Just for the unjust. He has been lifted up as the Brazen Serpent was, He has become conspicuous by His very lowliness; by a self-sacrifice so complete that He gave His all, His life, He has won to Himself all men and made His will supreme, so that it and no other shall one day everywhere rule. He gave Himself for the healing of the nations, and the very death which seemed to extinguish His usefulness has made Him the object of worship and trust to all.

This is certainly the point of analogy between Himself and the Brazen Serpent which our Lord chiefly intended to suggest—that as the serpent was *lifted up* so as to be seen from every part of the camp, even so the death of the Son of man was to make Him conspicuous and easily discernible. It is by their death that many men have become immortalized in the memory of the race. Deaths of gallantry, of heroism, of self-devotion have often wiped out and seemed to atone for preceding lives of dissipation and uselessness. The life of Christ would have been inefficient without His death. Had He only lived and taught, we should have known more than was otherwise possible, but it is doubtful whether His teaching would have been much listened to. It is His death in which all men are interested. It appeals to all. A love that gave its life for them, all men can understand. A love that atoned for sin appeals to all, for all are sinners.

But though this is the chief point of analogy there are others. We do not know *precisely* what the Israelites would think of the Brazen Serpent. We need not repeat from the sacred narrative the circumstances in which it was formed and lifted up in the wilderness. The singularity of the remedy provided for the plague of serpents under which the Israelites were suffering, consisted in this, that it resembled the disease. Serpents were destroying them, and from this destruction they were saved by a serpent. This special mode of cure was obviously not chosen without a reason. To those among them who were instructed in the symbolic learning of Egypt there might be in this image a significance which is lost to us. From the earliest times the serpent had been regarded as man's most dangerous enemy—more subtle than any beast of the field, more sudden and stealthy in its attack, and more certainly fatal. The natural revulsion which men feel in its presence, and their inability to cope with it, seemed to fit it to be the natural representative of the powers of spiritual evil. And yet, strangely enough, in the very countries in which it was recognised as the symbol of all that is deadly, it was also recognised as the symbol of life. Having none of the ordinary members or weapons of the wilder lower creatures, it was yet more agile

and formidable than any of them; and, casting its skin annually, it seemed to renew itself with eternal youth. And as it was early discovered that the most valuable medicines are poisons, the serpent, as the very “personification of poison,” was looked upon as not only the symbol of all that is deadly, but also of all that is health-giving. And so it has continued to be, even to our own days, the recognised symbol of the healing art, and, wreathed round a staff, as Moses had it, it may still be seen sculptured on our own hospitals and schools of medicine.

But whatever else the agonised people saw in the brazen image, they must at any rate have seen in its limp and harmless form a symbol of the power of their God to make all the serpents round about them as harmless as this one. The sight of it hanging with drooping head and motionless fangs was hailed with exultation as the trophy of deliverance from all the venomous creatures it represented. They saw in it their danger at an end, their enemy triumphed over, their death slain. They knew that the manufactured serpent was only a sign, and had in itself no healing virtue, but in looking at it they saw, as in a picture, God’s power to overcome the most noxious of evils.

That which Moses lifted up for the healing of the Israelites was a likeness, not of those who were suffering, but of that from which they were suffering. It was an image, not of the swollen limbs and discoloured face of the serpent-bitten, but of the serpents that poisoned them. It was this image, representing as slain and harmless the creature which was destroying them, which became the remedy for the pains it inflicted. Similarly, our Lord instructs us to see in the cross not so much our own nature suffering the extreme agony and then hanging lifeless, as sin suspended harmless and dead there. All the virus seemed to be extracted from the fiery, burning fangs of the snakes, and hung up innocuous in that brazen serpent; so all the virulence and venom of sin, all that is dangerous and deadly in it, our Lord bids us believe is absorbed in His person and rendered harmless on the cross.

With this representation the language of Paul perfectly agrees. God, he tells us, “made Christ to be sin for us.” It is strong language; yet no language that fell short of this would satisfy the symbol. Christ was not merely made man, He was made sin for us. Had He merely become man, and thus become involved in our sufferings, the symbol of the serpent would scarcely have been a fair one. A better image of Him would in that case have been a poisoned Israelite. His choice of the symbol of the brazen serpent to represent Himself upon the cross justifies Paul’s language, and shows us that He habitually thought of His own death as the death of sin.

Christ being lifted up, then, meant this, whatever else, that in His death sin was slain, its power to hurt ended. He being made sin for us, we are to argue that what we see done to Him is done to sin. Is He smitten, does He become accursed, does God deliver Him to death, is He at last slain and proved to be dead, so certainly dead that not a bone of Him need be broken? Then in this we are to read that sin is thus doomed by God, has been judged by Him, and was in the cross of Christ slain and put an end to—so utterly slain that there is left in it not any so faint a flicker or pulsation of life that a second blow need be given to prove it really dead.

When we strive to get a little closer to the reality and understand in what sense, and how, Christ represented sin on the cross, we recognise first of all that it was not by His being in any way personally tainted by sin. Indeed, had He Himself been in the faintest degree tainted by sin this would have prevented Him from representing sin on the cross. It was not an actual serpent Moses suspended, but a serpent of brass. It would have been easy to kill one of the snakes that were biting the people, and hang

up its body. But it would have been useless. To exhibit one slain snake would only have suggested to the people how many were yet alive. Being itself a real snake, it could have no virtue as a symbol. Whereas the brazen serpent represented all snakes. In it each snake seemed to be represented. Similarly, it was not one out of a number of real sinners that was suspended on the cross, but it was one made "in the likeness of sinful flesh." So that it was not the sins of one person which were condemned and put an end to there, but sin generally.

This was easily intelligible to those who saw the crucifixion. John the Baptist had pointed to Jesus as the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. How does a Lamb take away sin? Not by instruction, not by example, but by being sacrificed; by standing in the room of the sinner and suffering instead of him. And when Jesus, Himself without sin, hung upon the cross, those who knew His innocence perceived that it was as the Lamb of God He suffered, and that by His death they were delivered.

Another point of analogy between the lifting-up of the serpent and the lifting-up of the Son of Man on the cross is to be found in the circumstance that in each case the healing result is effected through a moral act on the part of the healed person. A look at the brazen serpent was all that was required. Less could not have been asked: more, in some cases, could not have been given. If deliverance from the pain and danger of the snake-bite had been all that God desired, He might have accomplished this without any concurrence on the part of the Israelites. But their present agony was the consequence of their unbelief, and distrust, and rebellion; and in order that the cure may be complete they must pass from distrust to faith, from alienation to confidence and attachment. This cannot be accomplished without their own concurrence. But this concurrence may be exercised and may be exhibited in connection with a small matter quite as decisively as in connection with what is difficult. To get a disobedient and stubborn child to say, "I am sorry," or to do the smallest and easiest action, is quite as difficult, if it be a test of submission, as to get him to run a mile, or perform an hour's task. So the mere uplifting of the eye to the brazen serpent was enough to show that the Israelite believed God's word, and expected healing. It was in this look that the will of man met and accepted the will of God in the matter. It was by this look the pride which had led them to resist God and rely upon themselves was broken down; and in the momentary gaze at the remedy appointed by God the tormented Israelite showed his reliance upon God, his willingness to accept His help, his return to God.

It is by a similar act we receive healing from the cross of Christ. It is by an act which springs from a similar state of mind. "Every one that *believeth*,"—that is all that is required of any who would be healed of sin and its attendant miseries. It is a little and an easy thing in itself, but it indicates a great and difficult change of mind. It is so slight and easy an action that the dying can do it. The feeblest and most ignorant can turn in thought to Him who died upon the cross, and can, with the dying thief, say, "Lord, remember me." All that is required is a sincere prayer to Christ for deliverance. But before anyone can so pray, he must hate the sin he has loved, and must be willing to submit to the God he has abandoned. And this is a great change; too difficult for many. Not all these Israelites were healed, though the cure was so accessible. There were those who were already insensible, torpid with the heavy poison that ran through their blood. There were those whose pride could not be broken, who would rather die than yield to God. There were those who could not endure the thought of a life in God's service. And there are those now who, though they feel the sting of sin, and are convulsed and tormented by it, cannot bring themselves to seek help from Christ. There are those who do not believe Christ can

deliver them; and there are those to whom deliverance weighted with obligation to God, and giving health to serve Him, seems equally repugnant with death itself. But where, there is a sincere desire for reconciliation with God, and for the holiness which maintains us in harmony with God, all that is needed is trust in Christ, the belief that God has appointed Him to be our Saviour, and the daily use of Him as our Saviour.

In proceeding to make a practical use of what our Lord here teaches, our first duty, plainly, is to look to Him for life. He is exhibited crucified—it is our part to trust in Him, to appropriate for our own use His saving power. We need it. We know something of the deadly nature of sin, and that with the first touch of its fang death enters our frame. We have found our lives poisoned by it. Nothing can well be a fitter picture of the havoc sin makes than this plague of serpents—the slender weapon sin uses, the slight *external* mark it leaves, but, within, the fevered blood, the fast dimming sight, the throbbing heart, the convulsed frame, the rigid muscles no longer answering to our will. Do we not find ourselves exposed to sin wherever we go? In the morning our eyes open on its vibrating fangs ready to dart upon us; as we go about our ordinary employments we have trodden on it and been bitten ere we are aware; in the evening, as we rest, our eye is attracted, and fascinated, and held by its charm. Sin is that from which we cannot escape, from which we are at no time, nor in any place, secure; from which, in point of fact, no one of us has escaped, and which in every case in which it has touched a man has brought death along with it. Death may not at once appear; it may appear at first only in the form of a gayer and intenser life; as, they tell us, there is one poison which causes men to leap and dance, and another which distorts the face of the dying with a hideous imitation of laughter. Is that not a diseased soul which has no vigour for righteous and self-sacrificing work; whose vision is so dim it sees no beauty in holiness?

Of this condition, faith in God through Christ is the true remedy. Return to God is the beginning of all healthy spiritual life. Faith means that all distrust, all resentment at what has happened in our life, all proud and all despondent thoughts, are laid aside. To believe that God is loving us tenderly and wisely, and to put ourselves unreservedly into His hand, is eternal life begun in the soul.

[10] In saying, “Art thou the teacher of Israel, and knowest not these things?” our Lord hints that it is bad enough for an ordinary Israelite to be so ignorant, but for a teacher how much worse. If the teacher is thus obtuse, what are the taught likely to be? Is this the state of matters I must confront? And in saying that the subjects of conversation were “earthly” (ver. 12) He meant that the necessity of regeneration or entrance into the kingdom of God was a matter open to observation and its occurrence a fact which might be tested here upon earth.



The Expositor's Bible

Marcus Dods, D.D.

Gospel of John Part 1

Chapter 9

THE WOMAN OF SAMARIA.

“When therefore the Lord knew how that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus Himself baptized not, but His disciples), He left Judæa, and departed again into Galilee. And He must needs pass through Samaria. So He cometh to a city of Samaria, called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph: and Jacob’s well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with His journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour. There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give Me to drink. For His disciples were gone away into the city to buy food. The Samaritan woman therefore saith unto Him, How is it that Thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a Samaritan woman? (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give Me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water. The woman saith unto Him, Sir, Thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast Thou that living water? Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his sons, and his cattle? Jesus answered and said unto her, Every one that drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up unto eternal life. The woman saith unto Him, Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come all the way hither to draw. Jesus saith unto her, Go, call thy husband, and come hither.”—JOHN iv. 1–16.

Jesus left Jerusalem because His miracles were attracting the wrong kind of people, and creating a misconception of the nature of His kingdom. He went into the rural districts, where He had simpler, less sophisticated persons to deal with. Here He gained many disciples, who accepted baptism in His name. But here again His very success endangered His attainment of His great end. The Pharisees, hearing of the numbers who flocked to His baptism, fomented a quarrel between His disciples and those of John; and would, moreover, have probably called Him to account for presuming to baptize at all. But why should He have feared a collision with the Pharisees? Why should He not have proclaimed Himself the Messiah? The reason is obvious. The people had not had sufficient opportunity to ascertain the character of His work; and only by going about among them could He impress upon susceptible spirits a true sense of the nature of the blessings He was willing to bestow. To the woman of Samaria He did not hesitate to proclaim Himself, because she was a simple-minded woman, who was in need of sympathy and spiritual strength. But from controversial Pharisees, who were prepared to settle His claims by one or two trifling theological tests, He withdrew. The time would come when, after conferring on many humble souls the blessings of the kingdom, He must publicly proclaim Himself King; but as yet that time had not arrived, and therefore He left Judæa for Galilee.

A line drawn from Jerusalem to Nazareth would pass through the entire breadth of Samaria, and quite close to the town of Sychar. Between Judæa, where Jesus was, and Galilee, where He wished to be, the province of Samaria intervened. It stretched

right across from the sea to the Jordan, so that the Jews, who were too scrupulous to pass through Samaritan territory, were compelled to cross the Jordan twice, and make a considerable *détour* if they wished to go to Galilee. Our Lord had no such scruples; besides, the springs near Salim, where John was baptizing, were not far from Sychar, and He might wish to see John on His way north. He took, therefore, the great north road, and one day at noon^[11] found Himself at Jacob's well, where the road divides, and where, at any rate, it was natural that a tired traveller should rest during the mid-day hours. Jacob's well is still extant, and is one of the few undisputed localities associated with our Lord's life. Travellers of all shades of theological opinion and of no theological opinion are agreed that the deep well, now much choked with *débris*, lying twenty minutes east of Nablûs, is the veritable well on the stone rim of which our Lord sat. Ten minutes' walk north of this well lies a village now called El-Askar, which represents in name and partly in locality the Sychar of the text. Partly in locality I say, for "Palestine was ten times as populous in the days of our Lord as it is at present;" and there is therefore good ground for the supposition that although now but a little village or hamlet, Sychar was then considerably larger, and extended nearer to the well. Coming, then, to this well, and being tired with the forenoon's walk, our Lord sat down, while the disciples went forward to the town to buy bread.

And thus arose that conversation with the woman of Sychar, which has brought hope and comfort to many a thirsting and weary soul besides. That which struck the woman herself and the disciples is not that which is likely to impress us most distinctly. We all feel the unsurpassed delicacy and grace of the whole scene. No poet ever imagined a situation in which the free movements of human nature, the picturesqueness of outward circumstance, and the profoundest spiritual interests were so happily, easily, and effectively combined. Yet the chief thing which struck the woman herself and the disciples was the ease with which Jesus broke down the wall of partition which the hatred of centuries had erected between Jew and Samaritan.

To estimate aright the magnanimity and originality of our Lord's action in making Himself and His salvation accessible to this woman, the marked separation that had hitherto existed must be borne in mind. The Samaritans were of heathen origin. In the Second Book of Kings, chap. xvii., we read that Shalmaneser, King of Assyria, pursuing the usual policy of his empire, carried the Israelites to Babylonia, and sent colonists from Babylonia to occupy their cities and land. These colonists found the country overrun by wild beasts, which had multiplied during the years of depopulation; and accepting this as proof that the God of the land was not pleased, they begged their monarch to send them an Israelitish priest, who would teach them the manner of the God of the land. Their application was granted, and an adulterated Judaism was grafted on their native religion. They accepted the five Books of Moses, and looked for a Messiah—as indeed they still do. The origin of their hatred of the Jews is told in Ezra. When the Jews returned from exile and began to rebuild the temple, the Samaritans begged to be allowed to share in the work. "Let us build with you," they said, "for we seek your God as ye do; and we sacrifice unto Him since the days of Esarbaddon." But their request was bluntly refused; they were treated as heathens, who had no part in the religion of Israel. Hence the implacable religious enmity which for centuries manifested itself in all sorts of petty annoyances, and, when occasion offered, more serious injuries.

This Samaritan woman, then, was taken quite aback when the quiet figure on the well, which by dress and accent she had recognised as that of a Jew, uttered the simple request, "Give me to drink." As any Samaritan would have done, she twitted

the Jew with showing a frankness and friendliness which she supposed were wholly due to His own keen thirst and helplessness to quench it. But, to her still greater surprise, He does not wince before her thrust, nor awkwardly apologise, or seek to explain, but gravely and earnestly, and with dignity, utters the perplexing but thought-provoking words: "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water." He perceived the interest of the situation, saw with compassion her entire ignorance of the presence in which she stood, and of the possibilities within her reach. So do the most important issues often hinge on slight, trivial, every-day incidents. The turning-points in our career have often nothing to show that they are turning-points. We unconsciously determine our future, and bind ourselves with chains we can never break, by the way in which we deal with apparent trifles. We do not know the forces that lie hidden all around us; and for want of knowledge we miss a thousand opportunities. The sick man drags out a miserable existence, incapacitated and useless, while within his reach, but unrecognised, is a remedy which would give him health. It is often by a very little that the scientific or philosophical student fails to make the discovery he seeks; one more fact known, one idea fitted into its proper place, and the thing is done. The gold-digger throws aside his pick in despair at the very point where another stroke would have turned up the ore. So with some among ourselves; they pass through life alongside of that which would make all eternity different to them, and yet for lack of knowledge, for lack of consideration, the thin veil continues to hide from them their true blessedness. Like the crew that were perishing from thirst, though surrounded by the fresh waters of the River Amazon that penetrated far into the salt ocean, so we, surrounded on all hands by God and upheld by Him, and living in Him, yet do not know it, and refrain from dipping our buckets and drawing out of His life-giving fulness. How often, looking on those who, like this Samaritan woman, have gone wrong and know no recovery, who go through their daily duties sad and heavy at heart and weary of sin—how often do these words rise to our lips, "If only thou knewest." How often does one long to be able to shed a sudden and universal light into the minds of men that would reveal to them the goodness, the power, the all-conquering love of God. Yes, and even in those who can speak intelligently of things Divine and eternal, how much blindness remains. For the knowledge of words is one thing, the knowledge of things, of realities, is another. And many who can speak of God's love have never yet seen what that means for themselves. Certainly it is true of us all, that if we are not deriving from Christ what we recognise as living water, it is because there is a defect in our knowledge, because we do not know the gift of God.

In two particulars this woman's knowledge was defective: she did not know the gift of God, nor who it was that spoke to her.

She did not know the gift of God. She was not expecting anything from that quarter. Her expectations were limited by her earthly condition and her physical wants. With affections worn out, with character gone, with no purifying joy, she came out listlessly day by day, filled her pitcher, and went her weary way. She had no thought of God's gift, no belief that the Eternal was with her, and desired to communicate to her a spring of deep and ever-flowing joy. Doubtless she would have acknowledged God as the Giver of all good; but she had no idea of the completeness of His giving, of the freeness of His love, of His perception and understanding of our actual wants, of the joy with which He provides for them all. Through all ages and for all men there remains this gift of God, sought and found by those who know it; different from and superior to the best human gifts, inheritances, and acquisitions; not to be drawn out of the deepest, most cherished well of human sinking; steadily arrogating

to itself an infinite superiority to all that men have regarded and busily sunk their pitchers in; a gift which each man must ask for himself, and having for himself knows to be the gift of God to him, the recognition by God of his personal wants, and the assurance to him of God's everlasting regard. This gift of God, that carries to each soul the sense of His love, is His deliverance from evil. It is His answer to the misery and vanity of the world which He has resolved to redeem to worth and blessedness. It is all that is given in Christ, the hope, the holy impulses, the new views of life—but above all it is the means of conveyance that brings God to us, His love to our hearts.

What, then, can teach a man to know this gift? What can make a man for a while forget the lesser gifts that perish in the using? What can reasonably induce him to turn from the accredited sources round which men in all ages have crowded, what can induce him to forego fame, wealth, bodily comfort, domestic happiness, and seek first of all God's righteousness? May we not all well pray with Paul, "that we may have not the spirit of the world but the Spirit of God, *that we may know the things that are freely given us of God;*" that we may see the small value of wealth or power or any of those things which can be won by mere worldly prudence or greed; and may learn fixedly to believe that the things of true value are the internal, spiritual possessions, which the unsuccessful may have as well as the successful, and which are not so much won by us as given by God?

Jesus further describes this gift as "living water," a description suggested by the circumstances, and only figurative. Yet it is a figure of the same kind as pervades all human language. Water is an essential of animal and vegetable life. With a constantly recurring appetite we seek it. To have no thirst is a symptom of disease or death. But the soul also, not having life in itself, needs to be sustained from without; and when in a healthy state it seeks by a natural appetite that which will sustain it. And as most of our mental acts are spoken of in terms of the body, as we speak of *seeing* truth and *grasping* it, as if the mind had hands and eyes, so David naturally exclaims, "My soul *thirsts* for the living God." In the living soul there is a craving for that which maintains and revives its life, which is analogous to the thirst of the body for water. The dead alone feel no thirst for God. The soul that is alive sees for a moment the glory and liberty and joy of the life to which God calls us; it feels the attraction of a life of love, purity, and righteousness, but it seems continually to sink from this and to tend to become dull and feeble, and to have no joy in goodness. Just as the healthy body delights in work, but wearies and cannot go on exerting itself for many hours together, but must repair its strength, so the soul soon wearies and sinks back from what is difficult, and needs to be revived by its appropriate refreshment.

And this woman, if for a moment she felt as if Christ were playing with her or making her enigmatical offers that could never bring her any substantial good, was immediately made aware that He who made these offers had fully in view the harshest facts of her domestic life. Mystified, she is also attracted and expectant. She cannot mistake the sincerity of Jesus; and, scarcely knowing what she asks, and with her mind still running on relief from her daily drudgery, she says, "Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw." In prompt response to her faith Jesus says, "Go, call thy husband, and come hither." The water which He means to give cannot be given before thirst for it is awakened. And in order to awaken her thirst He turns her back upon the shameful wretchedness of her life, that she may forget the water of Jacob's well in thirst for relief from shame and misery. In requiring her thus to face the facts of her guilty life, in encouraging her to bring clear before Him all her sinful entanglement, He responds to her request, and gives her the first draught of living water. For there is no abiding spiritual satisfaction

which does not begin with a fair and frank consideration of our past, and which does not proceed upon the actual facts of our own life. If this woman is to enter into a hopeful and cleansed life, she must enter through confession of her need of cleansing. No one can slink out of his past life, forgetting or huddling up what is shameful. It is only through truth and straightforwardness we can enter into that life which is all truth and integrity. Before we drink the living water we must truly thirst for it.

If the inquiry be more closely pressed, and if it be asked what this Samaritan woman would find to be living water to her, what it was which, after Christ had gone, would daily renew in her the purpose to live a better life and to bear her burden cheerfully and hopefully, it will be seen that it must have been simply the remembrance of Christ; the knowledge that in Christ God had sought her, had claimed her in the midst of her evil life for some better and holier thing, had, in a word, loved her through all her sin, and sent deliverance to her. It is still, and always, this knowledge which comes with fresh exhilarating power to every disconsolate, despairing, fainting soul. The knowledge that there is One, the Holiest of all, who loves us, and who will be satisfied with nothing short of the purest blessedness for us; the knowledge that our God follows us, forgives us, elevates and purifies us by His love, this is living water to our souls; this revives us to the love of goodness, and braces us for all effort. It is not a little cistern that soon runs dry. To the end of a Christian's life this fact of God's love in Christ comes as fresh and as reviving to the soul as at first; to us this day it has the same power of supplying motive to our life as it had when Christ spoke to the woman.

He further defines the gift as "a well of water *in the soul* itself springing up to everlasting life." This peculiarity of the water He would give was remarked upon here for the sake of contrasting it with the well outside the city to which the woman in all weathers had to repair; often wishing, no doubt, as she went out in the heat or in the rain, that she had a well at her door. The source of spiritual life is within; it cannot be inaccessible; it does not depend on anything from which we may be separated. And this is man's victory and end when within himself he has the source of life and joy, so that he is independent of circumstances, of position, of things present and things to come. It was a commonplace even of heathen philosophy, that no man is happy until he is superior to fortune; that his happiness must have an inward source, must depend on his own spiritual state, and not on outward circumstances. Similarly Solomon thought it a saying worthy of preservation that "the good man is satisfied from himself;" that is, he shall not look to success in life, or to comfortable circumstances, or even to domestic happiness or the society of old friends, as a sure and unfailing source of joy; but shall be at bottom independent of everything save what he carries always and everywhere in himself. Nothing is more pitiable than the restlessness one sees in some people; how they can find nothing in themselves, but are ever going from place to place, from entertainment to entertainment, from friend to friend, seeking something to give them rest, and finding nothing, because they seek it without and not within. It is Christ dwelling in the heart by faith that is alone the fountain of living water. It is His inward presence, apprehended by faith, by imagination, by knowledge, that revives the soul continually. It is thus that God makes us partakers of the life that is only in Him, linking us to Himself by our will, by all that is deepest in us, and so producing true and lasting spiritual life.

The woman was blinded by her ignorance on a second point; she did not know who it was that said to her, "Give Me to drink." Until we know Christ we cannot know God: it is to Christ we owe all our best thoughts about God. This woman, when she

had met the absolute goodness and kindness of Christ, had for ever different thoughts of God. So as we look at Christ our thought of God expands, and we learn to expect substantial good from Him. Yet often, like this woman, we are in Christ's presence without knowing it, and listen, like her, to His appeals without understanding the majesty of His person and the greatness of our opportunity. He does offer largely; He speaks as if He were perfect master of the human heart, knew its every experience, and could satisfy it. He speaks of the gift He has to bestow in terms which convict Him of silly and heartless extravagance if that gift be not perfect; He has, in plain words, misled and deceived a large part of mankind, and especially those who were well inclined and thirsting for righteousness, if He cannot perfectly satisfy the soul. He challenges men in the most grievous and undone conditions to come to Him; He calls them off from every other source and stay, and bids them trust to Him for everything. If a man expects to find in Him all that the human heart can contain of joy, and all that the human nature is susceptible of, he does not expect more than the explicit offers of Christ Himself warrant. Manifestly such offers are at least worth considering. May it not be true that if we were to awake to the knowledge of Christ, we might now find His pretensions to be well founded? He professes to bestow what is worth our immediate acceptance, His friendship, His Spirit. What if it should be now that He seeks to come to *our* heart with these words, "If *thou* knewest who it is that speaketh." Yes, if but for one hour we saw God's gift, and Him through whom He offers it, *we* should become the suppliants. Christ would no longer need to knock at our door; we should wait and knock at His.

For in truth it is always the same request He urges to all. In His words to the woman, "Give Me to drink," there was more than the mere request that He would lift her pitcher to His lips. Driven from Judæa, wearied as much with the blindness of men as with His journey, He sat on the well. Everything He saw had that day some spiritual meaning for Him. The bread His disciples brought reminded Him of His true support, the consciousness that He was doing His Father's will; the fields whitening for harvest suggested to Him the nations unconsciously ripening for the great Christian ingathering. And when He said to the woman, "Give Me to drink," He thought of the intenser satisfaction she could give Him by confiding in Him and accepting His help. In her person there stands before Him a new, untried race. Oh that she may prove more accessible than the Jews, and may allay His thirst for the salvation of men! His parched tongue seems forgotten in the interest of His talk with her. And to which of us has He not in this sense said, "Give Me to drink"? Is it cruelty to refuse a cup of cold water to a thirsting child, and none to refuse to quench the thirst of Him who hung upon the cross for us? Ought we to feel no shame that the Lord is still in want of what we can give? This woman knew it was a real thirst which could induce a Jew to ask drink from her. Has He not sufficiently shown the reality of His thirst for our friendship and trust? Could it be a feigned desire that led Him to do all He has done? Are we never to have the joy of appropriating His love as spent upon us; are we never with humble ecstasy to exclaim:—

"Weary satst Thou seeking *me*, Diedst redeeming on the tree. Can in vain such labour be"?

[11] Some good authorities hold that John reckoned the hours of the day from midnight, not from sunrise. It is, however, probable that John adopted the Roman reckoning, and counted noon the sixth hour.



The Expositor's Bible

Marcus Dods, D.D.

Gospel of John Part 1

Chapter 10

JESUS DECLARES HIMSELF.

“The woman answered and said unto Him, I have no husband. Jesus saith unto her, Thou saidst well, I have no husband: for thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: this hast thou said truly. The woman saith unto Him, Sir, I perceive that Thou art a prophet. Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe Me, the hour cometh, when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall ye worship the Father. Ye worship that which ye know not: we worship that which we know: for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for such doth the Father seek to be His worshippers. God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship in spirit and truth. The woman saith unto Him, I know that Messiah cometh (which is called Christ): when He is come, He will declare unto us all things. Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am He.”—JOHN IV, 17–26.

In this conversation at Jacob's well the woman for some time, quite naturally, misses the point of what Jesus says. It does not occur to her that by “water” He means anything else than what she could carry in her pitcher. Even when He speaks of causing a well to spring up “within herself,” she still thinks merely of the domestic convenience of some such arrangement, and begs Him to give what would save Her the endless trouble of coming to draw water out of Jacob's well. This simplicity has its good side, as also has her obvious confidence in His words. Jesus sees in this child-like simplicity and directness a much more hopeful soil for His message than He had found even in a thoughtful man of education like Nicodemus. He seeks, therefore, to prepare the soil further by quickening within her a sense of spiritual want. This may best be effected by backing her into her actual life. Therefore He says, “Go, call thy husband, and come hither.” And in this simple way He leads the woman at once to recognise His prophetic insight into her condition, and to bring His offers into connection with her character and her life. And there was that in her manner of owning Him as a prophet, a frankness and a simplicity in uttering her mind and listening to His explanations, that prompted Him explicitly to say, “I that speak unto thee am the Messiah.”

To this unfortunate and ill-living alien woman, then, Jesus declared Himself as He had not declared Himself to the well-to-do, respectable Jewish rabbis. The reason of this difference in our Lord's treatment of individuals arises from the different dispositions they manifest. Acknowledgment of His power to work miracles may seem at first sight as good a certificate for Christian discipleship as acknowledgment of His prophetic power. But it is not so; because such an acknowledgment of His prophetic insight as this woman made is an acknowledgment of His power over the human heart and life. He who is thus felt to penetrate to the hidden acts, and to lay His hand upon the deepest secrets of the heart, is recognised as in a personal connection with the individual; and this is the foundation on which Christ can build, this is the beginning of that vital connection with Him which gives newness of life. Those who are merely solving a problem when they are considering the claims of

Christ, are not likely to have any personal revelation made to them. But to every one, who, like this woman, shows some desire to receive His gifts, and who is not above owning that life is a very poor affair without some such thing as He offers; to every one who is conscious of sin, and who looks to Him as able to deliver from all its foul entanglement, He does make Himself known. To such persons He will disclose Himself when He sees that they are ripe for the disclosure. To such the moment of moments will come, when to them He will say: "I that speak unto thee am He."

This distinction between the chemist who analyses the living water, and the thirsting soul that uses it, runs very deep, and may be commended to the consideration of any who are apt to be carried away by the current of unbelief that characterizes much of our literature. I think it may be said that in writers distinguished by a lack of Christian belief there will commonly be found an absence of what is popularly and fitly called "an awakened conscience." It will be found that they do not know what it is to look at Christ from the point of view of this woman, from the point of view of a shattered and wretched life, and a conscience that day by day is saying, It is I myself who have broken my life, and doing so I have become a transgressor, and need pardon, guidance, strength. Acute thought, an admirable faculty of explaining and enforcing what is thought, we find in abundance; but we certainly do not find a spirit humbled by a sense of sin and a conscience alive to the deepest obligations. So far as can be gathered from the writings of the most conspicuous unbelievers, they do not possess the first requisite for discerning a Saviour—namely, a sense of need. They lack the prime preparation for speaking on such a subject; they have never dealt fairly with their own sin. We do not consult a deaf man if we wish to ascertain whether the noise we have heard is thunder or the rumbling of a cart; neither can we expect that those will be the best teachers regarding God in whom the faculty by which we chiefly discern God—viz., the conscience—has been less exercised than any other. It is through the conscience God makes Himself most distinctly felt; it is in connection with the moral law we come most clearly in contact with Him; and convictions of God's Being and connection with us root themselves in the soul that a sense of sin has ploughed.

I am far from saying that in deciding upon the claims of Christ the understanding is to have no voice. The understanding must have a voice here as elsewhere. But it is a strong presumption in Christ's favour that He offers precisely what sinners need; and it is decisive in His favour when we find that He actually gives what sinners need. If it is practically found that He is the force that lifts thousands and thousands of human beings out of sin; if He has, in point of fact, brought light to those in deep darkness, comfort and courage to the desolate and heavily burdened, consecration and purity to the outcast and the corrupt, then, plainly, He is what He claims to be, and we owe Him our faith.

If God is to reveal Himself at all, the revelation must be made not solely or chiefly to the understanding, but to that part of us which determines character, and is capable of appreciating character. The revelation must be moral not intellectual. As our Lord's ministry proceeded He recognised that it was always the simple who most readily accepted and trusted Him; and He recognised that this was a thing to be thankful for: "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." And every one who thinks of it sees that it must be so—that a man's destiny must be decided not by his understanding, but by his character and leanings; not by his ability or disability to believe this or that, or to prove that his belief is well grounded, but by his aspirations, by the real bent of his heart. We should feel that there was

something very far wrong if our faith depended upon proofs that not every one could master, and if thus the clever man had an advantage over the humble and contrite. "The evidence must be such that spiritual character shall be an element in the acceptance of it." And such we find it to be. The reality and the significance of the revelation of God in Christ are more readily apprehended by the spiritually than by the intellectually gifted. Persons who are either by nature humble and docile, or whom life has taught to be so, persons who feel their need of God, and deeply long for an eternal state of peace and purity, these are the persons to whom God finds it possible to make Himself known. And if it be thought that this circumstance, that simple and docile spirits are convinced while hard-headed men are unconvinced, throws some suspicion on the reality of the revelation, if it be thought that the God and the eternity they believe in are but fancies of their own, it may fairly be replied, that there is no more reason for such a thought than for supposing that the rapture of a trained musician is fanciful and self-created, and not excited by any corresponding reality, because it is not shared by those whose taste for music is unawakened.

Convinced that Jesus was a prophet, the woman proposes to Him the standing subject of debate between Jews and Samaritans. Her statement of it is abrupt, and offers some appearance of being intended to turn the conversation away from herself; but this does not harmonise with her simple and direct character, and it is quite possible that in the midst of her confused and disappointed life she had sometimes wondered whether all her misery did not arise from her being a Samaritan. She knew what the Jews said of the Samaritan worship. She knew that they mocked at the Temple which stood on the hill over against Jacob's well; and when she found how very little her worship had helped her, she may have begun to suspect that there was truth in the Jewish allegations. Evidently the aspect of the Messiah, which had chiefly struck her, was His power to lead men into all truth, to teach them all things. Persons in her station, and quite as much overborne by sin as she, often retain their hold upon religious teaching; and in the midst of much that is superstitious they have a spark of true hope and longing for redemption. Jesus shows by the gravity and importance of His answer that He considered the woman sincere in the statement of her difficulty, and anxious to know where God might really be found. Perplexed and bewildered by her earthly experience, as so many of us are, she suddenly awakes to the consciousness that here, before her, and conversing with her, is a prophet; and at once she utters to Him what had been burning in her heart, "Where, where is God to be found?"

And so in reply to the inquiry of one sincere woman Jesus makes that great announcement which has ever since stood as the manifesto of spiritual worship. Not in any particular and isolated place, He tells the woman, is God to be found, not in the temple at Jerusalem, nor in the rival structure on Gerizim, but in spirit. "God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth." As our Lord intimates, this was a new kind of worship, essentially different from that to which Jews and Samaritans, and indeed all men, had hitherto been accustomed.

The magnitude of the contents of such sayings can as little be comprehended as their significance can be exhausted. We have first of all the central affirmation: "God is a Spirit." To fill out this definition with intelligible ideas is difficult. It implies that He is a Personal Being, that He is self-conscious, possessed of intelligence and will; but although Personal His Personality transcends our conception. So far as regards the immediate application of the definition by our Lord at this time, it suffices to note its primary meaning that God has not a body, and consequently is subject to none of the limitations and conditions to which the possession of a body subjects human persons. He needs no local dwelling-place, no temple, no material offerings. In local

worship there was an advantage while the world was young, and men could best be taught by symbols. A house in their midst, of which they might say, "God is there," was undoubtedly an aid to faith. But it had its disadvantages. For the more a worshipper fixed his mind on the one local habitation, the less could he carry with him the consciousness of God's presence in all places.

Very slowly do we learn that God is a Spirit. We think nothing is more surely believed among us. Alas! make almost any application of this radical truth, and we find how little it is believed. Take, for example, the appearances and voices by which intimations were made to godly men in Old Testament times. Why are many people reluctant to allow that these manifestations were inward and to conscience, that they came as convictions wrought by an unseen power, rather than as outward appearances or audible voices? Is it not because the truth that God is a Spirit is not adequately apprehended? Or why again do we so crave for signs, for clearer demonstrations of God's being and of His presence? Ought we not to be satisfied if He responds to spiritual aspirations, and if we find that our craving for holiness is met and gratified?

The inference drawn by our Lord from the truth that God is a Spirit is one which needs still to be pressed. God seeks to be worshipped not by outward forms or elaborate ritual but in spirit. Ordinary teachers would have put in a saving clause to preserve some forms of worship; Christ puts in none. Let men worship God in spirit, and let forms take their chance. To worship God in spirit is to yield the unseen but motive powers within us to the unseen but Almighty influences which we recognise as Divine. It is to prostrate our spirit before the Divine Spirit. It is in our deepest being, in will and intention, to offer ourselves up to Him in whom goodness is personified. When a man is doing that, what does it matter what he says to God, or with what forms of worship he comes before Him? That alone is acceptable worship which consists in the devout approach of the human spirit to the Divine; and that is accomplished often as effectually in our business intercourse with men when tempted to injustice, or in our homes when tempted to anger or to laxity, as when we are in the house of God. Worship in the spirit needs no words, no appointed place, but only a human soul that bows inwardly before the goodness of God, and submits itself cordially to His sovereign and loving will.

This certainly is a strong argument for simplicity of worship. Why, it may indeed be said, why have any outward worship at all? Why have churches and why have Divine service? Well, it would have been better for the Church if there had been far less outward worship than there commonly has been. For by its elaborate services the Church has far too much identified religion with that worship which can only be rendered in church. No one can be surprised that in utter disgust at the disproportion between outward and spiritual worship, between the gorgeous and fussy services that profess so much, and the slender and rare devotion of the soul to God, discerning men should have turned their back on the whole business, and declined to be partakers in so huge and profane a farce. Milton in his later years attended no Church and belonged to no communion. This certainly is to run to the opposite extreme. No doubt that worship may be real and acceptable which is offered in the silence and solitude of a man's spirit; but we naturally utter what we feel, and by the utterance strengthen the feelings that are good, and rid ourselves of the bitterness and strain of those that are painful and full of sorrow. Besides, the Church is, before all else, a society. Our religion is meant to bring us together; and though it does so more effectually by inspiring us with kindness and helpfulness in life than by a formal meeting together for no purposes of active charity, yet the one fellowship aids the other, as many of us well know.

While, then, we accept Christ's statement in its fullest significance, and maintain that our "reasonable service" is the offering of ourselves as living sacrifices, that spiritual worship is offered not in church only or mainly, but in doing God's will with a hearty good-will, we all the rather see how needful it is to utter ourselves to God as we do in our social worship; for as the wife would need some patience who was cared for indeed by her husband in the supply of her common wants, but had never a word of affection spoken to her, so our relations to God are not satisfactory unless we utter to Him our devotion as well as show it in our life. He was one of the wisest of English writers who said, "I always thought fit to keep up some mechanical forms of good breeding (in my family), without which freedom ever destroys friendship." Precisely so, he who omits the outward and verbal expression of regard to God, will soon lose that regard itself.

But if the words of Christ were not intended to put an end to outward worship altogether, they do, as I have said, form a strong argument for simplicity of worship. No forms whatever are needed that our spirit may come into communion with God. Let us begin with this. As true and perfect worship may be rendered by the dying man, who cannot lift an eyelid or open his lips, as by the most ornate service that combines perfect liturgical forms with the richest music man has ever written. Rich music, striking combinations of colour and of architectural forms, are nothing to God so far as worship goes, except in so far as they bring the human spirit into fellowship with Him. Persons are differently constituted, and what is natural to one will be formal and artificial to another. Some worshippers will always feel that they get closer to God in private, in their own silent room, and with nothing but their own circumstances and wants to stimulate them; they feel that a service carefully arranged and abounding in musical effects does indeed move them, but does not make it easier for them to address themselves to God. Others, again, feel differently; they feel that they can best worship God in spirit when the forms of worship are expressive and significant. But in two points all will agree: first, that in external worship, while we strive to keep it simple we should also strive to make it good—the best possible of its kind. If we are to sing God's praise at all, then let the singing be the best possible, the best music a congregation can join in, and executed with the utmost skill that care can develop. Music which cannot be sung save by persons of exceptional musical talent is unsuitable for congregational worship; but music which requires no consideration, and admits of no excellence, is hardly suitable for the worship of God. I do not know what idea of God's worship is held by persons who never put themselves to the least trouble to improve it so far as they are concerned.

The other point in which all will agree, is that where the spirit is not engaged there is no worship at all. This goes without saying. And yet, subtract from our worship all that is merely formal, and how much do you leave? Worse still, there are those who do not even strive after the fit and decorous form, who do not bow their heads in prayer, who are not ashamed to be seen looking about them during the most solemn acts of worship, who show that they are indevout, thoughtless, profane.

The true worshippers shall worship the Father not only "in spirit," but also "in truth." The word "truth" here probably covers two ideas—the ideas of reality and of accuracy. It is opposed to symbolic worship and to ignorant worship. It does not mean that worship was now to be sincere, for that it had already been both among Samaritans and Jews. But among the Jews the worship of God had been symbolical, and among the Samaritans it had been ignorant.

The Jewish worship had been symbolical, every person and thing, every colour, gesture, movement, having a meaning for the initiated. The time for this, says our

Lord, is past. We are to worship really. They need no longer take an animal to the temple to symbolise that they gave themselves to God; they were to spend their whole care on the *real* thing, on giving themselves to God; they were not to set candles about their altars to show that light was come into the world, they were themselves to shine as lights lit by Christ; they were not to swing censers to symbolise the sweet-smelling prayers of the saints, they were to offer prayers from humble hearts. In effect Christ said, You are grown up now, and can understand the realities; put away then these childish things. And those who continue to worship with various robes, and prescribed gesticulations and movements, and pictures, and altars, and everything to impress the senses, write themselves down children among grown-up people.

Truth is opposed also to error or misconception about the object of worship. Christ, by His presence, enables men to worship the Father in truth. He gives them the true idea of God. He makes God real, giving an actuality to our thought of God which we could not otherwise arrive at; and He shows us God as He truly is, connected with ourselves by love; holy, merciful, just.



The Expositor's Bible

Marcus Dods, D.D.

Gospel of John Part 1

Chapter 11

THE SECOND SIGN IN GALILEE.

“In the mean while the disciples prayed Him, saying, Rabbi, eat. But He said unto them, I have meat to eat that ye know not. The disciples therefore said one to another, Hath any man brought Him aught to eat? Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to accomplish His work. Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh the harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields, that they are white already unto harvest. He that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal; that he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together. For herein is the saying true, One soweth and another reapeth. I sent you to reap that whereon ye have not laboured: others have laboured, and ye are entered into their labour. And from that city many of the Samaritans believed on Him because of the word of the woman, who testified, He told me all things that ever I did. So when the Samaritans came unto Him, they besought Him to abide with them: and He abode there two days. And many more believed because of His word; and they said to the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy speaking: for we have heard for ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world. And after the two days He went forth from thence into Galilee. For Jesus Himself testified, that a prophet hath no honour in his own country. So when He came into Galilee, the Galilæans received Him, having seen all the things that He did in Jerusalem at the feast: for they also went unto the feast. He came therefore again unto Cana of Galilee, where He made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judæa 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. Jesus therefore said unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will in no wise believe. The nobleman saith unto Him, Sir, come down ere my child die. Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way; thy son liveth. The man believed the word that Jesus spake unto him, and he went his way. And as he was now going down, his servants met him, saying, that his son lived. So he inquired of them the hour when he began to amend. They said therefore unto him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him. So the father knew that it was at that hour in which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth: and himself believed, and his whole house. This is again the second sign that Jesus did, having come out of Judæa into Galilee”—JOHN IV. 31–54.

The disciples, when they went forward to buy provisions in Sychar, left Jesus sitting on the well wearied and faint. On their return they find Him, to their surprise, elate and full of renewed energy. Such transformations one has often had the pleasure of seeing. Success is a better stimulant than wine. Our Lord had found one who believed Him and valued His message; and this brought fresh life to His frame. The disciples go on eating, and are too busy with their meal to lift their eyes; but as they eat they talk over the prospects of the harvest in the rich fields through which they have just walked. Meanwhile our Lord sees the men of Sychar coming out of the town in obedience to the woman's request, and calls His disciples' attention to a harvest more worthy of their attention than the one they were discussing: “Were you not saying that we must wait four months till harvest comes again ^[12] and cheapens the bread for which you have paid so dear in Sychar? But lift up your eyes and mark the eager crowd of Samaritans, and say if you may not expect to reap much this very day. Are not the fields white already to harvest? Here in Samaria, which you only

wished quickly to pass through, where you were looking for no additions to the Kingdom, and where you might suppose sowing and long waiting were needed, you see the ripened grain. Others have laboured, the Baptist and this woman and I, and ye have entered into their labours.”

All labourers in the Kingdom of God need a similar reminder. We can never certainly say in what state of preparedness the human heart is; we do not know what providences of God have ploughed it, nor what thoughts are sown in it, nor what strivings are being even now made by the springing life that seeks the light. We generally give men credit, not perhaps for less thought than they have, for that is scarcely possible, but for less capacity of thought. The disciples were good men, but they went into Sychar judging the Samaritans good enough to trade with, but never dreaming of telling them the Messiah was outside their town. They must have been ashamed to find how much more capable an apostle the woman was than they. I think they would not wonder another time that their Lord should condescend to talk with a woman. The simple, unthinking, untroubled directness of a woman will often have a matter finished while a man is meditating some ponderous and ingenious contrivance for bringing it to pass. Let us not fall into the mistake of the disciples, and judge men good enough to buy and sell with, but quite alien to the matters of the Kingdom.

“There is a day in spring
When under all the earth the secret germs
Begin to stir and glow before they bud.
The wealth and festal pomps of midsummer
Lie in the heart of that inglorious hour
Which no man names with blessing, though its work
Is bless'd by all the world. Such days there are
In the slow story of the growth of souls.”

Such days may be passing in those around us, though all unknown to us. We can never tell how many months there are till harvest. We never know who or what has been labouring before we appear on the scene.

The woman's testimony was enough to excite curiosity. The men on her word came out to judge for themselves. What they saw and heard completed their conviction; “And they said to the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy speaking: for we have heard for ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world.” This growth of faith is one of the subjects John delights to exhibit. He is fond of showing how a weak and ill-founded faith may grow into a faith that is well rooted and strong.

This Samaritan episode is significant as an integral part of the Gospel, not only because it shows how readily unsophisticated minds perceive the inalienable majesty of Christ, but also because it forms so striking a foil to the reception our Lord had met with in Jerusalem, and was shortly to meet with in Galilee. In Jerusalem He did many miracles; but the people were too political and too prejudiced to own Him as a spiritual Lord. In Galilee He was known, and might have expected to be understood; but there the people longed only for physical blessings and the excitement of miracles. Here in Samaria, on the contrary, He did no miracles, and had no forerunner to herald His approach. He was found a weary wayfarer, sitting by the roadside, begging for refreshment. Yet, through this appearance of weakness, and dependence, and lowliness, there shone His native kindness, and truth, and kingliness, to such a degree, that the Samaritans, although naturally suspicious of Him as a Jew, believed in Him, delighted in Him, and proclaimed Him “Saviour of the world.”

After two days of happy intercourse with the Samaritans Jesus continues His journey

to Galilee. The proverbial expression which our Lord used regarding His relation to Galilee—that a prophet has no honour in his own country—is one we have frequent opportunity of verifying. The man that has grown up among us, whom we have seen struggling up through the ignorance, and weakness, and folly of boyhood, whom we have had to help and to protect, can scarcely receive the same respect as one who presents himself a mature man, with already developed faculties, no longer a learner, but prepared to teach. Montaigne complained that in his own country he had to purchase publishers, whereas elsewhere publishers were anxious to purchase him. “The farther off I am read from my own home,” he says, “the better I am esteemed.” The men of Anathoth sought Jeremiah’s life when he began to prophesy among them.

It is not the truth of the proverb that presents any difficulty, but its application to the present case. For the fact that a prophet has no honour in his own country would seem to be a reason for His declining to go to Galilee, whereas it is here introduced as His reason for going there. The explanation is found in the beginning of the chapter, where we are told that it was in search of retirement He was now leaving the popularity and publicity of Judæa, and repairing to His own country.

But, as frequently on other occasions, He now found that He could not be hid. His countrymen, who had thought so little of Him previously, had heard of His Judæan fame, and echoed the recognition and applause of the south. They had not discovered the greatness of this Galilean, although He had lived among them for thirty years; but no sooner do they hear that He has created a sensation in Jerusalem than they begin to be proud of Him. Every one has seen the same thing a hundred times. A lad who has been despised as almost half-witted in his native place goes up to London and makes a name for himself as poet, artist, or inventor, and when he returns to his village everybody claims him as cousin. Such a change of sentiment was not likely to escape the observation of Jesus nor to deceive Him. It is with an accent of disappointment, not unmingled with reproach, that He utters His first recorded words in Galilee: “Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will in no wise believe.”

This sets us in the point of view from which we can clearly see the significance of the one incident which John selects from all that happened during our Lord’s stay in Galilee at this time. John wishes to illustrate the difference between the Galilean and the Samaritan faith, and the possibility of the one growing into the other; and he does so by introducing the brief narrative of the courtier from Capernaum. Accounts, more or less accurate, of the miracles of Jesus in Jerusalem had found their way even into the household of Herod Antipas. For no sooner was He known to have arrived in Galilee than one of the royal household sought Him out to obtain a boon which no royal favour could grant. The supposition is not without plausibility that this nobleman was Chuza, Herod’s chamberlain, and that this miracle, which had so powerful an effect on the family in which it was wrought, was the origin of that devotion to our Lord which was afterwards shown by Chuza’s wife.

The nobleman, whoever he was, came to Jesus with an urgent request. He had come twenty miles to appeal to Jesus, and he had been unable to trust his petition to a messenger. But instead of meeting this distracted father with words of sympathy and encouragement, Jesus merely utters a general and chilling observation. Why is this? Why does He seem to lament that this father should so urgently plead for his son? Why does He seem only to submit to the inevitable, if He grants the request at all? Might it not even seem as if He wrought the miracle of healing rather for His own sake than for the boy’s or for the father’s sake, since He says, “Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will in no wise believe”—that is, will not believe *in Me*?

But these words did not express any reluctance on the part of Jesus to heal the nobleman's son. Possibly they were intended, in the first instance, to rebuke the desire of the father that Jesus should go with him to Capernaum and pronounce over the boy words of healing. The father thought the presence of Christ was necessary. He had not attained to the faith of the centurion, who believed that an expression of will was enough. Jesus, therefore, demands a stronger faith; and in His presence that stronger faith which can trust His word is developed.

The words, however, were especially a warning that His physical gifts were not the greatest He had to bestow, and that a faith which required to be buttressed by the sight of miracles was not the best kind of faith. Our Lord was always in danger of being looked upon as a mere thaumaturge, who could dispense cures merely as a physician could within his own limits order a certain treatment. He was in danger of being considered a dispenser of blessings to persons who had no faith in Him as the Saviour of the world. It is therefore with the accent of one who submits to the inevitable that He says, "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will in no wise believe."

But especially did our Lord wish to point out that the faith He approves and delights in is a faith which does not require miracles as its foundation. This higher faith He had found among the Samaritans. Many of them believed, as John is careful to note, because of His conversation. There was that in Himself and in His talk which was its own best evidence. Some men who introduce themselves to us, to win our countenance to some enterprise, carry integrity in their whole bearing; and we should feel it to be an impertinence to ask them for credentials. If they offer to prove their identity and trustworthiness we waive such proof aside, and assure them that they need no certificate. This had been our Lord's experience in Samaria. There no news of His miracles had come from Jerusalem. He came among the Samaritans from nobody knew where. He came without introduction and without certificate, yet they had discernment to see that they had never met His like before. Every word He spoke seemed to identify Him as the Saviour of the world. They forgot to ask for miracles. They felt in themselves His supernatural power, lifting them into God's presence, and filling them with light.

The Galilæan faith was of another kind. It was based on His miracles; a kind of faith He deplored, although He did not quite repudiate it. To be accepted not on His own account, not because of the truth He spoke, not because His greatness was perceived and His friendship valued, but because of the wonders He performed—this could not be a pleasant experience. We do not greatly value the visits of a person who cannot get on without our advice or assistance; we value the friendship of him who seeks our company for the pleasure he finds in it. And although we must all be ceaselessly and infinitely dependent on the good offices of Christ, our faith should be something more than a counting upon His ability and willingness to discharge these good offices. A faith which is merely selfish, which recognises that Christ can save from disaster in this life or in the life to come, and which cleaves to Him solely on that account, is scarcely the faith that Christ approves. There is a faith which responds to the glory of Christ's personality, which rests on what He is, which builds itself on the truth He utters, and recognises that all spiritual life centres in Him; it is this faith He approves. They who find in Him the link they have sought with the spiritual world, the pledge they have needed to certify them of an eternal righteousness, they to whom the supernatural is revealed more patently in Himself than in His miracles, are those whom the Lord delights in.

But the lower kind of faith may be a step to the higher. The agony of the father can

make nothing of general principles, but can only reiterate the one petition, "Come down ere my child die." And Jesus, with His perfect knowledge of human nature, sees that it is vain trying to teach a man in this absorbed condition of mind, and that probably the very best way to clarify his faith and lead him to higher and worthier thoughts is to grant his request—a hint not to be overlooked or despised by those who seek to do good, and who are, possibly, sometimes a little prone to obtrude their teaching at most inopportune seasons—at seasons when it is impossible for the mind to admit anything but the one absorbing topic. Circumstances are, in general, much better educators of men than any verbal teaching; and that verbal teaching can only do harm which interposes between the moving events that are occurring and the person who is passing through them. The success of our Lord's method was proved by the result; which was, that the slender faith of this nobleman became a genuine faith in Christ as the Lord, a faith which his whole household shared.

From the very greatness of Christ, and our consequent inability to bring Him into comparison with other men, we are apt to miss some of the significant features of His conduct. In the circumstances before us, for example, most teachers at an early stage in their career would have been in some excitement, and would probably have shown no reluctance to accede to the nobleman's request, and go down to his house, and so make a favourable impression on Herod's court. It was an opportunity of getting a footing in high places which a man of the world could not have overlooked. But Jesus was well aware that if the foundations of His kingdom were to be solidly laid, there must be excluded all influence of a worldly kind, all the overpowering constraint which fashion and great names exercise over the mind. His work, He saw, would be most enduringly, if most slowly, done in a more private manner. His own personal influence on individuals must first of all be the chief agency. He speaks, therefore, to this nobleman without any regard to his rank and influence; indeed, rather curtly dismisses him with the words, "Go, thy son lives." The total absence of display is remarkable. He did not go to Capernaum, to stand by the sickbed, and be acknowledged as the healer. He made no bargain with the nobleman that if his son recovered he would let the cause be known. He simply did the thing, and said nothing at all about it.

Though it was only one in the afternoon when the nobleman was dismissed he did not go back to Capernaum that night—why, we do not know. A thousand things may have detained him. He may have had business for Herod in Cana or on the road as well as for himself; the beast he rode may have gone lame where he could not procure another; at any rate, it is quite uncalled for to ascribe his delay to the confidence he had in Christ's word, an instance of the truth, "He that believeth shall not make haste." The more certainly he believed Christ's word the more anxious would he be to see his son. His servants knew how anxious he would be to hear, for they went to meet him; and were no doubt astonished to find that the sudden recovery of the boy was due to Him whom their master had visited. The cure had travelled much faster than he who had received the assurance of it.

The process by which they verified the miracle and connected the cure with the word of Jesus was simple, but perfectly satisfactory. They compared notes regarding the time, and found that the utterance of Jesus was simultaneous with the recovery of the boy. The servants who saw the boy recover did not ascribe his recovery to any miraculous agency; they would no doubt suppose that it was one of those unaccountable cases which occasionally occur, and which most of us have witnessed. Nature has secrets which the most skilful of her interpreters cannot disclose; and even so marvellous a thing as an instantaneous cure of a hopeless case may be due to some hidden law of nature. But no sooner did their master assure

them that the hour in which the boy began to amend was the very hour in which Jesus said he would get better, than they all saw to what agency the cure was due.

Here lies the special significance of this miracle; it brings into prominence this distinctive peculiarity of a miracle, that it consists of a marvel which is coincident with an express announcement of it, and is therefore referrible to a personal agent.^[13] It is the two things taken together that prove that there is a superhuman agency. The marvel alone, a sudden return of sight to the blind, or of vigour to the paralysed, does not prove that there is anything supernatural in the case; but if this marvel follows upon the word of one who commands it, and does so in all cases in which such a command is given, it becomes obvious that this is not the working of a hidden law of nature, nor a mere coincidence, but the intervention of a supernatural agency. That which convinced the nobleman's household that a miracle had been wrought was not the recovery of the boy, but his recovery in connection with the word of Jesus. What they felt they had to account for was not merely the marvellous recovery, but his recovery at that particular time. Even though it could be shown, then,—as it can never be,—that every cure reported in the Gospels might possibly be the result of some natural law, even though it could be shown that men born blind might receive their sight without a miracle, and that persons who had consulted the best physician suddenly recovered strength—this, we are to remember, is by no means the whole of what we have to account for. We have to account not only for sudden, and certainly most extraordinary cures, but also for these cures following uniformly, and in every case the word of One who said the cure would follow. It is this coincidence which puts it beyond a doubt that the cures can be referred only to the will of Christ.

Another striking feature of this miracle is that the Agent was at a distance from the subject of it. This is, of course, quite beyond our comprehension. We cannot understand how the will of Jesus, without employing any known physical means of communication between Himself and the boy, without even appearing before him so as to seem to inspire him by look or word, should instantaneously effect his cure. The only possible link of such a kind between the boy and Jesus was that he may have been aware that his father had gone to seek help for him, from a renowned physician, and may have had his hopes greatly excited. This supposition is, however, gratuitous. The boy may quite as likely have been delirious, or too young to know anything; and even though this slender link did exist, no sensible person will build much on that. And certainly it is encouraging to find that even while on earth our Lord did not require to be in contact with the person healed. "His word was as effective as His presence." And if it is credible that while on earth He could heal at the distance of twenty miles, it is difficult to disbelieve that He can from heaven exercise the same omnipotent will.

NOTE.—It is not apparent why John appends the remark, "This is again the second sign that Jesus did, having come out of Judæa into Galilee." He may, perhaps, have only intended to call attention more distinctly to the place where the miracle was wrought. This idea is supported by the fact that John shows, on parallel lines, the manifestation of Christ in Judæa and in Galilee. It is just possible that he may have wished to warn readers of the Synoptical Gospels, that Jesus had not yet begun the Galilæan ministry with which these Gospels open.

[12] The words (ver. 35) have quite the ring of a proverb—a proverb peculiar to

seed-time and for the encouragement of the sower. If uttered on this occasion in seed-time, this gives December as the date.

[13] This is lucidly taught in Mozley's *Bampton Lectures*.



The Expositor's Bible

Marcus Dods, D.D.

Gospel of John Part 1

Chapter 12

SABBATH CURE AT BETHESDA.

“After these things there was a feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem by the sheep gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a multitude of them that were sick, blind, halt, withered. And a certain man was there, which had been thirty and eight years in his infirmity. When Jesus saw him lying, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, He saith unto him, Wouldest thou be made whole? The sick man answered Him, Sir, 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. Jesus saith unto him, Arise, take up thy bed, and walk. And straightway the man was made whole, and took up his bed and walked. Now it was the Sabbath on that day. So the Jews said unto him that was cured, It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for thee to take up thy bed. But he answered them, He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk. They asked him, Who is the man that said unto thee, Take up thy bed, and walk? But he that was healed wist not who it was: for Jesus had conveyed Himself away, a multitude being in the place. Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing befall thee.”—JOHN v. 1–14.

The miracle here recorded is selected by John because in it Jesus plainly signified that He had power to quicken whom He would (v. 21), and because it became the occasion for the unbelief of the Jews to begin the hardening process and appear as opposition.

The miracle was wrought when Jerusalem was full; although whether at the Feast of Tabernacles, or Purim, may be doubted. The pool at the sheep-gate or sheep-market is commonly identified with the Fountain of the Virgin, which still supplies a bath known as *Hammam esh Shefa*, the Bath of Healing. It seems to have been an intermittent spring, which possessed some healing virtue for a certain class of ailments. Its repute was well established, for a great multitude of hopeful patients waited for the moving of the waters.^[14]

To this natural hospital Jesus wended His way on the Sabbath of the feast. And as the trained eye of the surgeon quickly selects the worst case in the waiting-room, so is the eye of Jesus speedily fixed on “a man which had an infirmity thirty and eight years,” a man paralysed apparently in mind as well as in body. Few employments could be more utterly paralysing than lying there, gazing dreamily into the water, and listening to the monotonous drone of the cripples detailing symptoms every one was sick of hearing about. The little periodic excitement caused by the strife to be first down the steps to the bubbling up of the spring was enough for him. Hopeless imbecility was written on his face. Jesus sees that for him there will never be healing by waiting here.

Going up to this man, our Lord confronts him with the arousing question, “Are you desiring to be made whole?” The question was needful. Not always are the miserable willing to be relieved. Medical men have sometimes offered to heal the

mendicant's sores, and their aid has been rejected. Even the invalid who does not trade pecuniarily on his disease is very apt to trade upon the sympathy and indulgence of friends, and sometimes becomes so debilitated in character as to shrink from a life of activity and toil. Those who have sunk out of all honest ways of living into poverty and wretchedness are not always eager to put themselves into the harness of honest labour and respectability. And this reluctance is exhibited in its extreme form in those who are content to be spiritual imbeciles, because they shrink from all arduous work and responsible position. Life, true life such as Christ calls us to, with all its obligations to others, its honest and spontaneous devotion to spiritual ends, its risks, its reality, and purity, does not seem attractive to the spiritual valetudinarian. In fact, nothing so thoroughly reveals a man to himself, nothing so clearly discloses to him his real aims and likings, as the answer he finds he can give to the simple question, "Are you willing to be made whole? Are you willing to be fitted for the highest and purest life?"

The man is sufficiently alive to feel the implied rebuke, and apologetically answers, "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool. It is not that I am resigned to this life of uselessness, but I have no option." The very answer, however, showed that he was hopeless. It had become the established order of things with him that some one anticipated him. He speaks of it as regularly happening—"another steps down before me." He had no friend—not one that would spare time to wait beside him and watch for the welling up of the water. And he had no thought of help coming from any other quarter. But there is that in the appearance and manner of Jesus that quickens the man's attention, and makes him wonder whether He will not perhaps stand by him and help him at the next moving of the waters. While these thoughts are passing through his mind the words of Jesus ring with power in his ears, "Rise, take up thy bed, and walk." And he who had so long waited in vain to be healed at the spring, is instantaneously made whole by the word of Jesus.

John habitually considered the miracles of Jesus as "signs" or object lessons, in which the spiritual mind might read unseen truth. They were intended to present to the eye a picture of the similar but greater works which Jesus wrought in the region of the spirit. He heals the blind, and therein sets Himself before men as the Light of the world. He gives the hungry bread, but is disappointed that they do not from this conclude that He is Himself the Bread sent by the Father to nourish to life everlasting. He heals this impotent man, and marvels that in this healing the people do not see a sign that He is the Son who does the Father's works, and who can give life to whom He will. It is legitimate, therefore, to see in this cure the embodiment of spiritual truth.

This man represents those who for many years have known their infirmity, and who have continued, if not very definitely to hope for spiritual vigour, at least to put themselves in the way of being healed—to give themselves, as invalids do, all the chances. This crowding of the pool of Bethesda—the house of mercy or grace—strongly resembles our frequenting of ordinances, a practice which many continue in very much the state of mind of this paralytic. They are still as infirm as when they first began to look for cure; it seems as if their turn were never to come, though they have seen many remarkable cures. Theoretically they have no doubt of the efficacy of Christian grace; practically they have no expectation that they shall ever be strong, vigorous useful men in His Kingdom. If you asked them why they are so punctual in attendance on all religious services, they would say, "Why, is it not a right thing to do?" Press them further with our Lord's question, "Are you expecting to be made whole? Is this your purpose in coming here?" They will refer you to their past, and tell you how it has always seemed to be some other person's case that

was thought of, how the Spirit of God seemed always to have other work than that which concerned them. But here they are still—and commendably and wisely so; for if this man had begun to disbelieve in the virtue of the water because he himself had never experienced its power, and had shut himself up in some wretched solitude of his own, then the eye of the Lord had never rested upon him—here they are still; for the best part of a lifetime they have been on the brink of health, and yet have never got it; for eight-and-thirty years this man had seen that water, knew that it healed people, put his hand in it, gazed on it,—yes, there it was, and *could heal him*, and yet his turn never came. So do these persons frequent the ordinances, hear the word that can save them, touch the bread of communion, and know that by the blessing of God the bread of life is thereby conveyed, and yet year by year goes past, and for them all remains unblessed. They begin despairingly to say—

“Thy saints are comforted, I know, And love Thy house of prayer; I therefore go where others go, But find no comfort there.”

This miracle shows such persons that there is a shorter way to health than a languid attendance on ordinances—an attendance that is satisfied if there seems to be still in operation what may be useful to others. It is the voice of Christ they need to hear. It is that voice summoning to thought and hope that we all need to hear, “Wilt thou be made whole?” Are you weary and ashamed of your infirmity; would you fain be a whole man in Christ, able at last to walk through life as a living man, seeing the beauty of God and of His work, and meeting with gladness the whole requirements of a life in God? Does the very beauty of Christ’s manhood, as He stands before you, make you at once ashamed of your weakness and covetous of His strength? Do you see in Him what it is to be strong, to enter into life, to begin to live as a man ought always to live, and are you earnestly looking to receive power from on high? To such come the life-giving voice of the Word who utters God, and the life that is in God.

It is important to notice that in Christ’s word to the sick, “Rise, take up thy bed, and walk,” three things are implied—

1. There must be a prompt response to Christ’s word. He does not heal any one who lies sluggishly waiting to see what that word will effect. There must be a hearty and immediate recognition of the speaker’s truth and power. We cannot say to what extent the impotent man would feel a current of nervous energy invigorating him. Probably this consciousness of new strength would only succeed his cordial reliance on the word of Christ. Obey Christ, and you will find strength enough. Believe in His power to give you new life, and you will have it. But do not hesitate, do not question, do not delay.

2. There must be no thought of failure, no making provision for a relapse; the bed must be rolled up as no longer needed. How do those diseased men of the Gospels rebuke us! We seem always half in doubt whether we should make bold to live as whole men. We take a few feeble steps, and return to the bed we have left. From life by faith in Christ we sink back to life as we knew it without Christ—a life attempting little, and counting it a thing too high for us to put ourselves and our all at God’s disposal. If we set out to swim the Channel we take care to have a boat within hail to pick us up if we become exhausted. To make provision for failure is in the Christian life to secure failure. It betrays a half-heartedness in our faith, a lurking unbelief which must bring disaster. Have we rolled up our bed and tossed it aside? If Christ fails us, have we nothing to fall back upon? Is it faith in Him that really keeps us going? Is it His view of the world and of all that is in it that we have

accepted; or do we merely take a few steps on His principles, but in the main make our bed in the ordinary unenlightened worldly life?

3. There must be a continuous use made of the strength Christ gives. The man who had lain for thirty-eight years was told to *walk*. We must confront many duties without any past experience to assure us of success. We must proceed to do them in faith—in the faith that He who bids us do them will give us strength for them. Take your place at once among healthy men; recognise the responsibilities of life. Find an outlet for the new strength in you. Be no longer a burden, a charge to others, but begin yourself to bear the burdens of others, and be a source of strength to others.

Before the man could get home with his bed he was challenged for carrying it on the Sabbath. They must surely have known that he himself, and many more, had that very morning been carried to Bethesda. But we can scarcely conclude from the Jews thus challenging the healed man that they sought occasion against Jesus. They would have stopped any one going through the streets of Jerusalem with a bundle on the Sabbath. They had Scripture on their side, and founded on the words of Jeremiah (xvii. 21), “Take heed to yourselves, and bear no burden on the Sabbath day.” Even in our own streets a man carrying a large package on Sunday would attract the suspicion of the religious, if not of the police. We must not, then, find a malicious intention towards Jesus, but merely the accustomed thoughtless bigotry and literalism, in the challenge of the Jews.

But to their “It is not lawful,” the man promptly answers, perhaps only meaning to screen himself by throwing the blame on another, “He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed.” The man quite naturally, and without till now reflecting on his own conduct, had listened to Christ’s word as authoritative. He that gave me strength told me how to use it. Intuitively the man lays down the great principle of Christian obedience. If Christ is the source of life to me, He must also be the source of law. If without Him I am helpless and useless, it stands to reason that I must consider His will in the use of the life He communicates. This must always be the Christian’s defence when the world is scandalised by anything he does in obedience to Christ; when he goes in the face of its traditions and customs; when he is challenged for singularity, overpreciseness, or innovation. This is the law which the Christian must still bear in mind when he fears to thwart any prejudice of the world, when he is tempted to bide his time among the impotent folk, and not fly in the face of established usage; when, though he has distinctly understood what he ought to do, so many difficulties threaten, that he is tempted to withdraw into obscurity and indolence. It is the same Voice which gives life and directs it. Shall I then refuse it in both cases, or choose it in both? Shall I shrink from its directions, and lie down again in sin; or shall I accept life, and with it the still greater boon of spending it as Christ wills?

But though the man had thus instinctively obeyed Jesus, he actually had not had the curiosity to ask who He was. It is almost incredible that he should have so immediately lost sight of the person to whom he was so indebted. But so taken up is he with his new sensations, so occupied with gathering up his mats, so beset by the congratulations and inquiries of his comrades at the porch, that before he bethinks himself Jesus is gone. Among those who do undoubtedly profit by Christ’s work there is a lamentable and culpable lack of interest in His person. It does not seem to matter *from whom* they have received these benefits so long as they have them; they do not seem drawn to His person, ever following to know more of Him and to enjoy His society, as the poor demoniac would have done, who would gladly have left home and country, and who cared not what line of life he might be thrown into or

what thrown out of, if only he might be with Christ. If one were to put the case, that my prospects were eternally and in each particular changed by the intervention of one whose love is itself infinite blessing, and if it were asked what would be my feeling towards such a person, doubtless I would say, He would have an unrivalled interest for me, and I should be irresistibly drawn into the most intimate personal knowledge and relations; but no—the melancholy truth is otherwise; the gift is delighted in, the giver is suffered to be lost in the crowd. The spectacle is presented of a vast number of persons made blessed through the intervention of Christ, who are yet more concerned to exhibit their own new life and acquirements, than to identify and keep hold of Him to whom they owe all.

Although the healed man seems to have had little interest in Christ, Christ kept His eye upon him. Finding him in the Temple, where he had gone to give thanks for his recovery, or to see a place he had so long been excluded from, or merely because it was a place of public resort, our Lord addressed him in the emphatic words, “Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon thee.” The natural inference from these words is that his disease had been brought on by sin in early life—another instance of the lifelong misery a man may incur by almost his earliest responsible acts, of the difficulties and shame with which a lad or a boy may unwittingly fill his life, but an instance also of the willingness with which Christ delivers us even from miseries we have rashly brought upon ourselves. Further still, it is an instance of the vitality of sin. This man’s lifelong punishment had not broken the power of sin within him. He knew why he was diseased and shattered. Every pain he felt, every desire which through weakness he could not gratify, every vexing thought of what he might have made of life, made him hate his sin as the cause of all his wretchedness; and yet at the end of these thirty-eight years of punishment Christ recognised in him, even in the first days of restored health, a liability to return to his sin. But every day we see the same; every day we see men keeping themselves down, and gathering all kinds of misery round them by persisting in sin. We say of this man and that, “How is it possible he can still cleave to his sin, no better, no wiser for all he has come through? One would have thought former lessons sufficient.” But no amount of mere suffering purifies from sin. One has sometimes a kind of satisfaction in reaping the consequences of sin, as if that would deter from future sin; but if this will not hold us back, what will? Partly the perception that already God forgives us, and partly the belief that when Christ commands us to sin no more He can give us strength to sin no more. Who believes with a deep and abiding conviction that Christ’s will can raise him from all spiritual impotence and uselessness? He, and he only, can hope to conquer sin. To rely upon Christ’s word, “Sin no more,” with the same confident faith with which this man acted on His word, “Rise, take up thy bed”—this alone gives victory over sin. If our own will is too weak, Christ’s will is always mighty. Identify your will with Christ’s, and you have His strength.

But the fear of punishment has also its place. The man is warned that a worse thing will fall upon him if he sins. Sinning after the beginning of deliverance, we not only fall back into such remorse, darkness, and misery as have already in this life followed our sin, but a worse thing will come upon us. But “worse.” What can be worse than the loss of an entire life; like this man, passing in disappointment, in uselessness, in shame, the time which all naturally expect shall be filled with activity, success, and happiness; losing, and losing early, and losing by one’s own fault, and losing hopelessly, everything that makes life desirable? Few men so entirely miss life as this man did, though perhaps our activities are often more hurtful than his absolute inactivity, and under an appearance of prosperity the heart may have been torn with remorse as painful as his. Yet let no man think that he knows the worst that sin can do. After the longest experience we may sink deeper

still, and indeed must do so unless we listen to Christ's voice saying, "Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon thee."

[14] Verse 4 is omitted by recent editors on the authority of the best ancient MSS.



The Expositor's Bible

Marcus Dods, D.D.

Gospel of John Part 1

Chapter 13

JESUS LIFE-GIVER AND JUDGE.

“The man went away, and told the Jews that it was Jesus which had made him whole. And for this cause did the Jews persecute Jesus, because He did these things on the sabbath. But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh even until now, and I work. For this cause therefore the Jews sought the more to kill Him, because He not only brake the sabbath, but also called God His own Father, making Himself equal with God. Jesus therefore answered and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father doing: for what things soever He doeth, these the Son also doeth in like manner. For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth Him all things that Himself doeth: and greater works than these will He shew Him, that ye may marvel. For as the Father raiseth the dead and quickeneth them, even so the Son also quickeneth whom He will. For neither doth the Father judge any man, but He hath given all judgement unto the Son; that all may honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which sent Him. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth My word, and believeth Him that sent Me, hath eternal life, and cometh not into judgement, but hath passed out of death into life. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour cometh, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live. For as the Father hath life in Himself, even so gave He to the Son also to have life in Himself: and He gave Him authority to execute judgement, because He is the Son of man. Marvel not at this: for the hour cometh, in which all that are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done ill, unto the resurrection of judgement. I can of Myself do nothing; as I hear, I judge: and My judgement is righteous; because I seek not Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me. If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true. It is another that beareth witness of Me; and I know that the witness which He witnesseth of Me is true. Ye have sent unto John, and he hath borne witness unto the truth. But the witness which I receive is not from man: howbeit I say these things, that ye may be saved. He was the lamp that burneth and shineth: and ye were willing to rejoice for a season in his light. But the witness which I have is greater than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given Me to accomplish, the very works that I do, bear witness of Me, that the Father hath sent Me. And the Father which sent Me, He hath borne witness of Me. Ye have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form. And ye have not His word abiding in you: for whom He sent, Him ye believe not. Ye search the scriptures, because ye think that in them ye have eternal life; and these are they which bear witness of Me; and ye will not come to Me, that ye may have life. I receive not glory from men. But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in yourselves. I am come in My Father's name, and ye receive Me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive. How can ye believe, which receive glory one of another, and the glory that cometh from the only God ye seek not? Think not that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, on whom ye have set your hope. For if ye believed Moses, ye would believe Me; for he wrote of Me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe My words?”—JOHN V. 15-47.

As soon as the impotent man discovered who it was that had given him strength, he informed the authorities, either from sheer thoughtlessness, or because he considered that they had a right to know, or because he judged that, like himself, they would rather admire the miracle than take exception to the Sabbath-breaking. If this last

was his idea, he had not gauged the obtuseness and self-righteous spite of honest and pious literalism. “For this cause did the Jews persecute Jesus, because He did these things on the Sabbath.”^[15] In what particular form the charge of Sabbath-breaking was brought against our Lord, whether formal or conversational and tentative, John does not say. He is more concerned to give us in full the substance of His apology. For the first time our Lord now gave in public an explanation of His claims; and this five minutes’ talk with the Jews contains probably the most important truth ever uttered upon earth.

The passage embodies the four following assertions: that the healing of the incurable on the Sabbath resulted from and exhibited His perfect unison with the Father; that this giving of life to an impotent man was an illustration or sign of His power to quicken whom He would, to communicate life Divine and eternal to all in whatsoever stage of spiritual or physical deadness they were; that His claim to possess this supreme power was not mere idle assertion, but was both guaranteed by this miracle, and otherwise was amply attested; and that the real root of their rejection of Him and His claims was to be found, not in their superior knowledge of God and regard for His will, but in their worldly craving for the applause of men.^[16]

1. Our Lord’s reply to the charge of Sabbath-breaking is, “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.” He did not make any comment on the Sabbath law. He did not defend Himself by showing that works of mercy such as He had done were admissible. On other occasions He adopted this line of defence, but now He took higher ground. The rest of God is not inactivity. God does not on the Sabbath cease to communicate life to all things. He does not refrain from blessing men till the sun of the Sabbath is set. The tides rise and fall; the plants grow; the sun completes his circuit on the Sabbath as on other days. “Why does not God keep the Sabbath?” a caviller asked of a Jew. “Is it not lawful,” was the answer, “for a man to move about in his own house on the Sabbath? The house of God is the whole realm above and the whole realm below.” For God the Sabbath has no existence; it is a boon He has given to His creatures because they need it. His untiring beneficence is needful for the upholding and for the happiness of all. And it is the same superiority to the Sabbath which Jesus claims for Himself. He claims that His unceasing work is as necessary to the world as the Father’s—or rather, that He and the Father are together carrying out one work, and that in this miracle the Jews find fault with He has merely acted as the Father’s agent.

From this statement the Jews concluded that He made Himself equal with God. And they were justified in so concluding. It is only on this understanding of His words that the defence of Jesus was relevant. If He meant only to say that He imitated God, and that because God did not rest on the Sabbath, therefore He, a holy Jew, might work on the Sabbath, His defence was absurd. Our Lord did not mean that He was imitating the Father, but that His work was as indispensable as the Father’s, was the Father’s. My Father from the beginning up till now worketh, giving life to all; and I work in the same sphere, giving life as His agent and almoner to men. The work of quickening the impotent man was the Father’s work. In charging Him with breaking the Sabbath they were charging the Father with breaking it.

But this gives Jesus an opportunity of more clearly describing His relation to God. He declares He is in such perfect harmony with God that it is impossible for Him to do either that miracle or any other work at His own instigation. “The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father doing.” “I can of myself do nothing.” He had power to do it, but no will. He had life in Himself, and could give it to whom He pleased; but so perfect was His sympathy with God, that it was

impossible for Him to act where God would not have Him act. So trained was He to perceive the Divine purpose, so habituated to submit Himself to it, that He could neither mistake His Father's will nor oppose it. As a conscientious man when pressed to do a wrong thing says, No, really *I cannot* do it; as a son who might happen to be challenged for injuring His father's business would indignantly repudiate the possibility of such a thing. "What do I live for," he would say, "but to further my father's views? My father's interests and mine are identical, our views and purposes are identical. I *cannot* do anything antagonistic to him." So Jesus had from the first recognised God as His Father, and had so true and deep a filial feeling that really it was the joy of His life to do His will.

This, then, was the idea the Lord sought to impress on the people on the first occasion on which He had a good opportunity of speaking in public. He cannot do anything save what is suggested to Him by consideration of God's will. Even as a boy He had begun to have this filial feeling. "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" That in Him which is most conspicuous and which He wishes to be most conspicuous is perfect sonship; filial trust and duty carried to its perfect height. It is this perfect filial unanimity with the Father which makes His life valuable, significant, different from all other lives. It is this which makes Him the perfect representative of the Father; which enables Him to be God's perfect messenger to men, doing always and only the will of God in men's sight. He is in the world not for the sake of fulfilling any private schemes of His own, but having it as His sole motive and aim to do the Father's will.

This perfect filial feeling had no doubt its root in the eternal relation of the Son to the Father. It was the continuance, upon earth and under new conditions, of the life He already had enjoyed with the Father. Having assumed human nature, He could reveal Himself only so far as that nature allowed Him. His revelation, for example, was not universal, but local, confined to one place; His human nature being necessarily confined to one place. He did not assert superiority to all human law; He paid taxes; He recognised lawful authority; He did not convince men of His Divinity by superiority to all human infirmities; He ate, slept, died as ordinary men. But through all this He maintained a perfect harmony with the Divine will. It was this which differentiated Him from ordinary men, that He maintained throughout His life an attitude of undoubting trust in the Father and devotion to Him. It was through the human will of the Lord that the Divine will of the Eternal Son uniformly worked and used the whole of His human nature.

It is in this perfect Sonship of Christ we first learn what a son should be. It is by His perfect loyalty to the Father's will, by His uniform adoption of it as the best, the only, thing He can do, that we begin to understand our connection with God, and to recognise that in His will alone is our blessedness. Naturally we resent the rule of any will but our own; we have not by nature such love for God as would put His will first. To our reason it becomes manifest that there is nothing higher or happier for us than to sink ourselves in God; we see that there is nothing more elevating, nothing more essential to a hopeful life than that we make God's purposes in the world our own, and do that very thing which He sees to be worth doing and which He desires to do. Yet we find that the actual adoption of this filial attitude, natural, rational, and inviting as it seems, is just the most difficult of all difficulties, is indeed the battle of life. Who among us can say that we do nothing of ourselves, nothing at our own instance, that our life is entirely at God's disposal?

To this filial disposition on the part of the Son the Father responds: "The Father loveth the Son, and showeth Him all things that Himself doeth" (ver. 20). If we ask

how Jesus saw the Father's works, or how, for example, He saw that the Father wished Him to heal the impotent man, the answer must be that it is by inward sympathy the Son apprehends what the Father wills. We in our measure can see what God is doing in the world, and can forward God's work. But not by mere observation of what God had done and was doing through others did Jesus see what the Father did, but rather by His own inward perception of the Father's will. By His own purity, love, and goodness He knew what the Father's goodness willed. But the Father was not passive in the matter, merely allowing the Son to discover what He could of His will. Godet illustrates this active revelation on the Father's part by the simile of the father in the carpenter's shop at Nazareth showing the son the things he made and the method of making them. This simile, however, being external, is apt to misdirect the mind. It was by a wholly inward and spiritual process the Father made known to the Son His purposes and mind.

2. This quickening of the impotent man was meant to be an object lesson, a sign of the power of Jesus to communicate life, Divine and eternal, to whom He would. "Greater works" than this of curing the paralytic "will the Father show to the Son, that ye may marvel" (ver. 20). As through His word vigour had been imparted to the impotent man, so all who listen to His word will receive everlasting life (ver. 24). As the impotent man, after thirty-eight years of deadness, found life on the moment by believing Christ's word, so every one who listens to that same voice as the word of God receives life eternal. Through that word he connects himself with the source of life. He becomes obedient to the life-giving will of God.

The question, How can the spiritually dead hear and believe? is the question. How could the impotent man rise in response to Christ's word? Psychologically inexplicable it may be, but happily it is practically possible. And here, as elsewhere, theory must wait upon fact. One thing is plain: that faith is the link between the Divine life and human weakness. Had the impotent man not believed, he would not have risen. Christ quickens "whom He will;" that is to say, there is no limit to His life-giving power; but He cannot quicken those who will not have life or who do not believe He can give it. Hence necessarily "the Father hath committed all judgement unto the Son." To the impotent man Jesus put the question, "Wilt thou be made whole?" and by that question the man was judged. By the answer he gave to it he determined whether he would remain dead or receive life. Had he not on the moment believed, he would have doomed himself to permanent and hopeless imbecility. Christ's question judged him.

Precisely so, says Jesus, are all men judged by My presence among them, and My offer of life to them. For the Father has not only given to the Son to have life in Himself, that He may thus communicate it (ver. 26), but "He hath given Him authority to execute judgement also, because He is a Son of man." For these words do not mean that Jesus will be Judge because men should be judged by one who shares their nature,^[17] or because they must be judged by the holiest and most loving of men^[18]—as if God Himself were not sufficiently loving—but, as the object-lesson shows us, Jesus is necessarily Judge by appearing as God's messenger, and by offering to men life everlasting. By becoming a son of man, by living in human form as the embodied love and life of God, and by making intelligible God's good-will and His invitation to life, Christ necessarily sifts men and separates them into two classes. Every one who hears the word of Jesus is judged. He either accepts quickening and passes into life, or he rejects it and abides in death. This human appearance, Jesus seems to say, which stumbles you, and makes you think that My pretensions of judging all men are absurd, is the very qualification which makes judgment one of My necessary functions.

And this explains why we find Christ uttering apparent contradictions: at one time saying, “For judgment came I into this world,” and at another time saying, “I came not to judge the world.” The object of His coming into the world was to give life, not to condemn men, not to cut them off finally from life and from God, but to open a way to the Father, and to be their life. But this very coming of Christ and the offers He makes to men constitute the critical test of every soul that is brought into contact with them. Judgment is the necessary accompaniment of salvation. Man’s will being free, it must be so. And this judgment, determined in this life, will one day appear in final, irreversible, manifested result. “The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.”

3. But naturally the Jews would say: “These are extraordinary and apparently extravagant claims to make. It is not easily credible that this voice which now so quietly speaks to us is one day to wake the dead. It is not easily credible that one whom we can carry before our courts is to judge all men.” To which thoughts Jesus replies: “I do not expect you to take My word for these things, but there are three guarantees of My truth to which I point you. There is first of all (1) the testimony of John^[19]—a man in whose prophetic gift you for a while prided yourselves, rejoicing that God had sent you so powerful and enlightening a messenger. His whole function was to testify of Me. This lamp, in the light of which you rejoiced, was lit solely for the purpose of making quite visible to you that which you now say you cannot see. But this is not the best witness I have, although those of you who cannot see for themselves might be saved if only you would believe John’s testimony. But (2) I have greater witness than that of John. John said that I should come as the Father’s agent. Well, if you cannot believe John’s words, can you not believe the things you see? This impotent man raised to health, is this not a little hint of the Divine power that is in your midst? And are not all the works I do the Father’s works, done by His power and for His purposes? Is not My whole career its own best evidence? But besides, (3) the Father Himself has borne witness to Me. He has not appeared to you. You have not heard His voice nor seen His shape, but His *word*, His own sufficient account of His nature and connection with you, you have. You search the Scriptures, and rightly, for they are they which testify of Me. They are the Father’s word which, had you listened to, you would have known Me as sent by Him. Had you not mumbled only the husk of Scripture, counting its letters and wearing it on your foreheads, but had you, through God’s law, entered into sympathy with His purpose on earth, had you, through all that Scripture tells you of Him, learned His nature, and learned to love Him, you would at once have recognised Me as His messenger. ‘Ye have not His word abiding in you;’ ye have not let it lie in your minds and colour them; ye have not chewed, and digested, and assimilated the very quintessence of it, for had you done so you would have learned to know God and seen Him in Me.^[20] But ‘whom He sent, Him ye believe not.’”

The very Scriptures which had been given to guide them to Christ they used as a veil to blind themselves to His presence. Jesus points out where their mistake lay. “You search the Scriptures, because you suppose that in them, a mere book, you have eternal life; the truth being that life is in Me. The Scriptures do not give life, they lead to the Life-giver. The Scriptures, by your superstitiously reverent and shallow use of them, actually prevent you from finding the life they were meant to point you to. You think you have life in them, and therefore will not come to Me.” So may a book, lifted out of its subordinate place, be entirely perverted from its use, and actually hinder the purpose it was given to promote. To worship the Bible as if it

were Christ is to mistake a finger-post for a house of shelter. It is possible to have a great zeal for the Bible and yet quite to misapprehend its object; and to misapprehend its object is to make it both useless and dangerous. To set it on a level with Christ is to do both it, Him, and ourselves the gravest injustice. Many who seem to exalt the Scriptures degrade them; and those who give them a subordinate place truly exalt them. God speaks in Scripture, as this passage shows, but He speaks for a definite purpose, to reveal Christ; and this fact is the key to all difficulties about the Bible and inspiration.

4. The unbelief of the Jews is traced by Jesus to a moral root. They seemed very zealous for God's law, but beneath this superficial and ostentatious championing of God there was detected a deep-seated alienation from God which unfitted them for knowing either Him or His messenger. "Glory from men I do not receive (ver. 41). But the reason of this is that ye have not the love of God in you, and cannot appreciate Divine glory or recognise it when you see it. How can you believe, when your hearts crave the glory you can give to one another, your ambition rising no higher than to be spoken of by ignorant people as the upholders of religion? You have taught yourselves to measure men by a wholly spurious standard, and cannot believe in one who is a transparency through which the glory of God shines upon you." Had some one come in his own name, seeking a glory the Jews could give him, adapting himself to their poor conceptions, him they would have received. But Jesus being sent by God had that glory which consisted in being a perfect medium of the Father's will, doing the Father's work and never seeking His own glory.

This, then, was the reason why the Jews could not believe in Jesus. Their idea of glory was earthly, and they were unfitted to see and appreciate such glory as He showed in deeds of kindness. And those sayings of Jesus penetrate deeply into the permanent roots of unbelief.

It was certainly a great demand on their faith which Jesus made. He asked them to believe that the most Divine of prerogatives, life-giving and judging, belonged to Him. But He gave them evidence. He only asks them to believe what they have seen exemplified. He does not as yet even ask them to draw inferences. He does not blame them for not seeing what is implied regarding His eternal relation to the Father. He adduces evidence "that they may be saved;" that they may be induced to partake of the life He dispenses; and He laments that they will not believe that He is commissioned by God to speak words of life to men, although He has given them demonstration of His commission and power to give life.

To us also He speaks—for plainly such powers as He here claims are not such as can be capriciously given and withdrawn, rendered accessible to one age but not to another, exhibited on earth once but never more to be exercised. They are not powers that could be given to more than one messenger of God. To suppose more than one source of spiritual life or more than one seat of judgment is against reason.

[15] Similarly in the Synoptical Gospels the hostility of the Jews is traced to His apparent breach of the Sabbath law.

[16] The following division of the former part of this Apology may help the reader to follow the sequence of thought. In vv. 19, 20, Jesus enounces the general features of His relation to the Father. In vv. 21–23 the works dictated by this relation and

resulting from it are spoken of generally as “quickenings” and “judging.” These works are in vv. 24–27 exhibited in the spiritual sphere, and in vv. 28, 29, in the physical sphere. The first part of the defence is closed in ver. 30 with a re-affirmation of His absolute unison with the Father.

[17] Westcott.

[18] Stier.

[19] It is very doubtful whether ver. 32 refers to John. I think it refers to the Father. Still Jesus, in vv. 33–35, refers the Jews to the testimony of John, although for His own part He depends on higher testimony.

[20] The same idea is resumed in vv. 45–47. If you have not understood the writings of Moses which you have heard from Sabbath to Sabbath, and have not received the knowledge of God they were meant to give you, how shall ye believe the once heard words of Him whose coming was meant to be prepared for, and His identification made easy by all that Moses wrote and by the institutions he established.



The Expositor's Bible

Marcus Dods, D.D.

Gospel of John Part 1

Chapter 14

JESUS THE BREAD OF LIFE.

JOHN 6:1–59.

In this chapter John follows the same method as in the last. He first relates the sign, and then gives our Lord's interpretation of it. As to the Samaritan woman, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so now to the Galileans, Jesus manifests Himself as sent to communicate to man life eternal. The sign by means of which He now manifests Himself is, however, so new that many fresh aspects of His own person and work are disclosed.^[21]

The occasion for the miracle arose, as usual, quite simply. Jesus had retired to the east side of the sea of Tiberias, probably to a spot near Bethsaida Julias, that He might have some rest. But the people, eager to see more miracles, followed Him round the head of the lake, and, as they went, their number was augmented by members of a Passover caravan which was forming in the neighbourhood or was already on the march. This inconsiderate pursuit of Jesus, instead of offending Him, touched Him; and as He marked them toiling up the hill in groups, or one by one, some quite spent with a long and rapid walk, mothers dragging hungry children after them, His first thought was, What can these poor tired people get to refresh them here? He turns therefore to Philip with the question, "Whence are we to buy bread that these may eat?" This he said, John tells us, "to prove" or test Philip. Apparently this disciple was a shrewd business man, quick to calculate ways and means, and rather apt to scorn the expectations of faith. Every man must rid himself of the defects of his qualities. And Jesus now gave Philip an opportunity to overcome his weakness-in-strength by at last boldly confessing his inability and the Lord's ability,—by saying, We have neither meat nor money, but we have Thee. But Philip, like many another, missed his opportunity, and, wholly oblivious of the resources of Jesus, casts His eye rapidly over the crowd and estimates that "two hundred pennyworth"^[22] of bread would scarcely suffice to give each enough to stay immediate cravings. Philip's friend Andrew as little as himself divines the intention of Jesus, and naïvely suggests that the whole provision he can hear of in the crowd is a little boy's five loaves and two fishes. These helpless, meagrely furnished and meagrely conceiving disciples, meagre in food and meagre in faith, are set in contrast to the calm faith and infinite resource of Jesus.

The moral ground being thus prepared for the miracle in the confessed inability of the disciples and of the crowd, Jesus takes the matter in hand. With that air of authority and calm purpose which must have impressed the onlookers at all His miracles, He says, "Make the men sit down." And there where they happened to be, and without further preparation, on a grassy spot near the left bank of the Jordan, and just where the river flows into the lake of Galilee, with the evening sun sinking behind the hills on the western shore and the shadows lying across the darkened lake, the multitude break up into groups of hundreds and fifties, and seat themselves in perfect confidence that somehow food is to be furnished. They seat themselves as

those who expect a full meal, and not a mere snack they could eat standing, though where the full meal was to come from who could tell? This expectation must have deepened into faith as the thousands listened to their Host *giving thanks* over the scanty provision. One would fain have heard the words in which Jesus addressed the Father, and by which He caused all to feel how near to each was infinite resource. And then, as He proceeded to distribute the ever-multiplying food, the first awe-struck silence of the multitude gave way to exclamations of surprise and to excited and delighted comments. The little lad, as he watched with widening eyes his two fishes doing the work of two thousand, would feel himself a person of consequence, and that he had a story to tell when he went back to his home on the beach. And ever and anon, as our Lord stood with a smile on His face enjoying the congenial scene, the children from the nearest groups would steal to His side, to get their supplies from His own hand.

1. Before touching upon the points in this sign emphasised by our Lord Himself, it is perhaps legitimate to indicate one or two others. And among these it may first of all be remarked that our Lord sometimes, as here, gives not medicine but food. He not only heals, but prevents disease. And however valuable the one blessing is—the blessing of being healed—the other is even greater. The weakness of starvation exposes men to every form of disease; it is a lowered vitality which gives disease its opportunity. In the spiritual life it is the same. The preservative against any definite form of sin is a strong spiritual life, a healthy condition not easily fatigued in duty, and not easily overcome by temptation. Perhaps the gospel has come to be looked upon too exclusively as a remedial scheme, and too little as the means of maintaining spiritual health. So marked is its efficacy in reclaiming the vicious, that its efficacy as the sole condition of healthy human life is apt to be overlooked. Christ is needful to us not only as sinners; He is needful to us as men. Without Him human life lacks the element which gives reality, meaning, and zest to the whole. Even to those who have little present sense of sin He has much to offer. A sense of sin grows with the general growth of the Christian life; and that at first it should be small need not surprise us. But the present absence of a profound sorrow for sin is not to bar our approach to Christ. To the impotent man, conscious of his living death, Christ offered a life that healed and strengthened—healed by strengthening. But equally to those who now conversed with Him, and who, conscious of life, asked Him how they might *work* the work of God, He gave the same direction, that they must believe in Him as their life.

2. Our Lord here supplied the same plain food to all.

In the crowd were men, women, and children, old and young, hardworking peasants, shepherds from the hillside, and fishermen from the lake; as well as traders and scribes from the towns. No doubt it elicited remark that fare so simple should be acceptable to all. Had the feast been given by a banqueting Pharisee, a variety of tastes would have been provided for. Here the guests were divided into groups merely for convenience of distribution, not for distinction of tastes. There are few things which are not more the necessity of one class of men than of another, or that while devotedly pursued by one nation are not despised across the frontier, or that do not become antiquated and obsolete in this century though considered essential in the last. But among these few things is the provision Christ makes for our spiritual well-being. It is like the supply of our deep natural desires and common appetites, in which men resemble one another from age to age, and by which they recognise their common humanity. All the world round, you may find wells whose water you could not say was different from what you daily use, at any rate they quench your thirst as well. You could not tell what country you were in nor what age by the taste of the

water from a living well. And so what God has provided for our spiritual life bears in it no peculiarities of time or place; it addresses itself with equal power to the European of to-day as it did to the Asiatic during our Lord's own lifetime. Men have settled down by hundreds and by fifties, they are grouped according to various natures and tastes, but to all alike is this one food presented. And this, because the want it supplies is not fictitious, but as natural and veritable a want as is indicated by hunger or thirst.

We must beware then of looking with repugnance on what Christ calls us to, as if it were a superfluity that may reasonably be postponed to more urgent and essential demands; or as if He were introducing our nature to some region for which it was not originally intended, and exciting within us spurious and fanciful desires which are really alien to us as human beings. This is a common thought. It is a common thought that religion is not an essential but a luxury. But in point of fact all that Christ calls us to, perfect reconciliation with God, devoted service of His will, purity of character,—these are the essentials for us, so that until we attain them we have not begun to live, but are merely nibbling at the very gate of life. God, in inviting us to these things, is not putting a strain on our nature it can never bear. He is proposing to impart new strength and joy to our nature. He is not summoning us to a joy that is too high for us, and that we can never rejoice in, but is recalling us to that condition in which alone we can live with comfort and health, and in which alone we can permanently delight. If we cannot now desire what Christ offers, if we have no appetite for it, if all that He speaks of seems uninviting and dreary, then this is symptomatic of a fatal loss of appetite on our part. But as Jesus would have felt a deeper compassion for any in that crowd who were too faint to eat, or as He would quickly have laid His healing hand on any diseased person who could not eat, so does He still more deeply compassionate all of us who would fain eat and drink with His people, and yet nauseate and turn from their delights as the sickly from the strong food of the healthy.

3. But what Jesus especially emphasises in the conversation arising out of the miracle is that the food He gives is Himself. He is the Bread of Life, the Living Bread. What is there in Christ which constitutes Him the Bread of Life? There is, first of all, that which He Himself constantly presses, that He is sent by the Father, that He comes out of heaven, bringing from the Father a new source of life into the world.

When our Lord pointed out to the Galileans that the work of God was to believe in Him, they demanded a further sign as evidence that He was God's Messenger: "What sign doest Thou that we may see and believe Thee? What dost Thou work? Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; they had bread from heaven, not common barley loaves such as we got from You yesterday. Have You any such sign as this to give? If You are sent from God, we may surely expect you to rival Moses."^{123]} To which Jesus replies: "The bread which your fathers received did not prevent them dying; it was meant to sustain physical life, and yet even in that respect it was not perfect. God has a better bread to give, a bread which will sustain you in spiritual life, not for a few years but for ever" (vv. 49, 50). "I am the living bread which came down out of heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever."

This they could not understand. They believed that the manna came from heaven. Not the richest field of Egypt had produced it. It seemed to come direct from God's hand. The Israelites could neither raise it nor improve upon it. But how Jesus, "whose father and mother we know," whom they could trace to a definite human origin, could say that He came from heaven they could not understand. And yet,

even while they stumbled at His claim to a superhuman origin, they felt there might be something in it. Everyone with whom He came in contact felt there was in Him something unaccountable. The Pharisees feared while they hated Him. Pilate could not classify Him with any variety of offender he had met with. Why do men still continually attempt afresh to account for Him, and to give at last a perfectly satisfactory explanation, on ordinary principles, of all that He was and did? Why, but because it is seen that as yet He has not been so accounted for? Men do not thus strive to prove that Shakespeare was a mere man, or that Socrates or Epictetus was a mere man. Alas! that is only too obvious. But to Christ men turn and turn again with the feeling that here is something which human nature does not account for; something different, and something more than what results from human parentage and human environment, something which He Himself accounts for by the plain and unflinching statement that He is “from heaven.”

For my part, I do not see that this can mean anything less than that Christ is Divine, that in Him we have God, and in Him touch the actual Source of all life. In Him we have the one thing within our reach which is not earth-grown, the one uncorrupted Source of life to which we can turn from the inadequacy, impurity, and emptiness of a sin-sick world. No pebble lies hid in this bread on which we can break our teeth; no sweetness in the mouth turning afterwards to bitterness, but a new, uncontaminated food, prepared independently of all defiling influences, and accessible to all. Christ is the Bread from heaven, because in Christ God gives Himself to us, that by His life we may live.

There is another sense in which Christ probably used the word “living.” In contrast to the dead bread He had given them He was alive. The same law seems to hold good of our physical and of our spiritual life. We cannot sustain physical life except by using as food that which has been alive. The nutritive properties of the earth and the air must have been assimilated for us by living plants and animals before we can use them. The plant sucks sustenance out of the earth—we can live upon the plant but not on the earth. The ox finds ample nourishment in grass; we can live on the ox but not on the grass. And so with spiritual nutriment. Abstract truth we can make little of at first hand; it needs to be embodied in a living form before we can live upon it. Even God is remote and abstract, and non-Christian theism makes thin-blooded and spectral worshippers; it is when the Word becomes flesh; when the hidden reason of all things takes human form and steps out on the earth before us, that truth becomes nutritive, and God our life.

4. Still more explicitly Christ says: “The bread which I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.” For it is in this great act of dying that He becomes the Bread of Life. God sharing with us to the uttermost; God proving that His will is our righteousness; God bearing our sorrows and our sins; God coming into our human race, and becoming a part of its history—all this is seen in the cross of Christ; but it is also seen that absolute love for men, and absolute submission to God, were the moving forces of Christ’s life. He was obedient even unto death. This was *His* life, and by the cross He made it ours. The cross subdues our hearts to Him, and gives us to feel that self-sacrifice is the true life of man.

A man in a sickly state of *body* has sometimes to make it matter of consideration, or even of consultation, what he shall eat. Were anyone to take the same thought about his spiritual condition, and seriously ponder what would bring health to his spirit, what would rid it of distaste for what is right, and give it strength and purity to delight in God and in all good, he would probably conclude that a clear and influential exhibition of God’s goodness, and of the fatal effects of sin, a convincing

exhibition, an exhibition in real life, of the unutterable hatefulfulness of sin, and inconceivable desirableness of God; an exhibition also which should at the same time open for us a way from sin to God—this, the inquirer would conclude, would bring life to the spirit. It is such an exhibition of God and of sin, and such a way out of sin to God, as we have in Christ's death.

5. How are we to avail ourselves of the life that is in Christ? As the Jews asked, *How* can this man give us His flesh to eat? Our Lord Himself uses several terms to express the act by which we make use of Him as the Bread of Life. "He that believeth on Me," "He that cometh to Me," "He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood, hath eternal life." Each of these expressions has its own significance. Belief must come first—belief that Christ is sent to give us life; belief that it depends upon our connection with that one Person whether we shall or shall not have life eternal. We must also "come to Him." The people He was addressing had followed Him for miles, and had found Him and were speaking to Him, but they had not *come* to Him. To come to Him is to approach Him in spirit and with submissive trust; it is to commit ourselves to Him as our Lord; it is to rest in Him as our all; it is to come to Him with open heart, accepting Him as all He claims to be; it is to meet the eye of a present, living Christ, who knows what is in man, and to say to Him "I am Thine, Thine most gladly, Thine for evermore."

But most emphatically of all does our Lord say that we must "eat His flesh and drink His blood" if we are to partake of His life. That is to say, the connection between Christ and us must be of the closest possible kind; so close that the assimilation of the food we eat is not too strong a figure to express it. The food we eat becomes our blood and flesh; it becomes our life, our self. And it does so by our eating it, not by our talking of it, not by our looking at it, and admiring its nutritive properties, but only by eating it. And whatever process can make Christ entirely ours, and help us to assimilate all that is in Him, this process we are to use. The flesh of Christ was given for us; by the shedding of Christ's blood, by the pouring out of His life upon the cross, spiritual life was prepared for us. Cleansing from sin and restoration to God were provided by the offering of His life in the flesh; and we eat His flesh when we use in our own behalf the death of Christ, and take the blessings it has made possible to us; when we accept the forgiveness of sins, enter into the love of God, and adopt as our own the spirit of the cross. His flesh or human form was the *manifestation* of God's love for us, the visible material of His sacrifice; and we eat His flesh when we make this our own, when we accept God's love and adopt Christ's sacrifice as our guiding principle of life. We eat His flesh when we take out of His life and death the spiritual nutriment that is actually there; when we let our nature be penetrated by the spirit of the cross, and actually make Christ the Source and the Guide of our spiritual life.

This figure of *eating* has many lessons for us. Above all, it reminds us of the poor appetite we have for spiritual nourishment. How thoroughly by this process of eating does the healthy body extract from its food every particle of real nutriment. By this process the food is made to yield all that it contains of nourishing substance. But how far is this from representing our treatment of Christ. How much is there in Him that is fitted to yield comfort and hope, and yet to us it yields none. How much that should fill us with assurance of God's love, yet how fearfully we live. How much to make us admire self-sacrifice and fill us with earnest purpose to live for others, and yet how little of this becomes in very deed *our* life. God sees in Him all that can make us complete, all that can fill and gladden and suffice the soul, and yet how bare and troubled and defeated do we live.^[24]

6. The mode of distribution was also significant. Christ gives life to the world not directly, but through His disciples. The life He gives is Himself, but He gives it through the instrumentality of men. The bread is His. The disciples may manipulate it as they will, but it remains five loaves only. None but He can relieve the famishing multitude. Still not with His own hands does He feed them, but through the believing service of the Twelve. And this He did not merely for the sake of teaching us that only through the Church is the world supplied with the life He furnishes, but primarily because it was the natural and fit order then, as it is the natural and fit order now, that they who themselves believe in the power of the Lord to feed the world should be the means of distributing what He gives. Each of the disciples received from the Lord no more than would satisfy himself, yet held in his hand what would through the Lord's blessing satisfy a hundred besides. And it is a grave truth we here meet, that every one of us who has received life from Christ has thereby in possession what may give life to many other human souls. We may give it or we may withhold it; we may communicate it to the famishing souls around us or we may hear unconcerned the weary heart-faint sigh; but the Lord knows to whom He has given the bread of life, and He gives it not solely for our own consumption but for distribution. It is not the privilege of the more enlightened or more fervent disciple, but of all. He who receives from the Lord what is enough for himself holds the lives of some of his fellows in his hand.

Doubtless the faith of the disciples was severely tried when they were required to advance each man to his separate hundred with his morsel of bread. There would be no struggling for the first place then. But encouraged in their faith by the simple and confident words of prayer their Master had addressed to the Father, they are emboldened to do His bidding, and if they gave sparingly and cautiously at first, their parsimony must soon have been rebuked and their hearts enlarged.

Theirs is also our trial. We know we should be more helpful to others; but in presence of the sorrowful we seem to have no word of comfort; seeing this man and that pursuing a way the end of which is death, we have yet no wise word of remonstrance, no loving entreaty; lives are trifled away at our side, and we are conscious of no ability to elevate and dignify; lives are worn out in crushing toil and misery, and we feel helpless to aid. The habit grows upon us of expecting rather to get good than to do good. We have long recognised that we are too little influenced by God's grace, and only at long intervals now are we ashamed of this; it has become our acknowledged state. We have found that we are not the kind of people who are to influence others. Looking at our slim faith, our stunted character, our slender knowledge, we say, "What is this among so many?" These feelings are inevitable. No man seems to have enough even for his own soul. But giving of what he has to others he will find his own store increased. "There is that scattereth abroad and yet increaseth," is the law of spiritual growth.

But the thought which shines through all others as we read this narrative is the genial tenderness of Christ. He is here seen to be considerate of our wants, mindful of our weaknesses, quick to calculate our prospects and to provide for us, simple, practical, earnest in His love. We see here how He withholds no good thing from us, but considers and gives what we actually need. We see how reasonable it is that He should require us to trust Him. To every fainting soul, to every one who has wandered far and whose strength is gone, and round whom the shadows and chills of night are gathering, He says through this miracle: "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto Me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness."^[25]

[21] At the risk of omitting points of interest, I have thought it advisable to treat this whole representation of Christ, as far as possible, within the limits of one chapter.

[22] Roughly speaking, £8.

[23] From Psalm lxxii. 16 the Rabbis gathered that the Messiah when He came would renew the gift of manna.

[24] The figure of eating reminds us that the acceptance of Christ is an act which each man must do for himself. No other man can eat for me. It also reminds us that as the food we eat is distributed, without our own will or supervision, to every part of the body, giving light to the eye and strength to the arm, making bone or skin in one place, nerve or blood-vessel in another, so, if only we make Christ our own, the life that is in Him suffices for all the requirements of human nature and human duty.

[25] On verses 37, 44, and 45 see note at the end of this volume.



The Expositor's Bible

Marcus Dods, D.D.

Gospel of John Part 1

Chapter 15

THE CRISIS IN GALILEE.

“Many therefore of His disciples, when they heard this, said, This is a hard saying; who can hear it? But Jesus knowing in Himself that His disciples murmured at this, said unto them, Doth this cause you to stumble? What then if ye should behold the Son of man ascending where He was before? It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I have spoken unto you are spirit, and are life. But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who it was that should betray Him. And He said, For this cause have I said unto you, that no man can come unto Me, except it be given unto him of the Father. Upon this many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him. Jesus said therefore unto the twelve, Would ye also go away? Simon Peter answered Him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we have believed and know that Thou art the Holy One of God. Jesus answered them, Did not I choose you the twelve, and one of you is a devil? Now He spake of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he it was that should betray Him, being one of the twelve.”—JOHN VI. 60–71.

The situation in which our Lord found Himself at this stage of His career is full of pathos. He began His ministry in Judæa, and His success there seemed to be all that could be desired. But it soon became apparent that the crowds who followed Him misunderstood or wilfully ignored His purpose. They resorted to Him chiefly, if not solely, for material advantages and political ends. He was in danger of being accounted the most skilful metropolitan physician; or in the greater danger of being courted by politicians as a likely popular leader, who might be used as a revolutionary flag or party cry. He, therefore, left Jerusalem at an early period in His ministry and betook Himself to Galilee; and now, after some months' preaching and mingling with the people, things have worked round in Galilee to precisely the same point as they had reached in Judæa. Great crowds are following Him to be healed and to be fed, while the politically inclined have at last made a distinct effort to make Him a king, to force Him into a collision with the authorities. His proper work is in danger of being lost sight of. He finds it necessary to sift the crowds who follow Him. And He does so by addressing them in terms which can be acceptable only to truly spiritual men—by plainly assuring them that He was among them, not to give them political privileges and the bread that perisheth, but the bread that endureth. They found Him to be what they would call an impracticable dreamer. They profess to go away because they cannot understand Him; but they understand Him well enough to see He is not the person for their purposes. They seek earth, and heaven is thrust upon them. They turn away disappointed, and many walk no more with Him. The great crowd melts away, and He is left with His original following of twelve men. His months of teaching and toil seem to have gone for nothing. It might seem doubtful if even the twelve would be faithful—if any result of His work would remain, if any would cordially and lovingly adhere to Him.

One cannot, I think, view this situation without perceiving how analogous it is in many respects to the aspect of things in our own day. In all ages of course this

sifting of the followers of Christ goes on. There are experiences common to all times and places which test men's attachment to Christ. But in our own day exceptional causes are producing a considerable diminution of the numbers who follow Christ, or at least are altering considerably the grounds on which they profess to follow Him. When one views the defection of men of influence, of thought, of learning, of earnest and devout spirit, one cannot but wonder what is to be the end of this, and how far it is to extend. One cannot but look anxiously at those who seem to remain, and to say, "Will ye also go away?" No doubt such times of sifting are of eminent service in winnowing out the true from the mistaken followers, and in summoning all men to revise the reason of their attachment to Christ. When we see men of serious mind and of great attainments deliberately abandoning the Christian position, we cannot but anxiously inquire whether we are right in maintaining that position. When the question comes to us, as in Providence it does, "Will ye also go away?" we must have our answer ready.

The answer of Peter clearly shows what it was that bound the faithful few to Jesus; and in his answer three reasons for faith may be discerned.

1. Jesus satisfied their deepest spiritual wants. They had found in Him provision for their whole nature, and had learned the truth of His saying, "He that cometh to Me shall never hunger, and He that believeth on Me shall never thirst." They could now say, "Thou hast the words of eternal life." His words made water into wine, and five loaves into five thousand, but His words did what was far more to their purpose,—they fed their spirit. His words brought them nearer to God, promised them eternal life, and began it within them. From the lips of Jesus had actually fallen words which quickened within them a new life—a life which they recognised as eternal, as lifting them up into another world. These words of His had given them new thoughts about God and about righteousness, they had stirred hopes and feelings of an altogether new kind. And this spiritual life was more to them than anything else. No doubt these men, like their neighbours, had their faults, their private ambitions, their hopes. Peter could not forget that he had left all for his Master, and often thought of his home, his plentiful table, his family, when wandering about with Jesus. They all, probably, had an expectation that their abandonment of their occupations would not be wholly without compensation in this life, and that prominent position and worldly advantage awaited them. Still, when they discovered that these were mistaken expectations, they did not grumble nor go back, for such were not their chief reasons for following Jesus. It was chiefly by His appeal to their spiritual leanings that He attracted them. It was rather for eternal life than for present advantage they attached themselves to Him. They found more of God in Him than elsewhere, and listening to Him they found themselves better men than before; and having experienced that His words were "spirit and life" (ver. 63), they could not now abandon Him though all the world did so.

So is it always. When Christ sifts His followers those remain who have spiritual tastes and wants. The spiritual man, the man who would rather be like God than be rich, whose efforts after worldly advancement are not half as earnest and sustained as His efforts after spiritual health; the man, in short, who seeks first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and lets other things be added or not to this prime requisite, cleaves to Christ because there is that in Christ which satisfies his tastes and gives him the life he chiefly desires. There is in Christ a suitableness to the wants of men who live in view of God and eternity, and who seek to adjust themselves, not only to the world around them so as to be comfortable and successful in it, but also to the things unseen, to the permanent laws which are to govern human beings and human affairs throughout eternity. Such men find in Christ

that which enables them to adjust themselves to things eternal. They find in Christ just that revelation of God, and that reconciliation to Him, and that help to abiding in Him, which they need. They cannot imagine a time, they cannot picture to themselves a state of society, in which the words and teaching of Jesus would not be the safest guide and the highest law. Life eternal, life for men as men, is taught by Him; not professional life, not the life of a religious rule that must pass away, not life for this world only, but life eternal, life such as men everywhere and always ought to live—this is apprehended by Him and explained by Him; and power and desire to live it is quickened within men by His words. Coming into His presence we recognise the assuredness of perfect knowledge, the simplicity of perfect truth. That which outrides all such critical times as the disciples were now passing through is true spirituality of mind. The man who is bent on nourishing his spirit to life everlasting simply cannot dispense with what he finds in Christ.

We need not then greatly fear for our own faith if we are sure that we covet the words of eternal life more than the path to worldly advantage. Still less need we tremble for the faith of others if we know that their tastes are spiritual, their leanings Godward. Parents are naturally anxious about their children's faith, and fear it may be endangered by the advances of science or by the old props of faith being shaken. Such anxiety is in great measure misdirected. Let parents see to it that their children grow up with a preference for purity, unselfishness, truth, unworldliness; let parents set before their children an example of real preference for things spiritual, and let them with God's aid cultivate in their children an appetite for what is heavenly, a craving to live on terms with God and with conscience; and this appetite will infallibly lead them to Christ. Does Christ supply the wants of our spirits? Can He show us the way to eternal life? Have men found in Him all needed help to godly living? Have the most spiritual and ardent of men been precisely those who have most clearly seen their need of Him, and who have found in Him everything to satisfy and feed their own spiritual ardour? Has He, that is to say, the words of eternal life? Is He the Person to whom every man must listen if he would find his way to God and a happy eternity? Then, depend upon it, men will believe in Christ in every generation, and none the less firmly because their attention is called off from non-essential and external evidences to the simple sufficiency of Christ.

2. Peter was convinced not only that Jesus had the words of eternal life, but that no one else had. "To whom shall we go?" Peter had not an exhaustive knowledge of all sources of human wisdom; but speaking from his own experience he affirmed his conviction that it was useless to seek life eternal anywhere else than in Jesus. And it seems equally hopeless still to look to any other quarter for sufficient teaching, for words that are "spirit and life." Where but in Christ do we find a God we can accept as God? Where but in Him do we find that which can not only encourage men striving after virtue, but also reclaim the vicious? To put anyone alongside of Christ as a revealer of God, as a pattern of virtue, as a Saviour of men, is absurd. There is that in Him which we recognise as not merely superior, but of another kind. So that those who reject Him, or set Him on a level with other teachers, have first of all to reject the chief part of what His contemporaries were struck with and reported, and to fashion a Christ of their own.

And it should be observed that Christ claims this exceptional homage from His people. The "following" He requires is not a mere acceptance of His teaching alongside of other teaching, nor an acceptance of His teaching apart from Himself, as if a man should listen to Him and go home and try to practise what he has heard; but He requires men to form a connection with Himself as their King and Life, as that One who can alone give them strength to obey Him. To call Him "the Teacher,"

as if this were His sole or chief title, is to mislead.

The alternative, then, as Peter saw, was Christ or nothing. And every day it is becoming clearer that this is the alternative, that between Christianity and the blankest Atheism there is no middle place. Indeed we may say that between Christianity, with its supernatural facts, and materialism, which admits of no supernatural at all, and of nothing spiritual and immortal, there is no logical standing-ground. A man's choice lies between these two—either Christ with His claims in all their fulness, or a material universe working out its life under the impulse of some inscrutable force. There are of course men who are neither Christians nor materialists; but that is because they have not yet found their intellectual resting-place. As soon as they obey reason, they will travel to one or other of these extremes, for between the two is no logical standing-ground. If there is a God, then there seems nothing incredible, nothing even very surprising, in Christianity. Christianity becomes merely the flower or fruit for which the world exists, the element in the world's history which gives meaning and glory to the whole of it: without Christianity and all it involves the world lacks interest of the highest kind. If a man finds he cannot admit the possibility of such an interference in the world's monotonous way as the Incarnation implies, it is because there is in his mind an Atheistic tendency, a tendency to make the laws of the world more than the Creator; to make the world itself God, the highest thing. The Atheist's position is thoroughgoing and logical; and against the Atheist the man who professes to believe in a Personal God and yet denies miracle is helpless. And in point of fact Atheistic writers are rapidly sweeping the field of all other antagonists, and the intermediate positions between Christianity and Atheism are becoming daily more untenable.

Any one then who is offended at the supernatural in Christianity, and is disposed to turn away and walk no more with Christ, should view the alternative, and consider what it is with which he must throw in his lot. To retain what is called the spirit of Christ, and reject all that is miraculous and above our present comprehension, is to commit oneself to a path which naturally leads to disbelief in God. We must choose between Christ as He stands in the gospels, claiming to be Divine, rising from the dead and now alive; and a world in which there is no God manifest in the flesh or anywhere else, a world that has come into being no one knows how or whence, and that is running on no one knows whither, unguided by any intelligence outside of itself, wholly governed by laws which have grown out of some impersonal force of which nobody can give any good account. Difficult as it is to believe in Christ, it is surely still more difficult to believe in the only alternative, a world wholly material, in which matter rules and spirit is a mere accident of no account. If there are inexplicable things in the gospel, there are also in us and around us facts wholly inexplicable on the atheistic theory. If the Christian must be content to wait for the solution of many mysteries, so certainly must the materialist be content to leave unsolved many of the most important problems of human life.^[26]

3. The third reason which Peter assigns for the unalterable loyalty of the Twelve is expressed in the words, "We have believed and know that Thou art the Holy One of God." By this he probably meant that he and the rest had come to be convinced that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah, the consecrated One, whom God had set apart to this office. The same expression was used by the demoniac in the synagogue at Capernaum.^[27] But although the idea of consecration to an office rather than the idea of personal holiness is prominent in the word, it may very well have been the personal holiness of their Master which bore in upon the minds of the disciples that He was indeed the Messiah. By His life with them from day to day He revealed God to them. They had seen Him in a great variety of circumstances. They had seen His

compassion for every form of sorrow and misery, and His regardlessness of self; they had marked His behaviour when offered a crown and when threatened with the cross; they had seen Him at table in gay company, and they had seen Him fasting and in houses of mourning, in danger, in vehement discussion, in retirement; and in all circumstances and scenes they had found Him holy, so holy that to turn from Him they felt would be to turn from God.

The emphasis with which they affirm their conviction is remarkable: "We have believed and we know." It is as if they felt, We may be doubtful of much and ignorant of much, but this at least we are sure of. We see men leaving our company who are fit to instruct and guide us in most matters, but they do not know our Lord as we do. What they have said has disturbed our minds and has caused us to revise our beliefs, but we return to our old position, "We have believed and we know." It may be true that devils have been cast out by the prince of the devils; we do not know. But a stainless life is more miraculous and Divine than the casting out of devils; it is more unknown in the world, referrible to no freak of nature, accomplished by no sleight of hand or jugglery, but due only to the presence of God. Here we have not the sign or evidence of the thing but the thing itself, God not using man as an external agent for operating upon the material world, but God present in the man, living in his life, one with him.

Upon our faith nothing is more influential than the holiness of Christ. Nothing is more certainly Divine. Nothing is more characteristic of God—not His power, not His wisdom, not even His eternal Being. He who in his own person and life represents to us the holiness of God is more certainly superhuman than he who represents God's power. A power to work miracles has often been delegated to men, but holiness cannot be so delegated. It belongs to character, to the man's self; it is a thing of nature, of will, and of habit; a king may give to his ambassador ample powers, he may fill his hands with credentials, and load him with gifts which shall be acceptable to the monarch to whom he is sent, but he cannot give him a tact he does not naturally possess, a courtesy he has not acquired by dealing with other princes, nor the influence of wise and magnanimous words, if these do not inherently belong to the ambassador's self. So the holiness of Christ was even more convincing than His power or His message. It was such a holiness as caused the disciples to feel that He was not a mere messenger. His holiness revealed *Himself* as well as Him that sent Him; and the self that was thus revealed they felt to be more than human. When, therefore, their faith was tried by seeing the multitudes abandon their Lord, they were thrown back on their surest ground of confidence in Him; and that surest ground was not the miracles which all had seen, but the consecrated and perfect life which was known to them.

To ourselves, then, I say, by the circumstances of our time this question comes, "Will ye also go away?" Will you be like the rest, or will exceptional fidelity be found in you? Is your attachment to Christ so based on personal conviction, is it so truly the growth of your own experience, and so little a mere echo of popular opinion, that you say in your heart, "Though all men should forsake Thee, yet will not I"? It is difficult to resist the current of thought and opinion that prevails around us; difficult to dispute or even question the opinion of men who have been our teachers, and who have first awakened our mind to see the majesty of truth and the beauty of the universe; it is difficult to choose our own way, and thus tacitly condemn the choice and the way of men we know to be purer in life, and in every essential respect better than ourselves. And yet, perhaps, it is well that we are thus compelled to make up our own mind, to examine the claims of Christ for ourselves, and so follow Him with the resolution that comes of personal conviction. It is this

our Lord desires. He does not compel nor hasten our decision. He does not upbraid His followers for their serious misunderstandings of His person. He allows them to be familiar with Him even while labouring under many misconceptions, because He knows that these misconceptions will most surely pass away in His society and by further acquaintance with Him. One thing He insists upon, one thing He asks from us—that we follow Him. We may only have a vague impression that He is quite different from all else we know; we may be doubtful, as yet, in what sense some of the highest titles are ascribed to Him; we may be quite mistaken about the significance of certain important parts of His life; we may disagree among ourselves regarding the nature of His kingdom and regarding the conditions of entrance into it; but, if we follow Him, if we join our fortunes to His, and wish nothing better than to be within the sound of His voice and to do His bidding; if we truly love Him, and find that He has taken a place in our life we cannot ever give to another; if we are conscious that our future lies His way, and that we must in heart abide with Him, then all our slowness to understand is patiently dealt with, all our underrating of His real dignity is forgiven us, and we are led on in His company to perfect conformity, perfect union, and perfect knowledge.

All that He desires, then, is, in the first place, not something we cannot give, not a belief in certain truths about which doubt may reasonably be entertained, not an acknowledgment of facts that are as yet beyond our vision; but, that we follow Him, that we be in this world as He was in it. Shall we, then, let Him pursue His way alone, shall we do nothing to forward His purposes, shall we show no sympathy, address no word to Him, and pretend not to hear when He speaks to us? To drag ourselves along murmuring, doubting, making difficulties, a mere dead weight on our Leader, this is not to follow as He desires to be followed. To take our own way in the main, and only appear here and there on the road He has taken; to be always trying to combine the pursuit of our own private ends with the pursuance of His ends, is not to follow. Had we seen these men asking leave of absence two or three times a month to go and look after the fishing, even though they promised to overtake their Master somewhere on the road, we should scarcely have recognised them as His followers. Had we found them, on reaching a village at night, leaving Him, and preferring to spend their leisure with His enemies, we should have been inclined to ask an explanation of conduct so inconsistent. Yet is not our own following very much of this kind? Is there not too little of the following that says, "What is enough for the Lord is enough for me; His aims are enough for me"? Is there not too little of the following that springs from a frank and genuine dealing with the Lord from day to day, and from a conscientious desire to meet His will with us, and satisfy His idea of how we should follow Him? May we each have the peace and joy of the man who, when this question, "Will ye also go away?" comes to him, quickly and from the heart responds, "I will never forsake Thee."

[26] "Those who turn their backs on the Eternal Son must understand, then, that they are on their way to a creed which denies an Eternal Father, and puts in His place an unconscious impersonal soul of nature, a dead central force, of which all the forces in the universe are manifestations; or an unknown, unknowable cause, remaining to be postulated after the series of physical causes has been traced as far back as science can go; and which robs mortal man of the hope that the seed sown in the churchyard shall one day be reaped in the harvest of the resurrection.... Your so-called Christianity independent of dogmas is but the evening twilight of faith, the light which lingers in the spiritual atmosphere after the sun of truth has gone

down.”—Dr. Bruce, *Training of the Twelve*, p. 154, a book to which I am greatly indebted here and elsewhere.

[27] Mark i. 24.



The Expositor's Bible

Marcus Dods, D.D.

Gospel of John Part 1

Chapter 16

JESUS DISCUSSED IN JERUSALEM.

“And after these things Jesus walked in Galilee: for He would not walk in Judæa, because the Jews sought to kill Him. Now the feast of the Jews, the feast of tabernacles, was at hand. His brethren therefore said unto Him, Depart hence, and go into Judæa, that Thy disciples also may behold Thy works which Thou doest. For no man doeth anything in secret, and himself seeketh to be known openly. If Thou doest these things, manifest Thyself to the world. For even His brethren did not believe on Him. Jesus therefore saith unto them, My time is not yet come; but your time is always ready. The world cannot hate you; but Me it hateth, because I testify of it, that its works are evil. Go ye up unto the feast: I go not up yet unto this feast; because My time is not yet fulfilled. And having said these things unto them, He abode still in Galilee. But when His brethren were gone up unto the feast, then went He also up, not publicly, but as it were in secret. The Jews therefore sought Him at the feast, and said, Where is He? And there was much murmuring among the multitudes concerning Him: some said, He is a good man; others said, Not so, but He leadeth the multitude astray. Howbeit no man spoke openly of Him for fear of the Jews. But when it was now the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and taught. The Jews therefore marvelled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned? Jesus therefore answered them, and said, My teaching is not Mine but His that sent Me. If any man willet to do His will he shall know of the teaching, whether it be of God, or whether I speak from Myself. He that speaketh from himself seeketh his own glory: but he that seeketh the glory of him that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him. Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you doeth the law? Why seek ye to kill Me? The multitude answered, Thou hast a devil: who seeketh to kill Thee? Jesus answered and said unto them, I did one work, and ye all marvel. For this cause hath Moses given you circumcision (not that it is of Moses, but of the fathers); and on the Sabbath ye circumcise a man. If a man receiveth circumcision on the Sabbath, that the law of Moses may not be broken; are ye wroth with Me, because I made a man every whit whole on the Sabbath? Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgement. Some therefore of them of Jerusalem said, Is not this He whom they seek to kill? And lo, He speaketh openly, and they say nothing unto Him. Can it be that the rulers indeed know that this is the Christ? Howbeit we know this man whence He is; but when the Christ cometh, no one knoweth whence He is. Jesus therefore cried in the temple, teaching and saying, Ye both know Me, and know whence I am; and I am not come of Myself, but He that sent Me is true, whom ye know not. I know Him; because I am from Him, and He sent Me. They sought therefore to take Him: and no man laid his hand on Him, because His hour was not yet come. But of the multitude many believed on Him; and they said, When the Christ shall come, will He do more signs than those which this man hath done? The Pharisees heard the multitude murmuring these things concerning Him; and the chief priests and the Pharisees sent officers to take Him. Jesus therefore said, Yet a little while am I with you, and I go unto Him that sent Me. Ye shall seek Me, and shall not find Me: and where I am, ye cannot come. The Jews therefore said among themselves, Whither will this man go that we shall not find Him? will He go unto the Dispersion among the Greeks, and teach the Greeks? What is this word that He said, Ye shall seek Me, and shall not find Me: and where I am, ye cannot come? Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. But this spake He of the Spirit, which they that believed on Him were to receive: for the Spirit was not yet given: because Jesus was not yet glorified. Some of the multitude therefore, when they heard these

words, said, This is of a truth the prophet. Others said, This is the Christ. But some said, What, doth the Christ come out of Galilee? Hath not the Scripture said that the Christ cometh of the seed of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was? So there arose a division in the multitude because of Him. And some of them would have taken Him; but no man laid hands on Him. The officers therefore came to the chief priests and Pharisees; and they said unto them, Why did ye not bring Him? The officers answered, Never man so spake. The Pharisees therefore answered them, Are ye also led astray? Hath any of the rulers believed on Him, or of the Pharisees? But this multitude which knoweth not the law are accursed. Nicodemus saith unto them (he that came to Him before, being one of them), Doth our law judge a man, except it first hear from himself and know what he doeth? They answered and said unto him, Art thou also of Galilee? Search, and see that out of Galilee ariseth no prophet.”—JOHN vii.

After describing how matters were brought to a crisis in Galilee, and pointing out that, as the result of our Lord’s work there, only twelve men adhered to Him, and in even this final selection not all were to be trusted,—John passes on to describe the state of feeling towards Jesus in Jerusalem, and how the storm of unbelief gathered until it broke in violence and outrage.^[28] This seventh chapter is intended to put us in the right point of view by exhibiting the various estimates that were formed of the work and person of Jesus, and the opinions which any one might hear uttered regarding Him at every table in Jerusalem.

But the motive of His going to Jerusalem at all calls for remark. His brothers, who might have been expected to understand His character best, were very slow to believe in Him. They only felt He was different from themselves, and they were nettled by His peculiarity. But they felt that the credit of the family was involved, and also that *if* His claims should turn out to be true, their position as brothers of the Messiah would be flattering. Accordingly they betray considerable anxiety to have His claims pronounced upon; and seeing that His work in Galilee had come to so little, they do their utmost to provoke Him to appeal at once to the central authority at Jerusalem. They did not as yet believe in Him, they could not entertain the idea that the boy they had knocked about and made to run their messages could be the long-expected King; and yet there was such trustworthy report of the extraordinary things He had done, that they felt there was something puzzling about Him, and for the sake of putting an end to their suspense they do what they can to get Him to go again to Jerusalem. The lever they use to move Him is a taunt: “*If* these works of yours are genuine miracles, don’t hang about villages and little country towns, but go and show yourself in the capital. No one who is really confident that he has a claim on public attention wanders about in solitary places, but repairs to the most crowded haunts of men. Go up now to the feast, and your disciples will gather round you, and your claims will be settled once for all.”

To this Jesus replies that the hour for such a proclamation of Himself has not yet come. That hour is to come. At the following Passover He entered Jerusalem in the manner desired by His brethren, and the result, as He foresaw, was His death. As yet such a demonstration was premature. The brothers of Jesus did not apprehend the virulence of hatred which Jesus aroused, and did not perceive how surely His death would result from His going up to the feast as the acknowledged King of the Galilæans. He Himself sees all this plainly, and therefore declines the plan of operation proposed by His brothers; and instead of going up with them as the proclaimed Messiah, He goes up quietly by Himself a few days after. To go up as His brothers’ nominee, or to go up in the way they proposed, was counter to the whole plan of His life. Their ideas and proposals were made from a point of view wholly different from His. Very often we can do at our own instance, in our own way and at our own time, what it would be a vast mistake to do at the instigation of

people who look at the matter differently from ourselves, and have quite another purpose to serve. Jesus could safely do without display what He could not do ostentatiously; and He could do as His Father's servant what He could not do at the whim of His brothers.

The feast to which He thus quietly went up was the Feast of Tabernacles. This feast was a kind of national harvest home; and consequently in appointing it God commanded that it should be held "in the end of the year, when thou hast gathered in thy labours out of the field;" that is to say, in the end of the *natural* year, or in early autumn, when the farm operations finished one rotation and began a new series. It was a feast, therefore, full of rejoicing.^[29] Every Israelite appeared in holiday attire, bearing in his hands a palm-branch, or wearing some significant emblem of earth's fruitfulness. At night the city was brilliantly illuminated, especially round the Temple, in which great lamps, used only on these occasions, were lit, and which possibly occasioned our Lord's remark at this time, as reported in the following chapter, "I am the Light of the world." There can be little doubt that when, on the last day of the feast, He stood and cried, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink," the form of his invitation was moulded by one of the customs of the feast. For one of the most striking features of the feast was the drawing of water in a golden vessel from the pool of Siloam, and carrying it in procession to the Temple, where it was poured out with such a burst of triumph from the trumpets of the Levites, aided by the Hallelujahs of the people, that it became a common Jewish saying, "He who has not seen the rejoicing at the pouring out of the water from the pool of Siloam has never seen rejoicing in his life." This pouring out of the water before God seemed to be an acknowledgment of His goodness in watering the cornlands and pastures, and also a commemoration of the miraculous supply of water in the desert; while to some of the more enlightened it bore also a spiritual significance, and recalled the words of Isaiah, "With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation."

But this feast was not solely a celebration of the ingathering, or a thanksgiving for the harvest. The name of it reminds us that another feature was quite as prominent. In its original institution God commanded, "Ye shall dwell in booths or tabernacles seven days; all that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths," the reason being added, "that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt." The particular significance of the Israelites dwelling in booths seems to be that it marked their deliverance from a life of bondage to a life of freedom; it reminded them how they had once no settled habitation, but yet found a booth in the desert preferable to the well-provided residences of Egypt. And every Feast of Tabernacles seemed intended to recall these thoughts. In the midst of their harvest, at the end of the year, when they were once more laying up store for winter, and when every one was reckoning whether it would be an abundant and profitable year for him or no, they were told to live for a week in booths, that they might think of that period in their fathers' experience when God was their all, when they had no provision for the morrow, and which was yet the most triumphant period of their history. All wealth, all distinctions of rank, all separation between rich and poor, was for a while forgotten, as each man dwelt in his little green hut as well sheltered as his neighbour. And to every one was suggested the thought, that let the coming winter be well provided or ill provided, let it be bleak to some and bright to others, at bottom the provision of this world is to all alike but as a green bough between them and destitution; but that all alike, reduce them if you will to a booth which has neither store nor couch in it, have still the Most High God for their deliverer, and provider, and habitation.^[30]

Even before Jesus appeared at this feast He was the subject of much talk and exchange of opinions.

1. The first characteristic of the popular mind, as exhibited here by John, is its subservience to authority. Those who had a favourable opinion of Jesus uttered it with reserve and caution, “for fear of the Jews”—that is, of the Jerusalem Jews, who were known to be adverse to His claims. And the authorities, knowing the subservience of the people, considered it a sufficient reply to the favourable reports brought them by their own officers, to say, “Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on Him?” This seems a very childish mode of settling a great question, and we are ready to charge the Jews with a singular lack of independence; but we reflect that among ourselves great questions are settled very much by authority still. In politics we take our cue from one or two newspapers, conducted by men who show themselves quite fallible; and in matters of even deeper moment, how many of us can say we have thought out a creed for ourselves, and have not accepted our ideas from recognised teachers? And whether these teachers be the accredited representatives of traditional theology, or have secured an audience by their departure from ordinary views, we have in our own conscience a surer guide to the truth about Christ. For much that we may build upon the foundation we must be indebted to others; but for that which is radical, for the determination of the relation we ourselves are to hold to Christ, we must follow not authority but our own conscience.

Our equanimity need not, then, be greatly disturbed by the fact that so many of the rulers of public opinion do not believe in Christ. We need not tremble for Christianity when we see how widely extended is the opinion that miracles are the fancy of a credulous age. We need not be over-anxious or altogether downcast when we hear philosophers sublimely talk as if they had seen all round Christ, and taken His measure, and rendered satisfactory account of the pious delusions He Himself was subject to, and the groundless hallucinations which misled His followers into unheard-of virtue, and made them good men by mistake. Consider the opinions of men of insight and of power, but do not be overawed by them, for you have in yourself a surer guide to truth. Look at Christ with your own eyes, frankly open your own soul before Him, and trust the impression He makes upon you.

2. Again, John notices the *perplexity* of the people. They saw that, much as the authorities desired to put Him out of the way, they shrank from decisive measures. And from this they naturally gathered that the rulers had some idea that this was the Christ. Then besides, they saw the miracles Jesus did, and asked whether the Christ would do more miracles. They saw, too, that He was “a good Man,” and on the whole, therefore, they were disposed to look favourably on His claims; but then there always recurred the thought, “We know this Man whence He is; but when Christ cometh, no man knoweth whence He is.” They thought they could account for Christ and trace Him to His origin; and therefore they could not believe He was from God. This is the common difficulty. Men find it difficult to believe that One who was really born on earth and did not suddenly appear, nobody knew whence, can in any peculiar sense be from God. They dwell upon the truly human nature of Christ, and conceive that this precludes the possibility of His being from God in any sense in which we are not from God.

To this perplexity Jesus addresses Himself in the words (ver. 28), “Me you do in a sense know, and also whence I come, but that does not give you the full knowledge you need, for it is not of Myself I am come; your knowledge of *Me* cannot solve your perplexity, because I am not sent by Myself; He that sent Me is the real^[31] one,

and Him you do not know. I know Him because I am from Him, and He hath sent Me.” That is to say: Your knowledge of Me is insufficient, because you do not, through Me, recognise God. Your knowledge of Me is insufficient so long as you construe Me into a mere earthly product. To know Me, as you know Me, is not enough; for not in Myself can you find the originating cause of what I am and what I do. You must go behind my earthly origin, and the human appearance which you know, if you are to account for My presence among you, and for My conduct and teaching. It matters little what you know of Me, if through Me you are not brought to the knowledge of God. He is the real One, He is the Supreme Truth; and Him, alas! you do not know while you profess to know Me.

3. John notes the insufficient tests used both by the people and by the authorities for ascertaining whether Jesus was or was not their promised King. The tests they used were such as these, “Will Christ do more miracles?” “Will He come from the same part of the country?” and so forth. Among ourselves it has become customary to speak as if it were impossible to find or apply any sufficient test to the claims of Christ; impossible to ascertain whether He is, in a peculiar sense, Divine, and whether we can absolutely trust all He said, and accept the views of God He cherished and proclaimed. Certainly Christ Himself does not countenance this mode of speaking. In all His conversations with the unbelieving Jews He condemned them for their unbelief, ascribed it to moral defects, and persistently maintained that it was within the reach of any man to ascertain whether He was true or a pretender. There is a class of expressions which occur in this Gospel which clearly show what Jesus Himself considered to be the root of unbelief. To Pilate He says, “Every one that is *of the truth* heareth My voice.” To the Jews He says, “He that is of God, heareth God’s words; ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God.” And again in this seventh chapter, “If any man is desirous to do the will of God, he will know of My doctrine whether it be of God, or whether I speak of Myself.” All these statements convey the impression that Christ’s person and teaching will uniformly be acceptable to those who love the truth, and who are anxious to do the will of God.

Faith in Christ is thus represented as an act rather of the spiritual nature than of the intellect, and as the result of sympathy with the truth rather than of critical examination of evidence. A painter or art-critic familiar with the productions of great artists feels himself insulted if you offer him evidence to convince him of the genuineness of a work of art over and above the evidence which it carries in itself, and which to him is the most convincing of all. If one of the lost books of Tacitus were recovered, scholars would not judge it by any account that might be given of its preservation and discovery, but would say, Let us see it and read it, and we will very soon tell you whether it is genuine or not. When the man you have seen every day for years, and whose character you have looked into under the strongest lights, is accused of dishonesty, and damaging evidence is brought against him, does it seriously disturb your confidence in him? Not at all. No evidence can countervail the knowledge gained by intercourse. You know the man, directly, and you believe in him without regard to what other persons advance in his favour or against him. Christ expects acceptance on similar grounds. Look at Him, listen to Him, pass with Him from day to day of His life, and say whether it is possible that He can be a deceiver, or that He can be deceived. He Himself is confident that those who seek the truth, and are accustomed to acknowledge and follow the truth always, will follow Him. He is confident that they will find that He so fits in with what they have already learnt, that naturally and instinctively they will accept Him.

It is at the point in which all men are interested that Christ appeals to us—at the point of life or conduct; and He says that whoever truly desires to do God’s will,

will find that His teaching leads him right. And if men would only acknowledge Christ in this respect, and begin, as conscience bids them, by accepting His life as exhibiting the highest rule of conduct, they would sooner or later acknowledge Him in all. A man may not at once see all that is involved in the fact that Christ exhibits, as no one else exhibits, the will of God; but if He will but acknowledge Him as *the* Teacher of God's will, not coming to Him with a spirit of suspicion but of earnest desire to do God's will, that man will become a convinced follower of Christ. There are, of course, persons of a sound moral disposition who get entangled intellectually in perplexing difficulties about the person of Christ and His relation to God; but if such persons are humble—and humility is a virtue of decisive consequence—they will, by virtue of their experience in moral questions, and by their practical knowledge of the value of harmony with God, prize the teaching of Christ, and recognise its superiority, and submit themselves to its influence.

It was on the last day of the feast that our Lord made the most explicit revelation of Himself to the people. For seven days the people dwelt in their booths; on the eighth day they celebrated their entrance into the promised land, forsook their booths, and, as it is said in the end of the chapter, “went every man to his own *house*.” But on this great day of the feast no water was drawn from the pool of Siloam. On each of the preceding days the golden pitcher was in request, and the procession that followed the priest who carried it praised God who had brought water out of the rock in the desert; but on the eighth day, commemorating their entrance into “a land of springs of water,” this rite of drawing the water ceased.

But the true worshippers among these Israelites had been seeing a spiritual meaning in the water, and had been conscious of an uneasy feeling of thirst still in the midst of these Temple services—an uneasy questioning whether even yet Israel had passed the thirsty desert, and had received the full gift God had meant to give. There were thinking men and thirsty souls then as there are now; and to these, who stood perhaps a little aside, and looked half in compassion, half in envy, at the merry-making of the rest, it seemed a significant fact that, in the Temple itself, with all its grandeur and skilful appliances, there was yet no living fountain to quench the thirst of men—a significant fact that to find water the priest had to go outside the gorgeous Temple to the modest “waters of Siloah that go softly.” All through the feast these men wondered morning by morning when the words of Joel were to come true, when it should come to pass that “a fountain should come forth of the house of the Lord,” or when that great and deep river should begin to flow which Ezekiel saw in vision issuing from the threshold of the Lord's house, and waxing deeper and wider as it flowed. And now once more the last day of the feast had come, the water was no longer drawn, and yet no fountain had burst up in the Temple itself, their souls were yet perplexed, unsatisfied, craving, athirst, when suddenly, as if in answer to their half-formed thoughts and longings, a clear, assured, authoritative voice passed through their ear to their inmost soul: “If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink. He that believeth on Me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.”

In these words Christ proclaims that He is the great Temple-fountain; or rather, that He is the true Temple, and that the Holy Ghost proceeding from Him, and dwelling in men, is the life-giving fountain.^[32] All the cravings after a settled and eternal state, all the longings for purity and fellowship with the Highest, which the Temple services rather quickened than satisfied, Christ says He will satisfy. The Temple service had been to them as a screen on which the shadows of things spiritual were thrown; but they longed to see the realities face to face, to have God revealed, to know the very truth of things, and set foot on eternal verity. This thirst is felt by all men whose whole nature is alive, whose experience has shaken them out of easy

contentment with material prosperity; they thirst for a life which does not so upbraid and mock them as their own life does; they thirst to be able to live, so that the one half of their life shall not be condemned by the other half; they thirst to be once for all in the “ampler ether” of happy and energetic existence, not looking through the bars and fumbling at the lock. This thirst and all legitimate cravings we feel Christ boldly and explicitly promises to satisfy; nay more, all illegitimate cravings, all foolish discontent, all vicious dissatisfaction with life, all morbid thirst that is rapidly becoming chronic disease in us, all weak and false views of life, He will rid us of, and give us entrance into the life that God lives and imparts—into pure, healthy, hopeful life.

Christ stands and cries still in the midst of a thirsting world: “Whosoever will let him take of the water of life freely.” Has His voice become so familiar that it has lost all significance? For all who can hear and believe, His truth remains. There is life—abundant life for us. Drink of any other fountain, and you only intensify thirst, and make life more difficult, spending energy without renewing it. Live in Christ and you live in God. You have found the centre, the heart, the eternal life. As Christ stood and cried to the people He was conscious of power to impart to them a freshly welling spring of life—a life that would overflow for the strengthening and gladdening of others besides themselves. He has the same consciousness to-day; the deep, living benefits He confers are as open to all ages as the sunshine and the air; there is no necessity binding any one soul to feel that life is a failure, an empty, disappointing husk, serving no good purpose, bringing daily fresh misery and deeper hopelessness, a thing perhaps manfully to fight our way through but certainly not to rejoice in. If any one has such views of life it is because he has not honestly, believingly, and humbly responded to Christ’s word and come to Him.

[28] It will be observed that the remaining part of the Gospel goes into very small compass as regards time. Chapters vii.–x. 21 are occupied with what was said and done at the Feast of Tabernacles, chapters xii.–xx. with the last Passover.

[29] A mixture of religious thanksgiving and unrestrained social hilarity, analogous to the English celebration of Christmas.

[30] Psalm xc. 1.

[31] ἀληθινός.

[32] On ver. 39 see p. 48 of this volume.



The Expositor's Bible

Marcus Dods, D.D.

Gospel of John Part 1

Chapter 17

THE WOMAN TAKEN IN ADULTERY.

“And they went every man unto his own house: but Jesus went unto the mount of Olives. And early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came unto Him; and He sat down, and taught them. And the scribes and the Pharisees bring a woman taken in adultery; and having set her in the midst, they say unto Him, Master, this woman hath been taken in adultery, in the very act. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such; what then sayest Thou of her? And this they said, tempting Him, that they might have whereof to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down, and with His finger wrote on the ground. But when they continued asking Him, He lifted up Himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again He stooped down, and with His finger wrote on the ground. And they, when they heard it, went out one by one, beginning from the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman, where she was, in the midst. And Jesus lifted up Himself, and said unto her, Woman, where are they? did no man condemn thee? And she said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said, Neither do I condemn thee; go thy way; from henceforth sin no more.”—JOHN vii. 53–viii, 11.

This paragraph, from chap. vii. 53–viii. 11 inclusive, is omitted from modern editions of the Greek text on the authority of the best manuscripts. Internal evidence is also decidedly against its admission. The incident may very well have happened, and it bears every appearance of being accurately reported. We are glad to have so characteristic an exposure of the malignity of the Jews, and a view of our Lord which, although from a novel standpoint, is yet quite consistent with other representations of His manner and spirit. But here it is out of place. No piece of literary work is so compact and homogeneous as this Gospel. And an incident such as this, which would be quite in keeping with the matter of the synoptical Gospels, is felt rather to interrupt than to forward the purpose of John to record the most characteristic and important self-manifestations of Christ.

But as the paragraph is here, and has been here from very early times, and as it is good Gospel material, it may be well briefly to indicate its significance.

1. First, it reveals the unscrupulous malignity of the leading citizens, the educated and religious men, “the Scribes and Pharisees.” They brought to Jesus the guilty woman, “tempting Him” (ver. 6); not because they were deeply grieved or even shocked at her conduct; nay, so little were they impressed with that aspect of the case, that, with a cold-blooded indelicacy which is well-nigh incredible, they actually used her guilt to further their own designs against Jesus. They conceived that by presenting her before Him for judgment, He would be transfixed on one or other horn of the following dilemma: If He said, Let the woman die in accordance with the law of Moses, they would have a fair ground on which they could frame a dangerous accusation against Him, and would inform Pilate that this new King was actually adjudging life and death. If, on the other hand, He bid them let the woman go, then He could be branded before the people as traversing the law of Moses.

Underhand scheming of this kind is of course always to be condemned. Setting traps and digging pitfalls are illegitimate methods even of slaughtering wild animals, and the sportsman disdains them. But he who introduces such methods into human affairs, and makes his business one concatenated plot, does not deserve to be a member of society at all, but should be banished to the unreclaimed wilderness. These men posed as sticklers for the Law, as the immovably orthodox, and yet had not the common indignation at crime which would have saved them from making a handle of this woman's guilt. No wonder that their unconscious and brazen depravity should have filled Jesus with wonder and embarrassment, so that for a space He could not utter a word, but could only fix His eyes on the ground.

Making all allowance for the freedom of Oriental manners from some modern refinements, one cannot but feel some surprise that such a scene should be possible on the streets of Jerusalem. It reveals a hardened and insensible condition of public opinion which one is scarcely prepared for. And yet it may well be questioned whether it was a more ominous state of public sentiment than that in the midst of which we are living, when scenes, in *character* if not in appearance similar to this, are constantly reproduced by our novelists and play-writers, who harp upon this one vile string, professing, like these Pharisees, that they drag such things before the public gaze for the sake of exposing vice and making it hateful, but really because they know that there is a large constituency to whom they can best appeal by what is sensational, and prurient, and immoral, though to the masculine and healthy mind disgusting. Many of our modern writers might take a hint from our German forefathers, who, in their barbarian days, held that some vices were to be punished in public, but others buried quickly in oblivion, and who, therefore, punished crime of this sort by binding it in a wicker crate, and sinking it in a pit of mud out of sight for ever. We certainly cannot congratulate ourselves on our advancement in moral perception so long as we pardon to persons of genius and rank what would be loathed in persons of no brilliant parts and in our own circles. When such things are thrust upon us, either in literature or elsewhere, we have always the resource of our Lord; we can turn away, as though we heard not; we can refuse to inquire further into such matters, and turn away our eyes from them.

Few positions could be more painful to a pure-minded man than that in which our Lord was placed. What hope could there be for a world where the religious and righteous had become even more detestable than the coarse sin they proposed to punish? No wonder our Lord was silent, silent in sheer disturbance of mind and sympathetic shame. He stooped down and wrote on the ground, as one who does not wish to answer a question will begin drawing lines on the ground with his foot or his stick. His silence was a broad hint to the accusers; but they take it for mere embarrassment, and all the more eagerly press their question. They think Him at a loss when they see Him with hanging head tracing figures on the ground; they fancy their plot is successful, and, flushed with expected victory, they close in and lay their hands on his shoulder as He stoops, and demand an answer. And so He lifts Himself up, and they have their answer: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." They fall into the pit they have digged.

This answer was not a mere clever retort such as a self-possessed antagonist can always command. It was not a mere dexterous evasion. What these scribes would say of it to one another afterwards, or with what nervous anxiety they would altogether avoid the subject, we can scarcely conjecture; but probably none of them would affect to say, as has since been said, that it was a confounding of things that differ, that by demanding that every one who brought an accusation, against another should himself be open to no accusation Jesus subverted the whole administration of law.

For what criminal could fear condemnation, if his doom were to be suspended until a judge whose heart is as pure as his ermine be found who may pronounce it? Might not these scribes have replied that they were quite aware that they themselves were guilty men, but no law could lay hold of any outward actions of theirs, and that they were there not to talk of their relation to God or of purity of heart, but to vindicate the outward purity of the morals of their city by bringing to judgment this offender? They did not thus bandy words with our Lord, and they could not; because they knew that it was not He who was trying to confound private morality and the administration of law but themselves. They had brought this woman to Jesus as if He were a magistrate, though often enough He had declined to interfere with civil affairs and with the ordinary administration of justice. And in His answer He still shows the same spirit of non-interference. He does not pronounce upon the woman's guilt at all. Had they taken her before their ordinary courts He would have raised no word in her favour; did her husband after this prosecute her he can have feared no interference on the part of Jesus. His answer is the answer not of one pronouncing from a judgment-seat, nor of a legal counsel, but of a moral and spiritual teacher. And in this capacity He had a perfect right to say what He did. We have no right to say to an official who in condemning culprits or in prosecuting them is simply discharging a public duty, "See that your own hands be clean, and your own heart pure, before you condemn another," but we have a perfect right to silence a private individual who is officiously and not officially exposing another's guilt, by bidding him remember that he has a beam in his own eye which he must first be rid of, a stain on his own hands he must first wash out. The public prosecutor, or judge is a mere mouthpiece and representative among us of absolute justice; in him we see not his own private character at all, but the purity and rectitude of law and order. But these scribes were acting as private individuals, and came to Jesus professing that they were so shocked with this woman's sin that they wished the long-disused punishment of stoning to be revived. And therefore Jesus had not only a perfect right, as any other man would have had, to say to them, "Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery?" but also, as the searcher of hearts; as He who knew what is in man, He could risk the woman's life on the chance of there being a single man of them who was really as shocked as he pretended to be, who was prepared to say he had in his own soul no taint of the sin he was loudly professing his abhorrence of, who was prepared to say, Death is due to this sin, and then to accept such proportionate punishment as would fall to his own share.

Having given His answer His eye again falls, His former stooping attitude is resumed. He does not mean to awe them by a defiant look; He lets their own conscience do the work. But that their conscience should have produced such a result deserves our attention. The woman, when she heard His answer, may for a moment have trembled and shrunk together, expecting the crashing blow of the first stone. Could she expect that these Pharisees, some of them at least good men, were all involved somehow in her sin, tainted in heart with the pollution that had wrought such destruction in herself, or supposing they were so tainted, did they know it; or supposing they knew it, would they not be ashamed to own it in the face of the surrounding crowd; would they not sacrifice her life rather than their own character? But every man waited for some other to lift the first stone; every man thought that some one of their number would be pure enough and bold enough, if not to throw the first stone, at least to assert that he fulfilled the condition of doing so that Jesus had laid down. None was willing to put himself forward to be searched by the eyes of the crowd, and to be exposed to the still more trying judgment of Jesus, and to risk the possibility of His, in some more definite way, revealing his past life. And so they edged their way out through the crowd from before Him, each desiring to have

no more to do with the business; the oldest not so old as to forget his sin, the youngest not daring to say he was not already corrupt.

This reveals two things, the amount of unascertained guilt every man carries with him, guilt that he is not distinctly conscious of, but that a little shake awakens, and that weakens him all through his life in ways that he may be unable to trace.

Further, this encounter of Jesus with the leading men gives significance to His subsequent challenge: "Which of you convinceth Me of sin?" He had shown them how easy it was to convict the guilty; but the very ease and boldness with which He had touched their conscience convinced them His own was pure. In a society honeycombed with vice He stood perfect, untouched by evil.

This searching purity, this stainless mirror, the woman felt it more difficult to face than the accusing scribes. Alone with Him who had so easily unmasked their wickedness, she feels that now she has to do with something much more awful than the accusations of men—the actual irrevocable sin. There was no voice now accusing her, no hand laid in arrest upon her. Why does she not go? Because, now that others are silent, her own conscience speaks; now that her accusers are silenced, she must listen to Him whose purity has saved her. The presence among us of a true and perfect human holiness in the person of Christ, that is the true touchstone of character; and he who does not feel that this is what actually judges all his own ways and actions, has but a dim apprehension of what human life is—of its dignity, its responsibilities, its risks, its reality. Our sin, no doubt, hems us round with a thousand disabilities, and fears, and anxieties in this world, often dreadful to bear as the shame of this woman; there gradually gathers round us a brood of mischiefs we have given birth to by overstepping God's law, a brood that throngs our steps, and makes a peaceful and happy life impossible. Other men come to recognise some of our infirmities, and we feel the depressing influence of their unfavourable judgment, and in the secrecy of our own self-reflection we think meanly of ourselves; but this, overwhelming as it sometimes becomes, is not the worst of sin. Were all these evil consequences abated or removed, were we as free from accusing voices, either from the reflected judgment of the world or from our own memory, as that woman when she stood *alone* in the midst, yet there would then only the more clearly emerge into view the essential and inseparable evil of sin, the actual breach between us and holiness. The accusation and misery which sin brings generally either make us feel that we are expiating sin by what we suffer, or put us into a self-defensive attitude. It is when Jesus lifts His true eye to meet ours that the heart sinks humbled, and recognises that apart from all punishment and in itself sin is sin, an injury to God's love, a grievous wrong to our own humanity. In the attitude of Christ towards sin and the sinner there is an exposure of the real nature of sin which makes an ineffaceable impression.

But what will Jesus do with this woman thus left on His hands? Will *He* not visit her with punishment, and so assert His superiority to the accusers who had slunk away? He shows His superiority in a much more real fashion. He sees that now the woman is self-condemned, lies under that condemnation in which alone there is hope, and which alone leads to good. She could not misunderstand the significance of her acquittal. Her surprise must only have deepened her gratitude. He who had stood her friend and brought her through so critical a passage in her history could scarcely be forgotten. And yet, considering the net she had thrown around herself, could our Lord say "Sin no more" with any hope? He knew what she was going back to—a blighted home-life, a life full now of perplexity, of regret, of suspicion, probably of ill-usage, of contempt, of everything that makes men and women bitter and drives

them on to sin. Yet He implies that the legitimate result of forgiveness is renunciation of sin. Others might expect her to sin; He expected her to abandon sin. If the love shown us in forgiveness is no barrier to sin, it is because we have not been in earnest as yet about our sin, and forgiveness is but a name. Do we need an external scene such as that before us as the setting which may enable us to believe that we are sinners, and that there is forgiveness for us? The entrance to life is through forgiveness. Possibly we have sought forgiveness; but if there follows us no serious estimate of sin, no fruitful remembrance of the holiness of Him who forgave us, then our severance from sin will last only until we meet the first substantial temptation.

We do not know what became of this woman, but she had an opportunity of regarding Jesus with reverence and affection, and thus of bringing a saving influence into her life. This scene, in which He was the chief figure, must always have remained the most vivid picture in her memory; and the more she thought of it the more clearly must she have seen how different He was from all besides. And unless in our hearts Christ finds a place, there is no other sufficient purifying influence. We may be convinced He is all He claims to be, we may believe He is sent to save, and that He can save; but all this belief may be without any cleansing effect upon us. What is wanted is an attachment, a real love that will prompt us always to regard His will, and to make our life a part of His. It is our likings that have led us astray, and it is by new likings implanted within us that we can be restored. So long as our knowledge of Christ is in our head only, it may profit us a little, but it will not make new creatures of us. To accomplish that, He must command our heart. He must control and move what is most influential within us; there must arise in us a real and ruling enthusiasm for Him.

Perhaps, however, the chief lesson taught by this incident is that the best way to reform society is to reform ourselves. There is of course a great deal done in our own day to reclaim the vicious, to succour the poor, and so on; and nothing is to be said against these efforts when they are the outcome of a humble and sympathising charity. But they are very often adulterated with a spirit of condemnation and a sense of superiority, which on closer inspection is found to be unjust. These scribes and Pharisees, when they dragged this woman before Jesus, felt themselves on quite another platform than that which she occupied; but a word from Christ convinced them how hollow this self-righteous spirit was. He made them feel that they too were sinners even as she, and none of them was sufficiently hardened to lift a stone against her. This is creditable to the Pharisees. There are many among us who would very quickly have lifted the stone. Even while striving to reclaim the drunkard, for example, they arraign him with an implacable ferocity that shows they are quite unconscious of being sharers in his sin. If you challenged them, they would clear themselves by vehemently protesting that they had not touched strong drink for years; but do they not consider that the almost universal intemperance of the lowest class in society has a far deeper root than individual appetite; that it is rooted in the whole miserable condition of that class, and cannot be cured till the luxuries of the rich are by some means sacrificed for the bitter need of the poor, and the rational enjoyments which save the well-to-do from coarse and open vice are put within reach of the whole population? Poverty, and the necessity it entails of being content with a wage which barely keeps in life, are not the sole roots of vice, but they are roots; and so long as we ourselves, in common with the society in which we live, are involved in the guilt of upholding a social condition which tempts to every kind of iniquity, we dare not cast the first stone at the drunkard, the thief, or even their more sunken associates. No one man, and no one class, is more guilty than another in this great blot on our Christianity. *Society* is guilty; but as members who happen by the

accident of our birth to have enjoyed advantages saving us from much temptation which we know we could not have stood, we must learn at least to *consider* those who in a very real sense are sacrificed for us. Among certain savage tribes, when a chief's house is built, slaughtered slaves are laid in pits as its foundation; the structure of our vaunted civilisation has a very similar basement.

Still it is one of the most hopeful features of present-day Christianity that men are becoming sensible that they are not mere individuals, but are members of a society; and that they must bear the shame of the existing condition of things in society. Intelligent Christian men now feel that the saving of their own souls is not enough, and that they cannot with complacency rest satisfied with their own happy condition and prospects if the society to which they belong is in a state of degradation and misery. It is by the growth of this sympathetic shame that reformation on a great scale will be brought about. It is by men learning to see in all misery and vice their own share of guilt that society will gradually be leavened. To those who cannot own their connection with their fellow-men in any such sense, to those who are quite satisfied if they themselves are comfortable, I do not know what can be said. They break themselves off from the social body, and accept the fate of the amputated limb.



The Expositor's Bible

Marcus Dods, D.D.

Gospel of John Part 1

Chapter 18

CHRIST THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.

“Again therefore Jesus spake unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life. The Pharisees therefore said unto Him, Thou bearest witness of Thyself; Thy witness is not true. Jesus answered and said unto them, Even if I bear witness of Myself, My witness is true; for I know whence I came, and whither I go; but ye know not whence I come, or whither I go. Ye judge after the flesh; I judge no man. Yea and if I judge, My judgement is true; for I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent Me. Yea and in your law it is written, that the witness of two men is true. I am He that beareth witness of Myself, and the Father that sent Me beareth witness of Me. They said therefore unto Him Where is Thy Father? Jesus answered, Ye know neither Me, nor My Father: if ye knew Me, ye would know My Father also.”—JOHN viii. 12–19.

At the Feast of Tabernacles Jesus, who knew that He was sent to confer upon men the realities which had been symbolised and promised in all religious rites, proclaimed that He was the fountain of life (vii. 37); and thus responded to the unuttered prayer of those who looked with some weariness at the old routine of drawing water in remembrance of the provision God had made for their fathers in the desert. Another feature of the same Feast leads Him now to declare a further characteristic of His person. In commemoration of the Pillar of Fire that led their fathers in the trackless desert, the people lit large lamps round the Temple, and gave themselves up to dancing and revelry. But this, too, was no doubt felt to be for the superficial souls that can live upon rites and symbols, and do not seek to lay bare their inmost being to the very touch of eternal reality. Not merely the cynic would smile as venerable men joined in the lamp-light dance, but possibly even the grave and pious onlooker, looking back on his own mistakes in life, and conscious of the blind way in which he was still blundering on, stood wondering where the true Guide of Israel, the real Light of human life was to be found. In sympathy with all such longing after truth and clear vision Jesus cries, “I am the light of the world; he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”

His words must be interpreted by their reference to the light which was then being celebrated. Of that light we read that “the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud, to lead them the way, and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light.” This was a customary mode of directing the movements of large bodies of men, whether caravans or armies. In the case of an army a tall pole was erected in front of the chief’s tent, and from it a basket of fire was suspended, so that the glare of it was visible by night, and its smoke by day. The head of a marching column could thus be descried from a great distance, especially in wide level tracts with little or no vegetation and few inequalities of surface to interrupt the view. The distinctive peculiarity of the Israelitish march was that Jehovah was in the fire, and that He alone controlled its movements, and thereby the movements of the camp. When the pillar of cloud left its place and advanced the tents were struck, lest they should be separated, from Jehovah and be found unfaithful to Him. During the whole course of their sojourn in the wilderness their movements were thus controlled and ordered.

The beacon-fire that led them was unaffected by atmospheric influences. Dispelled by no gales, and evaporated by no fiercest heat of the Eastern sun, it hovered in the van of the host as the guiding angel of the Lord. The guidance it gave was uninterrupted and unerring; it was never mistaken for an ordinary cloud, never so altered its shape as to become unrecognisable. And each night the flame shot up, and assured the people they might rest in peace.

Two obvious characteristics of this guiding Light must be kept in view.

1. God's people were not led by a road already made and used, and which they could have studied from beginning to end on a map before starting; but they were led day by day, and step by step, by a living guide, who chose a route never before trodden. In the morning they did not know whether they were to go forward or back, or to stay where they were. They had to wait in ignorance till their guiding pillar moved, and follow in ignorance till it halted. Our passage through life is similar. It is not a chart we are promised but a guide. We cannot tell where next year or next month may be spent. We are not informed of any part of our future, and have no means of ascertaining the emergencies which may try us, the new ingredients which may suddenly be thrown into our life, and reveal in us what till now has lain hidden and dormant. We cannot tell by what kind of path we shall be led onwards to our end; and our security from day to day consists not at all in this, that we can penetrate the future, and see no dangers in it, but our security is that we shall always be guided by infallible and loving wisdom. We have learned a chief article of human wisdom if we have learned to leave to-morrow to God and faithfully follow Him to-day. A road as it lies in the distance often looks impassably steep, but as we approach and walk it step by step, we find it almost level and fairly easy.

2. This light was to guide, not their conduct, but their movements. All men need similar guidance. All men have practical matters to determine which often greatly perplex them; they must make a choice between one or other course of action that is possible. Steps which will determine their whole subsequent life must be taken or declined; and for the determining of such alterations in the place or mode of their life there is often felt great need of a guidance which can be entirely relied upon. Sometimes, indeed, our course is determined for us, and we are not consulted in the matter; as the pillar of fire was silent, assigning no reasons, condescending to no persuasion or argument, but simply moving forwards; passing over rugged and steep mountain ridges, past inviting and sheltered glens, offering no present explanation of the route, but justified always by the result. So we often find that our course is determined apart from our own choice, wishes, judgment, or prayers. But this we commonly resent, and crave a guidance which shall approve itself to our own judgment and yet be infallible; which shall leave us our freedom of choice, and yet carry us forwards to all possibilities of good. In fact, we would rather have our freedom of choice and the responsibility of guiding our own life, with all its risks, than be carried forward without choice of our own.

This is the great distinction between the light which Christ is and the light by which the Israelites were led from day to day. They had an external means of ascertaining promptly which way they should go. Their whole life was circumscribed, and its place and mode determined for them. The guidance offered to us by Christ is of an inward kind. A God without might seem perfect as a guide, but a God within is the real perfection. God does not now lead us by a sign which we could follow, though we had no real sympathy with Divine ways and no wisdom of our own; but He leads us by communicating to us His own perceptions of right and wrong, by inwardly enlightening us, and by making us ourselves of such a disposition that we naturally

choose what is good.

When matters difficult to handle and to manage come into our life, and when we are tempted to long for some external sign which would show us infallibly the right thing to do and the right way to follow, let this be our consolation, that this very exercise of judgment and bearing of responsibility in matters where right and wrong are not broadly distinguished are among the chief instruments for the formation of character; and that *even though we err* in the choice we make, yet by our error and by all honest effort to keep right with God in the matter, we shall certainly have made growth in ability to understand and to do what is right. No doubt it is easier to believe in a guide we can see and that moves before us like a pillar of fire; but supposing for a moment that this dispensation under which we are living is not a great deception, supposing for a moment that God is doing that one thing which He pledged Himself to do, namely, giving a Divine Spirit to men, Himself dwelling with men and in them, then we cannot fail to see that this guidance is of a much higher kind, and has much more lasting results than any external guidance could have. If, by allowing us to determine our own course and find our own way through all the hazards and perplexities of life, God is teaching us to estimate actions and their results more and more by their moral value, and if thereby He is impregnating you with His own mind and character, surely that is a much better thing than if He were keeping us in the right way merely by outward signs and irrespective of our own growth in wisdom.

Persons whose opinion is not to be lightly esteemed say that if we honestly seek God's guidance in any matter we cannot err, and have no business to reflect afterwards on our conduct as if we had made a wrong choice. I cannot think that is so. Sincere people who ask God's guidance, it seems to me, frequently make mistakes. In fact, our past mistakes are a great part of our education. Unless we are *habitually* in sympathy with God we are not infallible even in matters where a moral judgment is all that is required; and sometimes more is required of us than to say what is right and what is wrong. Other points have to be considered—points which call for a knowledge of life, of places, and professions, of the trustworthiness of other men, and a thousand matters in which we are liable to err. It is of course a great satisfaction to know that we wished to do right, even if we discover we have blundered; and it is also a satisfaction to know that God can use us for good in any position, even in that we have blundered into, although meanwhile we have lost some present good.

The light which Christ brought to the world was the light "of life." This additional description "of life" He commonly appended to distinguish the real and eternal good He bestowed from the figure by which it had been hinted at. He calls Himself the Bread *of life*, the Water *of life*, to point out that He is really and eternally what these material things are in the present physical world. All this present constitution of things may pass away, and the time may come when men shall no longer need to be sustained by bread, but the time shall never come when they shall not need life; and this fundamental gift Christ pledges Himself evermore to give. And when He names Himself the light *of life* He indicates that it is on the true, eternal life of man He sheds light.

There may, then, be many things and important things on which Christ sheds no direct light, although there is nothing of importance on which He does not shed light indirectly. He brought into the world no direct light upon scientific questions; He did not hasten the development of art by any special light thrown on its objects and methods. There was no great need for light on such matters. These are not the

distressing difficulties of human existence. Indeed, men find stimulus and joy in overcoming these difficulties, and resent being told nature's secrets, and not being allowed to find them out. But the darkness that settles on the life of the individual, and upon the condition of large classes of people through what is human, personal, and practical is often overwhelming, and compels men to cry for light. The strange miscarriage of justice in the life of many individuals; the compulsion put upon them to sin and to disbelieve through the pressure of unceasing failure and privation; the triumph of cold-hearted villainy; the bitterness of separation and death; the impenetrable darkness of the future; the incomprehensible dimness, in which the most important truths are involved—all this men find no pleasure in, but rather a torment that is sometimes maddening, often destructive of all faith, and always painful. This is the kind of darkness that causes men to sink; they run upon the rocks, and go down in darkness, no living soul hearing their cry. This is the darkness which wrings from many a heart at this moment the question of despair, "What has become, of God?"

The darkness regarding conduct in which men are involved has largely a moral root. Men are blinded by their appetites and passions, so that they cannot see the best ends and enjoyments of life. It is the strong craving we have for gratifications of sense and of worldly desire that misleads us in life. As some creatures have the faculty of emitting a dark and turbid matter that discolours the water, and hides them from their pursuers, so it is a self-evolved and home-made darkness that involves us. False expectations are the atmosphere of our life; we live in an unreal world created by our own tastes and desires, which misinform us, and bid us seek the good of life where it is not to be found.

It is then this light that Christ is and brings, light upon human life, light upon all that most intimately concerns human character, human conduct, and human destiny. What each of us chiefly needs to know is, what is the best kind of human life—how can I best spend my energies, and how can I best sustain them? Are there any results of life which are satisfying and which are certain; and if so, how can I attain them? Do not all things happen alike to all; is it not with the wise man and the righteous as with the fool? Is life worth serious devotion; will it repay what is spent upon it? Is not cynical indifference, or selfish caring for present interests, the most philosophical as well as the most pleasant and easy attitude towards life to assume? These are the questions which we find answered in Christ.

The expression, "the light of life," may, however, have a somewhat different meaning. It may mean that he who follows Christ shall have that light which accompanies, and is fed by, the life which Christ gives. At the outset of the Gospel John declared that "the Life was the light of men." And this is true in the sense that they who accept Christ as their life, and truly live in Him and by Him, walk in light and not in darkness. The clouds and gloom which overhung their life are dissipated. Their horizon is widened, their prospect cleared, and all things with which they have presently to do are seen in their true dimensions and relations. They who live with the life of Christ have a clear light regarding duty. The man who has entered into the life Christ opens to us, however slow and dull in intellect he may be, may indeed make many mistakes, but he will find his way through life, and issue from it, in his measure, triumphant.

It is further to be remarked that Jesus does not content Himself with a place beside other teachers, saying, "I will give you light," but affirms that the light is inseparable from His own person. "I am the light." By this He means, as already observed, that it is by receiving Him as our life that we have light. But His words also mean that He

imparts this light not by oral teaching, but by being what He is, and living as He does. Teaching by word and precept is well, when nothing better can be had;^[33] but it is the Word made flesh that commands the attention of all. This is a language universally intelligible. “A life, the highest conceivable, on almost the lowest conceivable stage, and recorded in the simplest form, with indifference to all outward accompaniments attractive whether to the few or to the many, is set before us as the final and unalterable ideal of human life, amid all its continual and astonishing changes.” It is by this life led here on earth He becomes our Light. It is by His faith maintained in the utmost of trial; His calmness and hopefulness amidst all that shrouds human life in darkness; His constant persuasion that God is in this world, present, loving, and working. It is by His habitual attitude towards this life, and towards the unseen, that we receive light to guide us. In His calmness we take refuge from our own dismay. In His hopefulness we refresh ourselves in every time of weariness. In His confidence our timorous anxieties are rebuked. Upon the darkest parts of our life there falls from Him some clear ray that brightens and directs. Thousands of His followers, in every age, have verified His words: “I am the light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”

And as the Teacher taught by living so must the scholar learn by living. Christ brings light by passing through all human experiences and situations, and “he that followeth” Him, not he that reads about Him, “shall have the light of life.” There are very few men in the world who can think to much purpose on truths so abstruse and complicated as the Divinity of Christ and the Atonement and Miracles; but there is no man so dull as not to see the difference between Christ’s life and His own. Few men may be able to explain satisfactorily the relation Christ holds to God on the one hand and to us on the other; but every man who knows Christ at all even as he knows his friend or his father, is conscious that a new light falls upon sin of all kinds, upon sins of appetite and sins of temper and sins of disposition, since Christ lived. It is in this light Christ would have us walk, and if we follow as He leads on, we shall never lack the light of life. We need not be seriously disturbed about the darkness that hangs round the horizon if light falls on our own path; we need not be disturbed by our ignorance of many Divine and human things, nor by our inability to answer many questions which may be put to us, and which indeed we naturally put to ourselves, so long only as we are sure we are living so as to please and satisfy Christ. If our life runs on the lines His life marked out, we shall certainly arrive where He now is, in the happiest and highest human condition.

[33] “Many had spoken wonderfully the truths concerning our state, and even concerning our hopes; they had sounded great depths in the sea of wisdom; they had drawn the line between what is solid and what is vain in life; they had caught, firmly and clearly, what was worth living for; they had measured truly the relative value of the flesh and the Spirit.”—Dean Church, *Gifts of Civilisation*, p. 105.



The Expositor's Bible

Marcus Dods, D.D.

Gospel of John Part 1

Chapter 19

JESUS REJECTED IN JERUSALEM.

“He said therefore again unto them, I go away, and ye shall seek Me, and shall die in your sin: whither I go, ye cannot come. The Jews therefore said, Will He kill Himself, that He saith, Whither I go, ye cannot come? And He said unto them, Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world. I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for except ye believe that I am He, ye shall die in your sins. They said therefore unto Him, Who art Thou? Jesus said unto them, Even that which I have also spoken unto you from the beginning. I have many things to speak and to judge concerning you: howbeit He that sent Me is true; and the things which I heard from Him, these speak I unto the world. They perceived not that He spake to them of the Father. Jesus therefore said, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself, but as the Father taught Me, I speak these things. And He that sent Me is with Me; He hath not left Me alone; for I do always the things that are pleasing to Him. As He spake these things, many believed on Him. Jesus therefore said to those Jews which had believed Him, If ye abide in My word, then are ye truly My disciples; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. They answered unto Him, We be Abraham’s seed, and have never yet been in bondage to any man: how sayest Thou, Ye shall be made free? Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Every one that committeth sin is the bondservant of sin. And the bondservant abideth not in the house for ever: the son abideth for ever. If therefore the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed. I know that ye are Abraham’s seed; yet ye seek to kill Me, because My word hath not free course in you. I speak the things which I have seen with My Father: and ye also do the things which ye heard from your father. They answered and said unto Him, Our father is Abraham. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham. But now ye seek to kill Me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I heard from God: this did not Abraham. Ye do the works of your father. They said unto Him, We were not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God. Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love Me: for I came forth and am come from God; for neither have I come of Myself, but He sent Me. Why do ye not understand My speech? Even because ye cannot hear My word. Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father it is your will to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and stood not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father thereof. But because I say the truth, ye believe Me not. Which of you convicteth Me of sin? If I say truth, why do ye not believe Me? He that is of God heareth the words of God: for this cause ye hear them not, because ye are not of God. The Jews answered and said unto Him, Say we not well that Thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil? Jesus answered, I have not a devil; but I honour My Father, and ye dishonour Me. But I seek not mine own glory: there is One that seeketh and judgeth. Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep My word, he shall never see death. The Jews said unto Him, Now we know that Thou hast a devil. Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and Thou sayest, If a man keep My word, he shall never taste of death. Art Thou greater than our father Abraham, which is dead? and the prophets are dead: whom makest Thou Thyself? Jesus answered, If I glorify Myself, My glory is nothing: it is My Father that glorifieth Me; of whom ye say, that He is your God; and ye have not known Him: but I know Him; and if I should say, I know Him not, I shall be like unto you, a liar: but I know Him, and keep His word. Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day; and he saw it, and was glad. The Jews therefore said unto Him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast Thou seen Abraham? Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am. They took up

stones therefore to cast at Him: but Jesus hid Himself, and went out of the temple.”—JOHN viii. 21–59.

John has now briefly detailed the self-manifestations of Jesus which He considered sufficient to induce the Jews to believe in Him; and he has shown us how, both in Galilee and in Jerusalem, the people, with few exceptions, remained unconvinced. He has also very clearly shown the reason of His rejection in Galilee. The reason was that the blessings He proposed to bestow were spiritual, while the blessings they craved were physical. Their Messianic expectation was not satisfied in Him. So long as He healed their sick, and by His mere will furnished famishing thousands with food, they thought, This is the King for us. But when He told them that these things were mere signs of higher blessings, and when He urged them to seek these spiritual gifts, they left Him in a body.

In Jerusalem opinion has followed a similar course. There also Jesus has exemplified His power to impart life. He has carefully explained the significance of that sign, and has explicitly claimed Divine prerogatives. But although individuals believe, the mass of the people are only perplexed, and the authorities are exasperated. The rulers, however, find it impossible to proceed against Him, owing to the influence He has with the people, and even with their own servants. This state of matters, however, was not destined to continue; and in the eighth chapter John traces the course of popular opinion from a somewhat hopeful perplexity to a furious hostility that, at length, for the first time, broke out in actual violence (viii. 59). Jesus did not indeed immediately retire, as if further efforts to induce faith were useless, but when the storm broke out a second time (x. 39, 40) He finally withdrew, and taught only such as sought Him out.

At this point, then, in the history we are invited to inquire what grounds of faith Jesus had presented, and what were the true reasons of His rejection.

1. But first we must ask, In what character or capacity did Jesus present Himself to men? What did He declare Himself to be? What demand did He make on the faith of those to whom He presented Himself? When He required that they should believe in Him, what exactly did He mean? Certainly He did not mean less than that they should believe He was the Messiah, and should accept Him as such. The “Messiah” was an elastic title, perhaps not conveying to any two minds in Israel precisely the same idea. It had indeed for all Israelites some contents in common. It meant that here was One upon earth and accessible, who was sent to be the Bearer of God’s good-will to men, a Mediator through whom God meant to make His presence felt and His will known. But some who believed Jesus was the Christ had so poor a conception of the Christ, that He could not accept theirs as a sound faith. The minimum of acceptable faith must believe in the actual Jesus, and allow the idea of the Christ to be formed by what was seen in Jesus. Those who believed must so trust Jesus as to be willing that He should fashion the Messiahship as He saw fit. It was therefore primarily in Himself the true believer trusted. He did not, in the first instance, believe He was this or that, but he felt, “Here is the greatest and best I know; I give myself to Him.” Of course this involved that whatever Christ claimed to be, He was believed to be. But it is of importance to observe that the confession, “I believe that Jesus is the Christ,” was not enough in Christ’s own day to guarantee the soundness of the faith of the confessor. He had further to answer the question, “What do you mean by ‘the Christ’? For if you mean a national Messiah, coming to give you political freedom and social blessings only, this faith cannot be trusted.” But if any one could say, “I believe in Jesus,” and if by this he meant, “I so believe in Him that whatever He says He is, I believe He is, and whatever be the contents

with which He fills the Messianic name, these contents I accept as belonging to the office," this faith was sound and acceptable.

And, according to this Gospel, Jesus at once made it plain that His idea of the Messianic office was not the popular idea, It was "eternal life" He constantly proclaimed as the gift the Father had commissioned Him to bestow; not physical life, not revived political life. So that it very shortly became impossible for any one to make the confession that Jesus was the Christ, in ignorance of what He Himself judged the Christ to be. It may be said, therefore, that when Jesus required men to believe in Him, He meant that they should trust Him as mediating efficiently between God and them, and should accept His view of all that was needful for this mediation. He meant that they should look to Him for life eternal and for perfect fellowship with God. What was doctrinally involved in this, what was implied in His claim regarding His eternal nature, might or might not at once be understood. What must be understood and believed was, that Jesus was empowered by God to act for Him, to represent Him, to impart to men all that God would impart.

II. This being so, we may now inquire, what sufficient reason Jesus, as already reported in this Gospel, has given why the people should accept Him as the Christ. In these eight chapters what do we find related which should have furnished the Jews with all the evidence which reasonable minds would require?

1. He was definitely identified as the Christ by the Baptist. It was John's function to recognise the person sent by God to fulfil all His will, and to found a kingdom of God among men. For this John lived; and if any man was in a position to say "yes" or "no" in response to the question, Is this the Christ, the Anointed and commissioned of God? John was that man. No man was in himself better qualified to judge, and no man had such material for judging, and his judgment was explicit and assured. To put aside this testimony as valueless is out of the question. It is more reasonable to ask whether it is even possible that in this matter the Baptist should be mistaken.

Jesus Himself indeed did not rest upon this testimony. For His own certification of His dignity He did not require it. He did not require the corroborative voice of one human being. It was not by what He was told regarding Himself that He became conscious of His Sonship; nor was it by an external testimony, even from such a man as John, that He was encouraged to make the claims He made. John was but a mirror reflecting what was already in Him, possibly stimulating self-consciousness, but adding nothing to His fitness for His work.

2. He expected that His claim to have come forth from God would be believed *on His own word*. The Samaritans believed Him on His own word. This does not mean that they believed a mere assertion; they believed the assertion of One whom they felt to be speaking the truth. There was that in His character and bearing which compelled their faith. Through all He said there shone the self-evidencing light of truth. They might not have been able to stand a cross-examination as to the reason of the faith that was in them, they might not have been able to satisfy any other person or induce him to believe, but they were justified in following an instinct which said to them, This man is neither deceiver nor deceived. There was nothing in the claim of Jesus absolutely incredible. Nay, it rather fell in with their idea of God and with the knowledge of their own needs. They wished a revelation, and saw nothing impossible in it. This may nowadays be judged a homely rather than a philosophical view to take of God and of His relation to men. But primary and universal instincts have their place, and, if scientific knowledge does not contradict

them, should be trusted. It was because the Samaritans had not tampered with their natural cravings and hopes, and had not allowed their idea of the Messiah to harden into a definite conception, that they were able to welcome Jesus with a faith which He rarely met with elsewhere.

And the main authentication of Christ's claim at all times is simply this, that He makes the claim, and that there is that in Him which testifies to His truth, while there is that in the claim itself which is congruous to our instincts and needs. There was that in the bearing of Christ which commanded belief in natures which were not numbed and blunted by prejudice. The Capernaum courtier who came to Jesus expecting to bring Him down with him to heal his boy, when he saw Him felt he could trust Him, and returned alone. Jesus was conscious that He spoke of what He knew, and spoke of it truly. "I speak that which I have seen with My Father" (ver. 38). "My record is true" (ver. 14). "If I say the truth, why do ye not believe Me?" (ver. 46.) This consciousness, both of an intention to speak the truth and of a knowledge of the truth, in a mind so pellucid and sane, justly impressed candid minds in His own day, and is irresistibly impressive still.

Again, we judge of what is probable or improbable, credible or incredible, mainly by its congruity with our previous belief. Is our idea of God such that a personal revelation seems credible and even likely? Does this supposed revelation in Christ consist with previous revelations and with the knowledge of God and His will which those revelations have fostered? Does this final revelation actually bring us the knowledge of God, and does it satisfy the longings and pure aspirations, the thirst for God and the hunger for righteousness, which assert themselves in us like natural appetites? If so, then the untutored human heart accepts this revelation. It is its own verification. Light is its own authentication. Christ brings within our ken a God whom we cannot but own as God, and who is nowhere else so clearly revealed. It is this immediacy of authentication, this self-verification, to which our Lord constantly appeals.

3. But a great part of the self-revelation of Christ could best be made in action. Such a work as the healing of the impotent man was visible to all and legible by the dullest. If His words were sometimes enigmatic, such an action as this was full of significance and easily understood. By this compassionate restoration of the vital powers He proclaimed Himself the Father's Delegate, commissioned to express the Divine compassion and to exercise the Divine power to communicate life. This was meant to be an easy lesson by which men might learn that God is full of compassion, ceaselessly working for the good of men; that He is present among us seeking to repair the mischief resulting from sin, and to apply to our needs the fulness of His own life, and that Jesus Christ is the medium through whom He makes Himself accessible to us and available for us.

These works were done by our Lord not only to convince the people that they should listen to Him, but also to convince them that God Himself was present. "If I do not the works of My Father, believe Me not. But if I do, though ye believe not Me, believe the works, that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in Me, and I in Him." It was this He strove to impress on the people, that God was with them. It was not Himself He wished them to recognise, but the Father in Him. "I seek not Mine own glory" (ver. 50). And therefore it was the kindness of the works He pointed to: "Many *good* works have I showed you from My Father" (x. 32). He sought through these works to lead men to see how in His Person the Father was applying Himself to the actual needs of mankind. To accept God for one purpose is to accept Him for all. To believe in Him as present to heal naturally leads to belief in Him as our

Friend and Father. Hence these signs, manifesting the presence and good-will of God, were a call upon men to trust Him and accept His messenger. They spoke of gifts still more akin to the Divine nature, of gifts not merely physical, but spiritual and eternal. Possibly in allusion to these intelligible and earthly signs our Lord said to Nicodemus, "If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?" If ye are blind to these earthly signs, what hope is there of your understanding things eternal in their own impalpable essence?

III. What were the true reasons of our Lord's rejection?

1. The first reason no doubt was that He so thoroughly disappointed the popular Messianic expectation. This comes out very conspicuously in His rejection in Galilee, where the people were on the point of crowning Him, but at once deserted Him as soon as it became clear that His idea of the needs of men was quite different from their's. The same reason lies at the root of His rejection by the authorities and people of Jerusalem. This is brought out in this eighth chapter. "Many had believed on Him" (ver. 30); that is to say, they believed on Him as Nicodemus had believed; they believed He was the Christ. But as soon as He explained to them (vers. 32, 34) that the freedom He brought was a freedom attained through knowing the truth, a freedom from sin, they either were unable to understand Him or were repelled, and from believers became enemies and assailants.

It may have been with reluctance our Lord disclosed to those who had some faith in Him, that in order to be His disciples (ver. 31) they must accept His word, and find in it the freedom He proclaimed. He knew that this was not the freedom they sought. But it was compulsory that He should leave them in no dubiety regarding the blessings He promised. It was impossible that they should accept the eternal life He brought to them, unless there was quickened within them some genuine desire for it. For what prevented them from receiving Him was not a mere easily rectified blunder about the Messianic office, it was an alienation in heart from a spiritual conception of God. And accordingly in depicting the climax of unbelief John is careful in this chapter to bring out that our Lord traced His rejection by the Jews to their inveterate repugnance to spiritual life, and their consequent blinding of themselves to the knowledge of God. "He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God" (ver. 47). "Ye seek to kill Me, because My word hath no place in you [finds no room in you]. I speak that which I have seen with My Father; and ye do that which ye have seen with your father" (vers. 37, 38).

2. Here, as elsewhere, therefore, our Lord traces the unbelief of the Jews to the blindness induced by alienation from the Divine. They do not understand Him, because they have not that thirst for truth and righteousness which is the best interpreter of His words. "Why do ye not understand My speech? even because ye cannot bear My word." It was this word of His, the truth regarding sin and the way out of it, which sifted men. Those who eagerly welcomed salvation from sin because they knew that bondage to sin was the worst of bondages (ver. 34), accepted Christ's word, and continued in it, and so became His disciples (ver. 31). Those who rejected Him were prompted to do so by their indifference to the Kingdom of God as exhibited in the person of Christ. He was not their ideal. And He was not their ideal, because however much they boasted of being God's people God was not their ideal. "If God were your Father, ye would love Me; for I proceeded forth and came from God" (ver. 42). Jesus is conscious of adequately representing God, so that to be repelled by Him is to be repelled by God. It is really God in Him that they dislike. This is not only His own judgment of the matter. It is not a mere fancy of His own that He truly represents the Father, for "neither came I of Myself, but He sent me."

He was sent into the world because He could represent the Father.

The rejection of Jesus by the Jews was therefore due to their moral condition. Their condition is such that our Lord does not scruple pungently to say, "Ye are of your father the devil." Their blindness to the truth and virulent opposition to Him proved their kinship with him who was from the beginning a liar and a murderer. They are so completely under the influence of sin that they are unable to appreciate emancipation from it. They look for satisfaction so determinedly in an anti-spiritual direction, that they are positively enraged at One who certainly has power, but who steadfastly uses it for spiritual purposes. Out of this condition they can be rescued by believing in Christ. Into the mystery which surrounds the possibility that such a belief should be cherished by any one in this condition, our Lord does not here enter. That it is possible, He implies by blaming them for not believing.

It is, then, those who are unconscious of the bondage of sin who reject Christ. One of the sayings with which He sifted His profoundly attached followers from the mass is this: "If ye continue in My word, then are ye My disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." The "word" of which Jesus here speaks is His whole revelation, all He taught by word and action, by His own habitual conduct and by His miracles. This it is which gives knowledge of the truth. That is to say, all the truth which men require for living they have in Christ. All knowledge of duty, and all that knowledge of our spiritual relations, out of which we can draw perennial motive and unfailing hope, we have in Him. The "truth" disclosed in Christ, and which emancipates from sin, must not be too carefully defined. But while leaving it in all its comprehensiveness, it must be noted that the truth which especially emancipates from sin and gives us our place as children in God's house, is the truth revealed in Christ's Sonship, the truth that God, in love and forgiveness, claims us as His children. In its own measure every truth we learn gives us a sense of liberty. The truth emancipates from superstition, from timorous waiting upon the opinion of authorities, from all that cramps mental movement and stunts mental growth; but the freedom here in view is freedom from sin, and the truth which brings that freedom is the truth about God our Father, and Jesus Christ whom He has sent.



The Expositor's Bible

Marcus Dods, D.D.

Gospel of John Part 1

Chapter 20

SIGHT GIVEN TO THE BLIND.

“And as He passed by, He saw a man blind from his birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, Rabbi, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he should be born blind? Jesus answered, Neither did this man sin, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him. We must work the works of Him that sent Me, while it is day; the night cometh, when no man can work. When I am in the world, I am the Light of the world. When He had thus spoken, He spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and anointed his eyes with the clay, and said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam (which is by interpretation, Sent). He went away, therefore, and washed, and came seeing. The neighbours therefore, and they which saw him aforetime, that he was a beggar, said, Is not this he that sat and begged? Others said, It is he: others said, No, but he is like him. He said, I am he. They said therefore unto him, How then were thine eyes opened? He answered, The man that is called Jesus made clay, and anointed mine eyes, and said unto me, Go to Siloam, and wash: so I went away and washed, and I received sight. And they said unto him, Where is He? He saith, I know not. They bring to the Pharisees him that aforetime was blind. Now it was the sabbath on the day when Jesus made the clay, and opened his eyes. Again therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he received his sight. And he said unto them, He put clay upon mine eyes, and I washed, and do see. Some therefore of the Pharisees said, This man is not from God, because He keepeth not the sabbath. But others said, How can a man that is a sinner do such signs? And there was a division among them. They say therefore unto the blind man again, What sayest thou of Him, in that He opened thine eyes? And he said, He is a prophet. The Jews therefore did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind, and had received his sight, until they called the parents of him that had received his sight, and asked them, saying, Is this your son, who ye say was born blind? how then doth he now see? His parents answered and said, We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind: but how he now seeth, we know not; or who opened his eyes, we know not: ask him; he is of age; he shall speak for himself. These things said his parents, because they feared the Jews: for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man should confess Him to be Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue. Therefore said his parents, He is of age; ask him. So they called a second time the man that was blind, and said unto him, Give glory to God: we know that this man is a sinner. He therefore answered, Whether He be a sinner, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see. They said therefore unto him, What did He to thee? how opened He thine eyes? He answered them, I told you even now, and ye did not hear: wherefore would ye hear it again? would ye also become His disciples? And they reviled him, and said, Thou art His disciple; but we are disciples of Moses, We know that God hath spoken unto Moses: but as for this man, we know not whence He is. The man answered and said unto them, Why, herein is the marvel, that ye know not whence He is, and yet He opened mine eyes. We know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and do His will, him He heareth. Since the world began it was never heard that any one opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, He could do nothing. They answered and said unto him, Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us? And they cast him out. Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and finding him, He said, Dost thou believe on the Son of God? He answered and said, And who is He, Lord, that I may believe on Him? Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen Him, and He it is that speaketh with thee. And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped Him. And Jesus said, For judgment came I into this world, that they which see not may see; and that they which see may become blind. Those of the Pharisees which were with

Him heard these things, and said unto Him, Are we also blind? Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye would have no sin: but now ye say, We see: your sin remaineth.”—JOHN IX.

We have already considered the striking use our Lord made of the Temple illumination to proclaim Himself the Light of the world. A still more striking physical symbol of this aspect of our Lord's person and work is found in His healing of the blind man. It is, as we have already had occasion to see, the manner of this evangelist to select for narration those miracles of Christ's which are especially "signs," outward embodiments of spiritual truth. Accordingly he now proceeds to exhibit Christ as the Light of the world in His bestowal of sight on the blind.

The disciples of Jesus had apparently been exercised by one of the outstanding problems of human life which perplex all thoughtful men: What regulates the distribution of suffering; why is it that while many of the most criminal and noxious men are prosperous and exempt from pain, many of the gentlest and best are broken and tortured by constant suffering? Why is it that inexplicable suffering seems so often to fall on the wrong people, on the innocent not on the guilty, on those who already are of refined and chastened disposition, not on those who seem urgently to need correction and the rod? Is suffering sent that character may be improved? But in Job's case it was sent because he was already irreproachable, not to make him so. Is it sent because of a man's early transgressions? But this man was *born* blind; his punishment preceded any possible transgression of his own. Was he then the victim of his parent's wrong-doing? But suffering is often the result of accident or of malice, or of mistake, which cannot be referred to hereditary sin. Are we then to accept the belief that this world is far from perfect as yet; that God begins at the beginning in all His works, and only slowly works towards perfection, and that in the progress, and while we are only moving towards an eternal state, there must be pains manifold and bitter? They are the shavings and sawdust and general disorder of the carpenter's workshop, which are necessarily thrown off in the making of the needful article.^[34] It is to it, to the finished work, we must look, and not to the shavings, if we would understand and be reconciled to the actual state of things around us.

When Jesus said, "Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents, but that the works of God should be made manifest in him," He of course did not mean to suggest that there is no such thing as suffering for individual or hereditary sin. By breaking the great moral laws of human life men constantly involve both themselves and their children in lifelong suffering. There is often so direct a connection between sin and suffering that the most hardened and insensible do not dream of denying that their pain and misery are self-inflicted. Sometimes the connection is obscure, and though every one else sees the source of a man's misfortunes in his own careless habits, or indolence, or bad temper, he himself may constantly blame his circumstances, his ill-luck, his partners, or his friends. It was our Lord's intention to warn the disciples against a curious and uncharitable scrutiny of any man's life to find the cause of his misfortunes. We have to do rather with the future than with the past, rather with the question how we can help the man out of his difficulties, than with the question how he got himself into them. The one question may indeed be involved in the other, but all suffering is, in the first place, a field in which the works of God may be exhibited. Wherever suffering has come from, there can be no manner of doubt that it calls out all that is best in human nature—sympathy, self-denial, gentleness, compassion, forgiveness of spirit, patient forbearance, all that is most Divine in man. To seek for the cause of suffering in order to blame and exonerate ourselves from all responsibility and claim on our pity and charity is one thing, quite another to inquire into the cause for the sake of more effectually dealing with the effect. No matter

what has caused the suffering, here certainly it is always with us, and what we have to do with it is to find in it material and opportunity for a work of God. To rid the world of evil, of wretchedness, lonely sorrow, destitution, and disease is, if anything, the work of God; if God is doing anything He is carrying the world on towards perfection, and if the world is ever to be perfect it must be purged from agony and wretchedness, irrespective of where these come from. Our duty then, if we would be fellow-workers with God in what is real and abiding, is plain.

To the work of healing the blind man Jesus at once applies Himself. While the lifted stones were yet in His pursuers hands He paused to express His Father's love. He must, He says, work the works of Him who sent Him. He represented the Father not mechanically, not by getting well off by rote the task His Father had set Him, not by a studied imitation, but by being Himself of one mind with the Father, by loving that blind man just as the Father loved him, and by doing for him just what the Father would have done for him. We do the works of God when in our measure we do the same, becoming eyes to the blind, feet to the lame, help any way to the helpless. We cannot lay our hand on the diseased and heal them; we cannot give sight to the blind and make a man thus feel, this is God's power reaching to me; this is God stooping to me and caring for my infirmity; but we can cause men to feel that God is thinking of them, and has sent help through us to them. If we will only be humble enough to run the risk of failure, and of being held cheap, if we will only in sincerity take by the hand those who are ill-off and strive to better them, then these persons will think of God gratefully; or if they do not, there is no better way of making them think of God, for this was Christ's way, who had rarely need to add much explanation of His kind deeds, but letting them speak for themselves, heard the people giving God the glory. If men can be induced to believe in the love of their fellow-men, they are well on the road to belief in the love of God. And even though it should *not* be so, though all our endeavours to help men should fail to make them think of God as their helper, who has sent us and all help to them, yet we have helped them, and some at least of God's love for these suffering people has got itself expressed through us. God has got at least a little of His work done, has in one direction stopped the spread of evil.

Neither are we to wait until we can do things on a great scale, and attack the evils of human life with elaborate machinery. Our Lord was not a great organiser. He did not busy Himself with forming societies for this, that, and the other charitable work. He did not harangue assemblies convened to consider the relief of the poor; He did not press the abolition of slavery; He did not found orphanages or hospitals; but "as He passed by," He saw one blind man, and judged this a call sufficiently urgent. Sometimes we feel that, confronted as we are with a whole world full of deep-rooted and inveterate evils, it is useless giving assistance to an individual here and there. It is like trying to dry up the ocean with a sponge. We feel impatient with individual acts, and crave national action and radical measures. And that is very well, so long as we do not omit to use the opportunities we actually have of doing even little kindnesses, of undergirding the shattered life of individuals, and so enabling them to do what otherwise they could not do. But we shall never do our part, either to individuals or on a large scale, until we apprehend that it is only through us and others that God works, and that when we pass by a needy person we prevent God's love from reaching him, and disappoint the purpose of God. It was this feeling that imparted to Christ so intense and wakeful an energy. He felt it was God's work He was on earth to do. "I must work the works of Him that sent Me while it is day." He recognised that God was in the world looking with compassion on all human sorrow, but that this compassion could find expression only through His own instrumentality and that of all other men. We are the channels or pipes through which the inexhaustible source of God's goodness flows to the world; but it is in our power to

turn off that flow, and prevent it from reaching those for whom it is intended. We do less than we ought for our fellow-men until we believe that we are the bearers of God's gifts to men; that to however few a number and in however small a way we are the media through which God finds way for His love to men, and that if we refuse to do what we can we disappoint and thwart His love and His purpose of good.

The blind man, with the quickened hearing of the blind, heard with interest the talk about himself; and a new awe fell upon his spirit as he heard that his blindness was to be the object of a work of God. He had learned to judge of men by the tones of their voice; and the firm, clear, penetrating voice which had just uttered these all-important words, "I am the Light of the world," could not, he knew, belong to a deceiver. In other ways also Jesus compensated for his lack of sight, and encouraged his faith by touching him and by laying on the closed eyes an extemporised ointment. But the miracle was not completed on the spot. The patient was required to go to the pool of Siloam and wash. John tells us that the name Siloam means Sent, and evidently connects this name with the claim Jesus constantly made to be the Sent of God.

But as the peculiarity of the miracle consisted in this, that the man was sent to the pool to be healed, we may be sure this arrangement was made to meet some element in the case. The man, with his bespattered eyes, had to grope his way to the pool, or get some kindly soul to lead him through the scoffing, doubtful crowd. And whatever this taught the man himself, it is to us a symbol of the truth that light does not come by the instantaneous touch of Christ's hand so much as by our faithfully doing His bidding. It is He who gives and is the light; but it does not stream in suddenly upon the soul, but comes upon the man who, though blindly, yet faithfully, gropes his way to the place Christ has bid him to, and uses the means prescribed by Him. "He that doeth the will of God, shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God." All the commands of Christ are justified in their performance; and clear light upon the meaning of much that we are commanded to do is only found in the doing of it.

But no doubt the special significance of the man's being sent to the pool of Siloam lay in the circumstance that it was in John's eyes a symbol of Christ Himself. He was sent by God. The people found it difficult to believe this, because He had slowly and unostentatiously grown up like any other man. "We know this Man, whence He is." "Is not this the carpenter's Son?" "How sayest Thou, I came down from heaven?" They could trace Him to His source. He did not appear fullgrown in their midst, without home, without any who had watched over His boyhood and growth. He was like the river whose sources were known, not like the stream bursting in full volume from the rock. The people felt ashamed to laud and celebrate as sent by God One who had grown up so quietly among themselves, and whose whole demeanour was so unostentatious. So had their fathers despised the waters of Siloam, "because they went softly;" because there was no mighty stream and roar, but a quiet pool and a little murmuring stream.

So might this blind man have reasoned when sent to Siloam: "Why, herein is a marvellous thing that I am to be healed by what has been within my reach since I was born, by the pool I used to dip my hand in when a boy, and wonder what like was the coolness to the sight. What hidden virtue can there be in that spring? Am I not exposing myself to the ridicule of all Jerusalem?" But, as this blind man's conduct afterwards showed, he was heedless of scorn and independent of other people's opinion, a fearless and trenchant reasoner who stands alone in the Gospel history for the firmness and sarcasm with which he resisted the bullying tone of the

Pharisees, and compelled them to face, even though they would not acknowledge, the consequences of incontrovertible facts. This characteristic contempt of contempt, and scorn of scorn served him well now, for straight he went to the pool in the face of discouragements, and had his reward.

And the Pharisees might, with their gift of interpreting trifles, have deduced from this cure at the humble and noiseless Siloam some suggestion that though Jesus did seem a powerless and common Man, and though for thirty years His life had been flowing quietly on without violently changing the established order of things, yet He might, like this pool, be the Sent of God, to whom if a man came feeling his need of light and expecting in Him to find it, there was a likelihood of his blindness being taken away. This, however, as our Lord had afterwards occasion to tell them, was precisely what they could not submit to do. They could not, in the presence of a wondering and scorning crowd, admit that they needed light, nor could they condescend to seek for light from so commonplace a source. And no doubt it was a very severe trial—it was well-nigh impossible, that men in high esteem for religious knowledge, and who had been accustomed to reckon themselves the protectors of the faith, should own that they were in darkness, and should seek to be instructed by a youth from the benighted district of Galilee. Even now, when the dignity of Jesus is understood, many are prevented from giving themselves cordially to the life He insists upon by mere pride. There are men in such repute as leaders of opinion, and so accustomed to teach rather than to learn, and to receive homage rather than to give it, that scarcely any greater humiliation could be required of them, than to publicly profess themselves followers of Christ. For ourselves even, who might not seem to have much on which to pride ourselves, it is yet sometimes difficult to believe that a mere application to Christ, a mere sprinkling of this fountain, can change our inborn disposition, and make us so different from our former selves, that close observers might well doubt our identity, some saying, “This is he,” others more cautiously only venturing to assert, “He is like him.”

Though very pleasant to contemplate, it is impossible adequately to imagine the sensations of a man who for the first time *sees* the world in which he has for years been living blind. The sensation of light itself, the new sense of room and distance, the expansion of the nature, as if ushered into a new and ampler world, the glory of colour, of the skies; of the sun, of the moon walking in brightness, the first recognition of the “human face Divine,” and the joy of watching the unspoken speech of its ever-changing expression, the thrill of first meeting parent, child, or friend eye to eye; the sublimity of the towers of Jerusalem, the glittering Temple, the marble palaces, by the base of which he had before dimly crept, feeling with his hand or tapping with his stick. To a man who, by the opening of one sealed sense, was thus ushered into so new a world, nothing can have seemed “too grand and good” for him to expect. He was prepared to believe in the glory and perfectness of God’s world, and in Christ’s power to bring him into contact with that glory. If the opening of his bodily organs of vision had given him such exquisite pleasure, and given him entrance to so new a life, what might not the opening of his inward eye accomplish? He had no patience with the difficulties raised by those who had not his experience: “How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles?” “Give God the praise; we know that this man is a sinner.” To all these slow-brained, bewildered pedants, he had but the answer, “Whether He be a sinner or no, I know not; *one* thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.” No arguments, happily, can rob me of the immense boon this Man has conferred upon me. If it gives you any satisfaction to apply your paltry tests to Him, and prove that He cannot have done this miracle, you are welcome to your conclusions; but you cannot alter the facts that I was blind, and that now I see. He who has given me so Divine a gift seems to me

to carry with Him in some true form the Divine presence. I believe Him when He says, "I am the Light of the world."

This miracle was so public as to challenge scrutiny. It was not performed in the privacy of a sick-room, with none present but one or two disciples, who might be supposed ready to believe anything. It was performed on a public character and in broad day. And we nowadays may congratulate ourselves that there was a strong party in the community, whose interest it was to minimise the miracles of our Lord, and who certainly did what they could to prove them fictitious. In the case of this blind man, the authorities took steps to sift the matter; the parents were summoned, and then the man himself. They did precisely what sceptical writers in recent years have desiderated; they instituted a jealous examination of the affair. And so straightforward was the man's testimony, and so well-known was he in Jerusalem, that instead of denying the miracle, they adopted the easier course of excommunicating him for acknowledging Jesus as the Christ.

Ready witted, bold, and independent as this man was, he cannot but have felt keenly this punishment. His hope of employment was gone, and even his new joy in seeing would scarcely compensate for his being shunned by all as a tainted person. Had he been of a fainthearted and moody disposition he might have thought it had been as well had he been left in his blindness, and not become an object of abhorrence to all. But Jesus heard of his punishment, and sought him out, and declared to him more fully who He Himself was. He thus gave to the man assurance of a friendship outweighing in value what he had lost. He made him feel that though cut off from the fellowship of the visible Church, he was made a member of the true commonwealth of men—numbered among those who are united in friendship, and in work, and in destiny to Him who heads the real work of God, and promotes the abiding interests of men. And such is ever the reward of those who make sacrifices for Christ, who lose employment or friends by too boldly confessing their indebtedness to Him. They will themselves tell you that Christ makes up to them for their losses by imparting clearer knowledge of Himself, by making them conscious that they are remembered by Him, and by giving them a conscience void of offence, and a spirit superior to worldly misfortunes.

As a final reflection on the miracle and its results our Lord says: "For judgement am I come into the world, that they which see not might see, and that they which see might be made blind." A kind of sad humour betrays itself in His language, as He sees how easily felt-blindness is removed, but how absolutely blind presumed knowledge is. Humility ever wins the day. The blind man now saw because he knew he was blind, and trusted that Christ could give him sight; the Pharisees were stone-blind to the world Christ opened to them and carried in His person, because they thought that already they had all the knowledge they required. And wherever Christ comes men thus form themselves around Him in two groups, blind and seeing. "For judgment," for testing and dividing men, He is come. Nothing goes more searchingly into a man's character than Christ's offer to be to him the Light of life, to be his leader to a perfect life. This offer discloses what the man is content with, and what he really sighs for. This offer, which confronts us with the possibility of living in close fellowship and love with God, discloses whether our real bent is towards what is pure, and high, and holy, or towards what is earthly. This man who eagerly asked, "Who is the Son of God that I might believe on Him?" acknowledged his blindness and his longing for light, and he got it. The Pharisees, who claimed to see, condemned themselves by their rejection of Christ. "If," says our Lord, "ye were blind, if you were ignorant like this poor man, your ignorance would excuse you. But now ye say, We see, you boast that you can discern the Christ, you have tests of

all kinds that you plume yourselves on, therefore your darkness and your sin remain.” That is to say, the one sufficient test of Christ’s claim is need. He presents Himself as the Light of the world, but if we are unconscious of darkness we cannot appreciate Him. But surely there are many of us who feel as if we were born blind, unable to see things spiritual as we ought; as if we had a sense too little, and could not find our way satisfactorily through this life. We hear of God with the hearing of the ear, but do not see Him; we have not the close and unmistakable discernment that comes by sight.

[34] See the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius.



The Expositor's Bible

Marcus Dods, D.D.

Gospel of John Part 1

Chapter 21

JESUS THE GOOD SHEPHERD.

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that entereth not by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. When he hath put forth all his own, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers. This parable spake Jesus unto them; but they understood not what things they were which He spake unto them. Jesus therefore said unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. All that came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door: by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and go out, and shall find pasture. The thief cometh not, but that he may steal, and kill, and destroy: I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd layeth down His life for the sheep. He that is a hireling, and not a shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, beholdeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth, and the wolf snatcheth them, and scattereth them: he fleeth because he is a hireling, and careth not for the sheep. I am the good shepherd; and I know Mine own, and Mine own know Me, even as the Father knoweth Me, and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice; and they shall become one flock, one shepherd. Therefore doth the Father love Me, because I lay down My life, that I may take it again. No one taketh it away from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment received I from My Father.”—JOHN X. 1-18.

This paragraph continues the conversation which arose out of the healing of the blind man. Jesus has pointed out to the Pharisees that they are affected with a more deplorable blindness than the born-blind beggar; He now proceeds to contrast their harsh treatment of the healed man with His own care of him, and uses this contrast as evidence of the illegitimacy of their usurpation of authority and the legitimacy of His own claim. It has been related (ix. 34) that the Jews had excommunicated the blind man because he had presumed to think for himself, and acknowledge as the Christ One regarding whom they had quietly enacted (ver. 22) that if any one acknowledged Him he should be banished from the synagogue. Very naturally the poor man would feel that this was a heavy price to pay for his eyesight. Brought up as he had been to consider the ecclesiastical authorities of Jerusalem as representing the Divine voice, he would feel that this excommunication cut him off from fellowship with all good men, and from the sources of a hopeful and godly life. Therefore, in pity for this poor sheep, and in indignation at those who thus assumed authority, Jesus explicitly declares, “I am the door.” Not through the word of men who tyrannize over the flock to serve their own ends are you either admitted to or debarred from the real sources of spiritual life and fellowship with the true and good. Through Me only can you find access to permanent security and the free enjoyment of all spiritual nutriment; “By Me if any man enter in he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.”

The primary object, then, of this allegorical passage is to impart to those who believe in Jesus the truest independence of spirit. This our Lord accomplishes by explicitly claiming for Himself the sole right of admission or rejection from the true fold of God's people. He comes into direct collision with the ecclesiastical authorities, denying that they are the true spiritual guides of the people, and presenting Himself as the supreme authority in matters spiritual. This uncompromising assertion of His own authority He makes in parabolic language; but that no one may misapprehend His meaning He Himself appends the interpretation. And in this interpretation it will be observed that, while the great ideas are explained and applied, there is no attempt to make these ideas square with the figure in every particular. In the figure, for example, the Door and the Shepherd are necessarily distinct; but our Lord does not on that account scruple to apply both figures to Himself. The rigidly logical explanation is thrown to the winds to make way for the substantial teaching.

I. First, then, Jesus here claims to be the sole means of access to security and life eternal. "I am the door: by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture," Prompted by consideration for the feelings of the blind man, this expression would by him be interpreted as meaning, These arrogant Pharisees, then, can after all do me no injury; they can neither exclude nor admit; but only this Person, who has shown Himself so compassionate, so courageous, so ready to be my champion and my friend. He is the door. And this simple and memorable claim has remained through all the Christian centuries the bulwark against ecclesiastical tyranny, not indeed preventing injustice and outrage, but entirely robbing excommunication of its sting in the conscience that is right with its Lord. Outcast from the fellowship and privileges of so-called Churches of Christ many have been, who had yet the assurance in their own heart that by their attachment to Him they had entered into a more lasting fellowship and unspeakably higher privileges.

By this claim to be the Door, Jesus claims to be the Founder of the one permanent society of men. Through Him alone have men access to a position of security to association with all that is worthiest among men, to a never-failing life and a boundless freedom. He did not use His words at random, and this at least is contained in them. He gathers men round His Person, and assures us that He holds the key to life; that if He admits us, words of exclusion pronounced by others are but idle breath; that if He excludes us, the approval and applause of a world will not waft us in. No claim could possibly be greater.

II. Jesus also claims to be the Good Shepherd, and sets Himself in contrast to hirelings and robbers. This claim He proves in five particulars: He uses a legitimate mode of access to the sheep; His object is the welfare of the sheep; His Spirit is self-devoted; He knows and is known by His sheep; and all He does the Father has given Him commandment to do.

1. First, then, Jesus proves His claim to be the Good Shepherd by using the legitimate means of access to the sheep. He enters by the door. The general description of the relation between sheep and shepherd was drawn from what might be seen any morning in Palestine. At night the sheep are driven into a fold, that is, a walled enclosure, such as may be seen on our own sheep farms, only with higher walls for protection, and with a strongly-barred door in place of a hurdle or light gate. Here the sheep rest all night, guarded by a watchman or porter. In the morning the shepherds come, and at the recognised signal or knock are admitted by the porter, and each man calls his own sheep. The sheep, knowing his voice, follow him, and if any are lazy, or stubborn, or stupid, he goes in and drives them out, with a

gentle, kindly compulsion, A stranger's voice they do not recognise, and do not heed. Besides, not only do they disregard a stranger's voice, but the porter also would do so, so that no robber thinks of appealing to the porter, but climbs the wall and lays hold of the sheep he wants.

Here, then, we have a picture of the legitimate and illegitimate modes of finding access to men and of gaining power over them. The legitimate leader of men comes by the door and invites: the illegitimate gets in anyhow and compels. The true shepherd is distinguished from the robber by both the action of the porter and the action of the sheep. But who is the porter who gives Christ access to the fold? Possibly, as some have suggested, the mind of Christ's contemporaries would revert to John the Baptist. The claim of Jesus to deal with men as their spiritual protector and leader had been legitimated by John, and no other pretended Messiah had been. And certainly, if any individual is indicated by the porter, it must be John the Baptist. But probably the figure includes all that introduces Jesus to men, His own life, His miracles, His loving words, providential circumstances. At all events, He makes His appeal openly, and has the requisite pass-word. There is nothing of the thief or the robber about His approach—nothing underhand and stealthy, nothing audaciously violent. On the other hand, "All that ever came before Me are thieves and robbers." The contemporary authorities in Jerusalem had come "before" Jesus, in so far as they had prepossessed the minds of the people against Him, and forcibly kept the sheep from Him. Their prior claims were the great obstacle to His being admitted. They held the fold against Him. It must have been plain to the people who heard His words that their own ecclesiastical authorities were meant. And this is not contradicted by the added clause, "but the sheep did not hear them." For these usurping leaders did not find the ear of the people, although they terrified them into obedience.

2. The Good Shepherd is identified and distinguished from the hireling by His object and His spirit of devotion—for these two characteristics may best be considered together (vv. 10–13). The hireling takes up this business of shepherding for his own sake, and just as he might take to keeping swine, or watching vineyards, or making bricks. It is not the work nor the sheep he has any interest in, but the pay. It is for himself he does what he does. His object is to make gain for himself, and his spirit is therefore a spirit of self-regard. Necessarily he flees from danger, having more regard for himself than for the sheep. The object of the good shepherd, on the contrary, is to find for the sheep a more abundant life. It is regard for them that draws him to the work. Consequently, as all love is self-devoting, so the regard of the shepherd for the sheep prompts him to devote himself, and, at the risk or expense of his own life, to save them from danger.

This differentiation of the hireling and the good shepherd was, in the first instance, exemplified in the different conduct of the authorities and Jesus towards the blind man. The authorities having fallen into the idea which commonly ensnares ecclesiastical magnates, that the people existed for them, not they for the people, persecuted him because he had followed his conscience: Jesus, by interposing in his favour, risked His own life. This collision with the Pharisees materially contributed to their determination to put Him to death.

Probably our Lord intended that a larger meaning should be found in His words. To all His sheep He acts the part of a good shepherd by interposing, at the sacrifice of Himself, between them and all that threatens (vv. 17, 18). His death was voluntary, not necessitated either by the machinations of men or by His being human. His life was His own, to use as He saw best; and when He laid it down He did so freely. It

was not that He succumbed to the wolf, to any power stronger than His own will and His own discernment of what was right. We may resign ourselves to death or choose it; but even though we did not, we could not escape it. Christ could. He “laid down” His life; and He did so, moreover, that He might “take it again.” His sheep were not to be left defenceless, shepherdless: on the contrary, He died that He might free them from all danger and become to them an ever-living, omnipresent Shepherd. In these words the figure is lost in the reality.

In the words themselves, indeed, there is no direct suggestion that the penalty of sin is that which chiefly threatens Christ’s sheep, but Christ could hardly use the words, and His people can hardly read them, without having this idea suggested. It was by interposing between us and sin that our Shepherd was slain. At first sight, indeed, we seem to be exposed to the very danger that slew the Shepherd: the wolf seems to be alive even after slaying Him. In spite of His death, we also die. What then is the danger from which He by His death has saved us?

The danger which threatened us was not bodily death, for from that we are not delivered. But it was something with which the death of the body is intimately connected. Bodily death is as it were the symptom, but not the disease itself. It is that which reveals the presence of the pestilence, but is not itself the real danger. It is like the plague-spot that causes the beholder to shudder, though the spot itself is only slightly painful. Now a skilful physician does not treat symptoms, does not apply his skill to allay superficial distresses, but endeavours to remove the radical disease. If the eye becomes bloodshot he does not treat the eye, but the general system. If an eruption comes out on the skin, he does not treat the skin, but alters the condition of the blood; and it is a small matter whether the symptom goes on to its natural issue, if thereby the eradication of the disease is rather helped than hindered. So it is with death: it is not our danger; no man can suppose that the mere transference from this state to another is injurious; only, death is in our case the symptom of a deep disease, of a real, fatal ailment of soul. We know death not as a mere transference from one world to another, but as our transference from probation to judgment, which sin makes us dread; and also as a transference which in form forcibly exhibits the weakness, the imperfection, the shame of our present state. Thus death connects itself with sin, which our conscience tells us is the great root of all our present misery. It is to us the symptom of the punishment of sin, but the punishment itself is not the death of the body but of the soul; the separation of the soul from all good, from all hope,—in a word, from God. This is the real danger from which Christ delivers us. If this be removed, it is immaterial whether bodily death remain or not; or rather, bodily death is used to help out our complete deliverance, as a symptom of the disease sometimes promotes the cure. Christ has tasted death for every man, and out of each man’s cup has sucked the poison, so that now, as we in turn drink it, it is but a sleeping draught. There was a chemistry in His love and perfect obedience which drew the poison to His lips; and absorbing into His own system all the virulence of it, by the immortal vigour of His own constitution, He overcame its effects, and rose again triumphing over its lethargic potency.

It was not mere bodily death, then, which our Lord endured. That was not the wolf which the Good Shepherd saved us from. It was death with the sting of sin in it. It is this fact which shows us, from one point of view, the place of Christ’s death in the work of atonement. Death sets the seal on a man’s spiritual condition. It utters the final word: He that is holy, let him be holy still; he that is filthy, let him be filthy still. The biblical view of death is that it marks the transition from a state of probation to a state of retribution. “It is appointed unto men once to die, and after death the judgment.” There is no coming back again to make another preparation for

judgment. We cannot have two lives, one after the flesh, and another after the spirit, but one life, one death, one judgment. Bodily death therefore thus becomes not only the evidence of spiritual death, but its seal. But this, falling upon Christ, fell harmless. Separation from God must be separation of the will, separation accomplished by the soul's self. In Christ there was no such separation. Sinners abide in death, because not only are they judicially separated, but they are in will and disposition separate. Plunge iron and wood into water: the one sinks, the other rises immediately, cannot be kept under, has a native buoyancy of its own that brings it to the surface, immerse it as often as we please. And Christ is as the wood cut by the prophet, that not only floats itself, but brings to the surface the heaviest weight.

3. It is the mutual recognition of sheep and shepherd which decisively exhibits the difference between the true shepherd and the robber. The timid animals that start and flee at the sound of a stranger's voice suffer their own shepherd to come among them and handle them. As the ownership of a dog is easily determined by his conduct towards two claimants, at one of whom he growls and round the other of whom he joyously barks and jumps; so you can tell who is the shepherd and who is the stranger by the different way in which a sheep behaves in the presence of each. If a shepherd's claim were doubtful, it might be settled either by his familiarity with its marks and ways, or by its familiarity with him, its sufferance of his hand, its answer to his voice. Christ stakes His claim on a similar mutual recognition. If the soul does not respond to His call and follow Him, he will admit that His claim is ill-founded. He may require to enter the fold, to rouse the slumbering by a tap of His staff, to lift the sickly, to use a measure of severity with the dull and slow; but ultimately and mainly He bases His claim to be the true Leader and Lord of men simply on His power to attract them to Him. If there is not that in Him which causes us to mark Him off from all other persons, and makes us expect different things from Him, and causes us to trust ourselves with Him, then He does not expect that any other force will draw us to acknowledge Him.

The application of this to the attitude the blind man had assumed towards the Pharisees and towards Jesus was sufficiently obvious. He had disowned the Pharisees; he had acknowledged Jesus. It was plain therefore that Jesus was the Shepherd, and it was also plain that the Pharisees were not among Christ's sheep; they might be in the fold, but as they did not recognise and follow Christ they showed that they did not belong to His flock. And Christ trusts still to His own attractiveness and fitness to our needs. It is very remarkable how insufficient an account of their own conversion highly educated persons can give. Professor Clifford's favourite pupil was, like himself, an atheist; but racked by distress on account of Clifford's death, and being obliged to pass through other circumstances fitted to disclose the weakness of human nature, this pupil became an ardent Christian. One reads the record of this conversion expecting to find the reasoning power of the mathematician adding something to the demonstration of God's personality, or building a sure foundation for Christian faith. There is nothing of the kind. The experience of life gave new meaning to Christ's offer and to His revelation—that was all. So too in criticizing Renan's "Life of Christ," a French critic more profound than himself says: "The characteristic thing in this analysis of Christianity is that sin does not appear in it at all. Now if there is anything which explains the success of the Good News among men, it is that it offered deliverance from sin—salvation. It certainly would have been more appropriate to explain a religion religiously, and not to evade the very core of the subject. This 'Christ in white marble' is not He who made the strength of the martyrs." All this just means that if men have no sense of need they will not own Christ; and that if Christ's own

presence and words do not draw them, they are not to be drawn. Of course much may be done in the way of presenting Christ to men, but beyond the simple exhibition of His person by word or in conduct not much can be done. It is a mystery, often oppressive, that men seem quite unattracted and unmoved by the Figure that so transcends all others, and gives a heart to the world. But Christ is known by His own.

This great fact of the mutual recognition of Christ and His people has an application not only to the first acceptance of Christ by the soul, but also to the Christian experience throughout. A mutual recognition and deep-lying affinity not only at first forms but for ever renews and maintains the bond between Christ and the Christian. He knows His sheep and is known by them. Often they do not know themselves;^[35] but the Shepherd knows them. Many of us are frequently brought into doubt of our interest in Christ, but the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, "The Lord knoweth them that are His." We go astray, and get so torn with thorns, so fouled with mire, that few can tell to what fold we belong—our owner's marks are obliterated; but the Good Shepherd in telling His sheep has missed us, and come after us, and recognises and claims us even in our pitiable state. Who could tell to whom we belong when we lie absolutely content with the poisonous pasture of this world's vanities and rank gains; when the soul is stained with impurity, torn with passion, and has every mark that distinguishes Christ's people obscured? Is it surprising we should begin then ourselves to doubt whether we belong to the true fold or whether there is any true fold? Shameful are the places where Christ has found us, among prayerless days, unrestrained indulgences, with hardened heart and cynical thoughts, far from any purpose of good; and still again and again His presence has met us, His voice recalled us, His nearness awakened once more in us the consciousness that with Him we have after all a deeper sympathy than with any besides.

The whole experience of Christ as our Shepherd gives Him an increasing knowledge of us. The shepherd is the first to see the lamb at its birth, and not one day goes by but he visits it. So needful and merciful a work is it that it has no Sabbath, but as on the day of rest the shepherd feeds his own children so he cares for the lambs of his flock, sees that no harm is befalling them, remembers their dependence on him, observes their growth, removes what hinders it, hangs over the pale of the fold, watching with a pleased and fond observance their ways, their beauty, their comfort. And thus he becomes intimately acquainted with his sheep. So Christ becomes increasingly acquainted with us. We have thought much of Him; we have again and again pondered His life, His death, His words. We have endeavoured to understand what He requires of us, and day by day He has somehow been in our thoughts. Not less but far more constantly have we been in His thoughts, not a day has passed without His recurrence to this subject. He has looked upon and considered us, has marked the working of our minds, the forming of our purposes. He knows our habits by watching against them; our propensities by turning us from them. We are not left alone with our awful secret of sin: there is another who comprehends our danger, and is bent upon securing us against it.

Slowly but surely does Christ thus win the confidence of the soul; doing for it a thousand kind offices that are not recognised, patiently waiting for the recognition and love which He knows must at last be given; quietly making Himself indispensable to the soul ere ever it discerns what it is that is bringing to it so new a buoyancy and hope. Slowly but surely grows in every Christian a reciprocal knowledge of Christ. More and more clearly does His Person stand out as the one on whom our expectation must rest. With Him we are brought into connection by every

sin of ours, and by every hope. Is it not He before whom and about whom our hearts thrill and tremble time after time with a depth and awe of emotion which nothing else excites? Is it not to Him we owe it that this day we live in peace, knowing that our God is a loving Father? Is it not still His grace we must learn more deeply, His patient righteous way we must more exactly fall in with, if we are to forget our loved sin in the love of God, ourselves in the Eternal One? What is growth in grace but the laying bare of the sinner's heart to Christ, fold after fold being removed, till the very core of our being opens to Him and accepts Him, and the reciprocal laying bare of the heart of Christ toward the sinner?

For this growth in mutual understanding must advance till that perfect sympathy is attained which Christ indicates in the words: "I know My sheep and am known of Mine, as the Father knoweth Me and I know the Father." The mutual understanding between the Eternal Father and the Son is the only parallel to the mutual understanding of Christ and His people. In the loving union of husband and wife we see how intimate is the understanding, how the one is dissatisfied if any anxiety is not uttered and shared, how there can be no secret on either side. We see how a slight movement, a look, betrays intention more than many words of a stranger could reveal it; we see what confidence in one another is established, how the one is not satisfied until his thought is ratified by the other, his opinion reflected and better judged in the other, his emotion partaken of and again expressed by the other. But even this, though suggestive, is but a suggestion of the mutual intelligence subsisting between the Father and the Son, the absolute confidence in one another, the perfect harmony in purpose and feeling, the delight in knowing and being known. Into this perfect harmony of feeling and of purpose with the Supreme does Christ introduce His people. Gradually their thoughts are disengaged from what is trivial, and expand to take in the designs of the Eternal Mind. Gradually their tastes and affections are loosened from lower attachments, and are wrought to a perfect sympathy with what is holy and abiding.

[35] St. Augustine.



The Expositor's Bible

Marcus Dods, D.D.

Gospel of John Part 1

Chapter 22

JESUS, SON OF GOD.

“And it was the feast of the dedication at Jerusalem: it was winter; and Jesus was walking in the temple in Solomon’s porch. The Jews therefore came round about Him, and said unto Him, How long dost Thou hold us in suspense? If Thou art the Christ, tell us plainly. Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believe not: the works that I do in My Father’s name, these bear witness of Me. But ye believe not, because ye are not of My sheep. 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, and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. My Father, which hath given them unto Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are one. The Jews took up stones again to stone Him. Jesus answered them, Many good works have I showed you from the Father; for which of those works do ye stone Me? The Jews answered Him, For a good work we stone Thee not, but for blasphemy; and because that Thou, being a man, makest Thyself God. Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If He called them gods, unto whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), say ye of Him, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God? If I do not the works of My Father, believe Me not. But if I do them, though ye believe not Me, believe the works: that ye may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father. They sought again to take Him: and He went forth out of their hand. And He went away again beyond Jordan into the place where John was at the first baptizing; and there He abode. And many came unto Him; and they said, John indeed did no sign: but all things whatsoever John spake of this man were true. And many believed on Him there.”—JOHN X. 22–42.

After our Lord’s visit to Jerusalem at the Feast of Tabernacles, and owing to His collision with the authorities in regard to the blind man whom He healed, He seems to have retired from the metropolis for some weeks, until the Feast of the Dedication. This Feast had been instituted by the Maccabees to celebrate the Purification of the Temple after its profanation by Antiochus Epiphanes. It began about the 20th December, and lasted eight days. As it was winter, possibly raining, and certainly cold, Jesus walked about in Solomon’s Porch, where at all events He was under cover and had some shelter. Here the Jews gradually gathered, until at length He found Himself ringed round by hostile questioners, who bluntly, almost threateningly asked Him, “How long dost Thou make us to doubt? If Thou be the Christ, tell us plainly,” a question which shows that, although they inferred from the assertions He had made regarding Himself that He claimed to be the Messiah, He had not directly and explicitly proclaimed Himself in terms no one could misunderstand.

At first sight their request seems fair and reasonable. In fact it is neither. The mere affirmation that He was the Christ would not have helped those whom His works and words had only prejudiced against Him. As He at once explained to them, He had made the affirmation in the only way possible, and their unbelief arose not from any want of explicitness on His part, but because they were not of His sheep (ver. 26). “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.” Here, as

elsewhere, He points in confirmation of His claim to the works His Father had given Him to do, and to the response His manifestation awakened in those who were hungering for truth and for God. Those who were given to Him by the Father, who were taught and led by God, acknowledged Him, and to such He imparted all those eternal and supreme blessings He was commissioned to bestow upon men.

But in describing the safety of those who believe in Him, Jesus uses an expression which gives umbrage to those who hear it—"I and the Father are one." Those who trust themselves to Christ shall not be plucked out of His hand: they are eternally secure. The guarantee of this is, that those who thus trust in Him are given to Him by the Father for this very purpose of safe-keeping: the Father Himself therefore watches over and protects them. "No man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand. I and My Father are one." In this matter Christ acts merely as the Father's agent. The Pharisees might excommunicate the blind man and threaten him with penalties present and to come, but he is absolutely beyond their reach. Their threats are the pattering of hail on a bomb-proof shelter. The man is in Christ's keeping, and thereby is in God's keeping.

But this assertion the Jews at once construed into blasphemy, and took up stones to stone Him. With marvellous calmness Jesus arrests their murderous intention with the quiet question: "Many good works have I showed you from My Father; for which of these do you stone Me? You question whether I am the Father's Agent: does not the benignity of the works I have done prove Me such? Do not My works evince the indwelling power of the Father?" The Jews reply, and from their point of view quite reasonably: "For a good work we stone Thee not; but because Thou, being a man, makest Thyself God." How far they were justified in this charge we must inquire.

In this conversation two points are of the utmost significance.

1. The comparative equanimity with which they consider the claim of Jesus to be the Messiah is changed into fury when they imagine that He claims also equality with God. Their first appeal, "If Thou be the Christ, tell us plainly," is calm; and His answer, though it distinctly involved an affirmation that He was the Christ, was received without any violent demonstration of rage or of excitement. But their attitude towards Him changes in a moment and their calmness gives place to uncontrollable indignation as soon as it appears that He believes Himself to be one with the Father. They themselves would not have dreamed of putting such a question to Him: the idea of any man being equal with God was too abhorrent to the rigid monotheism of the Jewish mind. And when it dawned upon them that this was what Jesus claimed, they could do nothing but stop their ears and lift stones to end such blasphemy. No incident could more distinctly prove that the claim to be the Messiah was in their judgment one thing, the claim to be Divine another thing.

2. The contrast our Lord draws between Himself and those who had in Scripture been called "gods" is significant. It is the eighty-second Psalm He cites; and in it the judges of Israel are rebuked for abusing their office. It is of these unjust judges the psalm represents God as saying, "I have said, Ye are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High. But ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes." To these judges this word of God, "Ye are gods," had come at their consecration to their office. Having been occupied with other work they were now set apart to represent to men the authority and justice of God. But, argues our Lord, if men were called gods, to whom God's word came,—and they are so called in Scripture, which cannot be broken,—appointing them to their office, may He not

rightly be called Son of God who is Himself sent to men; whose original and sole destiny it was to come into the world to represent *the Father*? The words are overweighted with manifold contrast. The judges were persons “to whom” the word of God came, as from without; Jesus was a person Himself “sent into the world” from God, therefore surely more akin to God than they were. The judges represented God by virtue of a commission received in the course of their career—the word of God *came* to them: Jesus, on the other hand, represented God because “sanctified,” that is, set apart or consecrated for this purpose before He came into the world, and therefore obviously occupying a higher and more important position than they. But, especially, the judges were appointed to discharge one limited and temporary function, for the discharge of which it was sufficient that they should know the law of God; whereas it was “the Father,” the God of universal relation and love, who consecrated Jesus and sent Him into the world, meaning now to reveal to men what lies deepest in His nature, His love, His fatherhood. The idea of the purpose for which Christ was sent into the world is indicated in the emphatic use of “the Father.” He was sent to do the works of the Father (ver. 37); to manifest to men the benignity, tenderness, compassion of the Father; to encourage them to believe that the Father, the Source of all life, was in their midst accessible to them. If Jesus failed to reveal the Father, He had no claim to make. “If I do not the works of My Father, believe Me not.” But if He did such works as declared the Father to be in their midst, then, as bearing the Father in Him and doing the Father’s will, He might well be called “the Son of God.” “Though ye believe not Me, believe the works; that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in Me, and I in Him.”

There can be no question, then, of the conclusiveness with which our Lord rebutted the charge of blasphemy. By a single sentence He put them in the position of presumptuously contradicting their own Scriptures. But weightier questions remain behind. Did Jesus merely seek to parry their thrust, or did He mean positively to affirm that He was God? His words do not carry a direct and explicit affirmation of His Divinity. Indeed, to a hearer His comparison of Himself with the judges would necessarily rather tend to veil the full meaning of His previous claims to pre-existence and superhuman dignity. On reflection, no doubt the hearers might see that a claim to Divinity was implied in His words; but even in the saying which first gave them offence, “I and the Father are one,” it is rather what is implied than what is expressed that carries with it such a claim. For Calvin is unquestionably right in maintaining that these words were not intended to affirm identity of substance with the Father.^[36] An ambassador whose actions or claims were contested might very naturally say, “I and my Sovereign are One”; not meaning thereby to claim royal dignity, but meaning to assert that what he did, his Sovereign did; that his signature carried his Sovereign’s guarantee, and that his pledges would be fulfilled by the entire resources of his Sovereign. And as God’s delegate, as the great Messianic Viceroy among men, it was no doubt this that our Lord wished in the first place to affirm, that He was the representative of God, doing His will, and backed by all His authority. “See the Father in Me,” was His constant demand. All His self-assertion and self-revelation were meant to reveal the Father.

But although He does not directly and explicitly say, “I am God”; although He does not even use such language of Himself as John uses, when he says, “The Word was God”; yet is not His Divine nature a reasonable inference from such affirmations as that which we are here considering? Some interpreters very decidedly maintain that when Christ says, “I and the Father are one,” He means one in power. They affirm that this assertion is made to prove that none of His sheep will be plucked out of His hand, and that this is secured because His Father is “greater than all,” and He and His Father are one. Accordingly they hold that neither the old orthodox

interpretation nor the Arian is correct: not the orthodox, because not unity of essence but unity of power is meant; not the Arian, because something more is meant than moral harmony. This, however, is difficult to maintain, and it is safer to abide by Calvin's interpretation, and believe that what Jesus means is that what He does will be confirmed by the Father. It is the Father's power He introduces as the final guarantee, not His own power.

Still, although the very terms He here uses may not even by implication affirm His Divinity, it remains to be asked whether there are not parts of Christ's work as God's commissioner on earth which could be accomplished by no one who was not Himself Divine. An ambassador may recommend his offers and guarantees by affirming that his power and that of his Sovereign are one, but in many cases he must have actual power on the spot. If a commissioner is sent to reduce a mutinous army or a large warlike tribe in rebellion, or to define a frontier in the face of an armed claimant, he must in such cases be no mere lay-figure, whose uniform tells what country he belongs to, but he must be a man of audacity and resource, able to act for himself without telegraphing for orders, and he must be backed by sufficient military force on the spot. It comes therefore to be a question whether the work on which Christ was sent was a work which could be accomplished by a man however fully equipped? Jesus though nothing more than human might have said, if commissioned by God to say so, "The promises I make, God will perform. The guarantees I give, God will respect." But is it possible that a man, however holy, however wise, however fully possessed by the Holy Spirit, could reveal the Father to men and adequately represent God? Could He influence, guide, and uplift individuals? Could He give life to men, could He assume the function of judging, could He bear the responsibility of being sole mediator between God and men? Must we not believe that for the work Christ came to do it was needful that He should be truly Divine?

While therefore it is quite true that Christ here rebuts the charge of blasphemy in His usual manner, not by directly affirming His Divine nature, but only by declaring that His office as God's representative gave Him as just a claim to the Divine name as the judges had, this circumstance cannot lead us to doubt the Divine nature of Christ, or prompt us to suppose He Himself was shy in affirming it, because the question is at once suggested whether the office He assumed is not one which only a Divine Person could undertake. It need not stumble our faith, if we find that not only in this passage but everywhere Jesus refrains from explicitly saying: "I am God." Not even among His Apostles, who were so much in need of instruction, does He definitely announce His Divinity. This is consistent with His entire method of teaching. He was not aggressive nor impatient. He sowed the seed, and knew that in time the blade would appear. He trusted more to the faith which slowly grew with the growth of the believer's mind than to the immediate acceptance of verbal assertions. He allowed men gradually to find their own way to the right conclusions, guiding them, furnishing them with sufficient evidence, but always allowing the evidence to do its work, and not breaking in upon the natural process by His authoritative utterances. But when, as in Thomas's case, it did dawn on the mind of any that this Person was God manifest in the flesh, He accepted the tribute paid. The acceptance of such a tribute proves Him Divine. No good man, whatever his function or commission on earth, could allow another to address him, as Thomas addressed Jesus, "My Lord and my God."

In the paragraph we are considering a very needful reminder is given us that the Jews of our Lord's time used the terms "God" and "Son of God" in a loose and inexact manner. Where the sense was not likely to be misunderstood, they did not

scruple to apply these terms to officials and dignitaries. The angels they called sons of God; their own judges they called by the same name. The whole people considered collectively was called "God's son." And in the 2nd Psalm, speaking of the Messianic King, God says, "Thou art My Son: this day have I begotten Thee." It was therefore natural that the Jews should think of the Messiah not as properly Divine, but merely as being of such surpassing dignity as to be worthily though loosely called "Son of God." No doubt there are passages in the Old Testament which intimate with sufficient clearness that the Messiah would be truly Divine: "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever;" "Unto us a Child is born ... and His name shall be called the Mighty God;" "Behold the days come that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and this is the name whereby He shall be called, Jehovah our Righteousness." But though these passages seem decisive to us, looking on the fulfilment of them in Christ, we must consider that the Jewish Bible did not lie on every table for consultation as our Bibles do, and also that it was easy for the Jews to put a figurative sense on all such passages.

In a word, it was a Messiah the Jews looked for, not the Son of God. They looked for one with Divine powers, the delegate of God, sent to accomplish His will and to establish His kingdom, the representative among them of the Divine presence; but they did not look for a real dwelling of a Divine Person among them. It is quite certain that the Jews of the second century thought it silly of the Christians to hold that the Christ pre-existed from eternity as God, and condescended to be born as man. "No Jew would allow," says a writer of that time, "that any prophet ever said that a Son of God would come; but what the Jews do say is that the Christ of God will come."

This circumstance, that the Jews did not expect the Messiah to be a Divine Person, throws light upon certain passages in the Gospels. When, for example, our Lord put the question, "What think ye of Christ? Whose Son is He?" The Pharisees promptly answer, "He is the Son of David." And, that they had no thought of ascribing to the Messiah a properly Divine origin, is shown by their inability to answer the further question, "How then does David call Him Lord?"—a question presenting no difficulty at all to any one who believed that the Messiah was to be Divine as well as human.^[37]

So, too, if the Jews had expected the Messiah to be a Divine person, the ascription of Messianic dignity to one who was not the Messiah was blasphemy, being equivalent to ascribing Divinity to one who was not Divine. But in no case in which Jesus was acknowledged as the Messiah were those who so acknowledged Him proceeded against as blasphemous. The blind men who appealed to Him as the Son of David were told to be quiet; the crowd who hailed His entrance to Jerusalem scandalized the Pharisees but were not proceeded against. And even the blind beggar who owned Him was excommunicated by a special act passed for the emergency, which proves that the standing statute against blasphemy could not in such a case be enforced.

Again, this fact, that the Jews did not expect the Messiah to be strictly Divine, sheds light on the real ground of accusation against Jesus. So long as it was supposed that He merely claimed to be the promised Christ, and used the title "Son of God" as equivalent to a Messianic title, many of the people admitted His claim and were prepared to own Him. But when the Pharisees began to apprehend that He claimed to be the Son of God in a higher sense, they accused Him of blasphemy, and on this charge He was condemned. The account of His trial as given by Luke is most significant. He was tried in two courts, and in each upon two charges. When brought

before the Sanhedrim He was first asked, “Art Thou the Christ?” a question which, as He at once pointed out, was useless; because He had taught quite openly, and there were hundreds who could testify to the claims He had put forward. He merely says that they themselves will one day own His claim. “Hereafter shall the Son of Man sit on the right hand of the power of God.” This suggests to them that His claim was to something more than they ordinarily considered to be involved in the claim to Messiahship, and at once they pass to their second question, “Art Thou then the Son of God?” And on His refusing to disown this title, the High Priest rends His clothes, and Jesus is there and then convicted of blasphemy.

The different significance of the two claims is brought out more distinctly in the trial before Pilate. At first Pilate treats Him as an amiable enthusiast who fancies Himself a King and supposes He has been sent into the world to lead men to the truth. And accordingly after examining Him he presents Him to the people as an innocent person, and makes light of their charge that He claims to be King of the Jews. On this the Jews with one voice cry out, “We have a law, and by our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God.” The effect of this charge upon Pilate is immediate and remarkable: “When Pilate heard that saying *he was the more afraid*, and went again into the judgment hall, and saith unto Jesus, Whence art Thou?” But Jesus gave him no answer.

It is plain then that it was for blasphemy Christ was condemned; and not simply because He claimed to be the Messiah. But if this is so, then how can we evade the conclusion that He was in very truth a Divine person? The Jews charged Him with making Himself equal with God; and, if He was not equal with God, they were quite right in putting Him to death. Their law was express, that no matter what signs and wonders a man performed, if he used these to draw them from the worship of the true God he was to be put to death. They crucified Jesus on the ground that He was a blasphemer, and against this sentence He made no appeal. He showed no horror at the accusation, as any good man must have shown. He accepted the doom, and on the Cross prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” That which they considered an act of piety was in truth the most frightful of crimes. But if He was not Divine, it was no crime at all, but a just punishment.

But no doubt that which lodges in the heart of each of us the conviction that Christ is Divine is the general aspect of His life, and the attitude He assumes towards men and towards God. We may not be able to understand in what sense there are Three Persons in the Godhead, and may be disposed with Calvin to wish that theological terms and distinctions had never become necessary.^[38] We may be unable to understand how if Christ were a complete Person before the Incarnation, the humanity He assumed could also be complete and similar to our own. But notwithstanding such difficulties, which are the necessary result of our inability to comprehend the Divine nature, we are convinced, when we follow Christ through His life and listen to His own assertions, that there is in Him something unique and unapproached among men, that while He is one of us He yet looks at us also from the outside, from above. We feel that He is Master of all, that nothing in nature or in life can defeat Him; that while dwelling in time, He is also in Eternity, seeing before and after. The most stupendous claims He makes seem somehow justified; assertions which in other lips would be blasphemous are felt to be just and natural in His. It is felt that somehow, even if we cannot say how, God is in Him.

[36] Calvin says: “The ancients misinterpreted this passage to prove that Christ is of one substance with the Father. For Christ is not here disputing regarding unity of substance, but regarding the harmony of will (consensu) which he has with the Father, maintaining that whatever He does will be confirmed by the Father’s power.”

[37] In this passage I borrow the convincing argument of Treffry in his too little read treatise *On the Eternal Sonship*. He says, p. 89: “Had the Jews regarded the Messiah as a Divine person, the claims of Jesus to that character had been in all cases equivalent to the assertion of His Deity. But there is not upon record one example in which any considerable emotion was manifested against these claims; while, on the other hand, a palpable allusion to His higher nature never failed to be instantly and most indignantly resented. The conclusion is obvious.”

[38] “Utinam quidem sepulta essent” (*Instit.*, I., 13, 5).



The Expositor's Bible

Marcus Dods, D.D.

Gospel of John Part 1

Chapter 23

JESUS THE RESURRECTION AND LIFE.

“Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, of the village of Mary and her sister Martha. And it was that Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. The sisters therefore sent unto Him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick. But when Jesus heard it, He said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified thereby. Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. When therefore He heard that he was sick, He abode at that time two days in the place where He was. Then after this He saith to the disciples, Let us go into Judæa again. The disciples say unto Him, Rabbi, the Jews were but now seeking to stone Thee; and goest Thou thither again? Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day? If a man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because the light is not in him. These things spake He: and after this he saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus is fallen asleep; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep. The disciples therefore said unto Him, Lord, if he is fallen asleep, he will recover. Now Jesus had spoken of his death: but they thought that He spake of taking rest in sleep. Then Jesus therefore said unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him. Thomas, therefore, who is called Didymus, said unto his fellow-disciples, Let us also go, that we may die with Him. So when Jesus came, He found that he had been in the tomb four days already. Now Bethany was nigh unto Jerusalem, about fifteen furlongs off; and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary, to console them concerning their brother. Martha, therefore, when she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him; but Mary still sat in the house. Martha, therefore, said unto Jesus, Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. And even now I know that, whatsoever Thou shalt ask of God, God will give Thee. Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again. Martha saith unto Him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said unto her, I am the Resurrection, and the Life: he that believeth on Me, though he die, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth on me shall never die. Believest thou this? She saith unto Him, Yea, Lord: I have believed that Thou art the Christ, the Son of God, even He that cometh into the world. And when she had said this, she went away, and called Mary her sister secretly, saying, The Master is here, and calleth thee. And she, when she heard it, arose quickly, and went unto Him. (Now Jesus was not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha met Him.) The Jews then which were with her in the house, and were comforting her, when they saw Mary, that she rose up quickly and went out, followed her, supposing that she was going unto the tomb to weep there. Mary therefore, when she came where Jesus was, and saw Him, fell down at His feet, saying unto Him, Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, He groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, and said, Where have ye laid him? They say unto Him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept. The Jews therefore said, Behold how He loved him! But some of them said, Could not this man, which opened the eyes of him that was blind, have caused that this man also should not die? Jesus therefore again groaning in Himself cometh to the tomb. Now it was a cave, and a stone lay against it. Jesus saith, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto Him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days. Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou believedst, thou shouldst see the glory of God? So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up His eyes, and said, Father, I thank Thee that Thou heardest Me. And I know that Thou hearest Me always: but

because of the multitude which standeth around I said it, that they may believe that Thou didst send Me. And when He had thus spoken, He cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. He that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave-clothes; and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.”—JOHN xi. 1–44.

In this eleventh chapter it is related how the death of Jesus was finally determined upon, on the occasion of His raising Lazarus. The ten chapters which precede have served to indicate how Jesus revealed Himself to the Jews in every aspect that was likely to win faith, and how each fresh revelation only served to embitter them against Him, and harden their unbelief into hopeless hostility. In these few pages John has given us a wonderfully compressed but vivid summary of the miracles and conversations of Jesus, which served to reveal His true character and work. Jesus has manifested Himself as the Light of the World, yet the darkness does not comprehend Him; as the Shepherd of the Sheep, and they will not hear His voice; as the Life of men, and they will not come unto Him that they might have Life; as the impersonated love of God come to dwell among men, sharing their sorrows and their joys, and men hate Him the more, the more love He shows; as the Truth which could make men free, and they choose to serve the father of lies, and to do his work. And now, when He reveals Himself as the Resurrection and the Life, possessed of the key to what is inaccessible to all others, of the power most essential to man, they resolve upon His death. There was an appropriateness in this. His love for His friends drew Him back at the risk of His life to the neighbourhood of Jerusalem: it is as if to His eye Lazarus represented all His friends, and He feels constrained to come out from His safe retreat, and, at the risk of His own life, deliver them from the power of death.

That this was in the mind of Jesus Himself is obvious. When He expresses His resolve to go to His friends in Bethany, He uses an expression which shows that He anticipated danger, and which at once suggested to the disciples that He was running a great risk. “Let us go,” not “to Bethany” but “into Judæa again.” His disciples say unto Him, “Master, the Jews of late sought to stone Thee, and goest Thou thither again?” The answer of Jesus is significant: “Are there not twelve hours in the day?” That is to say: Has not every man his allotted time to work, his day of light, in which he can walk and work, and which no danger nor calamity can shorten? Can men make the sun set one hour earlier? So neither can they shorten by one hour the day of life, of light, and toil your God has appointed to you. Wicked men may grudge that God’s sun shine on the fields of their enemies and prosper them, but their envy cannot darken or shorten the course of the sun: so may wicked men grudge that I work these miracles, and do these deeds of My loving Father, but I am as far above their reach as the sun in the heavens; until I have run My appointed course their envy is impotent. The real danger begins when a man tries to prolong his day, to turn night into day; the danger begins when a man through fear turns aside from duty; he then loses the only true guide and light of his life. A man’s knowledge of duty, or God’s will, is the only true light he has to guide him in life: that duty God has already measured, to each man his twelve hours; and only by following duty into all hazards and confusion can you live out your full term; if, on the other hand, you try to extend your term, you find that the sun of duty has set for you, and you have no power to bring light on your path. A man may preserve his life on earth for a year or two more by declining dangerous duty, but his *day* is done, he is henceforth only stumbling about on earth in the outer cold and darkness, and had far better have gone home to God and been quietly asleep, far better have acknowledged that his day was done and his night come, and not have striven to wake and work on. If through fear of danger, of straitened circumstances, of serious inconvenience, you refuse to go where God—*i.e.*, where duty—calls you, you make a terrible mistake;

instead of thereby preserving your life you lose it, instead of prolonging your day of usefulness and of brightness and comfort, you lose the very light of life, and stumble on henceforward through life without a guide, making innumerable false steps as the result of that first false step in which you turned in the wrong direction; not dead indeed, but living as “the very ghost of your former self” on this side of the grave—miserable, profitless, *benighted*.

John apparently had two reasons for recording this miracle; firstly, because it exhibited Jesus as the Resurrection and the Life; secondly, because it more distinctly separated the whole body of the Jews into believers and unbelievers. But there are two minor points which may be looked at before we turn to these main themes.

First, we read that when Jesus saw Mary weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, He *groaned in spirit* and was troubled, and then wept. But why did He show such emotion? The Jews who saw Him weep supposed that His tears were prompted, as their own were, by sorrow for their loss and sympathy with the sisters. To see a woman like Mary casting herself at His feet, breaking into a passion of tears, and crying with intense regret, if not with a tinge of reproach, “Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died,” was enough to bring tears to the eyes of harder natures than our Lord’s. But the care with which John describes the disturbance of His spirit, the emphasis he lays upon His groaning, the notice he takes of the account the Jews give of His tears,—all seem to indicate that something more than ordinary grief or sympathy was the fountain of these tears, the cause of the distress which could vent itself only in audible groans. He was in sympathy with the mourners and felt for them, but there was that in the whole scene with which He had no sympathy; there was none of that feeling He required His disciples to show at His own death, no rejoicing that one more had gone to the Father. There was a forgetfulness of the most essential facts of death, an unbelief which seemed entirely to separate this crowd of wailing people from the light and life of God’s presence. “It was the darkness between God and His creatures that gave room for, and was filled with, their weeping and wailing over their dead.” It was the deeper anguish into which mourners are plunged by looking upon death as extinction, and by supposing that death separates from God and from life, instead of giving closer access to God and more abundant life,—it was this which caused Jesus to groan. He could not bear this evidence that even the best of God’s children do not believe in God as greater than death, and in death as ruled by God.

This gives us the key to Christ’s belief in immortality, and to all sound belief in immortality. It was Christ’s sense of God, His uninterrupted consciousness of God, His distinct knowledge that God the loving Father is *the* existence in whom all live,—it was this which made it impossible for Christ to think of death as extinction or separation from God. For one who consciously lived in God to be separated from God was impossible. For one who was bound to God by love, to drop out of that love into nothingness or desolation was inconceivable. His constant and absolute sense of God gave Him an unquestioning sense of immortality. We cannot conceive of Christ having any shadow of doubt of a life beyond death; and if we ask why it was so, we further see it was because it was impossible for Him to doubt of the existence of God—the ever-living, ever-loving God.

And this is the order or conviction in us all. It is vain to try and build up a faith in immortality by natural arguments, or even by what Scripture records. As Bushnell truly says: “The faith of immortality depends on a sense of it begotten, not on an argument for it concluded.” And this sense of immortality is begotten when a man is truly born again, and instinctively feels himself an heir of things beyond this world

into which his natural birth has ushered him; when he begins to live in God; when the things of God are the things among which and for which he lives; when his spirit is in daily and free communication with God; when he partakes of the Divine nature, finding his joy in self-sacrifice and love, in those purposes and dispositions which can be exercised in any world where men are, and with which death seems to have no conceivable relation. But, on the other hand, for a man to live for the world, to steep his soul in carnal pleasures and blind himself by highly esteeming what belongs only to earth,—for such a man to expect to have any intelligent sense or perception of immortality is out of the question.

2. Another question, which may, indeed, be inquisitive, but can scarcely be reprehended, is sure to be asked: What was the experience of Lazarus during these four days? To speculate on what he saw or heard or experienced, to trace the flight of his soul through the gates of death to the presence of God, may perhaps seem to some as foolish as to go with those curious Jews who flocked out to Bethany to set eyes on this marvel, a man who had passed to the unseen world and yet returned. But although no doubt good and great purposes are served by the obscurity that involves death, our endeavour to penetrate the gloom, and catch some glimpses of a life we must shortly enter, cannot be judged altogether idle. Unfortunately, it is little we can learn from Lazarus. Two English poets, the one fitted to deal with this subject by an imagination that seems capable of seeing and describing whatever man can experience, the other by an insight that instinctively apprehends spiritual things, and both by reverential faith, have taken quite opposite views of the effect of death and resurrection upon Lazarus. The one describes him as living henceforth a dazed life, as if his soul were elsewhere; as if his eye, dazzled with the glory beyond, could not adjust itself to the things of earth. He is thrown out of sympathy with the ordinary interests of men, and seems to live at cross purposes with all around him. This was a very inviting view of the matter to a poet: for here was an opportunity of putting in a concrete way an experience quite unique. It was a task worthy of the highest poetic genius to describe what would be the sensations, thoughts, and ways of a man who had passed through death and seen things invisible, and been “exalted above measure,” and become certified by face to face vision of all that we can only hope and believe, and had yet been restored to earth. The opportunity of contrasting the paltriness of earth with the sublimity and reality of the unseen was too great to be resisted. The opportunity of flouting our professed faith by exhibiting the difference between it and a real assurance, by showing the utter want of sympathy between one who had seen and all others on earth who had only believed,—this opportunity was too inviting to leave room for a poet to ask whether there was a basis in fact for this contrast; whether it was likely that in point of fact Lazarus did conduct himself, when restored to earth, as one who had been plunged into the full light and thronging life of the unseen world. And, when we consider the actual requirements of the case, it seems most unlikely that Lazarus can have been recalled from a clear consciousness and full knowledge of the heavenly life—unlikely that he should be summoned to live on earth with a mind too large for the uses of earth, overcharged with knowledge he could not use, as a poor man suddenly enriched beyond his ability to spend, and thereby only confused and stupefied. Apparently the idea of the other poet is the wiser when he says:—

“Where wert thou, brother, those four days?’ There lives no record of reply, Which, telling what it is to die, Had surely added praise to praise.

“From every house the neighbours met, The streets were fill’d with joyful sound, A solemn gladness even crown’d The purple brows of Olivet.

“Behold a man raised up by Christ! The rest remaineth unrevealed; He told it not; or something seal’d The lips of that Evangelist.”

The probability is, he had nothing to reveal. As Jesus said, He came “to awake him out of sleep.” Had he learned anything of the spirit world, it must have oozed out. The burden of a secret which all men craved to know, and which the scribes and lawyers from Jerusalem would do all in their power to elicit from him, would have damaged his mind and oppressed his life. His rising would be as the awaking of a man from deep sleep, scarcely knowing what he was doing, tripping and stumbling in the grave-clothes and wondering at the crowd. What Mary and Martha would prize would be the unchanged love that shone in his face as he recognized them, the same familiar tones and endearments,—all that showed how little change death brings, how little rupture of affection or of any good thing, how truly he was their own brother still.

To our Lord Himself it was a grace that so shortly before His own death, and in a spot so near where He Himself was buried, He should be encouraged by seeing a man who had been three days in the grave rise at His word. The narrative of His last hours reveals that such encouragement was not useless. But for us it has a still more helpful significance. Death is a subject of universal concern. Every man must have to do with it; and in presence of it every man feels his helplessness. Nowhere do we so come to the limit and end of our power as at the door of a vault; nowhere is the weakness of man so keenly felt. There is the clay, but who shall find the spirit that dwelt in it? Jesus has no such sense of weakness. Believing in the fatherly and undying love of the Eternal God, He knows that death cannot harm, still less destroy, the children of God. And in this belief He commands back to the body the soul of Lazarus; through the ear of that dead and laid-aside body He calls to His friend, and bids him from the unseen world. Surely we also may say, with Himself, we are glad that He was not with Lazarus in his sickness, that we might have this proof that not even death carries the friend of Christ beyond His reach and power.

There is no one who can afford to look at this scene with indifference. We have all to die, to sink in utter weakness past all strength of our own, past all friendly help of those around us. It must always remain a trying thing to die. In the time of our health we may say,—

“Since Nature’s works be good, and Death doth serveAs Nature’s work, why should we fear to die?”

but no argument should make us indifferent to the question whether at death we are to be extinguished or to live on in happier, fuller life. If a man dies in thoughtlessness, with no forecasting or foreboding of what is to follow, he can give no stronger proof of thoughtlessness. If a man faces death cheerfully through natural courage, he can furnish no stronger evidence of courage; if he dies calmly and hopefully through faith, this is faith’s highest expression. And if it is really true that Jesus did raise Lazarus, then a world of depression and fear and grief is lifted off the heart of man. That very assurance is given to us which we most of all need. And, so far as I can see, it is our own imbecility of mind that prevents us from accepting this assurance and living in the joy and strength it brings. If Christ raised Lazarus He has a power to which we can safely trust; and life is a thing of permanence and joy. And if a man cannot determine for himself whether this did actually happen or not, he must, I think, feel that the fault is his, and that he is defrauding himself of one of the clearest guiding lights and most powerful determining influences we have.

This miracle is itself more significant than the explanation of it. The act which embodies and gives actuality to a principle is its best exposition. But the main teaching of the miracle is enounced in the words of Jesus: “I am the Resurrection

and the Life.” In this statement two truths are contained: (1) that resurrection and life are not future only, but present; and (2) that they become ours by union with Christ.

(1) Resurrection and Life are not blessings laid up for us in a remote future: they are present. When Jesus said to Martha, “Thy brother shall rise again,” she answered, “I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day,”—meaning to indicate that this was small consolation. There was her brother lying in the tomb dead, and there he would lie for ages dead; no more to move about in the home she loved for his sake, no more to exchange with her one word or look. What comfort did the vague and remote hope of reunion after long ages of untold change bring? What comfort is to sustain her through the interval? When parents lose the children whom they could not bear to have for a day out of their sight, whom they longed for if they were absent an hour beyond their time, it is no doubt some comfort to know that one day they will again fold them to their breast. But this is not the comfort Christ gives Martha. He comforts her, not by pointing her to a far-off event which was vague and remote, but to His own living person, whom she knew, saw, and trusted. And He assured her that in Him were resurrection and life; that all, therefore, who belonged to Him were uninjured by death, and had in Him a present and continuous life.

Christ, then, does not think of immortality as we do. The thought of immortality is with Him involved in, and absorbed by, the idea of life. Life is a present thing, and its continuance a matter of course. When life is full, and abundant, and glad, the present is enough, and past and future are unthought of. It is life, therefore, rather than immortality Christ speaks of; a present, not a future, good; an expansion of the nature now, and which necessarily carries with it the idea of permanence. Eternal life He defines, not as a future continuance to be measured by ages, but as a present life, to be measured by its depth. It is the quality, not the length, of life He looks at. Life prolonged without being deepened by union with the living God were no boon. Life with God, and in God, must be immortal; life without God He does not call life at all.

In evidence of this present continued life Lazarus was called back, and shown to be still alive. In him the truth of Christ’s words was exemplified: “He that believeth in Me, though he were dead yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die.” He will doubtless, like all men, undergo that change which we call death; he will become disconnected from this present earthly scene, but his life in Christ will suffer no interruption. Dissolution may pass on his body, but not on his life. His life is hid with Christ in God. It is united to the unfailing source of all existence.

(2) Such life, now abundant and evermore abiding, Christ affords to all who believe in Him. To Martha He intimates that He has power to raise the dead, and that this power is so much His own that He needs no instrument or means to apply it; that He Himself, as He stood before her, contained all that was needful for resurrection and life. He intimates all this, but He intimates much more than this. That He had the power to raise the dead it would, no doubt, revive the heart of Martha to hear, but what guarantee, what hope, was there that He would exercise that power? And so Christ does not say, I have the power, but, I am. Is any one, is Lazarus, joined to Me? has he attached himself confidingly to My Person: then whatever I am finds exercise in him. It is not only that I have this power to exercise on whom I may; but I am this power, so that if he be one with Me I cannot withhold the exercise of that power from him.

They who have learned to obey Christ's voice in life will most quickly hear it, and recognise its authority, when they sleep in death. They who have known its power to raise them out of spiritual death will not doubt its power to raise them from bodily death to a more abundant life than this world affords. They once felt as if nothing could deliver them; they were dead—deaf to Christ's commands, bound in bonds which they thought would hold them till they themselves should rot away from within them; they were buried out of sight of all that could give spiritual life, and the heavy stone of their own hardened will lay on their ruined and outcast condition. But Christ's love sought them out and called them into life. Assured that He has had power to do this, conscious in themselves that they are alive with a life given by Christ, they cannot doubt that the grave will be but a bed of rest, and that neither things present nor things to come can separate them from a love which already has shown itself capable of the utmost.



The Expositor's Bible

Marcus Dods, D.D.

Gospel of John Part 1

Chapter 24

JESUS THE SCAPEGOAT.

“Many therefore of the Jews, which came to Mary and beheld that which He did, believed on Him. But some of them went away to the Pharisees, and told them the things which Jesus had done. The chief priests therefore and the Pharisees gathered a council, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many signs. If we let Him thus alone, all men will believe on Him: and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation. But a certain one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, nor do ye take account that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. Now this he said not of himself: but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation; and not for the nation only, but that he might also gather together into one the children of God that are scattered abroad. So from that day forth they took counsel that they might put Him to death. Jesus therefore walked no more openly among the Jews, but departed thence into the country near to the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim; and there He tarried with the disciples.”—JOHN XI. 45–54.

When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead He was quite aware that He was risking His own life. He knew that a miracle so public, so easily tested, so striking, could not be overlooked, but must decisively separate between those who yielded to what was involved in the miracle, and those who hardened themselves against it. It is remarkable that none had the hardihood to deny the fact. Those who most determinedly proceeded against Jesus did so on the very ground that His miracles were becoming too numerous and too patent. They perceived that in this respect Jesus answered so perfectly to the popular conception of what the Messiah was to be, that it was quite likely He would win the multitude to belief in Him as the long-looked-for King of the Jews. But if there were any such popular enthusiasm aroused, and loudly declared, then the Romans would interfere, and, as they said, “come and take away both our place and nation.” They felt themselves in a great difficulty, and looked upon Jesus as one of those fatal people who arise to thwart the schemes of statesmen, and spoil well-laid plans, and introduce disturbing elements into peaceful periods.

Caiaphas, astute and unscrupulous, takes a more practical view of things, and laughs at their helplessness. “Why!” he says, “do you not see that this Man, with His *éclat* and popular following, instead of endangering us and bringing suspicion on our loyalty to Rome, is the very person we can use to exhibit our fidelity to the Empire. Sacrifice Jesus, and by His execution you will not merely clear the nation of all suspicion of a desire to revolt and found a kingdom under Him, but you will show such a watchful zeal for the integrity of the Empire as will merit applause and confidence from the jealous power of Rome.” Caiaphas is the type of the bold, hard politician, who fancies he sees more clearly than all others, because he does not perplex himself by what lies below the surface, nor suffer the claims of justice to interfere with his own advantage. He looks at everything from the point of view of his own idea and plan, and makes everything bend to that. He had no idea that in making Jesus a scapegoat he was tampering with the Divine purposes.

John, however, in looking back upon this council, sees that this bold, unflinching diplomatist, who supposed he was moving Jesus and the council and the Romans as so many pieces in his own game, was himself used as God's mouthpiece to predict the event which brought to a close his own and all other priesthood. In the strange irony of events he was unconsciously using his high-priestly office to lead forward that one Sacrifice which was for ever to take away sin, and so to make all further priestly office superfluous. Caiaphas saw and said that it was expedient that one man die for the nation; but, as in all prophetic utterance, so in these words, says John, a very much deeper sense lay than was revealed by their primary application. It is, says John, quite true that Christ's death would be the saving of a countless multitude, only it was not from the Roman legions that it would long save men, but from an even more formidable visitation. Caiaphas saw that the Romans were within a very little of terminating the ceaseless troubles which arose out of this Judæan province, by transporting the inhabitants and breaking up their nationality; and he supposed that by proclaiming Jesus as an aspirant to the throne and putting Him to death, he would cleanse the nation of all complicity in His disloyalty and stay the Roman sword. And John says, that in carrying out this idea of his, he unwittingly carried out the purpose of God that Jesus should die for that nation—"and not for that nation only, but that also He should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad."

Now it must be owned that it is much easier to understand what Caiaphas meant than what John meant; much easier to see how fit Jesus was to be a national scapegoat than to understand how His death removes the sin of the world. There are, however, one or two points regarding the death of Christ which become clearer in the light of Caiaphas's idea.

First, the very characteristics of Christ which made Caiaphas think of Him as a possible scapegoat for the nation, are those which make it possible that His death should serve a still larger purpose. When the brilliant idea of propitiating the Roman government by sacrificing Jesus flashed into the mind of Caiaphas, he saw that Jesus was in every respect suited to this purpose. He was in the first place a person of sufficient importance. To have seized an unknown peasant, who never had, and never could have, much influence in Jewish society, would have been no proof of zeal in extinguishing rebellion. To crucify Peter or John or Lazarus, none of whom had made the most distant claim to kingship, would not serve Caiaphas's turn. But Jesus was the head of a party. In disposing of Him they disposed of His followers. The sheep must scatter, if the Shepherd were put out of the way.

Then, again, Jesus was innocent of everything but this. He was guilty of attaching men to Himself, but innocent of everything besides. This also fitted Him for Caiaphas's purpose, for the high priest recognised that it would not do to pick a common criminal out of the prisons and make a scapegoat of him. That had been a shallow fiction, which would not for a moment stay the impending Roman sword. Had the Russians wished to conciliate our Government and avert war, this could not have been effected by their selecting for execution some political exile in Siberia, but only by recalling and degrading such an outstanding person as General Komaroff. In every case where any one is to be used as a scapegoat these two qualities must meet—he must be a really, not fictitiously, representative person, and he must be free from all other claims upon his life. It is not everyone who can become a scapegoat. The mere agreement between the parties, that such and such a person be a scapegoat, is only a hollow fiction which can deceive no one. There must be underlying qualities which constitute one person, and not another,

representative and fit.

Now John does not expressly say that the deliverance Jesus was to effect for men generally was to be effected in a similar manner to that which Caiaphas had in view. He does not expressly say that Jesus was to become the scapegoat of the race: but impregnated as John's mind was with the sacrificial ideas in which he had been nurtured, the probability is that the words of Caiaphas suggested to him the idea that Jesus was to be the scapegoat of the race. And, certainly, if Jesus was the scapegoat on whom our sins were laid, and who carried them all away, He had these qualities which fitted Him for this work: He had a connection with us of an intimate kind, and He was stainlessly innocent.

This passage then compels us to ask in what sense Christ was our sacrifice.

With remarkable, because significant, unanimity the consciences of men very differently situated have prompted them to sacrifice. And the idea which all ancient nations, and especially the Hebrews, entertained regarding sacrifice is fairly well ascertained. Both the forms of their rites and their explicit statements are conclusive on this point,—that in a certain class of sacrifices they looked on the victim as a substitute bearing the guilt of the offerer and receiving the punishment due to him. This seems, after all discussion, to be the most reasonable interpretation to put upon expiatory sacrifice. Both heathens and Jews teach that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins; that the life of the sinner is forfeited, and that in order to the sparing of his life, another life is rendered instead; and that as the life is in the blood, the blood must be poured out in sacrifice. Heathens were as punctilious as Hebrews in their scrutiny of the victims, to ascertain what animals were fit for sacrifice by the absence of all blemish. They used forms of deprecation as exactly expressing the doctrines of substitution and of atonement by vicarious punishment. In one significant, though repulsive, particular some of the heathen went farther than the Hebrews: occasionally, the sinner who sought cleansing from defilement was actually washed in the blood of the victim slain for him. By an elaborate contrivance the sinner sat under a stage of open woodwork on which the animal was sacrificed, and through which its blood poured upon him.

The idea expressed by all sacrifices of expiation was, that the victim took the place of the sinner, and received the punishment due to him. The sacrifice was an acknowledgment on the sinner's part that by his sin he had incurred penalty; and it was a prayer on the sinner's part that he might be washed from the guilt he had contracted, and might return to life with the blessing and favour of God upon him. Of course, it was seen, and said by the heathen themselves, as well as by the Jews, that the blood of bulls and goats had in itself no relation to moral defilement. It was used in sacrifice merely as a telling way of saying that sin was acknowledged and pardon desired, but always with the idea of substitution more or less explicitly in the mind. And the ideas which were inevitably associated with sacrifice were transferred to Jesus by His immediate disciples. And this transference of the ideas connected with sacrifice to Himself and His death was sanctioned—and indeed suggested—by Jesus, when, at the Last Supper, He said, "This cup is the New Testament in My Blood, which is shed for many, for the remission of sins."

But here the question at once arises: In what sense was the Blood of Christ shed for the remission of sins? In what sense was He a substitute and victim for us? Before we try to find an answer to this question, two preliminary remarks may be made—first, that our salvation depends not on our understanding how the death of Christ takes away sin, but upon our believing that it does so. It is very possible to accept the

pardon of our sin, though we do not know how that pardon has been obtained. We do not understand the methods of cure prescribed by the physician, nor could we give a rational account of the efficacy of his medicines, but this does not retard our cure if only we use them. To come into a perfect relation to God we do not require to understand how the death of Christ has made it possible for us to do so; we need only to desire to be God's children, and to believe that it is open to us to come to Him. Not by the intellect, but by the will, are we led to God. Not by what we know, but by what we desire, is our destiny determined. Not by education in theological requirements, but by thirst for the living God, is man saved.

And, second, even though we carry over to the death of Christ the ideas taught by Old Testament sacrifice, we commit no enormous or misleading blunder. Christ Himself suggested that His death might be best understood in the light of these ideas, and even though we are unable to penetrate through the letter to the spirit, through the outward and symbolic form to the real and eternal meaning of the sacrifice of Christ, we are yet on the road to truth, and hold the germ of it which will one day develop into the actual and perfect truth. Impatience is at the root of much unbelief and misconception and discontent; the inability to reconcile ourselves to the fact that in our present stage there is much we must hold provisionally, much we must be content to see through a glass darkly, much we can only know by picture and shadow. It is quite true the reality has come in the death of Christ, and symbol has passed away; but there is such a depth of Divine love, and so various a fulfilment of Divine purpose in the death of Christ, that we cannot be surprised that it baffles comprehension. It is the key to a world's history; for aught we know, to the history of other worlds than ours; and it is not likely that we should be able to gauge its significance and explain its *rationale* of operation. And therefore, if, without any sluggish indifference to further knowledge, or merely worldly contentment to know of spiritual things only so much as is absolutely necessary, we yet are able to use what we do know and to await with confidence further knowledge, we probably act wisely and well. We do not err if we think of Christ as our Sacrifice; nor even if we somewhat too literally think of Him as the Victim substituted for us, and ascribe to His Blood the expiatory and cleansing virtue which belonged symbolically to the blood of the ancient sacrifices.

And, indeed, there are grave difficulties in our path as soon as we strive to advance beyond the sacrificial idea, and try to grasp the very truth regarding the death of Christ. The Apostles with one voice affirm that Christ's death was a propitiation for the sins of the world: that He died *for* us; that He suffered not only for His contemporaries, but for all men; that He was the Lamb of God, the innocent Victim, whose blood cleansed from sin. They affirm, in short, that in Christ's death we are brought face to face, not with a symbolic sacrifice, but with that act which really takes away sin.

If we read the narrative given us in the Gospels of the death of Christ, and the circumstances that led to it, we see that the sacrificial idea is not kept in the foreground. The cause of His death, as explained in the Gospels, was His persistent claim to be the Messiah sent by God to found a spiritual kingdom. He steadily opposed the expectations and plans of those in authority until they became so exasperated that they resolved to compass His death. The real and actual cause of His death was His fidelity to the purpose for which He had been sent into the world. He might have retired and lived a quiet life in Galilee or beyond Palestine altogether; but He could not do so, because He could not abandon the work of His life, which was to proclaim the truth about God and God's kingdom. Many a man has felt equally constrained to proclaim the truth in the face of opposition; and many

a man has, like Jesus, incurred death thereby. That which makes the death of Jesus exceptional in this aspect of it is, that the truth He proclaimed was what may be called *the* truth, the essential truth for men to know—the truth that God is the Father, and that there is life in Him for all who will come to Him. This was the kingdom of God among men—He proclaimed a kingdom based only on love, on spiritual union between God and man; a kingdom not of this world, and that came not with observation; a kingdom within men, real, abiding, universal. It was because He proclaimed this kingdom, exploding the cherished expectations and merely national hopes of the Jews, that the authorities put Him to death.

So much is obvious on the very face of the narrative. No one can read the life of Christ without perceiving this at least—that He was put to death because He persisted in proclaiming truths essential to the happiness and salvation of men. By submitting to death for the sake of these truths He made it for ever clear that they are of vital consequence. Before Pilate He calmly said, “To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth.” He knew that it was this witnessing to the truth that had enraged the Jews against Him, and even in prospect of death He could not refrain from proclaiming what He felt it was vital for men to know. In this very true sense, therefore, He died for our sakes—died because He sought to put us in possession of truths without which our souls cannot be lifted into life eternal. He has given us life by giving us the knowledge of the Father. His love for us, His ceaseless and strong desire to bring us near to God, was the real cause of His death. And, recognising this, we cannot but feel that He has a claim upon us of the most commanding kind. Not for His contemporaries alone, not for one section of men only, did Christ die, but for all men, because the truths which He sealed by His death are of universal import. No man can live eternal life without them.

But again, Jesus Himself explained to His disciples in what sense His death would benefit them. “It is expedient for you that I go away, for if I go not away the Comforter will not come unto you.” The spiritual kingdom He proclaimed could not be established while He was visibly present. His death and ascension put an end to all hopes that diverted their minds from that which constituted their real union to God and satisfaction in Him. When He disappeared from earth and sent the Holy Spirit to them, what remained to them was God’s kingdom within them, His true rule over their spirits, their assimilation to Him in all things. What they now clearly saw to be still open to them was to live in Christ’s spirit, to revive in their memories the truths His life had proclaimed, to submit themselves entirely to His influence, and to make known far and near the ideas He had communicated to them, and especially the God He had revealed. It was His death which set their minds free from all other expectations and fixed them exclusively on what was spiritual. And this salvation they at once proclaimed to others. What were they to say about Jesus and His death? How were they to win men to Him? They did so in the first days by proclaiming Him as raised by God to be a Prince and a Saviour, to rule from the unseen world, to bless men with a spiritual salvation, by turning them from their iniquities. And the instrumentality, the actual spiritual experience through which this salvation is arrived at is the belief that Jesus was sent by God and did reveal Him, that in Jesus God was present revealing Himself, and that His Spirit can bring us also to God and to His likeness.

Still further, and not going beyond the facts apparent in the Gospel, it is plain that Christ died for us, in the sense that all He did, His whole life on earth from first to last, was for our sake. He came into the world, not to serve a purpose of His own, and forward His own interests, but to further ours. He took upon Him our sins and

their punishment in this obvious sense, that He voluntarily entered into our life, polluted as it was all through with sin and laden with misery in every part. Our condition in this world is such that no person can avoid coming in contact with sin, or can escape entirely the results of sin in the world. And in point of fact persons with any depth of sympathy and spiritual sensibility cannot help taking upon them the sins of others, and cannot help suffering their own life to be greatly marred and limited by the sins of others. In the case of our Lord this acceptance of the burden of other men's sins was voluntary. And it is the sight of a holy and loving person, enduring sorrows and opposition and death wholly undeserved, that is at all times affecting in the experience of Christ. It is the sight of this suffering, borne with meekness and borne willingly, that makes us ashamed of our sinful condition, which inevitably entails such suffering on the self-sacrificing and holy. It enables us to see, more distinctly than anything besides, the essential hatefulness and evil of sin. Here is an innocent person, filled with love and compassion for all, His life a life of self-sacrifice and devotion to human interests, carrying in His person infinite benefits to the race—this person is at all points thwarted and persecuted and finally put to death. In this most intelligible sense He very truly sacrificed Himself for us, bore the penalty of our sins, magnified the law, illustrated and rendered infinitely impressive the righteousness of God, and made it possible for God to pardon us, and in pardoning us to deepen immeasurably our regard for holiness and for Himself.

Still further, it is obvious that Christ gave Himself a perfect sacrifice to God by living solely for Him. He had in life no other purpose than to serve God. Again and again during His life God expressed His perfect satisfaction with the human life of Christ. He who searches the heart saw that into the most secret thought, down to the most hidden motive, that life was pure, that heart in perfect harmony with the Divine will. Christ lived not for Himself, He did not claim property in His own person and life, but gave Himself up freely and to the uttermost to God: more thoroughly, more spontaneously, and with an infinitely richer material did He offer Himself to God than ever burnt-offering had been offered. And God, with an infinite joy in goodness, accepted the sacrifice, and found on earth in the person of Jesus an opportunity for rejoicing in man with an infinite satisfaction.

And this sacrifice which Christ offered to God tends to reproduce itself continually among men. As Christ said, no sooner was He lifted up than He drew all men to Him. That perfect life and utter self-surrender to the highest purposes, that pure and perfect love and devotion to God and man, commands the admiration and cordial worship of serious men. It stands in the world for ever as the grand incentive to goodness, prompting men and inspiring them to sympathy and imitation. It is in the strength of that perfect sacrifice men have ceaselessly striven to sacrifice themselves. It is through Christ they strive to come themselves to God. In Him we see the beauty of holiness; in Him we see holiness perfected, and making the impression upon us which a perfect thing makes, standing as a reality, not as a theory; as a finished and victorious achievement, not as a mere attempt. In Christ we see what love to God and faith in God really are; in Him we see what a true sacrifice is and means; and in Him we are drawn to give ourselves also to God as our true life.

Looking then only at those facts which are apparent to every one who reads the life of Christ, and putting aside all that may over and above these facts have been intended in the Divine mind, we see how truly Christ is our Sacrifice; and how truly we can say of Him that He gave Himself, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God. We see that in the actual privations, disappointments, temptations, mental strain, opposition, and suffering of His life, and in the final conflict of death, He

bore the penalty of our sins; underwent the miseries which sin has brought into human life. We see that He did so with so entire and perfect a consent to all God's will, and with so ready and unreserved a sacrifice of Himself, that God found infinite satisfaction in this human obedience and righteousness, and on the basis of this sacrifice pardons us.

Some may be able to assure themselves better of the forgiveness of God, if they look at what Christ has done as a satisfaction for or reparation of the ill that we have done. He properly satisfies for an offence who offers to the offended party that which he loves as well or better than he hates the offence. If your child has through carelessness broken or spoiled something you value, but seeing your displeasure is at pains to replace it, and does after long industry put into your hands an article of greater value than was lost to you, you are satisfied, and more than forgive your child. If a man fails in business, but after spending a lifetime to recover himself restores to you not only what you lost by him, but more than could possibly have been made by yourself with the original sum lost, you ought to be satisfied. And God is satisfied with the work of Christ because there is in it a love and an obedience to Him, and a regard to right and holiness, that outweigh all our disobedience and alienation. Often, when some satisfaction or reparation of injury or loss is made to ourselves, it is done in so good-hearted a manner, and displays so much right feeling, and sets us on terms of so much closer intimacy with the party who injured us, that we are really glad, now that all is over, that the misunderstanding or injury took place. The satisfaction has far more than atoned for it. So is it with God: our reconciliation to Him has called out so much in Christ that would otherwise have been hidden, has so stirred the deepest part, if we may say so, of the Divine nature in Christ, and has called out also so signally the whole strength and beauty of human nature, that God is more than satisfied. We cannot see how without sin there could have been that display of love and obedience that there has been in the death of Christ. Where there is no danger, nothing tragic, there can be no heroism: human nature, not to speak of Divine, has not scope for its best parts in the ordinary and innocent traffic and calm of life. It is when danger thickens, and when death draws near and bares his hideous visage, that devotion and self-sacrifice can be exercised. And so, in a world filled with sin and with danger, a world in which each individual's history has something stirring and tragic in it, God finds room for the full testing and utterance of our natures and of His own. And in the redemption of this world there occurred an emergency which called forth, as nothing else conceivably could call forth, everything that the Divine and human natures of Christ are capable of.

Another result of Christ's death is mentioned by John: "That the children of God which were scattered abroad might be gathered together in one." It was for a unity Christ died, for that which formed one whole. When Caiaphas sacrificed Christ to propitiate Rome, he knew that none but Christ's own countrymen would benefit thereby. The Romans would not recall their legions from Africa or Germany because Judæa had propitiated them. And supposing that the Jews had received some immunities and privileges from Rome as an acknowledgment of its favour, this would affect no other nation. But if any members of other nations coveted these privileges, their only course would be to become naturalized Jews, members and subjects of the favoured community. So Christ's death has the effect of gathering into one all those who seek God's favour and fatherhood, no matter in what ends of the earth they be scattered. It was not for separate individuals Christ died, but for a people, for an indivisible community; and we receive the benefits of His death no otherwise than as we are members of this people or family. It is the attractive power of Christ that draws us all to one centre, but being gathered round Him we should be

in spirit and are in fact as close to one another as to Him.



The Expositor's Bible

Marcus Dods, D.D.

Gospel of John Part 1

Note on Chap. 4

NOTE ON CHAP. VI., VERS. 37, 44, 45.

Three terms are used in these verses which call for examination,—“giving,” “drawing,” “teaching.” The two latter are used in a connection which leaves little room for doubt as to their meaning. “No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him.... It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man, therefore, that hath heard and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto Me;” but, by implication, no man who has not so learned. Both verses express the thought that without special aid from God no man can come to Christ. There must be a Divine illumination of the human faculties, enabling the man to apprehend that Jesus is the Christ, and to receive Him as such. These expressions cannot refer to the outward illumination which is communicated by Scripture, by the miracles of Christ, and so forth; because the whole of the crowd addressed by our Lord had such illumination, and yet not all of them were “taught of God.” The “hearing,” and “learning,” or “being taught of God,” here spoken of must signify the opening of the inner ear by the unseen operation of God Himself. Most emphatically does Jesus affirm that without this exercise of the Divine will and Divine power upon the individual no man can receive Him. The mere manifestation of God in the flesh is not enough: an inward and special enlightenment is required to enable a man to recognise God manifest in the flesh. The words, then, of ver. 44 can only mean that in order to apprehend the significance of Christ and to yield ourselves to Him we must be aided individually and inwardly by God.

Whether the “giving” of ver. 37 is intended to signify an act prior to the teaching and drawing may reasonably be doubted. It is prior to the “coming” to Christ, as the terms of the verse prove: “All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me: and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.” Principal Reynolds says it is “the present activity of the Father’s grace that is meant, not a foregone conclusion,” No doubt that is in strictness true. Our Lord, in the face of general unbelief, is comforting Himself with the assurance that after all He will draw to Himself all whom the Father gives Him; and this implies that the Father’s giving is the main factor in His success.

