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# FIRST INTERVIEW WITH THE CHRIST.

BY PROF. JOHN D. DAVIS, PH.D.

*“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.”—JOHN 1:37-42.*

ONE of the two that heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, who some weeks later was called to leave all and follow the Master permanently, and who later still was set apart to be an apostle. The other was John, who likewise was afterward called to permanent fellowship and then to apostleship. At least the inference that he was John is warranted by the fact that John, who alone records the event, manifests the disposition to narrate such incidents only as came, in whole or in

part, under his own observation; by the fact that the minute, graphic description likewise indicates an eye-witness; by the fact that, though he mentions two men with Jesus, he leaves one unnamed—the customary modest method of John in referring to himself (21 : 2, 7).

Andrew and John could and did make a living for themselves. No shiftlessness in them. Both were fishermen, perhaps then as afterward partners in business (Luke 5 : 10 ; Mark 1 : 16). One at least had inherited from his father habits of industry, and both belonged to thrifty families, possessed some little property, and hired help in their work.

Andrew and John were, moreover, at this time, before they had felt the influence of Jesus, religious men, products of institutional religion. We must not undervalue this. We must not forget that, although Jesus had occasion to say, "Woe unto thee, Bethsaida; woe unto thee, Capernaum," he was not condemning the religion of these cities in itself, but only the spirit which animated the worshippers. The instituted religion was a power for good. With all its defects, with all its extreme views, nevertheless it maintained, amidst the darkness of a polytheistic age, the worship of the one, the true God; jealously guarded the honor of his name, as Jewish blood shed by Seleucidan and

Roman testified; taught the observance of the Sabbath by rest and public services; inculcated a lofty morality; and had lately produced characters like Simeon and Anna, Zacharias and Elizabeth, Joseph and Mary. Into this visible Church Andrew and John had been publicly admitted as infants, under its influence they had grown to manhood, and they came to Jesus with the mass of their religious beliefs correct. The minds of these men did not need to be unmade, but simply enlightened.

But more: Andrew and John were disciples of John the Baptist. They had visited the preacher at the Jordan, their eyes had been opened to sin, they had heard his call, had been baptized unto repentance, and, whatever their conduct may have been in the past, were resolved henceforth to live in newness of life and in accordance with the spirit of Israel's faith.

It is not strange that these men came to Jesus; not strange that they were the first to come. Men careless about making provision for the near future are logically and generally careless about making provision for the remote and eternal future. Men under the influence of false systems of religion, the nations of heathenism for example, are as a rule won for Christ only by the toil and patience and training of years. Men who see sin in the deed

only and are content when the outside of the platter has been cleaned, men who confound respectability of life with righteousness in God's sight, do not follow Christ, for they know no need of him. Such cases are indeed not hopeless. It is a glory of Christ that he has lifted a shiftless, criminal Jerry McAuley out of vice into virtue; that his truth has led a nation of cannibals to put away cruelty and idolatry in a day; that his words pierced the self-sufficient, moral Nicodemus and won his allegiance. But this is not natural, it is exceptional. The men we expect to come to Jesus are the earnest spirits of the nation, who have been trained in the fear of the Lord from youth up, who have been taught of salvation through the Christ, who have been to Jordan and have realized and resolved that the ax must be laid to the root of the tree, that sin must be destroyed in the heart. For such, as it was for Andrew and John, it is only a step to Jesus, only a step to a life-long fellowship with the Master.

May we not pause here to consider what this means with reference to our methods of work? Is it wise for us to seek to carry the good news of salvation post-haste and as mere heralds through the world? Or shall the Christian Church, to whose trust has been committed the Gospel, in its work

of transmission and extension found and foster churches, establish schools, gather in the children, train them in the maxims of wisdom, teach them the law of God and his holy fear, seek to impress upon them the guilt and loathsomeness of sin, show them that its roots are in the heart, and point them to the Christ as prophet, priest, and king? Success does not always attend such efforts; but history from the time of John the Baptist until now declares that that is the true way. As we scatter to all parts of the earth on the Master's business, let us remember this. To whatever part of this comprehensive work you may be called, whether teaching rudiments or unfolding the glory of Christ to eager, anxious souls, remember that your work is a necessary part of the great whole, and do it for Christ's sake. There is a difference of privilege, but the same work. Aim to prepare Andrews and Johns.

Jesus turned, beheld the two men following, and said unto them, "What seek ye?" They said unto him, "Rabbi, we seek to know where thou abidest." He said unto them, "Come, and ye shall see." They came, saw where he abode, and tarried with him that day. He had just come from the wilderness victor over temptation, triumphant in faith and purpose. His act was an inten-

tional revelation, the first revelation of his public ministry.

It showed to those men the possibility of fellowship with the Christ. How gracious he was! Regarded with awe by their teacher the Baptist, declared by him to be the God-chosen King, the ardently desired Messiah, they felt him to be far above them. They had followed at a distance respectfully, timidly; venturing only to come near enough to learn where he dwelt. He, however, noticed them, trusted them, did honor to their manhood, granted their request to know where he dwelt by inviting them to his abiding-place, walked side by side with them thither, and talked with them by the way. John the Baptist had spoken glorious things about the Great Unknown who stood in their midst, but the half had not been told. Suddenly a great light had shined upon them. The Christ was full of grace.

But not only did the Christ's attitude reveal graciousness, it showed his fearless openness. He was ready to be seen as he was: to take them at once, without preparation, and show them his plain lodgings, probably a booth; to let them study his manner of life, to examine him himself. He was like the neighboring river in which they had been baptized, like the huge mountains behind which



the declining sun was about to set, like the deep blue sky overhead—full of mystery, but hiding nothing. He that had eyes to see and ears to hear, a mind to think and a heart to feel, might study and know who he is. No wonder that afterward one of these two men who followed Jesus described him as one whom he had seen with his eyes, whom he had heard, whom his hands had handled—full of grace and truth. Jesus did nothing secretly; he ever taught openly in the Temple; he performed his mighty works indifferently where.

Jesus had revealed to Andrew and John the possibility of intimate fellowship with him. And “they abode with him that day.” Afterward Andrew sought out his brother Simon and said unto him, “We have found the Messiah.” Behold the effect of intercourse with Jesus. Their brief interview with Jesus had wrought in them the conviction that he was the Christ. “We have found the Messiah.”

And yet there was apparently nothing extraordinary in that interview. Jesus certainly wrought no miracle; for that was delayed, as we know, until the marriage at Cana, and then called forth a new faith in these men. There was no miracle; and, we judge, not even a revelation of that superhuman knowledge which he manifested a day or so later

when he said to Nathanael, "Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee." The Apostle John in narrating the first meeting of himself and Andrew with Jesus records it as a simple interview; memorable, not by mighty deeds, but by its effects upon two lives.

It was, moreover, the same Jesus that had mingled with men for thirty years. Why, then, should he who was merely respected in Nazareth so mightily impress these men now? In part, because while a youth in his father's house he had not been pointed out to men as the Messiah. The story of his birth and of his presentation in the Temple belonged to the privacy of the family. The friends of the Baptist's parents knew of Zacharias' dumbness, and of his fervent declaration, when his tongue was loosed, that the son who had just been born to him should be the forerunner of the Messiah; but there is no reason to suppose that the kindred of the Baptist knew anything connected with the birth of Jesus. It is true also that the shepherds had looked upon the child, and that wise men from the east had come to Herod asking where he should be born that was to be King of the Jews. But the shepherds returned to their work in the fields, the wise men had quietly left the country, and Joseph had taken Mary and the young child into Egypt. Herod's excitement

occasioned by the visit of the Magi, leading to the convocation of the doctors of the law to declare unto him where the Christ should be born and reflecting itself in anxiety throughout the city as to what course the freak would take, had been allayed when Herod sent armed men to Bethlehem to slay all the babes of two years and under. When after two years the parents of Jesus again settled in Nazareth, it was merely noised abroad that the carpenter and his wife had come back from Egypt and a first-born child with them.

When Jesus began to be about thirty years of age, there were apparently but two persons alive who were acquainted with his early history, Mary and John the Baptist; and these two believed on him. John had probably heard from his mother regarding his cousin, but he had refrained from pointing him out until authorized. Mary treasured the events connected with the infant Jesus and pondered them in her heart. She alone was left as witness, and it is doubtless due chiefly to the testimony of this woman that we owe our knowledge of the early life of the Master. Jesus had not affected his fellow-townsmen as he was now affecting the two fishermen, partly because his title was unproclaimed. His beautiful character had indeed been recognized; he grew in favor with God and man. His insight

into the Scriptures as early as his twelfth year was acknowledged by the doctors of the law at Jerusalem; and there is some reason to suppose that he had been accepted by the Nazarenes as a reader of the Word of God in their synagogue. He was indeed a light; but he was a light shining in darkness, the darkness comprehending it not.

But again, while in Nazareth not only had he been unproclaimed, he had hidden his light; now his hour had come. At Jordan he had been anointed by the Spirit for the work; in the wilderness he had been chastened by temptation, and had emerged consecrated to his mission; from the Baptist he had received official announcement. Henceforth he is able and willing to reveal himself and his doctrine fully and freely to men. Andrew and John catch the first glimpse of that revelation, are the first to see the effects of that conflict and feel the influence of the ennobled soul.

But even that was not enough to account for the mighty impression the Christ made upon those two friends; for when Jesus later returned to Nazareth and offered himself to his countrymen, they led him to the brow of the hill upon which their city was built, and would have cast him headlong over the brink. Testimony and character impressed Pilate also; but they did not make the Roman a follower

of the Christ. Since his day testimony and character have impressed thousands, so that with Rousseau they confess that the life and death of Jesus are those of a God; and yet they refuse to bow in loyal allegiance to him.

In the case of Andrew and John the impression was made upon men prepared. The two friends had already turned from sin to God. The contrite heart joyfully receives the approved Christ; and therefore again we say, Aim to prepare men for Christ by leading them to repentance. In the early days of this century in western Pennsylvania the mighty servants of God who labored in that then wilderness followed this method. Gathering the people together in Nature's temples, holding what many suppose to be the first camp-meetings, day after day they preached the law, the heart's guilt, the wrath of God, until the audience cast themselves prostrate on the ground undone. Then, and not till then, was the gracious Saviour held up, sinners believed and arose, and a sturdy, godly generation sprang into being. From the days of John the Baptist until now it is in men awake and repentant that testimony to the Christ confirmed by his character is effectual.

And now let us ask what there was in this special interview with Jesus that convinced these men that

he was the Christ. As already noticed, there was no miracle; so far as known, no display of superhuman knowledge. There was, however, the man—his personality, his aspect. There was the manner—supreme grace warming the heart, awakening affection; frank openness begetting confidence. There was the talk—as of one with authority, and not as the scribes, at which long before the doctors in the Temple had marveled; talk of which the graciousness later at Nazareth awakened the wonder of his fellow-citizens; talk which more than once by its unanswerable logic and heart-searching power silenced the wily questioner; talk which disarmed the opposition of men sent to lay hands on him, and called forth from them the declaration, “Never man spake as this man”; talk which, on the way to Emmaus, the speaker unrecognized, caused the hearts of two downcast disciples to burn within them.

It was these things, the man, the manner, the converse, which convinced Andrew and John that they had found the Messiah; yea more, which wrought in them the belief that an interview with Jesus would convince other men also: for Andrew sought his brother, saying, “We have found the Messiah,” and brought him to Jesus; and Philip told Nathanael that they had found him of whom

Moses in the law and the prophets did speak, Jesus of Nazareth; and to the rejoinder, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" replied, "Come and see."

And in these elements there is evidence of Messiahship of great convincing power.

1. It is impossible to close the eyes to the fact that, as promised in the Mosaic law, a masterful Prophet had arisen like unto Moses; whose right to acknowledgment stood attested, for unquestionably he spake according to the law and the testimony.

2. Not only was a Prophet undoubtedly before them, they recognized in him the predicted character also of the servant of the Lord. In his graciousness and sympathy they read the story, "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; my chosen, in whom my soul delighteth. . . . He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench." "He hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound."

Brethren, it will be your privilege, as it was the privilege of Peter and Paul, to prove from the Scriptures of the Old Testament that Jesus is the

veritable, long-promised Christ. The temptation is too often yielded to, to build the argument solely on minute predictions, to cite those passages only which refer, and which have ever been understood by the Jews to refer, to the place of the Christ's birth and to other incidents of his history. We would utter no word of condemnation against such an argument when made with scholarly discrimination and adequate knowledge. It subserves one purpose of prophecy; it is authorized by the New Testament; it is a mighty weapon for attack and defense; it satisfies the craving for definite proof. But do not stop with this argument, neglecting the weightier matter. Go to the valley of the Jordan and learn from the two disciples who first followed Jesus that before the events of his life had been enacted, before there were definite incidents to which minute predictions in any number could be applied, there was enough in Jesus to convince that the fulfillment of prophecy was there. Jesus in himself and Jesus during the Christian era has realized the predicted character, and that is the great argument from prophecy.

3. There was perhaps a third element which corroborated their faith. His was a character in contrast to their own. We cannot tell how clear to their minds at this interview was the wide differ-



ence between them and the Master. But if their senses were acute enough to discern it, the contrast convinced. I believe that a man whose eyes are open to the subtle nature, the guilt and the loathsomeness of sin; a man who in grief and hatred thereof has turned from it unto God; who as he contends with evil, struggles with adversity, and journeys through mysterious darkness, keeps his eyes fixed on Jesus in like but yet fiercer conflict, and finds Jesus, in contrast with himself, ever the strong, patient, uncomplaining, trustful, obedient, sinless Son of the heavenly Father—gazing thus with senses exercised and keen, cannot fail to recognize in Jesus, and in this teeming world in Jesus alone, the King. The figure stands solitary in earth's history who is glorious in holiness.

There stood a mighty Prophet; there was the predicted character of the Lord's Servant; there was a peerless One. The good news proclaimed by John the Baptist was true. The Christ had indeed come.