

*The*

# GOSPEL

*according to*

# MARK

*and Its Meaning for Today*

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ERNEST TRICE THOMPSON

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**TO HELEN**

*my beloved companion through the years*

## Preface

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This book has been written primarily for laymen, who will continue to study the Bible as it was read and accepted in the early Church. Critical questions are largely, though not altogether, ignored. The author's concern has been with the significance of Mark's Gospel for the present day. In his attempts at understanding he has secured help over a period of years from many sources. If at any point he has failed through inadvertence to make the proper acknowledgments he offers his humble apologies.

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## Introduction

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THE Gospel according to Mark is probably the least read of all the Gospels. Yet it is the earliest of the four, the one on which Matthew and Luke largely depended for their story of Christ, and by far the most vivid. If we want to study the teachings of Jesus we turn naturally to the Gospel according to Matthew; if we wish to see Jesus as the universal Saviour we turn to the Gospel according to Luke; if we are concerned with the eternal significance of the Christ we turn to the Gospel according to John; but if we prefer to see Jesus as He walked and talked in Galilee, as He impressed His contemporaries, as He really was, Son of Man as well as Son of God, then we turn best to the Gospel according to Mark.

The Gospel itself contains no statement regarding its origin or authorship. The ancient writers and the earliest manuscripts uniformly ascribe it to a man named Mark. Some modern scholars argue that this Mark was a Gentile, an otherwise unknown member, perhaps a teacher, of the church in Rome. From earliest times, however, and still generally today he is identified with John Mark, a young man who appears frequently in the New Testament records. (See Acts 12:12, 25; 13:5, 13; 15:37-39; Colossians 4:10; Philemon 24; II Timothy 4:11; I Peter 5:13.) His mother, evidently a widow, was in comfortable circumstances, and her home in Jerusalem was one of the meeting

places of the early Christians. There is some reason for believing that it was here that Jesus ate the Last Supper with His disciples, and that Mark was the young man who followed Jesus to the Garden wrapped in a linen cloth. (Mark 14:51-52.) Mark was also a kinsman (nephew or cousin) of Barnabas, and at different times and in different ways collaborated with this greathearted man and with Paul in the work of the Kingdom. In the latter part of the Gospel period, Mark seems to have become the companion and associate of Peter. According to the early tradition of the Church, it was from this great apostle, who was the dominant figure among the early followers of Jesus, that Mark secured much of the material for the Gospel which bears his name. Thus Papias, one of the early Church Fathers, who was reputed to have known John the Apostle, wrote early in the second century (c. A.D. 140): "This also the presbyter [John] used to say: 'Mark, indeed, who became the interpreter of Peter, wrote accurately, as far as he remembered them, the things said or done by the Lord, but not however in order.' For he [Mark] had neither heard the Lord nor been His personal follower, but at a later stage, as I said, he had followed Peter, who used to adapt the teachings to the needs of the moment, but not as though he were drawing up a connected account of the oracles of the Lord: so that Mark committed no error in writing certain matters just as he remembered them."<sup>1</sup>

With this agrees a later statement of Irenaus, bishop of Lyons (c. A.D. 180): "After the deaths [of Peter and Paul] Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, himself also handed down to us in writing the things which Peter had proclaimed."<sup>2</sup>

This external testimony is corroborated by the internal evidence within the Gospel itself. Mark certainly had

other sources of information—oral tradition circulating in the Roman Church, shaped it may be by, and to some extent adapted for, catechetical purposes; perhaps also some written material—oral tradition which had been given a more permanent form. But there are innumerable little touches that could have come only from an eyewitness, and that eyewitness was apparently Peter himself. In a very real sense, then, the Gospel according to Mark may be regarded as the Gospel according to Peter.

According to the early tradition of the Church, which few are inclined to question, Mark wrote his Gospel for the special benefit of the church at Rome. In A.D. 64 the Emperor Nero launched a savage persecution against the Christians in this city, the capital of the Empire. Tacitus, the Roman historian, tells us that “they were not only put to death but subjected to insults, in that they were either dressed up in the skins of wild beasts and perished by the cruel mangling of dogs, or else put on crosses to be set on fire and, as day declined, to be burned, being used as lights by night. Nero had thrown open his gardens for that spectacle and gave a circus play, mingling with the people dressed in a charioteer’s costume or driving in a chariot.” In the course of this persecution the tradition of the Church holds that Paul was beheaded and that Peter was crucified. Shortly before or shortly after this event members of the church in Rome urged Mark to record the story which he had heard so often from Peter’s lips. Clement, head of a famous catechetical school in Alexandria about A.D. 190-203, tells the story thus: “The Gospel according to Mark had this occasion. As Peter had preached the Word publicly at Rome and declared the Gospel by the Spirit, many who were present requested that Mark who had followed him for a long time and remembered his sayings, should write them out. And

having composed the Gospel he gave it to those who had requested it.”<sup>3</sup>

Mark had, therefore, a double purpose in writing this Gospel: (1) to preserve the memoirs of Peter, along with other essential elements in the tradition that circulated in Rome; and (2) to strengthen the Church. A.E.J. Rawlinson thinks that the Gospel was written for private circulation among the leaders of the persecuted Church, to read aloud to gatherings of the faithful and other interested persons, to strengthen Christians who were facing persecution and to stir them up to continued missionary activity on behalf of Jesus Christ, and to lead others to confess Jesus even in the midst of persecution. Some passages of the Gospel take on new meaning when read against this background. It is clear that it was not Mark’s purpose to give us a life of Christ, but rather a Gospel—that is, good news about Jesus who brings us salvation here and hereafter.

As Dean Farrar has written: “Matthew desired to link the present with the past; to point to the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies; to prove that Jesus was the Messiah of the Jew, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham. Luke wrote to connect Christianity with the advancing future; to associate the work of Jesus with humanity; to set Him forth as the Son of Adam, the Saviour of the world. John wrote to connect Christ with the Eternal; to serve the deepest needs of the soul; to satisfy the most yearning aspirations of the spirit. The object of Mark in this concise, vigorous, vivid Gospel was more limited, though not less necessary. It was to manifest Jesus as He had been in the present, in daily actual life; Jesus living and working among men, in the fullness of His energy; Jesus in the awe-inspiring grandeur of His human personality as a Man who was also the Incarnate, the wonder-working Son of God.”<sup>4</sup>

This last clause suggests to us the real theme of the Gospel which is stated more concisely in the first verse of the first chapter of Mark: "The beginning of the gospel [that is, Good News] of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."<sup>5</sup> Jesus was the personal name of our Lord, the name of the man whom His neighbors knew as the carpenter of Nazareth. Christ was originally an official name, literally the Anointed One, describing the Messiah whom the prophets of the Old Testament had predicted. The Son of God is a phrase suggesting the unique relationship which Jesus bore to the Father. In a word the purpose of Mark, as suggested in his opening phrase, is to show us that the man Jesus, who lived and worked and taught and suffered in Judea and Galilee, was also the promised Messiah and truly the Son of God. The Gospel was written by one who had come to that firm conviction and hoped that others would share it with him.

The Gospel emphasizes not the teachings of Jesus, but His life, His activities, and especially His mighty works and His sacrificial death, the aspects of Jesus' life that might be expected to appeal to the Romans, who put a premium on action. The movement is rapid, we get the impression of constant motion, almost breathless haste. No other Gospel gives us so vivid a picture of the Master's vibrant personality. The key word, the key thought of the Gospel, in the estimation of many, is "Power."

It will add greatly to our enjoyment of the Gospel and also to its full understanding, if we bear in mind a few simple things about the situation in Palestine at the time. We note here only the more dynamic elements which throw light on the actual ministry of Christ.

When Jesus began His ministry the Jews were a subject people, held under the power of Rome, but looking for-

ward eagerly to deliverance and to the re-establishment of the Jewish nation as an independent kingdom.

Rome had a genius for government, and her rule brought many advantages to Palestine. Nevertheless, Rome did not rule Palestine for Palestine's good, but for her own good. To put it bluntly, Palestine was exploited for the benefit of the Romans, especially for the ruling class of Rome. In the speeches of Cicero, Rome "appears almost in the guise of a vast commercial enterprise for the exploitation of the Near East; a trading corporation prepared to use force where force is required, but only as a means to an end—greater trade and larger revenues."<sup>6</sup>

Take taxes as an example. The Jews were a poor people; their country lacked natural resources and was greatly overpopulated, yet it has been estimated that the taxes paid by the Jews amounted to one-third of their total income. We dislike to pay taxes, no matter how large our income or how great the need, even when they are imposed by our own representatives in the state or national capital. But the Jews were a subject people, and a large part of their total taxation went to conquerors whom they hated and despised. To make it worse, they were a proud people, a people who remembered the glorious days of the Maccabees, when their ancestors had fought against imposing odds and won their independence from the successors of Alexander the Great. More important still, they were convinced that they were the Chosen People, the descendants of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, the heirs of the promises made to them by God, and it was intolerable that they should be ground under the feet of the Gentile dogs.

Every once in a while their feelings would break out in some overt act of rebellion. Four times, for example, in Jesus' lifetime there were armed revolts against the power of Rome. The most spectacular of these revolts came when

Jesus was about ten years of age. It must have made a great impression on His mind. This revolt centered in Sepphoris, the largest city in Galilee, and the second largest in Palestine, just three miles from Nazareth. Sepphoris was an important military post where Herod the Great had stored a large amount of arms and provisions. After the deposition of his son Herod Archelaus (in A.D. 6), when the Roman administrators were trying to get some idea of the resources of the country by means of a census, a revolutionary leader named Judas (Acts 5:37) equipped his followers with weapons taken from the royal palace in Sepphoris and made this region the center of his operations. After the revolt was crushed the Romans proceeded to destroy the city and to raze it to the ground. Two thousand Jews were crucified and their bodies left to rot, hanging on trees, with arms outstretched, as a grisly warning to the people, an example of what happened to those who rebelled against the power of Rome. The rest of the population, including the women and the children, were sold into slavery.

This was the most important revolt against Rome in Jesus' day, but there were others. In fact, not a year passed without blood being shed by incipient revolutionists. Included in this number, no doubt, were the Galileans whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices. (Luke 13:1.) Barabbas, whom the Jerusalem populace in the end chose in preference to Jesus, was one of a group who had made insurrection and in the insurrection committed murder. (Mark 15:7.) We cannot fully appreciate Jesus' message, we cannot really understand the development of His ministry, unless we remember that in His day, the Jews were a subject people, seething with bitterness, hatred, and resentment against the Romans, and that an explosion was likely to occur at any moment. The great ques-

tion in Jesus' day in Palestine, a question which no public teacher could evade, was the Roman question—what ought to be done about Rome?

When Jesus came into Galilee proclaiming His good news, there were four answers being given to that question. To put it more exactly there were four attitudes, four programs, four parties, all of them contrary to the spirit of Jesus, and in contrast with which His own message can best be understood.

On the extreme left were the Zealots or Cananaeans, revolutionists, who preferred death for themselves and their families rather than continued obedience to the power of Rome. They were confident that God would finally deliver the nation from its enemies, but certain also that God would help only those who helped themselves. So they exploited every grievance and utilized the flimsiest pretext to stir up the people against their conquerors. With the dagger and the sword they sought deliberately to force God's intervention. Each successive failure left them undiscouraged. The next attempt would the more certainly succeed. The more radical members of this group came to employ terrorist methods against the adherents of Rome and all whom they suspected of laxity in religion, going so far as to stab openly in the streets anyone they thought it expedient to remove. For this reason they were known as Sicarii (men of the dagger) or assassins. They encouraged banditry and were a source of much anxiety to the Roman authorities.

Josephus, a Jewish historian who wrote in the generation after Jesus, indicates that this party was organized immediately after the fall of Sepphoris. It is more likely that they were responsible for this disastrous uprising. The Romans thought that the terrible reprisals which they exacted would break the spirit of the Jews and pre-

vent similar outbreaks in the future. Instead it enflamed the hatred of the populace and intensified their determination to break the Roman yoke. The Zealots were growing steadily during the ministry of Jesus. They appealed especially to young men who craved action and to the poorer people—artisans and peasants—who had little to lose but their lives. Their influence continued to increase, until finally in A.D. 66 they instigated the mad revolt against Rome which ended, as Jesus had predicted, in the destruction of Jerusalem and the final collapse of the Jewish nation.

The way of the Zealots was the way of force.

At the opposite pole from the Zealots were the Essenes. To them the situation in Palestine seemed hopeless. There was nothing they could do to rescue the nation from its degradation, and so their minds turned in on themselves. They became ascetics. Many refrained from marriage and withdrew from the ordinary life of the community. They formed communities of their own in the wilderness and held all things in common. They lived lives that were personally irreproachable, but did nothing to solve the pressing problems of the day or to help the nation in its hour of need. Pliny, Roman administrator and litterateur, wrote: "Their membership is steadily recruited from the large number of people who resort to their mode of existence because they are wearied of life's struggle with the waves of adversity."

The way of the Essenes was the way of flight.

A third group differed considerably from the previous two. They were concerned primarily with their own material advancement. Accepting the Roman power as inevitable, they made terms with the conquerors which were advantageous to them personally.

In the north, in Galilee, these first-century collabora-

tionists were called Herodians. Herod the Great died in 4 B.C. and was succeeded by his three sons, who reigned with the permission of the Romans as tetrarchs—Herod Archelaus in Judea, Herod Antipas in Galilee, and Herod Philip in a small region east of Galilee. Herod Archelaus was deposed, as we have seen, in A.D. 6 and from this time on Judea was governed by a Procurator sent out from Rome. The Herodians who played a role in the Gospel story were adherents of Herod Antipas, who was only a Roman puppet. To line their pockets, to advance their worldly fortunes, the Herodians had joined their efforts and hopes with those of the peoples' hated conquerors.

In the south, in Judea, exponents of this point of view were the Sadducees, whose national leader was the High Priest. They included the priestly aristocrats (the few priestly families that were at the top of the hierarchical ladder), the rich landowners and the wealthy merchants, men who occupied the highest offices in church and state, and who accepted the Roman authority in order that they might maintain their ancient prerogatives. The High Priest and his associates (the "chief priests") controlled the Temple and its worship and drew from its revenues a princely income. Millions of Jews all over the world paid an annual tax of two drachmas for the support of the priests and for the continuance of the Temple ceremonies. In addition the chief priests received taxes from the Jews in Palestine and made large profits from the Temple traffic on which they had a monopoly.

Herodians and Sadducees differed in many ways, but were agreed in their determination to maintain the status quo, which worked to their own particular advantage. Both groups were quick to oppose any man or any move-

ment which threatened in any way their privileged position under the Romans.

The way of the Herodians and of the Sadducees was the way of compromise.

The fourth group and the one which played the largest role in the Gospel drama were the Pharisees. They were as religious as the Essenes and as patriotic as the Zealots. But unlike the former they did not withdraw from the common life and unlike the latter they opposed the use of the sword. They adopted a pacifistic attitude, however, not because they were pacifists in principle, but merely because they knew that "resistance was a physical impossibility and only invited complete destruction and devastation. They did not love Rome because they could not fight; they hated her the more. Their non-resistance was with a glowing eye and a heart full of hate, but with an arm that did not dare to strike."<sup>7</sup> The Pharisees said in effect: "This is a desperate situation, and we must look to God for help. He can get us out, and He is the only one who can. Some day He will intervene miraculously from heaven and set up His Kingdom here on earth. All we can do is to fulfill the conditions necessary for God's intervention; we cannot expect Him to intervene until we have fulfilled the contract that He made with our fathers (see Deuteronomy 28:1-10, for example). If we keep the law given by Moses and the tradition of our fathers (that is, their traditional interpretation of the Mosaic Law) then and only then will God intervene from heaven, punish our enemies, and establish His Kingdom."

We cannot understand the role played by the Pharisees, their insistence on every detail of the Law, their scorn of the common people who were unable or unwilling to keep the multitude of its exactions, their bitter opposition to

Jesus for breaking the traditions of the Fathers, unless we keep this fact in mind, that obedience to the Law in all of its details was necessary that the Jews might maintain their racial identity and preserve their religious heritage, and in addition that the way might be prepared for God's intervention to deliver His Chosen People from the Romans and to establish His reign among men.

The Pharisees were the popular religious leaders. Their ideals were high and are paralleled in many instances by the teachings of Jesus. Nonetheless their rigid insistence on the Law (not only the written Law, the Pentateuch, accepted by the Sadducees, but also the unwritten Law, the tradition of the Fathers) separated the Jews from their neighbors and tended to separate the Pharisees from their fellow Jews. It incited hatred, scorn, and contempt for non-Jews, who were ceremonially unclean; for publicans (tax-collectors), who had entered the service of Rome; and for "sinners," a term of contempt, which included not only those who were morally delinquent, but also those who were merely indifferent to the ritual and ceremonial claims of the Law.

The religion of the Pharisees intensified, therefore, the racial intolerance of the Jew; it fed the nation's hatred against the Romans and played into the hands of the Zealots, who were constantly pushing the nation toward that disastrous war with Rome which ended with the destruction of the Jewish state.

The way of the Pharisees was the way of devotion toward God divorced from love toward man (that is, toward man as man, all men, Gentile as well as Jew); devotion toward God which emphasized scrupulous attention to religious practices and ceremonial observances, but which in practice obscured or minimized man's responsibility toward

his fellow man. Jesus described their failure (a danger which comes to churchmen in every age and which is in no wise peculiar to the Pharisees) in unforgettable words, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith." (Matthew 23:23.)

There were various programs dangled before the mass of the people when Jesus came into Galilee. In addition there was a common hope, shared by all except the Herodians and the Sadducees, who were satisfied with things as they were. It was the revolutionary hope of a new and divine Jewish Kingdom (the Kingdom of God) to be established by someone (the Messiah) especially anointed by God for that purpose.

The Kingdom of God meant at least two things for the Jews—first and primarily, the reign of God; and second, the blessing of God. First, it meant the reign of God—not the reign of God in heaven, but the reign of God on earth; not the reign of God over individuals merely, but also and basically the reign of God over the nation. As G. F. Moore has made clear: "What the Jew craved for himself was to have a part in the future golden age of the nation, as prophets depicted it. . . . It was only so, not in some blissful lot for his individual self apart, that he could conceive of perfect happiness."<sup>8</sup>

As indicated by this quotation, the Kingdom of God meant for the Jew not only the reign of God but also the divine blessings which individuals and society would enjoy when the reign of God became a fact. A basis for this hope was found in the inspired Scriptures. (Read for example Amos 5:9-14 and Psalm 72.) It was fed by the popular apocalyptic literature which continued to appear

during the Intertestament period. In the 17th of the Psalms of Solomon, written about 50 b.c., we read the following passages:

Behold, O Lord, and raise up for them their king, the son of David,  
Against the time which thou, O God, choosest for him to begin his reign over Israel thy servant.  
And gird him with strength to shatter unrighteous rulers,  
And to purge Jerusalem from Gentiles that trample her down to destruction;  
By (his) wisdom and (his) righteousness to expel sinners from the inheritance;  
To destroy the pride of the sinner as a potter's vessel;  
With a rod of iron to break in pieces all their resources;  
To destroy the lawless Gentiles with the word of his mouth,  
So that, at his threatening, Gentiles shall flee before him;  
And to convict sinners for the thoughts of their heart.  
And he will gather a holy people whom he will lead in righteousness.  
And he will judge the tribes of a people sanctified by the Lord his God.  
And he will not let injustice lodge among them any more.  
Nor shall any wicked-minded man dwell among them.  
For he will know them that they are all sons of their God,  
And he will distribute them by (their) tribes on the land.  
And alien immigrants shall not dwell with them any more;  
He will judge peoples and nations in the wisdom of his righteousness.  
And he will have the Gentile nations to serve him under his yoke;  
And he will glorify the Lord in a place to be seen of all the earth.  
And he will purify Jerusalem with sanctification such as it had of old,  
So that the Gentiles will come from the world's end to see his glory,

Bearing as gifts her sons that had fainted (or wavered in their faith),

And to see the glory of the Lord with which he has glorified her.

And he will be a just and God-instructed king over them; And there is no injustice among them in his days.

For all are holy and their king is the Lord's Messiah . . . Happy are they that shall be born in those days,

To see the good fortune of Israel which God will bring to pass in the gathering together of the tribes;

God hasten his mercy upon Israel,

To deliver us from the uncleanness of unhallowed enemies!"<sup>9</sup>

As indicated in these sources, the blessings which Israel expected to enjoy when the Kingdom of God had become a fact fell into at least five different categories.

First, there were political blessings. The Jews would be freed from the might of Rome, and the Empire of David and Solomon would be re-established. Non-Jews would be subjects or proselyted citizens. "Of a kingdom in any other sense," says Shailer Mathews, "there is no trace, either in the apocalyptic literature or in popular expectations."<sup>10</sup>

Second, there were economic blessings. The fields would bring forth plentifully and there would be abundance of food for all.

Third, there were social blessings. Justice would be established among men; the rich would no longer be able to take advantage of the poor, or the strong of the weak.

Fourth, there were what might be termed international blessings. Nations would beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Every man would be able to sit in safety under his own vine and fig tree. (See Isaiah 2:4; Micah 4:10-14.)

Finally, there were religious blessings. God would write His law upon the hearts of men and all men would come to know God, from the least even unto the greatest. (See Jeremiah 31:33-34.)

All five of these goals would be realized when God's reign was established on earth. Some in Jesus' day emphasized certain of these blessings more than others; but all, singly or together, played their part in the common hope. They were present even in the most pious circles, the circles in which the Christian movement found its cradle. Thus Mary, according to Luke's Gospel, exulted at the prospect of her Son's labors:

He has shown strength with his arm,  
he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their  
hearts,  
he has put down the mighty from their thrones,  
and exalted them of low degree;  
he has filled the hungry with good things,  
and the rich he has sent empty away.  
He has helped his servant Israel,  
in remembrance of his mercy,  
as he spoke to our fathers,  
to Abraham and to his posterity forever. (Luke 1:51-55)

And Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, is said to have prophesied:

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,  
for he has visited and redeemed his people,  
and has raised up a horn of salvation for us  
in the house of his servant David,  
as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,  
that we should be saved from our enemies,  
and from the hand of all who hate us;  
to perform the mercy promised to our fathers,  
and to remember his holy covenant,

the oath which he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us  
that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies,  
might serve him without fear,  
in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of  
our life. (Luke 1:68-75)

These various elements in the common hope are significant, for they all persist in one form or another in our own dreams of the future. Each of us wants his own nation to be free and independent and powerful in the affairs of the world; we want economic prosperity which brings abundance, not simply for the few, but also for the many; we want justice, especially for the poor and the oppressed; we long and we pray for peace on earth, good will among men; and last, but by no means least, we desire a genuine revival of religion which shall write God's law on the hearts of men and which shall give a vital, satisfactory knowledge of God to all men from the least even unto the greatest.

There was a widespread expectation that this new society would be established only with the advent of a divinely commissioned leader. Some, particularly in Galilee, where the influence of the Zealots was strong, expected this "Messiah" to be a military and political leader, especially equipped by God for the work of deliverance through the sword. He would be a mighty conqueror like David, but greater than David, great David's greater Son. Others, particularly in Judea, where apocalyptic hopes were cherished, expected the Coming One to be a pure heavenly being, whom God would supernaturally send in His own time, one like the Son of Man, whom Daniel had predicted would come riding on the clouds of heaven. But all agreed that the chief function of the Deliverer would be the overthrow of the oppressors, the crushing of the un-

godly powers, which held the Chosen People in subjection.

"When we turn our attention . . . to the upheavals which shook the nation and finally brought about its downfall," writes Guignebert, "we recognize that it was the Messianic hope, conceived of either as the immediate assumption of Jahweh of the government of the world, or as the beneficent and blessed rule of a representative of the divine Majesty, which stirred up and sustained them all. . . .

"This line of thought," he continues, "was translated into action by two different forces, the one represented by the Pharisees and the other by the Zealots. Neither of these, doubtless, numbered many adherents, but both of them, the former by means of legalistic observance and the latter by means of open revolt, claimed the attention of the common folk and guided them, each in its own direction, according to circumstances, with varied success. Thus the mass of the population sometimes listened in quiet admiration to the Pharisees, and sometimes sprang to arms at the bidding of the Zealots, and were always ready to lend an ear to a *nabi* foretelling wonders. . . .

"So far as we can judge," he adds, "the leaven of all Palestinian uprisings at the time of Jesus lay in the Messianic hope. . . . The most crushing failures never damped the leaders' ardour. Last time, they said, God's hour had not struck, but every day brought it nearer, and who could tell whether this time it had not arrived? . . . It was rare indeed even for the most paltry pretender to be unable to enlist in his cause some hundred credulous souls, and it only needed a glimmer of success to swell the hundreds into thousands."<sup>11</sup>

This was the situation when "John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." (Mark 1:4.) And it is against this background that we can best understand Jesus' own mes-

sage of the Kingdom, together with the sinister forces which in the end encompassed His death. Some elements in the common hope Jesus accepted; others He rejected. His way was neither the way of force, nor the way of flight, nor the way of compromise, nor the way of devotion to God divorced from devotion to man. It was the way of love to God and man (not some men but all men), a way which began in a manger and ended on a cross.

# I

## The Beginning of Jesus' Ministry

*Mark 1:1-45*

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### 1. THE PREACHING OF JOHN. Mark 1:1-8

MARK points out at the beginning of his Gospel that “John the baptizer” was the inaugurator of the Christian movement, the inaugurator or forerunner foretold by the prophets of old. The older manuscripts, followed by the Revised Standard Version, say, “As it is written in Isaiah the prophet.” As we read the passage, however, we note that there are two prophecies: the first, in verse 2, from Malachi 3:1; the second, in verse 3, from Isaiah 40:3. The prophecy from Malachi was probably inserted by some early editor, influenced perhaps by Matthew 11:10 or Luke 7:27. Later manuscripts sought to avoid confusion by changing the introductory phrase to read “as it is written in the prophets,” and this is the reading adopted by the King James Version.

The message from Malachi in the original reads, “Behold, I send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me.” God is the speaker, and He is not promising to send His messenger to prepare the way for another, but declaring that He is coming Himself to purge His holy temple, and that He is sending a messenger to prepare

the way for Himself. In Mark's Gospel this is adapted to Messianic use by the change of "the way before me" to "thy way," and is applied to the mission of the forerunner to prepare the way for the Messiah. "This Messianic use of a passage having another primary sense is the rule . . . in Messianic prophecy. The principle underlying it is that the Messianic kingdom founded by Jesus is the real culmination of Jewish history, and that its prophecies of near events somehow all point forward also to Him."<sup>1</sup>

The second passage, from Isaiah, had originally the return of the Jews from Babylon in view. It proclaims the glad news of the deliverance and gives the call to have all things ready for God when He brings the people out of exile through the desert to their land. But the Kingdom of God was to have its complete realization in the Messianic Kingdom. So the past national deliverance was taken to point forward to the greater Messianic deliverance, and to the forerunner's summons to the Jews to a spiritual preparation for it.

These ancient prophecies quoted by Mark emphasize the fact that John really did prepare the way for Jesus, or that Jesus' ministry grew out of that of John's. There are a number of indications that John's movement was of greater extent, and that John's personal influence was more enduring than a cursory reading of the Gospels would indicate.

Incidentally Mark tells us a few other facts about the forerunner of the Christian movement. The region in which he preached was the barren, desolate region west of the Dead Sea and south of Jerusalem, "rugged and dreary beyond description; full of bare rocks, rich in hollows . . . full of sandy plains, with scarce a village or even a farmhouse. John did not always continue in the same place. The principal stations mentioned in the New Testament

were near the Jericho ford, near the Bethshean ford, and in a secluded valley not far from Jerusalem.”<sup>2</sup> John’s only garment, a coarse cloth woven of camel’s hair, was the sort of garment that was both inexpensive and serviceable. The girdle, which was needed to keep the loose robe together for purposes of toil or rapid movement, was a skin, like the girdle of rough untanned leather which is still worn by the Bedouin, the poor laborer, and the dervish. The food mentioned is that of the desert, a common diet among the poor in Palestine until recent times. The dress and the food taken together represent the spirit of the man, his contempt of ease and luxury, his revolt against a sinful generation, everything which caused him to dwell apart from men and to condemn their manner of life. As Lenski says, his appearance “was a call to all those who made food and drink, house and raiment their chief concern in life, to turn away from such vanity and to provide far more essential things.”<sup>3</sup>

Mark tells us that “John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” That is, he performed a rite of outward purification (baptism), explaining that it was meant to symbolize an inward purification (repentance) looking to the forgiveness of sins.

Baptism, symbolizing cleansing, was a rite undergone by a proselyte to Judaism, and was, therefore, a familiar one to the Jews. But to insist that the Jews themselves (the whole nation) needed this baptism was a decided affront to Jewish pride and aroused the opposition of the religious leaders.

The repentance for which John called and without which baptism was meaningless, meant not only sorrow for sin, but a change of mind, a new direction for one’s life. Luke tells us (3:11-14) that the people asked him

what he would have them to do. John replied in effect, "Some of you have more clothing than you need, share with those who lack; some have more food than is necessary, distribute to those who are in need." Tax collectors asked what repentance required of them. John answered, "Take no more than the law allows." Soldiers likewise made request of him. John told them to be satisfied with their pay and not to prey on the populace. For John, repentance meant a change of attitude toward one's fellow man; it meant that one would not take advantage of his fellow man and that he would share his goods with those who were in need.

Matthew (3:2) tells us that John came preaching, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." His great purpose, in other words, was to prepare the nation spiritually and ethically for the advent of the Kingdom, which he insisted was just around the corner and might come at any moment.

Such an announcement always drew its crowds, as witness the movements inaugurated by Judas of Galilee, Theudas, Bar Cochba, and others. The bulk of the crowd came to hear John, we may suppose, because of their hope of deliverance from the Romans, the wrathful destruction of their enemies, the dominance of a triumphant Palestine in that new world which the prophet was said to be announcing. The Pharisees and Sadducees scoffed at his message (Mark 11:27-33), and the bulk of the people turned away from his stern ethical demands (Matthew 11:7-19), but large numbers were baptized, believing with John that even now the ax was laid to the root of the trees (Matthew 3:10).

John also proclaimed the coming of the Messiah. This is the real point of the story so far as Mark is concerned. We read in the other Gospels how the people began to

wonder if John himself were not the promised Deliverer, and the leaders of the nation, on the alert for any movement that might bring down upon them the wrath of the Romans, questioned him regarding his claims. John denied that he was the Messiah, but he proclaimed (rather than preached) over and over again that the Messiah would soon appear. So great is this Coming One, said John, that I am not worthy to stoop down and perform for Him the most menial service.

The reason why this Coming One is mightier than John is given in verse 8: "I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." As Dr. E. P. Gould puts it: "The contrast between the work of the Baptist, and that of the Messiah, amounts to this, that the mightier one who is to follow John will do the real work of which the Baptist is able to perform only the sign. Water cleanses only the body and represents figuratively the inward cleansing of the man. But the Holy Spirit is the element in which man is cleansed inwardly and really, and it is this real baptism which the coming one was to perform."<sup>4</sup> To put it in other words, John realized that the Coming One would be able to impart a dynamic moral power, a divine energy, that would burn out the evil in their natures and produce genuine holiness of life. He urged men to cease exploiting their fellow men and to share their possessions with those who were in need. But his preaching, he realized, did not effect the radical change in men's characters that was essential. The Messiah, he predicted, would transform men's lives and give them the desire and the power to measure up to this ideal. Then and not till then would the Kingdom come.

## 2. THE BAPTISM OF JESUS. Mark 1:9-11

News of the great revival spread to Nazareth, fifty miles to the north. Jesus laid down His carpenter's tools, came, listened to the great prophet, and was baptized by him in the Jordan.

Some have wondered why Jesus, who had no consciousness of sin, should have submitted Himself to this symbolic rite. But there were other reasons which made it both wise and desirable. For one thing it was a public endorsement of the vital religious movement inaugurated by John, and an open acknowledgment that the nation with which He was identified needed to turn to God with new penitence and faith. It was also a personal dedication of His own life to the service of God and to the propagation of His reign among men. Jesus was conscious at all times of His fellowship with the Father, but there were times when His religious experience was unusually profound. Such was the case here. As He came out of the water "he saw the heavens opened and the Spirit descending upon him like a dove." These words describe a vision seen, Mark's words suggest, only by Jesus Himself, or a unique religious experience whose meaning Mark could express only in symbols natural to the times.

"He saw the heavens opened." The Jews believed in a plurality of heavens, in the last and highest of which dwelt the Most High, inaccessible and alone. The opening heavens on this occasion suggests the intimacy of Jesus' communion with the Father, the clear insight He had into God's character and will.

"And the Spirit descending upon him like a dove." Familiar pictures represent this scene literally. Dr. Bartlett suggests that we may best understand this picturesque

account of what Jesus saw by comparison with His words on a somewhat similar occasion recorded in Luke 10:18. There on the return of the Seventy from successful work for the Kingdom, Jesus exclaimed, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." Such language there cannot be taken literally, nor should it be here. In Rabbinic literature, the dove is sometimes used as a symbol for the Spirit of God. And that is the meaning here. The dove symbolizes the fact that God's Spirit did really descend upon Jesus. The Spirit took possession of His life from this time and onward, equipping Him for the work to which He was called. This for Mark was the real significance of Jesus' baptism. The evangelist had already indicated that the real baptism, of which that with water is only the sign, is a baptism with the Holy Spirit. Here he points out that Jesus' active ministry began with the descent of the Holy Spirit, that His was a Spirit-empowered life. So Peter later summarized his Master's life: "You know . . . how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him." (Acts 10:38.)

"And a voice came from heaven, 'Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased.' " The language used here is reminiscent of Psalm 2:7 (a Messianic Psalm) and of Isaiah 42:1, which describes the "Servant" of the Lord as one in whom the Lord "delights." The picture of God's Servant which begins here is completed in the familiar 53rd chapter, describing the Suffering Servant, and in 61:1-3, the passage quoted by Jesus in His sermon in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-20). This was apparently a favorite section of Scripture with Jesus. Perhaps He had been thinking of His career in the light of the prophet's picture of the Servant of the Lord. As He came up from the water, God's

voice sounded clearly in His mind. He knew that He was God's Son, the Servant in whom He delights.

Some think that Jesus, here, first became fully conscious of His Messiahship, or that the dawning consciousness of being the people's Messiah here reached its climax. Others feel that He was aware of His unique relationship to God from early boyhood (see Luke 2:49) and that the Voice merely called Him to begin His Messianic work. Mark's emphasis is upon the divine attestation to the fact that Jesus is God's only begotten Son.

### 3. THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS. Mark 1:12-13

Mark's account of the temptation is more abbreviated than that of either Matthew or Luke. He does not give us even a hint as to the nature of the temptations. We know from the other Gospels that they revolved about the use Jesus was to make of His Messianic powers, or the way in which He was to conduct His Messianic program. But Mark mentions only the fact of the temptation, the place, the duration, the wild beasts, and the ministering angels. As A. B. Bruce has said, "These few touches of Mark suggest a vivid picture of a spiritual crisis: intense preoccupation, instinctive retreat into congenial grim solitudes, temptation, struggle, fierce and protracted, issuing in weakness, calling for preternatural aid."<sup>5</sup>

Mark's real interest in the event seems to be in the occasion of Jesus' departure into the wilderness. "Immediately" after His baptism, with its assurance that He was the Son of God, "the Spirit . . . drove him out. . ." Mark is trying to describe the urgency of the spiritual impulse which prompted Jesus to seek in solitary communion light and guidance for the part whereto He had been called. John had prophesied that the Messiah would baptize with the Holy Spirit. As Jesus came up from the Jordan, the Spirit

had descended upon Him, and now it is the Spirit who drove Him out. Henceforth in a new and special sense Jesus was under the control of the Spirit.

The mention of the wild animals accentuates the loneliness of the place. It was not such a wilderness as John habituated, but a haunt of the hyena, jackal, and leopard. Here, in absolute solitude, alone with God, Jesus thought out the problems connected with His call. Or it may be that the wild beasts were mentioned by Mark to emphasize the fierceness of the temptations which assailed Him. Satan, we can be sure, appeared to Jesus not in any outward form, but inwardly. The word "angel" means messenger and is used in the Bible sometimes for the human agents who carry out God's will, sometimes for natural forces which God uses for His providential government of the universe (see Psalm 104:4—"who makest the winds thy messengers"—literally, "thy angels"; compare Hebrews 1:7), and sometimes for supernatural visitants. Here the "angels" that ministered to Him may refer to the human hands that brought Him sustenance, or they may, and more likely, symbolize that inward peace and strength which came to Him at the end of His prolonged spiritual struggle, as He came into a clear understanding of His Father's will for His further career.

Does the Spirit lead, much less drive, us into temptation? "In a sense," says Dr. Snowden, "He does; He does not lead us into temptation in the sense that He solicits us to do evil, but it is often necessary in our line of duty that we be subjected to temptation, and God's providence guides or permits us to enter into it, and we may be divinely led into temptation in the sense of trial [which is the real meaning of the Greek term], as also being in our line of duty and needful as a spiritual education for the strengthening of our character."<sup>6</sup>

May a good man be tempted as severely as a bad man? Of course he may. The most difficult ethical choices that we are forced to make are not the choices between good and evil, but the choice between two alternatives both of which are evil, or between two good alternatives, one of which is better than the other. Jesus was tempted to choose a lesser good, to seek a desirable end by ways which God could not approve. And these are the most dangerous temptations for most of us. We face such temptation every time we confront a new responsibility, or a new opportunity that calls for a choice between alternatives, or for the adoption of a new policy. It is inescapable, involved in life itself.

#### 4. THE OPENING OF JESUS' MINISTRY IN GALILEE. Mark 1:14-15

Mark indicates the time and the place and summarizes – the message. First, the time. It was just after John's arrest by Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee. John had publicly criticized him for living with Herodias, his brother Philip's wife. Herod in a rage cast him into prison and later beheaded him at the instigation of Salome, the daughter of Herodias. (Mark 6:17-29.)

Second, the place. "After John was arrested, Jesus came – into Galilee." According to the Johannine tradition, Jesus had been preaching for some months in Judea. The growing jealousy of the Pharisees rendered His longer stay there dangerous or unprofitable. (John 4:1.) When John's ministry in Galilee was summarily checked, Jesus came here to carry on His mission. As Lietzmann says: "Galilee was surrounded by pagan districts, separated by Samaria from the Judaistic center of religion, and penetrated with foreign elements. Hence it had no understanding of Pharisaic strictness. In this region, therefore, a hearing could be

found for a message which said that the Kingdom of God was open to the pagan or half-pagan taxgatherers, the despised sinners, the poor and the pitiable, but closed to the Pharisees with their display of righteous correctness, and to the rich givers of charity.”<sup>7</sup>

Third, the message. Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel.” This is Mark’s summary of Jesus’ original message, the basic and fundamental proclamation which was the foundation of His ministry.

He preached “the gospel of God.” So it reads in the Revised Standard Version, though the King James reading, “the gospel of the kingdom of God,” is also found in some of the early Greek manuscripts and is preferred by some scholars. The word “gospel” as used by Mark means “Good News,” so that the verse might be translated, “Jesus came into Galilee preaching good news *from God*” or, as others prefer, “Jesus came into Galilee preaching good news *about God*.” Certainly it was both. Jesus was confident that His message came to Him from God; to those who heard Him it was also good news, fresh and stirring news about God.

This good news about God contained many elements which we cannot now discuss, but at the heart of it was the idea that God is our Father. The Jews believed that God was their Father, but for all practical purposes He was the Father only of the Jews. The Pharisees believed that God was their Father, but acted as though He were Father only of those who observed the Mosaic Law. “But this crowd, who do not know the law,” they said, “are accursed.” (John 7:49.) Jesus taught that God is the Father of all men. And this doctrine of the Fatherhood of God carried with it a corollary, the brotherhood of man. Jesus

did not teach that all men actually lived as sons of God; some were, in effect, sons of the Devil (John 8:44); but even they were prodigal sons, who might any day come to themselves and say, "I will arise and go to my Father." Jesus did not indicate that all men were actually brothers, but that all men were potentially brothers, and would become brothers in fact when they learned to know and to do the Father's will.

Jesus came proclaiming good news about God and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand."

When John the Baptist said, "The kingdom of God is at hand," he meant, quite evidently, that the Kingdom was drawing near and might come now at any time. Many scholars think that Jesus had the same general idea. Moffatt translates Jesus' phrase as "The time has now come, God's reign is near," and Goodspeed's translation is similar. But Jesus, in the light of His subsequent teaching, seems to have meant something more, that the Kingdom of God is here now, at this very moment, in His person and work and wherever men accept God's reign over their lives through Him. He meant, as the Sermon on the Mount suggests, that the blessings of God are available for individuals and for society in so far as they accept God's will as revealed through Him. For the people generally, the Kingdom was future and would be manifest in the political structure of Israel. For Jesus it was present and was manifest in the hearts and lives of individual men and women who believed in the good news of the Kingdom. (Cf. Luke 17:21.)

Of course there is a sense in which the Kingdom of God will come in the future. Jesus taught His disciples to pray for its consummation, the time when God's reign would become absolute in all the earth. Nevertheless

Jesus' fundamental and basic message was that the Kingdom is here, now, in Him and wherever men learn to live trustfully and obediently as God's children.

To enter the Kingdom, to enjoy its benefits, and to extend its blessings to others, Jesus declared that men must repent and believe in the good news.

Repentance, as we have seen, means more than sorrow for sin. There can be no repentance without sorrow for misused opportunities, for the good that we have left undone, and for the wrong we have done to ourselves, to our neighbors, and to God. But the Greek word translated "repent" goes deeper than that; it means to change one's mind, to change one's attitude toward life, to change one's way of living. To repent, as Jesus used the term, meant to turn away from the world and to turn toward God; to turn away from one's self as the supreme objective in life and to seek first God's Kingdom and His righteousness.

If we are to enter the Kingdom and share in its blessings we must repent and believe in the good news. What good news? It came to include other elements, essential elements regarding Jesus' death, vital elements regarding Jesus' person, but the good news was based on the fact that God is the Father of all men everywhere, and that the blessings of God are available for all men in so far as they accept God's will as revealed through Him.

To believe in the good news means to live each day as though God were our Father, to trust Him when the way is dark, to seek first His reign and His righteousness. It means to live each day as though all men are now or may become brothers in Christ. It means to live knowing that God's blessings are available now for men whose lives are fully surrendered to Him through Jesus Christ.

Men are looking today for the golden age, when we shall have prosperity and justice and peace and brotherhood

and genuine fellowship with God. Some men postpone their hopes to another world. Some scan the heavens and search the pages of Scripture for times and seasons which Jesus said it was not for us to know. (Acts 1:7.) Other men are looking for some leader, some panacea that will deliver us from our present evil situation. We need wise men who can lead us at least in the direction of the promised land. We should not underestimate the importance of political and economic measures constantly being debated. But Christians must not forget or allow others to forget this fundamental message of Jesus, that the Kingdom of God exists wherever men accept God's reign, and that the blessings of God are available for individuals and for society in so far as they accept God's love as manifest in Him, and God's will as revealed in Him.

##### 5. THE CALL OF THE FIRST DISCIPLES. Mark 1:16-20

Jesus realized that He must gather around Him those whom He could train for the great task of persuading men to enter the Kingdom. The call of the first four disciples as told by Mark seems abrupt, almost inexplicable. If we had no other information, we would be forced to assume that Peter and Andrew, James and John had some previous acquaintance with Jesus, and that He was here only calling them to a definite decision. The story in John (1:35ff.) tells us that this was indeed the case. John the Baptist had pointed them to Jesus and they had spent some time in His company. Probably they slipped off from their work from time to time after that first meeting that they might be with Jesus, but they continued to give most of their time to the business on which they depended for their livelihood. Mark tells us how Jesus called them to a closer and more exacting discipleship.

Simon and Andrew were wading on the beach and casting their net before them into the sea. Jesus came by and said quietly, "Follow me and I will make you become fishers of men." He was inviting them to follow Him as His disciples in accordance with the custom of the day, to attend Him, not sporadically as hitherto, but constantly. Give up your business, He said to them, and follow me, and I will make you to become (implying a gradual process of training) fishers of men. The primary task of these men was not to study, nor even to teach (as was the case with the disciples of the ordinary rabbi), but to save men; to bring them into the Kingdom. Jesus' own teaching was only a means toward that end.

"Immediately," says Mark, "they left their nets and followed him." And going on a little farther, He saw James and John in their boat, some distance from the shore. "And immediately he called them." H. D. A. Major holds that "This fine distinction between speaking and hailing [as indicated more clearly in the Greek original, verses 17 and 20], and the difference in the fishing operations of the two pairs of brothers suggest actual recollection [the mark of an eyewitness]."<sup>8</sup> These small details had impressed themselves upon Peter's memory and are reflected in his story, as it comes to us through Mark. "And they left their father Zebedee in the boat"—not alone, Mark is careful to indicate; the older man had hired servants to assist him in carrying on his work—"and followed him."

These four men were the first of a long line that has continued down to the present day, men drawn by Jesus' vision of the Kingdom, impelled by His clear and commanding personality, to become fishers of men. Jesus still calls men, some to leave their occupation or to abandon their own plans and careers, but more to serve Him in and through their present occupations.

"Jesus calls us from the worship  
Of the vain world's golden store,  
From each idol that would keep us,  
Saying, 'Christian, love Me more.' "<sup>9</sup>

But this is not all. The Kingdom of God is at hand. But men must enter the Kingdom one by one, and they will not enter unless there are those to persuade them. And so Jesus invites us all, in one way or another, to become fishers of men.

"Jesus calls us: by Thy mercies,  
Saviour, may we hear Thy call,  
Give our hearts to Thine obedience,  
Serve and love Thee best of all."

## 6. A BUSY SABBATH IN CAPERNAUM. Mark 1:21-34

According to the Jewish historian, Josephus, Galilee possessed altogether 204 towns and cities, although it was only fifty miles in length and about thirty in breadth. Its life centered about the beautiful Sea of Galilee, which is thirteen miles long and eight miles wide. Its waters are supplied by the Jordan and are delightfully fresh and abound in fish. In the time of Jesus there were about its shores at least nine flourishing towns. One of these was Capernaum, situated somewhere at the northern end of the lake.

Jesus came to this city shortly after arriving in Galilee, stopping in the home of Simon Peter. Mark tells us how He spent His first Sabbath in this city, either because it was a typical day in Jesus' ministry, or because it marked the beginning of His extreme popularity among the people.

In the morning Jesus went to the synagogue, in accordance with His regular custom. (Luke 4:16.) The synagogue worship, from which our Christian worship has

been derived, included prayer, reading of Scripture, and exposition by any rabbi or any other male Jew invited to speak by the ruler of the synagogue. It was customary to extend such an invitation to any visiting speaker. The synagogues became in this way one of Jesus' chief means of obtaining access to the people. They remained open to Him until after His clash with the religious leaders, after which He was forced to speak in the open air.

Mark does not tell us what Jesus said on this particular day, but he does point out the effect it had on the people. "They were astonished," the King James Version says, "at his doctrine." The Revised Standard Version puts it better, "They were astonished at his teaching." It was not what He said in this instance that astonished them, but the way in which He said it: "for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes." The scribes or rabbis were professional teachers of the Old Testament Scriptures. Their method was that of continual appeal to external authority, to the words of some great rabbi, or to generally accepted tradition. But Jesus "spoke with the tone of certitude, with the note of an inherent authority, as one who had knowledge in himself and a message direct from God."<sup>10</sup> It came to the people with an authority of its own, the authority of truth, which amazed them. But Jesus' teaching was interrupted, and the interruption brings Him before us for the first time as a healer.

One of the worshipers in the synagogue was a man with an unclean spirit. "Unclean spirit" and "demon" are interchangeable terms in the New Testament, the former being the word commonly used by Mark. "According to the views of the ancient Jews, and of other peoples of the Hellenistic area as well, the world was filled with myraids of disembodied spirits or demons, all under the leadership

of a Prince of Evil (cf. Eph. 2:2; 1 Cor. 5:5; Jn. 12:31, etc.). There were several explanations current concerning the origin of these spirits, but as to their constant presence and malicious activity there was general agreement. . . . These demons were unbelievably numerous—seven and a half million, says one authority. . . . They lived mostly in the wilderness, where their howling at times could be heard—around ruined structures or in unclean places like cemeteries. They could enter into human bodies and work all sorts of harm. They caused plagues and calamities, caused diseases and accidents, and tempted men to sin.”<sup>11</sup>

The possessed individual in the story before us shows symptoms which would probably be diagnosed today as one of the several forms of hysteria. “Under the influence of Jesus’ personality and of the mass psychology of the crowd in the synagogue he cried out, acclaiming Jesus as God’s holy One who had come to destroy all evil spirits.”<sup>12</sup> Jesus turned and rebuked the unclean spirit, who tore the man with a violent spasm and came out of him with a loud cry.

The amazement of the people first aroused by Jesus’ method of teaching was increased. Moffatt translates verse 27: “It’s new teaching with authority behind it!”<sup>13</sup> “Exorcism was practised among the Jews (cf. Matt. 12:27; Acts 19:13); but usually by the magical use of sacred formulas of incantation, not by direct personal command in which the speaker’s own personality was a factor of moral power. Here was one who used no such labored arts, but simply spoke and it was done: ‘He cast out the demon with a word.’ (Matt. 8:16.)”<sup>14</sup> Mark adds that the report of the incident spread throughout all the region of Galilee. The word “immediately” (K.J.V.) or “at once” (R.S.V.) suggests the lightning speed with which the news traveled;

"everywhere" means in every direction. Probably this was the first cure of its kind that Jesus had performed, and it laid the basis for His fame as a healer.

Jesus returned from the synagogue to the home of His host, accompanied by James and John. It seems that Peter's mother-in-law was sick at the time with a fever, probably malaria, a common malady throughout the region, one which burns the body and saps the strength. They told Jesus about it, not necessarily expecting Him to heal her, but to account for her absence, or as one naturally tells a friend of family trouble. Jesus went up into her room, took her feverish hand in His, raised her up, and the fever fled at His touch. In this case there was nothing of the lassitude of ordinary convalescence. So immediate and complete was the cure that she was able at once to go about her ordinary domestic duties, such as helping to spread the board for the company.

News of what had happened in the synagogue and after that in Peter's home spread through Capernaum. It was not a modern city, only a village, seemingly with one synagogue. It was against the law to heal on the Sabbath day, but the Jewish Sabbath ended at sunset. As soon as it was proper, therefore, the whole town seemed to be gathered about Peter's door. They had brought with them all in the neighborhood that were sick or that were possessed with demons. "And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons"—so Mark wrote in the earliest of the four Gospels. Matthew, working over Mark's materials at a later date, recognized that this statement might be understood to mean that there were some whom He could not help. To avoid this misunderstanding, Matthew says, "he cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick." (Matthew 8:16.)

The demons knew Him (to use Mark's phraseology)

either because of their supernatural powers, or because of the fact that "the very absence of normal reflective control over their various native powers often gives the mentally afflicted greater vividness of sensibility in the sphere of instinctive intuitions, even of a moral and spiritual order, than that of the mass of mankind."<sup>15</sup>

Perhaps the demons were voicing as their own convictions questions that were beginning to arise in the popular mind. Jesus did not allow them to speak because rumors that He was the Messiah might spread rapidly and lead to mass uprisings that would invite speedy Roman intervention; and because He did not wish to be regarded as the Messiah before He had clearly set forth His conception of the Kingdom of God and of His own mission, both so different from that of popular expectation.

## 7. THE FIRST TOUR ABOUT GALILEE. Mark 1:35-45

The next morning a great while before day, Jesus arose, went out to a lonely place (as correctly translated in the Revised Standard Version), and there prayed.

Mark may record this incident, as he does others in this section, because it was typical. As Newton Davies writes: "His seeking a place of quiet at dawn may have been a lifelong habit. Successful ministering to men, Jesus realized, could be accomplished only by constant communion with God. To meet the tests and challenges of Jerusalem one must have a Bethany and a Mount of Olives. To live nobly in the living room of life depends on our having an inner chamber whose doors we can close and in whose silence we can hear the words of God by which alone man can live."<sup>16</sup>

Luke makes it clear, however, that Jesus was accustomed to pray at length in the great crises of His life. And it may be that He was praying here because He was facing a

critical choice. Just as He was tempted in the wilderness to use His supernatural powers to turn stones into bread—not for Himself alone, we can be sure, but also for all who were economically distressed—so now, it may be, He was tempted to embark upon the career of a healer. He arose while it was still dark that He might escape the crowds which He knew would gather as soon as it was light. The crowds did gather, and Peter and they that were with him, as soon as they found Jesus (probably they knew His habits), urged Him to return to Capernaum. After such an auspicious start on the day before, it would be foolish in their estimation to remain away.

But, to judge from later analogies, Jesus felt that it was not His message but His miracles that filled all minds there. (See Matthew 11:23; John 6:26.) His reply to their expostulations suggests that He felt that there was a danger that His mission might be regarded as that of a mere wonder worker if He stayed on longer at Capernaum after the events of yesterday. In any case Capernaum had had its chance of responding to the call of the Kingdom. It was time now to go into the next towns, "for that is why I came out"—that is, from Capernaum.

These words suggest that a consuming missionary passion had something to do with His sudden departure. So "he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons."

Matthew mentions three activities—preaching, teaching, and healing. The substance of Jesus' preaching in this opening period of His ministry is summarized in Mark 1:14-15. The most systematic presentation of His teaching is found in the Sermon on the Mount, recorded in Matthew 5—7. (Those who respond to the proclamation of the Kingdom must still be taught the meaning of citizenship in the Kingdom. The importance of this teaching element

is sometimes overlooked by those who write or speak on the Church's mission.) But there was a third characteristic of Jesus' ministry which is also important—the ministry of healing. "He went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons." Jesus' supreme concern for the souls of men did not prevent Him from ministering also to their bodies.

Only one cure is recorded on this trip, which may have lasted for weeks or even for months. The cure of the leper is described, either because it was the first of its kind or, more likely, because of its results.

Leprosy proper was at that time an incurable disease, but the Bible word covers various diseases of the skin, some of which were curable. Persons suffering from leprosy in any of its forms were forbidden to come within six feet of a person who was not infected. If they put their heads into a house it became unclean. If anyone approached they were to give warning of their condition by crying, "Unclean, unclean." If they broke beyond bounds, the populace sometimes stoned them.

This leper, however, ignoring the law, fell at Jesus' feet (a posture not of worship but of strong entreaty) and besought Him to heal him. He had heard of other cures effected by Jesus and did not doubt that Jesus had power to cure his own malady. He was not certain, however, of His willingness to do so. "If you will, you can make me clean." We cannot help but wonder what distressing experiences this man had undergone, what rebuffs he had met, that he was so uncertain of his reception. It may be not brutality that he had met, but only indifference and lack of concern. As someone has suggested, lepers were so common in Palestine that probably those who encountered them had lost the capacity of feeling sorry for them, and never thought of doing anything for their relief or com-

fort. This leper had lost confidence in men's inherent kindness.

Jesus, we are told, was filled with compassion as He looked upon the victim of this loathsome disease. In spite of the strict requirements of the Mosaic Law, Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him. "The man kneeling there had felt no touch of a hand for years . . . the very kisses of his own children and his wife's embrace of love were denied him. And now Jesus puts out His hand, and . . . gives assurance of His sympathy and His brotherhood, as He lays His pure fingers upon the rotting ulcers."<sup>17</sup> That touch must have done something to the man's spirit which cannot be put in words; more, it may be, than the cure itself, it would help to restore his shattered faith in human nature. And it throws a flood of light on Jesus' attitude toward suffering humanity. It was not necessary to touch this man so loathsome to the sight, so revolting to the touch. It was an act of spontaneous sympathy and love, a love that went out even to the unlovely, a sympathy that was extended to all men who were in need. As Matthew says: "He took our infirmities and bore our diseases." (Matthew 8:17.) He bore them first upon His own mind and heart, and then He bore them away.

At Jesus' words the man's flesh became as pure as that of a little child. The further directions of Jesus to the man are intended to prevent His own work being hindered by giving too great publicity to the cure; to support the hygienic measures of the religious authorities in their endeavor to prevent the spread of this terrible disease; and to guarantee the man full and official reinstatement in the community. According to the law, if a leper had any reason to suppose himself cured, he must submit himself to the priest for inspection. If he was pronounced clean, he must go through a ritual of purification and offer prescribed

sacrifices, after which he was free to return to normal life.

The man's disobedience is easily understood. He was moved with gratitude and thought no doubt that he was rendering Jesus a service. But the ensuing notoriety spoiled the plan of Jesus to preach in the towns and forced Him to retire into the less populous areas.

The Synoptic Gospels make it plain that Jesus' great popularity arose primarily from His fame as a healer. In addition to the individual cures, there are such passages as the following: "And when they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret, and moored to the shore. And when they got out of the boat, immediately the people recognized him, and ran about the whole neighborhood and began to bring sick people on their pallets to any place where they heard he was. And wherever he came, in villages, cities, or country, they laid the sick in the market places, and besought him that they might touch even the fringe of his garment; and as many as touched it were made well." (Mark 6:53-56.)

There can be no doubt but that a large part of Jesus' time was spent in healing the sick—that it was a vital part of His ministry. The question inevitably rises—why? Some suggest that it was a sign of His divine credentials. But this could hardly be the case, for Jesus consistently forbade those who had been healed to bear witness of Him and declined to give signs to those who asked.

We are driven to the conclusion that Jesus healed the sick because of His intense human sympathy, because He had the power and could not remain indifferent to the cry of human need. As Reginald J. Barker says: "It is clear that in the mind of Jesus the conquest of disease is part of the Divine Purpose."<sup>18</sup> Or as Dr. Cairns puts it: "It is perfectly clear that He gloried in the work of healing the bodies as well as the souls of men, and that He regarded

the overthrow of disease as an essential part of His mission and of His manifestation of the Kingdom.”<sup>19</sup>

It would be unfair to conclude that this was the chief part of His ministry. Mark 1:38 indicates that Jesus felt that the crucial need of humanity was entrance into the Kingdom of God, those new relations with God and each other which are the foundation of healthy bodily and spiritual life. He steadfastly refused to be dragged away from this larger purpose by men’s immediate physical needs. As Barker says again: “The sick who gathered about Him were largely there for what they could get; they were self-regarding. His pity for them and His compassion are never in doubt, but the crucial need of men was that change of mind, that conquest of all self-regarding egoism, that new life of love to God and men, that Divinely ruled life, which was the real foundation of a healthy community life upon earth. . . . It was what was in Him that He desired to see most of all in them. The recipient may, by the very fact of the gifts, be confirmed in his self-regarding life; and in this matter, as in economic affairs, Jesus saw no ultimate solution along the line of the individual’s absorption in his own needs. ‘All these things’ could only be added to them, if they sought first ‘God’s Kingdom and its justice.’ ”<sup>20</sup>

Nevertheless Jesus was interested in the bodies as well as the souls of men. When His disciples were sent out on their first preaching mission they “anointed with oil many that were sick and healed them.” (6:13.) And throughout history the Church has retained Jesus’ interest in physical healing. In fact, Christianity has been the original inspiration of those medical and surgical services which are one of the proud possessions of the modern world. Lecky has pointed out that the Christians were the first to found hospitals, asylums for lepers, and similar organizations,

and he further declares that such institutions were "altogether unknown to the pagan world." In modern times missionaries have been the first to extend these services to non-Christian lands.

This aspect of Jesus' work is carried on today by physicians, nurses, and social workers. The world has always honored them, not only because of their high calling, but also because of the genuine Christian spirit which so frequently inspires their services. But what does it mean to us who are neither physicians, nurses, or social workers? Are we responsible for the bodies as well as the souls of men? Can we be satisfied so long as adequate medical facilities are not made available to all classes and conditions of men? Should Christians be more concerned today with healing or preventing disease? The late Bishop Gore said, "Jesus certainly meant His Church to be a fellowship of men bent on rebellion against a world of needless suffering." If this is so, there is much for it to do.

## II

### Opposition to Jesus' Ministry

*Mark 2:1—3:6*

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**I**N chapter 2 and the first paragraph of chapter 3 Mark tells us how opposition to Jesus' ministry arose from both the political and the religious leaders of Galilee. He is particularly concerned with the attitude of the religious authorities. Four definite charges, he indicates, were brought against Jesus rather early in His ministry by the representative religious leaders of the time. The first two had to do with His relation to "sinners"; the other two with His relation to the Mosaic Law, the Bible of His day.

#### 1. HE FORGIVES SIN. *Mark 2:1-12*

After Jesus' busy Sabbath in Capernaum and His consequent popularity, He withdrew from the city, as we have seen, in spite of the pressure brought upon Him to remain. He returned with His popularity increased by the cures effected during His tour of the Galilean villages. He went, presumably, to the house of Simon Peter, which seems to have been His "home" in the city. The house opened probably on a courtyard, from which a door led into the street.

When it was noised about that Jesus had returned a crowd quickly gathered, pressed into the house, filled the courtyard, and thronged the entrance from the street.

In the crowd, close to Jesus, Mark tells us, were "some of the scribes."

"These scribes formed an exceedingly powerful organization in the time of Jesus. . . . They were allotted the first seats in the synagogue, the upper places at table were reserved for them, and their dress marked their dignity. Their political importance was great, for it was their instructions which enveloped the whole Jewish life from the cradle to the grave in the precepts of the law, and prevented the nation from amalgamating with Gentiles or submitting to be seduced by the cosmopolitan ideas which the Roman conquerors tried to impart to subject nations. They fulfilled the Mosaic law by multiplying its precepts, and intensifying its minute ceremonial observances . . ."<sup>1</sup>

Luke tells us (5:17) that they were "Pharisees and teachers of the law . . . from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem" itself, who had come on a formal errand of investigation. They were there to find fault, looking for something to criticize.

Mark tells us that Jesus spake the word unto the assembled group. "The word" is used here, as elsewhere, in a technical sense for the good news of the Kingdom of God. Jesus was engaged in this task, speaking simply and informally, when the interruption occurred which aroused the smoldering opposition of the scribes.

The interruption was brought about through the efforts of four men to bring their afflicted friend to Jesus. The man was paralyzed. He was carried on a light pallet or mattress bed, one of his friends being at each corner. It was impossible for them to make their way through a crowd which, intent on hearing Jesus, refused to open a way for them. The four men, however, could not be discouraged.

Houses of the poorer people in Palestine were of but one story with low roofs, and built of a mixture of straw and

mud plastered over a framework of posts and wickerwork. The flat roof, consisting of beams covered with poles and brushwood, and overlaid with earth and gravel, was reached ordinarily by a ladder or a flight of stairs running from the street.

Dr. Maclaren comments: "These four eager faces looked down through the broken roof, when they had succeeded in dropping the bed right at Christ's feet, with a far keener pleasure than if they had just carried Him in by the door. No doubt their act was inconvenient; for, however light the roofing, some rubbish must have come down on the heads of some of the notabilities below. And, no doubt, it was interfering with property as well as with propriety. But here was a sick man, and there was his Healer; and it was their business to get the two together somehow. It was worth risking a good deal to accomplish. The rabbis sitting there might frown at the rude intrusiveness; Peter might object to the damage to his roof; some of the listeners might dislike the interruption to His teaching."<sup>2</sup>

But Jesus, when He saw the faith of the five men (faith in His ability to heal the paralytic, evinced by the energy by which they overcame all obstacles), said to the paralyzed man: "My son, your sins are forgiven." These words make it quite plain that Jesus saw something more in the man than the mere desire to be healed, for to forgive sins is to free one from penalty and to restore one to friendship with God. Disease was popularly supposed by the Jews to be the punishment of sin and the work of demons. "There is no sick man healed of his sickness," said the rabbis, "until all his sins have been forgiven him." Jesus Himself did not accept this theory, which is contrary to the truth of things. It may be, however, that He saw in the face of this pitiful sufferer more than faith that the Healer could cure his malady, some wistful trace of the sense of past sins in

the heart of the sufferer; some acute consciousness of guilt which must be removed before bodily health could be restored. Therefore He began with the spiritual need of the sufferer, which very likely the man himself had most at heart.

In the crowd, however, as already noted, there happened to be a number of scribes. They said nothing aloud, but sat in shocked surprise, inwardly commenting on this daring declaration of the popular teacher. "What does the man mean by talking like this? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins, who but God alone?"<sup>3</sup>

Jesus perceived that they so reasoned within themselves. It was written no doubt on their faces. The word "perceived," however, denotes full knowledge. He was able to read their minds like a book. Therefore He offered to prove that He had authority (this is the meaning of the word rather than "power," as in the King James Version) to forgive sins on earth (in contrast with the authority of God in heaven). "Which is easier," He asks, "to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, take up your pallet and walk'?"

As Amos R. Wells once wrote: "Christ is not speaking of the *acts*, since of course the healing of a sick soul is more difficult than the healing of a sick body; the first has to do with eternal and the second with temporal interests. But Christ is asking which *claim* could more easily be made, made with the least chance of being discovered false if no power lay behind it; and of course the first claim was far easier to make, since no one could prove whether it was substantiated or not. Therefore Christ, having made the first claim, goes on to make the second and more difficult claim, to prove the first."<sup>4</sup>

The cure of the paralytic which Jesus then proceeded to effect, to the great amazement of the crowd, gave "the

doubters objective means of judging for themselves, and so 'knowing' whether He had also Divine authority behind His words when assuring the paralytic that his deeper, spiritual malady was then and there met by the Divine forgiveness of sins."<sup>5</sup> The bed, as indicated, was only a light pallet, which could easily be carried by a man in good health. That the paralytic could do this was a proof of his complete recovery.

Jesus claims that authority to forgive sins was given to the "Son of man." This is the first time this expression has occurred. It seems to have been Jesus' favorite designation of His person. Why did He so describe Himself and what does the phrase mean? It was used in Jesus' time where we would use the general phrase "man." Ezekiel frequently used the title to describe himself as a prophet. (2:1; 3:10, etc.) It is used in Daniel (10:5, 16, 18; 12:6-7) and in the book of Enoch to describe the coming Messiah. The expression as used here then might mean "man" or "I" or "I, as a prophet," or "I, as the Messiah," or "I, as a representative man." Jesus may have used it just because its meaning was indefinite; it would cause them to think. To have called Himself plainly the Messiah would have precipitated a crisis, forcing the people to decide prematurely on His claim. His subsequent use of the term, however, suggests that He used it in the Messianic sense.

Jesus was highly popular at the outset of His ministry. Opposition arose, Mark indicates, when He began to claim a place of particular authority within the Kingdom, and it arose on an issue that was central to His mission—the forgiveness of sin. When Jesus came to eat His last meal with His disciples, He took a cup, saying, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." (Matthew 26:28.) Peter, in the first Christian sermon, said, "Repent, and be baptized

every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins." (Acts 2:38.) In the oldest and best beloved of Christian creeds we affirm: "I believe in God the Father . . . in Jesus Christ His only Son . . . in . . . the Holy Catholic [or universal] Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins . . ." "For sin," says George Hedley, "the Jesus of the Gospels has no tolerance at all. He will not excuse it, condone it, compromise with it, for an instant. Yet for sinners He has all the tolerance in the world . . . In Him we believe in the forgiveness of sins, in the wiping out of the taint of sin from our lives. In Him we believe also in the forgiveness of sinners, in the re-creating of ourselves into newness of living. His name is called Jesus, for He saves His people from their sins."<sup>6</sup>

## 2. HE EATS WITH PUBLICANS AND SINNERS. Mark 2:13-17

Jesus was accustomed to teach the people who crowded around Him on the seashore near Capernaum. As He went from the city to the seashore and back again, He passed by the place of toll, that is, the custom house. On one such occasion He spoke to Levi (called Matthew elsewhere), who was in charge of the toll house, and invited him to follow Him; that is, to give up his business and, according to the custom of the day, to become one of His regular attendants or disciples. Levi complied promptly and gladly. As the story is told by Mark, the decision seems rather sudden, but we can assume that Jesus had seen the man's interest in His teaching, and that the summons only brought to a crisis a decision that was already forming in his mind.

Matthew's job, which was a good one, was to collect taxes perhaps "on all the caravans of 'the great white road,' the 'way of the sea,' that artery of commerce between East and West. He would have to examine the baggage of the travelers arriving by boat, and the produce of the lake brought

in by the fishing smacks, and the produce of the fields brought to market at Capernaum; also the loads brought out from the city by marketers and other buyers. Perhaps he had sold up some fisherman and his family, or some poor peasant. It was an unpleasant business but one must live.”<sup>7</sup>

And yet Levi was not really satisfied. “Down in the depths of his heart he must sometimes have felt a misery which it was difficult to stifle . . . But of late months, on the wide quayside, there had been gathered crowds attracted by the words of one whom they hailed as a new prophet. Matthew would have listened to Him from his seat at the customs, and have become more and more aware of something titanic and original in this teacher and in His burning message. . . . Life might once more be worth living if he could become a disciple of this man. But Jesus of Nazareth would never stop to take notice of Levi the Outcast; the thing was inconceivable. And then the miracle happened and the dream came true: ‘And as Jesus passed forth from thence he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of customs; and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him.’ ”<sup>8</sup>

Shortly after his conversion, Matthew gave a dinner party to which many of his old associates were invited, Jesus being the honored guest. When the scribes of the Pharisaic party, who were the guardians and interpreters of the Sacred Law, saw it they asked Jesus’ disciples, “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?”

Pharisees held that a Jew who observed the Law was defiled if he came into contact with one who did not observe it in the traditional way. They pledged themselves among other things not to be a guest in the home of one who neglected to observe the Law, nor to entertain such a one unless he left his outer garment outside the house.

"Pharisaism thus was endeavoring to separate law-observant Jews from those who were neglectful of the commandments, just as the same spirit had, centuries earlier, separated Jews from pagan Gentiles. In Jesus' day this Pharisaic movement was rapidly becoming the dominant force in orthodox Judaism."<sup>8</sup>

Publicans were tax collectors in the employment of the government, here the government of Herod Antipas, which was supported by the Romans. These officials, under the system then in vogue, had ample opportunities for extortion and oppression, of which they generally took advantage. They were intensely unpopular with all patriotic Jews, who regarded them as traitors, helping to "bleed" their fellow countrymen in the interests of the conqueror; they were ranked with robbers, brigands, ruffians, murderers, and reprobates, whose evidence in courts of law was invalid, and whose money could not be accepted as alms. "Sinners" in the Pharisaic sense were persons who consorted with Gentiles, or were perhaps themselves of Gentile origin (see Galatians 2:15), or simply those who were indifferent to the demands of the Law, and who refused to observe the religious customs of the day. Their modern counterpart might be "non-churchgoers."

The religious people of Jesus' day, with few exceptions, did not believe that the conversion of a publican was possible; they refused to mix with such outcasts and entertained no hope for them. The fact that Jesus called one of their number into His inner circle was bad enough, but to take a meal in Matthew's home, to sit down at the table with other customhouse officers, the riffraff, harlots it may be, and other soiled and wretched outsiders—to put Himself on their level was to put Himself quite outside the pale of the respectable and decent folk of that day. So the Pharisees thought.

Jesus did not share the attitude of intolerance and aloofness that was manifest in the religious leaders of His day. How then did He justify His revolutionary attitude (it was nothing less than that) toward the despised classes of His time? He spoke of Himself as a physician of the soul, who came to minister to those who were sick. He explained that He came to call not the righteous but sinners.

What did Jesus mean by the distinction between sick and sound, righteous and sinners? Did He mean to say that there were any without sin, who did not need His healing message? Of course not. It was first of all an argument *ad hominem*. Taking the Pharisees at their own valuation, they ought to see that His business was with those who were sick of soul. But there is more to His words than that. Jesus cannot help any man who regards himself as righteous. No one is wholly righteous, but there are many who are self-righteous, and until they recognize that they are sick and in need of healing, the Great Physician must pass them by.

- Two further truths stand out from this incident. First, Jesus saw men not just in the lump, but individually, and He refused to regard any class as beyond hope. It was His duty and the duty of all religious men to seek to win back those who had wandered from the Father's love.

Second, to minister to those who were spiritually ill, Jesus ignored the social taboos of His own day. He broke through the rigid social conventions of His time to eat with religious and social outcasts. The "good people" of that day never forgave Him for this disregard of social custom. It was one of the things which occasioned His death.

### 3. HE REFUSES TO FAST. Mark 2:18-22

The third charge against Jesus arose out of His attitude toward fasting. The Law of Moses made compulsory only one fast day, the Day of Atonement. (Leviticus 16:23, 26-34.) The Pharisees, however, were accustomed to fast twice every week, on Mondays and Thursdays. (See Luke 18:12.) And frequent fastings, both public and private, were common, even among those Jews who were not as systematic as the stricter Pharisees. It was regarded as one of the essential marks of a religious man.

Jesus and His disciples, it seems, were not accustomed to fast. The fact became so notorious that some of the disciples of John, in company with the Pharisees, came and asked Jesus for an explanation.

Jesus' answer is divided into two parts. The first suggests that fasting is not appropriate at a time when joy, rather than sorrow, is their ruling feeling. (Mark 2:18-20.) The second suggests that formal observances of this sort are out of harmony with the Gospel.

Jesus explained that His disciples did not fast, first, because it was not appropriate to their mood. It would be just as incongruous as it would be for guests to fast at a wedding (at an Oriental wedding seven whole days were spent in festivity and rejoicing). In this passage, Jesus does not forbid fasting nor does He command it. He simply teaches that if it is to be practiced it should spring from a sense of need rather than from a desire to gain merit with God. "The days will come," Jesus continued, "when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day." He refers here to His death. His disciples will fast in that day, not because it is a binding or meritorious duty in itself, but because it will be the appropriate expression of their feelings.

This explanation throws light not only on the value of fasting, but also on the nature of Jesus. He is often pictured as a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. So He was. But He was not of sorrowful mien, or sad at heart. Else He could not have said that He and His disciples were as happy as guests at a wedding festival.

Jesus explained that His disciples did not fast in accordance with traditional custom, second, because such customs were not in harmony with the Gospel. He illustrated this point by two analogies. In the first He pointed out that new, undressed cloth shrinks and, if used to mend old cloth, is apt to drag away and increase the rent it is meant to cover. The second was equally as forceful. Wine bottles were skins in those days. But skins in time get stiff and crack; and in that condition they are unable to endure the pressure put upon them by newly fermented wine.

By these two figures Jesus suggests that to combine the new spirit of the Gospel with the old forms of Judaism would be as disastrous for the one as for the other. "The old religion attempted to regulate conduct by rules and forms, the new by principles and motives, and these are foreign, the one to the other. It is not fasting to which objection is taken, but fasting according to rule, instead of its inherent principle. As a piece of legalism, or asceticism, in which fasting per se becomes of moral obligation, it is incongruous with the free spirit of Christianity."<sup>10</sup>

#### 4. HE DISREGARDS THE SABBATH. Mark 2:23—3:6

The fourth charge which Mark records was one of the most serious which the Pharisees had to bring against Jesus. Their attitude on the matter is made clear in two incidents, separated in time but brought together by Mark to illustrate his point.

*The First Instance. Mark 2:23-28*

Jesus and His disciples were walking through a grain field on the Sabbath. As they walked, His disciples plucked some of the grain and ate it. Some of the Pharisees who were in the party cried out: "Look at what they are doing on the sabbath! That is not allowed."<sup>11</sup>

As a matter of fact this action of Jesus' disciples ignored no written law touching the Sabbath, but only one of the elaborate rules which the scribes had deduced from the broad principle of the Mosaic Law prohibiting ordinary labor on the day of sacred rest. Altogether the scribes agreed there were 39 principal types of labor which were forbidden, but under each of the major types there was almost an endless number of petty prohibitions. Thus grass was not to be trodden as being akin to harvest work. Shoes with nails were not to be worn, as the nails would be a "burden" and a burden was not to be carried. No fire was to be lighted on the Sabbath. An egg could not be boiled by putting it in a hot kettle nor in sand heated by the sun. A woman could not look into a mirror on the Sabbath day, because she might discover a gray hair in her head and be tempted to pluck it. Plucking grain was likewise wrong because it was a kind of reaping, and rubbing off the husks was a sin because it was a kind of threshing.

"These were 'the traditions of the elders' with which the scribes 'made the commandment of God of none effect.' (Matthew 15:6.) These were the 'heavy burdens and grievous to be borne,' which they laid on men's shoulders," though they themselves resorted to all kinds of subterfuges to evade them. "This is what religion runs into when it keeps the letter and loses the spirit. Such regulations made it impossible to keep the Sabbath and smothered its rest under burdens heavier than daily toil."<sup>12</sup>

When the Pharisees questioned Jesus about His disciples' disregard of such burdensome restrictions, He answered them by an appeal to the Scripture. He reminded them that David had once gone to the Tabernacle and eaten some of the showbread, though his action was contrary to the Law. His great need (he was fleeing from Saul at the time) excused him. The incident is used by Jesus to illustrate the principle governing the observance of the Sabbath as a day of rest and worship. It was intended to benefit men and not to burden them physically and religiously. If the good of men is really furthered by violating some legalistic requirement, then a lesser law is broken in order to keep a higher one. "The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath."

The fourth commandment (Exodus 20:8-11) commands us to keep the Sabbath day holy, and on this day to refrain from all work. In declaring that the Sabbath was made for man, Jesus clearly implies that we are to keep the Sabbath holy for our own good, not because God arbitrarily requires us to worship Him one day in seven; that in like fashion we are to desist from labor on the Sabbath day, not because it is dishonoring to God, but because it is not for the best interests of man. In other words, Jesus suggests that the Sabbath day was given, first, for man's spiritual good and, second, for man's physical good. For our own highest development we need a day of spiritual and physical refreshment or, as we might say, a day of spiritual and physical re-creation. Both of these ends must be taken into account in any proper observance of the day. Anything that unnecessarily prevents the day from ministering to our own spiritual and physical welfare, or from ministering to the spiritual and physical welfare of others, is wrong. Within these limits considerable liberty must be allowed. What may be wrong for one man may not be

wrong for another. We should not insist on traditional observance of the Sabbath merely because it is traditional. As Snowden says, "The Sabbath is a day of rest and gladness, and we must not add to it restrictions until it becomes a burden grievous to be borne."<sup>13</sup>

"The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath." As Luccock points out: "These words, carried to their logical implication, mean that no institution is sacred in itself. People are sacred. Any final authority and sanctity that an institution deserves comes from its service to the wide variety of human need."<sup>14</sup>

The final phrase, "so the Son of man is lord even of the sabbath," is probably Mark's addition to the original saying of Jesus. It is the theological conclusion drawn by him and the early Church from Jesus' attitude toward the Sabbath, in the light of His resurrection from the dead.

### *The Second Instance. Mark 3:1-6*

This incident occurred sometime later, evidently when the freedom of Jesus' treatment of this sacred day had created considerable notoriety, for His enemies were on the watch for a fresh charge against Him.

It happened in the synagogue. A man was there with a withered (i.e., paralyzed) hand. According to tradition, the man was a mason, and it was his right hand, on which he chiefly depended for his livelihood, that was disabled. Mark says Jesus' enemies watched Him. The word implies minute observation, here evidently with hostile intent.

Jesus did not evade the issue, as He might easily have done. Instead He asked the stonemason to stand out where all the congregation could see him. According to the Pharisees' interpretation of the law of Moses it was illegal to heal a man on the Sabbath day unless his life was in danger. But Jesus put the matter in another light. He said:

"Is it lawful on the sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" The question of Jesus disclosed a fundamental truth. Not to do good when the opportunity is present is to do evil. To refuse to save a life is in fact to kill. To this question the Pharisees returned no reply.

Jesus looked around about on them (an expressive phrase used some half-dozen times by Mark, mostly of the quick, searching glance around the circle of His friends or enemies which Peter remembered as characteristic of his Master), with anger mingled with grief. We need not be surprised at the strong emotion felt by Jesus. Anger, someone has said, is one of the sinews of the soul. The man who has lost the capacity for honest indignation at moral wrong is deficient in his own moral character. Jesus grew angry at the wrong done to others; never, so far as we know, at the wrong done to Himself. He was angry on this occasion at the Pharisees' indifference to human suffering, at their insistence that the service of a day is more important than the service of man. But even here His anger was tempered with grief, sorrow, concern for the hardening of their heart (hardening rather than hardness—the former denoting a process, the latter a state of their heart), the stilling of their natural compassion, which served to increase their spiritual obtuseness, their moral blindness.

What was it that thus hardened these men's hearts? It was not money or power or lust, although all these things do serve to harden the hearts of men, but religion. Not true religion, of course; it was only a caricature of real religion, but was their conception of religion. We do not catch the full significance of this incident unless we note this fact. For religion, or at least what passes for religion, does sometimes harden men's hearts today. This is apt to be the case, particularly, when men like the Pharisees identify religion with acceptance of orthodox beliefs or

with the observance of outward forms. Such men, like the Pharisees, do at times become harsh, vindictive, unjust, and bitter toward those whom they regard as unorthodox and impious. It is unfortunate. For in the eyes of the world religious hatred is an unpardonable sin. And Christians who are uncharitable toward their opponents or harsh in their treatment of them, or indifferent to genuine human needs, have done true religion incalculable harm.

The extent to which the Pharisees had hardened their hearts is indicated by the next verse, which tells us that they went out and took counsel with the Herodians how they might destroy Him. We should not be surprised at that. There is no hatred in the world more cruel and more unscrupulous at times than religious hatred. Religious hatred is unscrupulous at times because those who hate believe that their hatred is devoted to the service of God. The end sought, destruction of the one whom God hates, blinds them to the nature of the means which are being used. In a word, the end justifies the means.

"The Pharisees, good men in the main, who as a school of thought had done great service to the cause of religion among the Jews," says C. H. Turner, ". . . had in our Lord's time quite lost the sense of proportion: and the sense of proportion is for theologians of all times and all countries the most valuable thing, and the thing most easily lost. The 'mint and anise and cummin' of the observance of the smallest details of the Law, and of their own interpretations of the Law, had come to mean more to them than the things for which the whole Old Testament stood, 'judgment and mercy and faith.' "<sup>15</sup> And that is the great danger which comes not only to theologians, but to all religious people, in all lands and in all times. It is a subtle sin which creeps upon us before we are aware and against which all of us must be continually on our guard.

"The Pharisees went out, and immediately held counsel with the *Herodians* against him, how to destroy him." We are not told why the Herodians sought to destroy Jesus, but it is easy to guess. They feared the political implications of Jesus' growing popularity with the people. The Jews were seething with hatred and bitterness toward their Roman conquerors. Not a year passed without violence and bloodshed. The nation was drifting steadily toward revolution and war. The men who profited by Herod's rule would move promptly to destroy any man or movement which threatened their privileged position under the Romans. Religious people, as we have observed, are sometimes implacable; but they are not the only ones by any means. Interfere with a man's income, threaten the system which profits him, and he is apt to become unscrupulous and hard. And so the religious leaders, desiring to get rid of a popular leader who was challenging the whole system of Jewish religious and social control, joined hands with the political forces which wished no disturbance of the peace, and together they determined that Jesus must die.

### III

## The Mixed Reception of Jesus' Ministry

*Mark 3:7-35*

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**I**N the third section of his Gospel, Mark pictures the divergent attitudes that began to be taken toward Jesus. We are shown how He was regarded by five different groups: the common people, His disciples, some of His "friends," the leaders of the church, and the members of His own family.

#### 1. THE COMMON PEOPLE. *Mark 3:7-12*

Mark's picture of the attitude of the common people is very vivid. As rendered by Moffatt:

"Jesus retired with his disciples to the sea, and a large number of people from Galilee followed him; also a large number came to him from Judæa, Jerusalem, Idumæa, the other side of the Jordan, and the neighbourhood of Tyre and Sidon, as they had heard of his doings. So he told his disciples to have a small boat ready; it was to prevent him being crushed by the crowd, for he healed so many that all who had complaints were pressing on him to get a touch of him. And when unclean spirits saw him,

they fell down before him, screaming, ‘You are the Son of God!’ But he charged them strictly and severely not to make him known.”<sup>1</sup>

The first thing that strikes us about this story is that Jesus is said to have withdrawn to the sea. The word “withdraw” suggests retirement with a view to avoiding needless friction. The cause for such a retirement is given us in the preceding paragraph. It was to avoid further antagonism of the Pharisees. Or it may be because the synagogues were no longer open to Him. It becomes plain as we read that a new phase in the ministry of Jesus had begun. The synagogue is forsaken, and the open places and the seashore are sought. Just as the evangelical leaders, Whitefield and the Wesleys, were forced out of the Church in England, so Jesus was forced out of the synagogue. From this time on, His ministry is conducted almost altogether in the open air.

We note also that He withdrew with His disciples. Though the Twelve had not yet been chosen, it is plain from this verse that Jesus had a company of disciples, pupils who accompanied Him from place to place; with them we have what may be called the real beginning of the Christian movement.

The opposition of the Pharisees, followed by Jesus’ withdrawal from the synagogues, did not destroy His popularity with the common people. Mark tells us that He had a large popular following in Galilee; then in addition there was a great crowd attracted by His fame from outside Galilee: from Judea and Jerusalem, its capital; from Idumea, south and west of the Dead Sea; from Perea, the territory east of the Jordan; and from the district of Tyre and Sidon, i.e. the Phoenician seacoast to the northwest. The places mentioned include all Palestine, except Samaria, which is significantly omitted, and the adjacent regions, north and south, east and west.

There is no evidence that any large proportion of those who gathered about Jesus were ready to follow His way of life, the way which He set before them in the Sermon on the Mount, for example. The evidence is all otherwise. They came, as Mark indicates, because they had heard "all that he did." His personality, His teaching, His conflict with the Pharisees, His countless acts of kindness and mercy, no doubt played their part. But it was primarily His miracles which attracted them, the cures which He wrought on diseased bodies, the demons which He cast out from distraught minds.

Mark says that "all who had diseases pressed upon him." Literally the words mean "fell" on Him, "a picture in a phrase of the eager, excited impetuosity of the people," which at times was likely to crush Him. They believed that if they but touched Him they would experience His healing power. To avoid this danger, which was at times very real, and also to secure room for addressing the crowds, Jesus ordered a small boat to be in habitual attendance upon Him, that in case of need He might use it to get Himself free from the milling, excited throng.

In the crowd there were many possessed with unclean spirits. Whenever these poor, tormented individuals beheld Jesus they fell down before Him and cried out, or as Moffatt puts it, screamed, "You are the Son of God!" To them and to the crowd this appellation would mean no more than that Jesus was the promised Messiah. Only later, after the resurrection, did it come to mean one who was divine. Jesus invariably charged them not to make Him known. Why? Because as Bengel puts it, "Neither was this the time, nor were these the preachers."

The populace expected the Messiah to deliver them from the power of Rome. Jesus did not wish false hopes to be raised in their mind, hopes which might invite inter-

vention on the part of the government and interfere with the further dissemination of His message.

## 2. DISCIPLES. Mark 3:13-19

In addition to the crowds who were attracted to Jesus by the things which He did, there were many who became His followers and who regarded themselves as His disciples. These disciples, as contrasted with the multitudes, were learners in the school of Christ, men committed in some measure to His way of life. They varied considerably in the strength of their loyalty and attachment. Some, like Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus (John 19:38-39), followed Him secretly for fear of the authorities. Others, like Simon the leper (Mark 14:3) and the owner of the house where the Passover was held (Mark 14:12-16), welcomed Him when He came into their neighborhood.

Luke informs us (8:3) that certain women ministered to Him of their substance. A few men were invited very early in Jesus' ministry to give up their secular occupations and accompany Jesus in His travels. Mark tells us how finally these men and a few others, twelve in all, were solemnly set aside for discipleship of the most intimate sort.

This act, which marks a distinct epoch in Jesus' ministry, was due to contrasted causes: the great popularity of Jesus with the common people and the increasing hostility of the rulers. The first made it necessary for Jesus to have assistants in His work of teaching and healing; the second suggested that the time of His own ministry was limited and that it would be necessary to train a group of men to carry on His work. The fact that He appointed twelve is significant. The old Israel was composed of twelve tribes. Twelve "apostles" might indicate that Jesus intended to found a new Israel to carry on the work of God's Kingdom.

In a very real sense we have here the beginning of the Christian Church.

Luke tells us that the selection took place at break of day, as Jesus came fresh from a night of communion with God. (Luke 6:12-13.) Two selections were made. First, He invited a number of men to leave the vast crowd and to follow Him further back into the hills which border the western side of the sea. Back in the hills, surrounded by a body of disciples, perhaps some scores, He picked out a smaller band of Twelve, whom He then solemnly commissioned.

The purpose of the commission, Mark tells us, was two-fold: (1) that they might be with Him: through constant association with Him they were to learn to know the Good News of the Kingdom of God; (2) that ultimately He might send them forth to preach, i.e. to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom to others and to cast out demons. The world in which Jesus lived was a demon-possessed world. The Gospel in Jesus' hand and in the disciples' hand was not a mere theory, but a practical power. As Dr. James H. Snowden once wrote: "The Gospel is not simply a beautiful theory to be admired when dressed up in fine rhetoric and delivered with eloquence in the pulpit, but it is a revolutionizing and regenerating force. It must heal people and cast out devils, or it is of no use in the world."<sup>2</sup>

The names of the apostles are given in four different lists, in each case the list falling into three groups. There is some slight variation in the names, probably because the men were known under different names. Levi, for example, after his conversion may have taken the name of Matthew.

Some of the men in Mark's list have epithets or surnames (nicknames): for example, Simon, called Peter, or in Aramaic, Cephas, the name by which he was known to

Paul. (I Corinthians 1:12.) It may seem strange that a man so volatile and changeable should have received such a name. Did Jesus give it to him (John 1:42) because He foresaw his staunchness and martyr end; or was it given in the hope that the name would have a steady influence upon him, reminding him constantly of the possibilities that the Master had seen in him? James and John He called "Boanerges," meaning "sons of thunder," it may be in playful raillery because of their hot tempers. It is interesting to observe in this connection that John became in time the great apostle of love. (See I John 4:7-21.) Simon is described as the Canaanite, a word which means zealot, and identifies him as a former member of that nationalistic party, bitterly opposed to the domination of Rome, and committed to an armed revolution. Iscariot following the name of Judas is supposed by some to indicate that Judas was a native of Kerioth, a town in southern Judea. More likely it is intended to link him with the Sicarii, or men of the dagger, the left wing terrorist group within the party of the Zealots. If so, there were two men among Jesus' most immediate entourage who once believed that the Kingdom of God could be ushered in by military victory. They had now begun to glimpse a better way.

The men whom Jesus chose to carry on His work represented various types of character and different grades of ability. Some of them were mediocre, it may be, but not all of them were. When we read this list, with its amazing contrasts, with its Peter and its John, with its Bartholomew, a man of guileless faith (John 1:47 ff.), and its skeptical-minded Thomas, with its Matthew, who had once worn the livery of Rome, and its Simon, who had drawn his sword against it, we know it is true that Christ is willing to receive into His Church, and into His service, men of the most diverse temperaments, qualities, and gifts.

**3. "FRIENDS."** Mark 3:19b-21

Jesus was tremendously popular with the people generally; a small group was passionately devoted to His cause. In addition there were "friends"—old friends of the family, it may be—who had known Jesus since He was a boy.

These friends loved Him and had His interests at heart. But they were puzzled over His strange actions, His engrossment in His work, so absorbing that oftentimes He forgot to eat, His lack of concern over the increasing opposition of the religious leaders of the nation, the reports about Him that were flying over the countryside. He was a little "touched," they concluded—out of His mind. He needed to rest, to get away from the crowds. It was their duty to protect Him from the people and above all from Himself. And so "they went out to seize him."

**4. ENEMIES.** Mark 3:22-30

Jesus' friends thought He was beside Himself: His enemies had a more sinister explanation of His powers. In the crowd that thronged about Jesus there were clergymen who had come down from the metropolis, perhaps at the special request of the local Pharisees. Matthew and Luke tell us that their charge was hurled against Jesus after He had healed a demoniac. They could not deny the fact of the cure. But they attempted to change the attitude of the crowd toward Jesus by insinuating that He was a magician, working by the aid of the prince of the devils; in other words, that He was a dangerous impostor in alliance with Satan, a charge that did not seem utterly absurd when there was a widespread belief in "black magic."

When Jesus heard their whispered charges, He invited them to come within talking distance that He might reason about the matter with them. He then proceeded to refute

their charge, to explain the true secret of His power, and to warn them against a most dangerous sin.

First, He refutes the charge of the Pharisees. (3:23-26.) The point of His two analogies (that of a divided kingdom and that of a divided household) is that, if Satan were in collusion with Jesus and lent Him his power, he would be his own destroyer, for Jesus' whole work is directed against Satan's dominion over the bodies and souls of men. The argument of the Pharisees is, therefore, reduced to an absurdity.

Jesus then points out the real relation to Satan involved in His casting out demons. It reveals conflict with Satan and victory over him. The point is again illustrated by an analogy. No one can enter a strong man's house and spoil his goods, unless he first bind the strong man. (3:27.)

Jesus then passes to a word of warning. All sins (that is, all kinds of sin) will be forgiven, and all blasphemies, "but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin."

Two questions arise here: What is the unpardonable sin; and why will it never be forgiven?

In regard to the unpardonable sin, no explanation has any right to consideration unless it is drawn from the context. Plainly Jesus is warning the Pharisees against a sin which they have almost committed, in that they have confused the workings of the Holy Spirit in Him with the workings of the Devil. If men, religious or otherwise, disparage or deride as evil efforts which are obviously for the good of men and which manifest the power of the Holy Spirit, if they vilify as agents of the Devil men who are in truth instruments of the Spirit, they are in danger of committing the unpardonable sin.

It is unpardonable only because it is a sin for which men will never ask pardon. Jesus' teaching makes it abun-

dantly clear that God is always ready to forgive any penitent sinner. Jesus means to say, then, that one may sin so willfully against the light, against the truth revealed to him by the Holy Spirit, that the time will come when he can no longer distinguish between good and evil, between the Holy Spirit and an unclean spirit, between the works of God and the works of the Devil. Repentance for such a man may become a moral impossibility. Probably we should understand "never" not as absolutely, but as "for all practical purposes."

##### 5. His FAMILY. Mark 3:31-35

One other group Mark tells us was attracted by Jesus. "His mother and his brothers came; and standing outside they sent to him and called him"—acting no doubt at the behest of Jesus' friends, who had come to apprehend Him, as they saw it, for His own good. When Jesus was told of it He said: "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking around on those who sat about Him, He said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother."

Jesus does not mean to repudiate His family. His thoughts went out to His mother even when He was hanging on the cross. But He does mean to say quite clearly that those who seek to do the Father's will are more nearly akin to Him than those who are only kin according to the flesh, particularly if they are out of sympathy with the purposes of God. He does not repudiate family in the ordinary sense, but He broadens the concept of family to include all those who are spiritually kin. His words further indicate that a man's highest loyalty is to God and not to his family, and that if one must choose he must seek first God's Kingdom and His righteousness.

Some men opposed Jesus during the days of His flesh;

others thought He was out of His mind; many were attracted to Him by the things which He did, although they were not ready to follow His way of life; some became disciples; a smaller number He could depend on to spread His gospel; meanwhile there was growing up something new in the world, a Christian family composed of men and women who sought to know and to do the Father's will, men and women who were brothers and sisters of one another because they were brothers and sisters in Christ. Men today are still divided, and after the same pattern.

## IV

### The Future of Jesus' Ministry

*Mark 4:1-34*

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**I**N chapter 3 of Mark's Gospel we have a picture of the mixed reception of Jesus' ministry: the common people heard Him gladly; a small group of men became His disciples; old "friends" began to fear that He had lost His mind; His family apparently was unsympathetic; religious leaders declared that He was in league with the Devil.

In chapter 4 we have a trio of parables interpreting the situation and setting forth the future of Jesus' ministry and the growth of the Kingdom of God.

#### 1. THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER. Mark 4:1-9

It was beside the Sea of Galilee. The crowd was unusually large. In order that He might address them more easily, Jesus entered the little boat (3:9) that was kept ready for Him and pushed out a little on the water.

Then He told them about a farmer who went out to sow his field. Some of the seed which he scattered from his bag fell upon the path which traversed the lot. The seed could not penetrate the trodden soil and naturally was devoured by the birds. Another part of the field was rocky. That is, a rocky ledge came up near the surface and cropped up

here and there through the thin coat of earth, a characteristic feature of many grain fields in Galilee. The nearness of the seed to the surface, its exposure to the sun and the rain, induced rapid growth; it was soon scorched and withered, however, because it had no roots.

Another part of the seed fell upon soil which had not been properly weeded. "The thorns," someone has pointed out, "are the result of bad husbandry: the Oriental farmer will not be at pains to eradicate them: they have been cut down or burnt, but the roots are still in the soil and spring up afresh, impeding the development of the wheat."<sup>1</sup> In the early stages the thorns cannot be distinguished from the wheat. At the last, however, they reveal their true nature and choke the wheat at the very time it should yield its increase.

The rest of the grain, the larger part, one would naturally assume, fell upon fertile soil. It sprang up and bore fruit, some thirty, some sixty, and some a hundredfold.

The point of the parable is that the seed had fortunes corresponding to the soil. In the first case it did not spring up at all; in the second it sprang up, only to quickly wither and die; in the third, it sprang up and grew, but yielded nothing owing to the choking effects of rival growths; in the fourth it came to maturity and to an increase varying in measure according to the different degrees of the soil's softness, depth, and purity. "He who has ears to hear," said Jesus, "let him hear."

Jesus went on to tell other stories, including, it may be, the ones given later on in this chapter. Mark interrupts the flow of events to give us Jesus' reason for adopting the parabolic method and His explanation of the parable of the Sower.

## 2. THE PURPOSE OF PARABLES. Mark 4:10-12

"When he was alone," Mark tells us, "those who were about him with the twelve asked him concerning the parables. And he said to them, 'To you has been given the secret [or 'mystery'] of the kingdom of God . . .'"

The word "mystery" or "secret" was a common term in Jesus' day. "Mystery" religions, spreading over the Graeco-Roman world from the Orient, were for centuries the chief rivals, and very dangerous ones, of the Christian faith. They were religions which admitted their votaries by secret rites, mysterious initiations, associated as a rule with some doctrine of redemption. The word "mystery," then, as used in the New Testament, is not something hard to understand, but something hidden, revealed only to the initiate. Jesus declared that He revealed the secret of the Kingdom of God to His disciples, but spoke in parables to them that were without.

The secret of the Kingdom as set forth in these parables is the secret of its gradual growth. Everyone else believed that the Kingdom would come suddenly, through a military victory, or through divine intervention in the affairs of men. Its arrival would be apparent to everyone, because embodied in the political structure. Jesus on the other hand taught that it comes through the sowing of the truth in the hearts of men and only gradually bears its fruit in the life of the world, like a farmer who sows his fields; like a seed which is lost in the earth and brings forth first the blade, then the ear, and then the full grain in the ear; like a tiny mustard seed which grows in time into a great shrub.

This secret of the gradual growth of the Kingdom, Jesus said, could be given to His disciples. To the rest, however, He thought it best to speak in parables "that they may

indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand; lest they should turn again, and be forgiven."

These words are a little hard to understand at first, but the difficulty disappears when we observe that Jesus was quoting a passage from Isaiah, and that Isaiah was speaking ironically, putting the result as a purpose, as is done so often in the Hebrew. Jesus also was speaking ironically. His whole ministry shows that, and also His further remarks in 4:21-22, where He indicates that whatever truth has come to them must be shared with other men.

C. H. Turner remarks here: "Our Lord of course cannot mean, and there is no reason why a careful exegesis should make Him out to mean, that God intended or desired that the Jewish people should reject the appeal of Jesus. But they had, in fact, proved in the main unresponsive. Their leaders in Galilee had plotted His undoing, and those from Jerusalem had involved themselves in the one irremissible sin. The multitudes were willing to take His benefits, His present wonderful cures, and any prospect of His future leadership of a political upheaval, but they had not shown themselves, apart from a small minority of followers, willing to give anything in return. They must have the chance of hearing God's message . . . But by this time our Lord has the sense of failure already beginning to cast its shadow over Him, and He feels that though they may see outwardly they will not in fact perceive, and though they may hear outwardly, they will not make the effort to understand. After all, had not the prophets foretold it all?"<sup>2</sup>

But though Jesus spoke ironically, as Isaiah had done, He was also serious. He could not give men truth which they resolutely and adamantly refused to accept.

As Bartlett remarks: "Hitherto He had taught in more direct terms, by words like those of the Sermon on the

Mount, or by direct similes which explained themselves. But He had now reached a point in His ministry at which He had to deal with fresh aspects of the Kingdom as He saw it. These were so strange to most Jews, so unlike all their ideas and expectations, that He had to adopt a method of instruction that suggested rather than explicitly declared, so that each might the better perceive that for which he was spiritually ready, and no more. It only gave glimpses and hints, so as to provoke reflection, and gradually make a way in their minds for new truth."<sup>3</sup> The story would be retained by the listener, and the truth might gradually dawn upon his soul.

### 3. EXPLANATION OF THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER. Mark 4:13-25

Having explained why He had adopted the parabolic means of instruction Jesus proceeded to explain the parable itself. It was a parable illustrating the growth of the Kingdom, one which had grown out of His own experience, and which reflected the situation in which He now found Himself. He was the sower, though others after Him are sowers also. The divine message which He brought to men was the seed, from which the Kingdom would come in the hearts of men and in the life of the world. The minds of men are like the different types of soil.

Some are like the roadway or path running through the field. Their hearts are shut to the Gospel, and the message of Jesus can find no entrance. As Maclaren says: "It never gets deeper than their ears, or, at the most, effects a shallow lodgment on the surface of their minds. So many feet pass along the path, and beat it into hardness, that the truth has no chance to take root."<sup>4</sup> The figure of the road also typifies the character that has lost all sensitiveness and sympathy with spiritual things. All the influences that

work against religious truth and steal it out of men's hearts are the servants of Satan, doing his work.

Other men offer a superficial soil for the Gospel. They are attracted by the pleasant things and do not stop to count the pains and oppositions that constitute the other side of the Kingdom in this evil world. The Word takes no real root in their lives, and as soon as opposition or difficulties arise, they fall away.

The minds of other men can be compared to thorny ground. The seed takes root and grows but produces little or no fruit because other interests crowd it out. Rival growths which absorb the attention and choke the Word, says Jesus, are "the cares of the world, and the delight in riches, and the desire for other things." The cares of this world may be legitimate ones, good things in themselves, even necessary things—the care of home and family, the care of one's business, for example—but they so monopolize the life that the finer growths cannot develop. Delight in riches has always constituted a danger to the religious life. And it can infect those who merely want riches, as well as those who have them. The "desire for other things" is a general term, including all the pleasures of life. Many of them are neutral or good in themselves. But men sometimes devote themselves so exclusively to them that they choke the Word. Others are essentially evil. The phrase may also refer to sensual vices. Nothing chokes the Word more quickly.

There are some minds, however, which Jesus can compare to good ground. They receive the Word and allow it to bear its proper fruit in character and service, in smaller or larger measure, according to their capacity or consecration. Capacity or consecration! Jesus may mean that some bear more fruit than others because their capacity is greater. But He may also mean, and probably does, that in many

lives the seed bears only a fraction of what it might bear because the truth is only partially assimilated. Some men are thirty per cent Christians, producing only a fraction of what they might if only they were fully surrendered; others are producing up to sixty per cent of their capacity; a few, a very few, allow the Word to bear its full fruit in their lives.

The parable is not intended to be pessimistic, as some think, but realistic. It reflects the facts of life. The Kingdom comes through the sowing of the Word in the hearts of men. Much of the seed is wasted, but some of it bears fruit, thirty, sixty, or even a hundredfold.

Our duty is first to sow the seed, or, changing the figure as Jesus does in 4:21-22, to let the truth shine like light in the darkness. "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God," Jesus had said as He began to explain the parable to them, and now He goes on to tell them that privilege carries with it responsibility. If their insight into great truths was greater than that of the multitude, theirs was the responsibility of making use of it for the common benefit.

"Is a lamp," he asks, "brought in to be put under a bushel, or under a bed, and not on a stand?" This saying brings before us the picture of a humble Eastern home, with four essential articles of furniture: a lamp, a flat saucer with a wick swimming in oil; a bushel, or measure for grain, which could be turned upside down and used as a table; a bed, raised slightly, but sufficiently to admit of a flat vessel's being put under it without danger, if for any reason it were desired to shade the light; and a lamp stand, perhaps a stone projection from the wall.

The saying of Jesus appeals to common sense. A man does not light a lamp and then smother it; he puts it rather on the stand where it may be visible. This was part of the

nightly routine of every Jewish home. To Jesus it mirrored a larger truth. "There is nothing hid, except to be made manifest; nor is anything secret, except to come to light." Whatever truth had come to them that was hidden from the people as a whole must in due time be shared with all. This was the duty not only of the Twelve but of all Jesus' disciples. "If any man has ears to hear," Jesus said, "let him hear."

It is also our duty to receive the Word. "If any man has ears to hear, let him hear. And he said to them, 'Take heed what you hear.'" Luke, in the corresponding passage (8:18), has "take heed how you hear." The original Aramaic, spoken by Jesus, could mean one or the other, or both. We must take heed what we hear, for much of the seed that is sown is not the seed of the Kingdom, and if it is received into our hearts and minds it will produce an evil crop. (See Matthew 13:24-25.) We must also take heed how we hear, or else the good seed that is sown will not produce its proper fruit. The wayside hearer, the rocky ground hearer, and the thorny ground hearer heard, but to no profit. The mind as well as the ears must take in the words; they must arouse the affections and stir the will.

"The measure you give will be the measure you get." Jesus' words seem to suggest that we receive ultimately in proportion as we give; that we receive from God only as we share with our fellow men.

"For to him who has will more be given; and from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away." Rawlinson thinks that this may be a popular saying coined by some cynical observer of Oriental society, who has noticed how presents were given to rich men, while the poor man who had nothing was fleeced to the last farthing. As here applied it means that in spiritual things those who receive and make their own the truth which comes to them will

obtain even higher knowledge: the measure of their reception is the measure of further and further gifts. But those who do not employ the gifts they have will lose the capacity to do so, just as an organ of the body becomes atrophied by disuse. This is a truth which applies not only to spiritual knowledge but to all knowledge.

#### 4. THE PARABLE OF THE SEED IN THE GROUND. Mark 4:26-29

No doubt the disciples were dismayed that there was so little visible result from Jesus' preaching, that the opposition of the authorities was rising ever higher, that the multitudes flocked to hear Him but were unwilling to accept His way of life. The Kingdom He had proclaimed seemed no nearer than before.

That they might not be discouraged, Jesus told them first the parable of the Sower, which brings home the fact that while some of the seed is wasted, a portion of it falls on good ground and bears fruit more or less abundantly. He followed this parable with a second, which illustrates another aspect of the Kingdom's growth. "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed upon the ground, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he knows not how. The earth produces of itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear."

This parable tells us three things about the growth of the Kingdom. First, it is certain. It is certain because the seed—i.e., the Gospel—has life, vitality in itself; and because it is adapted to the soil and the soil to the seed. It is true that some of the soil is not fit, as illustrated in the parable of the Sower. But if the seed is scattered some of it will take root in the individual heart, in the life of a nation or of the world, and in due time its fruit will appear.

Second, it is secret. "The seed appears to have a precarious existence. Buried in the earth, who knows that it will ever survive? Then is seen the miracle of the first shoot piercing its way through the hindering soil; then the ear; then the full grain!" "It thrives not primarily by human aid [though cultivation is necessary for the best results], but by inherent power. A man may dissect the roots of a flower, and analyze the soil, but the secret of growth will still elude him. 'God giveth the increase.' "<sup>5</sup> And so with the Kingdom of God. We do not understand how the Gospel bears its fruit in human life or in the life of a nation. We cannot see what takes place beneath the surface. We never know what hold the seed we scatter have taken, what fruit they shall bear in human life. Once a seed has found congenial soil, it will germinate and grow. One of the joys of heaven may be to discover what fruit some chance word, some small unselfish deed, has borne in individual lives, or in the life of the world.

Third, it is gradual—first the blade, then the ear, and then at last the full grain in the ear. So it is with individuals. We do not see the full fruit all at once. That bit of truth, that new ideal which has found lodgment within a boy's heart, may seem to have small influence on his life; but give it time—first the blade will appear, then the ear, and finally many years hence the full grain in the ear. "Nothing great is produced suddenly," wrote Epictetus in the first century A.D., "not even a grape or a fig. If you say to me that you want a grape or a fig now, I will answer you that you cannot have it; a grape takes time. Let it flower first, then it will ripen. And would you have the fruit of a man's life and character all in a moment? Do not expect it!"

And so it is in the life of the world. The gospel which

Jesus proclaimed has borne some fruit, but not its full fruit; that is still to come.

But other seed is also being planted in human hearts and minds. "Whoever thought that the little man with a beard who, in the 1880's, spent day after day just reading in the British Museum would [one day] terrorize the world by his philosophy in 1950? The little man with the beard was Karl Marx—a man with an idea! Whoever thought that the 'mad scientist of Kent,' sixteen miles from London Bridge, who paid a musician to play a trombone in his garden just to see what effect the music would have on a row of growing beans—whatever thought that this Charles Darwin would have such a volcanic effect on the thinking of mankind? Plant a seed—in the earth, in the mind, in the heart—and it will grow!"<sup>6</sup> And that is true whether we sow good seed or bad.

Our duty is to prepare and clean the soil and sow the right kind of seed, confident that fruit will appear in time: first the blade, then the ear, and then the full grain in the ear. Like the farmer, we must exercise patience and hope in the full conviction that in the spiritual universe, as in the natural, there are divine forces which promote the growth of good impulses and produce great fruitfulness in human lives.

##### 5. THE PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED. Mark 4:30-32

One truth about the Kingdom's growth remains to be shown. And the parable of the Mustard Seed is intended to teach this, that the small beginning and gradual growth are not inconsistent with a great result.

"With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it?" said Jesus. "It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground,

is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."

There is a school of exegetes which holds that this parable describes the distorted or abnormal growth of the Kingdom, as seen, for example, in the Roman Catholic Church of the Middle Ages; the birds that dwell in the branches of the mustard shrub are said to be the emissaries of evil who dwell within the Church and defile it. But this interpretation is untrue to the setting of the parable and to the normal use of language. It is inconsistent also with Jesus' mode of thought. Birds to Him were not symbols of evil. The parable is intended to contrast the small beginnings of the Kingdom with its widespread growth. The disciples are not to be discouraged by its insignificant beginnings; some day it will overshadow the earth.

That was a daring claim to make. In Galilee at the time, the Kingdom appeared as a speck too trivial for reckoning. As Dr. Buttrick has written: "Men did not heed the birth of Jesus. Bethlehem, amid the bustle of the Roman census, talked not of Him, but of the oppression of the conqueror, the movement of the legionnaires, the arrival of caravans from Damascus, and the probable yield of harvest—of all the momentous affairs of the world. He found no room in that hubbub of voices, even as He found no room in the inn. . . . Grown to manhood's estate His witness was still negligible. The Roman State and the Jewish Church both frowned upon Him; He was only a carpenter from a village in an inconsequential and conquered province. . . .

"His end was a gallows—with only a handful of friends to mourn His death. How could His faith endure? In very truth it was 'less than the least of all seeds.' Yet Jesus was sure it would survive and grow. Let it be buried deep in

the earth; it would germinate and find the sun! Let it be cast to the winds; it would gain lodgment in some obscure rock-crevice and there blossom! Let it be drowned in a sea of blood; red tides would carry it to the soil of some strange shore! An incredible optimism—but history has kept troth with Him. The microscopic seed is now a plant overtopping all others in the planet-garden."

"We are victimized by bigness," continues Dr. Buttrick. "Some day we shall learn His mind and rest our hopes on God's tiny seeds—this man's utter consecration; that mother's prayer; this girl's joy, 'as white as river's sand'; that boy's imagination, glorious with ideals unfurled like banners! For of such is the tree of the kingdom of heaven.'" Small beginnings are not to be despised in any fields, least of all in the spiritual field.

The three parables assembled in this chapter belong together. They direct attention successively to the soil, to the hidden life working in the seed, and to the final results of the sowing. Any impression of failure derived from the first parable is corrected by the second and the third.

Jesus does not say, however, that evil will be completely eliminated in the life of the individual or in the life of the world. In the parable of the Tares (Matthew 13:24 ff.) He makes it clear that tares are sown as well as wheat; that they grow together and cannot be separated in the individual heart, in any human institution, or in the life of the world until the final judgment. Then and only then will God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

# V

## The Power of Jesus' Ministry

*Mark 4:35—6:6a*

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**I**N the fifth section of his Gospel, Mark gives us a selected list of the mighty works performed by Jesus. The stilling of the tempest illustrates Jesus' power over the deep; the cure of the Gerasene demoniac, His power over demons; the cure of an afflicted woman, His power over disease; the raising of Jairus' daughter, His power over death. Taken together this group of miracles gives us an impression of Jesus' wonderful power over the whole range of life.

### 1. THE STILLING OF THE TEMPEST. Mark 4:35-41

At the close of an exhausting day's work, Jesus requested His disciples to cross to the other side of the lake, evidently that He might be freed from the crowd and find rest. (4:1.) They departed without further ado, accompanied by a number of other boats.

Suddenly without warning there broke upon them one of those fierce squalls that still sweep down from the heights through the ravines that open on the western shore. As the waves rose higher, they beat into the boat, and it began to fill (not "was full" as it reads in the King James Version).

Jesus was asleep in the stern, with His head resting upon the leather seat of the steersman; so fast asleep that when the winds began to rise, the waves to roll, and the boat to fill, He was not waked. "What strikes us here," says R.G. Gillie, "is that He had learned 'to relax,' to use the language of today. No sooner was His work done, than He composed Himself to sleep, and as comfortably as possible He used the cushion as His pillow. Some people break down because they have never learned to relax. Their work done, they cannot rest. Their minds are still busy. If we are to work to the full, we must learn to drop the yoke swiftly and to rest with both mind and body."<sup>1</sup>

The disciples, fishermen, used to the changing moods of the sea, at last began to fear for their safety. They shook Jesus into wakefulness, crying, "Teacher, do you not care if we perish?" Moffatt translates: "Teacher, are we to drown, for all you care?" Their words contain a touch of reproach, a bit of resentment, as though Jesus had waked sufficiently to know what was going on and then dropped off to sleep again, regardless of their fate.

All three synoptics tell us that Jesus rebuked the wind. Mark alone gives us the terms of the command addressed to the sea: "Peace! Be still!"—literally, "Be muzzled forthwith," as if the sea were a raging, roaring beast. Immediately, we are told, the wind ceased, and "the lake sank back forthwith, like an exhausted creature, into motionless repose."<sup>2</sup>

Jesus then turned to the disciples and said, "Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?" In whom should they have had faith? Some think that the lack of faith was in Jesus Himself, "in His power and disposition to care for them . . . after so many attestations of both. Their appeal to Him while He was asleep had not been the calm invocation of

a trusted power, but the frightened reproach of those whose faith is defeated by danger.”<sup>3</sup>

It is more likely that He meant faith in the Fatherly God whom He had taught them to know. Faith that God would do what? Save them from the storm? That is a common assumption, but it is almost certainly wrong. Jesus did not teach men that God would protect them from physical harm; He warned them on the other hand that they must be ready to deny themselves and to take up their cross and follow Him. When Mark wrote this story, scores of Christians, among whom were Peter and Paul, had been only recently put to death by the orders of Nero. Surely, therefore, the early Church did not understand it to mean that men ought to have faith in God’s readiness to deliver them from danger. Jesus wanted the disciples to be confident of God’s love and care and unafraid, therefore, in the midst of the storm, fearless in the presence of death itself. In life, in death, this is still our Father’s world. We cannot drift beyond His love and care. The storm on the sea which ended in calm could not disturb Jesus’ own peace any more than did later the storm of men’s passions which led to Calvary. (John 14:27.)

The disciples were mastered now by a different kind of fear, not weak timidity, but religious awe, as men in the presence of the supernatural. They said nothing to Jesus because they were afraid to speak. But as they worked their ship the question went around: “Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?” No other incident had yet moved them as this did. They were led to face the question which must come sooner or later to anyone who follows the Bible story, “Who then is this?”

## 2. THE CURE OF THE GERAENE DEMONIAC. Mark 5:1-20

After Jesus had stilled the tempest, He continued with His disciples on their journey and landed on the south-eastern side of the sea, in the country of the Gerasenes, most of whom were non-Jewish. At one point the shore rises steeply up from the lake, and the overhanging hill contains many ancient tombs cut in the limestone rock.

In this country there was a demoniac who disturbed the entire countryside. He dwelt among the tombs, which, as indicated, were simply caves in the rocks. Men would be more horrified by this mode of life because tombs were thought to be haunted by demons and by spirits of the dead, and were often the lairs of wild beasts.

Some light is thrown upon demon-possessed persons by the case of the demoniac boy who was healed by Jesus following the Transfiguration. (9:14-20.) Mark tells us that this boy had a deaf and dumb spirit, who tore him grievously, so that he fell on the ground, and wallowed foaming. But in Matthew (17:15-16) the father of the boy explained his trouble by saying, "for he is an epileptic and he suffers terribly; for often he falls into the fire, and often into the water."

In like manner the Gerasene demoniac was quite evidently a maniac. Insane men oftentimes have superior strength. This one had broken every restraint, so that his neighbors had given up every hope of taming him. As Moffatt translates: "All night and day among the tombs and the hills he shrieked and gashed himself with stones." Luke points out that for a long time he had worn no clothes.

The lunatic caught sight of Jesus from a distance and came bounding toward Him in a mad frenzy, but when he drew near his mood changed; calmed and in part sub-

dued by the charm or spell of the Master, he prostrated himself before Him.

Jesus spoke first, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" The demoniac then began shrieking aloud, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me." The reference is apparently to the painful paroxysm which attends the expulsion of the demons (see 1:26; 9:26), a paroxysm which was supposed to hurt them as much as it hurt the victim.

Jesus then asked the man his name. The question was intended, perhaps, to clear his mind (the confusion of consciousness is seen in the mixed, contradictory utterances, now as man, now as demon) and bring him more to himself, and so under spiritual control. The man replied, "My name is Legion; for we are many." Then speaking on behalf of the demons, earnestly he besought Jesus not to send them out of the country. Gould suggests that this request can be explained only as part of the hallucination of the demoniac, to be referred possibly to his terror of city or town, and his unwillingness to be driven out of the solitary, wild district haunted by him. Then came the request of the demons to be allowed to enter the herd of swine feeding nearby, doubtless the common property of the village. This accorded with the popular belief that demons could live happily only in some kind of an animal organism.

When Jesus granted this request, the herd stampeded, and two thousand pigs rushed down the steep slope into the sea and were drowned.

For some people this is the most difficult of all of Jesus' miracles to accept. In his famous debate with William E. Gladstone in 1892, Huxley charged that Jesus was heartless and unsympathetic in thus taking away the livelihood of men who had had no relation to Him. Even believers

sometimes find it difficult to understand why Jesus caused the destruction of such valuable property.

One popular answer is that Jews were forbidden to raise swine, and that it was ethically proper for Jesus to destroy property which was illegally owned. There is no evidence, however, that the pigs were owned by Jews. The Gerasene country was largely settled by Gentiles, and the pigs were probably owned by them. Also Jesus did not approve of the Mosaic regulations regarding swine (Mark 7:14-23) and could not therefore cause the destruction on this particular score.

As a matter of fact there is no evidence that Jesus foresaw the destruction of the herd, much less that He caused it. It is frequently assumed that Jesus foresaw what occurred because He was the Son of God and hence must have known all things, past, present, and future. But this assumption does not follow, even though the premise be granted. Paul says that Jesus emptied Himself of many of His divine attributes when He became man (Philippians 2:7); the Gospel writers tell us that He grew in knowledge (Luke 2:52), and frequently that He was astonished or amazed (cf. Mark 6:6); and Jesus on one point confessed His ignorance (Mark 13:32). The facts in this case are the cure of the demoniac (accompanied probably by a violent spasm) and the rush of the frightened swine. They were frightened, it may be, by the loud shrieks and wild gestures of the maniac. Or perhaps, as J. Weiss suggests, "The man hurled himself upon the swine, struck terror into them, and drove them down the steep. For long he had been overpowered by the idea that the demons by whom he was possessed would like to enter into them, and he recognized the opportunity provided by the strange exorcist who asked him his name."<sup>4</sup> In any case the account gives no indication that Jesus was responsible for the loss

of the swine and we have no right to read that into the story.

If, however, Jesus did foresee the loss of the swine, as is generally assumed, then we will have to conclude that Jesus saw that it was necessary for the permanent cure of the man that he should be able to convince himself that the demoniacal powers which held him in bondage had quitted their hold. And in Jesus' estimation one man was worth more than two thousand pigs.

But that was not the general view. Mark tells us that the keepers of the swine rushed to the village with the news. The people flocked out to see for themselves and found the erstwhile lunatic clothed and in his right mind, sitting with Jesus. Their first emotion was one of religious awe. But when the whole story was told them, their sense of awe passed into anxiety to get out of their neighborhood the prophet whose presence had cost them so dear.

They were more terrified, it seems, by the damage to their swine than moved by the benefit to the demoniac; not the only instance in which the property value of beasts (or a business) has been more considered than the moral advantage of men. As Snowden puts it: "They did not want a saviour in their country who saved men at the expense of pigs. Let the devils have the man, but save the hogs! And for fear that He might save more men at the cost of more pigs they ordered Him out of their coasts."<sup>5</sup>

Jesus had probably intended to stay some days on the eastern shore, but at their request He prepared immediately to depart. Filled with gratitude the former demoniac wished to accompany Him.

Jesus bade him rather to go home to his friends and tell them what great things the Lord had done for him. "This command, the exact opposite of the injunction of secrecy usually enforced by Jesus, is due to the fact that

this was a region not frequented by Him, and in which, therefore, the ordinary reasons for such silence were inoperative. . . . The effect produced would . . . be not a false Messianism, as in Galilee, but a sense of God's presence and pity. The demoniac's story would counteract the impression made by the destruction of the swine." 6

### 3. THE CURE OF AN AFFLICTED WOMAN. Mark 5:21-34

One day a man came pushing through the throng which had gathered about Jesus, evidently, from his dress, a man of importance. When he reached the Master he prostrated himself at His feet (an act of humility) and explained that he was Jairus, one of the rulers of the synagogue in Capernaum.

At this period in Jesus' ministry the rulers of the synagogue were almost solidly opposed to His work, and those who were personally favorable to Him held aloof through the pressure exerted on them by their associates. (See John 7:48; 12:42.) It is never easy for a man to run counter to the social or intellectual prejudices of his group. Jairus, however, had some personal knowledge of Jesus' power, and his great need led him to overcome his normal inhibitions. As he bowed before Jesus he poured out his story. His little daughter (Luke tells us that she was his only daughter) was critically ill and was lying at the point of death. All other resources had been exhausted. Jesus was his only hope. And so the distracted father entreated the Master earnestly to come and lay His hands on her that she might be made whole and live.

Jesus sympathetically acceded to the request and went along with him. The curious crowd followed, pressing about Him closely on every side.

Worming her way through the crowd there was a woman

on a mission. She presents a figure quite different from that of Jairus. As Erdman has written: "Jairus is a man of prominence in the community, 'one of the rulers of the synagogue,' a person of comparative wealth and power and social position, and for twelve years his home has been brightened by the presence of a little daughter. . . The woman is poor, weak, ceremonially unclean, friendless, unknown, and for twelve years her life has been darkened by continual suffering and disease."<sup>7</sup> Mark remarks, almost as though he had had some such experience of his own: she "had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse." This depreciation of the medical profession is not uncommon in ancient authors. Luke, himself a physician, characteristically softens the expression. The woman, he says, "could not be healed by any one." (8:43.)

Almost at the end of her rope, the woman heard of Jesus and the wonderful cures He was able to perform: Because she was poor, friendless, and ceremonially unclean, and compelled, therefore, by the Law (Leviticus 15:19, 25) to avoid all contacts with her fellow men, she slipped furtively through the crowd behind Jesus and touched the fringes of His garments. For she said (the Greek tense suggests that she kept saying it to herself), "If I touch even his garments, I shall be made well."

Erdman remarks: "Her faith is imperfect; she seems to think that the power of Jesus is magical and mechanical, that there is no need of His knowing her or of His thinking of her, that she need make no request for help or express gratitude for relief. Her faith is imperfect, but it is sincere; and Jesus makes an immediate response to her timid touch, 'and straightway . . . she felt in her body that she was healed of her plague.'"<sup>8</sup>

A psychologist would say, no doubt, that the power of

autosuggestion and the tense emotional disturbance caused by coming into the crowd played a part in the cure. Perhaps so. But Jesus felt the touch; He realized that power had gone forth from Him, and that a cure had been performed. He turned and inquired, "Who touched my garments?"

The disciples felt that it was impossible to answer such a question; too many had touched Him. But Jesus, responding "to the shy approach of individual need as surely and deftly as a magnetic needle responds to the North Star,"<sup>9</sup> kept looking around (this is the force of the Greek tense) in quest of the person who had touched Him meaningfully. His purpose was "to bring the person who had touched Him with a view to physical benefit, and in a superstitious spirit, into a more spiritual relation to Himself with a view to a fuller and more abiding benefit."<sup>10</sup>

The woman, knowing what had been done to her, but not understanding Jesus' further purpose toward her, came with fear and trembling, fell down before Him and told Him all the truth, which would include not only what she had just done, but also her excuse for doing it. "The fear and trembling of the woman is perhaps to be regarded as due not only to natural self-consciousness at becoming so conspicuously the center of attention, but also to doubt as to our Lord's attitude to one who had sought to draw upon His miraculous power without His knowledge: she may even have feared lest He should now reverse the miracle: she feels like a detected criminal confessing a crime, and so she falls trembling at His feet."<sup>11</sup>

But when her story was finished, and she looked up into His face, there was no eloquent denunciation, but only sympathy and compassion. "Daughter," Jesus said, and what a beautiful term this was on the Master's lips, "your faith [not your superstitious touch] has made you well;

go in peace, and be healed of your disease." The phrase, "Go in peace," is not a mere formula of dismissal, but a word of reassurance that all is well. Henceforth there will be no recurrence of her malady.

#### 4. THE RAISING OF JAIRUS' DAUGHTER. Mark 5:35-43

While Jesus was still talking to the woman, messengers came telling Jairus that his daughter was dead, and that it was useless for him to trouble the Master any longer. Ignoring what they said, Jesus urged the despairing father, "Do not fear, only believe," or, bringing out the full force of the Greek tense, "Cease to fear, keep on believing," or "Hold on to your faith, do not give way to despair." Jesus then dismissed the crowds, also the larger part of His disciples, and allowed no one to follow Him but Peter, James, and John.

When He reached the house He found a tumult of sorrow, with much weeping and wailing.

Jesus questioned the propriety of such unrestrained grief. He said, "Why do you make a tumult and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping." He did not mean to deny that physical death had ensued, though some commentators take it in this sense. More likely He used the word figuratively, as in Psalm 17:15; Daniel 12:2; and I Thessalonians 5:10. What He wished especially to do was to put a meaning upon death more worthy of those who believe in God than that suggested by such unbridled expressions of hopeless grief. Death is a sleep. We lie down at night and sleep, and when we awake it is a new day. So at the end of our earthly pilgrimage—we lie down and sleep, and when we awake we are in a new and better world. Those who believe in God should not mourn as those who have no hope.

"Death, be not proud, though some have called thee  
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so:

• • • • • • • • • • • • • • •

One short sleep past, we wake eternally,  
And Death shall be no more: Death, thou shalt die!"<sup>12</sup>

Jesus' word excited the scornful amusement of the crowd, but He ejected them all and took only a few sympathetic witnesses into the death chamber. He then took the child by the hand and said, "Talitha cumi," which means, "Little girl, get up." The words and the manner of their speaking made such an impression on Peter that he treasured them in his heart, and when thereafter he told the story in Greek, the universal language of the day, he repeated Jesus' words in their original Aramaic, a custom followed by Mark in his writing of the Gospel.

The girl responded to Jesus' words and got up. Jesus immediately charged them not to talk about the matter; the same policy He had previously followed in order not to kindle popular excitement and mistaken expectations. He then commanded that something should be given the child to eat, "fresh evidence," as someone has indicated, "of the sympathetic tenderness of the Lord and His attention to small details in which the safety and comfort of others were involved. Life restored by a miracle must be supported by ordinary means; the miracle has no place where human care and labor will suffice."

## 5. FAILURE OF JESUS' POWER IN NAZARETH. Mark 6:1-6a

This section in Mark's Gospel which sets forth a sample of Jesus' mighty works reaches its climax not in the raising of Jairus' daughter from the dead, but in the failure of His power in Nazareth. Mark says, "He could do no mighty

work there." Matthew, writing later, with Mark's account before him, seemed to feel that Mark's blunt words might be misunderstood and so changed the expression to read, "And he did not do many mighty works there." (13:58.) But Mark drives the lesson home. Jesus who stilled the tempest, who cast a thousand demons out of the Gadarene demoniac, who healed a woman of an incurable disease, who raised a little girl from the dead, could do no mighty work in Nazareth. Why?

Mark gives the answer. When Jesus came to Nazareth, His home town, He began to teach in the synagogue—naturally, for His fame had spread beyond the borders of Palestine. Members of the congregation who had known Jesus from boyhood, some of whom had employed Him to work on their barns or their plows, were astonished at His wisdom and at His reputed powers; but because He had been brought up among them, because His brothers and sisters still lived among them, because they knew that He had labored with His hands as a carpenter, they were not attracted but repelled.

Jesus said unto them, "A prophet is not without honor, except in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house." These last phrases confirm the impression conveyed in 3:21, 31-34, that His relatives, even the members of His own family, were not in sympathy with His mission. And so, Mark tells us, "he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands upon a few sick people and healed them." Without faith, Matthew indicates, and Mark plainly states, there could be no cure. "And he marveled because of their unbelief." Jesus, it is evident, was not incapable of being surprised; He did not expect such obstinate unbelief on the part of His fellow townsmen.

## JESUS' POWER TODAY

This section of Mark's Gospel drives home three important truths:

First, Jesus sympathized with human needs, with men who were afraid, with those who were mentally distraught, with those who were physically ill, with those who were grieved over the loss of their loved ones.

Second, Jesus had power to help. He was able to still the tempest, to cast out a legion of demons, to cure a woman whom no physician could heal, to raise Jairus' daughter from the dead. As Matthew explains, "This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah, 'He took our infirmities and bore our diseases.' " (8:17.) He bore them first on His own heart, and then He bore them away.

Third, Jesus' power was available for men and women through faith. To the disciples afraid of the storm He said reproachfully, "Have you no faith?" To the woman healed of her plague, He said, "Your faith has made you well." To the despairing father, He said, "Do not fear, only believe." (The Greek tense suggests, "Keep on believing.") In Nazareth "he could do no mighty work. . . And he marveled because of their unbelief."

Two questions arise: First, what did Jesus mean by faith? In the incidents studied, and commonly in the Gospels, "faith . . . is a belief that Jesus can do a certain thing (sometimes one thing, sometimes another), such as led him who had it to come to Jesus and commit his case to Him. To such faith Jesus invariably responded by doing that which men believed He could do. 'According to your faith' was His constant formula (cf. Matthew 9:29). The principle holds still: Within the bounds of what is true

about Jesus, He is to us what and as much as we believe Him to be.”<sup>12</sup>

The second question is this: the power of Jesus, released in our lives through faith, for what ends is it available? If we go to Jesus in faith today, can we look to Him to extricate us from every evil situation? Will He heal all our diseases? Will He restore our loved ones to life? Will He prevent us from ever sinking in the waves? Not necessarily. Jesus assured us of God’s love, but He did not teach us that after He was gone we could expect to be saved from all the ills of life. He Himself went to the cross. He said, “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” (Matthew 16:24.) And again, “In the world you have tribulation.” (John 16:33.)

His disciples who understood Him best did not expect faith to have such miraculous power. All of them suffered for their faith, but it did not surprise them. Paul suffered from a physical affliction, which, despite his prayers, never left him. (II Corinthians 12:7-9.) His friend Timothy suffered from a stomach ailment of which Paul was unable to cure him. (I Timothy 5:23.) Paul warned his converts in Galatia that “through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22), and led the Christians in Rome to anticipate tribulations, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, and the sword (Romans 8:35). And Peter, shortly before the Neronian persecution, wrote, “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you to prove you, as though something strange were happening to you.” (I Peter 4:12.) All through history some of the truest saints have suffered from bodily infirmities and from life’s heartaches and tragedies.

It is plain, then, from Scripture and experience, that

we cannot draw upon the power of Jesus to rid ourselves from all the ills of life. If we could, the world with its natural laws would cease to serve God's purpose, the creation of moral character.

The power which faith in Jesus releases in our lives is spiritual power, a power whose fruit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (*Galatians 5:22-23*); a power which enables us to overcome anxiety, fear, despair, selfishness, hatred, sin, and finally death. This is in accordance with His purpose, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." (*John 10:10*.)

So God did not remove Paul's thorn in the flesh, but He said to him, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." And Paul replied, "I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong." (*II Corinthians 12:9-10*.) In like manner also God did not answer Jesus' prayer that the cup might be taken from His lips. But He answered Jesus. Our Master went from the Garden with a steadiness that no suffering could shake, with a loyalty to His cause that no danger could relax, with a magnanimity that neither jibe, nor jeer, nor insult could embitter, and with a peace in His soul that not even the cross could destroy. As we follow Jesus from the Garden in Gethsemane to the cross on Calvary we know that there is nothing that prayer cannot accomplish for the man.

It is in this realm, the spiritual realm, that it is done unto us according to our faith.

We are discovering, however, in ever-increasing measure

that a faith which destroys our spiritual ills and that brings our will into harmony with that of the Master will also heal our bodies and prevent mental and physical ailments which might otherwise develop.

God heals, it appears, in many ways.

He heals through the efforts of surgeons, physicians, and nurses. Not to utilize their skills, not to employ the modern drugs which scientists have discovered, is to refuse the gifts which God has put at our disposal through the labors of a host of devoted men. It is, in fact, a lack of faith in God and in the world which He has created; a lack of faith in man whom God has ordered to replenish the earth and subdue it. (*Genesis 1:28.*)

God heals also through the development of a healthy emotional attitude toward life and through a religious faith which produces such emotions. Competent medical authorities tell us that at least fifty per cent of our physical ailments are due to unhealthy emotions which we have not yet learned to control. One eminent medical authority claims that "the mental and spiritual factor in disease varies from sixty to seventy-five per cent."

Some emotions, it seems, are destructive in their tendency; they interfere with the proper functioning of the body. These destructive emotions are the ones against which Jesus warned us, and which a religious attitude toward life tends to destroy. They are the emotions of anger, hostility, fear, anxiety, resentment, and frustration, every one of which helps to bring on mental or physical illness. The emotions evoked by religious faith, the emotions of confidence, hope, friendliness, affection, and love, on the other hand, are healing emotions. They serve to prevent disease, and also help greatly in curing those illnesses which have other causes.

Carl Jung, one of the fathers of modern psychiatry, said: "During the past thirty years, people from all the civilized countries of the earth have consulted me. . . . Among all my patients in the second half of life—that is to say, over thirty-five—there has not been one whose problem in the last resort was not that of finding a religious outlook on life. It is safe to say that every one of them fell ill because he had lost that which the living religions of every age have given to their followers, and none of them has been really healed who did not regain his religious outlook."<sup>14</sup>

Dr. Alexis Carrel, well-known French scientist, declared: "As a physician, I have seen men, after all other therapy had failed, lifted out of disease and melancholy by the serene effort of prayer. . . . When we pray, we link ourselves with the inexhaustible motive power that spins the universe. We ask that a part of this power be apportioned to our needs. Even in asking, our human deficiencies are filled and we arise strengthened and repaired."<sup>15</sup>

Even a superstitious faith effects its cure, as the Bible reveals, and as the effects of many present-day healing cults abundantly illustrate.

God cures through the efforts of surgeons, physicians, and nurses. He cures through a religious faith that produces a healthy emotional attitude toward life. He cures sometimes in ways that neither we nor the physician can understand at the present moment, and in ways it may be that we shall never understand. We speak of them as providential or miraculous cures. We do not yet know what can be accomplished in this connection through our own prayer or the prayer of others.

But while God cures in these and other ways, He allows many of His most devoted servants to suffer, despite the skill of the physician, despite their trust in God, despite

their own prayers and the prayers of their friends, until the end of this mortal life. They are not finally healed until their souls are released from their earthly habitations and they are at home with the Saviour in the heavenly mansions.

It is here that faith often wins its greatest victories.

# VI

## The End of Jesus' Ministry in Galilee

*Mark 6:6b-56*

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**T**HE sixth section of Mark's Gospel describes the culmination of Jesus' public ministry in Galilee. One of the things which brought His public ministry in that region to its climax and end was the sending out of the twelve disciples.

### 1. THE MISSION OF THE TWELVE. *Mark 6:6b-13*

Jesus was no longer content to depend on His own efforts to evangelize the villages of Galilee. He called unto Him the Twelve and began to send them out two by two. This was in accordance with His original purpose in calling them—"to be with him, and to be sent out to preach." (3:14.) It may be that Jesus was moved to send them out on this occasion because of the pressing spiritual needs to which He in person could not attend, or because He wished to train them for the fuller responsibility which would devolve upon them after His death. It was due in large part, no doubt, to the growing opposition, which indicated that His ministry was now approaching its crisis. As Denny suggests: "It was now a race against the enemy for the mastery of public opinion, and the apostles as well as Jesus

seem to have felt the urgency of the situation."<sup>1</sup> Branscomb says the significance of this mission must not be overlooked. "Jesus undertook to arouse the nation. To His own efforts He added those of such followers as He could trust."<sup>2</sup>

The directions which Jesus gave to the evangelists on this occasion were not intended for all disciples, nor even to be permanent for the Twelve. They were adapted to the haste and intensity demanded by this particular mission. The Twelve were to go forth two by two, that one might help and encourage the other, and that their testimony might be more telling. They were commissioned not only to preach but also to heal. As Mark puts it, He "gave them authority over the unclean spirits." In other words their ministry, even as the ministry of their Master, was to the whole man—body, mind, and soul.

They were to take nothing for their journey save a staff only. "They were to be content," that is, "with the simplest equipment." They "were to go forth promptly and as they were, traveling 'light' that they might travel fast," thus emphasizing the urgency of their message, and the brevity of the time. "Hence they were to take neither bread, nor wallet [a small leather sack for carrying provisions], nor money, nor anything beyond the staff which every traveler carried." They were to go shod with sandals, "the simplest covering for the feet, and typical of the traveler. Shoes were also worn by the Jews, furnished with upper leather and more costly." They were not to wear two coats, which would be "unsuitable for plain men going about among ordinary folk."<sup>3</sup>

The purpose of all these injunctions was to secure simplicity and freedom from hindrance in their work. They were not to burden themselves either to get or to carry anything unnecessary. The customs of the land made it

unnecessary to provide for traveling expenses, since they went afoot, and could obtain free entertainment everywhere.

Furthermore Jesus instructed them that they were to have but one stopping place in each village (not to waste time seeking for better quarters), and if a place would not receive them, they were to shake off the dust that was on their feet, as a sign of disapproval and protest against their conduct, with the hope that thus they might be induced to reflect and repent. Snowden comments: "Ministers and missionaries are to do all they can and go to the last limit of patience and sympathy and love in endeavoring to win the attention and confidence and conversion of unbelievers. But there may come a point of refusal and persecution when further efforts would be useless and harmful. We may do harm in pressing our Christian faith too persistently on others. Their sovereign right to decide their own faith and action must be respected. We may grieve over their unbelief, but we must leave them alone."

In accordance with Jesus' instructions the disciples went out and preached that men should repent; they also healed, anointing the sick with oil. Oil was much used by the physicians of that day. (See Isaiah 1:6; Luke 10:34; James 5:14-15.) It seems that, in healing the sick, the disciples used, as Jesus did not, the regular remedies of the day. On their return they told Jesus all that they had done (particularly, we assume, about those whom they had healed) and all that they had taught. (6:30.) The words suggest that they had great things to tell.

## 2. THE CONCERN OF HEROD. Mark 6:14-29

Some time previous to this, Mark tells us, Herod had beheaded John the Baptist, whose movement Jesus had continued and expanded. (Josephus, the Jewish historian,

tells us that Herod feared that John's growing popularity might lead to revolution, and for this reason destroyed him. This differs from Mark's account but is not necessarily contradictory.) And now news came to the tetrarch of Jesus' enlarged mission, seven groups spread over Galilee. "The court . . . could regard with indifference the preaching of a local prophet, so long as it was limited to the Jewish lake-side towns; but when it was systematically carried into every part of the country, suspicion was aroused."<sup>4</sup> Particularly disturbing were the popular rumors that began to drift in to Herod. Some said (as the Revised Standard Version correctly translates it) that He was a reincarnation of John the Baptist, others that He was Elijah, while others thought He was merely a prophet, like one of the prophets who came in olden times. These rumors were all connected with the Messianic hopes of the people, and Messianic hopes were likely to lead the Jews into a revolution, as Herod well knew. "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised," said Herod, when he heard it. It may be that we are to understand this literally. If so, Herod was very superstitious, and was suffering from a bad conscience. It is more likely, however, that he simply meant, "It is John the Baptist all over again. I have gotten rid of one prophet, and now I have another on my hands." What is quite certain is that Herod watched Jesus narrowly from this time on, waiting for the opportune moment to seize Him, as earlier he had seized John.

This new attitude of Herod must certainly be a partial explanation of the fact that Jesus shortly thereafter brings His public ministry in Galilee to a close, and from this time on spends most of His time outside of Herod's jurisdiction. (He is in Decapolis, 7:31; in the territory governed by Philip, 8:27; in the parts about Tyre and Sidon, 7:24; in Galilee, incognito, 9:30.) The growing hostility

of Herod was another sign that Jesus' ministry was nearing its end, and He deemed it best under these circumstances to give Himself to the more careful training of His own disciples, and particularly the Twelve.

### 3. THE FEEDING OF THE FIVE THOUSAND. Mark 6:30-46

The disciples, returning from their preaching mission, told Jesus all things whatsoever they had done and taught. Jesus, ever sensitive to the physical needs of those about Him, suggested that they go with Him to a quiet place where they might find rest. It was not to be found where they were. Streams of visitors, drawn by the fame of Jesus' works, kept them ever in movement and broke in even on their meals. According to the literal rendering of the Greek, they had no "opportunity or leisure for anything."

Jesus' plan to be alone with the Twelve was frustrated by the people who recognized His intentions. They went around the northern end of the lake by foot, and when Jesus and His disciples landed, they found the usual throng of people awaiting them. But though Jesus' expectations of quiet were defeated He did not give way to a sense of disappointment. Instead His compassion was stirred by the spectacle of the eager interest of the crowd, whose needs had not been met by the recognized teachers of religion. As Mark puts it: "He had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd." Crowds affect people in various ways. Some look upon them with amusement, some with cynicism, some with careful calculation of financial gain, some with scorn, or even with hatred, some with careless indifference. But Jesus looked upon them with compassion, stirred by a sense of their physical and spiritual needs. (See Matthew 9:36.) So, giving up the rest which He had sought for Himself and His disciples, He began to teach them many things.

When the day was far spent the disciples came to Him with a suggestion. It was time to think of food. The country was barren. It might be well for Jesus to dismiss the crowd, so that they could go into the country—that is, to the farms and villages round about—and buy themselves something to eat. But Jesus turned to them and said, “You give them something to eat.”

The disciples were startled by such a suggestion. They said to Him, “Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread?” The word “penny” in the King James Version is misleading. A denarius was the day’s wage of a laborer. Whether the disciples had this much is not clear. Probably not. They meant to say that Jesus was asking the impossible. But Jesus was insistent. He said, “How many loaves have you? Go and see.” They came back and reported, “Five, and two fish.” A loaf in Jesus’ day was a thick scone, not enough for a full meal for one hungry man. The fishes would be of a dried sort, used as a relish for the bread.

Goodspeed in his American Translation of the New Testament graphically describes what followed:

He directed them all to sit down in parties on the fresh grass [this would prevent a scramble for the food]. And they threw themselves down in groups, in hundreds and in fifties. Then he took the five loaves and the two fish and looked up to heaven and blessed the loaves and broke them in pieces and gave them to the disciples to pass to the people; and he divided the two fish among them all. And they all ate and had enough. And the pieces they gathered up filled twelve baskets, besides the pieces of the fish. There were five thousand men who ate the loaves.<sup>5</sup>

Mark offers no explanation as to how the miracle was performed. He does not even hint. A popular commentator, Lenski, offers the traditional interpretation: “The miracle

was not wrought by the words, but . . . by the will of Jesus. . . . Always there were more pieces to break off; the bread grew in Jesus' hands.”<sup>6</sup>

A rational explanation which has become rather popular is that under the spell of Jesus' teaching, and inspired by His example in sharing what food He possessed, those who had brought food (as some must have done) shared with those who had none, and in the end there was enough for everyone and to spare. The miracle was one which Jesus wrought in the hearts of men. That would have been a miracle worthy of the Master and with meaning for our own day. But the writers of the four Gospels (this is the one miracle which they all describe) seem to have understood it otherwise.

John tells us that the people were so impressed by what Jesus had done that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king. (John 6:15.) Evidently they wished Him to lead a Messianic revolt against the power of Rome. It was this political excitement, no doubt, which led Jesus to send the disciples away without any delay and to dismiss the multitudes as quickly as possible. He Himself departed into the mountains to pray, as He did in all the crises of His life.

#### 4. WALKING ON THE SEA. Mark 6:47-52

That evening there was a storm on the sea. About three o'clock in the morning the disciples saw Jesus coming unto them, walking on the waves. He entered the boat and the wind ceased.

The Gospel according to Mark was written for the special benefit of the church at Rome, shortly after the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul in the persecutions under Nero. “To the Roman church, thus bereft of its leaders and confronted by a hostile government,” says A. E. J. Rawlinson,

"it must have indeed appeared that 'the wind was contrary' and progress difficult and slow: faint hearts may even have begun to wonder whether the Lord Himself had not abandoned them to their fate, or to doubt the reality of Christ. They are to learn from this story that they are not ' forsaken,' that the Lord watches over them unseen, and that He Himself—no phantom, but the Living One, Master of winds and waves—will surely come quickly for their salvation, even though it be in 'the fourth watch of the night.' "<sup>7</sup>

### 5. IN GENNESARET. Mark 6:53-56

In the closing paragraph of the sixth chapter Mark tells us of the crowds that thronged Jesus when He returned to Gennesaret. This was a fertile plain on the west side of the lake, about three miles long and a mile wide, lying just south of Capernaum. The people of Gennesaret recognized Him at once—they had seen Him before at Capernaum or in their own villages, and Mark describes graphically the scenes that ensued. Moffatt, trying to bring out the force of the original, translates the whole passage as follows:

On crossing over they came to land at Gennesaret and moored to the shore. And when they disembarked, the people at once recognized Jesus; they hurried round all the district and proceeded to carry the sick on their pallets, wherever they heard that he was; whatever village or town or hamlet he went to, they would lay their invalids in the marketplace, begging him to let them touch even the tassel of his robe—and all who touched him recovered.<sup>8</sup>

The beds, as correctly rendered by Moffatt, were rather pallets. The people to be cured were carried about from place to place. If they did not find Jesus in one place, the bearers carried the sick to another place, where they hoped to find Him. As Amos Wells once wrote: "Our Lord seems

to have moved freely about the whole region, and the determined sick folks who could get about on their own legs or hire carriers, followed Him about as rumor reported His movements, keeping up their pursuit until they found Him—a vivid description of a desperate search. They ran; that is, they moved as fast as they or their bearers could, lest the Healer should escape them." And as He came into a village, they gathered their sick in the market place, the center of civic life and social intercourse, and besought Him that they might touch if it were but the border of His garment. This was very different from the inconsiderate pressure reported earlier by Mark. (3:9.) The crowd here was reverent and full of faith. They did not knock against Him, but humbly begged permission to touch not His person but the mere hem of His garment. They had both humility and trust, and therefore as many as touched Him were made whole.

As Jesus' public ministry draws toward its close His popularity with the common people seems undiminished. It was a popularity that could not be destroyed by the opposition of the religious guides or destroyed by the vested interest of the day. As J. Paterson-Smyth has said: "We cannot get these pictures right of Jesus in Capernaum and throughout Galilee without sketching in always the background of multitudes. Always you feel the presence of the friendly crowds, the popularity of Jesus. It comes rather as a surprise. We think of Him as despised and rejected of men. We have been so obsessed with the thought of the national rejection that we have not been much noticing the crowd of simple, honest faces always about Him, listening, liking, applauding. Evidently He was immensely popular. . . . Every page of the record has enthusiastic crowds around Him. We read, 'The multitude thronged him.' 'All men are seeking thee.' 'All the city was gathered

together at the door.' 'They came to him from every quarter.' 'They ran to him from every city.' 'The people hung on him listening.' 'His mother and brethren could not come at him for the crowds.' The woman with the issue of blood came behind Him in the press. He had to feed five thousand men that followed Him to the desert. A crowd was waiting beneath the Mount of Transfiguration. Crowds, enthusiastic crowds, pressing on Him all the time. 'So many coming and going that there was no leisure so much as to eat.' He seemed to draw them like a magnet. They liked to be near Him. . . . And, mark you, this was not merely in the early Galilee days. It continued right through. Even to the end. Even in hostile Jerusalem. . . . The people . . . crowded the streets in the Palm Sunday procession. Next morning, in the Temple, 'all the people came near unto him.' The Pharisees said, 'If we let him alone all men will believe on him.' And again, 'Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing, behold the world is gone after him.' Right to the end He was the popular hero. The people championed Him. He was always safe when they were about. When His enemies sought to seize Him, 'they feared the people.' 'They said, Not on the Feast Day lest there be an uproar among the people.' . . . True, there was a crowd at the early morning trial yelling out, 'Crucify him'—[but they were] a packed jury persuaded by the priests that they should ask Barabbas and destroy Jesus."<sup>9</sup>

But despite His continuing popularity with the people Jesus brought His public ministry in Galilee to an end. Sinister forces were working to destroy Him. And He needed to give Himself to the chosen few who must carry on His work after He had gone.

# VII

## Jesus' First Withdrawal— Into Syrophoenicia

*Mark 7:1—8:10*

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**I**N chapters seven, eight, and nine Mark describes the development of Jesus' semi-public ministry. Hitherto He had devoted Himself to proclaiming the Gospel to the nation as a whole. Now He devotes Himself largely to the training of the Twelve. To be with them alone He withdraws twice from Galilee and goes far beyond its borders, once into the regions of Tyre and Sidon and again into the country round about Caesarea Philippi. This important change in Jesus' method was due no doubt to several factors—to the watchfulness of Herod, to the misunderstanding of the people (who after the feeding of the five thousand wished to crown Him as an earthly king, John 6:15), but most of all, it would seem, to His desire to prepare the Twelve for the final denouement in Jerusalem.

### 1. A CONTROVERSY OVER DEFILEMENT. *Mark 7:1-23*

The first withdrawal was preceded by a new controversy with the Pharisees. They had attacked Jesus previously because He disregarded the tradition regarding fasting

and the Sabbath. Now it is the tradition regarding defilement. This tradition, based on the Mosaic distinction between "clean and unclean," was one of the chief means of keeping the Jews a distinct and separate people. It helped to justify their hatred of the Gentile, and their scorn of the common people who were not meticulous in its observance. This section deals therefore with a matter of fundamental importance.

The question was raised by Pharisees, who were the self-constituted guardians of religious observance in their localities, together with some of their recognized teachers from Jerusalem, summoned no doubt to aid in their organized opposition to Jesus' mission in Galilee. "Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders," they asked, "but eat with hands defiled?"

The elders were the teachers of preceding generations. The tradition of the elders was that body of teaching and usages which had gradually grown up among the Pharisees, and which for them had all the force and sacredness of law. Indeed, it can be said that in Jesus' time the Jews had two laws, their written law, the Pentateuch, and their unwritten law, the tradition of the elders. And oftentimes the scribes held their traditions to be of greater authority than the divine law, even as "Christians are apt to be more tenacious of the usages and traditions of their sect than studious of the Scriptures or eager to find out the real truth."<sup>1</sup> We can understand the dynamite wrapped up in the seemingly harmless question: "Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders?"

The question grew more specifically out of the disciples' attitude toward ceremonial purity. The Law of Moses required various kinds of washings for various kinds of defilement (Leviticus 11-15), and the Pharisees had extended the law in various ways through their traditions.

Thus in the market place there was always the danger of defilement through contact with unbelievers, and therefore the pious Jew after he had returned from the market place would bathe himself ceremonially before eating. In like manner they washed ceremonially their cups and pots and brazen vessels in order to safeguard them for use in eating and drinking.

Now the Pharisees had noted that the disciples of Jesus did not observe these ceremonial laws, but that they ate their food with defiled—that is—unwashed hands. Of course this objection did not mean that the followers of Jesus ate with hands which were physically unclean, only that they neglected the ceremonial washings of which we have spoken. Therefore they came to Jesus with a question, dealing, so they thought, with the fundamentals of their religion: "Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with hands defiled?"

The question is in reality a twofold one. It concerns first, Jesus' attitude toward the traditions of the fathers in general, and secondly and more specifically, His attitude toward the matter of ceremonial purity.

Jesus began by explaining His disregard of their traditions in general. He reminded them that Isaiah many years previously had appropriately described a national characteristic, common to their ancestors and to them. They worshiped God with their lips, but not with their hearts; they substituted for the doctrines of God the erroneous concepts of men. Their tradition in many cases missed the true meaning of Scripture; therefore in holding fast to their traditions they had in reality substituted them for the commandments of God.

As Gould says, the mistake of the Pharisees "does not stand by itself; it has been repeated in every age. Everywhere, the same fatality attends authoritative exposition

of the Scriptures, nay, is involved in its very nature. The human exposition gets substituted for the Divine word, and so the worship of man becomes vain.”<sup>2</sup>

The men who have thus substituted tradition for religion are charged by Jesus with hypocrisy. This word has a very harsh sound to our ears; there is no uglier word in the English language, and scarcely any more deadly insult can be offered to a man than to call him a hypocrite. As used by Jesus, however, the word probably had a slightly different meaning. As W. L. Hannam has pointed out: “The ‘hypocrite’ was the play-actor [this is the meaning of the Greek term: literally, a man under a mask], a familiar figure anywhere in the Roman Empire, the impersonator who professed to be somebody else than his real self.” He continues: “We measure the capacity of an actor by his power to create an illusion; for instance, if John Smith is playing the part of Hamlet, and we are painfully conscious all the time that he is John Smith, then he is a poor actor. We did not pay our money to see John Smith, but Hamlet, and we are disappointed because we have not been deceived! Many of the world’s best actors and actresses never appear upon the stage; some of them hold very adverse views of the theatre, but they are amazingly capable performers for all that—indeed, so successful are they that they have even succeeded in deceiving themselves; for they think quite sincerely that they are doing one thing, whereas all the time they are doing something quite different. They may, for instance, think that they are worshiping God in church; but in fact they are only playing a part, which from long practice has become second nature to them.”<sup>3</sup>

The hypocrite, in other words, is an actor. His acting may be conscious or unconscious. Some of the best acting is unconscious, deceiving even the actor himself. And so

probably here. Some of the Pharisees, it may be, were deliberately playing a part. But most of them were sincere and earnest men, not conscious hypocrites, but unconscious ones. Their religious customs had become a substitute for real religion. They actually thought that they were worshiping God, when as a matter of fact they only washed their hands. Falling into some comparable mistake is the danger that religious men face in every age.

But Jesus had a more serious charge to make against the Pharisees. Not only had their religious customs become a substitute for real religion, but some of their traditions were actually opposed to genuine religion. As Jesus puts it, "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God, in order to keep your tradition!" He illustrates the charge by taking a specific incident in which their traditions were utterly incompatible with the requirements of Scripture. According to the extraordinary practice to which He refers, a man could declare that his property was Corban (that is, dedicated to God). He was then forbidden to use it, even if he should later desire to do so, for the relief of his parents. It is even alleged that having dedicated his money to the Temple treasury he could in the end avoid its payment—this, however, is improbable. At any rate the divine obligation to honor one's parents, including filial ministration to their physical needs, was set aside by the operation of some supposedly higher obligation.

"And many such things you do," concludes Jesus, gathering up and comprehensively repudiating the whole body of the tradition of the elders which possessed the characteristics of the instance He had cited. "And thus He gives in most vivid form an indication of the fundamental difference in the content of His teaching from that of the scribes and Pharisees. For Jesus, the obligations of human-

ity, of man to man in loving, helpful, generous service, according to capacity and according to need, are of the very essence of religion, are, in themselves, of their very nature, duties to God which may not be ignored or superseded. But the scribes had some other and higher duties to God, whose center was conformity to priestly ritual, ceremonial, and ecclesiastical requirement. Their claim to superiority to other men and preference in the divine esteem was not based on a more generous and more fraternal attitude toward their fellow men, but rather on such things as fasting twice a week and giving tithes of all that they possessed. And they would not learn the simple but revolutionary lesson that God requires mercy rather than sacrifice.”<sup>4</sup>

Having justified His disregard of the tradition of the elders, Jesus now proceeds to answer the more specific charge, His disregard of their tradition regarding religious purity. He calls the people around Him and enunciates a general principle, which struck at the heart of all requirements regarding ceremonial purity, not only of the unwritten Rabbinic law, but also of the whole Levitical system of distinctions between things clean and unclean in themselves.

“Only that which goes out of a man can defile a man, that is, make him religiously unclean. . . . What goes into the man cannot defile him religiously. . . . What comes out of the mouth comes from the heart, and the heart is the seat of religious uncleanness, as it is the seat of religious purity. *Things* cannot be *religiously* either clean or unclean: only *persons*. And persons cannot be defiled by *things*: they can only be defiled by themselves, by acting irreligiously. . . . This principle seems profoundly true. It destroys with a prophet’s blow the terrible incubus from which all ancient religions suffered, that certain objects

or physical states are in themselves taboo or religiously unclean.”<sup>5</sup>

Jesus had stated the principle broadly to the people without. He states it again and explains it now to the disciples at their request. It seems strange to us that they should not understand, but the principle involved was so revolutionary, so far-reaching in its effect, affecting as it did not only the tradition of the elders, but also the legislation of Moses (the Bible as they possessed it), that the disciples could not conceive that Jesus meant all that His words seemed to imply. Jesus, however, appeals to the moral perceptions, the common sense of His disciples. “Do you not see,” He said, “that whatever goes into a man from outside cannot defile him?” Your own moral sensitiveness, He suggests, should make it clear to you that on this point the Law is wrong. “Thus he declared all foods clean.” We scarcely need to say that this last remark is a comment added by the evangelist, and that it was only gradually that the full significance of Jesus’ sayings penetrated into their minds. (Cf. Acts 10.)

Real uncleanness, which is moral defilement, Jesus proceeded to point out, has its source in the heart, which according to popular Jewish psychology was the organ with which was associated the higher life of man (including the mind). “For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts” (prompting and preceding our evil deeds). Here we have the general principle; some of the particulars, the many varied forms in which evil thoughts take shape, are suggested in the terms that follow. Fornication, adultery, and licentiousness (lasciviousness in the K.J.V.) are sins of passion and impurity, which leave their defiling touch on every age. Theft, murder, and coveting (all forms of selfish grasping to the detriment of others) are sins against property and the person of others. Envy (“evil eye” in the

K.J.V., suggesting a maliciously jealous temper or envy), deceit (the word denotes any trick and abstractly trickery, cunning, craft), slander (rather than blasphemy, as in the K.J.V.), and pride (the word includes pride of self and contempt of others, that is, arrogance) are sinful tempers of mind. Wickedness and foolishness (meaning here moral obtuseness and religious indifference, what Luccock describes as "the perverse confusion of values, the foolish choice of lesser goods, the reckless unconcern for the spiritual, the persistence in shopping for shoddy stuff"<sup>6</sup>) describe the attitude of the heart toward the moral and spiritual.

All these things proceed from within and defile the man. The last clause suggests that the evil which men think and do does not merely reveal their wickedness but defiles them, makes them wicked. We are so far the creators of our own evil character.

## 2. THE CURE OF THE SYROPHOENICIAN WOMAN'S DAUGHTER.

Mark 7:24-30

After His clash with the Pharisees over purification Jesus withdrew from Palestine altogether, into the regions of Tyre and Sidon. These two cities were the largest in Phoenicia, 35 and 55 miles respectively from the Sea of Galilee. He evidently hoped that in this alien land He might be able to give His disciples His undivided attention. But, as Mark tells us, He could not be hid.

A woman with an afflicted child was one of those to find Him out. She knew that He had healed many in Galilee and begged Him to have mercy on her daughter. According to Matthew's account she cried, "Have mercy on me." (Matthew 15:22.) So closely was her heart wrapped up with her child that "the daughter's demon was the mother's torment." So it is with any mother. The child's suffering

becomes her own suffering; is often, indeed, felt more deeply than her own.

Jesus' treatment of the woman is at first glance very surprising. The Jews abhorred the Gentiles. They accounted them unclean, outcasts, and branded them as "uncircumcised dogs"; and it almost seems for a time as though Jesus shared this cruel prejudice. He began by ignoring the woman. As Matthew, who in this incident is more graphic than Mark, puts it, "He did not answer her a word." "Stolid silence met her heartbroken cry. It looked as though the old enmity between Jew and Canaanite were putting her beyond the pale of His mercy so that there was no healing for her."<sup>7</sup>

But the woman persisted and finally the disciples, with their Jewish antipathy for Gentiles, were annoyed. This crying woman was disturbing their Master's rest and would presently attract the attention of the populace, which might get them into trouble. They urged Jesus to grant her request (as may be inferred from Jesus' reply), simply that they might be rid of her.

But Jesus replied, still without addressing the woman, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (Matthew 15:24.) This surprising statement, which has no parallel in any saying of Jesus, seemed to shut the door irrevocably in the woman's face.

The woman, however, continued to follow Him. It appears that the evening meal was spread, and, as He reclined at table, she fell at His feet, like the woman in the house of Simon the Pharisee, and cried, "Lord, help me." Then at last He addressed her, saying, "It is not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." (Matthew 15:26.) This is exactly the answer that might have been expected from the average Jew, who regarded Gentiles as unworthy of association with them, and were accustomed

to call them dogs. But it is most surprising that Jesus should adopt such an attitude. He seems to be utterly callous to suffering on the part of one who is a member of a despised race, and now to add insult to injury. But the woman could not be discouraged. "Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table," she replied. Then at last Jesus revealed His true heart: "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly.

How are we to understand Jesus' treatment of the Syro-phoenician woman? Some think that Jesus was reluctant to heal the woman's daughter, because the ensuing notoriety would frustrate the purpose which had brought Him hither, the desire to be alone with the Twelve. Others think that He was seeking to test and therefore to develop the woman's faith; and others still that Jesus' own mind was not yet clear as to the propriety of a Gentile mission. "In a sense," suggests Vincent Taylor, "He is speaking to Himself as well as to the woman."<sup>8</sup>

To the writer, studying the incident in the light of Jesus' whole character, it seems that what He had in mind chiefly was the spiritual instruction of the disciples. They shared the Jews' prejudice regarding the Gentiles. Perhaps Jesus followed the course He did to break down this prejudice (by pretending to share it until they themselves were ashamed) and to demonstrate to them how worthy of His grace even a despised Gentile might be. His purpose, in other words, was not to test the woman's faith so much as it was to reveal it to the disciples, and to reveal it in such a way that it would be impressed forever upon their memories.

As the record shows, it was the only incident during Jesus' stay in Phoenicia, whose memory was preserved in the early Church. The disciples never forgot how Jesus

acted a part, appearing for a moment to share their own prejudice that they might be freed from it forever, and revealing to them the wonderful faith of a despised member of another race. It was an event, it may be, that in the later days encouraged the disciples to carry out the Master's commission to take the Gospel even unto the ends of the earth.

We should remember, too, that on these trips outside of Palestine, Jesus was trying to increase the disciples' faith; He was leading up to the great question, "Who do you say that I am?" (Matthew 16:15.) He wanted them to have a faith that could withstand even the cross. Here He lets them see a faith that persists in spite of discouraging prospects. In the days to come, when their faith seemed to go unrewarded, they would recall the persistent faith of this unnamed Syrophoenician woman.

### 3. THE RETURN THROUGH DECAPOLIS. Mark 7:31—8:10

The lesson which Jesus had taught His disciples in Phoenicia would be further impressed by the additional miracles that were wrought on the return trip through the region of the Decapolis. (7:31-37; Matthew 15:29-31.)

The story of the feeding of the four thousand (8:1-10) differs from that of the feeding of the five thousand in several minor respects, such as the number who were fed, the number of loaves and fishes, and the number of baskets filled after the repast was over. There may have been two similar occasions when Jesus had compassion upon a multitude, or the two stories may be different accounts of the same event.

# VIII

## Jesus' Second Withdrawal— Toward Caesarea Philippi

*Mark 8:11—9:29*

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### 1. THE REQUEST FOR A SIGN. *Mark 8:11-13*

JESUS' dealing with the Syrophenician woman, His cure of the deaf man, His feeding of the four thousand, had all taken place outside of Galilee. How long He was away, we cannot say, but He had no sooner returned to Galilee than "the Pharisees came and began to argue with him, seeking from him a sign from heaven, to test him."

Gould argues, and perhaps correctly, that the emphasis is on a sign *from heaven*. Signs there had been, but for those who believed, and performed not primarily as signs but because Jesus had sympathy for human needs, and because divine power was available through faith. Some of these miracles or signs the Pharisees themselves had witnessed. But they explained them as being due to the powers of the Devil. Now they demand a sign from heaven, some portent in the skies, which no one could deny.

Such a sign, an attempt to compel men's belief, Jesus steadfastly refused to give. It was a decision which He had

made in the wilderness, when He was first tempted by the Devil. (Matthew 4:7.) The reality of God's love cannot be made to conform to any conditions imposed by man. If only a man will believe in God's love there will be signs enough; but no signs are to be offered to unbelief.

"No sign," Jesus said, "shall be given to this generation." That is, no sign of the type demanded by them, no sign to the Pharisees and those like them who rejected His revelation of the Father and demanded a sign that would compel unwilling hearts. Matthew and Luke tell us that He added: "No sign shall be given to it except the sign of Jonah." (Matthew 16:4; Luke 11:29.) The sign which Jonah gave to the men of Nineveh was his proclamation of the divine message, and that was the sign which Jesus offered to all those who had ears to hear. "If any man's will is to do his will," He is reported elsewhere to have said, "he shall know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority." (John 7:17.)

## 2. A WARNING AGAINST LEAVEN. Mark 8:14-21

Immediately after this brush with the Pharisees Jesus withdrew a second time from Galilee, going this time into the regions of Caesarea Philippi. On the way, as they crossed over the lake, Jesus cautioned them, saying, "Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod."

Leaven, corresponding to our yeast, is used in the Rabbinic writings in three different senses: first, as a synonym for bread; second, as the teaching of the Law; and three, as an evil disposition, which leads men astray.

The disciples apparently understood Jesus to use the word with this first meaning—that He was warning them against eating bread which had been contaminated by the

Pharisees or by the Herodians. "And they discussed it with one another, saying, 'We have no bread.' " Jesus chided them for their lack of understanding, and urged them to look for the deeper meaning of His words.

Matthew tells us that the disciples "then . . . understood that he did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (the second meaning of leaven, as indicated above). (Matthew 16:12.) But Jesus' meaning went deeper still. He was referring primarily to the spirit of the Pharisees and of the Herodians, the mistaken attitude, the evil disposition which had led them astray, and which might so easily pervert the disciples as well (the third meaning of leaven, as the term was used by the rabbis).

Luke tells us that Jesus said to His disciples, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy." (12:1.) By this He meant not conscious hypocrisy, as we have seen, but the self-deception, the unconscious play-acting of religion, which led them to identify religion with their human traditions and so escape the searching ethical demands of God. (Mark 7:6-9.) The leaven of the Herodians, on the other hand, was worldliness, the readiness to compromise one's convictions for the sake of material gain. Jesus warned His disciples against the leaven of hypocrisy and the leaven of worldliness, it may be, because these are the greatest dangers which religion faces in every age, and against which He knew that His own disciples must always be on their guard. The tendency to identify religion with forms of our own choosing, to the neglect of God's own demands on our life, the tendency to worldliness, the delusion that we can serve both God and Mammon, or first Mammon and then God, are like leaven in a mass of dough. It will not be long until all the dough is leavened, our whole religious outlook seriously perverted.

"If then the light in you is darkness," Jesus had said, "how great is the darkness!" (Matthew 6:23.)

### 3. THE CURE OF A BLIND MAN. Mark 8:22-26

It is noticeable that Jesus "took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the village," just as earlier in Decapolis He had taken the deaf mute aside from the multitude privately (7:33) before He cured him. The reason is evidently His need for privacy. His public ministry had ended; He is giving Himself—He feels that He must give Himself—as far as possible to the disciples, preparing them for the difficult days which lie ahead.

In both of these cases Jesus relies more upon means to arouse confidence and faith than is usually the case, perhaps because both incidents occur outside of Galilee, where faith was not so readily aroused. The cure of this blind man is the one case where Jesus' cure is a gradual one.

Jesus continued northward until He came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, a town of some importance, beautifully situated near the springs of the Jordan, at the southern base of Mount Hermon, and about twenty-five miles from Capernaum. It was on the site of the ancient Dan and had become a center of worship for the pagan Pan. The city had been rebuilt and beautifully decorated in honor of the reigning emperor, Tiberius Caesar. The disciples saw all about them the evidences of human power and of man's indescribable spiritual need.

### 4. PETER'S CONFESSION. Mark 8:27-30

After a period of prayer (Luke 9:18), Jesus turned to the disciples and asked, "Who do men say that I am?" They had mingled with people, talked to strangers, and knew the various currents of thought. Opinion, they reported, was divided. Some thought He was John the

Baptist, that fearless prophet whom Herod had martyred, come again to life; others, that He was Elijah, the most popular of all the prophets, noted for his courage; others, that He was Jeremiah (Matthew 16:14), renowned for his tenderness, but also for his boldness; others, that He was some other of the older prophets or perhaps a new prophet, in line with the promise of Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15.

It appears that no one outside the circle of the Twelve now looked upon Jesus as the Messiah. There had been those who were inclined to accept Him as such (see John 6:15, 66), but they had gradually come to the conclusion that Jesus was not the man to usher in the kingdom of material splendor and political dominion for which they were looking. It is a remarkable tribute to Jesus' character that, in spite of this fact, He was commonly regarded as a reincarnation of some of the great prophetic figures of the past. They could not explain the riddle of His personality except by saying that He was John, or Elijah, or Jeremiah, or some other of the prophets. All these were rugged men, quite different from the gentle Jesus as pictured from the fourth century on. None of these portraits can claim to represent the original; they reflect the Christian ideal of asceticism and withdrawal from the world of later centuries. Jesus' contemporaries saw Him in quite a different light. They numbered Him among the prophets, bold, aggressive, masculine, who proclaimed God's word to an unwilling generation.

John, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets! Any spiritual leader could be content with a tribute like that—anyone but Jesus. He turned to the disciples with a personal question which they could no longer avoid, "But who do you say that I am?" He asked that He might know how far they had advanced in their understanding, how

far prepared they were to meet the critical days just ahead.

Peter answered not only for himself, but also for the Twelve: "You are the Christ." This confession did not mean that Peter at this time regarded Jesus as fully divine; it did mean that he was convinced that Jesus was not the forerunner of the Messiah, as the people had decided, but the Messiah Himself, in whom Israel's hopes would be fulfilled.

Though He acknowledged Peter's statement to be true, Jesus strictly charged His disciples that they should keep the matter to themselves. Neither the people at large, nor the opponents of Jesus, "nor even the outer circle of true disciples, who had passed through no such experience of intimate acquaintance with Jesus as these twelve had had, were yet prepared for an announcement of Jesus' Messiahship. They would all have interpreted it according to their own conception of Messiahship, and would have undoubtedly endeavored to commit Jesus to a policy of revolution"<sup>1</sup> against Rome. Even His most intimate disciples still had much to learn. A short time afterward two of them urged Him to use His Messianic power to destroy a Samaritan village by fire from heaven, as Elijah had destroyed the men whom the king of Israel had sent to arrest him. Jesus was forced to rebuke them, as no doubt He would rebuke many of His disciples today, "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of; for the Son of man came not to destroy men's lives but to save them." (Luke 9:55-56, margin.)

##### 5. THE FIRST LESSON ON THE CROSS. Mark 8:31—9:1

As soon as Jesus discovered that the disciples had perceived that He was the Messiah, He began to show them what His Messiahship implied, first for Him, and then for themselves.

First, He began to teach them that He Himself must suffer. He had given them intimations of this fact before, but this was His first clear teaching on the matter. He could not teach them that He must suffer as the Messiah until they first realized that He was the Messiah, but no sooner had they learned the one lesson than He began immediately to teach them the other. It is only the beginning of that instruction that we have here. Matthew says distinctly "from that time Jesus began" to teach them (16:21) and Mark tells us how from time to time Jesus repeated the teaching (9:30-32; 10:32-34).

In this first lesson He tells them that He "must" suffer, but He does not explain why He must do so. Later He gives them intimations also as to the reason. (Cf. Mark 10:45; Luke 22:19 ff.) Mark says He spoke this first lesson on the cross openly (K.J.V.), that is, plainly (R.S.V.), unmistakably, as opposed to the hints or veiled allusions such as He had previously given.

Peter, however, took Jesus aside and began to rebuke Him. We can agree with Burton and Mathews:

"That Peter should venture to reprove Jesus is surprising, but not that he found it difficult to accept Jesus' announcement of His death. Affection for Jesus and his just confessed faith in Jesus' Messiahship both made such acceptance difficult. The Jews of Jesus' day believed, not in a suffering, but in a triumphant, Messiah, and least of all in one whom His own nation should reject. To Peter, sharing still the ideals of his people, Messiahship, so far from involving rejection and death, excluded them. (Cf. John 12:34; Luke 24:20-21, 26.)"<sup>2</sup>

At Peter's speech Jesus turned sharply around to see if the rest of the disciples had noted what was passing. And when He saw that it was the case, He rebuked Peter in the hearing and for the warning of all: "Get behind me, Satan!"

These were the very words used by Jesus in His temptation in the wilderness. "Peter, in his repudiation of the doctrine of the cross, is dominated by the same sort of worldly ideals to which Satan had there appealed. He is, indeed, Satan's mouthpiece, for he is not thinking in terms of God's values and purposes, but in the common terms of men."<sup>3</sup> "Out of my way, Satan! For you are more concerned with human ambitions than with the purposes of God." So T. W. Manson translates His words.<sup>4</sup> Peter believed that Jesus was the Son of God; he loved Him devotedly; but he did not yet have the mind of Christ, and therefore he allowed himself to be used as a spokesman for the Devil. It has happened again and again from Peter's day unto the present. We want Christianity, but want it too often without the cross.

To guard against this danger Jesus then proceeds to announce not only to His disciples but also to all those who have been attracted to Him: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

The first obligation or condition of discipleship that Jesus here sets forth is self-denial. Not to deny things to himself (as the indirect object) but to "deny himself" (as direct object) is Jesus' requirement. His words suggest the thought of two objects—self and Christ—the one to be denied and the other accepted as the center of one's life. If you would turn toward me, Jesus suggests, you must turn away from yourself. If you would accept me as the chief object of desire you must renounce yourself as such an object. If you would henceforth live in my service you must at once cease to live for your own pleasure and interest. "To deny one's self is to cease to make one's own interest and pleasure the end of life, and one's own will the law of life, and in place of these to follow Jesus in

making love the law of action (John 4:34; 5:30; Mark 3:35), and the well-being of men the end of life (Mark 10:42-45).”<sup>6</sup> Or to put it more briefly, it is to renounce self and enthrone Christ.

The second obligation or condition of discipleship is the bearing of the cross. The phrase really indicates not a second obligation or condition, but rather the extent to which Jesus’ disciples are to carry their devotion to Him. A criminal carried his own cross to the place of execution, and to take up the cross meant, as the first disciples well understood, to be willing to go to one’s death. The equivalent of it in our language would be to go to the electric chair or to the fighting front, where death is always an imminent possibility. To take up the cross is to be ready as Jesus was to lay down life itself in obedience to the will of God and for the good of men.

The third obligation of discipleship is to follow Christ. “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and *follow me.*”

Christianity’s greatest rival for the affections of men at the present time is Communism. Observers are agreed that this movement is powerful, in part, because Communists have a cause in which they believe and because they are willing to work harder and to suffer more for their cause than are most other groups. Kao Tien-Hsi, a Chinese Christian who forsook Marx for Christ, writes:

“The noble qualities of the Communist partisans are their disciplined life of self-denial, their enthusiastic devotion, their zeal to preach to and convert men, their ability to endure hardship and suffer persecution as well as their faith that Communism will conquer the world. Many young Chinese Communists have given up their all—wives, children, property, families, even their lives—for the cause of the social revolution and for their party. In

Church history, we have many, many more such examples than the Communists. Can we, in this generation, keep up the spirit of sacrifice, martyrdom, exertion in work and hardship for our faith, for our mission, and for our Lord? If we have this kind of spirit, we will not be ashamed of being Christians or afraid of failure.”<sup>6</sup>

There are men all over the world who are ready to deny themselves and to take up their cross and follow Karl Marx. What we need is more men and women who will deny themselves and take up their cross and follow Jesus. And such we must have in greater numbers if the Church is not to continue to give ground in many parts of the world. In the present struggle for world leadership, these words of Jesus, this challenge and this demand, ring with new urgency and new significance.

Jesus gives four reasons why His disciples should be willing to deny themselves even at the cost of life itself and to follow Him. The first is stated as a paradox (vs. 35): “For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it.” Jesus’ meaning is clear. The man who hoards his life, who withholds it from Christ and His service, never discovers what life can be in this world and loses it in the world to come. The man who expands his life freely in the service of Christ finds true life in this world and preserves it through eternity. A man must become “integrated” about Christ and be willing to pay the cost, whatever it is; only so can he hope to really “live” in this world or the next.

The second reason follows up and enforces the first: “For what does it profit a man [what good does it do him], to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?” A man may refuse to accept God’s will for his life. He may gain riches, pleasure, power, but even if it were possible for him to gain the whole world, it would still be a bad bargain, since

by refusing God's will he has missed the way to eternal life.

The third reason adds to and supports the other two, "For what can a man give in return for his life?" These words seem to suggest that there will be no second chance. When once life is wasted, there is nothing with which it can be bought back; and without it everything else is worthless.

The fourth reason goes back to Jesus' original statement: "For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of man also be ashamed, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." Jesus "comes" in different ways, as the disciples came in time to realize. He comes for His own at the moment of death. "In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also." (John 14:2-3.) He comes also in the great crises of history, when the Kingdom moves forward with new power; at Pentecost, for example, when the Spirit descended upon the waiting disciples. That, they came to understand in time, was what He meant when He said, "Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power." And there is the final coming when the Kingdom of God would come in its consummated form and when all men would stand before the judgment bar of God. In that day, says Jesus, I will be ashamed of those who have been ashamed of me.

## 6 . THE TRANSFIGURATION. Mark 9:2-8

Six days after Peter's confession and Jesus' first announcement of the cross, Jesus took with Him that little group of disciples who formed the inner circle of the

Twelve and went up into a high mountain. Almost certainly this mountain was one of the spurs of Hermon, towering snow-capped above Caesarea Philippi, in all respects a fit scene for the events that followed.

Luke tells us that He went up to pray, and that it was while He was praying that the transfiguration took place. The word "transfigured" means "changed in appearance." How, must be gathered from the context. Luke says simply that the fashion of His countenance was altered. Matthew says His face did shine as the sun. All three evangelists mention the change in appearance of His garments. Matthew says His garments became white as the light; Luke says His garments became white and dazzling; Mark says His garments became glistening, intensely white, as no fuller (the ancient equivalent of our dry cleaner) can bleach them. It may have been a light that shone on Him from above; more likely it was a radiance that came from His close communion with the Father. Prayer can bring us into such communion with the Father that it transforms our countenance and our lives. On this occasion Jesus' fellowship with the Father was so intimate that His face shone with an inward glow and His whole appearance was transformed.

"And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses." The words suggest that this was a vision which appeared to the disciples, but which would have been hidden from anyone else who was present, if he had not shared in their exalted experience. Luke tells us that these two men, the one representing the Law and the other the Prophets, were talking to Jesus about His approaching death. We infer that this was the matter about which Jesus had been praying; probably that His disciples' faith might not be shattered thereby. (See Luke 22:31-32.) The three disciples

remained silent, stricken with awe, until the two celestial visitors began to withdraw.

Then Peter spoke up and said, "Master, it is well that we are here, let us make three booths [or shelters], one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." Mark explains that Peter made this remark because he didn't know what else to say. According to Bishop McConnell, "Peter belongs to that rather numerous class of persons who, when they do not know what to say, say it." "His words seem absurd," says Erdman; "beings from the unseen world would hardly care for huts on the mountainside; it would not be a kindness to detain . . . visitors from heaven. However, his suggestion is far from meaningless; Peter is not to be ridiculed; he realizes the blessedness of the experience; however clumsily expressed, his desire is to prolong such an ecstatic vision; in spite of his fear, he wishes to continue in such blissful companionship."<sup>7</sup>

"Yet," as Snowden remarks, "blessed as was this experience, Peter was mistaken in his desire and proposal to protract it. Jesus and the disciples had other work to do than to enjoy this glory, and the heavenly visitors could not tarry long on earth. The Mount of Transfiguration is not a place to dwell: too much work is waiting for us on the plain below. . . . Prayer and meditation on the Mount must be combined with active mercy on the plain to form the full-orbed Christian life."<sup>8</sup>

As Georgia Harkness has so beautifully written:

"Transfigured on a mount the Master stood,  
His raiment white, and dazzling to the sight,  
In radiance divine. It would be good  
To stay and dwell forever in that light,  
So Peter thought—but Jesus spake him nay.  
He knew that all about was work to do,  
That in the vale below a sick boy lay,  
And troubled folk they might bring healing to.

"I too have seen a vision on a mount—  
Have gazed on dazzling whiteness, and been swept  
By mountain winds, dew-cleansed at morning's fount.  
I yearned to linger there—but downward crept  
A mist, and drove me to the vale below.  
Because He went, I was less loath to go."<sup>9</sup>

Jesus did not need to reply to Peter's suggestion, for "as if in answer to Peter's impulsive proposal, a cloud swept across, overshadowing them all. . . . In the Old Testament the 'cloud' is associated with special manifestations of God. . . . The later Jewish writings indicate that there was a belief that it was to reappear in the time of the Messiah."<sup>10</sup> Then, as the culmination of the experience there came a voice out of the cloud, "This is my beloved Son [greater, therefore, than Moses, giver of the Law; greater than Elijah, the refounder of the prophetic order]; listen to him." The scene then ended as unexpectedly as it had begun. All vanished as at a touch, and only Jesus as they had known Him was seen. But the vision remained, we may be sure, to strengthen them in the difficult days that lay ahead.

#### 7. THE DESCENT INTO THE PLAIN. Mark 9:9-13

As they were coming down from the mountain Jesus charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen until the Son of Man was risen from the dead. The reason for this order is not hard to discern. It would have excited false Messianic hopes and expectations among the people and might easily have led to revolution against Rome, in which the gospel would have been forgotten. Later, when Jesus' death had put an end to false expectations and the resurrection had pointed to His true glory, stories of His earthly glory and power would help forward the truth.

The disciples could not understand why the Christ needed to rise from the dead. "According to their expectation the Messiah would have the way prepared for Him by the returned Elijah. His own advent would be a triumph. There would be no defeat, no death, no need for a resurrection of the Messiah. . . . The reply of Jesus is that Elijah has come—in the person of John the Baptist—but he had no easy triumph. The victory of the Son of Man will not be a cheap one either."<sup>11</sup>

### 8. THE CURE OF AN EPILEPTIC. Mark 9:14-29

When Jesus returned with James and John and Peter to the place where He had left the other nine disciples, He found them surrounded by a great crowd, arguing (as translated by the Revised Standard Version) with the scribes (probably rabbis attached to the local synagogue), who had seized the opportunity to discredit Jesus in the eyes of the people. The throng was amazed at His opportune appearance and ran to greet Him. Jesus soon discovered the cause of the disciples' predicament.

A man with an epileptic son (Matthew 17:15), who was also deaf and dumb because he was demon-possessed, heard that Jesus was nearby, and brought his son to this particular place, hoping to find the Lord. Discovering that He had gone up into the mountain, he turned to the disciples, hoping that they would be able to perform the cure. Or perhaps the disciples had themselves offered to heal the boy. In any case they had attempted to cast out the demon and had ignominiously failed. Now the man's faith was shaken, and evidently the scribes had shaken the faith of the people (too often since that time, the world has judged Christ to have failed when it is only His disciples who have failed). The disciples themselves were greatly embarrassed, especially as Jesus had given them power over

demons, and as hitherto they had been successful in their cures. (See Mark 3:15; 6:13.)

When Jesus heard the story He cried: "O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you?" The strong feeling reflects the Master's cumulative sense of disappointment at the people's continued lack of faith. He felt that His work among them should have produced greater results.

As Jesus spoke the boy was brought before Him and lay wallowing at His feet. As Maclaren points out, there is something very beautiful and tender in Christ's way of dealing with the tortured father. "He begins with the question, 'How long is it ago since this came unto him?' and so induces him to tell all the story of the long sorrow, that his burdened heart might get some ease in speaking, and also that the feeling of the extremity of the necessity . . . might help him to the exercise of faith. . . . Get a man thoroughly to know his need, and vividly to feel his helpless misery, and you have carried him a long way towards laying hold of the refuge from it."<sup>12</sup>

The father grasped the opportunity to pour out his heart to Jesus. His intense sympathy caused him to identify himself with his son in a common wretchedness, "If you can do anything, have pity on us and help us."

The father's faith had been none too strong at the outset, and the failure of the disciples had made it weaker. Jesus in reply took up the father's words and repeated them with a touch of compassionate rebuke, declaring that the question of ability turns upon the question of faith: "All things are possible to him who believes," meaning probably, as A. E. J. Rawlinson suggests, "not that 'faith can do anything' but that one who has faith will set no limits to the power of God."<sup>13</sup>

The father caught the point and rose at once to a higher

faith: "I believe; help my unbelief!" There is no contradiction here. Those who are trying to exercise living faith in God best know the unbelief that lurks in their heart. As Andrew Murray remarks: "He wished to believe, but felt unbelief still too strong within him. What, then, shall be done? He presents himself to the Lord just as he is. He knows that his desire is to trust in Jesus; but he does not know whether there be more unbelief than faith in his heart. Just as he is, he goes to Jesus, and with childlike sincerity and simplicity he pours out his heart before Him: 'Lord, I believe: but, alas, there is still too much unbelief; come to the help of my distrustfulness.'"<sup>14</sup>

Jesus turned at once to the boy, "You dumb and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him." And after crying out and convulsing the lad terribly, it came out.

After they had returned to the house the disciples, still smarting under their humiliation, asked Jesus the reason of their failure. Jesus replied, "This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer." As F. C. Grant indicates, prayer here does not refer to "a momentary ejaculation, but [to] a life of intimacy with God through personal communion."<sup>15</sup> The King James Version adds, "and fasting." But the best manuscripts omit this phrase and the Revised Version is right in leaving it out; it is plainly a later interpolation. The cause of the disciples' inability was in themselves. They had trusted to the quasi-magical power with which they thought themselves invested, and neglected prayer, the true source of spiritual power.

Just why the disciples had neglected to pray, we do not know, but it is a very common failure. Matthew reports that Jesus told them that it was due to their little faith. As someone has pointed out: "They had been trusting in their commission and had thought little of the moral conditions, those of faith and prayer, on which its efficacy depended."

They had come to think that they had sufficient resources within themselves and to forget their dependence on God. They failed here, because of their lack of faith, because their spiritual level had been lowered by their neglect of the practice of prayer. "A lesson," remarks Paterson-Smyth, "which some of us can translate for ourselves. There are days when through our neglect, our spiritual life is at a low ebb and we are less able than at other times to cast out our devils. For each of us one kind of devil is hardest to cast out. We need to get to our knees when this kind comes."<sup>16</sup> Halford E. Luccock puts it more generally, "In a life of sustained communion lies the power to deal with any evil."<sup>17</sup>

# IX

## Lessons on the Way to Jerusalem

*Mark 9:30—10:45*

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IMMEDIATELY after Peter's great confession and Jesus' subsequent lesson on the cross, followed by the scene on the mount which came as the sequel of these two, Jesus turned His face toward Jerusalem. He moved slowly, because He planned to arrive in Jerusalem at the time of the Passover, when Jerusalem would be crowded with pilgrims, and there make His final appeal to the nation. He taught publicly in Perea, the territory east of the Jordan, which He had not visited hitherto, but devoted Himself for the most part to the continued instruction of His disciples. The lessons imparted during this period, as preserved by Mark, deal with a variety of topics, but running through them all is the thought of self-denial, the thought of the cross, its necessity for Christ or for the disciples.

### 1. A LESSON ON THE CROSS. *Mark 9:30-32*

Jesus returned first to Capernaum, but without making any public appearance, traveling incognito as it were. His public ministry in Galilee was now definitely ended, and He was trying to prepare His disciples for His approaching

death. "But they did not understand the saying," says Mark, preserving the recollection of Simon Peter. It may be that Jesus did not speak as explicitly as Mark, writing after the event, has indicated. Or it may be that the disciples simply could not take it in; it was too foreign to their way of thinking—contrary to all of their ideas of what the Messiah would be and do. "They did not understand the saying," Mark says, "and they were afraid to ask him." Afraid, no doubt, because they gathered that it was an unpleasant future which Jesus anticipated and they did not wish to face it. Just as a man fears and often refuses to go to a doctor who may tell him that he has an incurable disease. Too many of us are afraid to face facts, if they are unpleasant.

## 2. A LESSON ON TRUE GREATNESS. Mark 9:33-37

Jesus' lesson on true greatness was repeated more than once. It needed to be repeated, then as now. As most of His other teachings, it was called forth by circumstances rather than set out as a deliberate and formal "lesson." The first occasion for such an informal lesson arose in Capernaum, after the return from Caesarea Philippi, after Jesus had confirmed the disciples' faith in Him as the Messiah, after Peter and James and John had seen His glory in the Transfiguration. They did not understand what He meant by His coming sufferings, but perceived quite clearly that a crisis was at hand. Probably they thought that there would be a short period of conflict and suffering, and then would come the earthly kingdom for which all faithful Jews were waiting.

Speculation about the glories of the coming era led to a dispute as to which of them was the greatest, that is, would have the most influential and honorable position in the kingdom which they believed that Jesus was about to

inaugurate. When Jesus questioned them about the matter they held their peace. Their silence was due to their shame. They knew Jesus' opinion of such disputes.

"Things change their aspect when we view them in the presence of Jesus," comments J. D. Jones. "We, too, fret and fume, if we feel our proper place is not given to us. We grow hot and jealous about rank and position and the rest of it. But how mean and petty it all looks when we bring it into the presence of Jesus! It would do us good to bring our ambitions and desires and plans constantly into the presence of the lowly Jesus, and test them there."<sup>1</sup>

The Master sat down very quietly and called the Twelve around Him. "If any one would be first," He said, "he must be last of all and servant of all." In other words, "true greatness consists in the humble spirit which is willing to take the last place and the least place; but it includes something more; it consists likewise in the desire to 'minister,' that is, to serve."<sup>2</sup> E. W. Burch tries to bring out the proper relationship between the two as follows: "No man can push his way to prominence in the Kingdom of God; but, rather, if he desires prominence, let him show proficiency in serving, even if he appear to be last of all."<sup>3</sup>

Jesus proceeded to impress the lesson "by an acted parable of peculiar beauty: 'He took a little child, and set him in the midst of them: and taking him in his arms, he said unto them, 'Whosoever shall receive one of such little children in my name, receiveth me.' To care for a little child, or for one who like a little child needs our sympathy, our protection, our guidance, our help, is really to do a great thing; so great, indeed, that to do so in the name of Christ, and for the sake of Christ, is really to render the service to Christ. It is even more, if more can be; it is to render a service directly to God, for Jesus adds, 'And whosoever receiveth me, receiveth . . . him that sent me.' True great-

ness, then, consists not in attaining the first place in the notice and praise of the world, not in being served by many, but in being willing to stoop down to a humble place, not for the sake of self-effacement, not in timid diffidence, but in order to serve others for the sake of Christ.”<sup>4</sup>

There is no service dearer to the heart of God, Jesus seems to say, than the service of boys and girls, helping them to form right habits and ideals, and sheltering them from the pitfalls of life.

### 3. A LESSON ON TOLERANCE. Mark 9:38-42

Jesus' remarks about rendering service in His name recalled a recent incident to John's mind, which he evidently brought before the Master for His approbation. He said, “Teacher, we saw a man casting out demons in your name, and we forbade him, because he was not following us.” Dr. Rawlinson reminds us that “the practice of exorcism—a natural correlative of the belief in demons—was widespread in the Hellenistic period both among Jews and Gentiles, and often degenerated into a form of magic, in which everything turned upon the use of the appropriate ‘Name’ or power. [See Acts 19:13 ff.] The magical papyri, great numbers of which have been found in Egypt, make it evident that names derived from Judaism—e.g. Jahveh, Sabaoth, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and various names of Jewish angels and archangels—were in frequent use among non-Jewish magicians for such purposes: and among such heathen formulae of magic the Name of Jesus also occasionally occurs. The present story presupposes such a magical or quasi-magical use of the Name of Jesus for the purpose of exorcism, by one who was not himself a follower of the Master.”<sup>5</sup>

Jesus did not approve of John's action. He said, “Do not

forbid him; for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon after to speak evil of me." His reply indicates that the disciples had erred through excess of zeal. And He gives a reason. There was nothing to fear from leaving such a case alone. A man who had faith enough in the power of the name of Jesus to think of using it to cast out demons was not likely to prove an enemy, rather might he be a friend, or be gained as one. "These words of Jesus," says Luccock, "are a rebuke to all our blind exclusiveness, our arrogant assumptions that God's action in the world is limited to the forms with which we are familiar."<sup>6</sup>

"For," said Jesus, "he that is not against us is for us." It is important to note that this is said of one who evidently had some loyalty to Jesus and was actually engaged in benefiting others, not of one who was simply inactive. We recall that on another occasion Jesus said, "He who is not with me is against me" (Matthew 12:30), a striking example of the fact that Jesus' sayings need to be studied in their historical context.

The cases are indeed different, and yet the two sayings rest on the same principle, i.e., that one cannot be neutral in his attitude toward Jesus. A man is for Jesus if he has faith, however imperfect, which leads him to service in His name. A man is against Jesus if he holds aloof and refuses to assist Him. The one saying does not negative the other, but supplements it. Jesus goes on to point out that one may do less than casting out demons to enroll himself among the circle of His friends. The smallest service, such as a cup of cold water rendered to one who is Christ's, will be taken as showing friendliness to Him and so will not lose its reward.

But the converse is equally true. A wrong done to a disciple, however insignificant he may be, will bring incal-

culable harm upon the evildoer. Indeed it were better for one to lose his life, to be drowned in the depths of the sea, than to betray, to ensnare, to endanger the immortal soul of one who has faith, however meager, in Him. ("Little one" here refers to anyone whose faith is meager or small, or to anyone who is little or humble in the estimation of the world.)

#### 4. A LESSON ON SELF-DISCIPLINE. Mark 9:43-50

Jesus' lesson on tolerance had led Him to speak of the peril one runs who allows himself to become a source of spiritual harm to others. This in turn leads Him to warn His disciples against the danger of injuring themselves, to remind them that they must be willing to exercise the most strenuous self-discipline in order to maintain their spiritual well-being. He said, "If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell."

Jesus is speaking thus strongly not to establish a rule in life to be literally obeyed, but to convince people of the supreme value of purity and godliness and of the necessity of self-discipline to that end. If a man is wise, he will avoid at any cost a temptation which experience proves he cannot resist. If he is willing to pay the cost he may enter into eternal life. If he is unwilling to do so, he may suffer eternally in hell.

Literally the phrase is "in Gehenna." The word "Gehenna" was the name given to a ravine outside of Jerusalem, where in ancient times idolatrous Israelites sacrificed

their children to Moloch. It was desecrated by Josiah (II Kings 23:10) and became the place where the refuse and garbage of Jerusalem was thrown. Here worms consumed the dead matter and fires were kept burning to destroy the refuse. Hence it came to be used as a name for the place of future punishment. When Jesus referred to the unquenchable fires of Gehenna, He is then simply carrying out the imagery of the locality. He did not mean to teach that sinners in hell will suffer in literal flames any more than that they will find there worms and maggots to feed unendingly on their bodies. Both expressions are figures that suggest the fierceness and the continuance of the suffering that follows for those who have failed to exercise moral discipline in this life, or else, as some suggest, "the destruction of waste products in God's creation." The fires burned unceasingly in Gehenna, but the refuse was consumed. So in 8:34-36 Jesus had said that a man may save his life eternally or *lose* it.

Jesus continued, "For every one will be salted with fire." Salt was used in Jesus' day, when there was no artificial ice and no electric refrigeration, as a preservative against corruption in things apt to putrefy. It is evident, then, that Jesus in this phrase is speaking of the necessity of fire as a preservative in every man's life. And the sense in which fire preserves is by consuming what is bad in a man so that what is good remains. (See Malachi 3:2-3.) Every man by self-discipline must burn out the evil that is in him in order that his true life may be saved from corruption; or he must allow the fires of persecution, the fiery trials through which he goes, to burn out the dross of his nature. (See I Peter 1:6-7.) The phrase "and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt" is not in the Revised Standard Version because it is not in the best manuscripts. Probably it was an early gloss, intended to make clearer the thought that suffering purifies

the Christian and makes him an acceptable sacrifice to God, just as salt purified the sacrifices offered under the old law of Judaism.

The disciples must not only be salted with fire; they, in turn, were to be the salt of the world, purifying the world by their words and lives, destroying the agents of decay ever at work in human society. Unless the disciples can serve as salt in the community they are worthless. They must keep the purifying sacrificial fire alive in their souls. And, as one condition of its presence, they must be at peace among themselves. Thus the discourse reverts to the point from which it started. Desire for the first place, disputes about precedence, endanger the life of the soul. The disciples must let the purifying fire burn up the egotism that destroys peace and brotherhood in the Christian family.

#### 5. A LESSON ON DIVORCE. Mark 10:1-12

Jesus' teaching about divorce came in reply to a question. Some of the Pharisees asked Him, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" Matthew adds, "for any cause," meaning for any cause one chooses. The Jewish teachers were all agreed that a man had the right to put away his wife in case of infidelity, but they were divided as to whether or not he might put her away for other causes as well. One school, that of Shammai, held that a man could divorce his wife only if she were guilty of adultery; the other school, that of Hillel, held that he might do it for anything that displeased him. The husband did indeed have this legal right and he often used it.

As a student of Jewish life tells us: "Jewish society was disgraced by an appalling laxity in the matter of divorce. Family life was imperiled by it, and an intolerable wrong was done to womanhood. It made woman the slave of man,

putting the wife at the husband's mercy. For while she could not for any cause divorce him, he might for no cause at all divorce her and cast her out upon the world."

The Pharisee's motive in bringing this question to Jesus was to try Him or to test Him, perhaps to involve Him in an apparent conflict with the law. Possibly also there was a more sinister motive. The ruler of Galilee and Perea was Herod Antipas, who had divorced his wife in a very arbitrary way, in order that he might marry Herodias, his brother Philip's wife. John the Baptist rebuked him and later paid the penalty with his life. Perhaps the Pharisees intended to bring Jesus also into collision with this unscrupulous ruler.

Jesus asked the Pharisees first of all about their own interpretation of the Law, "What did Moses command you?" They replied, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce, and to put her away." (See Deuteronomy 24:1-4.) This reply indicates that the questioners were followers of the laxer school of interpretation, that of Hillel.

Jesus did not argue with them as to the meaning of the passage in Deuteronomy, whether the unseemly thing were infidelity or anything at which the husband took offense. He said in effect: "Moses allowed, rather than commanded, the right of divorce, because of the hardness of the people's heart." His ruling was a concession to their weakness. It was the best that could be done under the circumstances, at their then stage of civilization. Actually it marked an advance over previous custom. Men generally were allowed to divorce their wives without giving any reason for their action. Moses compelled them to set forth the grounds for the divorce in a public document which afforded some protection to the woman, particularly if the reason was an inconsequential one. But this is not the ideal

which God set forth in the beginning. He made them male and female. He meant them to live together as husband and wife; to become physically and spiritually one. "What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder." Later in a private conversation with the disciples, Jesus declared that a husband who puts away his wife, or a wife who puts away her husband, and then remarries commits adultery.

Does it follow from Jesus' words that Christians should never seek to be released from the marriage bond? Some think that this is the only possible course for a Christian to follow. But in Matthew's account of this same conversation—written a full generation later—the phrase appears, "except for unchastity" (Matthew 19:9), which apparently allows divorce in cases of infidelity. Some scholars think that this clause was added by later scribes who found Jesus' original teaching a bit too difficult, and this is the likely explanation. Others argue, not so plausibly, that Mark assumed that his readers would recognize that there was this one ground for divorce.

Some years after Jesus taught in Galilee, Paul faced a practical problem which had arisen in the church in Corinth. If a believing husband is deserted by an unbelieving wife (or vice versa), is the innocent party entitled to a divorce with the right of remarriage in the church? Paul concludes that "in such a case the brother or sister is not bound." (I Corinthians 7:12-16.) The fact that both Matthew and Paul modify the original teaching of Jesus as reported by Mark lead some to point out that it was not Jesus' custom to lay down binding laws, to be legalistically interpreted and applied, but rather to give broad spiritual principles to be applied in love to the various concrete situations as they arise.

Divorce as practiced in Jesus' day was an injustice to the

woman. There are cases today when it seems an injustice to compel her to remain with her husband. It may be that in such cases Christian people are entitled to seek and to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit. But whether or not this is so, the ideal remains. Marriage is to be a lifelong union between one man and one woman. Every effort is to be made to keep the home intact. Separation is to be sought only when otherwise worse evils would result.

Incidentally Jesus' reference to the Mosaic legislation on divorce throws light on His attitude toward the Old Testament revelation. In the light of His other teaching (cf. Matthew 5:17 ff.), we can be sure that there are other Old Testament ideals which reflect the hardness of the people's heart rather than the divine ideal revealed in Jesus Christ. Jesus is a more adequate interpreter of the Father's heart and will than either Moses or Elijah, or any of their successors. As the voice on the Mount declared: "This is my beloved Son; listen to him." (9:7.)

## 6. A LESSON ON CHILDREN. Mark 10:13-16

As Dr. Erdman has pointed out: "Something is added to the exquisite beauty of this picture by the setting in which it is placed. Jesus has just been speaking of the sanctity of the marriage tie by which the safety of the home is secured; He now teaches the sacredness of childhood in which the home finds its completeness, its glory, and its ennobling care."<sup>7</sup>

Mothers were bringing their children to Jesus that He might touch them. "Some commentators refer to an alleged Jewish custom of bringing children to be blessed by synagogue rulers, but the motive of those who brought the children to Jesus is more probably the simple instinctive impulse to secure for them the 'touch' of the great wonder-working Prophet, which would be regarded as carrying

with it a blessing, exactly as Italian peasants today bring their little ones to receive the blessing of a Cardinal, or the sanctifying touch of a holy relic of some saint. The disciples wish to spare the Master from being troubled, as one might wish to safeguard a famous man from the embarrassing solicitations of autograph-hunters today.”<sup>8</sup>

When Jesus saw it He was indignant. The Greek word used here is an expressive one, as though Jesus felt, “This is too much to let pass calmly.” It was a disappointment that kindled strong feeling to see His spirit so misunderstood and His ministry hindered by the very men He had been instructing so patiently. “Let the children come to me,” He said, and “do not hinder them.” The implication is that the children will come to Him of their own accord, if they are not hindered. His was the kind of personality that attracted them.

Then He added the significant words, “for to such belongs the kingdom of God.” He means that the quality of childlikeness, receptivity, and trustfulness, whether found in a child or an adult, is a necessary condition of obtaining the blessing of the Kingdom.

He proceeds to impress the point upon them still more: “Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.” In what respects are we to imitate a child if we are to receive the Kingdom of God? Not in his innocence, for Jesus came to seek and to save those who are lost. Not in humility, for not all children are humble. Not in his unselfishness, for the average child is a consummate egotist. With the Oriental child’s unquestioning obedience, say some. In our readiness to receive the Kingdom as God’s gift, and not as our own achievement, say others. With a child’s unwavering trust, say others still. R. J. Barker puts the emphasis on another quality: “His meaning is not merely that just as a child

is completely and trustfully dependent on a father's care, so we also must trust our Father; it is primarily that 'entering the Kingdom' for us adults is starting life over again. Much we have learned must be forgotten and we must start learning again as children do. To cease to be teachable is to suffer from arrested spiritual development. If we would enter the Kingdom we must be as receptive as children."<sup>9</sup>

Jesus, we read, took the little children in His arms and blessed them fervently (so the Greek). This was no official benediction. Jesus loved little children, not simply the childlike. Hardly anything is more characteristic of Jesus than this attitude toward children. It is unparalleled in ancient literature.

#### 7. A LESSON ON WEALTH. Mark 10:17-27

One day a young man (Matthew 19:20) ran up to Jesus and knelt reverently before Him. Mark tells us that he was rich, and Luke adds that he was a ruler, probably one of the rulers of the local synagogue, at any rate, a man of distinction in his community. His great question was, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He evidently thought that there was some single act, or a series of acts, which could guarantee the achievement of his heart's desire. This conception of salvation, says Halford E. Luccock, "represents one of the greatest and most persistent fallacies in religion and ethics, from the power of which, with its crippling effects, Jesus sought to release men. The conception that salvation, or life in its largest religious sense, is something that can be won by 'doing' any one thing, or a number of things, is completely false. The young man was on the wrong road, and that was part of what Jesus told him. . . . Eternal life . . . cannot be won by 'doing.' It comes of a spirit which informs the whole man, an inwardness of character which springs from one's

relation to God. . . . Filial conduct must spring from the fact that we are sons of our heavenly Father.”<sup>10</sup>

“Why do you call me good?” Jesus asked. “No one is good but God alone.” He did not mean to deny that He was good, or to claim that, being good, He must be God. He meant rather to raise the young man’s conception of what constituted goodness. The standards of goodness by which we measure ourselves are divine standards, not human ones. And tried by that test, no man is ever fully good.

Having set the standard of goodness Jesus went on to rehearse the divine precepts which were regarded by the Jews as the highest expression of the divine will. He “cites only the commandments which regulate man’s duty to his neighbor, probably because they admit of a relatively simple application to the conduct of life.”<sup>11</sup> The tenth commandment is replaced by “Do not defraud” (cf. Deuteronomy 24:14-15), perhaps because to defraud the poor might be regarded as the special temptation of the rich.

Jesus did not intend this to be a final answer to the young man’s question. It was only the beginning. The truly searching demand was still to come. The Master’s words here, then, do not indicate that a man may find eternal life by observing these or any other “commands.” They do indicate that a man cannot be saved apart from the commandments. Christian love to God and man is not a substitute for the law. It is the fulfillment of the law.

The young man claimed to have kept all the commandments, and no doubt he had done so, judged by the standards of his class, but his further question, “What do I still lack?” (Matthew 19:20) reveals that he himself knew that there was something missing. His life was not a satisfying one; neither did it measure up to the fullest potentialities of which he was capable.

In response to this felt need, Jesus replied, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you have . . . and come, follow me." What the young man lacked was Jesus Himself, or that which Jesus alone could give—love to God and man that leads one to meet every situation as God would have him do, as obedience to particular commandments can never do; forgiveness when he fails; a divine fellowship that enables him in spite of frequent failures to grow continually in the divine likeness. The young man was asked to surrender his wealth because it stood between him and God, between him and the satisfying life that he sought. It was a demand that Jesus made of no other man during the days of His flesh, though some who followed Him were men and women of means. One, indeed, who wished to do what Jesus required of the rich man—leave all and follow Him—was not permitted by Jesus to do it but was told instead, "Go home to your friends." (5:18-19.) Jesus does not require all men, or most men, to surrender their wealth; He is more likely to ask them to use it as good stewards of that which God has bestowed upon them. He does call each one of us "from the worship of the vain world's golden store, from each idol that would keep us, saying, 'Christian, love me more.'"

Jesus' words do not teach us, then, that a man can win salvation by keeping the commandments. Unfortunately that way is beyond us. There will always be something that we lack. They do teach us that only a good man can inherit eternal life; that if there is anything that comes between us and God we must be willing to sacrifice it; that the possession of wealth, which ensnares men's hearts and makes them shrink from entire self-giving, may prove a spiritual stumbling block that needs to be abandoned; that some men will never find the peace or satisfaction which they crave until they sit loose to their wealth and

follow where Jesus leads them; that we fulfill the law and find eternal life only as we do follow Him who said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me." (John 14:6.)

The refusal of the rich young ruler to abandon his wealth for the Kingdom led Jesus to utter a warning against riches. "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." This metaphor is not to be taken literally. It was a proverb and a paradoxical expression for something so difficult as to be practically impossible. The disciples were astounded. If a ruler in the synagogue, an honored religious leader, a man of personal godliness, is held outside of the Kingdom of heaven, if men of wealth with all the prestige that wealth gives them find salvation so difficult, what chance has the ordinary person? Jesus looked upon them and said, "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God." God can save even a rich man (or a man whose mind is set on riches); He can give to a man loaded down with worldly wealth and beset with worldly temptation, enough grace to enable him to conquer his temptations and use his riches for the glory of God and the good of his fellow men.

#### 8. A LESSON ON SACRIFICE. Mark 10:28-31

Peter reminded Jesus that they had made the sacrifice which the rich young ruler had refused to make. True they had no great wealth to surrender, but some of them at least were men in comfortable circumstances; and whether they had little or much they had left what they had. "What then shall we have?" asked Peter. (Matthew 19:27.)

Jesus replied that any man who made any sacrifice for His sake and the Gospel's should receive a hundredfold, not in the world to come, but now, "in this time." Not of course

a hundred houses for every one given up for Christ's sake, but that which is worth a hundred times as much, in the real treasures of the Kingdom, i.e. in the peace and joy which come to those who make spiritual good supreme. Along with this spiritual reward, persecutions must be expected, and in the end, in addition to all else, there will be the reward of eternal life.

"But many that are first will be last, and the last first." God is judge and rewarder, and His judgments are not always in agreement with those of men. Peter felt that he and his fellow apostles had made great sacrifices. Jesus assures him that no one shall lose his reward, but adds that those who seem to have given up less may in fact receive more.

#### 9. ANOTHER LESSON ON THE CROSS. Mark 10:32-34

As Jesus walked ahead of them on the road to Jerusalem, the disciples were amazed—amazed, no doubt, at His determination to go to Jerusalem in spite of the bitter opposition that awaited Him there; and those that followed Him, the Twelve and others, were afraid. They were afraid, yet they followed, with no thought of turning back. As T. W. Manson comments: "They are baffled and bewildered by Him, and yet they cannot desert. There is something touching about this stubborn blind devotion to a leader whom they love but cannot understand."<sup>12</sup> And Jesus continued to teach them—although the language may not have been so explicit as Mark, writing after the event, seems to indicate—that Jerusalem was their destination, and that in Jerusalem He would be slain and rise again.

#### 10. A SECOND LESSON ON TRUE GREATNESS. Mark 10:35-45

Despite Jesus' efforts to bring His disciples to His own point of view, they continued to think that the Messiah

would establish a political kingdom, powerful and glorious, in which they would naturally share. As they drew nearer to the city, the old dispute regarding their respective positions in this forthcoming commonwealth, previously rebuked before they left Galilee (9:33-37), broke out anew.

Peter, James, and John were the trio on whom Jesus placed the greatest reliance. They might naturally expect, therefore, a like pre-eminence in the coming Kingdom. But James and John, brothers, apparently wanted for themselves a preference even within this inner circle. The time seemed to be drawing near, so they decided to bring their claims to Jesus' attention so that their superior status might be guaranteed in advance. They approached Jesus with the vague request that He will do them a favor. And when Jesus inquired what that favor might be, they replied: "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory," meaning in that glorious Messianic Kingdom which they thought was about to appear.

"How lonely Jesus must have been!" Dr. Merrill comments in his meditations on *The Way*: "No one seemed capable of understanding Him. He takes His choicest friends and followers apart, and tells them of the suffering, the sacrifice, the death that await Him. And they understand Him so little that two of them, with their mother to plead for them (Matthew 20:20), come to ask the chief seats in His Kingdom. The plainest of words fell on their minds and made no impression. So it has been down through the centuries. Christ has been telling men of love, of sacrifice, of humbleness, of unselfishness; and they have talked and prayed and worked as if the main concern was place and power and ease and honor. He has called them to take up the cross, and they have fought to see who should wear a crown, or carry a crozier."<sup>18</sup>

Jesus turned to the two brothers and said patiently: "You do not know what you are asking." They did not know, that is, that the high places in the Kingdom were something quite different from what they had expected, that they came not through appointment but through achievement, that they entailed suffering rather than honor. So He proceeded to ask them, "Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" The cup was a familiar metaphor for one's experience in life, whether of joy or sorrow. The baptism to which He referred was not a religious rite but "a baptism of fire" which included ridicule, misunderstanding, disappointment, danger, and death. It was a cup which He had already begun to drain; a baptism through which He was even now beginning to pass. (Cf. Mark 14:36; Luke 12:50.)

"Yes," the two replied, in effect; "we are able and prepared to pay any price for the boon we ask. We will share your sufferings, if only thereby we may attain our coveted pre-eminence in your glory." As Dr. Sledd reminds us: "Their attitude does not necessarily involve any appreciation of, or assent to, the idea of a suffering Messiah, but only that, if Jesus' gloomy forebodings (as they thought) should in fact be realized, they were nevertheless able and willing to go through His experiences of suffering in order to obtain the honors they sought."<sup>14</sup> Perhaps they thought there would be a brief ordeal, after which God's intervention in power would set all right and usher in the stage of Jesus' vindication and glory.

Jesus replied, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized." With all their imperfections, He realized that in the end they would not fail. Nor did they. But in spite of their readiness to suffer, the places of honor in His

Kingdom were not His to give. The conditions of their attainment had been fixed by the Father and they would be bestowed on those for whom under these conditions they had been prepared. Favoritism, personal influence, schemes of one sort or another, may count for something in this world; they count for nothing in the Kingdom of God.

When the ten heard of the two disciples' request they were indignant, with righteous indignation perhaps, but more likely with jealous indignation. They wanted the chief places in the Kingdom for themselves. Jesus then proceeded to give to them all His second lesson on true greatness. "You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles," He said, "lord it over them"; that is, exercise arbitrary rule for their own advantage, not for the benefit of the ruled. It must not be so among those who own Him as Lord. Pre-eminence is to be measured here by loving service. As Jesus puts it in climactic fashion: "He who wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and he who wishes to win first place among you will have to be at everyone's command."<sup>15</sup>

Jesus, it is clear, was seeking to found a society quite different from that of the world, not a society founded on coercion, exploitation, and legalized inequality, but on love, service, and a recognized and gladly accepted equality. The model for the service of those who are seeking to build the new society is His own example—"For the Son of Man himself has not come to be waited on, but to wait on other people, and to give his life to free many others."<sup>16</sup> To give His life meant "not simply to lay it down in death, but to devote it to the service of mankind, including, if need be, and as He foresaw would in His case be needful, its surrender in death."<sup>17</sup>

The Greek word translated "ransom" means literally a

price paid for the deliverance of a person or thing. In Jesus' day it was common to pay a ransom to free a man from the bondage of slavery. Jesus' life, culminating in His death, was a ransom because it does what any ransom does, it delivers. It delivers those who are willing to learn of Him from the bondage of fear, anxiety, selfishness, sin, and finally from death itself.

# X

## Jesus' Last Week in Jerusalem

*Mark 10:46—15:47*

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### FRIDAY: THE CURE OF A BLIND MAN IN JERICHO

*Mark 10:46-52*

JESUS reached Jericho, a commercial and religious center, only fifteen miles from Jerusalem, on Friday, one week before the Passover. Already the road was crowded with pilgrims. Jesus, accounted a great prophet, was followed by an enthusiastic crowd. The rumor that He was, or claimed to be, in some sense the Messiah had by this time become widespread; it was on men's lips that He would enter Jerusalem in His Messianic capacity.

The first public manifestation of this undercurrent of surmise and conjecture came from a blind man on the outskirts of Jericho. Blindness was very common in Palestine, and its wretched victims posted themselves at the city gateways, especially at the Passover season. This man was named Bartimaeus. When he heard that Jesus was passing by he began to cry out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" "Son of David" was a popular name for the Messiah, and in particular of the nationalistic warrior-king expected

by the Zealots. The blind man had probably heard it applied to Jesus by some of the crowd.

Many of those nearby sought to silence the man—sought to silence him because such an appellation applied to such a man at such a time was like spark in tinder; it might touch off a revolutionary movement that would bring down upon them the vengeance of Rome. But the man called out the more, assuming no doubt that this was the best way to attract the Master's attention.

Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." Men turned to the beggar and said, "Take heart; rise, he is calling you." The man, throwing aside his mantle that he might move the more quickly, sprang up and ran to Jesus. The Master said, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man said, "Master, let me receive my sight." Jesus said, "Go your way; your faith has made you well." The man regained his sight immediately and followed Jesus along the road.

This is the first time that Jesus had publicly received and accepted a Messianic salutation. We can be sure that its effect was not lost on the crowd. No doubt Bartimaeus was one of the foremost of those who a short time later cried, "Hosanna! Blessed be he who comes in the name of the Lord!" The time had come for Jesus to offer Himself to the nation as their promised Messiah. The time had come for the nation to make its decision—for Jesus or against.

## SUNDAY: A DAY OF TRIUMPH

*Mark 11:1-11*

Jesus spent the Jewish Sabbath in Jericho at the home of Zaccheus. (Luke 19:1-10.) Early Sunday morning He left Jericho and began to ascend on foot the rather steep road

to Jerusalem. Between Jericho and Jerusalem were the two little villages of Bethany and Bethpage. Bethany was on the road where it begins to slope up the Mount of Olives on the far side from Jerusalem, and just one mile away. It was the home of Simon the Leper (14:3), and of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. Bethpage was on the southern side of the mountain, across the Kidron valley, half a mile east of Jerusalem. The Mount of Olives itself was on the eastern outskirts of Jerusalem; it rose 200 feet above the Temple and 2,600 feet above the level of the Mediterranean.

As Jesus approached these two little villages, He sent two of His disciples on ahead, probably to Bethany, saying, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately as you enter it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat; untie it and bring it. If any one says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately.' "

It is commonly assumed that we have in this command an instance of Jesus' prescience—He knew the colt would be awaiting His disciples because He was the Son of God and had a clear knowledge of all future events. It is quite possible, however, that Jesus had made the arrangements for the transaction beforehand. Even if that was not the case, colts were as common in a Palestinian village as automobiles in our own; and the Master had many friends in Bethany who would be glad to lend Him the animal on request.

The disciples did as Jesus directed and soon returned with the beast. An unused colt would not be provided with trappings. The disciples put some of their own garments on the creature to serve as a saddle. Jesus mounted the animal and rode the last few miles to Jerusalem. Meanwhile a crowd had collected, doubtless made up largely

of pilgrims to Jerusalem, on their way to the feast. Many of these took their coats and spread them on the road which Jesus was to traverse. Still others strewed leaves from the fields. To spread garments and leaves in this way was a large part of the reception given a king by an enthusiastic town. Evidently the crowd was welcoming Jesus to the capital of the nation as the Messiah foretold by the prophets.

This is made plain by the shouts that accompanied their actions. The words themselves are from the 118th Psalm, the last of the five Messianic psalms which were sung by the people as they wended their way around the altar at the great festivals. Their use on this occasion indicated that they regarded Jesus as the Messiah, whose coming the psalm was supposed to predict. The word translated "Hosanna" is not an exclamation but a prayer, meaning "Save now," and is probably here the appeal of the people to Almighty God to accomplish the expected salvation through Jesus.

The second phrase, from Psalm 118:26, pronounces a blessing on Jesus recognized as the representative of God.

The third phrase, an expansion and application of the words of the psalm, represents the coming Kingdom as already on its way and drawing nearer. It is no longer in a postponed and indefinite future, but in sight. It is called "the kingdom of our father David," because it was to be a reproduction, after long delay, of the splendors of the Davidic kingdom, quite evidently of material splendor, according to the expectation of the people.

The last phrase might be translated, "Save now in high heaven." It is a prayer for God who dwells in highest heaven to save His people now. Luke tells us that some of the Pharisees among the multitude said to Him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." Jesus answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out." (Luke 19:40.)

In other words, "It is impossible to check their enthusiasm, and I will not attempt to do so."

Jesus thus acknowledged the Messianic tributes that were offered Him, even if He did not deliberately invite them. The reason why He did not silence the people who so acclaimed Him, as hitherto He had never failed to do, is not hard to understand. He could not do so before without inviting misunderstanding and threatening His ministry, so different from that expected of the Messiah. But now the hour of decision has arrived. To conceal His claim any longer would be a betrayal of His cause. For three years, according to the common estimate, He had carried on His ministry up and down the land and now at last He offers Himself to the nation as their promised deliverer. "He does so, however, in a manner which is suggestive rather than explicit, and which was so calculated as to afford the minimum of pretext for a charge of quasi-political agitation."<sup>1</sup>

More than that, Jesus, as His disciples later came to recognize (Matthew 21:4-5), was seeking to call the nation's attention to a well-nigh forgotten prediction of the prophet Zechariah that the Messiah would come not as a conquering warrior, according to the popular expectation, but rather as the Prince of Peace (Zechariah 9:9-11). Wrote the prophet:

"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!  
Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!  
Lo, your king comes to you;  
    triumphant and victorious is he,  
    humble and riding on an ass."

No warrior ever rode an ass; that slow, plodding beast was the symbol of peace. The horse, on the other hand, providing the swiftest locomotion possible in that day, was the symbol of war. The prophecy continues:

"I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim  
and the war horse from Jerusalem;  
and the battle bow shall be cut off . . ."

We are apt to miss the significance of these words because the implements of war have been so drastically altered. Translated into modern terms it would read, "And I will do away with bombing planes, intercontinental missiles, and nuclear submarines; and I shall command peace to the nations; my dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from Washington to the ends of the earth." This is the prophecy which Jesus chose to call to the people's attention as He allowed them to proclaim Him as the Messiah.

And yet He knew that the nation would not recognize its day of opportunity. For Luke tells us that when Jesus reached the bend of the road from which a commanding view of Jerusalem first appears He could no longer restrain His tears. "Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace!" He cried. "But now they are hid from your eyes. For the days shall come upon you, when your enemies [the Romans] will cast up a bank about you and surround you, and hem you in on every side, and dash you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave one stone upon another in you; because you did not know the time of your visitation." (Luke 19:41-44.)

Three times, and three only, it is recorded that Jesus wept: once at the grave of Lazarus, where, touched and moved by the sorrow of so many around Him, He mingled His tears with those of His friends; once in the Garden of Gethsemane, where, as the writer of the Hebrews tells us, He "offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death" (Hebrews 5:7); and here, where He wept

over a city about to be destroyed by the ravages of war, its homes destroyed, and little children buried with their mothers in its ruins. Some men tell us that Jesus was concerned only with the salvation of individual souls, but they are wrong. Jesus longed desperately to save Jerusalem from the horrors of war and wept because in rejecting Him and His way of life the city had sealed its own doom.

Perhaps this action of Jesus served to cool a little bit the enthusiasm of the multitude, who were expecting Him to bring the long-expected deliverance from Rome. No doubt it was cooled still further when Jesus came into the city. Everything was astir at His coming, but contrary to their expectation nothing startling was done. Jesus simply went into the Temple and "looked around at everything." Then, as it was already getting dark, He went out into Bethany with the Twelve.

The multitude who had acclaimed His entrance did not seem so certain now that He was the Messiah. They explained to those who questioned them that He was the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee. (Matthew 21:11.)

## MONDAY: A DAY OF AUTHORITY

*Mark 11:12-26*

### 1. THE WITHERING OF THE FIG TREE. Mark 11:12-14, 20-26

As Jesus came to Jerusalem from Bethany the morning after His triumphal entry, He noticed in the distance a fig tree having leaves. It was not the season for figs, for figs in Palestine are gathered early in May, or more usually in June, while this was Passover week, sometime between the last of March and the middle of April. Nonetheless this fig tree had leaves on it; probably it had been planted in an advantageous position sheltered from the wind, favored by moisture and sunlight, and as the fruit of the fig tree

appears before the leaves it was natural to expect this fig tree to have at least some fruit. But when Jesus came up to it He found to His surprise that it had none. He spoke to the fig tree and said, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." The next morning when the disciples again passed by the fig tree they found it withered to its very roots.

How are we to explain Jesus' action on this occasion? Two difficulties are sometimes advanced: first, the damage done to the tree; second, Jesus' supposed display of petulance. Some think that the original story was modified, or that Jesus' words were misunderstood. Thus Theodore H. Robinson suggests that Jesus saw that decay had actually set in and remarked that the tree would never bear fruit again. The Aramaic, he points out, does not distinguish between a simple future tense and an imperative, and the disciples took His statement of fact to be a command. Other expositors suppose that a parable, like the one now found in Luke 13:6-9, has been transformed into a miracle by tradition.

As the story stands, it is to be taken as an acted parable. The Synoptic Gospels, and particularly Mark, make it clear that in Jesus' estimation the nation now faced its decisive test. If it fails to meet this last opportunity that is now given to it it must inevitably perish. The withered fig tree is a dramatic presentation of a general truth, of which the history of Israel affords a particular example. Any nation, any institution, which does not bear its proper fruit will in the end wither and die.

This was the immediate lesson written on the surface of the narrative. But on the next morning, as Mark tells the story, Jesus drew a deeper lesson for the special benefit of the disciples, a lesson on faith in the efficacy of prayer. They had been astonished at the quickness with which His

prayer (in regard to the fig tree) had been answered. Jesus points out that if their faith does not fail there is nothing which they cannot accomplish; they could even move "this mountain" (Olivet) into the Mediterranean Sea. Of course Jesus is speaking in exaggerated language and metaphorically. Prayer can accomplish the seemingly impossible.

"Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you receive it, and you will." Other words of Jesus, His own experience and ours, make it plain that this is not to be taken literally, in its fullest import, any more than the words about moving "this mountain" into the sea. Jesus Himself tells us elsewhere that prayer to be answered must be offered in His name, that is, in accordance with His character and purpose. But all this does not mean that Jesus' present words do not have real meaning.

Dr. John S. Bonnell, in his stimulating book, *Pastoral Psychiatry*, tells of a visit to a parishioner who suffered from constant anxiety and fear.

"I can't understand what's the matter with me," he said to Dr. Bonnell. "I have prayed every day, but I don't get an answer to my prayers."

"What have you requested in your prayers?" Dr. Bonnell asked him.

"I have asked God to take away my fears and to give me peace," he replied.

"You have asked God for this blessing," said Dr. Bonnell, "but have you been ready to accept the answer to your own prayers?"

He opened the Bible which lay on the table and read the verse we are now considering.

"I know you have been asking God to help you," he continued, "but you have lacked the faith to believe that God was ready and willing to answer your prayers. You have not accepted the answer when He is ready to give it

to you. You have been holding out your hands and saying: 'Please, God, help me. Take away my fear. Give me peace of mind.' You have been straining and agonizing about it and all the while God has been saying to you: 'Here, my child, take the gift. I have heard your prayer. Accept my peace.' But you have kept on saying, 'Please, God, give me peace,' clamoring for the answer that God even in that moment was offering you."

"You are suggesting," said the patient, "that receiving is as much a part of prayer as asking, aren't you?"

"Yes," replied Dr. Bonnell, "that is it exactly. . . . Are you ready now to accept these blessings which for weeks you have been asking of Him?"

He said, "I am ready now."

Dr. Bonnell suggested that instead of continuing to ask God for the blessings he so greatly desired, he should now thank Him for these gifts that God was even now offering to him.

From force of long-established habit he started to pray: "O God, give me freedom from fear and give me peace." Then he stammered, hesitated a moment, and commenced again, with increasing confidence: "O God, I thank Thee that Thou art giving me freedom from fear. I thank Thee for the peace, Thy peace, that I am accepting now. Gratefully I receive Thy gifts. I have needed them so badly. I take them now. I thank Thee, God, for this wonderful blessing."

When the prayer was concluded there was already a look of peace on his face, and the greater part of the tension and strain had passed. "That is the first time in my life," he said, "that I have ever accepted an answer to my own prayers."<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps this is what Jesus wanted to teach His disciples as He repeated so often: "As you have believed, so be it

done unto you" (Matthew 8:13); "All things are possible to him who believes" (Mark 9:23); "According to your faith be it done to you" (Matthew 9:29); "Go your way; your faith has made you well" (Mark 10:52; Luke 17:9); "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace" (Luke 8:48); "Whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you receive it, and you will" (Mark 11:24).

But the answer that God is seeking to give may be blocked by our unforgiving attitude toward our fellow man. God's healing and forgiving power cannot flow into our lives if we refuse to forgive others. So "whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything"—*anything*—"against *any* one; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses."

## 2. THE CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE. Mark 11:15-19

Visitors by the hundreds of thousands came to Jerusalem every year, and especially at the Passover season. To serve their needs merchants and money-changers had set up tables and booths in the Court of the Gentiles, which was the outermost and largest of the four courts surrounding the Temple proper. The merchants sold the wine, the birds, and the animals required of the worshipers. The money-changers changed the coinage of the visitors into the special coinage (a half-shekkel) which every male Israelite was required to use in the payment of his annual Temple tax.

It was unfortunate that this traffic was permitted in the Court of the Gentiles, the only portion of the Temple which a non-Jew was permitted to enter. No one thought anything of it. But it emphasized the fact that the Jewish religion in Jesus' day had become an intensely nationalistic one. Gentiles could share in the promises made to their fathers only if they became Jews. The universalism of

their faith, as foreshadowed by their great prophets, was all but forgotten.

The Temple trade was a monopoly in the hands of the Sadducees, particularly of the priestly hierarchy. Pilgrims to the great feasts were in effect forced to buy in this protected market. An animal, purchased at a lower price elsewhere in the city, might be rejected by the Temple officials as unfit. Says Edersheim: "Of the avarice and corruption of this infamous High-Priestly family, alike Josephus and the Rabbis give a most terrible picture. . . . No wonder that, in the figurative language of the Talmud, the Temple is represented as crying out against them: 'Go hence, ye sons of Eli, ye defile the Temple of Jehovah!' These painful notices of the state of matters at that time help us better to understand what Christ did, and who they were that opposed His doing."<sup>3</sup>

Early on Monday morning Jesus entered the Temple and "began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons." Matthew, Mark, and Luke say nothing about a whip. It appears only in John's account (2:14-16), who places the event at the beginning of Jesus' ministry rather than at the end. It is not clear, therefore, whether John is describing the same event that the Synoptics mention, or an earlier cleansing of the same sort. And it is not clear from John's account whether the whip was used on the men, or only, as is probable, on the beasts. Jesus did not rely on physical force to expel the money-changers. If that were all, one man against more than a score, they would not have left without a struggle. "To just what the act owed its success," says Bundy, "we cannot say: the speed and surprise with which Jesus took the situation in His own hands, the guilty conscience of the dealers and the

authorities who permitted this trade, the approval and support of general public sentiment, or simply the imposing impression of Jesus' personality.”<sup>4</sup>

After He had cleansed the Temple, Jesus proceeded to instruct the people as to the reason for His action. The gist of His explanation was that God had intended His house to be a house of prayer for all the nations (*Isaiah 56:7*), but that they had made it a den of robbers (*Jeremiah 7:11*). A house of prayer—not sacrifice, on which the priests put most emphasis; not material gain, as it had tended to become; but prayer; and a house of prayer not for the Jews only, but for all the nations. “But you have made it a den of robbers.” Jesus does not charge them with desecrating the Temple merely by their trade, but by a dishonest trade. The Temple was intended to be a place of prayer for all the nations; it had become a place where pilgrims from all lands were defrauded. This serious charge—of robbing religious pilgrims—that Jesus brought against the merchants and bankers of Jerusalem was in reality a charge leveled deliberately and in all seriousness against the priestly aristocracy, who under the Romans were the political, economic, and social rulers of the people. They were the ones who controlled the Temple traffic, and from it they derived a large portion of their tremendous wealth. It was in effect a second appeal to the nation to repudiate their present rulers and to accept Him as the promised Messiah; a more positive effort than He had made on the previous day in His “triumphal entry.” Malachi (3:1, 3) had predicted that “the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple . . . and he will purify the sons of Levi [the Aaronic priesthood].”

But that was only the negative aspect. Isaiah had foretold that the Jewish temple would one day, when the Messianic age arrived, become a house of prayer not only

for the Jews but for all the nations. As R.H. Lightfoot has said, "There is reason to think that both the Jewish claim to possess the only true worship of God and the Jewish hope that one day all the nations would join in this worship were not prominent in Jewish thought generally at the beginning of our era."<sup>5</sup> Jesus' reference to Isaiah's prediction would seem to indicate that He intended to remind them of the universal implications of their faith and to announce that He, as Messiah, came not only to cleanse the Temple of its abuses but also to inaugurate the opening of a new era when all men might worship God in spirit and in truth. (See John 4:23.)

From the human point of view it was the cleansing of the Temple which more than any other act precipitated Jesus' death. He had previously aroused the deadly antagonism of the Pharisees and the Herodians in Galilee; but it was the Sadducees, the priestly aristocrats, who actually encompassed His death. And this was the act, and this the criticism, which stirred them to action. As Mark says: "The chief priests and the scribes heard it and sought a way to destroy him; for they feared him, because all the multitude was astonished at his teaching." "Henceforth," says Bundy, "the chief priests and their agents are omnipresent. They figure either directly or indirectly in every instigation against Him and they never leave off their persistent pursuit until the death scene itself. They could not use the cleansing of the temple as a case against Jesus, for the act doubtless had popular approval. But it does explain the determined and bitter opposition of the chief priests to the man who defied their system, invaded their own special precinct of authority, and took things into His own hands. . . . The cleansing of the temple was the one act of Jesus that set the death machinery going that crushed Him within less than a week."<sup>6</sup>

## TUESDAY: A DAY OF CONFLICT

*Mark 11:27—13:37*I. A QUESTION REGARDING AUTHORITY. *Mark 11:27-33*

When Jesus returned to the city on Tuesday He was met by a delegation of chief priests, scribes (lawyers), and elders. The chief priests were the leaders of the Sadducean party, scribes and elders were the most influential representatives of the Pharisees. The Sanhedrin, the highest governing body among the Jews, was composed of these three types. The language of Mark suggests that this was an official or an unofficial delegation from that important body. They demanded that Jesus inform them as to what authority He had for His high-handed action of the preceding day. If He claimed divine authority they could accuse Him of blasphemy; if He had no authority they could arrest Him for disturbing the peace.

Jesus agreed to disclose His authority if the rulers would give Him and the populace, who were listening with absorbed interest, their opinion as to the authority of John the Baptist. Did it come from God or men? The representatives of the Sanhedrin, the religious authorities of Israel, did not dare to answer. They were impaled on the horns of a dilemma. They could not say that John had divine authority because they had refused to heed him. They were afraid to say that he had no such authority because the people regarded him as a prophet. So they said, "We do not know." And Jesus replied, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."

This was more than a clever evasion of the trap which had been set for Him. Jesus had compelled the religious authorities of the nation to acknowledge publicly that they were unable to pass on the credentials of a prophet. Quite

properly, therefore, He refused to recognize their ability to pass on His own credentials.

At the same time He made it clear to all that His authority, like that of John, came not from men but from God.

But Jesus was not content to leave it thus. He proceeded to launch an attack upon the rulers themselves, to charge in a series of parables (Mark 12:1-12; Matthew 21:28—22:14) that their leadership meant the loss of Israel's covenant privileges and the final destruction of the nation.

## 2. THE PARABLE OF THE VINEYARD. Mark 12:1-12

Mark gives us only one of the three parables which Jesus told on this occasion—the parable of the vineyard. The foundation of this parable was the Old Testament figure of Israel as the Lord's vineyard. (See Psalm 80; Isaiah 5:1-7.) A man planted a vineyard, said Jesus, and set a hedge about it as a protection against marauding beasts. He then dug a pit for the wine press. Here the grapes were trodden by the feet of the reapers, a joyous operation accompanied with song. (Judges 9:27.) At a lower level than the press was the pit, a smaller cavity into which the juice of the grapes ran and was collected. A tower was erected for purposes of observation, defense, and storage. So everything was done that could be done, and the owner, having let the vineyard to tenants, was entitled to look at the end of the season for his rent. The rent was customarily paid in the form of a certain portion of the fruits. But when the owner sent his servant to collect the rent the tenants abused him. This they continued to do in the case of one servant after another. Finally the owner sent his son, confident that they would reverence him. But they said, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours." So they killed the son and cast his body out of the vineyard. "What will the owner of the vineyard do?"

asked Jesus, and then gave the significant answer, "He will come and destroy the tenants, and give the vineyard to others."

The meaning of the parable is obvious. The vineyard is the Kingdom of God (Matthew 21:43), for which every necessary preparation has been made, and whose fruit God has every reason to expect. The tenants are the Jews, especially the rulers of the people, the hierarchy, to whose care the Kingdom has been entrusted. The servants are the prophets, whom God has sent from time to time, but whom the nation as a whole has disregarded and despised. He Himself is the Son, whom they are now plotting to kill. Jesus' implicit claim to be the Messiah is not to be overlooked, but the main point of the parable is found in verses 9-10. If the hierarchy's present policy is carried through, the Jewish nation will be destroyed and the custody of the Kingdom will pass into other hands.

The lesson is enforced by a quotation from the 118th Psalm. A stone, discarded as useless, becomes the chief corner stone of the structure. So Israel, scorned and despised by the world powers, will become the keystone of God's structure among men. This was the thought of the Psalmist, but as time went on, it came to have a Messianic implication. Here it is applied by Jesus to Himself as God's Son, rejected by the ruling classes of a perverted Judaism, but destined to become the foundation on which the true Israel will be built.

The rulers saw plainly enough that the parable was directed against them, that it was in effect an appeal to the people to repudiate their authority and to accept Jesus as their Messiah. Mad with rage, yet helpless in the face of Jesus' popularity, they departed ignominiously to plot further how they might accomplish His death.

### 3. A QUESTION REGARDING TRIBUTE. Mark 12:13-17

The rulers decided that the best plan was to entrap Jesus in His talk, that is, to force from Him some treasonable, blasphemous, or foolish answer, which would give them an excuse for arresting Him, or would at least undermine His popularity with the people. So they send to Him a little group composed of representatives of the Pharisees and the Herodians. These emissaries were chosen because they took different sides on the question to be proposed to Him. The Pharisees owed their popularity partly to their intense nationalism and their hatred of foreign rule. Together with the mass of the people they chafed at playing tribute to the Romans. The Herodians, on the other hand, were adherents of Herod Antipas and owed what power they possessed to the Roman government. Naturally they desired the maintenance of the status quo, which insured their own favored position. The union of those normally antagonistic parties shows how dangerous Jesus' influence was judged to be.

The question, then, was one that concerned tribute and was very skillfully baited. "Teacher," they began, "we know that you are true, and care for no man . . ."; in other words, "We know that you tell the truth regardless of consequences, for you are not guided by personal considerations, but teach the way of God with sincerity"—a real tribute, emphasizing Jesus' freedom from deference to the great and powerful. Then the question: "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" The tax referred to was the poll tax levied on individuals and paid yearly into the imperial treasury. It was an offense to the patriotic Jew, as it was the token of subjection to foreign rule. According to F.C. Grant, "This was the burning issue in Palestinian politics from the days of Herod (d. 4 b.c.) to the fall of

Jerusalem in A.D. 70."<sup>7</sup> It seemed to Jesus' enemies that He could not but answer this question to His detriment. If He replied that it was right to pay tribute, His influence with the people would cease, for one who came to terms with Rome was not the expected Messiah. If He replied that it was not lawful, the Herodians would denounce Him to the authorities, and He would be arrested as a rebel against Rome.

Jesus saw through their dissimulation and said, "Why put me to the test? Bring me a coin, and let me look at it." The tribute had to be paid in the imperial silver coinage, and it was this for which Jesus asked. It was not that He needed to look at the coin, but He wanted to establish the fact that they were actually using Caesar's coins and were therefore subject to his government; in addition it was only as they observed the coin that they could understand the significance of His answer. The coin in question had to be procured, possibly from the money-changers, and the bystanders would wait for it, wondering all the more how Jesus would respond. This effort to get the money, and the definite attention paid to the coin, fixed the whole incident, and particularly Jesus' answer, as a quick response would not have done. As Goudge says, "All this suggests that the Lord meant His answer to be a serious answer remembered and understood by His followers, and not just a means of confounding His adversaries."<sup>8</sup>

The coin which was finally procured had on one side a bust of Tiberius adorned with the laurel wreath, the sign of his divinity, and beneath it an inscription which may be translated, "Emperor Tiberius, august son of the august god." On the reverse side was the type of the Emperor's mother, Julia Augustus, sitting on the throne of the gods, in her right hand the Olympian scepter and in the other the olive branch which indicated that through her the

gods would bestow peace on mankind. These were the claims which the Roman emperors published on their coins, the principle means of propaganda in their day.<sup>9</sup>

Jesus asked, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" They replied, "Caesar's," leaving off the grandiose claims to divinity. Jesus then said to them, "Render [i.e., give back] to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

It was a skillful answer which left His opponents confused. At the same time it was a real clarification of the issues. Jesus said in effect that there are duties to civil government (even when it is an alien government, a tyrannical government, an ungodly government), and also duties to God. These are to be faithfully discharged, each in its own proper sphere. Civil taxes are to be paid, but at the same time responsibilities to God must be discharged. The Pharisees expected a political kingdom and thought it was disloyalty to God to pay a tribute to a foreign nation, particularly one which did not recognize Jehovah, the God of Israel; the Herodians, in making terms with the conquerors, had given up their interest in the Kingdom of God. In reminding the Pharisees of their obligations to the government to which they were in fact indebted, Jesus at the same time recalled both parties to the higher claims of God. "Render to Caesar what is his"—not the divine honors which he claims—but taxes, political obedience, and the like, and "to God the things that belong to Him": obedience, service, worship.

It is not accurate to say, as is so generally done, that Jesus evaded the dilemma put before Him. He did, as a matter of fact, advise the Jews to pay the exacted tribute. "What matter if we are a conquered race," He said in effect, "so long as we continue to serve God?" The way to change the oppression and tyranny of Rome, He intimates, is by gen-

tleness, good will, and contagious religious faith. As the significance of this reply sank into the popular mind we can be sure that it underminded His popularity with those who had set their hearts on deliverance from Rome. It may help to explain the choice which the inhabitants of Jerusalem made three days later between Barabbas, who was prepared to strike a blow for national independence, and Jesus, who counselled submission to Rome—His only weapon, invincible love. The final disaster that befell the Jewish nation in A.D. 70 was due to their rejection of this solution offered by Jesus.

#### 6. A QUESTION REGARDING THE RESURRECTION. Mark 12:18-27

The second attempt to discredit Jesus before the people came from the Sadducees, representing the priestly, aristocratic party. Their leaders were the chief priests, whose monopoly Jesus had attacked the previous day in the Temple. They counted for little with the people religiously and do not seem to have taken any notice of Jesus until late in His ministry. When He accepted the title, "Son of David," which seemed to point to intended revolt against the existing order of state and church and interfered with their vested interests in the Temple, the Sadducees joined the Pharisees in the opposition which aimed at His life.

Theologically the Sadducees were more conservative than the Pharisees. They recognized the Pentateuch as inspired Scripture, but not the Prophets and the Writings. They also rejected the traditions of the Fathers, which played so large a part in the beliefs of the Pharisees. One of the doctrines not found in the Pentateuch but which had come to be generally accepted by the Pharisees and the people in the inter-Testament period was a clear belief in

the future life, based on the theory of bodily resurrection.

The Sadducees now sought to embarrass Jesus and to discredit a fundamental tenet of their theological opponents by imagining a woman married successively to seven brothers according to the law set forth in Deuteronomy 25:5. "In the resurrection," they asked, "whose wife will she be?"

Jesus, in reply, pointed out that they understood neither the Scripture nor the power of God. They did not understand their own Scripture which said, "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob"—not "I was" but "I am," which indicates clearly that the relationship still continues. It follows incidentally that in Jesus' estimation our beloved dead do not rest in the grave until the resurrection; they are even now in fellowship with God, who does not allow a physical event like death to interrupt the communion between Himself and any of His children. As Jesus said at the grave of Lazarus, "Whoever lives and believes in me shall never die." (John 11:26; cf. Luke 23:43; Philippians 1:21-23.)

But the new life, Jesus points out, will not be similar in all respects with the old. God will provide a life in which there is no death, or birth, or marriage (based on physical bonds), but where relations are even higher than the most blessed relationship on earth. We are to understand, no doubt, that earthly ties will continue in heaven, when they are based on genuine affection and true spiritual affinity, but that the closest and most intimate relations will no longer be confined to one man and one woman, but will be broadened to include all who are drawn together by common tastes and interests.

## 7. A QUESTION REGARDING THE GREAT COMMANDMENT. Mark 12:28-34

The third question asked Jesus on this eventful occasion was brought forward by one of the scribes and was a question of quite another sort. This Bible student, apparently agreeing with Jesus' previous answers and hoping that he might secure light on his own problem, asked, "Which commandment is the first of all?"

To understand this question we must remember that the Jewish code of morality was extremely complex and consisted of a large number of minute requirements and regulations (the rabbis counted 613 commands in the law, of which 248 were positive orders and 365 prohibitions), with no distinction drawn between ethical and ceremonial obligations. There was a tendency, however, among the Pharisees of Jesus' day to recognize a gradation within these precepts of the law, to account some great in the sense of fundamental, and others small, in the sense of derivative. But since this distinction tended to make men think of the "light" commandment as less binding than the "weighty" or grave ones, and so to leave the former undone, many teachers objected to such an attempt. Later rabbis insisted that there were no greater and no less commandments. This particular scribe, no doubt, thought that here was a great teacher who could throw some light on the problem, that possibly there was an opportunity here to get an answer to the standing question about the first commandment. Which, amid the maddening maze of rules, he asked, was the most essential?

The first commandment, Jesus replied, was that taken from Deuteronomy 6:4-5, which Moses himself had declared epitomized all God's requirements (Deuteronomy 6:1-3), and which was repeated every morning and evening

in the Temple as a call to worship: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord in one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." As we might say, You shall love the Lord your God with heart, mind, and will, and in each case with all your might; in other words, intellect, affection, and will are to be put entirely at His disposal.

"The second," Jesus continued, "is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

The scribe had not asked for a second commandment; nevertheless Jesus proceeded to add it. Why? Because without it the first is incomplete, and might be misunderstood. To love God is the first and great commandment, Jesus said; but there is a second "like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these *two commandments* depend all the law and the prophets." (Matthew 22:39-40. Italics ours.) One of the disciples who heard Jesus later elaborated the thought: "If any one says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also." (I John 4:20-21.) The religious folk of Jesus' day assumed that it was possible to love God without necessarily loving all of one's fellow men. One of the tragedies of Christian history is that so often professed followers of Christ have not realized that this is an indissoluble union. Love to God finds its only adequate fulfillment in love to one's neighbor. Nonetheless this is the second command and not the first. Love to one's neighbor must be rooted in love of God, if it is to be wise (not mere sentimentality), if it is to endure

(even when we meet persistent unfriendliness, or sheer unloveliness), and if it is to be universal (excluding no race, no class, and no individual).

Jesus' second commandment, like the first, is taken from the Old Testament. It does not, however, occupy the commanding position of the first, but is brought in only incidentally in Leviticus 19:18, where it is parallel to such commandments as, "You shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed." Moreover, in Moses' law "neighbor" is quite evidently restricted to fellow Jews, while Jesus widened the meaning to fellow men, to anyone who has a need which we can help to meet. (See Luke 10:30-37.)

The second commandment does not merely enjoin love for one's neighbor, but also for one's self. Love for our neighbor is not to blind us to our own needs, our own rights; concern for our own wants is not to make us careless of the needs of our fellow men. We need to love God with all our heart, mind, and will; we are to love our neighbors even as we do ourselves.

To avoid popular misconceptions we should note that the Greek word which is translated "love" applies to the volition rather than to the emotions, to the will rather than to the affections. Love to God manifests itself primarily in obedience (as Jesus said, "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love." John 15:10). To love our neighbor is to cherish good-will toward him, to be ready to aid him, when the opportunity offers, whether we like him or no. (Luke 10:30-37.) To love our own self means among other things to be willing to lose our life in order that we may find it. (Mark 8:35.)

We saw at the outset of our study that the great question in Jesus' day was the Roman question—what are we to

do with Rome? To that question, answers were given by four parties with four different programs: (1) The Zealots, a revolutionary party, who were committed to the way of force; (2) the Essenes, an ascetic party, who followed the way of flight; (3) the Herodians in the North, and the Saducees in the South, who accepted the way of compromise; and (4) the Pharisees, who believed in a way of devotion to God which did not include necessarily love to man—love, that is, to all men, to man as man. Here most clearly, most succinctly Jesus sets forth His own way, a way of love to God and man; the only way, as He points out again and again, that individuals or nations can hope to enjoy the blessings of the Kingdom of God.

#### 8. A QUESTION REGARDING THE SON OF DAVID. Mark 12:35-37

The enemies of Jesus had finished with their questions. Jesus, however, was not prepared to let the matter drop. He asked His questioners a poser in return, a question in which He again resumes the offensive. It was a question that was very properly to the point. Their questions to Him had been really a challenge of His Messianic claims. His question is a criticism of their Messianic ideals. As we have noted, there was a popular belief that the Messiah was to be the Son of David in the commonly accepted sense of a political deliverer. The purpose then of Jesus' question was to undermine this conception, to display its inadequacy, and to develop by contrast His own conception of the Messiah as something transcending that which could be expected of one who was merely a son of David, and whose chief function was to restore the Davidic kingdom. More plainly, if David, the reputed author of the 110th Psalm, referred to the Messiah as his Lord, it ought to be

plain that He, the Messiah, should be something more than a second David.

## 9. AN INDICTMENT OF THE SCRIBES. Mark 12:38-40

Jesus' question regarding the Son of David, which no one could answer, was followed by a scathing indictment of the scribes and Pharisees, the most popular religious teachers of the day. With unerring instinct Jesus pointed out the fatal weakness of their religion, which is also the most common perversion of the religious spirit in every age: magnifying that which is unimportant (the tithing of mint and anise and cummin) and ignoring that which is fundamental (justice and mercy and faith); scrupulous regard for outward respectability, combined with lack of self-control and an unrestrained desire for gain; reverence for men who declared God's will in the past, but deadly opposition to those who bring it to bear on current issues. (Matthew 23:23-31.)

Mark reports only one item in this severe indictment. In Jesus' teaching He said, "Beware of the scribes, who like to go about in long robes, and to have salutations in the market places and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers." The phrase, "who devour widows' houses," is a graphic one which describes their hard and unscrupulous business practices, their readiness to take advantage of even a helpless woman if it is to their financial interest. Their long prayers were a conscious, or more likely an unconscious, cover or compensation for their unscrupulous business activities. They kept their religion and their business in two separate air-tight compartments. Their piety expressed itself in long prayers; it did not carry over into their business life. Such men, said Jesus, "will receive the greater condemnation."

## 12. THE WIDOW'S OFFERING. Mark 12:41-44

"And he sat down opposite the treasury [probably in the Court of the Women, where thirteen receptacles were placed to receive offerings for the Temple], and watched the multitude putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came, and put in two copper coins [the smallest coins in circulation, whose combined value was less than our penny].” And Jesus said, “This poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury.”

Perhaps Mark brings in this incident here to contrast it with the callousness of some of the scribes, as indicated above. But it emphasizes a fundamental truth—that in God's sight the value of a gift depends not upon its size, but upon the motive and spirit of him who gives.

## 13. A LOOK INTO THE FUTURE. Mark 13:1-37

As Jesus left the Temple on Tuesday evening, after His long, wearing controversy with the rulers, a day which marked His last public appearance and appeal in Jerusalem, His disciples called His attention to the magnificence of the Temple and especially to the size of the stones. These stones were indeed of remarkable size, some, Josephus tells us, being approximately 36 feet by 12 by 18. And the Temple itself was of extraordinary magnificence and architectural grandeur. Its eastern front was covered with plates of gold which threw back the rays of the rising sun and formed an object of rare beauty for miles around. The stone of which it was built was white marble, and a large part of the side walls was covered with gold.<sup>10</sup>

Jesus replied, “Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another, that will not

be thrown down." He was still thinking of the devastating war with Rome which He saw must be the inevitable result of their present national policy. (See Luke 19:41-44; Matthew 22:7; 23:37-39; Mark 12:9.) Forty years later in A.D. 70, Jesus' prediction was fulfilled. In that year the Romans under Titus captured the city and devoted it to destruction. The work of demolition was done so thoroughly that "no one visiting the city," says Josephus, a contemporary Jewish historian, "would believe it had ever been inhabited."

The disciples were much disturbed by Jesus' words and said (as reported in Matthew 24:3), "Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?" No doubt the disciples thought that these three questions referred to the same great event. They presumed that the destruction of Jerusalem would be followed immediately by Jesus' final coming and the end of the world.

Jesus' answer as reported by Mark, as it was read and accepted by the early Church, falls into four parts: \*

### (1) *A Twofold Warning. Verses 5-13*

Jesus begins by warning His disciples not to be misled by war or by calamities of any sort; these things will occur again and again, but they are not signs of the end. Instead of looking for the return of Christ in such periods of catastrophe, the disciples are to look to themselves; it is their duty to preach the Gospel and to be faithful to their Lord whatever may happen, knowing that "he who endures to the end will be saved."

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\* Many scholars, most "modern" scholars, believe that the discourse which follows includes sayings delivered by Jesus at other times, and also materials from some Jewish or early Christian source, and that many passages reflect the later experience of the Church. Attempted reconstructions are found in various critical commentaries.

False Messiahs will appear (verses 5-6) but the disciples are not to be deceived, said Jesus. They did appear, many of them, in that very generation, promising that God would lead the Jews to victory over the armies of Rome. One of these was Bar Cochba, the leader of the insurrection of A.D. 132, which ended in the destruction of the Jewish nation. And in one sense or another they have continued to appear up to the present time. There will also be wars and rumors of war, said Jesus, and earthquakes and famines. But none of these are to be taken as signs of the end. So far from marking the end, they are only the beginning of that process of travail by which the new birth is to be brought about.

The whole paragraph up to this point is a statement of the things which need not alarm them, since they are not, as men are apt to take them, signs of the end, but misleading signs. Jesus mentions these things that the disciples may be forewarned. "Take heed that no one leads you astray," is Jesus' first exhortation. "This must take place, but the end is not yet"; and again, "This is but the beginning of the sufferings."

"Take heed to yourselves." This is Jesus' second exhortation. Take heed to yourselves because you will face trials and persecutions. You will be carried before councils (municipal courts), and synagogues (religious tribunals), and even before governors and kings. You are not to be concerned beforehand about what you will say under such circumstances, for the Holy Spirit will Himself speak through you. You will be betrayed and mistreated by members of your own families and hated indeed of all men. But not even this is to be taken as a sign of the end. You are to remember that "the gospel must first be preached to all nations," and that "he who endures to the end will be saved."

It is worth while to recall that the first Christians to read this Gospel (that is, the Christians in Rome) had just passed through the very experiences which have been described, the persecution under Nero. The promise recorded in verse 11 had been fulfilled. The Church as a whole remained steadfast and continued to preach the Word. A few years later it had become the strongest church in the Roman Empire.

It is strange that subsequent generations of Christians have so completely misunderstood Jesus' words. Again and again men have taken wars and earthquakes and famines and persecutions and apostasies as signs of the end. But Jesus said specifically that these things were not signs of the end, and were not to mislead them. "This must take place," He said, "but the end is not yet."

It is strange, too, that so many Christians still think that the Bible teaches that there will always be wars and rumors of wars. It does nothing of the sort. Jesus said that there would be wars, and there have been, thousands of them; so far as His prediction is concerned, there never need be another one. He says nothing about war to the end of time. He merely says that wars will come and His disciples must not think that they are signs of the end. The Bible does not teach that there will always be wars; on the other hand, the Old Testament prophets predict that the time will come when nations will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks and when nations shall not learn war any more. (Isaiah 2:2-4.) This end may seem far distant, but it should never cease to inspire our hopes.

## (2) *The Destruction of Jerusalem. Verses 14-23*

The disciples had asked specifically about the destruction of the Temple, thinking it signified the end of the

world. Jesus said that they were not to think that the end of the world was at hand because of the coming of false Messiahs, wars, earthquakes, famines, or persecutions. But when they saw the "desolating sacrilege" ("abomination of desolation" in the King James Version) set up where it ought not to be, then if they were wise they would leave Jerusalem, and Judea too, as speedily as possible.

The term, "desolating sacrilege," is taken from Daniel 11:31; 12:11; and I Maccabees 1:54, in all of which places it refers, perhaps, as it clearly does in the last, to the heathen sacrifices offered on the altar of the Jewish Temple in the time of the Syrian king, Antiochus Epiphanes. It refers here to any like desecration of the Temple, or perhaps of the city. Luke interprets it to mean, "Jerusalem surrounded by armies." (Luke 21:20.) Mark refers to the siege of the city by the armies of Rome in cryptic, symbolic language (which his readers would understand) because he was writing in Rome, where a reference to the Roman siege might be construed as treason.

Jesus' prediction, as we have observed, was fulfilled in A.D. 66-70. As foretold in verses 19-20, the sufferings of the Jewish nation were terrible beyond belief. And if the period of starvation, internecine war, and slaughter had continued much longer the people would have been annihilated. Jesus, looking forward to that time, tells His disciples that not even then were they to expect the Christ to return. The Christians, we may recall, were indeed warned by Jesus' words; most of them fled the city at the approach of the Roman armies. Their refusal to participate in this war for national deliverance widened greatly the breach between synagogue and church.

### *(3) The Coming of Jesus in Power. Verses 24-30*

In this section Jesus speaks not of His final coming, but of His coming in power, immediately after the destruction

of Jerusalem. He is to come "in those days, after that tribulation," i.e., the destruction of Jerusalem, of which He has just spoken. (Verse 24.) The generation to which He was speaking would witness the event. (Verse 30.) It is plain therefore that He cannot be referring to His final coming, an event which we still await, and the day and hour of which, as He Himself indicated, no one knows but the Father.

The events to which Jesus now refers would be marked by heavenly portents. (Verses 24-25.) Some have thought that these expressions are all to be interpreted literally. The figures which Jesus used, however, belonged to the poetic, imaginative language of the prophets as they spoke of the manifestation of God's power in the future. For example, in Isaiah 13:10, we find the same sort of language referring to the destruction of Babylon by the Medes; and in Isaiah 34:4 to the judgment of the nations of the earth. (See also Ezekiel 32:7-8; Amos 8:9; Joel 2:30-31; 3:15.) "That is to say, this language is intended to portray the greatness of the doom of such nations as come under the judgment of God. . . . They are not events, but only imaginative portrayal of what it means for God to interfere in the history of nations."<sup>11</sup> We find the same expressions in Acts 2:19-20. Peter tells us that this prophecy was being fulfilled before their eyes, in the outpouring of God's Spirit at Pentecost. In the light of these passages Jesus' words would seem to mean only that the destruction of Jerusalem will be followed by some new manifestation of God's power in history.

The events to which Jesus refers are marked in the second place by the coming of the Son of Man in clouds with power and glory. The passage from which this language is taken is Daniel 7:13, in which one like a son of man comes with the clouds of heaven, and the Ancient of Days gives him an everlasting and universal kingdom. This

prediction does not need to be taken literally any more than that about the heavenly bodies. In adopting this language Jesus seems to mean that this prophecy out of the Old Testament was to be fulfilled in Himself at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem. The spoilation of the city, so far from meaning the end of the Kingdom, as the disciples assumed, would stimulate its coming. As Gould says, after discussing the passage at length: "The period beginning with the departure of Jesus from the world was to be marked by this assumption of heavenly power by the Christ, and by repeated interferences in crises of the world's history, of which this destruction of Jerusalem was the first. With it there was to be a consummation of that age, a winding up of the Jewish period [in which the Kingdom of God was identified with Jewish nationalism] and with it the great obstacle at that time to the setting up of the Kingdom of God in the world."<sup>12</sup>

The crisis to which Jesus alludes is marked, in the third place, by the gathering in of the elect from all corners of the globe. The angels represent the invisible heavenly agencies in an earthly event. Back of all that men shall do for the conversion of the world is the Lord Christ with the host of heaven. "As for the time, it begins then, at the time of the consummation of the Jewish age, because Judaism was the great obstacle at that time to the universal spread of the Kingdom. Under its influence, Christianity threatened to become a mere appendage of Judaism, to have the particularism, formalism, and legalism of that religion grafted upon it in such a way that it could never become a universal religion. With the removal of this obstacle, could begin, not the [final] gathering of the elect, but the [immediate] gathering of them from the four quarters of the world, the universal gathering."<sup>13</sup> The disciples thought that the destruction of Jerusalem was a

sign of the end of the world; instead Jesus indicated that it would usher in the period of world-wide expansion. Freed from its Jewish shackles, it would for the first time become a universal religion; and its converts would be brought in from the four corners of the earth.

This is exactly what happened. The destruction of Jerusalem ended any hopes of domination by the Jewish wing of the Church; the liberated Church spread among the Gentiles until first the Roman Empire, then Europe, then the two Americas, and then the far parts of the earth were claimed for Christ. And this world-wide expansion still continues.

This particular crisis, said Jesus, is close at hand. Some of those who hear Him will live to see it. They must therefore be continually on their guard.

(4) *The End of the World—Jesus' Final Coming.* Verses 31-37

"Heaven and earth will pass away," said Jesus, "but my words will not pass away. But of that day or that hour [when heaven and earth shall pass away] no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." Jerusalem will be destroyed, Jesus had just said, and the Kingdom will begin to come in power in the lifetime of the first disciples, but as to the end of the world, the time when it shall occur (the third question which the disciples had raised, as recorded by Matthew), He now says no one knows but the Father Himself.

In Acts 1:7 Jesus tells His disciples that they must not expect to know the times or seasons when the Kingdom will come in its consummated form. It is very strange that the one thing which Jesus told us that we could never know, the one thing which He confessed that He Himself did not know, is a thing which so many Christians seek

to know, and which so many through history have confidently claimed that they did know.

We cannot know the exact time or even the general period when Jesus will finally come, but we are told that He may come at any time (it may be in death or at the end of the world). And therefore we are always to be ready—either for death or for Christ's final coming. In the Gospel according to Matthew we have three parables telling us why we should be ready: First, because He will come unexpectedly (like a thief in the night); second, because when He comes He will bring rewards and punishments in His hand (as in the case of faithful and unfaithful servants); and third, because there will be no further opportunity (as with the wise and foolish virgins). In the same Gospel we have two additional parables telling us how we shall be ready—first, by using our talents in the Master's service, and second, by serving our fellow men. (Matthew 24:43—25:46.) Mark includes the essence of all these parables in just one: "It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Watch therefore—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning—lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Watch."

## WEDNESDAY: A DAY OF TREACHERY

*Mark 14:1-11*

### 1. THE PLOT OF THE RULERS. *Mark 14:1-2*

Wednesday for Jesus seems to have been a day of solitude and rest; at least, we have no record of His activity. His enemies, however, carried forward their sinister plans.

Matthew tells us that the chief priests and a number of the elders gathered in the home of Caiaphas, the High Priest. (Matthew 26:3.) They were seeking to find a way in which Jesus could be seized quietly without arousing the populace, and then put to death. It was only two days now before the Passover, which would be followed by the seven days of Unleavened Bread. Jerusalem was crowded with pilgrims, many of them from Galilee and staunch friends of Jesus. It was generally agreed that no steps could be taken until after the eight-day festival was over and Jesus' Galilean friends had departed. These cautious plans of the Sanhedrin were changed by the unanticipated offer of Judas. Before recounting the nature of Judas' treachery, however, Mark breaks the thread of the narrative and turns back to tell the story of a supper given Jesus some days previously in Bethany.

## 2. THE DINNER IN BETHANY. Mark 14:3-9

If we had only the account in Mark, we would naturally infer that this dinner was given Jesus on Wednesday night. John, however, tells us plainly that it occurred six days before the Passover. Mark inserts it here, probably, because it comes in more appropriately at this point than as a prelude to the triumphal entry. It also furnishes a suggestive background for the treachery of Judas.

The dinner was given by Simon, the leper, who is not otherwise known. We may suppose that he was one whom Jesus had healed. John tells us that Lazarus was also one of the guests of honor, and that Martha, in whose home Jesus was so welcome a guest, was one of those who helped to serve. During the course of the dinner, Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus (John 12:3), entered the room with an alabaster cruse of liquid spikenard. Unguents were, and are, highly valued in the hot Eastern countries, where

they are most welcome to parched skins; of all anointing oils the most precious was that selected by Mary, spikenard, made from a plant brought from far-off India. It was so valuable that only the rich could afford it, and Mary had a pound of it (John 12:2), which was worth more than 300 denarii, almost as much as a day laborer could earn in a year. Mary could not wait to open the vessel. In her eagerness she broke off the narrow neck of the flask itself, and emptied its contents over Jesus' head and feet.

Some of the disciples (led, according to John's account, by Judas), poor men, who had been all their lives obliged to practice the closest economy, said indignantly to themselves, "Why was the ointment thus wasted? For this ointment might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and given to the poor." And they reproached her.

But Jesus said, "Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me." The phrase, "beautiful thing," is emphatic, contrasted with their depreciation of what she had done. According to a utilitarian standard Mary's act was wastefully extravagant. But Jesus was at a crisis in His career and Mary's generous deed had touched Him deeply.

The words that follow—"you always have the poor with you"—do not mean that we are to reconcile ourselves to the perpetuation of poverty. "Kindness to the poor is a primary duty. Yet there are timely acts to which even it may give place for a while. When such a conflict of duties arises, it is to be settled by the principle that what can be done only at a given moment, or not at all, shall have precedence over what can be done at any time. Love has its own insight, and makes its way by a sure instinct through all difficulties of competing duties, to the fitness of things."<sup>14</sup> Mary had attempted by her deed to express what she could not put into words, namely, her boundless

sympathy with her Master in the cup which she perceived He was now drinking, the cup of disappointment in His own people and His rejection by their leaders.

Jesus' words do not require us to believe that Mary consciously anointed Him beforehand for His burial, and yet it may well be that, with the quick insight of woman's love, Jesus' words concerning His approaching death had a meaning for her that they did not have even for the Twelve. Her feminine intuition may have led her to recognize that this was her last opportunity to express her love and reverence for her beloved Teacher. Some think that it was on this occasion that Judas definitely determined to betray his Master into the hands of the authorities, and to that event Mark now turns.

### 3. THE BARGAIN WITH JUDAS. Mark 14:10-11

In judging Judas' act we must remember that he was one of the Twelve chosen by Jesus to be His most intimate companions and that originally he must have been a man of spiritual promise. He had taken part with the others in the first preaching mission and had rejoiced with them in his power to cast out demons and to heal the sick. Even now none of the Twelve suspect him of any disloyalty to their Master or of any defection from his ideals. What led him to betray Jesus into the hands of His enemies we can never know. John suggests that dishonesty and covetousness were among his motives. (12:4-6.) Some think he saw more clearly than the rest of the Twelve what Jesus was about, that he was the only one to recognize that Jesus wanted to build a kingdom on spiritual laws and to win the world by love. And to Judas that seemed a foolhardy and impossible adventure. Perhaps he was bitter at being duped, as he supposed, by Jesus into believing that He was the Christ. "In the future now outlined by Jesus he

saw no preferment and no realization of what, we may safely believe, were his hopes as to the Messianic kingdom. Cupidity and revenge easily become allies in any man's life.”<sup>15</sup>

There are some who suggest that Judas' motives were less culpable, that he sought, as it were, to force God's hand, expecting Him to intervene to save His Christ from the hands of His enemies and thus to establish His Kingdom. But of any such presumptuous motive the Bible record gives not the slightest hint. Mark himself offers no explanation for Judas' action. He only states the plain, ugly fact: “Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them.”

It is to be noted that in all accounts Judas, and not the Sanhedrin, takes the initiative. Sometime on Wednesday, after the rulers had decided that they would not move against Jesus until after the Festival week, Judas approached the chief priests and offered to deliver Jesus to them. They accepted his offer eagerly, promising to pay him for his trouble, Matthew tells us, thirty pieces of silver, the price of a slave.

From that time Judas began to look for a convenient opportunity to carry out his bargain. Luke adds, “in the absence of the multitude.” The risk of an uprising on the part of the people was what the chief priests were seeking to avoid. Judas went back to those whom he had left for the time and watched his chance to devise the means and find the occasion, as Jesus' plans for His movements developed.

Judas did not regard Jesus as the divine Son of God. He should not be considered, therefore, as a man who did what no other man would have done. According to Walter Rauschenbusch, Judas is “the type of the lost leader. ‘Just for a handful of silver he left us, just for a ribbon to stick

in his coat.' Some leaders blunder and learn better, some sag to lower levels but plod on; some sell out. Judas could not bear to live."<sup>16</sup> The fact that remorse drove him to kill himself (Matthew 27:3-5) indicates that he was not altogether bad.

"Once on a time I hated him.  
But since then I have seen  
Men take the price of treachery  
And swear their hands were clean.

"I have seen faith betrayed; have stood  
Where peace was bought and sold,  
Where truth was bartered for bright coins  
Of silver and of gold.

"Judas sinned once, and died self-slain;  
But I—and men like me—  
Live on, tho' every day we set  
Love's feet toward Calvary;

"Wax fat, tho' now and then we flee  
The grief-crowned face of Right—  
Sometimes I pray for Judas now  
As any brother might."<sup>17</sup>

## THURSDAY: JESUS' LAST DAY WITH HIS DISCIPLES

*Mark 14:12-31*

On Thursday morning Jesus' disciples came to Him and asked what arrangements they should make for the celebration of the Passover. This was the most solemn of all the Jewish celebrations and reminded the people of the way in which God had delivered their forefathers from the bondage of Egypt. The fact that Jesus and His disciples desired to eat the Passover together, rather than

with their respective families, which was the ordinary custom, shows the closeness of their fellowship.

Jesus' answer to the disciples' question seems at first a bit mysterious. They were to go into the city, follow a man bearing a pitcher of water (such a man, doing a woman's work, would be a marked individual), and ask the owner of the house to which he should lead them to make the necessary preparations. This may have been a prearranged plan to throw Judas off the track. Jesus did not wish to be surprised by His enemies until He had the opportunity to eat this farewell meal with His disciples. As it turned out Judas was able to warn the rulers of Jesus' whereabouts only at the eleventh hour—possibly, as John's Gospel implies, by leaving the table after the meal had begun.

John's more careful chronology indicates that the Last Supper was eaten twenty-four hours earlier than the Passover (John 18:28; 19:14, 31, 42); in that case it could not have been a Passover meal unless by anticipation. "At the same time, the nearness of Passover gave a tone and emphasis as well as a meaning to the observance which [later] led to some kind of identification of the supper with the paschal meal."<sup>18</sup> According to John's very circumstantial account Jesus was crucified at the very time (Friday morning) when the paschal lambs were being slain.

On Thursday evening, Jesus sat down at the table with the Twelve, including Judas, now thinking how he might use the opportunity that was arising. During the course of the meal, Jesus, who had seen the disloyalty of Judas from its inception, announced that one of those who sat at table with Him would betray Him, a suggestion that startled the Twelve, and led to strained expectancy on Judas' part as to what his Master would say or do next. None of the group suspected the true culprit, and when the disciples asked for the identification of the guilty party (they prob-

ably suspected that anyone who betrayed their Master would do so unconsciously) Jesus merely pointed out that it was one who was even then partaking with Him of this sacred rite of fellowship. He added that His approaching sufferings were in accord with the Scriptures, but that the one who was betraying Him was bringing judgment upon his own head. Throughout the whole scene Jesus seems to be appealing to Judas' better nature, even to his fears, to turn him from his evil course. It becomes plain that Judas was not acting from any divine necessity. He was a free agent, who voluntarily chose a course of action from which Jesus sought to dissuade him. But Judas was not to be dissuaded. He excused himself from the table and went out into the night, still unsuspected by the rest.

After Judas had departed and probably during the course of the meal, Jesus took bread and wine and, in the words which are so familiar to us, instituted the meal which henceforth for His disciples was to replace the Passover. First, He took the flat, parchment-like sheet of unleavened bread, and after He had blessed it (that is, thanked God) He broke it and gave it to His disciples, saying, "Take; this is my body." His words, spoken in this connection, could only mean that the bread which had been given them, after being broken, stood symbolically for His body, or rather the sacrificial giving of Himself for them.

Next He took a cup and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And He said, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many." The pouring of the wine corresponded to the breaking of the bread and referred likewise to His sacrifice on their behalf. Matthew adds that the sacrifice is for the remission of sins, or is made that there might be remission for sins. The covenant to which Jesus refers (in Luke and in Paul it is the "new covenant") refers to the new

covenant predicted by Jeremiah. (Jeremiah 31:31 ff.) Jeremiah, writing after the destruction of Jerusalem, stated that the covenant which God had made with the Children of Israel at Sinai, and which was based on the people's observance of the Ten Commandments, was no longer in effect. He predicted that the time would come when God would make a new Covenant with His people; the law would be written this time not on tables of stone, but on the hearts and consciences of men; under it all men, not merely members of a single nation, would come to know God; and adequate provision would be made for the forgiveness of sin. This is the covenant, Jesus' words seem to indicate, that would come into effect with His death. The old covenant made with Israel had failed. His death would inaugurate a new era, in which the law would be written on men's hearts rather than on tables of stone, and in which the knowledge of God and forgiveness for sins would become available for all mankind.

Mark says nothing of the memorial purpose of the supper, or of its continued observance. His account would indicate that the first intention of Jesus was to prepare the disciples for the shock of His death by explaining its true meaning as redemptive. Paul, however, tells us plainly, and his account is the earliest, that Jesus requested His disciples to observe this memorial supper until He came again. (I Corinthians 11:24-26.)

After the meal was ended, Jesus and His disciples sang a hymn, and then went to the Mount of Olives, where there was an orchard, called Gethsemane. The Fourth Gospel implies that it was a favorite haunt of Jesus and the Twelve and so probably a garden belonging to a friend. On the way Jesus warned His disciples that He would be taken from them that very night, and that all of them would be scattered. Peter said to Him, "Even though they

all fall away, I will not." And Jesus said to him, "Truly, I say to you, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times." Peter replied vehemently, "If I must die with you, I will not deny you." And so said they all.

## FRIDAY—THE DAY OF JESUS' DEATH

*Mark 14:32—15:47*

### 1. THE AGONY IN THE GARDEN. *Mark 14:32-42*

Reaching the Garden, Jesus left the main group and went forward with Peter, James, and John. These were the three disciples on whom He mainly relied and with whom He shared some of His most intimate experiences—the Transfiguration, for example. He left the rest of the disciples on this occasion that He might pray, hoping evidently that the three men on whom the continuation of His cause so largely depended would likewise engage in prayer. We observe once more how much prayer meant to Jesus. In the great crises of His life—before He embarked on His first Galilean tour (*Mark 1:35*), before He chose the Twelve (*Luke 6:12*), before He posed His great question, "Who do you say that I am?" (*Luke 9:18*), before His transfiguration (*Luke 9:29*), and before He faced the cross—He spent long seasons in prayer.

As the disciples later recalled, Jesus began "to be greatly distressed and troubled." Distressed and troubled at what? We cannot penetrate into the depth of Jesus' mind and heart at any time and certainly not in a moment such as this. It may be, however, that what troubled and disturbed Him was "His rejection by men, their fierce hatred of Him, His isolation of spirit, even among His own—all these things coming to the Son of Man, the lover of His kind, whose whole life was wrought by love into the fibre and tissue of the common human life, and was individual in no

sense."<sup>19</sup> Turning to His disciples, He said, "My soul is very sorrowful, even unto death; remain here, and watch." It may be that He wanted them to prevent Him from being disturbed in His further communion with the Father; it seems from what follows, however, that He wanted them to watch and pray that they, too, might be prepared for the coming crisis.

The burden of His own prayer was that, if it were possible without loss to the divine purpose, the cup might be removed from Him. The cup signified His approaching death and all that it involved. It was not merely or chiefly the physical horrors of a cruel death that weighed upon His soul, or even the defeat of His hopes. As Bartlett says: "We must view Jesus' feelings largely as the outcome of His Messianic experience and consciousness. We must see the rejection by God's People, and the death virtually at its hands, from which He shrank with such agony of soul, in the light of His representative function as the bearer of the Father's message of good-will and love to His erring children."<sup>20</sup> (See Luke 23:27-31.)

Rejection of Jesus meant rejection of God's love, in reality the rejection of God Himself, not only by Israel, but by humankind. The cup then was not Jesus' death on the cross, but His death in consequence of man's sin.

"All things are possible to thee," Jesus declared, as He began His prayer. Yes, God could have sent ten legions of angels and saved Christ from the cross. He could have confounded the machinations of His enemies. But something more was involved, and so Jesus prayed, as we must always pray, "yet not what I will, but what thou wilt."

## 2. JESUS' ARREST. Mark 14:43-53

Even while He prayed, there came the tramp of men through the underbrush. It was Judas, leading an irregular body of men gathered together by the representatives of

the Sanhedrin and armed with swords and clubs. Evidently the authorities were prepared for resistance, if not a popular uprising. That these fears were not entirely without ground is shown by the sequel—at least one sword was drawn and one member of the arresting party was wounded.

Not all of the crowd knew Jesus by sight and there was a possibility that He might escape unrecognized in the darkness. Judas, therefore, according to the prearranged plan, stepped forward, greeted Jesus as his Master, and kissed Him. A kiss was the normal greeting of affection between a teacher and pupil, and was given on the head rather than on the face.

The leaders of the gang followed Judas closely, laid rough hands upon Jesus, and put Him under arrest. The disciples, overwhelmingly outnumbered, prepared to defend Him. Two of them were armed with short swords or knives. One of them, Simon Peter (John 18:10), drew his weapon and struck out valiantly at the nearest of the mob, seeking to cleave his skull. His aim was bad, or his intended victim managed to dodge in the nick of time, so that the sword scraped the side of his head and cut off his right ear. Peter doubtless would have struck again, had not Jesus rebuked him for his impetuosity and commanded His disciples to cease their resistance.

Jesus then reproached the leaders of the contingent for coming against Him with swords and clubs, as though He were a robber skulking in the brush, when they had every opportunity to arrest Him publicly. He went on to point out that all this was come to pass that the Scriptures might be fulfilled. These words are important, for they throw light on Jesus' conception of His mission. The Scripture that He had in mind presumably included Isaiah 53:6-9, Zechariah 13:7, and Psalm 22. The disciples could not understand such an attitude. While Jesus chided His captors, they all forsook Him and fled.

It is easy to criticize the disciples for their cowardice. Flight came, however, only after Jesus had forbidden them to offer any resistance. Prevented from helping Him, it was natural that they should seek safety in flight. As A. T. Robertson points out: "Peter's conduct in trying to cut off the head of a servant of the high priest, Caiaphas, exposed him to arrest also. When Judas and his mob came, Jesus had made a plea for their freedom (John 18:8), but no promise of immunity for them had been given. If Jesus could be taken a prisoner by the Sanhedrin, there was no safety for them save in flight. But what about their vows of loyalty to the death made some hours before on this very night? And in particular what about Peter's boast that he would go with Jesus both to prison and to death? Circumstances alter cases, to be sure, and they were caught all of a sudden, so to speak. So Peter's flight follows his flight. The disciples are in a panic, a rout, and they run for their lives."<sup>21</sup>

Among those who lingered last was a lad, possibly John Mark, the author of the Gospel, in whose home Jesus had eaten the last supper (why else should this obscure incident be described?). Very likely Judas led his band first to the house. Mark, having been aroused and having no time to dress, followed the crowd with only a linen cloth thrown hastily about him. His courage sank when his obvious sympathy for the prisoner led to hands being laid upon himself. Squirming out of his captor's hands, he fled into the darkness, naked, leaving his astonished opponent holding nothing but the linen cloth.

### 3. THE PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION. Mark 14:53-65

The same night Jesus was led before the Jewish leaders for examination. This was strictly in opposition to the Jewish law, which provided that no accused person should

be arraigned in the night. The authorities were determined, however, to rush matters through before Jesus' friends could be aroused. They wished to confront the city in the morning with a "fait accompli." Under such circumstances the law was nothing but a formality. "Instead of being a regular trial before the Sanhedrin," F. C. Grant suggests, "what took place was probably a private examination *in camera*, conducted secretly by the powerful enemies who had Jesus in their hands and were determined to put Him out of the way by the surest and swiftest means available. This turned out to be denunciation before Pilate, in the hope of landing the whole movement in disgrace and making it impossible for His following to continue."<sup>22</sup>

The illegality of the whole business becomes more evident as the trial continues. Having formed the purpose of putting Jesus to death, the court sought witnesses against Him. Nominally they were His judges; actually they were His prosecutors. False witnesses, evidently hired to testify so that an indictment might be brought, were secured, but their witness did not agree. Seemingly the most dangerous charge they brought is that mentioned in verse 58, perhaps a garbled report of Jesus' words reported in John 2:19. Very likely it could be traced back ultimately to His prediction that the Temple would be destroyed (Mark 13:1-23), which some had interpreted in a revolutionary sense. But even here the testimony of different witnesses disagreed in essential particulars. Had the Sanhedrin been proceeding according to the ordinary rules, Jesus must now have been released, for even without the assistance of witnesses testifying in His favor there was nothing to condemn Him.

In this situation the High Priest, instead of releasing Him, resorted to further illegal methods. He attempted to compel the prisoner to testify against Himself, something as much forbidden by law in Jewish as in American pro-

cedure. Jesus was aware of His legal rights and refused to speak so long as no charge had been established against which He need defend Himself.

The High Priest in desperation asked one final question: "Are you the Christ [i.e., the Messiah], the Son of the Blessed?" And then he got his answer. Jesus had implicitly claimed to be the Messiah when He entered Jerusalem the week before, but never had He put the claim into clear, unmistakable language. Now the time had come for Him to make His confession before the highest tribunal of the nation. "To be silent now would wear the look of abdicating His claim at the critical moment of His life."<sup>23</sup> He answered, "I am," and then, quoting the words of Daniel 7:13, declared, "and you will see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." This might be literally construed, or it might only mean that they would see with their own eyes the advancing Kingdom of the Son of Man in the world. Such a claim was adjudged to be blasphemy. It was not such in the strict technical sense, but as Montefiore, the Jewish scholar, says: "The claim to be Messiah, without any of the ordinary qualifications of a Messiah—a claim admitted by a solitary prisoner in the full power of His enemies—must have seemed a presumptuous insolence, a kind of taking God's holy promises in vain."<sup>24</sup> He was, therefore, immediately sentenced to death. The meeting then adjourned until the morning, Jesus being turned over, meanwhile, to the guards, who, to amuse themselves, spat upon Him (a popular way of showing utter contempt), slapped His face with the palm of their hands, and struck Him with their fists.

#### 4. PETER'S DENIAL. Mark 14:66-72

While Jesus was undergoing a quasi-legal trial, Peter was undergoing a searching moral trial. When Jesus rebuked

him in the Garden and Himself offered no resistance, Peter dropped his sword and fled with the other disciples into the darkness. He soon turned back, however, and followed Jesus at a distance, an act of extraordinary boldness for one who had wounded the High Priest's servant. The story of what followed in the courtyard of the High Priest's palace is told very vividly. The slave girl recognized Peter, warming himself before the fire, as one whom she had previously seen in the company of Jesus. She looked at him and said, "You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus." Peter, caught unawares, disclaimed any knowledge of what she was talking about. His uneasiness then led him to withdraw into the gateway. Concerned for his safety, he still could not bear to leave the scene.

The servant girl followed him and charged him, this time before the bystanders, with being a disciple of Jesus. Again Peter denied it. Then the whole group began to press the charge, perhaps because they enjoyed his discomfiture. Peter began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, "I do not know this man of whom you speak." Just then the cock crew for the second time, and, according to Luke (22:61), the Lord turned and looked at Peter. It was a look of sorrow and sympathy, an indescribable look that cut Peter to the heart. He called to mind the words that Jesus had spoken, warning him against this very deed. And he broke down and wept.

From this time on, and indeed until after the crucifixion, "Peter drops out of the picture, a desolate deserter, groping in the dark with his sins and his sorrow. . . . The story of Peter's downfall," says A. T. Robertson, "is told with sheer simplicity and graphic power in the four Gospels. There is no effort to cover up his sin nor to justify it."<sup>25</sup> We will not fail to note, however, how human and natural it was. Peter could not save Jesus; the Master had refused his proffered aid, offered against imposing odds. The

thought might naturally occur, Why should I also throw my own life away? But "Mark, who wrote under Peter's influence, puts the dreadful fact as sharply and clearly as the rest. Peter has no defense to make for his denials. The look of Jesus melted his heart and broke it."<sup>26</sup> But for such a man, who sins however grievously and then weeps, there is hope.

"Not only Peter in the judgment hall,  
Not only in the centuries gone by,  
Did coward hearts deny Thee, Lord of all;  
But even in our time, and constantly;

For feeble wills, and the mean fear of men,  
And selfish dread, are with us now as then.

"Today we vow allegiance to Thy name;  
Today our souls, ourselves, we pledge to Thee,  
Yet if a storm-wind of reproach or blame  
Rises and beats upon us suddenly,  
Faltering and fearful, we deny our Lord,  
By traitorous silence or by uttered word.

"We close our lips when speech would wake a sneer;  
We turn aside and shirk the rougher path;  
We gloss and blink as if we did not hear  
The scoffing word which calls for righteous wrath.  
All unrebuked we let the scoffer go,  
And we deny our Lord and Master so.

"Come, Thou, as once of old Thou camest in  
And 'looked on Peter' in the judgment hall;  
Let that deep, grieved gaze rebuke our sin,  
Questioning, recalling, wakening, pardoning all,  
Till we go out and weep the whole night long,  
Made strong by sorrow as he was made strong."<sup>27</sup>

## 5. THE TRIAL BEFORE PILATE. Mark 15:1-15

The Sanhedrin, according to the Roman law, could condemn, but it could not execute a prisoner. This was reserved either with or without a new trial for the Roman procurator, in this case, Pontius Pilate. In order to bring about a trial by this Roman it was necessary to formulate a charge that merited death under Roman law. That upon which Jesus had just been condemned by the Jewish authorities would have stood no more in the court of Pilate than that against Paul with Gallio in Corinth. (Acts 18:15.) At daybreak, therefore, the Sanhedrin met for consultation, bound Jesus, and carried Him before Pilate. The charge which they preferred was that of *lèse majesté*, or attempted revolution (Luke 23:2), growing out of His claim to be the Messianic King.

Pilate asked, the Greek indicates with a feeling of surprise, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus replied, "You have said so." What did He mean? Some expositors, Moffatt, for example, say that He meant to answer Pilate's question in the affirmative; others, that He meant to answer it in the negative; it seems much more likely, from the form of the answer and from the total context, that Jesus meant His answer to be non-committal. In other words, He neither admitted nor denied the charge. There was a sense in which He was a king, but as Dr. Turner has pointed out, "He trusted to the whole circumstances of the position to convince Pilate that He and His few followers, unarmed and unresisting (apart from the impetuous act of a single disciple in Gethsemane), were not meditating any action in the political sphere."<sup>28</sup> John tells us that He went on to explain, "My kingship is not of this world; if my kingship were of this world, my servants

would fight, that I might not be handed over to the Jews; but my kingship is not from the world." (John 18:36.)

Pilate, taking in the situation, gave the priests to understand that he found no fault in the accused. This provoked a fresh outburst of accusations. (Verse 4.) Somewhat shaken by these new and serious charges, Pilate questioned Jesus further but elicited no reply. His life was sufficient answer to these charges, and He knew, moreover, that Pilate was cognizant of the facts. The governor marveled at the tranquil, dignified silence maintained by Jesus in the face of the fierce storm of accusations and the danger of the charges made against Him. In his embarrassment Pilate jumped at the mention of Galilee as the scene of Jesus' teaching and sent Jesus to Herod, the ruler of Galilee, who was attending the feast. But Herod refused to accept the responsibility (Luke 23:6-12) and returned Jesus to the "court of original jurisdiction."

Actuated by the Roman ideal of justice, Pilate now hit upon a fresh expedient for releasing Jesus. He saw the people of the city coming up to demand their annual privilege of securing the release of one outstanding prisoner. He knew that the priests had delivered up Jesus through envy and that Jesus had always been popular with the people, who shortly before had acclaimed His entrance into the city. And so Pilate went over the heads of the chief priests and appealed to the populace, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?"

But for the first time in Jesus' life the people turned against Him. They called for the release, not of Jesus, but of Barabbas. This Barabbas, we are told, was an insurrectionist, a man of action, a believer in violence, one of a group who in the insurrection had committed murder; apparently he was one of the Sicarii or dagger men, a terrorist, one of the left wing Zealots, who were constantly

pushing the nation closer to that disastrous war with Rome against which Jesus had repeatedly warned the people. Jesus, on the other hand, had revealed Himself—in this particular emergency, at least—as a pacifist, as a man who refused to allow His followers to strike a single blow on His behalf. He had raised the Messianic expectations of the people to the highest point, only to dash them to the ground again by His subsequent inaction and apparent powerlessness.

It was a clear choice, then, between two men and two philosophies: Barabbas, an exponent of violence, committed to the way of war; and Jesus, an exponent of love, committed to the way of peace.

Faced with this choice, the Jerusalem populace chose Barabbas, just as so frequently since then men have chosen the method of Barabbas, that of force, over against the method of Jesus, that of love.

Even so that terrible cry, "Crucify him," would probably not have arisen but for the instigation of the priests. Having lost confidence in Jesus they were ready to follow their accustomed leaders. We must remember, too, that the crowd which acclaimed Him on Sunday were largely Galileans, pilgrims to the festival. This crowd was composed largely, we may imagine, of Judeans, more completely under the control of the Priests.

Pilate was not willing to stand against rulers and people. It was not worth his while to risk his position in order to save an innocent Jew. One death more or less was—to him—a small matter. So he ordered Barabbas to be released and Jesus to be scourged. This was a common preliminary to crucifixion. The instrument was a whip, the leather lashes loaded with lead and iron. Pilate then turned Jesus over to the soldiers to be crucified.

The Roman governor was not one who would be con-

sidered "a bad man, much less a moral monster. He was not careless about his work; he heard the evidence patiently. Nor did he mean to be unjust. No, he was simply a politician who found himself in a difficult situation and was trying to avoid a decision. What occupied his mind was how to keep on good terms with the emperor at Rome, how to hold his office and retire in a few years without mishap, and enjoy a quiet old age. . . . He would have liked to see justice done to Jesus, whom he regarded as a gentle, harmless visionary; but he felt he could not take the risk . . ."<sup>29</sup> Just a politician! Trying to avoid a decision! Desiring justice, but unwilling to risk his position to secure it!

How did Pilate look back upon this, the most momentous decision of his career? A friend of "Simeon Stylites," popular columnist of the *Christian Century*, dreamed that Pilate wrote this letter to a friend in Rome:

"The Most Noble Tertius Quartus,  
Rome.

Your Excellency: You may have heard of the disturbance in Jerusalem last spring over the trial and execution of one Christus. It was quite a nuisance. But then, everything in this miserable province is a nuisance. But it passed off all right, and we will never hear of Christus again.

My skirts are clear. I rather liked the man. He was what these Jews call a prophet, from upcountry, unsophisticated, of course. But compared to the rabble yelling their heads off, and the priests pushing their flimsy charges with no evidence at all that would hold in a Roman court, he was dignified and attractive. I told them plainly and courageously that I found no fault in him. But they kept yelling, 'Crucify him!' So I washed my hands of the whole affair.

My reasons were sound. To have let this Christus go free would have meant a riot and disorder and, no doubt, com-

plaints to Rome. And you know that could be a lot of trouble. A procurator must keep order above all things.

Besides, it was none of my business, really. The man had committed no crime, but after all it was not my affair to mix into the squabbles of these fanatical Jews. It was their business, not mine.

And then it just happened to be a lucky chance to get solid backing from two groups usually opposed to me—the priests and the populace. I couldn't let that slip. It will mean a lot to my prestige and career here, and I hope in Rome too.

So if you hear any different reports, dismiss them.

With high esteem,

Pontius Pilate.

"Then I woke up," wrote Simeon's friend. "And I said, Great heavens! Those are the same reasons I give myself every day for not doing something that I know I ought to do—too much trouble, not my business, it won't pay off. Yours, Pontius Jones."<sup>80</sup>

As we think of Judas, who betrayed Jesus; of Peter, who denied Him; of Pilate, who condemned Him; and of the people, who preferred in the last analysis the man of violence to the man of peace, the man of hate to the man of love, we appreciate anew the words of the prophet: "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities." (Isaiah 53:5.)

## 6. JESUS MOCKED. Mark 15:16-20

After the scourging, the soldiers who had Jesus in charge led Him back to the court of the governor's palace and called together the whole battalion. They amused themselves by making sport of His claims to be called a king. In imitation of the imperial purple they threw about Him a scarlet robe, probably some old officer's or soldier's

coat. They twisted together some twigs from a thorn bush, and pressed them upon His head in derisive imitation of the laurel wreath worn on festal occasions by the Roman emperors. They put a reed into His right hand to represent the royal scepter. Kneeling down before Him they mocked Him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" Then to show their contempt for such a king, they spat upon Him, and took the reed and smote Him upon the head, driving the thorns into His brow; and some struck Him with their fists (John 19:3).

## 7. THE CRUCIFIXION. Mark 15:21-41

Plutarch tells us that it was the custom to make the condemned man carry his own cross, or at least one of its two beams. In accordance with this custom, Jesus bore His cross at least as far as the city gate. There His strength gave way, and a man named Simon, from Cyrene, a province in northern Africa, was pressed into service to carry the burden the rest of the way. The fact that Jesus collapsed under the burden is no indication that His physique was not robust. The suffering which He had undergone during the course of the night and the morning would have undermined the strength of any man. Alexander and Rufus, mentioned by Mark as the sons of Simon, evidently became Christians, and were well-known to the Christian community in Rome. It is a pleasing fancy to think that it was during this walk to Calvary that Simon, who doubtless rebelled against the degrading task forced upon him, first learned to love the Sufferer whom he relieved.

A guild of rich women maintained the merciful custom of offering to victims of crucifixion a potion of drugged wine as a soporific. Such a drink was offered to Jesus, but He refused it after discovering its nature by a sip. He chose to meet death with His senses undulled.

Crucifixion was the most degrading method of death known to the Romans, and one of the cruellest ever invented by man. The cross was commonly made by crossing two pieces of timber, the upright being perhaps eight or nine feet long. The body rested upon a peg driven into the upright post. The hands and feet were fastened to the upright and bar by ropes or nails, in Jesus' case the latter. "The cross, bearing its victim, was then raised upright and dropped into the hole dug for it with a violent jolt. Hanging on four great wounds, naked under a blazing sun, torn and bleeding, with wounds inflaming, fiery thirst raging, every nerve quivering and writhing with pain, the sufferer endured the mortal agony for one, two, or even three days, before death mercifully put an end to the scene."<sup>81</sup> In Jesus' case, the suffering, shortened by His previous ordeals, ended after six hours.

Far worse than the physical sufferings, no doubt, were the mental sufferings, the burden of the world's sin which Jesus bore upon His heart. "We must not say that He felt Himself guilty, or that He was punished, or that He was exposed to God's wrath," says A. E. Garvie, "for all such language involves an intolerable confusion of what is possible for the sinful and the sinless."<sup>82</sup> But His death came as a consequence of man's rejection of the divine love, and in His own heart Jesus felt the consequences of man's sin for God and for man himself as no other could do; "for on the one hand He loved the sinful race as no other has done, and so felt with and for it as no other could do, and on the other He so loved God that He saw sin and all it involves as God sees it. Sinless, He could suffer for sin [and did] as much more as His love for God and for man excelled all other love."<sup>83</sup>

Mark makes no attempt to play on our sympathies. He says nothing of Jesus' suffering either of mind or body. He

does bid us look at certain groups gathered about the cross.

First, there were the soldiers. While Jesus hung in mortal agony they amused themselves by dicing for His garments. Their eyes glittered with avarice as they watched the fall of the dice, but they had no concern for the man whom they had nailed to the cross. It was just a part of the day's work to them.

“Three workmen fashioning a cross  
On which a fourth must die!  
Yet none of any other had asked,  
“And why? And why? And why?”

“Said they, “This is our business,  
Our living we must earn;  
What happens to the other man  
Is none of our concern.” ”<sup>34</sup>

There have been many like these soldiers, unmoved by the most pitiful tragedy, save by what they could get out of it,

Second, there were the two thieves, not ordinary robbers, but highwaymen, bandits (in Josephus, the term often means insurrectionists); suffering as Jesus suffered, but with more reason, they joined in the abuse of the crowd, as though they hoped to find some mercy for themselves, or some forgetfulness, in cursing one who was more execrated than they. One of them, however, as the hours wore on, moved by the spirit of Jesus as manifested on the cross, recalling perhaps the hopes that He had held out during His ministry for men as sinful as he—the thief—himself, turned to Him in penitence and faith. (Luke 23:42.) Nothing that happened that day seemed to touch Jesus so much. He may have thought of His own words: “I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all [types of] men to myself.” (John 12:32.)

Third, there were the onlookers. Passers-by jeered at

Him, wagging their heads in derision, and the chief priests and scribes, representing the clergy, made sport of Him, one to another. As Rawlinson says: "There is a nice psychological discrimination made between the taunts of the vulgar, who address our Lord directly, and the derisive comments of the members of the Sanhedrin, who converse with one another."<sup>35</sup> There they were, the preachers and elders of the church, Pharisees in their ostentatious piety, Sadducees in their silken robes, Roman soldiers in their scarlet cloaks, coarse people drawn by low curiosity, and the basest dregs of the city. They taunted Him with His helplessness, so different from His lofty claims. "Aha!" they cried. "You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!" "He trusts in God," some cried in derision. So the Revised Standard Version translates it, better than the King James which places the verb in the past tense. "He trusts in God; let God deliver him now." (Matthew 27:43.) "He saved others," mocked some; "he cannot save himself." What a tribute this was, albeit unintended, to one who saves others just because He would not save Himself.

In all that sea of hostile faces, there were a few touched with pity and broken with grief. Luke mentions women among the spectators who bewailed and lamented Him. (Luke 23:27.) And there were His disciples. One group pressed in near the cross. It included His mother, the sword piercing her own soul, as Simeon had foretold (Luke 2:35); some of the women whom Jesus had befriended; and John, the beloved disciple (John 19:25-26). Another group, composed of other of the women and acquaintances of Jesus, together with His disciples, we may suppose, remained afar off, afraid to venture near, watching these things. (Mark 15:40-41; Luke 23:49.)

Jesus had been lifted up on the cross at nine o'clock in

the morning; from twelve until three when He finally died, the sky was overcast; to the disciples, nature itself seemed affected. At the latter hour Jesus cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" "He forsaken! Who can comprehend it?" exclaimed Luther. A common explanation, popularized by John Calvin, suggests that separation from God is the true death, the wages of sin; and in that dread hour Jesus bore in His own consciousness the utmost of its penalty.

There are, however, other explanations. The words, it should be noted, are a quotation from Psalm 22:1. Jesus may have meditated on the whole psalm as foreshadowing His experience. Says Dr. R. F. Horton: "If on the cross He was consciously quoting the psalm of the suffering Messiah [beginning with the cry of desolation, ending with the note of sublimest trust—see especially verses 1, 6-9, 16-21, 27-31], and the first verse was overheard, we are relieved of the difficulty which some have found in the thought that even for a moment Jesus felt forsaken by God. But on the other hand, this difficulty often disappears and becomes the deepest well of comfort in the dark hours of the Christian's experience. To know that He, our Lord and Saviour, in the fulfillment of His sacrifice for sin felt deserted by God, brings hope and comfort to the trembling human soul that is tempted to utter the same cry."<sup>38</sup>

Jesus quoted the psalm in Hebrew, so that some misunderstood His words and thought He called on Elijah. As they stood and watched, He cried with a vigor which surprised the watchers, who were accustomed to low moans of pain from the victims of crucifixion, "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!" (Luke 23:46); and then, "It is finished" (John 19:30), after which He bowed His head and breathed His last. Mark does not give us Jesus' last

words on the cross. "Jesus uttered a loud cry," he tells us, "and breathed his last." But the shout as he records it was a shout of victory.

When Jesus expired, Mark adds, "the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom." For the writer this may have symbolized the coming destruction of the Temple, or the end of the sacrificial system, or, as often claimed, the fact that the veil of separation between God and man was now removed and a new and living way opened into the presence of God.

When the centurion, who had watched Jesus as He died, saw that He thus died, he said, "Truly this man was a son of God!" (not "the Son of God," as in the K.J.V.). R. H. Lightfoot quotes Dr. C. H. Dodd, who thinks that the centurion is most likely to have connected the term "Son of God" with the emperor whom he served. "It expressed," says Dr. Dodd, "the subject peoples' sense of the majesty and power of Rome, embodied in the supernatural person of the Emperor. For a soldier to give this title to a Jew whom he had seen condemned and put to death meant a surprising change of mind. It meant not only that he had changed his mind about Jesus, but that he had begun to change his mind about God, or at least about what was really divine. He had been brought up to think that the most divine thing on earth was the splendour and military might of Rome and Caesar. Now he had somehow an inkling that divinity might reside where there was no visible might or splendour. All that was here was sheer goodness, fortitude, and self-sacrifice; and yet he saw a 'son of God.' The veil, Mark says, was rent; God stood revealed. The first witness to it is this pagan soldier, who sees divinity where he had least expected to see it."<sup>87</sup>

Jesus' body was taken down from the cross by Joseph of Arimathea, assisted by Nicodemus (John 19:38ff.), both

influential members of the Sanhedrin who had followed Jesus secretly hitherto, but now at last were not ashamed (it took courage) to avow themselves. It was the first illustration of how "His love unknown has broken every barrier down." As the Sabbath was near, the body was thrust provisionally into a tomb, hewed, as the custom was, out of rocks, and closed in the usual way with a large slablike stone.

# XI

## The Resurrection

*Mark 16*

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**A**MONG the disciples who watched Jesus die on the cross were three women, Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James, and Salome. The first Mary came from Magdala, a city on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. She had been delivered from seven demons and in her deep gratitude had followed Jesus on His journeys, helping with gifts of money to provide for Him and the Twelve. Mary, the mother of James, is the same as Mary, the mother of James the Less and of Joses, mentioned in 15:40. James the Less was one of the Apostles. Salome was the wife of Zebedee (Matthew 27:56), the mother of James and John, the woman who had once come to Jesus, asking that her two sons might sit in the principal places of honor in the coming kingdom.

These three women followed Joseph and Nicodemus as they took Jesus' body from the cross and brought it to the tomb. There, crushed and broken in heart, they began to render their last services to the dead, making free use of costly spices, as they wrapped the body for its long rest. (John 19:40.) They needed more spices, however, and wished to apply fragrant oils. On Saturday evening, after

the Sabbath was ended, they made their purchases and early on Sunday morning took their way to the tomb.

As they drew near they began to wonder how they would roll back the great stone which sealed its entrance. Evidently the tomb was a cave in the side of a hill, either a natural cave, such as is common in the rocks around Jerusalem, or wholly or partly artificial. The stone was probably a large one, rolling in a groove cut in the stone floor. The women were afraid that their united strength would not be sufficient to budge it. As they looked ahead, they were surprised to see the stone already rolled back, not all the way, but far enough to leave the entrance free.

Happy that their problem was so easily solved, they entered the tomb. Instead of the body of Jesus, they saw a young man (Matthew, writing later, says it was an angel), sitting on the right side of the tomb, dressed in a white robe. They stood, staring in awed amazement, until the man broke the silence: "Do not be bewildered. You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified? He has risen, he is not here. There is the place where he was laid. Go and tell his disciples and Peter, 'He precedes you to Galilee, as he told you—you shall see him there.'" (Moffatt.)

In other words, the women were not to linger in wonder and rapture, but to discharge at once the duty of being bearers of the news and of the message to the rest of the disciples. They were told especially to carry the message to Peter, the natural leader of the Twelve, broken down by the shock of his own denials as well as by the death of his Master. They were told to remind all the disciples of Jesus' promise to meet them in Galilee. (Mark 14:28; Matthew 26:32.) It would seem from what follows that the disciples were not persuaded to go into Galilee until the Master had several times appeared to them in Jerusalem. When

they did finally go, they collected together a group of about five hundred of Jesus' friends and to this assembled group Jesus spoke the words of the Great Commission, ending with the promise, "And lo, I am with you always."

When the young man had finished speaking, the women fled out of the tomb, for they were seized with terror, with awe, as those who stood in the presence of the Almighty. Mark adds, "They said nothing to any one, for they were afraid."

They said nothing, that is, to anyone on the way, nothing to anyone except those to whom they were commanded to speak, until the Holy Spirit had given them tongues tipped with flame.

Mark's Gospel, as it has come down to us in the earliest manuscripts, ends at this point, with verse 8. It is commonly assumed that Mark went on to describe the appearances of the Risen Christ as do the other Gospels, but that the original ending in some unaccountable way was lost. R. W. Lightfoot argues, on the other hand, that Mark intended his Gospel to end thus, in conformity with his usual literary instinct—that the Gospel reaches its natural climax in the announcement of the resurrection, and in the women's shuddering awe in the presence of this divine mystery. In any case it is agreed that verses 9-20 were added by a later hand and are not a true portion of the original Gospel. As to the authorship of the additional verses, an Armenian manuscript of the Gospel written in A.D. 986 attributes the paragraph to Aristion, the presbyter, mentioned by Papias as one of the disciples of the Lord. But this reference is of uncertain value, and the author of this later appendix must remain unknown.

In the rest of the New Testament we have references to ten appearances of the Risen Christ. On the first day He is said to have appeared (1) to Mary Magdalene, John 20:1-

18; (2) to the other women, hurrying away from the tomb, Matthew 28:9-10; (3) to Simon Peter, Luke 24:34; (4) to two disciples on the road to Emmaus, Luke 24:13-35; and (5) to ten disciples in the upper room, Luke 24:36-43. One week later He appeared (6) to the eleven disciples, Thomas, this time, being present, John 20:24-29. Sometime during the next month He showed Himself (7) to James, His brother, I Corinthians 15:7; (8) to the seven disciples fishing in the Sea of Galilee, John 21:1-23; (9) to the eleven disciples, with the five hundred probably present also, Matthew 28:16-20; I Corinthians 15:6; and (10) finally on the fortieth day He appeared to them near Bethany and was taken up out of their sight, Luke 24:50-51; Acts 1:6-11.

In the appendix to Mark's Gospel there are references to three of these appearances and to Jesus' final ascension.

### THE APPEARANCE TO MARY MAGDALENE

The story is given us more fully in John 20:1-18. Mary Magdalene did not go with the other women into the tomb; she ran back instead and told what she had seen to Peter and John. She followed the two men back to the tomb and lingered after they had departed, her frame shaken by bitter sobs. She saw a man approaching, whom she took to be the gardener, and she begged Him to tell her where they had put the body of her Master. But the "gardener" spoke her name with the peculiar inflection which only the Master had used. "Rabboni! [Master]," she cried, in a sudden transport of joy, and flung herself at His feet. But when she told the other disciples how she had met the Master, they thought she was hysterical, and refused to credit the tale until it was confirmed by other witnesses.

## THE APPEARANCE TO TWO DISCIPLES ON THE ROAD TO EMMAUS

The story is told more fully in Luke 24:13-35. On Sunday afternoon two disciples journeyed to Emmaus, discussing the crucifixion. A stranger joined them and questioned them about the topic of their conversation. They told Him that they had been talking about Jesus, who was a prophet, mighty in word and deed. At one time they had thought that he was more than a prophet; they had hoped that He was the one whom the prophets had foretold should deliver Israel. But the crucifixion had ended their dreams and saddened their hearts.

The stranger then pointed out how the Scriptures, rightly understood, had pointed to a suffering Messiah. As He talked the hearts of the two disciples burned within them, and they urged the stranger to spend the evening with them. As they sat down to their evening meal, the stranger broke bread, according to the Jewish custom, and said grace. As He conducted this simple little act of worship, there was something so characteristic about His manner, about His voice, that they recognized Him as their Lord. Then He suddenly disappeared from their sight. At once they rushed back to Jerusalem with the glad news, to learn that He had also appeared to Simon Peter.

## THE APPEARANCE IN THE UPPER ROOM

On the evening of this same day, the disciples were eating together in the upper room where they had partaken of their last supper with Jesus. The door was locked to protect them from any hostile interruption. Suddenly Jesus appeared and commanded them to go into all the world and preach the good news to the whole creation. The author of our appendix then adds: "He who believes and

*is baptized* will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (rather than "damned," as in the King James Version). The italicized phrase may have been added at a time when the Church had begun to believe that baptism was essential for salvation. Our unknown author then states that Jesus promised that certain signs should accompany them that believe. The casting out of demons is mentioned in Acts 8:7; 16:18; 19:12 and was a common phenomenon in the early Church. Speaking with new tongues was also a familiar phenomenon in the Apostolic Church. (See Acts 2:4-11; 10:46; 19:6; I Corinthians 12:10, etc.) It was probably a sort of ecstatic or rapt utterance, the spontaneous language of overpowering emotion. Gifts of healing are referred to by Paul (I Corinthians 12:9, 28); by James (5:14-15); and in Acts 5:16; 9:12, 17-19; 28:8. A poisonous serpent fastened itself upon Paul's arm and he suffered no harm. (Acts 28:5.) A story went the rounds in the early Church of how Justus, surnamed Barsabbas, drank a deadly poison, and yet by the grace of the Lord felt no ill effects. But the whole idea that serpents can be picked up and poisons drunk with impunity is so foreign to our Lord's principles that we can well doubt whether the author of this late appendix had accurate information on this particular subject. Modern cultists who handle rattlesnakes and copperheads thinking that the Scripture has promised them immunity are badly mistaken.

The story of the Ascension is given more fully in Acts 1:6-11. Our anonymous author simply tells us that, after Jesus had spoken to His disciples for the last time, He was received up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. This expression is not meant to describe a physical fact, but a spiritual relationship—Jesus' nearness to the Father, His exaltation with Him over the universe. The unknown writer of this added fragment to Mark's Gospel

brings the story to its climax when he adds that the disciples "went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it."

This was the general belief of the early Church. The Gospel according to Matthew, written two full generations after the death of Jesus, recalled how He had said, "Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." (Matthew 28:20.) Luke, setting out to describe the history of the early Church, the spread of the Gospel from Jerusalem into the heart of the Empire, says, "In the first book [the Gospel which bears his name] . . . I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach" (Acts 1:1), indicating plainly that in The Acts he is telling the story of the things that Jesus continued to do and teach. John, writing at the close of the century, apparently identifies the presence of the Risen Christ with the activities of the Holy Spirit. He recalls how Jesus in the upper room had said, "I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor" (Comforter, in the King James Version). (John 14:16.) Neither word adequately translates the Greek term used here for the Holy Spirit. It is the word Paraclete, which means Another One by your side to guide, counsel, comfort, and strengthen. That was the faith which sustained the Apostle Paul. "I can do all things," he said, "in him who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13.) And it is the faith which has sustained every subsequent generation of Christians.

"We may not climb the heavenly steeps  
To bring the Lord Christ down;  
In vain we search the lowest deeps,  
For Him no depths can drown.

"But warm, sweet, tender, even yet  
A present help is He;  
And faith has still its Olivet,  
And love its Galilee.

"The healing of His seamless dress  
Is by our beds of pain;  
We touch Him in life's throng and press,  
And we are whole again.

"O Lord and Master of us all,  
Whate'er our name or sign,  
We own Thy sway, we hear Thy call,  
We test our lives by Thine."<sup>1</sup>

## Notes and Acknowledgments

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