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**JESUS, SON OF MAN**

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**THE EPISTLE OF ST. PAUL TO THE GALATIANS**  
**(Moffatt Commentary)**

# JESUS, SON OF MAN

STUDIES CONTRIBUTORY TO  
A MODERN PORTRAIT

BY

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## PREFACE

**S**CHOLARS no longer attempt to write a "Life of Jesus." The materials for a biography do not exist. The Gospels are not so much "lives" of Jesus as a series of dramatic pictures. Each of the Gospels, viewed as a whole, has preserved for us a portrait, drawn with unsurpassable vividness and simplicity. It is a portrait based on the testimony of men who did not merely claim to have authentic information of the facts which were described, but who, viewing all history from a religious angle, recognised the supreme religious significance of "the things concerning Jesus of Nazareth."

The question inevitably suggests itself: if scholarship cannot give us a modern life of Jesus, may we not look to it to give us a modern portrait? To that question there are some who may be inclined to add this other: can scholarship not give us a portrait such as Christians and non-Christians alike may accept, true to history and free from religious bias?

The modern world, in so far as it does not share the faith of the Church, has in its mind's eye no clear picture of Jesus. Sometimes it sees Him vaguely through the mists of a theology of which it has inherited the forms but not the life. As the only-begotten Son of God and heaven-sent Messiah He has become for many so essentially "divine" that he has ceased to be "human," a strangely unreal figure in a world in which men toil and suffer and die. More frequently, in accordance with a purely evolutionary view of human development, He is pictured simply as preacher, teacher, saint, reformer, martyr—admittedly one of the noblest figures in the pageant of history, but one to whom no unique and exclusive authority belongs in relation either to God or to His fellow-men. Neither the one nor the other of these presentations of Jesus has a

justifiable claim to historical reality. There are various viewpoints for the interpretation of history; and a pseudo-scientific naturalism may be as fatal to clearness of vision as is a moribund theology.

The main difficulty in painting an acceptable modern portrait of Jesus is not that the facts at our disposal are insufficient; rather it is the difficulty of reaching a point of view from which the known facts can be seen in clear outline and perspective. It is to help in the quest for such a point of view that the following pages have been written. The quest must be pursued in a spirit at once critical and constructive. The material on which the picture is to be based must be carefully sifted and examined; but there must be equal care in seeing that our interpretative judgment does full justice to the facts as they stand revealed.

It is clear, for example, on every page of the Gospel story that Jesus, who is Himself in the truest sense *man*, accepts it as His divinely ordained mission to bring men home to *God*. And to do this He must redeem them from the powers that enslave them. He is therefore never merely preacher and teacher; He is conqueror and deliverer. And men come to acknowledge Him as Saviour and Lord. The power that inspires His words and His actions is recognised to be the power of the Living God. It may be claimed, therefore, that in Jesus God Himself draws near to men, and that through Him every barrier that separates man from God is broken down and removed. In and through Jesus God and man are reconciled.

If allowance is made for such elements as these in the mission and message of Jesus, then any portrait that has a claim to being authentic must be in some measure a confession of religious faith. A purely "objective" portrait is an impossibility. An essential preliminary to seeing Jesus clearly may be that we bow to His authority, and find in Him

“the way, the truth, and the life.” The portrait of Jesus which finds expression in the faith of the Church is not to be dismissed as the product of religious bias. Is it not rather the one portrait which can seriously claim to do justice to the facts of history ?

A word may be permitted in conclusion on the general line of approach here followed in the study of the Gospel story. Much has already been accomplished—though much more remains to be done—in discriminating between the various forms which the Gospel tradition has assumed in the course of its transmission : by a meticulous study of details we may, for example, distinguish not merely the Synoptic presentation from the Johannine, but also St. Mark’s presentation from that of St. Matthew and St. Luke. But it is also necessary at times to stand some distance back and survey the tradition as a whole, concentrating attention on the central elements in the ministry and teaching of Jesus. I trust I shall not seem indifferent to the first of those two lines of approach if, in the following pages, I have given rather special consideration to the second. In the Gospel story there are certain dominating features which stand out with the challenging clarity of mountain peaks ; and it is desirable to begin by having a clear general view of these, both in themselves and in their relation one to another. The individual sayings and episodes, on the other hand, are like tracks through the heather, full of interest and significance for the traveller who wishes this closer approach, but sometimes too ill-defined to provide by themselves a clear way to the summit. No doubt, if the peak is lost in the mists, the traveller will sedulously pick his way by the various tracks as best he can. But if he knows the general contour and the relative position of the peaks, that very knowledge will enable him often to choose the right path where otherwise he might go astray, and to link up those parts of the way where the track is lost.

I should be glad if the book might be of service to readers who have little or no specialised knowledge of New Testament criticism, but who are eager to reach a more intelligent comprehension of the central facts of the Gospel story. I trust, however, that such readers will be patient with a method of approach which proceeds along severely critical lines. It is never enough for the critic to proclaim or expound the truths at which he believes he has arrived ; he must take his readers with him as he surveys the available evidence, and help them to see the processes by which his conclusions have been reached.

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*January, 1947*

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

The present volume, in an expanded form, the Croall Lectures delivered in Edinburgh in the summer of 1937. I take this opportunity of thanking the Croall Lectureship Trustees both for the honour they did me in selecting me to be the lecturer on that occasion, and also for their generous indulgence in condoning the long interval (due in the main to the exigencies of the war-situation) which has separated the delivery of the Lectures and their publication.

In Chapters xvi and xvii, I have made some slight use of a paper on "The Apostles' Doctrine" which I delivered at the Mürren Conference arranged by Sir Henry Lunn in September 1924, and which was reproduced in *The Review of the Churches* (edited by Sir Henry Lunn) in January 1925.

I am grateful to various friends who have helped me in the discussion of specific problems, and more especially to Miss E. L. Shirley Smith for valuable assistance in the correction of proofs.

G.S.D.



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**PART I**  
**THE HISTORICAL PROBLEM**



## CHAPTER I

### THE GOSPEL STORY : HISTORY AND INTERPRETATION

**T**wo supreme tasks confront the critical interpreter of the New Testament. One is to present, as far as may be, a true picture of the life, teaching and influence of Jesus of Nazareth ; it is with this problem, in some of its aspects, that we shall be engaged in the pages which follow. Along with this goes the closely allied task of explaining the rise and early development of the Christian Church, and the place accorded to Jesus, apparently from the beginning, in the Church's faith and worship. To the orthodox Christian believer these are, of course, not two problems, but one ; and even the critical scholar who approaches them primarily as matters for historical investigation may without injustice be described as "wearing blinkers" if he keeps his eyes so fixed on one of them that he pays little or no heed to the other. The New Testament Scriptures offer no support for the idea that the Jesus of history can be understood except in relation to the faith of the Church, or the faith of the Church except in relation to the historical Jesus.

For the purposes of critical analysis, however, it is desirable that we should distinguish between the two problems ; and while recognising that they are intimately connected, we ought to be chary of defining the relationship too closely. Our task may be likened to that of a band of excavators engaged in exploring and clearing a tunnel by working on the approaches at either end. There is available in the Gospels a large amount of material from which the trained investigator may be able to learn much with regard to the life story of Jesus. Similarly, from a study of the early Epistles, the Acts of the Apostles, and even the Gospels he ought to be able to understand with considerable clearness

the beliefs, hopes, and manner of life of the early Christians. But the twenty years which succeeded the death of Jesus represent a tunnel in which much remains obscure. And in carrying on their investigations from the one end or from the other scholars must often be content to pick their way by slow and devious stages, intent primarily on the task immediately confronting them; but if they retain a sense of perspective they will not forget the work proceeding at the other end, and they will realise that the success of their labours will be measured by their ability to help in opening up a through-passage where at present the way is ill-defined or blocked.

There are thus two dangers to be avoided by the critical interpreter of the life story of Jesus.

(i) He must not be so obsessed with what he knows, or thinks he knows, to be the position at the far end of the tunnel (i.e. with regard to the faith of the early Church) that he views the connection between the two ends as much more clear and direct than it really is. The devout Christian believer will of course always read the Gospel story in the light of the faith of the Church—it is natural and right that he should do so, for the Gospels were all written as Christian documents, and as such they have a religious no less than an historical value. Nevertheless, in so far as we approach the Gospels with a genuine desire to discover in the first instance the historical facts to which they bear witness, we must be willing to distinguish between history and interpretation, and allowance must be made for the moulding of Christian tradition under the influence of religious faith.

There is a problem here which scholars as well as preachers sometimes ignore, or at least handle with inadequate caution, as may be seen in the history both of doctrine and of exegesis from the first century until now. Thus in regard to the Gospel story events have often been interpreted symbolically, or by a forced reference to some Old Testament prophecy, so as to establish a connection either backwards with the

earlier faith of Israel or forwards with the faith of the early Church. The development of a truer historical sense fortunately makes Biblical scholarship less liable now than formerly to fall into this kind of error. Nevertheless there still continue to appear some otherwise excellent critical studies of the life of Jesus—more especially those which profess to be written from a “catholic” standpoint—which are open to the reproach that they allow considerations of doctrinal interpretation to encroach unduly into the field of historical exegesis.<sup>1</sup>

(ii) The other danger—and, by contrast, this is one to which critics of the “liberal” school are more especially exposed—is to work at one end of the tunnel without due relation to the position which is being opened up at the other. It is a claim frequently put forward by critics whose interest (so they allege) is solely in historical fact that they apply to the study of Jesus the same scientific principles as would guide them if they were enquiring into the history of Julius Caesar, St. Columba or Joan of Arc. But when they deliberately leave untouched the explanation of the Church’s faith, alleging that, as a religious problem, it lies outside of their province, the result of their researches is often to increase rather than to narrow the unexplained gap separating “the Jesus of history” from “the Christ of faith”; and thereby their work stands condemned.

Historians of this type need to be reminded that the basis of the Church’s faith was laid by Jesus Himself in the minds and hearts and consciences of those who became His followers. The central fact about the life of Jesus, as we see Him in the Gospels, is that He brought men face to face

<sup>1</sup> Reference may be made to Father Hebert’s suggestive book entitled *The Throne of David* (1941), which has as sub-title *A Study of the Fulfilment of the Old Testament in Jesus Christ and His Church*. Amid much that is valuable the author is too prone to allow a religious interpretation to provide a key to the historical truth of what is related in the Gospels, and he does not sufficiently distinguish between the substance and the form of certain Old Testament conceptions in their influence on the mind of Jesus, and of the Church.

with the living God, offering them "life" for their acceptance or rejection. His life story was written not merely in those literary documents which we call the Gospels, but in the reactions which He evoked in the lives of the men and women among whom He moved—these reactions being, of course, part of the story set forth in the Gospels, though we also find them reflected in the life and faith of the early Church.

*We may conclude, therefore, that if we are to depict the life story of Jesus in anything like perspective, we must set ourselves to study Him as He addressed Himself to such people as Peter and Andrew, Nicodemus and Zacchaeus, Caiaphas and Pilate, Mary of Magdala and the unnamed woman of Samaria; and we must give due heed to the testimony of those who had the privilege of knowing Him and good cause to remember Him. The world, it is said, knows nothing of its greatest men. Certainly this is true of those whose greatness lies in the realm of the spirit. Such men and women are known only to those who know them intimately; and, that being so, the testimony of intimate friends has in their case a value which must not be ignored.*

We have here a general truth of the utmost significance for those who seek to reconstruct the life story of Jesus.

## CHAPTER II

### THE JESUS OF HISTORY

**A** LITTLE over a hundred years ago, in 1835 and 1836, David Friedrich Strauss published in Germany his epoch-making *Life of Jesus*, and thereby ushered in a period of scepticism in regard to the historicity of the Gospel story. As a convinced adherent of the Hegelian philosophy, Strauss accepted it as axiomatic that ideas and not facts are the true basis of religious faith ; and so, when he came to write a life of Jesus, his very indifference to questions of historical truth had the inevitable result that much which a previous generation had accepted as fact came now to be valued rather for the religious truth embodied in it, and its reliability as history was seriously disputed or denied. It was a fatal weakness in Strauss's work that it was dominated overmuch by philosophical presuppositions ; and in historical study philosophical theorising is no adequate substitute for a patient examination of the available evidence. In the reaction which inevitably ensued this fact came to be frankly recognised ; and as a prelude to any further historical advance criticism took in hand the literary analysis of the documents with which the historian has to operate. Strauss had accepted generally that a distinction must be drawn between the Fourth Gospel and the Synoptics ; now a further differentiation was made between the various strata that enter into the Synoptic tradition.

The immense amount of work which has been devoted to this task of source-criticism has achieved certain results of permanent value. To confine ourselves to the most fundamental of these, it is now generally agreed that Mark is the earliest of our Gospels, and that the Gospels of Matthew and Luke are both dependent (*a*) on that of Mark (which is

mainly narrative), and (b) on a lost collection of sayings of Jesus which is generally referred to by the symbol Q. Luke clearly had access to additional valuable sources of information; Matthew, too, has a good deal of material not found in any of the other Gospels, and probably derived in the main from Jewish-Christian circles.

#### I. THE QUEST OF THE HISTORICAL JESUS

The progress made in this field of literary analysis naturally caused attention to be directed afresh to the historical problem. During the latter half of the last century the main advance was occasioned by the work of a band of scholars (notably in Germany) who, in virtue of the general tendency of their critical and theological outlook, have come to be referred to as the "liberal protestant school"; and as an outstanding representative of this school in its later stages we may cite the name of the great German historian, Adolf Harnack. The reconstructions of these critics differed widely, one might say hopelessly, in matters of detail; but they were agreed, more or less, in presenting a picture of Jesus freed from all theological trappings, whose feet were firmly planted on earth, who never stepped beyond the bounds of the purely human. Some of them were careful to emphasise that, as an interpreter of the mind and will of God and as the divinely appointed agent for the establishment of God's Kingdom, Jesus claimed and holds among men a place of unchallengeable supremacy, which justifies the application to Him of such names as Son of God and Messiah; yet the Gospel, as they interpreted it, had to do with the Father and not with the Son, and the revelation which He gave to the world in His person was a revelation not of God but of man.

It is unfortunate that the school of criticism mentioned in the preceding paragraph should so frequently be referred to as "the liberal school," and that the strictures passed on it by later criticism should, in consequence, be taken in certain

quarters to imply a condemnation of the whole liberal movement and to justify a strictly "conservative" attitude to the treatment of Scripture. The liberalism which came through it to clear and forcible expression represents an attitude to the study of the Gospels which is not confined to any one generation or any one school. Yet, in any survey of critical opinion, what we may for convenience call the Harnack school may well receive rather special consideration. It succeeded in bringing into the very forefront of discussion the question of historicity—what are the facts on which the Christian faith is based? It brought about an immense widening of interest in the problem—Catholic Modernist joined with Protestant, non-Christian with Christian; and in the wake of the more scholarly treatises there began to appear a flood of popular literature (including even novels and romances) purporting to present the true Jesus of history as distinct from the Christ of the Church's faith. More especially it introduced into the quest a welcome spirit of confidence and hope, which, after the sceptical twilight of the Strauss period, suggested the breaking forth of the noonday sun. For though, as later critics<sup>1</sup> have not been slow to point out, the attitude of this school to the Gospel tradition was "three-quarters scepticism," it took such pride in what was called "scientific method" that it felt convinced of its ability to achieve "assured results." Its devotees made bold to declare that, thanks to the searching investigations of modern scholarship, the sublimely human figure of Jesus of Nazareth, stripped of all the draperies with which traditional theology had enveloped Him, now stood forth in clearer outline than it had ever done since those days when He walked the earth as a man among men. And with regard to His message—an essentially simple proclamation of the love of the Heavenly Father and of the ultimate triumph of His Kingdom, with a new way of life set forth in the Sermon on the Mount—it had only to be interpreted afresh to provide the basis of a religion for all humanity, adequate to the

<sup>1</sup> cf. Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, p. 307.

needs and acceptable to the highly developed standards of our modern civilisation.

Looking back, we can see today how little ground there was for these pretentious claims. The liberal critics who preferred to pursue their researches without reference to the faith of the Church were sometimes led by the scientific spirit into unexpected extravagances and perversities. Free enquiry all too readily took a modernising turn; and the Jesus who emerged at the end of the process often bore an aspect which readers found strangely if congenially familiar. Renan had invested Jesus with the glamour of romance. The German made Him the embodiment of the characteristic German virtues or the modern Germanic spirit. In Britain and America He was presented as a sublime anticipation in ancient Galilee of the modern philanthropist, idealist, and social reformer. Even when these absurdities were avoided He was depicted almost exclusively from the human side, as prophet, saint, martyr. Bousset's crowning description<sup>1</sup> of Him is: "leader of the ages and nations to God." What His significance was for the world as a revelation of God was left unexplored.

Thus a twofold weakness reveals itself in the more extreme liberal presentations. Besides being false or inadequate historically, they are quite unsatisfying on the philosophical and theological side. Deeply moving as they sometimes are in their religious appeal, they leave unanswered age-long questions regarding the relation of Jesus to the God in whose name He spoke and acted and to the world which He came to save. For these and other reasons the liberal critics of an earlier generation have now been dethroned from their high estate. Pronouncements which were then accepted as "the last word in criticism" receive from many scholars today nothing but disparagement and condemnation. This is not altogether as it ought to be. Despite all their deficiencies and ineptitudes, those earlier critics were pioneering along a path from which there can be no turning back—

<sup>1</sup> in the closing chapter of his *Jesus* (English translation) p. 209.

unless indeed the historical quest itself is to be abandoned as hopeless. Their methods, no doubt, were often mistaken and their conclusions wrong-headed. This does not mean, however, that their work was valueless. It means rather that the quest has now to be continued on broader and more critical lines. We proceed to note certain respects in which recent scholarship is profiting from the recognition of past errors, and is pointing the way to a fuller appreciation of the truth about the Jesus of history.

## II. THE DANGER OF FALSE PRESUPPOSITIONS

It must be recognised that some of the conclusions of the Harnack school are based on false presuppositions.

(a) Claiming that his interest is essentially historical the liberal critic often draws a rigid distinction between fact and faith, and in his portraiture of the historical Jesus claims to be free to set aside the beliefs about Jesus which were current in the early Church, holding that these can be appropriately left to be explained by the student of psychology or comparative religion. A conspicuous example of this method of approach is to be found in the recent book *Jesus* by Professor Guignebert of Paris, which in its English translation (1935) appears, it is interesting to note, in a series called "The History of Civilisation." In a foreword to this book it is blatantly asserted of the author that "over against the purpose of the Gospels, the methods of hagiography, apologetic, the credal dogmatic scheme, in short the whole of the 'Christology'," he is impelled to set "the reality of history," just because, as a historian, he is concerned solely with the life and teaching of Jesus.

But what, we may ask, does the writer mean by "the reality of history," and by what methods does he propose to establish it? If we are to speak of historical facts and historical evidence, we must not interpret "historical" too narrowly. It may readily be conceded that all that we read

about Jesus in our Gospels is derived from the testimony of men who believed in Him, and that their narratives may therefore be coloured or even in a measure transformed under the influence of their beliefs. Nevertheless, even for the historian, the most important of all facts about Jesus to be taken note of and accounted for concerns the influence which, during His brief ministry, He exerted on those who came most closely into touch with Him—an influence so potent and so decisive that those who opposed Him came to the inescapable conclusion that the one thing that must be done with Him was to get Him put to death, while those who attached themselves to Him came to believe, with a passionate conviction which even His death was not able to quench, that He was the Christ, the Son of the living God. A frank estimate of the influence which radiated from Jesus is enough to bring into suspicion, if not indeed into discredit, some of the essentially humanistic interpretations of His person which are accepted all too readily as historical.

It is indeed impossible to study the life of Jesus on the basis of the Gospels alone. It might even be urged with good reason that the right line of approach would be to begin with the known facts of His crucifixion and the rise of the Christian Church, and in the light of these to work our way back to the earlier and less clearly discernible facts of his life-story. Certainly no presentation of Jesus can be accepted as true to history if it does not provide a satisfactory historical explanation of the faith of His first followers.

(b) The liberal critic tends also to dismiss as unauthentic or at least as unessential those elements in the life and teaching of Jesus which he finds it difficult to harmonise with his general outline. The so-called "miracles" provide a case in point. These he prefers to ignore or explain away, partly on the general plea that "miracles do not happen," partly because they seem irrelevant adjuncts to a life which (as he interprets it) was essentially devoted to teaching a way of righteousness. No serious student of the Gospels will treat

lightly the difficulties of the miracle-narratives. The actual facts may in some cases have been misinterpreted. But the historian is proving false to his own scientific standards if he asserts generally that the event *could* not have happened when there is weighty evidence to support the view that it *did*. It is worth recalling, moreover, that to those who first witnessed them the miracles of Jesus did not appear primarily as abnormalities or wonders, but as works of power, mighty deeds performed in the power of the spirit of God. However we may explain them, miracle-narratives are an essential element in the Gospel story. If we attempt to excise them altogether, we are left with a record which ceases to be coherent or intelligible.

Another significant example arises in connection with the religious message of Jesus. Harnack interpreted Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God in a way which was thoroughly congenial to the religious idealism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; but he did so by ignoring, or interpreting in an acceptably modern sense, some of the most characteristic elements in the Gospel teaching. "The Kingdom of God is at hand." "There are some standing here who shall not taste death until they have seen the Kingdom of God come with power." "Ye shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of the Power and coming with the clouds of heaven." These and such like sayings raise indeed grave difficulties for the exegete; but their very difficulty is at least an argument in favour of their genuineness, and to interpret them as if they represented general religious truths, which Jesus found it convenient to express in dramatic language likely to appeal to His contemporaries, is to rob them of much of their content. Their eschatological assurance is in line, moreover, with the faith of the early Church; and that fact suggests, not that sayings have been illegitimately ascribed to Jesus which represent only the faith and outlook of the disciples after His death, but that such declarations had actually been made by Him, and had thus served in a measure to provide a basis for the faith of His followers.

Taking his cue from sayings such as these, Johannes Weiss<sup>1</sup> had as early as 1892 raised the challenge, which was later taken up and pressed home so forcibly by Albert Schweitzer,<sup>2</sup> that the message of Jesus was essentially eschatological, that so far from being content to teach men how to further God's Kingdom within the conditions of space and time He was dominated by the assurance that the present world was about to pass away, and His mission was to prepare men for that supra-mundane Kingdom which was soon to supersede it. Here indeed was a challenge which liberal critics of the Harnack school have never been able adequately to meet.

It is true that we can no longer rest wholly satisfied with the interpretation which Schweitzer and his followers have placed on the eschatological teaching of Jesus. It is not now a tenable view that Jesus' outlook was directed *solely* to a Kingdom which, while near, was still as yet in the future, and that His ethical teaching was of secondary importance, designed to meet conditions which were soon to pass away. But, however we interpret them, these eschatological declarations represent an essential element in the mind of Jesus to which full justice must be done in any account of Him which claims to be historical. They are, however, an element which cannot easily be reconciled with the liberal portrait of Jesus. The Jesus of the Harnack school is characterised by calmness, poise and sanity; even in His most challenging moods we recognise the truth of His words and bow before their authority. The Jesus of the eschatological school, on the other hand, seems in some respects an ecstatic, even fanatical, figure, remote from the ways and thoughts of our modern civilisation. Had we then rediscovered Jesus with Harnack only to lose Him again with Schweitzer? Or must we confess that neither the one nor the other has enabled us to see Him in the fullness of His stature? The quest must be continued further.

<sup>1</sup> in the first edition of his book *Die Predigt Jesu vom Reiche Gottes*.

<sup>2</sup> *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* appeared in English in 1910, with a laudatory preface by Professor F. C. Burkitt.

(c) In the third place the immense amount of study given to the relations of the four Gospels to one another has driven us to recognise that in some schools of criticism far too circumscribed a view is taken of the evidence available for a reconstruction of the Gospel story. Formerly the Fourth Gospel was largely set aside as being essentially a doctrinal reinterpretation; and as regards the Synoptics, excessive reverence was accorded to Mark as the earliest Gospel and to the collection of sayings (Q) from which it was postulated that Matthew and Luke drew much of their discourse material. Even Mark in its present form became subject to question as the view developed that it, in turn, gave signs of being a compilation from earlier sources. Bound up with their study of Gospel sources there was a naïve readiness among many critics to believe that only the earliest sources could be trusted as history, the later ones by contrast being subject to theological accretions, and that the further back we pursued our researches the more clearly did we come face to face with a purely human Jesus as distinct from the Christ of the Church's faith.

This emphatic appeal to the earliest Gospel sources, and to the undogmatic view of the Gospel story which it was claimed that they presented, seemed indeed a powerful weapon in the hands of the radical critic. Looking back we can see how much perplexity and anxiety it must have created for many an earnest Christian thinker and preacher. In their eager concern for historical truth men ceased to feel "at home" with St. Paul and St. John; and they turned to St. Mark's Gospel to find there stirring illustrations of the manhood of the Master, touching reminiscences of the life and teaching of the great Galilean. And they were left to reflect on the apparently unbridgeable gulf separating this very human Jesus from the divine figure who is made in the Fourth Gospel<sup>1</sup> to say that He and the Father are one, and of whom St. Paul<sup>2</sup> writes that in Him the divine Fullness chose to take up its abode, so that every power in the universe might

<sup>1</sup> x. 30.

<sup>2</sup> Col. i. 19 f.

be reconciled in a peace made by the blood of His cross. Was then that gulf real and unbridgeable? And did it represent "pure history" on the one side and "theological speculation" on the other?

We are now able to see that this "back to Mark and Q" movement was not in itself a satisfactory way of approaching the historical problem, and might indeed be grievously misleading. There were current at an early date other bodies of tradition besides Mark and Q, as indeed St. Luke reveals in the preface to his Gospel; and researches in source-criticism have done something towards helping us to retrace some of these. Instead of the prevailing Two Document Hypothesis Canon Streeter has put forward a Four Document Hypothesis giving a place (in addition to Mark and Q) to a Jerusalem sayings-source (M) used by Matthew, and to a body of tradition (L) which St. Luke came to know at Caesarea; and he has found wide support for the thesis that St. Luke began by combining Q and L to form an earlier Gospel (Proto-Luke)—into which at a later date he inserted sections from Mark to form our present Third Gospel, and which therefore represents a separate tradition which is probably earlier than Mark and completely independent of it. There is, further, a growing readiness to find real historical value in the evidence of the Fourth Gospel, not merely as regards episodes (as e.g. an early Judæan ministry, and the date of the Last Supper), but also (and this is especially significant) as regards much of the teaching.

There is, moreover, one notable fact regarding our sources which every advance in criticism serves to make more and more clear. No matter to which of our Gospels we turn, no matter into what sources we may analyse them, we nowhere find support for the "undogmatic" presentation of Jesus which liberal critics of an extreme type have put forward as historical truth. The Jesus of St. Mark's Gospel is, from first to last, Jesus the Son of God; the Jesus of Q<sup>1</sup> claims that the Father is truly known only by the Son and by those

<sup>1</sup> Mt. xi. 27, Lk. x. 22; cf. p. 106

to whom the Son will reveal Him. This does not mean that we are not to trace in the Gospel sources various stages of doctrinal development. What it does mean is that at no stage is there a presentation of Jesus which is dictated solely by a desire to present a historical picture, and that the once-familiar attempt to trace in our sources a progressive development from the "undogmatic-historical" to the "unhistorical-dogmatic" is based upon a dangerous fallacy. All of our sources, even those that are latest in date, seek to set forth historical facts; but all of them—even those that are earliest—view the facts from the standpoint of Christian faith. The recognition of that fact prepares the way for a new stage in the historical quest.

### III. THE REVIVAL OF SCEPTICISM

Our arguments so far have done nothing to discredit the attempt to get back to the truth about the historical Jesus; they have merely urged that if we are to succeed in that attempt we must do fuller justice to the available evidence than had been customary in some recent reconstructions, drawing it from a wider range and handling it with truer discrimination. Now, however, we turn to note how the "back to Jesus" movement has come to be challenged from a new angle—and that in a way which not merely raises doubts about the adequacy of certain widely-accepted constructions, but even denies altogether the validity of the principles on which the quest has proceeded. Here we are dealing not with a single unified reaction but with a variety of reactions, both doctrinal and critical, which in some respects appear to be poles asunder in their outlook, united only in their confident assertion that to rediscover the truth about the historical Jesus, at least with any fullness and with any assurance, is for us now no longer possible.

#### (a) THE BARTHIAN REACTION

In the first place there is the dogmatic movement associated more particularly with the name of Karl Barth.

Here the contention is that the New Testament is from first to last a testimony to the truth about Jesus Christ ; and any attempt to get behind that testimony to an alleged basis of fact (as distinct from the Christian interpretation of fact) is to be dismissed as futile and misdirected effort. To many this will seem like a reversion to the unyielding dogmatism of an earlier generation, which was satisfied to present Jesus precisely as He is seen in the Gospel records and in the faith of the Church, and from which the liberal movement in criticism, with its eager search for the historical basis of the faith, was welcomed as providing a deliverance. It may even seem that the very dogmatism of such a theological position half betrays and half conceals a mood of scepticism, as if hand in hand with the dogmatic assurance that Jesus Christ is fully known to His followers by faith goes the lurking suspicion that nothing at all can be known about Him in any other way.

#### (b) FORM-CRITICISM

If such scepticism on the historical question reveals itself among a certain school of dogmatic theologians, an argument for it has been provided by the school of criticism which in recent years has engaged most attention and has exercised the widest influence, viz. the so-called Form-criticism school. Form-criticism is an attempt to penetrate behind all written sources of the Gospels to that dim period during which the stories about Jesus were being told and re-told in oral tradition ; and its basic contention is that these stories took shape, not primarily in the hands of a biographer, but in connection with the developing life of the primitive Christian communities—in their mission-preaching, for example, or in their meetings for worship, instruction and edification. By stressing the fact (which of course had been previously recognised) that the Gospels are primarily collections of reminiscences current in the Christian communities, Form-criticism goes on to raise doubts regarding their value as historical documents, and (without disputing the essential historicity of Jesus)

questions how far the material exists for a strictly historical account of His life and teaching.

It is not surprising—if we may take this comparatively minor matter first—that scepticism should arise regarding the precise setting of various episodes recorded in the Gospels, and (more generally) regarding the development of events during the ministry. That much of the material in our Gospels was originally current as detached stories or sayings, with no exact definition of time or place, is indicated by the conventional character of many of the connecting links,<sup>1</sup> these connecting links often differing, moreover, in the corresponding accounts in the different Gospels; and we can understand that the Evangelists would not as a rule be vitally interested in the precise historical situation in which a certain happening took place or a certain saying was uttered. If this is admitted, the question arises whether we are justified in assuming, as is so frequently done, that we have a connected account of the progress of the ministry from stage to stage. Schweitzer<sup>2</sup> had already given expression to this objection in characteristically picturesque language: “Formerly it was possible to book through-tickets at the supplementary-psychological-knowledge office which enabled those travelling in the interests of Life-of-Jesus construction to use express trains, thus avoiding the inconvenience of having to stop at every little station, change, and run the risk of missing their connexion. This ticket office is now closed. There is a station at the end of each section of the narrative, and the connexions are not guaranteed.” There is a measure of truth in this contention; nevertheless it cannot be accepted without serious qualification. In studying St. Mark’s Gospel the conviction is forced upon us that the writer is far from indifferent to precise historical situations and historical developments.<sup>3</sup>

Form-criticism goes on, however, to raise a much more

<sup>1</sup> e.g. “and again He entered into Capernaum after some days”; “He went out again by the sea”; “He entered again into the synagogue.”

<sup>2</sup> *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, p. 331.

<sup>3</sup> cf. C. H. Dodd, *The Framework of the Gospel Narrative* (*Expository Times*, vol. xliii, pp. 396 ff).

serious issue. It notes that the stories fall into certain well-defined categories—e.g. miracle-stories; stories of the heroic type, in which Jesus radiates divine glory, or of the controversial, in which He challenges His opponents or successfully rebuts the charges they bring against Him; stories which have little point in themselves except that they lead to a memorable saying. Within these categories the stories are moulded according to a fairly well-defined pattern; and behind this moulding process the Form-critics trace the influence of the early Church as it faced its special needs and problems. The great theme of the first Christian preachers was, we are reminded, the divine drama of salvation, not the facts of the life of Jesus; but to illustrate and enforce their message they would introduce picturesque stories regarding the Lord Jesus when He was on earth—stories which readily passed into currency, but of which we today cannot be at all sure how far they have a basis in historical fact. So, too, doubt is raised with regard to many of the sayings of Jesus which had formerly been accepted without question. It is urged e.g. that, even when he had a genuine story to tell, the preacher would sometimes round it off with a pregnant sentence which linked up the story with some concrete situation in his own day. Thus Dibelius asks us to believe that the story about eating with publicans and sinners ends with the words:<sup>1</sup> “it is the sick who need a doctor, not those who are well,” and that the words which follow in our Gospels: “I came not to call righteous men, but sinners” are a preacher’s addition with reference to the missionary work of the Church.

When once a place is found for scepticism of this kind, where is it going to end? The real value of the Gospels as historical documents, according to the Form-critics, lies in the light which they shed on the developing interests and problems of the early Church; it is only an indirect and uncertain light which they shed on the life story of Jesus. And so we have this significant confession from a German representative<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mk. ii. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word* (English translation), p. 8.

of this school: "I do indeed think that we can now know almost nothing concerning the life and personality of Jesus, since the early Christian sources show no interest in either, are moreover fragmentary and often legendary." And alongside of this verdict we may set this other from a leading English scholar, Professor R. H. Lightfoot, in the concluding chapter of his Bampton Lectures:<sup>1</sup> "It seems, then, that the form of the earthly no less than of the heavenly Christ is for the most part hidden from us. For all the inestimable value of the Gospels, they yield us little more than a whisper of His voice; we trace in them but the outskirts of His ways."

Is such scepticism justified? Form-criticism by itself certainly does not provide adequate justification. Because it has helped us to see so much more clearly how the Gospel tradition was *moulded*, has it thereby explained away how that tradition *originated*? Does not the evolutionary process itself supply us with vital information about the facts which lie at its beginning? And if the Form-critics were true to their own principles, would their very emphasis on the formative influences in the life of the early Church not make more clear to them, in His words and His actions, the originality and creative power of Him who called all these influences into being? Form-criticism does not allow nearly enough for the impress of the personality of Jesus. It likewise underestimates the influence of that singularly important class to whom St. Luke, in the formal preface which as an historian he prefixes to his Gospel, pays honourable tribute, viz. "those who from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the word." The earliest Christian preachers were something more than religious idealists. At the heart of their message (as we can see from the valuable record preserved in the early chapters of the book of Acts) was an appeal to certain concrete happenings; and while it was to them a source of satisfaction and pride that they were called to offer their testimony<sup>2</sup> to these, they knew too that many

<sup>1</sup> *History and Interpretation in the Gospels*, p. 225.

<sup>2</sup> cf. Acts ii. 32: "whereof we are witnesses"; iv. 20: "we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."

of the outstanding facts concerning the life story of Jesus were matters of common knowledge, about which they could say to their hearers: "as ye yourselves also know."<sup>1</sup> Moreover, proclaiming as they did the story of One who had been condemned to a shameful death by the supreme authority in both Church and State, they must have known how every fact they told about such a Master would be liable to be disputed by opponents; and there is a fair presumption, therefore, that every fact that they told was felt by themselves to be such as would bear scrutiny. It is not without significance that, when the occasion arose to choose a successor to Judas in the band of the Twelve, a necessary condition was that he should have companied with the others during the whole of the public ministry of Jesus—a striking reminder, surely (if we can accept the tradition as trustworthy) that the early apostles attached the utmost importance to the factual basis of the message which they preached.

The scepticism of the Form-critics is in part a reaction from the excessive confidence that marked the reconstructions of the Harnack school; but it carries the reaction much too far. If it were true, as Bultmann would have us believe, that we can now know next to nothing about the historical Jesus, it would be a serious set-back to the course of historical investigation; but it would also be a serious loss for Christian faith. Christianity has always challenged the world with a message which it claims to be rooted in history; and that challenge will be robbed of its force if the position must be accepted that the truth about its historical origins can no longer be known. In that case the Gospel will become a mere "mythos," a scheme of salvation, the representation in story-book form (may we have even to say "in fairy tale form"?) of certain religious ideas. The wheel will have revolved full-circle back to the position in the days of Strauss. Then the need will arise once again, and even more urgently than

<sup>1</sup> Acts ii. 22; cf. St. Paul's claim in regard to himself in Acts xxvi. 26: "this thing was not done in a corner."

before, for a "back to Jesus" movement. For the human soul cannot rest wholly and permanently satisfied with the assurance that Jesus Christ is all that Christian faith asserts Him to be, and not go on also to try, so far as is humanly possible, to see Him as He walked the earth a man among men.

But if Form-criticism has gone too far in its negations, it is essentially sound in some of its fundamental principles, and it has brought with it some undeniable gains. The Gospels make no claim to be scientific biographies; they belong rather to what we may call "testimony literature." Nevertheless they represent the testimony of men who claimed to know the truth and were concerned that other men should know it; and though naturally there is room for dubiety in regard to many of the narratives viewed in isolation, there is no sound reason for doubting the truth of the general point of view from which they are written. And when once we have recognised that, we can go back to the isolated episodes and study them with more confidence. Taken as a whole, the Gospels present us at point after point with a basis of fact which we have no good reason for rejecting. By showing us how the Gospel tradition came to assume the shape in which it has come down to us, Form-criticism has broadened and strengthened the evidence for its historical value. So long as progress was sought mainly through an analysis of our Gospels into sources, it was inevitable that historical reliability should be judged mainly by questions of an early date and alleged apostolic authority—e.g., how far was St. Mark's Gospel dependent on the reminiscences of St. Peter, or the sayings in the source Q on the testimony of St. Matthew? The results of such enquiries may still be accepted as valuable, and so far from being discredited Source-criticism may still be expected to yield fresh light on the history behind our present Gospels; but we have to thank Form-criticism for helping us to see so much more clearly how, behind the tradition as a whole, there lies the testimony of the wider fellowship.

## IV. THE QUEST RENEWED

And so we take up the quest again in a spirit of confident hope. Partly this is because we can now recognise more frankly how the land lies at either end of the tunnel referred to in the previous chapter; and while working at one end we know we must keep our eye on the other. The scepticism which so often asserts itself in this enquiry is the outcome of a false method of approach. Those who profess to be strictly "scientific," interested solely in historical "research," eager to reconstruct the story of Jesus free from "prejudice" or "presupposition," naturally turn for evidence to the Gospels—there is no other evidence of value to which they can turn; but, finding this evidence too "subjective" for their taste, they cut and carve it according to what they profess to be "the principles of historical science," in which they now find a new standard of judgment to replace the outworn standard of the Church's faith.

A reconstruction reached on these principles, however, can never be free from prejudice and presuppositions; it will reflect the general outlook of the historian in question just as the portrait in the Gospels reflects the outlook of the first disciples. And it has the further disadvantage that a fuller and better application of the scientific method will soon reveal it to be inadequate or even false. This does not mean, of course, that scientific enquiry stands condemned, that the quest must be abandoned, and that we must without question fall back on acceptance of the Gospel story as it has come down to us. There is an inevitable tension between historical fact and historical interpretation to which justice is not always done by those who have not worked hard at the problem.

How then is progress to be achieved? If we are to reach the truth about Jesus, we must approach our sources in the spirit of reverent enquiry, but we must read them also as the testimony of men who themselves had known Him intimately and who were eager to testify to the things which they had seen and heard. There is no reason to think that their testimony

is essentially untrustworthy—indeed there is good reason to assert its reliability. And there is no evidence that there ever existed a Jesus essentially different from the Jesus to whom they bear witness. We have therefore good grounds for confidence that, if we learn to read them aright, the Gospels will yield us a reliable portrait of “the Jesus of history.” But one condition of reading them aright is that we read them in the light of the Christian faith.

### CHAPTER III

## THE MESSAGE OF JESUS: (A) ITS ROOTS IN THE RELIGION OF ISRAEL

**W**E turn from the problem of the life story of Jesus to consider some of the dominating conceptions in His teaching. Here, it may be felt, we may hope to reach a greater measure of objective truth. Many who attach little credence to the Gospel accounts of what Jesus *did* are disposed to trust the record of what He *taught*. There is a tendency, further, to believe that it is through His teaching, and through His teaching alone, that Jesus has significance for our own day. The stories of His ministry in Galilee and Jerusalem, of the miracles He is said to have performed, of the faith which He quickened in His disciples, of the opposition He encountered from Pharisees and Sadducees, of His condemnation by Pontius Pilate and of His alleged rising from the dead—all these are, on this view, matters of merely historical interest; whereas the teaching He has bequeathed to the world concerning the nature of God and the duty of man has a living significance for all time.

For those who adopt this standpoint in their reading of the Gospels the uniqueness of Jesus lies in the originality with which He enunciated certain general religious truths. And it is of course true that, when He proclaimed to men the Fatherhood of God and the Kingdom of God, He was enunciating truths which are as valid for us in our day as they were for those who first heard His message. But we shall miss the true significance of the teaching-ministry of Jesus unless we see that it was dominated by an aim at once more definite and more practical. His appeal was directed in the first instance to the men and women whom He met day by

day. And it was not sufficient for Him that He should instruct them as a teacher instructs his pupils. Rather He sought to break down certain barriers which were effectively separating them from the living God, and to establish between them and God such an intimate and personal relationship that they would come to know God as their Father and themselves as His children, that they would order their lives in complete accord with His Fatherly Rule, and that, by acknowledging this Fatherly Rule of God in their own lives, they would serve to advance its establishment in the lives of others and throughout God's creation.

Here, as in the previous chapter, we are to see the inadequacy of the "mere teacher" presentation of Jesus. Few who have any knowledge of Jesus will cavil at the claim that He was the greatest teacher of all time. But teaching with Him was never merely the imparting of knowledge; it was always directed towards practical ends affecting the relation between God and man. Teaching, in other words, was always a prelude to action; and it is in the results which Jesus accomplished, rather than in the truths which He taught, that we ought to see His unique greatness and His unique authority. If God be a living Spirit, then knowledge of God can never be merely the attainment of right conceptions about Him; it must imply the establishment of a right relationship with Him. Jesus is reported in the Fourth Gospel<sup>1</sup> as saying: "this is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God." Expressed otherwise, in a simple phrase which is capable of revealing ever fresh depths of meaning, the mission of Jesus is to effect an At-one-ment between God and man, bringing them together and accomplishing their reconciliation, and ensuring that the barriers which have hitherto kept them removed from one another should continue to separate them no longer. As St. Paul<sup>2</sup> has expressed it, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself."

<sup>1</sup> xvii. 3.

<sup>2</sup> 2. Cor. v. 19.

## I. THE TRUTH ABOUT GOD

There are certain general truths about God which lie at the root of all Jesus' teaching. They were in no sense original with Him; they were essential elements in the religion of Israel. One concerned the divine transcendence. God is "Lord of heaven and earth." With Him all things are possible. He is a God whom men must both fear and obey. When, in one of the sternest words in the Gospels, Jesus bids men fear Him who after death has power to cast into hell,<sup>1</sup> it is not the devil, but the Almighty God, whom He has in mind. As a companion truth to this Jesus taught also the loving-kindness of God, more particularly in relation to His human family. The God who cares for the lilies and the ravens cannot be unmindful of His children. Every hair on the head of each of them is numbered. No doubt some of His creatures will be able to enter more than others into an experience of His goodness; yet it remains true that God scatters His kindness with lavish hand, causing the sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sending His rain on the just and on the unjust.

These two general conceptions, which of course fuse into one, are essential elements in the Biblical doctrine of the Fatherhood of God. But it is to be noted that by themselves they do not carry us beyond the conception of the loving-kindness of a transcendent God. For all His care and goodness it is still implied that He is in heaven and we are on earth. And the human soul cries out for a God who shall not merely care for men from a distance, and, on occasion, intervene to help them, but shall draw near to them and indeed abide with them and make His Presence and His Power manifest continuously in their midst.

What were some of the ways in which God was conceived by the pious Israelite as revealing His Presence among men? In their simplest form manifestations of the divine Presence were essentially spasmodic; they represented a sudden

<sup>1</sup> Lk. xii. 5

incursion into the world of time and sense of a Power whose dwelling-place was elsewhere. Thus in the Old Testament God appears in a flame of fire; His voice sounds in the thunder; He reveals His designs in dreams, or communicates His will through His prophets. If, instead of being thus intermittent and apparently miraculous, God's Presence is to become an abiding reality, it follows that those whom He is to visit must in some way be ready to receive and welcome Him. And it is in line with the religious thought of the Old Testament that God's Presence should be manifested, not merely or even primarily in the lives of individual servants, but rather in the midst of a People whom He can call His own. "I will set my tabernacle among you . . . and I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people."<sup>1</sup> This thought of God dwelling with His people is indeed one of the dominating conceptions of the religion of Israel. As the tabernacle had accompanied the people in their wanderings in the wilderness, so too in later days the temple on Mount Zion was a constant reminder to Israel that God was in the midst of her. And the conception was made more vivid by the domestic metaphors under which the relationship was set forth—e.g. that of the bridegroom and the bride, the husband and the wife, the father and his children.

In this connection we may note the emergence of certain vital conceptions which come to fruition in New Testament teaching. One such conception is the Word of God. In its simplest form it denotes an utterance or message, conveying it may be a promise or behest to one of God's chosen servants. But, with a growing appreciation of the Divine Presence and Purpose, it is seen that God's Word cannot be limited to a series of episodic utterances; rather it is an abiding reality, inseparable from the very character of God Himself, a means by which God communicates to men something of His very Being. For occasional missions, therefore, God may employ "angels" or other intermediary powers, while He Himself remains in the background; but in communicating to men

<sup>1</sup> Lev. xxvi. 11, 12

His Word God communicates Himself, and in the New Testament the Word is associated with the Gospel.<sup>1</sup> The Word of God is therefore never merely a spoken word; it is a communication of the divine spirit or life; and if it is not to return to God void it must find those who will receive it and obey it. And if "Word" and "Spirit" are essentially one in the primary work of creation,<sup>2</sup> how much more truly are they one in that fuller and final revelation when the Word of God takes flesh and dwells among men. "He (i.e. the Word, the *Logos*) came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His Name."<sup>3</sup>

No less significant for our present purpose is the conception which found expression in the later Jewish doctrine of the *Shekinah*. God dwells in a light to which no man can approach; no man can behold His "glory" and live. In various ways, however, God enables man to realise His Presence—e.g. by an overshadowing cloud, or in a heavenly radiance such as surrounded the shepherds at Bethlehem. In a sense, therefore, God was regarded as taking up a temporary abode in these phenomena—or rather, so as to safeguard His transcendence, it was said that He caused His *Shekinah* to dwell in them. But just because God is essentially spiritual, and because also it is in and through His people that He has purposed most of all to reveal His Presence in the world, it comes to be recognised that His dwelling-place must be in the hearts of those who know Him and Him alone as their God and whose lives are devoted to His service; and His *Shekinah*, which was manifested fully in Jesus Christ, reveals itself also in all its fullness and power through the operations of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers.

A truly spiritual religion does not, of course, forget that if God is to dwell with His people, the people themselves must provide Him with a dwelling-place of the Spirit. "It was

<sup>1</sup> cf. 1 Pet. i. 25

<sup>2</sup> cf. Gen. i. 2 f.; Ps. xxxiii. 6

<sup>3</sup> Jn. i. 11 f.

finely perceived," writes Montefiore<sup>1</sup> with regard to Israel, "that God is in one sense only 'near' when His creatures are present, and ready to appreciate His nearness. It is they who, for practical purposes, turn His transcendence into immanence." By their faith and obedience they can make His Presence a living reality, just as by their disobedience and idolatry they can separate themselves effectively from Him. Again, in choosing to dwell with any one people, God was not content to limit Himself to that one people, but was rather seeking through that one people to lead all the peoples of the earth to know Him and receive Him. A simile<sup>2</sup> found in the Jewish Fathers recalls that "the sea rises and fills a cave of the shore with its water, but the sea itself is no smaller than before"; and the prophetic hope was that the knowledge of God would yet cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.<sup>3</sup>

In the century or two before Jesus came a darkness had fallen on the faith of Israel; and in many quarters men were less conscious of the Presence of God than of the things that seemed to separate Him from them. Thus there was developed in Judaism the conception of the two worlds, a conception which rested ultimately on the recognition of the Divine transcendence, though its development may have owed something to the political and social troubles of the times. On the one hand was the world in which God dwelt in all His righteousness, majesty and power, surrounded by hosts of attendant angels, and with those saints (like Moses and Elijah) who after their life of faith on earth had been admitted to His nearer presence—a world in which God's sovereignty was a reality and His will was done. On the other hand there was the world in which man dwelt in all his sinfulness,

<sup>1</sup> Chapter on "The Spirit of Judaism" in Jackson and Lake, *The Beginnings of Christianity*, Vol. I, p. 39; cf. Schechter, *Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*, p. 33: "The nearness of God is determined by the conduct of man, and by his realisation of this nearness, that is, by his knowledge of God."

<sup>2</sup> quoted by Montefiore in the chapter referred to above, p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> Is. xi. 9; Hab. ii. 14

misery and weakness ; and this lower world was in the grip of sinister powers, some of them definitely evil, spreading sin and disease and death and organised under the leadership of Satan, and all of them liable to mislead and corrupt mankind by the very fact that they came between man and the living God. This spatial conception of the two worlds was readily combined with the temporal conception of the two ages, the miseries of the present age being set in vivid contrast to the blessings of that future age in which God should be supreme over all.

This conception of the two worlds or the two ages was developed under Persian influences ; but it had its roots deep in the soil of Israel's faith. And, fortified by their belief in the sovereignty of God, the best spirits in Israel, despite every temptation to doubt or dismay, refused to acknowledge that the present evil world could be wholly outside the reach and range of the Divine Providence and Power. Nor could they drug their souls with the pious assurance that because God was in His heaven all was necessarily right with the world. When the conditions of earth seemed to testify most clearly that God had abandoned His creation, the faith of Israel cried aloud for Him to rend the heavens and come down.<sup>1</sup> And, while in some quarters His coming was pictured as that of the Deliverer and the Avenger, girt with a flaming sword, in others it was believed that He would come in sympathy and tenderness, to gather the lambs with His arm, to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, to make darkness light and the crooked things straight.<sup>2</sup>

As dew upon the tender herb, diffusing fragrance round ;  
 As showers that usher in the spring, and cheer the thirsty ground :  
 So shall His presence bless our souls, and shed a joyful light ;  
 That hallowed morn shall chase away the sorrows of the night.<sup>3</sup>

Where there was true piety it was also recognised that this divine Coming need not be postponed to a far-distant

<sup>1</sup> Is. lxiv. 1

<sup>2</sup> Is. xl. 11 ; xlii. 7, 16

<sup>3</sup> From *Scottish Paraphrases*, xxx (Hosea vi. 1-4)

future; it might take place here and now; for the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth Eternity is always ready to establish His dwelling "with him that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."<sup>1</sup>

It is in this confident assurance that God's Presence with His people may become a reality here and now, if only the people are ready to receive Him—not (as held by Schweitzer and his school) in the apocalyptic proclamation of a coming Kingdom—that we ought to find the essential key to the mission and message of Jesus.

## II. THE TRUTH ABOUT MAN

Jesus' teaching on man, no less than His teaching on God, rests on certain fundamental beliefs inherited from the religion of Israel. In the Old Testament both the transcendent power of God and His out-going loving kindness receive their sublimest manifestation in His dealings with man. Man is the peak point in God's creative activity; he is also the chief object of God's providential care and love.

Thus while over against God, the Maker of heaven and earth, man must take his place among the works of creation, he occupies within creation a position of pre-eminence which differentiates him from all other created things. He is never a mere creature of God's handiwork. Rather he has been marked out by God to exercise dominion<sup>2</sup> on the earth, to be indeed "lord" of creation; and it is in and through man that God's purposes for the world are to be advanced and finally brought to their consummation. But before God can effectively accomplish His purposes *through* man, there are purposes which He must accomplish *in* man himself. God is always seeking to bestow on man here and now every blessing which man on earth is capable of receiving; and the blessings received in the present life come to be regarded as an anticipation of still higher blessings in the life to come.

<sup>1</sup> Is. lvii. 15

<sup>2</sup> Gen. i. 26, 28

And man cannot truly exercise lordship on the earth, or be in any true sense the agent of the divine purposes, until a perfect spiritual relationship is established between him and God, that relationship which in the New Testament is called sonship.

The Old Testament gives expression to this unique relationship between God and man when it says that God made man in His own "image" or "likeness." The phrase is found three times in the early narratives of Genesis (i. 26f, v. 1, ix. 6), and nowhere else in the Old Testament.<sup>1</sup> The difficulty of determining precisely what it implies is illustrated abundantly in the history of theological thought, and it is significant that the phrase does not occur in the Gospels.<sup>2</sup>

While holding that man was originally created in the divine image, Scripture is equally emphatic that something has happened to spoil the intimacy of his relationship with God and to mar his effectiveness for the carrying out of the divine purposes. All attempts to describe how the new condition arose agree in insisting that man has shown himself disobedient and rebellious; he who had been created to be the recipient of God's highest blessings and the supreme agent for the manifestation of God's glory had come to find *in himself* the explanation of his own origin and destiny, with the result that only vaguely and intermittently does he own any Lord or God beyond his own exalted self.<sup>3</sup> No effort is made in Scripture to gloss over the resultant tragedy. A clear recognition of the glory which God had planned for man from the beginning serves only to increase the shame and degradation of his fall. On the other hand there is no uncertainty in the Scriptural proclamation that God's purpose for humanity still stands, together with that larger purpose which God is to accomplish through humanity for the whole of His creation; and with every fresh consciousness of

<sup>1</sup> cf. also in the Apocrypha: Ecclesiasticus xvii. 3; Wisdom ii. 23

<sup>2</sup> There are however parallels in the Apostolic writings. It probably underlies the language of Phil. ii. 6; see p. 193

<sup>3</sup> cf. p. 263

humanity's need and shame comes a deeper realisation of the redemptive power and love of God. This conviction regarding God's purposes for *man* runs through Scripture from the first chapter to the last. Israel may be God's chosen people ; but she has been chosen as a means towards the fulfilment of His purpose for humanity, and she must be rejected if she fails to fulfil that purpose. It was indeed with a view to the ultimate salvation of humanity that God had chosen Israel, speaking face to face with the patriarchs, giving His people the discipline of the Law, leading them through the wilderness to the Promised Land, and revealing His will through the prophets. Such is the faith of the Old Testament ; and it is in fulfilment of this faith that the New Testament declares how, in the fullness of time, God had revealed Himself on the human plane in the guise of a perfect Man, who is, in turn, to be the first-begotten among many brethren, the leader and indeed the originator of a new and true Humanity.

As we approach the study of the message of Jesus, we shall do well to keep steadily in view the value which in Scripture is attached to man. The message of the Old Testament prophets, while primarily a proclamation of the purpose of *God*, never ceased to relate that purpose to the needs of *man* ; it is in and through what He does for man that the glory of God is to be revealed. Nor was it otherwise in those later days, when the word of God through the mouth of the prophets gave place, for a time, to the feverish expectations of the apocalyptists, and it was felt that the present constitution of the universe demanded not merely the deliverance of Israel from the domination of Rome, but the redemption of humanity from the world powers which enslaved it. In such circumstances the hope of Israel was that a new people of God would be brought into being, representative of humanity<sup>1</sup> at its best ; and there is significance in the fact that in some quarters the supreme representative of this

<sup>1</sup> cf. the contrast in Daniel vii. 1-14, between the "four great beasts" and "one like unto a son of man".

redeemed People of God was known by the name of the Son of Man.

In a later chapter we shall have to consider what precisely the name "Son of Man" implied. Here let us recall in closing that it was the name by which Jesus was most accustomed to refer to Himself. Even when most concerned to make it plain that He spoke and acted in the name of God, it was as Son of Man that He presented Himself to His followers; it was as Son of Man that He gave His life for His brethren; and it was the Son of Man whom He pictured as coming in the glory of the Father as the world's judge.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE MESSAGE OF JESUS: (B) THE FATHERLY RULE OF GOD

**T**HE message which Jesus gave to the world is described in the New Testament as a Gospel. It is not a mere piece of teaching about God; it is a message which brings to men "news" about God, the ultimate authority for the news being God Himself. Such a message ranks Jesus at once among the prophets rather than the teachers of humanity, though we shall yet have to consider how far even the designation "prophet" gives an adequate description of His mission, inasmuch as it is the living God Himself, and not merely news about Him, that Jesus brings to men. It is of course only natural that, in addition to proclaiming His message as a prophet, He should have devoted much time and attention to teaching; for prophecy need never exclude exposition (which is the attempt to present truth so that men can understand it), and likewise it need not exclude apologetic (which is the attempt to meet difficulties and to remove objections). But however much Jesus may have sought to lead men to readjust their thinking regarding spiritual things, His ultimate aim was more definite and practical; it was to establish among men the Fatherly Rule of God.

What is the essence of the Gospel which Jesus proclaimed? If we are not, on the one hand, to reduce His Gospel to the enunciation of eternal spiritual truth, are we, on the other, to connect it essentially, as Schweitzer and his fellow critics of the apocalyptic school would have us do, with the proclamation of the imminent introduction of a new world-order, when the present conditions of earth will be superseded by the new conditions of God's Kingdom? There may be

elements of truth in both these presentations ; yet we shall err if we do not see how at the heart of all that Jesus says and does is a glowing sense of what the Living God ought to mean to men *here and now*. In the sermon at Nazareth as recorded in Luke iv. 16 ff. there is not a word suggestive of apocalyptic expectations. Jesus on that occasion appealed to a prophecy of Isaiah : " The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor ; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." And when He closed the book He boldly declared : " This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears." The age of promise has, for Jesus, given place to one of fulfilment. God has drawn near to visit and redeem His people.

#### I. GOD'S ANSWER TO MAN'S NEED

The Gospel of Jesus is a Gospel about *God*. No account of His message can be adequate that does not hold fast to that fact from first to last. What He proclaims to men, and what He does for them, springs directly from His sense of the love and power of the Father in Heaven. But it is well that we should relate His message also to His sense of human helplessness and need.

The world cried desperately in Jesus' day, as it cries still, for such a Gospel as He brought to bear on human need. Wherein, however, lay the need as Jesus saw it ? For Him the supreme tragedy of human life was that so many things were being allowed to separate men from the Presence and Power of *the living God*. In their sorrows and their sufferings God seemed far removed from them, and they stretched out to Him weak hands in fear—" a generation without faith."<sup>1</sup> God was no less removed from them even in their worship—they did not dare to approach too near to His Presence, and they did not know how to take their sins and

<sup>1</sup> Mk. ix. 19

leave them to be dealt with by a God with whom was mercy and plenteous redemption. The lack of a sense of His Presence was seen not least in the aimlessness and selfishness and pettiness which so often characterised their lives ; with their minds set on what they should eat and what they should put on they were living as the heathen live, forgetting that for those who truly know God the first concern ought always to be to seek His Kingdom and His righteousness. Jesus never imagined, however, that the tragedy was wholly to be met by the simple expedient of bringing healing to the individual soul. He knew how easily the soul of man could be crushed by the forces of evil organised into a system ; and it was His challenge to such forces that brought Him in the end to the Cross.

What precisely, we may ask, did He mean when, confronted with the test-question of the right attitude to be adopted towards the Roman administration, He replied : " Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's " (Mk. xii. 17) ? Of one thing we may be certain : His reply was not an evasion. He is saying something far more than that there can be no objection to accepting the established social order provided one keeps one's own soul right with God. Here, as always, He meets challenge with challenge. And in part, no doubt, His challenge is directed towards those of His countrymen whose political enthusiasms are being allowed to corrupt the purity of their religious devotion ; He reminds them, in other words, that whatever value may attach to political and social readjustments, these can never take the place of spiritual renewal, and that it is of far less importance to be an antagonist of Caesar than it is to be a protagonist for God. But viewing it in the light of His whole message and mission we can see that His challenge goes very much further than this. The Jesus who pits Himself fearlessly against the forces of demon-possession and disease, and in fierce indignation drives out before Him those who desecrate the place of prayer, is One who proceeds to the fight of life like

a strong man armed. He sees how there is no department of human life which has not, in some measure, come under the power of Satan, who must first be bound and then driven out if the souls of men are to be delivered from his bondage.<sup>1</sup> And it is an essential element in the mission of Jesus to accomplish this deliverance, and to bring every part of the present world-order (including politics and economics and all that may be called Caesar's) under the dominion of the Spirit of God, which, by controlling and revitalising it, will end by transforming it and making all things new.

His sense of God fills Jesus with an intense compassion for His brethren of mankind. But there is more in His soul than compassion. There is also, as Sir John Seeley so strongly insisted in his *Ecce Homo*, an intense "enthusiasm for humanity." Again and again we find Jesus urging that there is nothing so precious in God's sight as the life of a man. God clothes the lilies and feeds the ravens; and "are ye not much better than they?" If only men lived their lives under the sway of Him who made them and marked them out for a heavenly destiny—then surely they would take their lives more seriously, seeking with God's help to rise to the height of their divine calling. And they would take more seriously too the lives of their fellows, looking at them not with the eyes of the world but with the eyes of God the Father. What a tragedy that good men should think it more honouring to God to keep the Sabbath day "holy," than to bring healing and relief on the Sabbath to one of God's suffering children! What a tragedy that, when a stranger lay wounded and helpless by the roadside, there should be passers-by (including those whose lives were professedly dedicated to the service of God) who were indifferent to the call of human need and the responsibilities of human brotherhood! What a tragedy that men or women who had been indifferent to God's laws should be treated as outcasts when the Love of God was crying out for their restoration to the family circle! Thus, even while He was moved by a

<sup>1</sup> Mt. xii. 25-29

deep pity for the needs of men, the real driving-power in the soul of Jesus was the overmastering sense which He had of the Presence and the Power of God, who had marked out His children for a heavenly destiny, and would allow no one to pluck them out of His hand.<sup>1</sup> And the mission of Jesus, as He Himself conceived it, was in the name of God to overcome the evils by which mankind had become enslaved, and, through leading men to share in the sense of God's power and love, to lead them also to order their lives in obedience to God's will and the guidance of His Spirit.

How, we may ask ourselves, did Jesus set about the accomplishment of His mission? The temptation narratives reveal how He saw Himself debarred from certain lines of action because they were incompatible with the will of God the Father and His own interpretation of His Sonship. But the ways of the preacher and the teacher were still open, and above all He could accomplish much by the unspoken sermon of a daily life of love and power.

(a) As a preacher He could lift up His voice with strength, saying to the cities of Judah: "Behold, your God." He could speak to the heart and conscience of Jerusalem, telling her that the hour had come for her deliverance. So, indeed, He proclaimed at Nazareth. "This day is the Scripture fulfilled." The same note of fulfilment is sounded in the summary of Jesus' message which St. Mark gives in his opening chapter (i. 15): "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel."

Even that phrase "is at hand," which has served far more than we realise to establish the modern impression that Jesus was merely the herald of a coming Kingdom, may not unreasonably be taken to denote that the Kingdom had indeed dawned; it had come so near as to be a present reality.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jn. x. 29

<sup>2</sup> So C. H. Dodd (*Parables of the Kingdom*, p. 44) who equates ἤγγικεν in Mk. i. 15 (cf. Lk. x. 9, 11) with ἐφθασεν in Mt. xii. 28, Lk. xi. 20, and takes the meaning in all those cases to be "has arrived." On the linguistic side Dodd's argument has been ably challenged by J. Y. Campbell, *Expository Times*, vol. xlviii, pp. 91 ff.

There is an obvious danger of building too elaborate a superstructure on the basis of one particular word, especially if, as in the passage cited above, the interpretation of the word leaves room for doubt. But if regard be had, not to single words or phrases, but to the message of Jesus as a whole, there is no doubt that the substance of that message was that the time was ripe for the fulfilment of the divine promises of salvation. The Rule of God, which in the minds of so many was associated with an indeterminate future or a distant heaven, ought to be realised here and now in the conditions of space and time. We may recall how, in the Johannine account of the conversation with the woman of Samaria, the conventional outlook is illustrated by a popular saying<sup>1</sup> that "in four months comes the harvest"; and then, by way of emphatic contrast, Jesus adds: "But I tell you the harvest is with us now, and the time has come to gather it in" (Jn. iv. 35).

(b) In a later chapter we shall see how Jesus emphasised the same lesson when, in the quieter moods of the teacher, He trained His disciples and others to rethink their whole thoughts about the purposes of God and His ways of bringing His purposes to fulfilment. We must not omit, however, to note here how the reality behind His message revealed itself also in the God-possessed character of His daily life, and more particularly in what the Gospels call His "mighty works." The miracles of Jesus will perhaps never cease to raise questions in the mind of the earnest enquirer; but, as we have already noted,<sup>2</sup> any attempt to cut them out of the Gospel record would render that record quite unintelligible. Especially significant is the attitude of Jesus to demon-possession, and to other forms of sickness and disease which, like evil powers, hold men in their toils. The healing of a woman who had suffered sorely for eighteen years implied for Him the breaking of a bondage imposed by Satan (Lk. xiii. 16). The exorcisms performed by the Seventy who had

<sup>1</sup> The metrical form of the words in the Greek perhaps suggests a proverb.

<sup>2</sup> p. 18

gone out in His name were hailed by Him as a clear indication of Satan's dethronement (Lk. x. 18). And it is probably in the light of this attitude to human suffering that we ought to explain the anger which is ascribed to Jesus in Mark's account of the healing of the leper.<sup>1</sup> What makes Jesus angry is, of course, not that the leper should obtrude himself where no leper had a right to be, but that a child of man should remain under the bondage of so dreadful a disease, with all the penalties that it brought in its train. All these healings Jesus claims to perform in the power of the Spirit of God, and not in virtue of any uniqueness that may be His; and He appeals to them as evidence, not that He is a specially commissioned agent of Heaven, but that the Kingdom of God has dawned. "If I by the spirit of God cast out the demons, then has the Kingdom of God come upon you" (Mt. xii. 28; cf. Lk. xi. 20).

## II. THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD

What has been said about the divine visitation which enables devout souls to rejoice in the Presence and Power of God provides us with an approach to the consideration of Jesus' teaching on the Fatherhood of God. It is a common conception that one of the central aims of Jesus in His public ministry was to teach men in general to think and speak of God by the intimate name of Father, and that the supreme place which He has in the history of religious thought comes from the cogency and attractiveness with which such teaching was presented. Such an idea is not borne out by a study of the Gospels. Jesus did Himself think and speak of God as Father. But He is never represented as using the phrase "your Father" except when He is addressing those who, as disciples, have come to know God as Father.

The reason for this lies in an essential difference between pagan and Biblical thought regarding God's relation to His

<sup>1</sup> Mk. i. 40. There can be little doubt that the more difficult reading *ὀργισθεῖς* "moved with anger" of the Western Text is preferable to *σπλαγχνισθεῖς* "moved with pity."

creatures. In pagan thought there is a doctrine of divine fatherhood which is primarily ontological. All created things have their origin in God ; He is the only-begetter of all creation. To this conception of origin there is added the further thought that God the Father sustains all things in life by imparting to them a share in His own divine nature. As part of a theory of the creation and government of the universe such a doctrine can only end in pantheism.

It is altogether different in the religion of Israel, where God is always a transcendent and personal God. Though He is willing to make His dwelling-place among men, He is known as Father only to those who have been brought into intimate personal relationship with Him. In the Old Testament He is Father, not to man as man, nor to His creation taken as a whole, but to Israel as His chosen people. And He is Father to Israel, not primarily in virtue of some initial act of creation, but in virtue of a covenant relation with His people, according to which He deals with Israel as a father deals with a son. Fatherhood is thus a description of the divine character and purposes ; and the relationship which should exist between the Father and His children will demand for its realisation a moral and spiritual harmony between Him and them. It is significant in this connection that in so much of the Old Testament teaching the divine Fatherhood is a simile or a metaphor, not a dogma. " Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him " (Ps. ciii. 13). " The Lord thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son " (Deut. i. 31). " I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me " (Is. i. 2). This rebellion on the part of God's children is a reminder that the spiritual relationship which is presupposed when they call Him Father is not being realised in practice. Israel does not truly know what is implied in the Fatherhood of God if its own faith and practice are a denial of it.

It was only natural that Jesus should, from time to time, make use of illustrations which imply the divine Fatherhood,

as indeed many in Israel had done before Him. "What man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?" (Mt. vii. 9). But it was not the practice of Jesus in His public preaching and teaching to refer to God as "my Father" or as "your Father," or as "the Father" of men in general.<sup>1</sup> "Father" was indeed the name by which Jesus did Himself address God; and in His case it was the expression of a recognised harmony of mind and will and spirit. But just because He imparted to the conception of the divine Fatherhood so much more fullness and intimacy than it had ever previously possessed, we can well understand why He apparently did not encourage men to address God as Father so long as they had not yet learned to offer to God that response of trustful and loving obedience which showed that the divine Fatherhood was a reality to them. Words are dangerous tyrants, and never more so than in the realm of religion. And it is of the utmost significance that Jesus, who never allowed men lightly to apply honorific names to Himself,<sup>2</sup> was equally jealous to guard against an unworthy or presumptuous approach to the God of infinite power and love.

### III. THE KINGDOM OF GOD

In His proclamation of God's Kingdom, as in His message of the divine Fatherhood, Jesus had in mind the establishment of a right relationship between men and God. When He proclaimed to men the Kingdom of God He was not merely enunciating a theory of the universe or depicting an ideal order of society. For Jesus an indispensable precondition of the coming of God's Kingdom is that there should be a People who acknowledge God as King. Such a People He set Himself to bring into being. And in and through such a People God's Kingdom was to be established.

<sup>1</sup> A detailed examination of the Synoptic sources leads T. W. Manson (*Teaching of Jesus*, p. 98) to conclude, not merely that "Jesus rarely if ever spoke directly of God as Father except to his disciples," but also that "he began to speak to them in this way only after Peter's Confession."

<sup>2</sup> cf. p. 121

The Aramaic word *malkuth* which lies behind the Greek βασιλεία denotes not so much "kingdom" as "kingship" or "sovereign rule." The announcement of the Kingdom of God presupposes an acknowledgment that *God is King*. It is therefore something more than a general statement of *fact*; it is an act of *faith*, implying a personal recognition of the divine majesty and a readiness to submit to the divine authority.

That God was King was a fundamental article in the faith of Israel. And in virtue of her covenant relationship with Jehovah Israel recognised that His Kingdom had a quite definite application to herself; she herself, as Jehovah's People, had taken on herself the *malkuth* of Jehovah, and there was no rival king to whom she might own allegiance. Not that His sovereignty was limited to Israel. Taught by the great prophets Israel had learned, in theory at least, that no nation, and no department of human life, lay beyond the range of Jehovah's authority, and that she herself, by trustful acceptance of His kingship and absolute compliance with His sovereign will, must be His chosen agent for the extension of His rule unto the ends of the earth. When the nation failed to rise to the height of her theocratic mission, the further lesson had to be learned that, helpless as she was without Jehovah, she was by no means indispensable to Him, and that all His purposes were directed towards calling into being a true People of God, among whom His sovereign rule should be established and His will done.

When Jesus began His ministry, He did so in fulfilment of the faith of Israel. His message and His daily life alike demonstrated how completely His own soul was subject to the Rule of God, and it was with unchallengeable authority that He called on those around Him to bring their lives likewise into subjection to it. He is something more than a prophet or a herald of the Kingdom. The Rule of God is a reality in Himself. In Origen's phrase He is Himself the Kingdom (αὐτοβασιλεία). His whole message of the Kingdom of God places Him at once in a different category from the other

religious leaders of His day. In the main they anticipated a coming Kingdom ; Jesus declared that the time for its coming was *now*. They discussed the time and the manner of its coming ; Jesus laid down the conditions on which men could "enter" it. They taught that it would come by a divine *fiat*, as if God were meanwhile withholding it ; Jesus taught that it was God's good pleasure to give it now, if only men would "receive" it. Their hopes were fed on apocalyptic visions ; Jesus took His stand securely on ethical and spiritual principles. If only we remembered these fundamental distinctions we should be spared many misrepresentations of the teaching of Jesus.

Properly understood, the Fatherhood of God and the Kingship of God imply one and the same thing ; they imply the acknowledgement of God as at once Father and King. With Jesus the two conceptions were inseparably linked. "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth" (Mt. xi. 25). "It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom" (Lk. xii. 32). So, too, at the hour of His betrayal He recalled the Father's illimitable power. "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and He shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?" (Mt. xxvi. 53). To those who truly know God, all that He does is an expression at once of His Fatherhood and of His Kingship. Love and power are not two separate and distinct manifestations of the Divine character ; God's power cannot operate otherwise than through love, and His love is all-powerful. And man's response to such a God must therefore be a perfect blend of love and trust and obedience. We may therefore describe the mission of Jesus as directed towards bringing men under God's Fatherly Rule. He wished to lead men to know God as Father, but He wished no less to lead them to acknowledge God as King. And once their own lives had been brought under God's Fatherly Rule, Jesus inspired them to work and to pray for the establishment of that Rule among others. "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come."

An indispensable element in Jesus' message of the Kingdom of God is that men themselves, both individually and corporately, must own God as King. There can be no Kingdom of God without a People of God. This is not to be interpreted as meaning that the Kingdom and the People are in the fullest sense one and the same. God includes all His creation under His rule. But just because God's purposes for His creation reach their truest expression in what He accomplishes for and through man, so His Kingdom can have no meaning until first of all it becomes established in the hearts of men. It is with such a People that His Kingdom must begin; it is through such a People that it will be extended; and when finally the Kingdom reaches its consummation, God will be in the midst of a perfected People, ruling over them as a Father, and enriching them with all spiritual blessings.

Much argument of a not very profitable kind has in recent years raged round questions like the following: Is the Kingdom of God, as Jesus conceived it, to be realised in the future, or is there a sense in which it is present here and now? Is it primarily a gift which God Himself is ready to give to men, or is its realisation a task to which they are summoned to consecrate their interest and activity? The fact that for all these interpretations some Scriptural authority can be found ought to remind us that the contrasts, the alternatives, to which they give rise are unreal; the words and phrases in which a great spiritual truth is presented are being allowed to obscure for us the truth itself. It cannot be recalled too often, or too emphatically, that the first and foremost concern of Jesus was with God, the living God. In all His preaching and teaching on the Kingdom of God the emphasis lies on "God" and not on "the Kingdom"—the modern tendency to talk loosely of "the Kingdom" and to omit the name of God has no real justification in Scripture. The vision in the soul of Jesus, unlike that which so often inflames the zeal of humanitarian prophets and social reformers, was not a Utopia whose conformity with the highest human ideals

might justify its being described as divine. Rather it was a vision of God, the King, whose purposes of righteousness and love cannot forever remain unfulfilled, but must, in His own way, reach a glorious consummation in the establishment of His Fatherly Rule.

#### IV. THE ESCHATOLOGY OF JESUS

One of the main problems of New Testament criticism in the last fifty years has been to find an adequate interpretation of Jesus' message of the Kingdom of God. Largely under the influence of the Ritschlian theology, the Kingdom of God came to be interpreted in many quarters as primarily an ethical and spiritual ideal with which Jesus completely identified Himself; it represented the goal of human existence, the consummation of God's purposes for His children. So interpreted, the Kingdom of God was often presented in a way well calculated to be at once an appeal and a challenge to the idealism of youth; and the interpretation had the further advantage of apparent conformity with the idealistic thinking of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries regarding spiritual progress towards a perfected existence. Recent events in world history, on the other hand, have served to expose the weaknesses inherent in such a conception of the Kingdom of God. We can see now that it takes an over-idealistic view of human nature, that it minimises, or even ignores, the creative and redemptive activity of God, that it is based on an inadequate conception of the person and mission of Jesus, and that, in the main, it reduces the Church to the level of a society formed to continue and to promulgate the ideals of its Founder.

This way of interpreting Christ's message has never quite recovered from the shock which was administered to it when Johannes Weiss and Albert Schweitzer<sup>1</sup> forced us to take account of the eschatological element in the message of Jesus. There has, it is true, been time for us to recover from the

<sup>1</sup> cf. p. 14

exaggerated and one-sided emphasis which at first characterised the eschatological interpretation of the Gospel. But the result has been a long tug of war between two rival interpretations, the ethical and the eschatological, neither of which can claim to dispose of the other ; and the message of Jesus, so far from possessing the cogency of clear and unified thinking, has been interpreted as if it were dominated by two aims not easily reconciled, of teaching men the right attitude to life here and now, and of preparing them for the introduction from above of a new world order in which all earthly dispositions would be transformed.

Much of this tension would be seen to be resolved if we took a saner and more Christian view of what is meant by eschatology. Eschatology is a doctrine of the Last Things. And our conception of the Last Things will vary with our conception of the nature of history. So long as history is regarded as essentially a succession of events which follow one after the other in a time sequence, the Last Things will be the things which come at the end of the sequence ; they will be last in the sense that they are not followed by other events.<sup>1</sup> But if we conceive history as the Jews conceived it, as revealing in human affairs the working out of a divine purpose, then Last Things may begin long before the end of the time process ; they take place at any time when God effectively breaks through into history and it can be said of Him, " Lo, this is our God, we have waited for Him and He will save us " (Isaiah xxv. 9). And if it be the case that the concern of Jesus was to lead men to know that the salvation that God had promised under His covenant with His people was now *a present reality*, if He was announcing, not so much a consummation towards which men should look forward, as a consummation which need not tarry but may be experienced *now*, then His message was eschatological through and through. And the eschatology is to be traced, not merely in sayings like those regarding the coming of the Son of Man on the clouds of Heaven, but in such a word as " Son,

<sup>1</sup> cf. O. C. Quick, *Doctrines of the Creed*. p. 245

thy sins are forgiven,"<sup>1</sup> or the reply to the disciples of the Baptist, "Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached".<sup>2</sup>

Such eschatology, we may add, must inevitably carry with it important ethical implications. Its unreality would be exposed if these were lacking. And for that reason any interpretation of the message of Jesus which does justice to the ethical and spiritual character of the new life into which He seeks to lead men is likely to be far nearer to the truth than an eschatological interpretation which is empty of ethical content. On the other hand, we must never attempt to separate His ethic from His doctrine of God. And once we have seen the eschatological character of that doctrine, we may say that His ethic springs naturally from His eschatology.

Jesus' message of God's Fatherly Rule has been described in recent criticism<sup>3</sup> by the name of "realised eschatology," as opposed to that "futurist eschatology" which points forward to a still unrealised consummation. We need not quarrel with the term as such. But the mere fact that such a new term had to be introduced serves in itself to show how readily in the past we have ignored the true character of Jesus' eschatology, and how little we have realised that an essential part of His mission was to secure that, in and through Himself, the triumph of God should begin to be accomplished now. There comes to expression in His teaching, it is true, another element which seems to envisage the final victory, the consummation which comes at the end of the ages; and at a later stage of our enquiry<sup>4</sup> we shall have to consider His teaching regarding the End, and the influence which such teaching exerted on the religion and the theology of the early Church. Jesus looked forward to the End with perfect

<sup>1</sup> Mk. ii. 5;

<sup>2</sup> Lk. vii. 22; cf. Mt. xi. 4 f.

<sup>3</sup> Reference may be made to the writings of Professor C. H. Dodd: *The Parables of the Kingdom; The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments; History and the Gospel.*

<sup>4</sup> pp. 179-190; cf. pp. 259, 284.

assurance, though not in terms of times and seasons ; but everything that He has to say about the future triumph, everything that he has to teach about resurrection and judgment and the life beyond, arises from His profound conviction that the end of the present age has already set in, and that God's purposes for the world have now entered on their decisive stage of fulfilment.

**PART II**  
**THE PERSON OF JESUS**



## CHAPTER V

### “WHOM SAY YE, THAT I AM?”

**O**UR study of the message of Jesus raises inevitably deep and searching questions regarding the nature of His person and mission. What is the place which belongs to Jesus Himself in relation to the God whose fatherly character He reveals and whose sovereign rule He sets Himself to establish?

In considering this question we ought to keep steadily in mind the fact that so large a part of the life work of Jesus was devoted to preaching and teaching. That is an aspect of His mission to which, as a rule, we do less than justice when we are content to describe Him as God's Messiah; for in the faith of the primitive Church it is not primarily in virtue of His prophetic ministry that He is Messiah, but rather because, after the earthly ministry had ended in a shameful death, He had been (as was said) raised to the right hand of God.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand we must go on to recognise that such terms as preaching and teaching, taken by themselves, fall very far short of an adequate description of His earthly mission, as the mission is portrayed either in the pages of the Gospels or in the faith of the primitive Church. We are driven therefore to ask what are the claims, explicit and implicit, which Jesus makes for Himself, and what claims are His followers justified in making for Him?

#### I. JESUS KNOWN ONLY TO HIS FOLLOWERS

Jesus once addressed to His disciples the question,<sup>2</sup> “Who do men say that I am?” following it up with the more searching question, “Who do you say that I am?” The fact that it was to devoted followers that these questions

<sup>1</sup> cf. Acts ii. 33, 36.

<sup>2</sup> Mk. viii. 27.

were addressed is in itself significant. Clearly the disciples were regarded as more competent than non-disciples to judge on such a matter. Discipleship, in fact, was recognised as providing the indispensable basis for such a judgment. And Jesus, as we may learn from His rebukes to unclean spirits and His frequent injunctions to silence, would have cared nothing for a verdict which, however exalted, did not spring from such a personal experience as was implied in discipleship. We may even go further, and see here an acknowledgment on the part of Jesus of the important place which belonged to the disciples in the fulfilment of His mission. The aim of Jesus was, in the first instance, to gather around Him a band of men who should share with Him in His experience of God as Father and King; and if, in the providence of God, He was being called to discharge some further mission, of a kind frequently described as "messianic," that mission (whatever its precise character, and by whatever name we may call it) could only achieve final and complete fulfilment in so far as He led others to share it with Him.

## II. TITLES ASCRIBED TO JESUS

In the New Testament various titles are ascribed to Jesus: e.g. He is Christ, He is Lord, He is Son of God, He is Son of Man. All these titles have a history, which differentiates them one from the other. Yet the fact that they are all applied to Jesus leads in Christian thought and worship to an obliteration of their distinctive features; and the result is a composite picture in which other conceptions, such as the Davidic King, the expected Prophet, and the Suffering Servant, also find a place. But what, we may ask, was the attitude of Jesus Himself to such interpretations of His person and work? If we would answer that question aright, we must examine the various titles separately, and consider in each case how far, as He faced His mission, He could possibly have accepted such a way of regarding Himself.

The necessity for this enquiry is increased by the fact that

the coalescing process<sup>1</sup> was at work even in His lifetime—both among those who were influenced by Him, and even, we may believe, in His own soul. There can be no doubt that He spoke of Himself openly as the Son of Man, that He thought of Himself as the Son of God, that He recognised certain respects in which men ought to acknowledge Him as Lord, and that certain features of His earthly ministry gave ground for the ascription to Him, even in His lifetime, of the name Messiah (Christ), and of various other names suggestive of messianic authority. And we need not feel surprise if He who could be at once Master and Servant (as in the story of the Foot-washing, John xiii. 13f) also saw Himself to be at once King of Israel and God's Suffering Servant, at once Son of Man and Son of God; and all these conceptions may have contributed something to His reinterpretation of the conception of Messiahship.

It is to be remembered, of course, that the process of coalescence did not begin with the Christian movement. Israel's Messianic expectations before Jesus appeared were a welter of divergent ideas. In some circles the looked-for Messiah was an earthly deliverer, a King of Israel, who was to be at once Son of David and Son of God; in others he was a celestial being who was expected to appear suddenly with clouds and great glory, and who, though exalted high above men by the whole circumstances of His appearing, was to be known by the paradoxical name of the Son of Man. It was in the face of this confusion that Jesus, confronted with the necessity of interpreting aright, both for Himself and for others, the purposes of the most high God, had to ask which of these names He could accept as descriptive of His person and mission, and which of them He must sternly reject.

The coalescing process may often have been gravely at fault both in methods and in results; nevertheless we must allow for the deep sense of spiritual reality which found expression in it. In days when Israel had no visible king reigning in

<sup>1</sup> The process has doubtless influenced the transmission of some of the Gospel traditions.

Jerusalem and the nation was subject to a heathen power, the King of Israel who figured so prominently in the religious hope was naturally regarded by the devout as one whom Jehovah Himself should raise up and anoint to execute His will, a true “ Son of God ” and not merely the accepted head of an earthly nation ; and from another point of view any Deliverer and Judge who should appear on the clouds would be sent by God in response to the prayers of the righteous, to accomplish the deliverance of His people and to vindicate His holy name among men. And if a sense of spiritual reality contributed to mould the thoughts and expectations of the devout Pharisee, in the case of Jesus it was the all-decisive factor. In any attempt to understand the self-consciousness of Jesus, we need not dismiss it as altogether improbable that in some deeply spiritual sense He could conceive of Himself as at one and the same time Son of God and Son of Man, Servant of Jehovah and King of Israel, the Son of David as well as David’s Lord,<sup>1</sup> the promised Redeemer and the Holy and Anointed One through whom the Kingdom of God was to be established or governed. It is still more important, however, that we should recognise the converse truth, that Jesus would never have acquiesced in any such designations of Himself unless, in each case, the designation had been pregnant for Him with a deep and vital religious connotation, expressive of His faith that the hopes and yearnings of God’s people Israel were now in Him to be fulfilled.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> cf. Mk. xii. 35 ff.

<sup>2</sup> On this subject see references in the General Index under the heading *Titles*.

## CHAPTER VI

### ISRAEL'S HOPE OF DELIVERANCE

**T**O assess aright the messianic ideas current in the New Testament we must go back to their roots in the faith of Israel. Jewish eschatological hopes at the time of Jesus had come to assume many forms—diverse in origin and not always compatible one with another. It is of cardinal importance, therefore, that we should not attribute to them a fixity which did not belong to them. It is also important to recognise that not all of them deserve to be labelled as in the strict sense “messianic.” In other words, the divine visitation to which they point forward is not necessarily connected with the appearance of one who is recognised as “the Messiah.”

#### I. THE HOPE OF A MESSIAH

Messiah (*χριστός*) is originally an epithet meaning “anointed”; and as such we find it in the Old Testament applied to the king and to the high priest in virtue of the ritual anointing which marked their installation into office.<sup>1</sup> By a metaphorical extension of this usage, the term might be applied generally to anyone who was recognised as consecrated by God for some exalted mission. Thus even a heathen king<sup>2</sup> is the Lord’s anointed for the deliverance of His people Israel. Israel herself, or the king as representing the nation, is sometimes depicted as anointed by God in virtue of her mission to the nations.<sup>3</sup> When, following a period of national disaster, the expectation became strong that God would restore the glories of Israel, it was natural that, accompanying the hope of a restored kingdom, there

<sup>1</sup> 1 Sam. ii. 35; Lev. iv. 3

<sup>2</sup> Is. xlv. 1

<sup>3</sup> Ps. lxxxiv. 9, lxxxix. 51; 1 Sam. ii. 10; Hab. iii. 13

should be the expectation of a King-Messiah, one who should be anointed by God to show forth His righteousness, and who, besides being king, should also perhaps be to his people prophet and priest<sup>1</sup>; and according to the promise of 2 Sam. vii. 12ff it was expected that the ruler in this restored kingdom should be a scion of the House of David. During the tension of the century before Jesus appeared, increasing emphasis came to be laid in certain circles on the part to be played by this expected Messiah; and a significant development was that, whereas he was formerly regarded as God's representative in the new Kingdom which God was to establish, he was now thought of rather as the agent through whom the Kingdom was to be brought into being. Such a hope took many forms, in some of which the religious longing which inspired it at the first was overlaid with expectations of a less spiritual kind. Of these it is sufficient here to mention two, because of the prominence which they assume in the pages of our Gospels.

(a) One expectation, rooted in the faith which Israel had in her own destiny, was that the Messiah's first task would be the deliverance of Israel. It may be questioned whether, at the time of Jesus, there was any deep or widespread belief that a warrior-Messiah would arise to enable Israel to throw off the yoke of Rome and become herself supreme as a world power. But, both among the more eager Pharisees and in much popular religion, there flourished the faith that Israel had, under God, a heritage to which she must be true and a mission for which she must prepare herself, and that God would yet send a Messiah who, after accomplishing a signal deliverance for His people, would rule over them as a second David, and enable them to execute His purposes unto the ends of the earth. The inherent danger in such an expectation was that it might be more concerned about the glory of Israel than about the glory of God. This was a conception of Messiahship which Jesus decisively rejected at the Temptation,<sup>2</sup> and against which, just because it exercised so strong

<sup>1</sup> Is. xi; Ps. cx

<sup>2</sup> Mt. iv. 8 ff.; Lk. iv. 5 ff.

an appeal to many of His countrymen, He continued to be on His guard from the beginning of His ministry to the end.

(b) There were other circles in which a frank recognition of the evils of the present world-order ruled out all hope of a restoration to be accomplished on earth. Nothing worthy of the name of God could, in such circumstances, be brought about by a merely political *bouleversement*. When the time should come—as it certainly would—for God to arise to establish His Kingdom, this would mean a complete break with the conditions of earth. And the agent through whom the new era was to be inaugurated would be no earthly Messiah, no mere Son of David or King of Israel, but one who should come with the clouds of heaven, in supernatural power and glory. In some of the apocalyptic literature of the time—notably in the Book of Enoch—this divine vicegerent received the name of the Son of Man, a name which, in this connection, is perhaps to be associated with the vision of Daniel vii. 13, 14. It is clear that the expectation of a Son of Man profoundly influenced the thought of Jesus, though it remains to be seen how much His expectation had in common with that of the apocalyptists.

## II. EXPECTATIONS NOT DEFINITELY CONNECTED WITH A MESSIAH

So far we have been considering those forms of the eschatological hope in which there was a place for a divinely appointed Messiah. It cannot, however, be too strongly emphasised that in the thoughts of the great prophets—and it is there, rather than in the speculations and dreams of a less spiritually alive period, that we ought to look for affinities with the thought of Jesus—faith in the future was rooted in the revealed character of God, and eschatological hopes were centred, not on the coming of a Messiah, but on the vindication by God Himself of His own righteousness. In the prophetic proclamation of a coming Kingdom of God the expectation of a Messiah, where it was present at all,

was always secondary and was never essential. It was God Himself, and not some divinely commissioned agent, who was to redeem Israel, to judge the nations, and to exercise His sovereign rule to the ends of the earth. Even where, as in Isaiah's picture of a regenerated earth (ch. xi), a place is found for a Ruler who has sprouted, as it were, from the hewn stump of the House of Jesse, it is clearly recognised that it is primarily Jehovah, and not His commissioned representative, who has brought about the great consummation. And it is to be noted that, alike in this Isaiah passage and in others<sup>1</sup> which might be cited as parallels to it, the expected Ruler, while a Scion or Branch of the House of David, is not called in any explicit sense "the Messiah." His task is not to establish the Kingdom of God, but to rule over God's people in righteousness.

As to when and how this new era is to be ushered in, no man may know. As Jesus Himself said later: "Of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father."<sup>2</sup> But the same deep sense of spiritual realities which led the prophets to believe that the consummation was assured led them also to recognise that, in a variety of ways, God was preparing in advance for the coming triumph of His righteousness.

(i) It was recognised, for example, that the same God who had in other days delivered Israel from Egypt was still the living God who held the nations in the hollow of His hand; and what was history but the unfolding of His all-righteous purposes? Thus, in strange ways, He was always raising up men and nations to be His servants. Even a heathen king like Cyrus<sup>3</sup> might be an unconscious instrument of His holy will. More particularly, Israel herself, by her very sufferings, was being made more fit for the discharge of her mission as a chosen People; and Isaiah's sublime visions of the Servant of Jehovah continued to speak to the hearts of the devout,

<sup>1</sup> e.g. Jer. xxiii. 5; xxxiii. 15; Zech. iii. 8; vi. 12

<sup>2</sup> Mk. xiii. 32

<sup>3</sup> Is. xlv. 28; xlv. 1

reminding them that the vicarious suffering of the righteous could be used by God as a means for the advancement of His Kingdom.

In this connection it is well that we should remember that, in the Suffering Servant prophecy of Isaiah liii, there is nothing to suggest Messiahship or even Kingship in the strict sense of these terms. The Sufferer,<sup>1</sup> who may of course be Israel, or a redeemed Israel, is represented rather as one of God's saints, it may perhaps be as one of His prophets.<sup>2</sup> And while, in the succeeding centuries, the prophecy doubtless influenced profoundly the piety of Israel, the expectation of a Messiah who should fulfil in his life the role of God's Suffering Servant did not arise in Israel until Jesus made it possible for the two strands of thought to find their union in His own person.

(ii) In still another way the prophets took the eschatological hope, which might so easily have degenerated into a blind yearning after an apparently impossible future, and infused into it a strong sense of spiritual reality. God's final purposes might tarry; but God Himself was ever a "God at hand" and not a "God afar off" (Jer. xxiii. 23). Again and again Jeremiah represents God as "rising early," allowing no opportunity to slip of speaking to His people or otherwise establishing contact with them. "Since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt unto this day I have even sent unto you all my servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them" (Jer. vii. 25). The deliverance from Egypt stands as a fundamental fact in the religious experience of Israel; but the redemptive activity which God revealed then is never to be confined to the past, and points forward indeed to a still greater deliverance. "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that they

<sup>1</sup> Reference should be made to the suggestive articles of C. R. North in the *Expository Times* vol. 52, pp. 181 ff., 219 ff.

<sup>2</sup> The prophecy may have been influenced by the sufferings of Jeremiah or of some other prophet, perhaps even the author himself.

shall no more say, the Lord liveth, which brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt ; but, the Lord liveth, which brought up and led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all the countries whither I had driven them ; and they shall dwell in their own land " (Jer. xxiii. 7, 8). " He that scattereth Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock " (Jer. xxxi. 10). And the convictions thus tellingly enforced by Jeremias are the common possession of all the prophets. The God of Israel is one who visits and redeems His people (Lk. i. 68).

Conspicuous among the ways in which God's compassionate nature was conceived as revealing itself was His gift to His people of a succession of prophets who made known to them His will. And, properly interpreted, the well known prophecy ascribed to Moses in Deut. xviii. 15, " The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet, of thy brethren, like unto me," is an expression of the conviction that that gift will never fail ; while other nations may resort to soothsayers and seek for signs, Israel will continue to hear from the prophets the word of the Lord. But the days came when no new prophetic voice was heard in Israel ; and the words in Deuteronomy came to be interpreted as a promise that, as God had given Moses as a prophet to Israel at the beginning of her national history, so, ere the end, He would send to her a second Moses.<sup>1</sup> A similar hope took shape in the expectation of a coming Elijah (Mal. iv. 5).

We are not to imagine from this that in certain circles the expected Messiah was conceived as a prophet rather than as a king.<sup>2</sup> True, in the history of God's people it was revealed again and again, that the authority of the king had to give

<sup>1</sup> Jackson and Lake, *The Beginnings of Christianity*, vol. I, p. 406, question this ; but the evidence of John i. 21, vi. 14 (" the prophet ") is not to be set aside.

<sup>2</sup> It is similarly unnecessary to believe that there was an expectation of a Priest-Messiah, representing the house of Levi as the King-Messiah did that of David. In the passages often referred to in this connection (Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, Levi viii. and xviii.) there is no mention of a Messiah.

place to that of one of God's prophets—as Moses had withstood the heathen Pharaoh, so within Israel itself Samuel's commission from God was higher and more direct than that of Saul, Nathan's than that of David, Elijah's than that of Ahab. There is no evidence, however, that Israel ever expected a Prophet-Messiah—in the ministry of Jesus the mere fact that He appeared as a prophet made it well-nigh impossible for any but His most intimate disciples to think of Him in terms of Messiahship. The roots of the belief in the coming of a Moses or an Elijah were religious rather than speculative. The prophets had foretold that the great day of the Lord, when it came, would be a day of judgment no less than of deliverance, of destruction no less than of salvation. Surely therefore that "great and terrible day" would not dawn without the Lord first sending His messenger to prepare the way before Him; surely He would not smite the earth with a curse until He had spoken to His people, as He had done in the days of old, by the voice of one of His prophets, summoning them to return to the ways of righteousness and peace (Mal. iii. 1, iv. 5, 6). It will be noticed that Malachi, while predicting the coming of the day of the Lord, has no clear proclamation of a Messiah.

### III. THE FUSION OF DIVERSE EXPECTATIONS

It is natural that, in course of time, attempts should have been made to stabilise and co-ordinate these various expectations in so far as co-ordination was possible. It was not difficult to effect a fusion between the eschatological hope which looked forward to the coming of a Messiah and those others in which a Messiah had no clearly defined place. Thus in general (though we shall have to ask how far this applies in the case of Jesus) the expectation of a Messiah became established as an integral part of the eschatological hope; and a prophetic figure like Elijah, who was conceived originally as heralding the coming "Day of Jehovah," came to be regarded as a precursor of the Messiah.

It is important to note that certain other co-ordinations with which we become familiar in Christianity did not assume definite shape in pre-Christian thought, and their formulation is therefore to be attributed either to the unfettered originality of Jesus in the interpretation of His mission or to the faith which He succeeded in quickening in His disciples. We may note this firstly in regard to the two conceptions of the Davidic Messiah and the apocalyptic Son of Man. The Davidic Messiah was expected to appear on earth and to rule over a terrestrial kingdom; the Son of Man, on the other hand, was to appear from heaven, and at his coming the dead were to be raised for judgment, and an end was to be made to the conditions of earth. The Messiah was to arise in Israel and be king of Israel; in the case of the Son of Man, the very fact that he was to come from heaven served to indicate that he belonged to no one nation, and the name "Son of Man" linked him not with Israel but with humanity. The Son of David was human, though, in virtue of his divine commission, he might be called Son of God; the Son of Man, on the other hand, was not like other mortals, but was conceived as pre-existent and eternal. It was the influence of Jesus which made it possible for His followers to interpret these two apparently opposed conceptions in such a way as to make their harmonisation possible. And even so it is not strictly true to say that Jesus Himself identified the two terms; for while He put forward His claims as the Son of Man, He was studiously reticent about a claim to Messiahship.

In the same way there is no clear indication that, previous to Christianity, the Servant passages in Isaiah were interpreted with definite reference to the expected Messiah. It was not so that they exercised their undoubted influence on Israel's eager expectation of a divine deliverance. Judaism had no clear doctrine of a suffering Messiah. The Sufferer in Isaiah, ch. liii, is a "man" of sorrows, "disfigured till he seemed a man no more";<sup>1</sup> and it is as a representative of the people,

<sup>1</sup> lii. 14b (Moffatt)

not strictly as their Messiah, that he suffers. When Jesus comes He accepts for Himself the role of God's Suffering Servant, not that of the Messiah. After his resurrection from the dead His followers were indeed fired with the conviction that He was at once God's Servant and God's Messiah ; and they had solid grounds for making this identification. But Jesus Himself, in treading the path of the Suffering Servant, did not claim to do so as Messiah. It was as Son of Man that He had nowhere to lay His head, that He went to Jerusalem, and that there He gave His life as a ransom for many.

#### IV. SECTS AND PARTIES

The Messianic hope naturally exercised an influence on the development of the various parties which flourished in Israel at the time of Jesus ; and in some cases it even proved a source of serious tension. The party, later known as Zealots, which flourished notably in Galilee, was essentially nationalist in character ; it had no clearly defined religious doctrines ; and believing intensely in God's destiny for Israel, its adherents were prepared to take the Kingdom of God by violence and to find God's Messiah in any leader whose prowess justified their trust. The Essenes had no such daring outlook on the future ; it was enough for them if, by their separation from the world and their discipline of the flesh, they should keep themselves from evil, and be faithful to the law of their God. For the Sadducees, who took their stand on the books of Moses and denied all possibility of a resurrection, apocalyptic speculations had clearly no attraction. While their outlook was political rather than religious, their very adherence to Scripture must have made them believe in the triumph of their God and the establishment of His Kingdom ; and in so far as this faith took a more strictly messianic form their expectation naturally centred on a Son of David, though their association with the priesthood may also have led them to picture the Messiah's rule as predominantly priestly in character.

The one party for whom the messianic hope had a profoundly religious significance was the Pharisees; and the influence in their case was by no means uniform. Members of this party had not been slow to take up arms in defence of the faith, though, as we see them in the Gospels, they contented themselves rather with sullen hostility to the established regime of the Herods and the Roman Empire. In the half-century or so before the coming of Christ they seem to have reconciled themselves to the futility of power-politics, and to have set themselves rather to train the people of Israel in the fear of the Lord and the due observance of His Law. If only Israel would repent for one day, it was believed that the Kingdom of God would come. It was among the Pharisees and those whom they influenced that the apocalyptic hope was strongest. But in contrast to this we must note that in the Psalms of Solomon, a typically Pharisaic document dating from about the middle of the first century B.C., clear and forcible expression is given to the prophetic ideal of a Kingdom of God to be set up on earth in fulfilment of God's covenant with His people, a Kingdom characterised by righteousness and purged of all sin, a Kingdom over which a King shall reign springing (like Solomon) from the loins of David :

“Behold, O Lord, and raise up unto them their King, the Son of David, at the time in which Thou seest, O God, that He may reign over Israel Thy servant. And gird Him with strength, that He may shatter unrighteous rulers, and that He may purge Jerusalem from nations that trample her down to destruction.”

(Psalms of Solomon, xvii. 23, 24)

We may infer from this that, while the expectation of an apocalyptic Son of Man was sincerely held by many Pharisees and was the expression of a deep religious need, there were others of the party to whom it was little likely to commend itself. On patriotic grounds they disliked its tendency towards a “religion of humanity,” while on practical grounds

it seemed too visionary and speculative to preserve its hold on reality.

#### V. THE POPULAR RELIGION

The religious condition of a people, however, is not fully revealed by an examination of its outstanding religious sects. In every nation there is a popular religion too variegated and too undefined to admit of classification according to the tenets of school or party; it has, it may be, its affinities with several of these parties, and yet is in agreement with none. There will be found in it on the one hand superstitious beliefs and practices, and on the other pagan doubts and fears, which may be in theoretical contradiction to the genuine elements of the faith which it professes, and may cause it to be disowned by the religious leaders; but it may nevertheless have at its heart a genuine piety which God in His Heaven does not despise.

Despite the traditional care exercised by Jewish parents in the religious education of their children, it was true of Palestine then, as it is true of our own country to-day, that great masses of the people had grown up in lamentable ignorance both of the historical basis of their religion and of its living essence. Collectively such people were referred to as *Am-ha-Aretz*—the people of the land. No doubt many of these cherished in their hearts a reverent fear of the God of their fathers. But still they were uninstructed in the Law by which that God had revealed His will to His nation; and whether through ignorance of its enactments, or a failure to appreciate its significance, their conduct was characterised by an indifference to its observances which caused the stricter Pharisees to regard them as having sunk to the level of Gentile “sinners.” Even poverty, then as now, might render difficult the due performance of ceremonial ordinances. Nor were there wanting many in all grades of society, instructed and uninstructed alike, in whose lives religion was no longer a vital force. Corrupted it may be by prosperity or hardened by adversity, they were so far from making the law of God

their delight that they seemed rather to be open "transgressors" of it,<sup>1</sup> and were accordingly classified as "the presumptuous" and "the ungodly"—though again we must remember that, as men of the world, they would be less conscious of their "ungodliness" than were their religious brethren who condemned them. There were indeed many "lost sheep" in the House of Israel.<sup>2</sup>

But on the positive side of the picture there were not lacking evidences of a genuine religious faith. Popular piety tends to base itself on the divine promises; it cultivates primarily a sense of the divine presence in this life, and with less definiteness it looks forward to some form of future blessedness. Thus in Palestine there were large numbers of "the meek" or "the quiet in the land" who, with a piety no less deep than that of zealot or of scribe, rejoiced in the ever-present goodness and mercy of the Lord. And while, in their outlook on the future, they longed and prayed for the coming of Jehovah's Kingdom, they dwelt in thought mainly on what, according to His gracious promises, the Lord their God was in His good time to do for His afflicted people, and believed that for them His chief demand was that they should prepare their hearts in simplicity for His coming. And indeed for many what other type of religion was possible than this? Fanatical insurrection and ultra-scrupulous ceremonialism were alike alien to their manner of life as they went about their daily duties. Their faith was fed, it is true, on expectations of deliverance, and their outlook was coloured by visions of the End; but while one type of extremist would have taken the Kingdom of God by storm and another removed all obstacles to its coming by a meticulous observance of the Law, the quiet of the land had learned rather how good a thing it is to "hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord" (Lam. iii. 26).

This type of religion is in essence Pharisaic; we are to think of those who cultivated it as rejoicing to go into the

<sup>1</sup> see Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, p. 196, note 12.

<sup>2</sup> Mt. xv. 24

house of the Lord and finding delight in the keeping of His commandments. But while it undoubtedly owed much of its vitality to Pharisaic teaching, and was even capable, under Pharisaic influence, of assuming extremist forms, its general tendency was to nourish in its devotees a spirituality that set far less store on ritual observances than on personal devotion and upright living. Their religion was in line with the teaching of the great prophets, who, in their emphatic assertions that ritual observances (whatever their value) could never be a substitute for personal and social righteousness, had builded better than they knew. But just as to-day the piety of the common people seeks sustenance less in classic presentations of the faith than in the hymn-book and in manuals adapted for popular reading, so the pious Jew of those days, though he was familiar with the Law and the Prophets as expounded in the synagogue, nourished his personal religious life rather on the Psalms and on some of the later Jewish "Writings."

It has been customary among scholars in the last fifty years to emphasise the extent to which religious hopes in the period before the birth of Christ had assumed an apocalyptic form. Undoubtedly apocalyptic expectations at the time exercised an influence on popular religion, as they always do in times of great national or social unrest; but it would be a mistake to assume that, in the literary productions of the apocalyptic school, we have a true indication of the prevailing religious temper. Messianic ideas of the most varied kinds, many of them indeed incompatible with one another, found expression in the popular faith; and in some quarters, no doubt, the predominant outlook was apocalyptic—i.e. there was a tendency to despair of the present evil world and to look for some supernatural interposition by which Jehovah would suddenly arise and His enemies be scattered. But alongside of these apocalyptic dreams and yearnings, and it might even be in fusion with them, there existed other conceptions of a kind that may be more properly described as mystical, based as they were on a recognition of the abiding Presence of Jehovah with

His people. To the apocalyptist the sins and sorrows of the present age left no other explanation possible than that Jehovah had meantime withdrawn Himself, allowing the world to lie under the power of the Evil One, and faith, therefore, involved a feverish anticipation of the day of judgment, when He should suddenly reveal Himself in His might and bring in His Kingdom. Those, however, who had earned the name of "the meek" found peace and joy in the thought that their God was never far removed from them; they laid stress on His "mercy" and His "loving kindness"; they believed that He Himself was afflicted in the afflictions of His people;<sup>1</sup> and their hopes of salvation were based quite as much on a calm assurance of His present identification with them as on highly-coloured visions of an apocalyptic intervention.

#### VI. THE EVIDENCE OF LUKE, CHAPS. I AND II

If we turn to the first two chapters of St. Luke's Gospel, where we are introduced to the homes into which the Baptist and Jesus were born, we get a flood of light on the religious hopes which at that time flourished among the pious in Israel; and a study of the language in which these hopes are expressed enables us to trace many of them to a basis in Scripture—more especially in chapters xl-lxvi of the book of Isaiah.

We read in Luke of those who are waiting for "the consolation of Israel," and our thoughts go back to the call of God with which those chapters of Isaiah open:

"Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins."

Anna the prophetess spoke to those who "looked for redemption in Jerusalem"; and again we recall how the

<sup>1</sup> Is. lxiii. 9

Isaiah chapters ring with references to "the Lord, the Redeemer," and to the people who are called "the redeemed of the Lord." From first to last these two Lucan chapters, and notably the hymns which form so conspicuous a part of them, are aglow with the hope of salvation—and a salvation which is to be wrought out on earth. The God of whom they tell is One who visits and redeems His people; and this visitation means that the hungry shall be filled with good things, that light shall dawn for those who sit in darkness, and that the feet of men shall be guided into the way of peace. We remember, too, how in Isaiah's prophecies a redeemed Israel is to be God's Servant for the furtherance of His righteous purposes to the world: "I will give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation to the ends of the earth"; and the *Nunc Dimittis* expresses the belief that now the time has come for that promise to be fulfilled:

"Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word; for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel."

Lastly, it is not illegitimate to find in Simeon's words about "the sign which shall be spoken against," and the "sword" that "shall pierce through Thy own soul also," a belief (based on Isaiah) that the ideal Servant of God can only accomplish His mission by suffering, rejection and death.

It is evident that, in addition to those later chapters of Isaiah, the last two chapters of the book of Malachi contributed significantly to the religious hopes of the time. We see this in the way in which the opening words of St. Mark's Gospel fuse a quotation from Malachi<sup>1</sup> with one from Isaiah xl:

"Behold, I send My messenger before Thy face, which shall prepare Thy way before Thee. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make His paths straight."

<sup>1</sup> iii. 1

But more pertinently for our purpose, we see it in the words of the angel in announcing to Zacharias the task awaiting the son who is to be born to him. In language reminiscent of the concluding verses in the book of Malachi the angel declares<sup>1</sup> that :

“Many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before Him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just.”

To this is added the significant clause :

“To make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

In that prophecy of Malachi, caught up and repeated in the announcement to Zacharias, we have the expectation that before the day of the Lord, with all that that day would mean as regards both salvation and judgment, God would again send a prophet, a second Elijah, who would exercise a reconciling mission, and get a people ready in advance to meet the Lord when He should come.

One main conclusion emerges from the above study. It is that in its purest form the religion of the pious Israelite at that time was still essentially true to the highest spiritual convictions expressed in the Prophets and in the Psalms. It is a grave error to think of it predominantly in terms of the legalism, the chauvinism, the apocalyptic frenzy which manifested themselves among certain extremists. In those opening chapters of St. Luke there is nothing to indicate the expectation of the speedy break-up of the present world-order, and there is little that points specifically to the early coming of a Messiah.<sup>2</sup> The term Messiah indeed is not mentioned. There is, however, the expectation of a prophet who will lead many in Israel to return to the Lord, and so

<sup>1</sup> Lk. i. 16 f.

<sup>2</sup> The nearest equivalent is in i. 32 f. : “He shall be called the Son of the Highest ; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David ; and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever ; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.”

prepare for the blessed time when the Presence and the Power of God will be manifested among His people. If there is a strong hope that the Lord is yet to do great things for His people, what is anticipated is not primarily a violent, dramatic and unexplained intervention, but rather a visitation by the living God of the souls that quietly wait upon Him. These facts are not without significance for our enquiry regarding the person and mission of Jesus; and they provide more particularly an introduction for the study which follows in the next two chapters regarding the ministry of John the Baptist.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE MISSION OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

**S**TILL seeking light on the person and mission of Jesus, we turn next to consider the work of John the Baptist, the man whom the Church from the beginning has recognised as the forerunner of Jesus. It is a task to which the Gospels themselves invite us ; for in every one of them the narrative begins not with Jesus but with John, they all tell how Jesus associated with John in the Jordan valley, and in the early Church the mission of John was clearly regarded as an integral factor in the rise of the Christian movement.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, if there are difficulties about setting Jesus in the clear light of history, how much more difficult is the task in the case of John. For the Scriptural references to John are at best sketchy ; sometimes indeed they appear to be contradictory ; and the difficulty of reaching anything like clearness of outline is increased if account be taken also of the evidence of Josephus.<sup>2</sup>

Various strands have gone to the making of the composite picture of the Baptist which has become traditional in popular thinking ; and it is the task of the critical student to disentangle these.<sup>3</sup> But here, as in the study of Jesus, we must be careful not to draw false conclusions from our analysis. A comparison of the various sources may be expected to show traces of development in the evidence. This will not necessarily imply that the earlier sources are historically more reliable, and that the development in question marks a progressive departure from a purely historical to a more doctrinal presentation.<sup>4</sup> Why is it, we may ask, that St. Mark

<sup>1</sup> cf. Acts i. 22 ; x. 37

<sup>3</sup> cf. Lowther Clarke, *Divine Humanity*, ch. iii.

<sup>2</sup> *Antiquities*, xviii. 5, 2

<sup>4</sup> cf. p. 17.

opens his Gospel with an account of John the Baptist? It is not that, writing as a historian, he is going to give for its own sake a comprehensive and balanced account of the ministry of this great prophetic figure. Rather it is that, writing as a witness to the Christian faith, he wishes to depict John as the man who prepared the way for the coming of Jesus the Son of God. We are not therefore to assume that the account of the Baptist given in our earliest sources, valuable as it is, has in itself a claim to historical completeness; the general aim behind all the Gospels has influenced notably the selection of the recorded material and to some extent also the manner of its presentation. And if in some of the later sources we find material which is not in the earlier ones, no doubt we must allow in some cases for the influence of doctrinal development; but there may well be other cases in which the simpler explanation will be the truer one, viz. that the later sources preserve certain pieces of historical evidence which were unrecorded or insufficiently emphasised in the others. If that be so, then the later sources will have a real historical value of their own, as supplementing or even correcting the evidence of earlier traditions.

#### I. HIS ESCHATOLOGICAL MESSAGE

The soul of Israel was clearly stirred to its depths by the appearance in the Jordan solitudes of this weird and arresting preacher, who, wearing the dress of an ancient prophet, called with fierce passion for amendment of life, and invited those who recognised their spiritual need to submit themselves to water-baptism. He proclaimed his message with a spiritual fervour unmatched in the nation for centuries; and as they gathered around him the common people and the ecclesiastical leaders alike recognised that here was a man who was speaking direct to the conscience both of individuals and of the people of Israel. Once again a prophet had arisen in their midst.

So much our sources make abundantly plain. When,

however, the question arises of the essential character of John's message, critics are apt to fall into opposing camps, some concentrating attention almost exclusively on his preaching of a coming judgment (the eschatological element), others emphasising mainly, if not exclusively, his demand for righteous living (the ethical element). A dilemma similar to that which we have already considered in the case of Jesus<sup>1</sup> now confronts us in regard to the Baptist. It is a dilemma which can only be resolved, in the one case as in the other, by a clear perception of what eschatology implies, and of the right relation between eschatology and ethics. Eschatological preaching does not limit itself to a feverish proclamation of coming judgment; it confronts men with the living God and summons them to live as in His presence. The truest eschatological preaching is severely ethical; and there can be no effective ethical preaching divorced from eschatology.

Our New Testament sources leave no room for doubt regarding the eschatological character of John's preaching. He has an overwhelming sense of the nearness of divine judgment. It would perhaps be unsafe in this connection to appeal to the summary of his message in Matt. iii. 2, "the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand"; for these words, which have no parallel at this point in the other Gospels, may conceivably represent a tendency in early Christian circles to assimilate the message of the Baptist to that of Jesus. But there are expressions in the more detailed accounts of his preaching whose eschatological significance is not to be toned down. "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" "Now is the axe laid unto the root of the trees." And as further evidence we may adduce the practice of the baptismal rite, and the reference to "the mightier one," whose fan was in his hand and for whose coming the water-baptism which John administered served at best as a preparation. But to say that John's message was eschatological is to tell little about its

<sup>1</sup> p. 50

content; and in what follows attention is called to three respects in which the commonly accepted interpretation of his message seems to call for qualification or reconstruction.

## II. HIS ETHICAL MESSAGE

In the first place, emphasis on its eschatological character ought not to blind us to the fact that John's preaching was ethical to the core. In some modern reconstructions he is represented as wholly occupied with thoughts of impending doom, and caring little for the good life save as a means of escaping judgment. Such reconstructions not merely leave John a shadowy and unreal figure; in so far as he has reality at all he is something of a fanatic, in whom it is hard to see justification for the verdict passed on him by Jesus: "Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist." If we would understand the Baptist aright, we must not dwell overmuch on those apocalyptic expectations which, much as they may have meant for some of his contemporaries, would never for a man of his prophetic mould have been allowed to obscure the vision of a righteous God who is seeking to win for Himself a righteous people.

John's first call, according to all the Synoptists, is for repentance. And it is well to remember that to a pious Israelite repentance meant something far more than is implied in the Greek word *metanoia*, "change of mind"; it meant a "turning" to the Lord God, with an earnest desire to walk in His ways and to obey His will. The same moral earnestness lay behind John's summons to baptism, for baptism was "a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins," and it clearly indicated on the part of the recipient a desire to be cleansed in soul and to make a fresh start in life. In the short account of his preaching preserved in the source "Q," common to the First and Third Gospels, emphasis is laid on the necessity for righteous living—"bring forth fruit worthy of repentance;" and just as it is as individuals that men receive baptism, so too it is asserted (in the saying about "raising

up children for Abraham") that a man's standing before God will be determined by his character as an individual and not by his membership of any tribe or people. When we pass next to consider the evidence of the special source employed by St. Luke, we see John instructing various classes of enquirers as to how repentance ought to work out in the details of everyday life: tax-gatherers are not to practise extortion, soldiers are to refrain from violence in their dealings with civilians, and the ordinary man must be ready to assist his needy brethren. Finally Josephus, who is wholly indifferent to John's prophetic ministry and to his place in the development of the messianic hope, has preserved the tradition that John called on men to follow the way of righteousness, to deal justly with one another, to walk in piety before God, and to have the soul cleansed by righteousness. Professor Burkitt<sup>1</sup> has rightly summed up the position when he writes: "As I understand it, the teaching of John is wholly ethical. A good life henceforth (says he in effect) may serve a man in the coming visitation of God, and nothing else will." The one thing needful was an amended life; and such a demand was "practicable for every class in the situation in which they happened to be."

### III. HIS MESSAGE OF SALVATION

A second misrepresentation of the preaching of John is that it was essentially a message of judgment. In contrast with Jesus, John had (so it is frequently asserted) no gospel, no message of deliverance or hope, nothing but a stern warning of the doom which was in store for those who refused to repent. This is surely a radical perversion of the facts. Judgment must always be part of the message of the preacher who recognises that man may reject the salvation which God has to offer; but it cannot have been the whole of John's message.

<sup>1</sup> *Christian Beginnings*, p. 21. The phrase "wholly ethical" ought not to be misunderstood. John's demand for amendment of life arises from his vivid apprehension of the righteousness of God. His ethical message has an eschatological setting.

We ought rather to regard the Baptist—as the Church from the beginning has regarded him—as the herald of a coming salvation.

John had indeed an awesome sense of the wrath of God—it could not be otherwise with a prophet whose sense of the holiness of God made him the sworn foe of all unrighteousness and hypocrisy. And it is, not unnaturally, on this element in his preaching that our earliest sources dwell most fully. But the very fact that he called disciples, and that he asked men to submit to the rite of baptism, surely indicates that he was also seeking to “prepare a people for the Lord” (Lk. i. 17). And if in his picturesque metaphor of the threshing-floor he is ruthless in his description of the straw which is fit only for the fire, we ought not to forget that he has also a clear vision of the wheat which is to be gathered into the storehouse. He boldly declares, moreover, that the mightier one who is to come after him will baptise men with the Holy Spirit;<sup>1</sup> and such a declaration, though in expression it may owe something to later Christian thought, is not likely to be wholly without historical basis.

Is it not an aberration of scholarship to picture any great prophet of God as concerned solely with a message of doom? Every great prophet must indeed have a message of judgment; but the man who has nothing to proclaim but judgment is not, in the Biblical sense, a true prophet of God. John has all the sternness of an Amos; but even in Amos we find, side by side with his denunciations, promises of deliverance which need not be dismissed as unauthentic. It seems clear that the Baptist was profoundly influenced by Malachi; but Malachi, while he conceives God as drawing near to men in judgment and refining them as a workman might refine gold and silver, tells also (iii. 17) how God is coming to claim His own, and his prophecies close with the promise that before the great and

<sup>1</sup> Mk. i. 8. It has been suggested that the original version in the source Q may have been: “baptise with fire,” and that Matthew and Luke, who have “with the Holy Spirit and fire,” have combined the Q version with that of Mark. Such a suggestion perhaps owes some of its plausibility to a desire to connect John’s message solely with judgment.

terrible day of the Lord the prophet Elijah will appear to exercise a ministry of reconciliation.

There are indications, moreover, in our New Testament sources (notably in Luke and John) that behind the ministry of the Baptist, as behind that of Jesus, we ought to trace the formative influence of the prophecies of the Second Isaiah; and the message of these prophecies is essentially a message of salvation. They tell not so much of the day of the Lord as of the way of the Lord, that way which must be prepared for His advance. The God of whom they testify is indeed a transcendent God who sits on the circle of the heavens, so that in His presence the inhabitants of the earth are as grasshoppers; nevertheless, when He comes, it will be to feed His flock as a shepherd, to give power to the faint, to make darkness light and the crooked things straight. And meanwhile His people wait for Him, not in anxiety and dread, but in eager expectation and patient hope. Such was the message of the second Isaiah. And when, in a dark hour in Israel's history, there was raised up another great prophet in John the Baptist, he sounded aloud, it is true, his proclamation of judgment and his call to repentance; but it is also true that he declared to men God's purposes of salvation, thus taking his stand in the one direct line of succession that linked him, on the one hand, with the greatest of his prophetic predecessors, and, on the other, with that Holy One for whose coming he served, in the providence of God, to prepare the way. The Baptist is a true representative of the hope of Israel.

#### IV. THE FORERUNNER—BUT OF WHOM?

What has just been said leads to a consideration of still another frequent misinterpretation of the ministry of the Baptist. Again and again, in scholarly studies and in popular presentations, we are told that John regarded himself as a forerunner of the Messiah. Apparently it is taken for granted that, because there was an eschatological element in his preaching, he was aflame with the conviction that the Messiah

was soon to appear. But where in his preaching is there any clear reference to a Messiah? There is certainly nothing to suggest a Messiah who is suddenly to appear in apocalyptic splendour; and if it is maintained that he has in view a Messiah of another kind, one whom God is to raise up in Israel for the deliverance of His people, we may pertinently ask whether it does not obscure the issue to introduce the name Messiah where no such reference appears in our sources. There is a clear and emphatic reference to the coming of one ("the mightier one"), who, equipped with greater power, will exercise a more potent form of baptism. But no name or title is given to this "mightier one"; what is announced about him is the work he may be expected to do.

This distinction is worth noting; it is one which will frequently call for attention in the pages which follow. Popular religion finds a special interest in appellations and identifications; in prophetic religion, on the other hand, attention is riveted on the righteous will of God, whose agents and methods are wholly of His own choosing. And, in the case of a great prophet of righteousness like John the Baptist, we may be sure that any views he had about the identity of the divine agent whose coming he heralded were altogether secondary to his strong conviction that in and through such an agent (under whatsoever guise he might appear) God was to work for the accomplishment of His holy purposes. And while, as John saw it, the mission which "the mightier one" was to accomplish far transcended in importance the humble mission with which he himself had been entrusted, nevertheless he also saw that his own mission and that of "the mightier one" were alike in this, that each in its own way was directed towards the baptism of God's people, so that at last God might have for Himself a holy people, filled with His Spirit and dedicated to His service. It is the thought of "the People of God," rather than the more ultimate aim of "the Kingdom of God," which dominates the mind of the Baptist from first to last.

But while no name is given to the divine agent whose

coming is proclaimed, the fact that he is described by the definite article (“*the* mightier one”) suggests that the Baptist has here in mind some figure with a recognised place in the religious hopes of his day. It has been suggested that, here as elsewhere, his mind is working within the orbit of Isaiah’s prophecies, so that he thinks of himself as heralding the coming of the ideal Servant of Jehovah.<sup>1</sup> That the coming of such an ideal Servant to accomplish the redemption of Israel did to some extent enter into the expectations of the Baptist is by no means an unreasonable hypothesis. But it seems preferable to associate this particular reference to “the mightier one” with the influence of Malachi’s prophecies, and to believe that John has in mind here the promised Elijah (Mal. iv. 5).

Of all the great heroes in the history of Israel was there any more likely to appeal to the soul of the Baptist than the indomitable prophet of Ahab’s day, who with such passion and devotion, and at the cost of such suffering and sacrifice, had witnessed for Jehovah in face of the corruption of king and priest and people? Had not Elijah once called down fire from heaven to consume the enemies of the Lord, and when he came again might he not likewise be expected to exercise a baptism of fire? Above all, while it was expected that in the coming judgment the agent of the Lord was to act like a refiner’s fire, purifying the sons of Levi and purging them as gold and silver, was it not also implied in Scripture that one such agent would be Elijah himself, and that the great prophet, who in the days of his flesh had been so zealous for the divine law, was to return to lead men back to God and into the ways of reconciliation, harmony and peace?<sup>2</sup> There are other factors in the career of the Baptist which suggest that he was profoundly influenced by the story of Elijah—e.g. the dress which he wore,<sup>3</sup> his choice of the Jordan-valley as the scene of his mission, and his fearless stand against the king and the religious leaders of his day.

<sup>1</sup> Burney, *Aramaic Origin of the Fourth Gospel*, pp. 105 f.

<sup>2</sup> Mal. iii. 1 ff. ; iv. 5 f.

<sup>3</sup> cf. 2 Kings i. 8

All this might be taken to suggest that he even identified his own mission with that of the expected Elijah;<sup>1</sup> and as in Malachi's words the Elijah was to come "before the great and terrible day of the Lord," the identification has seemed to fit in well with the widely accepted view that John regarded himself as the forerunner of the Messiah. But there is enough evidence in our sources to assure us that the Baptist would never have taken so exalted and selfconscious a view of his mission. Water-baptism had in his eyes only a lowly and a limited significance. And, with regard to the status which he claims for himself, valuable light may be found in the Fourth Gospel, notably in a passage (i. 19 ff.) behind which we may trace an undeniably genuine tradition. There we read how priests and Levites from Jerusalem, deeply impressed by his personality and message, approached the Baptist with the question whether he claimed to be the Messiah. To this he answered an emphatic "No." "Art thou then the Elijah?" Again he answered "No." "Or the expected prophet?" Once more he answered "No." "Who then art thou?" He replied that he was a Voice, a nameless Voice, the Voice of which Isaiah had told (xl. 3), the Voice that called Israel to prepare the way of the Lord.

There is in all our Gospels still another line of evidence which enables us to carry our enquiry further. Confessing his insignificance in face of "the mightier one" who was to come, John says: "I am not fit even to take his shoes off." Here is an indication that he thought of himself in the guise of a servant, albeit a wholly unworthy and unprofitable servant. This attitude is of course in keeping with the spirit of those Isaiah-prophecies which, as we have seen, meant so much for the Baptist; any one who comes in the name of the Lord, be his mission exalted or lowly, must come as a servant of the Lord.<sup>2</sup> And perhaps we ought to allow also for the thought that Elijah had a servant<sup>3</sup> who waited

<sup>1</sup> cf. Lk. i. 17

<sup>2</sup> Elijah so regards himself; cf. 1 Kings xviii. 36

<sup>3</sup> 1 Kings xviii. 43; xix. 3

on him in the time of his previous ministry ; and the Baptist, conscious of his utter inadequacy, recognises what an honour and privilege it would be to act even as servant to the great Elijah when he should return.

In the course of the above discussion we have been led to consider the interpretation which the Baptist put upon his own mission. He does not doubt that he comes in the name of the Lord ; he was, as the Fourth Gospel says, " a man sent from God." But beyond that he makes no claim for himself ; he is at most a Voice, a Servant. His message is directed, as we have seen, toward the preparation of a holy people ; but he makes it clear that the task entrusted to him represents only an elementary stage in that work of preparation, and that a mightier one will come to perfect what he has begun. His message therefore is essentially prophetic, not apocalyptic ; it deals with the way of the Lord, and calls for the ordering of human life in conformity with the purposes of God. Inevitably it sounds a note of judgment ; for " who shall abide the day of His coming ?" Yet the God of whom he tells is the God of Israel, whose purpose is not to destroy but to save His people. All the more urgent is the call to repent and to return to the Lord. Thus the task of the Baptist is not the revelation of God to a waiting people ; it is the preparation of an unready people to meet their God.

From this twofold description of himself as a Voice and as a Servant we may liken the Baptist to the running footman who used to be employed in our country to run before his master's coach.<sup>1</sup> Quite literally the task of such a servant was to " prepare the way " for the coming of his lord and master. In himself the footman was a nobody—by birth

<sup>1</sup> The running footman was known also in Israel. " It was related about Hillel the Elder that he bought for a certain poor man who was of good family a horse to ride upon and a slave to run before him. On one occasion he could not find a slave to run before him, so he himself ran before him for three miles." (Babylonian Talmud, *Kethuboth* 67b). cf. also Juvenal, v. 52.

and upbringing he did not differ from the common people whom he had to warn of his lord's approach. But when he ran before the coach it was with "my lord" and not with the common people that his affinities were to be found. He ran, not as simple John Deere,<sup>1</sup> but as "my lord's servant." So too was it with the Baptist. A Voice crying in the wilderness, he had been sent to make a way for the Lord and to prepare His paths. Though unworthy to be ranked even as a servant, he nevertheless belonged to the entourage of the Lord of Heaven. John the Baptist thus ushered in a new movement in the history of Israel; and there is a sense in which he is inseparably linked with that new movement, just as an overture is part of an opera or a fanfare is part of the solemn entry for which it serves as a preparatory warning. We are to see in the next chapter how far this view of John is confirmed by the testimony of Jesus.

<sup>1</sup> I take the name from John Owen's novel *The Running Footman*.

## CHAPTER VIII

### JOHN THE BAPTIST AND JESUS

**T**HE foregoing study of the Baptist's prophetic message has provided a background against which we may now consider the more particular question of the relations between the Baptist and Jesus. It has been the belief of the Christian Church from the beginning that the Baptist's proclamation of the Mightier One who should come to baptise with the Holy Spirit was fulfilled in Jesus, that Jesus was in very truth the Lord whose way he was sent to prepare. But the passages we have so far considered in the Synoptic tradition do not require us to believe that, at the time his words were uttered, the Baptist was consciously referring to Jesus. Fundamentally his message was a proclamation about God rather than a testimony about Jesus; it was for the Lord God that the way was to be prepared, and a highway opened up in the desert. The recognition of this should be accepted as a right starting-point for further enquiry.

Having acknowledged this, however, we may question whether criticism has not gone too far in interpreting *every* testimony to Jesus in those earlier stages of John's ministry as a product of later Christian reflection. It is a debatable question how much weight ought to be attached to the passage in Matt. iii. 14, where John deprecates that such a one as Jesus should come to him for baptism ("I have need to be baptised by thee, and dost thou come to me?"), or to the references in St. Luke's infancy-narratives which point to a kinship between the two families, with the possibility that the Baptist and Jesus may have known one another in earlier days. But in the opening chapters of the Fourth Gospel the Baptist is made

to testify to Jesus in a way which is too impressive to be lightly set aside.

#### I. THE BAPTISM OF JESUS, AND THE WITNESS OF JOHN

The problems raised by the evidence of the Fourth Gospel are too complex for detailed enquiry in a general study such as this. But no one can read the Johannine narrative of the Baptist's early ministry without noting how it supplies flesh and blood where the Synoptic narrative is little more than a skeleton, and there are clear indications of dependence at this point on a genuinely Palestinian tradition. Further, it deals largely with the testimony of the Baptist *subsequent* to the time when he was joined by Jesus, and may therefore supplement the narrative of Jesus' entry on the scene. It is no real argument against the essential trustworthiness of the Fourth Evangelist that he makes no reference to the water-baptism of Jesus at the hands of John; for by giving in its place the Baptist's witness to the descent of the Spirit on Jesus he is careful to emphasise the one fact in the episode which to him, and to the Church, was of supreme importance. Something happened then (so much he wishes to make clear) to convince the Baptist that Jesus was indeed filled with the Spirit, a conviction which all his subsequent associations with Jesus served to confirm. And in the strength of that conviction the Baptist was apparently prepared to believe, not merely that "He must increase, but I must decrease," but also that in Jesus the hope of Israel was in some way to be fulfilled.

This does not mean (as it is so often represented as meaning) that according to the Fourth Gospel the Baptist at once began to believe and to declare that in Jesus the Messiah had come. The erroneous belief that this *is* implied has done much to shake belief in the credibility of the Fourth Gospel's evidence with regard to the Baptist. But nowhere is it said that the Baptist ascribed to Jesus the name "Messiah"; and what he is represented as saying about

Jesus does not imply Messiahship.<sup>1</sup> Let us examine the evidence more closely, and consider how far it helps us to a positive reconstruction.

(i) The basic fact in the Fourth Gospel narrative is that, after joining John in the Jordan valley, Jesus became possessed by the Spirit of God. That this happened in connection with John's baptismal mission is not definitely asserted, but may be regarded as implied. The significance attaching to the Baptist, however, is not that he administered water-baptism to Jesus, but that he was a witness to the descent of the Spirit. Apparently, therefore, the descent of the Spirit was not a purely subjective experience in the soul of Jesus; it was something which the Baptist saw, and to which he felt himself called to bear testimony. Such a culmination to his own humble mission of water-baptism was not wholly unexpected; he had been told to look out for it (i. 33). So far there is no essential incompatibility between this picture and that given in the other Gospels.

(ii) Now that he has seen how Jesus has been filled with the Spirit, John comes to know Him as he had not known Him before. He recognises that, as Jesus has received the Spirit, it is through Him that others are to be "baptised with the Holy Spirit." He concludes that, though coming on the scene later than himself, Jesus inevitably takes precedence of him; this looks like an avowal that he now sees in Jesus "the mightier one" whose coming (according to the Synoptists) he had proclaimed. All this again may be reconciled with the Synoptic account, and is in essential harmony with the reconstruction arrived at in the preceding chapter. John's message is not one of judgment merely; it is a message also of salvation. And with the descent of

<sup>1</sup> Andrew, however, at this time a disciple of the Baptist, is represented as saying: "We have found the Messiah" (i. 41); cf. iv. 25 f. These are the only instances of the Hebrew form *Messiah* (as distinct from the Greek form *Christ*) in the New Testament.

the Spirit on Jesus he sees how the salvation of Israel is now at last about to be revealed.

(iii) Can we go further, and define more precisely how he interprets the person of Jesus? We ought in all probability to begin by linking up the descent of the Spirit with such declarations as we find in Isaiah, e.g. xlii. 1, lxi. 1. In both of these cases the reference is quite definitely to the spirit of prophecy. They tell, of course, not of one prophet among many, but rather of one in whom all prophecy is to culminate, some unique Servant through whom God's purposes of righteousness will be revealed unto the ends of the earth. And such a representative of God has now appeared, the Baptist sees, in Jesus. He does not call Him Messiah; for so many perverse associations cling to the term Messiah that the Baptist here, like Jesus later, prefers not to use it. He calls Him, however, the Son<sup>1</sup> of God, a term which, when strictly interpreted, has a quite different connotation from the term Messiah.<sup>2</sup> For while Messiahship implies divine appointment, Sonship speaks of spiritual affinity—to be filled with the Spirit and to be a Son of God are one and the same thing.<sup>3</sup> He goes further, and calls Jesus the Lamb of God (i. 36)—in i. 29 he points Him out as “the Lamb of God who is to take away the sin of the world.” Here difficulties in abundance confront the exegete, and a completely satisfying solution is hard to come by. But, in view of the many indications that the mind of the Baptist was influenced by the language and hopes of the Second Isaiah, we are probably on right lines in tracing here a reference to the Servant of God<sup>4</sup> who, “wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities,” was led as a lamb to the slaughter and gave

<sup>1</sup> Jn. i. 34. Some MSS. read “the Elect of God”; cf. Is. xlii. 1

<sup>2</sup> cf. pp. 109 f.

<sup>3</sup> cf. Rom. viii. 14

<sup>4</sup> See Burney's illuminating treatment in his *Aramaic Origin of the Fourth Gospel*, pp. 104 ff., where he adopts the view that the Hebrew *taleh*, “lamb,” has come in its Aramaic form *talya* to mean “child,” “boy,” “young man,” “servant”; cf. also Howard, *Christianity according to St. John*, pp. 100 ff.

His life as a sin-offering ;<sup>1</sup> and bound up with this there may also be (though this must be recognised as very doubtful) a reference to the paschal lamb, and the deliverance of Israel from bondage in Egypt.

The problem remains whether we can accept it as a matter of history that, at a time when His ministry had scarcely begun, Jesus can have been regarded by the Baptist as the Lamb of God destined to take away the world's sin. The prevalent view in critical circles has for long been that the Fourth Evangelist is here attributing to the Baptist thoughts which really belong to the mind of the early Church. But the difficulties of the other view are not so great as they have been made out to be, and they are considerably lessened when we have rid ourselves of some of the misconceptions which have been too long current with regard to the general message and mission of the Baptist. It is beside the mark to assert that a messianic interpretation of Isaiah liii only became current with the rise of Christianity. It is not a messianic interpretation which the Baptist is represented as giving to it here. He is thinking, not of the Messiah as such, but of God's elect Servant, probably of the Prophet whom God is expected to send, and who, in the performance of his mission and in fulfilment of what had been foretold, was to suffer for the sins of his brethren.

It is not difficult to believe that, from the first, Jesus was dominated by the conviction that He was (*a*) the Son of Man, whose mission was not to Israel merely but to the whole family of mankind (cf. the reference to "the sin of the world"), and (*b*) the Suffering Servant, who could only be true to Himself and to God if He trod the way of sacrifice. May we even go further? Conceiving Himself as called to fulfil some such work as that of the promised prophet whom God was to send into the world, the second Moses or the second Elijah, is it possible that Jesus shared the belief (of which we have traces elsewhere) that, when in the days of their flesh these two supreme prophets had witnessed of God to Israel,

<sup>1</sup> Is. liii. 4-7, 10-12

Israel had not merely rejected their authority but had ultimately driven them to their death, and that a like fate awaited the prophet who should be sent (as He was now sent) to complete the work which they had begun?<sup>1</sup> We cannot read the relevant Old Testament narratives<sup>2</sup> without sensing the mystery which was felt to surround the passing from the earth of these two great representative leaders in the history of Israel. And Jesus Himself, at a later stage of His ministry, when on the Mount of Transfiguration He prepared Himself for the rejection and death which He saw awaiting Him, was in turn strengthened by a vision of Moses and Elijah, who, in the cryptic language of the Lucan narrative,<sup>3</sup> spoke to Him about the "departure" (*ἄξοδος*) which He was to accomplish in Jerusalem.

But speculations regarding the earthly end of Moses and of Elijah are of only indirect relevance for our present enquiry; and in the absence of fuller knowledge they cannot carry us far. It is not, however, an undue straining of evidence to believe that, even at the beginning of His ministry, Jesus was profoundly conscious that the mission to which He had been called by God would lead Him (as other prophets in Israel had been led) along the unending path of suffering and self-sacrifice. And if He had such thoughts with regard to Himself, He may have allowed the Baptist, in greater or less

<sup>1</sup> Reference may be made to the monograph on Moses by Professor E. Sellin of Berlin; see also his *Introduction to the Old Testament* (English Translation, p. 143). Sellin there also maintained the view, though he later departed from it, that Moses was the prototype of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah's prophecies. The passage in Rev. xi. 1-8 on the two witnesses (obviously Moses and Elijah, verse 6) goes on to tell how the beast "shall make war against them, and overcome them, and kill them. And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified." Does a tradition regarding the martyrdom of Elijah also lie behind the otherwise difficult closing words in Mk. ix. 13, where Jesus (with reference to the death of John the Baptist, cf. p. 102) says, "Elijah has indeed come, and they have done to him whatever they pleased, as it is written of him."? It may, however, be that these words are adequately explained by reference in a general way to the fate of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah's prophecy.

<sup>2</sup> Deut. xxxiv. 5 ff.; 2 Kings ii. 9 ff.

<sup>3</sup> ix. 31

measure, to share them with Him. We can picture John and Him together, pondering deeply on God's purposes for Israel and for the world, giving special heed to the glorious hopes that were opened up by the prophecies of Isaiah and Malachi, and eagerly looking forward to the coming, not so much of a Messiah as of a Prophet who should prepare the way of the Lord, and turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and of the children to the fathers. And, having seen the Spirit descend upon Jesus, John knew that Jesus was indeed the One for whom they were looking, the elect Servant, the prophet like unto Moses, the promised Elijah.

## II. JOHN'S QUESTION TO JESUS

Guided so far on our way by the evidence of the Fourth Gospel, we turn now to that passage in the Synoptics<sup>1</sup> where the Baptist from prison sends messengers to Jesus with the enquiry: "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?"

Here is an episode whose historical trustworthiness is not to be questioned, and it sheds valuable light on the development of relations between Jesus and John. But in one respect its evidence has been sadly mishandled. The phrase "he that should come" has been generally interpreted as a clear reference to the Messiah, so that once again we are confronted with the problem whether the Baptist at some stage of his ministry came to believe in the Messiahship of Jesus.

No doubt in certain contexts the designation "the coming one" might readily be understood as referring to the Messiah; but this is not one of them. In the eschatological hopes of the time there were others besides the Messiah whose "coming" was expected. In particular we recall the Baptist's own testimony to the Mightier One who was to "come" after him, the belief in the Elijah who was to "come" (to whom Jesus Himself refers in the passage which immediately follows this, Matt. xi. 14), and the ex-

<sup>1</sup> Mt. xi. 2 ff.; Lk. vii. 19 ff.

pectation of "the prophet that should come into the world" (John vi. 14). We need not hesitate to believe that "the coming one" about whom John now enquires, and "the mightier one" whose "coming" he had previously proclaimed, are for him one and the same; and it is in full accord with his prophetic mission that in each case his expectation should be directed, not towards the Messiah as such, but to "the prophet" whom God should send to usher in the End, the last and the greatest of the prophets in the age before the day of the Lord should come. We have already shown reasons for believing that the expectation of such a prophet had a place in his preaching even before Jesus joined him in the Jordan valley; and it is the same expectation which now finds expression in the question which he addresses to Jesus himself.

It is natural that we should ask: "When and how did the Baptist begin to believe that Jesus might be the One in whom this hope was to be fulfilled?" There are those who would see the first clear expression of that faith in the question which he now raises from his prison cell. Reports have reached him that the ministry of Jesus is more than an ordinary prophetic ministry—it is a ministry accompanied by healings and other works of power; and, first wistfully, then with eager hope, he begins now to ask himself whether Jesus may be the expected Prophet of God to whose coming he himself had pointed forward. If on the other hand (in accordance with the line of argument developed in the preceding chapter) we believe that some such faith had animated John since the time when the Spirit had been seen to descend on Jesus at the Jordan, then we shall interpret the present question as evidence, not of an incipient faith, but of bewilderment and hesitation.

The balance of evidence is strongly in favour of the second alternative. If we accept it, we shall naturally ask what led John now to waver in his earlier faith. Was it that he had expected some more ecstatic and wonder-working exhibition of the Spirit's operation? Such a hypothesis will at once be

rejected by those who believe that his spiritual outlook was profoundly influenced by the teaching of the Second Isaiah. Equally untenable is the contention<sup>1</sup> that, having previously proclaimed the coming of one who was to execute judgment, he now saw his predictions belied by one who preached mercy and loving kindness. If it were true that John's outlook was exclusively associated with judgment, we should have to ask ourselves why he had ever *begun* to nurse the belief in regard to which he was now apparently wavering, viz. that Jesus was the one whose coming he had foretold. Was there any obvious cleavage in the character of Jesus' early ministry which would explain why John had come for a time to hold that belief and then have come to question it?

Such a dilemma is an added reminder that we are following a false track when we interpret John's message solely in terms of judgment. John's expectations were indeed of the highest. He believed that, by the sending of the promised Prophet, God was to intervene mightily for the establishment of His righteousness and the salvation of His people. And, noting how truly the Spirit of God had descended upon Jesus, he had come to cherish the belief that in Jesus his high hopes were to receive fulfilment. But in prison, when perhaps his own spirits were low, he fell a prey to a sense of frustration and disappointment. His hopes were not being realised. Had he perhaps expected from Jesus a more rousing appeal, a more challenging proclamation, something more truly suggestive of the return of the tempestuous Elijah? We can imagine that the Baptist, now languishing in prison because he had dared to withstand king Herod as Elijah of old had withstood king Ahab, was troubled in soul to hear how Jesus was avoiding open conflict with the king, and was accomplishing little beyond preaching in the quiet villages, healing a few sick folk, and gathering around Him an unimpressive band of fishermen and tax-collectors. John's disappointment with Jesus was the same as that which eager, reforming

<sup>1</sup> cf. T. W. Manson, in *The Mission and Message of Jesus*, p. 358.

spirits have so often felt with regard to the Church—His methods were too quiet, His results seemed too meagre.

If John's sceptical query was designed as a challenge, Jesus met it with a challenge still more daring. He began by turning aside all question of personalities. To the query "Art thou he that should come?" he replied, "Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see." It matters nothing to Jesus by what name men call Him. His one concern is to do the works of Him that sent Him. And it is in the light of what He does for men that all questions which men may raise about His person must be answered. And what are the works to which He points as evidence? "The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them."

Not an impressive catalogue, it may be, to those who associate the Voice of the Lord mainly with the wind, the earthquake and the fire; but, as we are reminded by the relevant passage in Isaiah (lxi.1), they are evidence none the less of the power of the Spirit of God; and Jesus has revealed for all time that it is in ways such as these that the Spirit is most truly operative. Jesus' message ends with the saying: "Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me." These words are a reminder to the Baptist in his hour of disappointment that, if he has been nursing expectations of a more catastrophic kind, he should hold fast to the evidence that is before him and revise his expectations in the light of it.

The reply of Jesus thus sheds a significant light on the principles which guided Him in the execution of His mission. It also helps us to see how the Baptist, for all his spiritual greatness, fell far short of the stature of Jesus. He had stood near by when Jesus had submitted to baptism, and had noted the descent of the Spirit. But he had not been with Jesus when the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness, there to learn in sore conflict with the devil how the Spirit was to manifest itself in action. Those features in the ministry of Jesus which

to John were a source of disappointment were the very ones which Jesus selected to authenticate His claims. It is to be noted that, in His recital of the works which He is accomplishing, He puts forward a claim which He daringly challenges John to acknowledge. The terms in which He describes what He is doing are taken almost wholly from the words of Isaiah<sup>1</sup>. But there is the inescapable implication that what was once foretold by the prophet is now being realised in actual fact. Prophecy has given place to fulfilment. In calling attention, therefore, to the mighty works which are an integral part of His mission, Jesus challenges John to recognise that God Himself has intervened to inaugurate that blessed Rule among men which was an essential element in the Hope of Israel, and to which the prophets of old, and now more recently John himself, had borne witness.

We may say, then, that there are two things which Jesus seeks to do for John as he lies in prison, a prey to doubt and disappointment. In the first place He wishes to assure him that the faith which had burned so brightly for him in the heyday of his mission, viz. that God's day of judgment and salvation was at hand, was justified, and more than justified. And there must be no going back on such a faith. But Jesus further suggests to him that the one alternative to going back is to go forward. John's faith had carried him far ; but it had not carried him far enough. Because he had been looking for a fiery prophet, a second Elijah, who should prepare a way for the coming of the Lord, he had not unnaturally been disappointed by the ministry of Jesus. If only now he would learn to see in that ministry a demonstration in action of the power of the Spirit of God, then he would recognise in it a proof that the coming of the Lord needed no further prophetic ministry as a preparation, for it was already an accomplished fact. The great day whose near approach John had so confidently heralded had now dawned ; and John, alas ! had failed to recognise it.

<sup>1</sup> lxi. 1-3 ; cf. xxix. 18 ; xxxv. 5, 6

## III. PROPHECY GIVES PLACE TO FULFILMENT

Such seems to be the implication of Jesus' reply to the Baptist. There is abundant evidence throughout the Gospels that Jesus did regard His mission in this eschatological light, as ushering in a new era in the relations of God and man; and we may go on now to note how this thought comes to clear and emphatic expression in the passage (from the source Q) which immediately follows in Matthew.<sup>1</sup> Speaking, we are told, to the multitudes on the departure of the messengers, Jesus pays a very notable tribute to the Baptist, calling him "a prophet, and more than a prophet," saying that "among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist," and even adding (according to the version in Matthew) that, for those who can "receive it," John may be regarded as the expected Elijah. But He goes on to make the significant qualification that "he that is least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he." And, taken as a whole,<sup>2</sup> the passage implies that all the previous religious history of Israel, which reached its peak-point in the ministry of the Baptist, is to be sharply distinguished from the new era which has now dawned, and which is called "the Kingdom of God."

We have here one of the most illuminating passages in the Gospels on the relation of Jesus to His predecessors. But, to be precise, it is not of Himself that Jesus speaks here, but of that Kingdom of God of which He is the representative and the protagonist. It is clear that, as He conceives it, the Kingdom of God has in one sense come. In this connection Luke's version of the saying in xvi. 16 is interesting. After asserting that the law and the prophets held sway until the ministry of John, Jesus there goes on to say: "since that

<sup>1</sup> xi. 7 ff.; cf. Lk. vii. 24 ff., xvi. 16

<sup>2</sup> Luke has no parallel to Matthew's saying about John's being the Elijah; and the saying in Mt. xi. 12, 13 that law and prophecy culminated in John and that since then the Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence occurs (in a rather different form) at a later passage in Luke (xvi. 16).

time the good news of the Kingdom of God is being preached, and every one is pressing into it."<sup>1</sup> It is equally clear, of course, that the coming of the Kingdom of God is limited as yet to certain local manifestations of it. But Jesus is here asserting emphatically that something is now being accomplished among men which brings the Sovereign Rule of God out of the realm of prophecy into the realm of history. Prophecy is now being realised.

No portrait of Jesus has any claim to be historical which does not do justice to this daring self-consciousness of His that in Him and through Him the Kingdom of God, which had been proclaimed by the prophets and heralded by the Baptist, had now indeed come. We may compare the remarkable passage in Mt. xii. 41 f., Lk. xi. 31 f., where He asserts that prophecy and wisdom must now give way because "something greater" has arrived to take their place. So too in Mt. xiii. 17, Lk. x. 24 He recalls the prophets and others who "desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them."

No man can make such claims for the works which he is doing without at the same time making a claim for himself as the doer of them. What claim then is Jesus making? If He is bringing to an end the reign of prophecy and law and human wisdom, is that not tantamount to an assertion of Messiahship? And when He declares about John the Baptist: "If you will receive it, this is the expected Elijah," what conclusion can His hearers draw but that, if John is the Elijah, then Jesus must be the Messiah? Yes, if men can so "receive it," i.e. if they care to accept the truth in that guise, then such a conclusion is indeed inescapable. But neither in the one case nor in the other does Jesus make this part of His

<sup>1</sup> The precise meaning of the Matthew version (xi. 12) is much more obscure. In view of the context and of the parallel verse in Luke it is best taken as referring to the strong action of Jesus who has stormed a way into the Kingdom of God (or it may be, through whom the Kingdom of God has burst through to exercise its power among men), so that now men are eagerly pressing in to it who formerly were kept waiting outside.

message. Such designations in themselves mean nothing to Him ; His concern is for the life which justifies the designation. If men are looking for an Elijah *redivivus*, they are invited to see that their expectation has been fulfilled in the Baptist. Similarly, if they are looking for a Messiah, Jesus would have them recognise that His ministry is truly messianic. But Jesus does not Himself indulge in such speculations, nor does He encourage them in others. The one vital thing for men to know is that God Himself has drawn near for their salvation ; and nothing ought to be allowed to come between them and the acceptance of what God has to give them. To the woman who said to Him : “ Blessed is the womb that bare Thee ” (Lk. xi. 27), He replied : “ Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.”

We need not doubt the essential reliability of the passage we have just been considering in which Jesus pays tribute to the person and the mission of the Baptist. It is derived in the main from the Gospel-source Q. The verse in which John is referred to as the Elijah is, it is true, found only in St. Matthew’s version, and is accordingly taken by some critics as a reflection of the mind of the Church rather than an authentic word of Jesus ; but, genuine or not, it only makes explicit what is clearly implied in the rest of the passage, viz. that Jesus sees in the mission of the Baptist a culmination of the whole prophetic movement, and a prelude to the inauguration of the Rule of God.

Corroboration for the identification of John with the Elijah is found in another passage which has behind it the authority of Mark (ix. 11 ff.). The passage occurs in an impressive setting. St. Peter has just made his confession regarding the Messiahship of Jesus ; and Jesus has replied with an emphatic declaration regarding the Son of Man, how He must undergo suffering, rejection and death, and rise after three days. This leads in turn to the story of the Transfiguration experience, according to which Jesus appears enveloped in the glory of God and accompanied by Moses and Elijah ; and the disciples

who are with Him are forbidden to disclose what they have seen until the Son of Man be risen from the dead. It is at this point that Mark (followed by Matthew) introduces a difficulty which is perplexing the disciples with regard to the coming of the Elijah. They are familiar with the scribal tradition (based on Malachi iv. 5, 6) that the End will be preceded by the sending of the prophet Elijah; and they are apparently puzzled to explain how this expectation is to be fulfilled if already the Messiah has come in Jesus. Jesus replies that the expectation of Elijah's coming has indeed a sure foundation; then, after recalling again how it had been ordained that the Son of Man should suffer and be rejected, He adds: "I say unto you, Elijah has come, and they have wreaked their will on him, as it has been written of him."

This reply of Jesus is not without difficulty in matters of detail; but its main drift is clear, and we may claim it as providing a revelation of singular interest and value into the workings of the Master's mind. Jesus avoids a direct answer to the question that has been put to Him—after all, He is not personally interested in such a question as the coming of the Elijah, but if the disciples are interested in it He will lead them (as is His way with questioners) to see how they may find an answer for themselves. He begins with an assurance designed to confirm their faith: it is quite true that the Elijah must first come on his mission of reconciliation and restoration. In what follows there is no explicit mention of the Baptist. But the words are such that the disciples could not fail to understand their implication. Their minds were at this time full of the tragedy which had so recently overtaken John, but which, until Jesus now opened their eyes to its meaning, they had not seen in its true light. Herod and his queen had outmatched even Ahab and Jezebel in their treatment of a prophet of the Lord. For those, therefore, who could "receive it," (to recall the language of the corresponding passage in Mt. xi. 14)—in other words, for those who were interested in such matters and were enabled to understand their true interpretation—the coming of

Elijah had indeed been fulfilled in the coming of the Baptist.

Most important of all, however, is the stress which Jesus here lays on the sufferings<sup>1</sup> of the new Elijah. He must not lose this opportunity of training His disciples to see that what happened to John happened in accordance with the divine purposes. Suffering and rejection are part of the lot which God has ordained for His servants. And, more particularly, if they were the lot appointed for the Elijah, how much more are they appointed for Him for whom the Baptist (in his role of the Elijah) was the forerunner. "The Son of Man must suffer." Looking back over the incident, we can see with what gentleness Jesus deals with the weakness and immaturity of the disciples. There is no rebuff or rebuke. But all the time He is seeking to lift them up to higher and purer realms of spiritual vision. It is not in the light of scribal speculations or in the prosaic interpretations of prophecy that God's truth will stand revealed, but rather in the recognition of the spiritual laws by which He brings His purposes to fruition.

#### IV. JOHN AND JESUS—A COMPARISON AND A CONTRAST

We may therefore conclude our study of the relations of Jesus and John. Each of them, seen in his own light, helps us better to understand the other; and they are linked inseparably in the story of the rise of the Christian Church. Modern criticism has tended overmuch to set them in contrast to one another. John has been depicted as an apocalyptic visionary, a fiery prophet of judgment; and as such he seems an ill-matched forerunner for Him who as Son of Man and Son of God came to reconcile men to the Heavenly Father. John and Jesus have far more in common than is recognised in many modern reconstructions. Both of them merit the description: "a prophet, and more than a prophet." They both have an overwhelming sense of the nearness of God, whose purposes for His creation they see to be ripening fast. Their message, moreover, is in each case ethical to the core.

<sup>1</sup> cf. page 93

They both recognise to the full that a righteous God demands righteous conduct on the part of His people, and that where men will not conform to His holy will they must bow to his judgment. They are both moved, too, by a poignant sense of human need. And in varying measure they both proclaim a God who is seeking to accomplish the salvation of His people.

Wherein then lay the essential difference between Jesus and John? Scripture explains the transcendence of Jesus in terms of His "baptism by the Spirit." The Spirit had descended on Him when He joined John in the Jordan valley. It was in the power of the Spirit that He did all His "mighty works." It was as one anointed by the Spirit that He could appeal in His sermon at Nazareth to the words of Isaiah, adding, "This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears." The Spirit which had been given to Himself He communicated in turn to others. As John baptised men with water, Jesus baptised them with the Holy Spirit. To Jesus Himself the fact that the Spirit had been given was a proof, not primarily that He was the Messiah, but that in Him and through Him the Rule of God was now in process of being established.

Here we may recall that line of demarcation which Jesus draws between the age of prophecy which had reached its culmination in the Baptist and the new era which He Himself is ushering in. It is not for nothing that John is described as the greatest among those born of women. Ordinary generation by the flesh is contrasted with generation by the Spirit. We have here the same contrast as that which comes to expression in Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again." Baptism with the Spirit, moreover, made Jesus in a unique sense "the Son of God." But He was also called by God to communicate the Spirit to others, and so to raise them to the status of sons, and to restore them to the family of God the Father.

The Baptist was profoundly convinced that Jesus was

filled with the Spirit. But he drew a false, or at least an imperfect, deduction from this. He still explained Jesus in terms of prophecy. He was prepared to see in Jesus the greatest of all prophets, to believe therefore that in Him was being fulfilled the promise of the great Elijah who should come before the great and terrible day of the Lord. He failed to recognise that in the providence of God there must come a time when even prophesying will be superseded.<sup>1</sup> And, filled with the Spirit, Jesus knew that He Himself had been sent to translate prophecy into history.

The difference in the spiritual outlook of John and of Jesus may be illustrated in closing by the difference in their attitude to the Elijah-expectation. To John that expectation meant much—it profoundly influenced the whole character and course of his mission. He was proud to be a humble servant preparing the way for the Elijah that was to come. And it speaks volumes for the impression which Jesus made upon him that he came to believe that in Jesus the expected Elijah had come. To Jesus, on the other hand, the Elijah-expectation in itself meant next to nothing. His preoccupation with the living God caused all such theorisings to assume for Him a secondary place. But as He pondered deeply on the ways of God, and saw how in and through Himself the Rule of God was being inaugurated among men, He recognised how in a sense it might be claimed that the Elijah-expectation had been fulfilled. For those who could “receive it” Elijah had indeed come; he had come in the Baptist.

<sup>1</sup> cf. 1 Cor. xiii. 8

## CHAPTER IX

### THE SON OF GOD

THE followers of Jesus from the first expressed their faith in Him by calling Him the Son of God ; and in so doing they were undoubtedly building on foundations laid by Himself. We have good warrant even in the Synoptic Gospels for believing that Jesus did regard Himself as (in a unique sense) the Son of God, and that at times He even spoke of Himself as such to others.

#### I. SONSHIP IN THE GOSPELS

In support of this contention we may begin by noting the remarkable saying in Mt. xi. 25-27 (cf. Lk. x. 21 f.) which, derived as it seems to be from the source Q, has a *prima facie* claim to be regarded as authentic.<sup>1</sup> In that passage Jesus, speaking first of all in the first person singular, lifts His soul to Him whom He calls Father (“ I praise Thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth ”), and thereafter goes on to declare : “ All things have been delivered to me by my Father ; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son, and he to whom the Son may choose to reveal Him.”

A still stronger claim to genuineness may seem to attach to the saying in Mk. xiii. 32 : “ Of the day and hour no man knoweth, no, not the angels in heaven, nor even the Son, but only the Father ” ; for a saying which so definitely limits the Son’s knowledge was not likely to have been preserved unless there were the strongest reasons for regarding it as spoken by Jesus. It is to be noted, however, that in both of these

<sup>1</sup> Rawlinson in Appended Note IV to his Bampton Lectures, *The New Testament Doctrine of the Christ*, leaves the authenticity of the saying an open question. This seems an unduly cautious verdict.

sayings the name "the Son" is used in a quite general way as a correlative of "the Father": Jesus leaves it to others to determine how far He is referring to Himself.

A more arresting instance—for the general circumstances make it impossible to rule out a reference to Himself—is to be found in the Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen,<sup>1</sup> in which, during that last fateful week in Jerusalem, Jesus provides an answer to the ecclesiastical leaders who challenge Him for a justification of His authority. The parable tells how the owner of a vineyard<sup>2</sup> had appealed in vain to his recalcitrant husbandmen by sending to them one servant after another whom they maltreated or even killed; and thereafter he decides as a last expedient to send to them his son, an only<sup>3</sup> son, feeling convinced that they will treat him with becoming reverence. "But the husbandmen said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours. And they took him and killed him and cast him out of the vineyard."

The story was a direct challenge to the Jewish leaders, and they could not help recognising it as such; but, inseparable from the challenge, is the claim which Jesus here implicitly makes to be God's only Son. Just as in other sayings He differentiates Himself from all the prophets who had gone before Him, so here He draws a clear distinction between God's earlier messengers (described as "servants") and the only Son in whom the Father's purposes reach finality.

Lastly, there are the instances (to be considered later in this chapter) of the use of the term Son, or Son of God, in connection with the narratives of the Baptism and the Temptation; and these narratives in all probability owe their origin to Jesus Himself.

There are accordingly sayings<sup>3</sup> even in the Synoptic Gospels which point to a readiness on the part of Jesus to regard Himself as in a unique sense the Son of God; and we may

<sup>1</sup> Mk. xii. 1-12

<sup>2</sup> God is frequently so described in the Old Testament.

<sup>3</sup> cf. p. 115

infer that the much greater frequency with which such sayings occur in the Fourth Gospel is not to be attributed merely to the development of Christological interpretation, but represents an authentic tradition. But it is not simply by a study of a number of isolated sayings that we reach assurance on the question whether Jesus regarded Himself as the Son of God. Sonship and Fatherhood are correlative terms. As we have seen,<sup>1</sup> Jesus' proclamation of the divine Fatherhood is something very different from the enunciation of a general truth that God is the Father of all men and that all men are His sons. By His preaching and teaching, by His works of mercy and power, by the whole character of His life Jesus gave to the world a new demonstration of the divine Fatherhood in action. The Fatherhood of God was in fact invested with a new range and depth of meaning when in God's good time there appeared One who knew and represented Him as a Son knows and represents the Father. We may indeed claim that, read in the light of His revelation of God's Fatherhood, every page in the Gospels bears witness to Jesus' consciousness of His Sonship.

## II. WHAT SONSHIP IMPLIES

It is futile to look for the roots of this conception elsewhere than in the religion of Israel. Heathen thought, it is true, has various analogies to it—there are, e.g. the familiar stories of mythology according to which the offspring born of a divine being was called a son of God, and in times contemporaneous with the rise of the Christian faith the Roman Emperor was hailed after his death as *divi filius*. And familiarity with these pagan conceptions may in some measure have made it easier for the Gentiles to accept the designation as applied to Jesus. But it would be a flagrant violation of the evidence if we were to attempt to find in heathen thought an explanation of the rise and development of the distinctively Christian conception. Anything analogous to the mythological conception would certainly have been abhorrent to

<sup>1</sup> pp. 48 ff.

devout Jewish Christians; for though, as the Virgin Birth story reminds us, Jewish Christian thought might accept belief in a supernatural birth, it would have revolted from any attempt to explain divine Sonship merely, or even mainly, in terms of physical origin. Sonship in the religious thought of Israel necessarily implied a special relationship more or less spiritual in character. With regard to the application of the title "Son of God" to the Roman Emperor, it is too often forgotten that this use implied, not that the reigning Emperor was himself a quasi-divine being, but that he was the son, or successor, of one who at his death was invested with divine honours.

It is frequently said that in the religious history of Israel the term Son of God was identical with Messiah. Such an assertion is apt to be misleading; for the two terms had a different connotation and a different history. It is true that in certain religious circles, both Jewish and Christian, they might come to be interpreted as if they had much the same meaning, and they might be applied together to the same person—e.g. according to the version in Matthew, Simon Peter's confession of faith took the form: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God;" and the words of the high priest at the trial of Jesus were: "I adjure thee by the living God that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God" (Mt. xvi. 16; xxvi. 63). This ought not, however, to blind us to the fact that the two conceptions were different in origin, and that (despite the influence of Psalm ii in which God's Messiah is called His Son) Son of God was not in itself a recognised Messianic term.<sup>1</sup> The identification of the two terms in the two Matthaean passages<sup>2</sup> referred to, and in other passages which might be quoted from non-Christian Jewish

<sup>1</sup> cf. Dalman, *Words of Jesus*, pp. 268 ff., where it is explained that "when God calls the Messiah His Son, this is merely meant as a sign of the exceptional love with which He above others is regarded." W. Manson, *Jesus the Messiah*, p. 105, notes also how the Targumists, while zealous to find references to the King Messiah in the Old Testament, systematically paraphrase references to the Son, so as to "ethicise the father-son relation."

<sup>2</sup> cf. also Lk. i. 32 f.

sources,<sup>1</sup> may remind us that the term Son of God, like the term Messiah, had a different connotation in different religious circles, and that the distinctively messianic interpretation which entered into the thought of St. Peter and of the high priest was not the interpretation which for Jesus was primary and essential.

What then is implied in the genuinely Christian conception of the Son of God? In the religion of Israel God is always regarded as seeking to win for Himself a people. "They shall be my people, and I will be their God." That relation between God and people was no doubt often interpreted in Israel, as in other nations, on a narrowly nationalistic basis, the people regarding itself as being no less essential to God than God was to the people. Under the influence of the prophetic teaching, however, the nationalistic conception was made in Israel to give way before a more genuinely spiritual one; and the intimacy of the relationship came to be expressed metaphorically as that of bridegroom and bride, husband and wife, father and son.<sup>2</sup> With regard to the last of these metaphors we may recall such instances as these: "Israel is my son, my first-born" (Ex. iv. 22); "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt" (Hos. xi. 1); "I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my first-born," and "Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child" (Jer. xxxi. 9, 20).

While, however, the prophets continued to hold up this relation of father and son as a great ideal for the people, they were driven also to recognise how sadly the ideal was belied by

<sup>1</sup> e.g. 4 Ezra vii. 28, 29, xiii. 32, 37, 52, xiv. 9, where the term Son, obviously under the influence of Psalm ii, has a quite different sense from that which normally belongs to it in the New Testament.

<sup>2</sup> Along with this usage we may group the application of the term "Son," not to the nation as a whole, but to the king as the nation's supreme representative, e.g. 2 Sam. vii. 13 f.: "I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father and he shall be my son" (cf. Psalm lxxxix. 26, 27); and this use of the term "Son" as applied to Jehovah's agent or vicegerent led on, as we have already noted, to a more *messianic* conception of the Son, which was not strictly in the line of the Christian development.

the reality. Not that Jehovah on His part was false to the ideal. But His people were. And so we have Hosea's distressful story of the erring wife, Ezekiel bewails the nation's whoredoms, Jeremiah laments "they have broken my covenant, although I was an husband unto them" (xxxii. 32). Similarly it is recognised that while the fatherhood of Jehovah never changes, the people that He has called to be His son does not respond to His fatherly intentions. "Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish people and unwise? Is not He thy father?" "Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful" (Deut. xxxii. 6, 18). So far we have been speaking of the nation collectively as the son; but we may note that, as religious thought came to recognise that Jehovah's relation was with individuals no less than with the nation, so too alongside of the metaphor of the son there came to be developed the cognate metaphor of a family of sons. Thus it is quite natural to speak of Israel as "the children of the Lord" (Deut. xiv. 1); and Hosea, looking forward beyond the failure of the national hope to the fulfilment of a more spiritual one says: "In the place where it was said unto thee, Ye are not my people, it shall be said unto thee, Ye are the sons of the living God" (i. 10).

A Father with a family of sons—in that vision of Hosea's we see the sublime ideal which in all His dealings with His people the Lord God of Israel was conceived as seeking to bring to fruition. Time and again that ideal is repeated. Note this for example from Jeremiah (iii. 19, Moffatt's translation):

"I thought that I would treat you like a son, and give you a delightful land, the fairest heritage of any nation. I thought that you would call me Father, and never turn away from me."

Here, too, is a noble passage from the Psalms of Solomon (xvii. 27-30):

"He shall gather together a holy people, whom he shall lead in righteousness; and he shall not suffer unrighteous-

ness to lodge any more in their midst . . . For he shall know that they are all sons of their God."

And in the Book of Jubilees (i. 24, 25) we have :

"And their souls shall cleave to me and to all my commandments, and I shall be their Father and they will be my children. And they will all be called children of the living God, and every angel and every spirit will know, yea, they will know that these are my children, and that I am their Father in uprightness and righteousness and that I love them."

This last quotation is interesting as emphasizing that fatherhood expresses itself in love, and that sonship entails obedience to the Father's commandments.

### III. HOW SONSHIP IS TO BE ESTABLISHED

Such then, is the ideal that Jehovah has set before Himself. But how is it going to be accomplished, seeing that His people fall so far short of it? In the first place they will require to have demonstrated to them, in some way that they cannot fail to comprehend, the essentially fatherly character of the Lord their God; and secondly they will have to have some change wrought in themselves to make them order their lives as those who are called to be sons. It will be well to examine these two aspects of the subject in more detail.

(1) Israel was slow to rise to the conception of Jehovah as essentially a Father. It was characteristic of a good deal of pre-Christian Judaism that it tended to separate God from His people, construing Him essentially in terms of legalism (He had given them the Law, and was concerned that they should obey it), or in terms of apocalyptic (in some supernatural way He would suddenly usher in a new era, an era of bliss for those whom He called and of doom for those whom He rejected). And alongside of such conceptions it was natural that there should go the expectation of a Messiah who should come in

might to exercise deliverance and judgment. But there was also, as we have seen,<sup>1</sup> another current in the Jewish religious hope which was not primarily legalistic, or ritualistic, or apocalyptic (though it might be all or any of these too), but was primarily pious, with the piety revealed in the Psalms. There were those who believed in all simplicity and devoutness that "like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him" (Ps. ciii. 13). They found expression for their hopes and their prayers in such a message as this from Isaiah: "I will mention the loving-kindness of the Lord . . . For He said, Surely they are my people . . . So He was their Saviour. In all their afflictions He was afflicted; no angel but rather His own presence saved them; in His love and in His pity He redeemed them . . . Look down from heaven and behold; thou, O Lord, art our Father, our Redeemer" (Is. lxiii. 7 ff.).

Was it not in an atmosphere of such pious expectation and assurance that Jesus of Nazareth was reared? When in His early days in Galilee He bowed His head in prayer in the synagogue, or in His country walks surveyed the face of nature in all its beauty and its terror, or in quiet meditation reflected on the unfolding of His nation's history, may we say that in all these experiences He had begun to trace the voice and the face and the finger, not merely of the Lord God of Israel, but of One whom He called "the Father?" And when later He went forth among men on a great divine mission, as one who was anointed to preach the gospel to the poor, His task as He construed it was to reveal to men the Father whom so often they quite failed to recognise. Behind the law which forbade men to heal on the Sabbath, behind the tragedy of a prodigal son, or a woman that was a sinner, or a money-grasping publican, or a bereaved parent, or even a sparrow lying dead on the ground, He led men to see the Father whose first and only concern was to recover those who were His own; and in the end of the day when He went to a cross He was still pointing men to the Father who loved them with a love beyond

<sup>1</sup> pp. 71 f. 74

anything they had dreamed of, a love that was stronger even than sin or death.

(2) But in addition to receiving a new revelation of the fatherly character of God it was necessary that men should also receive a new revelation of themselves as sons of God. It goes without saying that the more the religion of Israel led men to think sublimely of the character of their God, the more it made plain to them that neither as a nation nor as individuals were they worthy of the dignity and destiny which so gracious a God had appointed for them. "I have brought up children; and they have rebelled against me" (Is. i. 2). And in the face of that tragedy we have the relentless reverberation of the prophetic message that Jehovah would reject the nation. Were there not others whom He could appoint to be His people? Amid the gathering clouds of doom, however, hope would continually break through. Surely from among the people there would be a righteous Remnant. God would heal their backsliding (Jer. iii. 22); and there would be some to whom He could impart His Holy Spirit.

Yet the further men entered into the mystery of the transcendent holiness and love of God, the more did they feel the circle narrowing of those who could be regarded by such a God as constituting a holy people, and who could dare to think of themselves as sons and daughters of such a Father. At last, in the fulness of time, God raised up One in whom He could be satisfied. And we read how, as He stood in Jordan to be baptised into the fellowship of those who were to be ready to receive the Lord when He should come, Jesus heard a voice from heaven saying: "Thou art my Son, the beloved; on Thee I have set my approval." For years previous to the Baptism experience He had learned to lift up His eyes to heaven and acknowledge God as "the Father." Now, as the Spirit of God descends on Him at His Baptism, there comes from God the answering voice which says: "I, the Father, acknowledge Thee as my Son." And it is not

merely "one son among many." It is "my Son, the beloved"; and "the beloved"<sup>1</sup> in such a context implies an *only* son. Thus at the Baptism Jesus learns not merely that God is pleased to regard Him as a Son, but that in all Israel, the nation to which He had been a Father, and which He had marked out for His inheritance, there was one and one only in whose life the Father could recognise the spirit of Sonship.<sup>2</sup>

#### IV. THE BAPTISM AND THE TEMPTATIONS OF JESUS

The Baptism-experience, therefore, is for Jesus not a revelation of Messiahship but a revelation of Sonship. It is a recognition of spiritual affinity—not, primarily at least, a call to office. Inevitably, of course, the acknowledgment of His Sonship raises for Jesus the question of the implications of Sonship—the Son must ask what is the Father's will for Him; to that extent a call to office or mission cannot be excluded. But it is noteworthy how careful our sources are at this point to emphasise the so-called "filial consciousness" of Jesus as fundamental. The Gospels, it is true, were not designed to provide material for psychological studies; yet it is impossible to read them at this point without being impressed both by the scrupulous truthfulness revealed in their composition and by the light which they shed on the mind and spirit of Jesus. The words that sounded in the soul of Jesus ("Thou art my Son") were an echo from the Second Psalm. Yet Jesus could apply to Himself the Psalmist's words without being tied to the Psalmist's interpretation. For the idea of Sonship found in Psalm ii is altogether different from that which we have traced through the messages of the prophets to its fulfilment in the person

<sup>1</sup> The new edition of Liddell & Scott's Greek Lexicon gives the primary meaning of ἀγαπητός as "that wherewith one must be content: hence of only children." The Hebrew *yahid* is similarly used, e.g. of Abraham's only son and Jephthah's only daughter. In each of these cases the LXX has ἀγαπητός, in the latter case in conjunction with μονογενής, for which indeed it comes to be practically an equivalent.

<sup>2</sup> We may compare Paul's argument about Christ as the one offspring or seed in Gal. iii. 16.

of Jesus. The Son in that Psalm is not one whose character is a reflex of the Father's; rather He is the King-Messiah, the vicegerent of Jehovah, who goes forth in the name of God to scatter the heathen hosts who rage against Jehovah and His Anointed. It is not so with Jesus. Ranging Himself in line with the evangelical tradition, Jesus sees clearly at His Baptism, not that He is called to act as God's Messiah, but that He is so linked in spirit with the Father that the Father acknowledges Him to be His Son. This emphasis on "character" rather than on "mission" is further brought out in the words which follow,<sup>1</sup> viz. "in Thee I am well pleased," or better, "on Thee I set my approval"; for these words, echoing as they do one of the Servant passages in Isaiah,<sup>2</sup> imply that even at His Baptism Jesus recognised that Sonship for Him must be interpreted in terms of service.

The Temptation-narratives which follow show that, even when He turns next to face the question of mission, the basic factor for Jesus is His consciousness of Sonship. "If thou art the Son of God"—this is the starting-point for two of the three Temptations. What are the tasks which the Father has marked out for the Son, and how is the Son to discharge them? These questions were not to be answered by a facile identification of Sonship with Messiahship, for there were many conceptions of Messiahship (based even on Scripture) with which Jesus would have refused to identify Himself. Jesus saw clearly that, in discharging the mission which was opening out before Him, He must at all points be guided by loyalty to His Sonship and to the Father who had called Him to be His Son. His first task therefore was to make real to His brethren the presence of the Father from whom so many things were separating them; and hand in hand with this went the other task of bringing those brethren back into the family of God the Father. Such tasks were not "messianic" as that term

<sup>1</sup> In the Western Text in Luke the latter part of the quotation is taken from the words in Ps. ii: "this day have I begotten thee."

<sup>2</sup> xlii. i; cf. xlv. 2.

was generally understood ; and in the Temptations Jesus saw clearly that the traditional conceptions of Messiahship shed no light on the methods by which He was to accomplish them. Other methods, however, were open to Him—He would preach the Gospel ; He would teach and train disciples ; and He would bring to bear on the needs of daily life the mercy and power of the living God.

#### V. JESUS AND HIS BRETHREN

While knowing Himself to be (in a special sense) the Son of the Father, Jesus does not forget that in the purposes of the Father all men are sons. His Sonship therefore does not separate Him from His brethren—rather it binds Him the more closely to them. But in the mind of Jesus Sonship is never (as it is in the minds of so many to-day) a vague metaphor to express the relation of men as created beings to the Power that lies behind creation. It implies quite definitely a spiritual relation by which men are brought into communion with God the Father. As such it is never the result of some merely natural process of birth or development ; it is the outcome of a supernatural act on the part of God who so expresses His Fatherhood that men are drawn to make to Him the response of sons.

The fact remains, however (it was arrestingly clear to Jesus, though the modern world tends to turn a blind eye to it), that man as man has fallen from his high estate. He neither knows God as Father nor himself and his brethren as sons. To that extent he is a lost son. That tragic word "lost" on the lips of Jesus is not to be taken, in accordance with a purely naturalistic interpretation of life, as meaning simply that man has lost his way, and must learn to find it. All the teaching of Jesus, even His teaching on man, is centred on the fact of God the Father, so that when He speaks of a lost son He means that the son is lost to where he belongs ; it is God the Father who has lost him. And just as the good shepherd goes to seek the lost sheep, so the Son of Man

goes forth in the name of God the Father to seek and to save His lost brethren (Lk. xix. 10).

The New Testament revelation of the Son of God is thus an essential element in the fulfilment of the biblical hope of God's purposes for mankind. Through the coming of His Son God does something full and final for the establishment on earth of a righteous people. Here we see how the mission of Jesus brings to a culmination the work for which the mission of the prophets, and more particularly that of John the Baptist, was a preparation. And it is instructive to note how the aims and methods of Jesus differed from those of the Baptist. John's aim was so to purify Israel as to win out of it a righteous Remnant; that of Jesus was to gather together for the Father a family of sons. With John the process was one of winnowing; with Jesus it was one of ingathering. John was an ascetic; Jesus was the friend of publicans and sinners. John called on men to prepare to meet their God; Jesus declared by word and action that God had drawn near to men and was calling them to their place in His family. It is not surprising that John's message expressed itself symbolically in the rite of baptism, while that of Jesus expressed itself in a family gathering for the breaking of bread.

## CHAPTER X

### DID JESUS CLAIM TO BE THE MESSIAH ?

**W**HILE Jesus recognised Himself to be in a unique sense the Son of God, did He also think of Himself as the Messiah? That question has confronted us more than once in the preceding pages ; and it calls now for fuller examination. As a preliminary to our consideration of it, however, there is one position which ought to be made clear beyond any possibility of doubt. Any interpretation of Jesus which questions the uniqueness of His relation to God and His own recognition of that uniqueness is shipwrecked on the rock of the New Testament evidence. Though He stood in the succession of the prophets, Jesus Himself knew (as also His followers came to recognise with a conviction that nothing could shake) that in one essential respect He differed from all who had gone before Him. Others had declared God's purposes of salvation ; in Jesus these purposes were being brought to fulfilment. Expressed in more technical language, His mission was not prophetic merely ; it was eschatological ; if we care so to describe it, it was messianic. And His followers gave expression to their deepest convictions about Him by declaring Him to be the expected Messiah.

#### I. HIS CLAIM TO AUTHORITY

In the Gospels, however, there is singularly little evidence that Jesus specifically laid claim to be the Messiah ; and He is represented as enjoining silence when others ascribed Messiahship to Him.<sup>1</sup> What deductions are we to make from this ? Some critics,<sup>2</sup> in the interest of a liberal Christ-

<sup>1</sup> e.g. Lk. iv. 41 ; Mk. viii. 29 f.

<sup>2</sup> e.g. Wrede, *Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien* ; cf. R. H. Lightfoot's sympathetic treatment of Wrede's contentions in his Bampton Lectures, *History and Interpretation in the Gospels*.

ology, have adopted the perverse hypothesis that in the actual life-story of Jesus there was nothing to suggest Messiahship or anything corresponding to it, that it was only when they came to believe that He had been raised from the dead that His disciples hailed Him as Messiah, and that the Marcan picture, according to which Jesus is represented as indeed the Messiah though He set Himself to have the fact concealed, was a product of early Christian thinking, an attempt to explain why the Messiahship had remained a secret until the disciples took to declaring it after the Resurrection. Such a reconstruction is hopelessly wide of the mark. The steadfast faith which the early Church had in the Messiahship of Jesus could never have originated and been maintained if, previous to the belief in the Resurrection, a sure basis had not been provided for it in the life and teaching of Jesus. Dr. C. J. Cadoux<sup>1</sup> has summarised the position as follows: "Let it suffice to remark that the denial of Jesus' Messianic self-consciousness seems to rest on an unwarrantably low estimate of the historical value of the Gospels, that Jesus' secretiveness in the matter of His Messiahship can be more satisfactorily explained as due to the conditions of His work than as an invention of His followers after His death, and that the great number of modern scholars are therefore unquestionably right in believing his Messianic claim to be an historical reality."

It is possible to accept wholeheartedly such a conclusion so far as it asserts the unique and decisive character of the mission of Jesus, and yet to question whether Jesus did, as a matter of fact, interpret His mission in terms of Messiahship. For Messiahship implied an office, a status, a dignity; and it was not by an appeal to any such extraneous authority that Jesus set Himself to establish His claims or to accomplish His mission. Titles and designations play a dangerous role in religion; and Jesus resolutely avoided them, knowing how prone men are to use them without a clear and devout realisation of what they imply.

<sup>1</sup> *The Historic Mission of Jesus*, 51 f.

Here we come face to face with a question of vital importance, not merely for a clear and well-balanced outlook on the course of the life story of Jesus, but also for a fresh appreciation of His significance for the world of to-day. The question at issue concerns nothing less than the character of His authority—the basis on which it rested and His methods of exercising it. The deep-seated and far-reaching character of that authority was abundantly plain to all who heard His words or witnessed His actions. But it was no part of His purpose to arrogate to Himself a title in explanation of His authority. Never for a moment were men allowed to forget that He spoke and acted in the name of God. The one essential response, therefore, which they could make to His challenge must be the response of faith and obedience. Note for example these emphatic demands :

“ Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven ; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.”<sup>1</sup>

“ Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say ? ”<sup>2</sup>

“ Ye call Me Master and Lord ; and ye say well ; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.”<sup>3</sup>

“ Be not ye called Rabbi ; for one is your Master ; and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth ; for one is your Father, which is in heaven. Neither will ye be called masters ; for one is your Master, even Christ.”<sup>4</sup>

The one acceptable way in which men might confess their faith in Jesus was to follow His lead and to do His will. And when His Jewish opponents, recognising the momentous implications that underlay His teaching, demanded to be told plainly whether or not He claimed to be the Messiah,

<sup>1</sup> Mt. vii. 21

<sup>2</sup> Lk. vi. 46

<sup>3</sup> Jn. xiii. 13-15

<sup>4</sup> Mt. xxiii. 8-10 ; cf. p. 126

He appealed to the works which He was doing in the Father's name :

“ If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works ; that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in Him.”<sup>1</sup>

It may at first sight seem largely a matter of words that we should question whether Jesus accepted the role of Messiah when undoubtedly He gave expression in so many cognate ways to the unequivocal character of His claims. We have seen Him at His Baptism and Temptation entering on His ministry as the Son of God, called to a mission which might with full appropriateness be described as messianic. His numerous declarations about the Son of Man, to be considered in our next chapter, testify to His conviction that He was at once the representative, the saviour, and the judge of men. He asserted that His appearance constituted an event in world-history more decisive than the preaching of Jonah or the wisdom of Solomon.<sup>2</sup> And scarcely less significant for the careful reader of the Gospels is the reiterated use by Jesus of the first personal pronoun “ I ” (as e.g. in a reminder of His presence or an enforcement of His behests), recalling as it does the atmosphere of the Old Testament commands and promises, and seemingly implying that He speaks and acts with a commission from Jehovah Himself, the great “ I am.”<sup>3</sup>

Yet all such modes of expressing His authority have a spiritual content which might easily be lacking in an assertion of Messiahship. For Messiahship could be interpreted in so many different ways, some of them dangerously misleading just because they were in essence so unspiritual. It was quite otherwise when, as Son of Man and Son of God, Jesus identified Himself in the name of the Heavenly Father with His brethren of mankind, seeking to uplift them to a realisation of their true manhood and their divine sonship. It was a fundamental

<sup>1</sup> Jn. x. 37 f.

<sup>2</sup> Mt. xii. 41 f ; Lk. xi. 31 f.

<sup>3</sup> e.g. Mk. vi. 50, ix. 25, and frequently in the Fourth Gospel, e.g. vi. 35, xi. 25 ; cf. K. L. Schmidt, *Le Problème du Christianisme primitif*, 35 ff.

principle with Jesus that men must first of all, in a spirit of receptiveness and self-dedication, accept what in the name of God He sought to bring to them, and only in the light of what He did for them might they go on to put an interpretation on His person and mission. Any attempt to reverse the process—to begin by formulating their views as to His person, and then to interpret what He sought to do for them in the light of their preconceived theories—was sure to evoke from Him violent discouragement and rebuke.

## II. HIS REACTIONS TO THE ASCRIPTION OF MESSIAHSHIP

It is well, however, that we should look more carefully into the evidence which may be claimed as pointing to His acceptance of the role of Messiah. We begin by noting His reactions on those occasions when the question of Messiahship was raised for Him by others.

(a) An instance of primary importance is St. Peter's confession: "Thou art the Christ." According to Matthew (xvi. 17) Jesus receives the confession with acclamation: "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona; flesh and blood hath not revealed this to thee, but my Father in Heaven." And we may well believe that Jesus, who valued faith supremely and cared little that perhaps it was misguided if only it was sincere,<sup>1</sup> must have been deeply moved when one of His disciples showed such spiritual insight as to say that his Master's vocation under God far transcended that of one of the prophets, and was indeed messianic. But however probable in itself such a reaction may have been, there is no indication of it in the narratives of Mark and Luke. There the sole rejoinder of Jesus is a stern injunction to silence. And the teaching which immediately follows refers, not to the Messiah, but to the Son of Man, treading the foreordained path of God's Suffering Servant.

(b) At His examination before the high priest Jesus is

<sup>1</sup> e.g. Mt. viii. 10; cf. Mk. xi. 23; Lk. xviii. 8

asked the direct question : " Art thou the Christ ? " and according to Mk. xiv. 62 He answers emphatically : " I am."<sup>1</sup> This reply, if it is genuine, may well seem to settle our problem for us ; and, even if we hesitate to believe that there had been any such avowal of Messiahship at an earlier stage of the ministry, we may picture Jesus, now that the hour of judgment has come, confronting His accusers with a direct affirmation of His messianic claims. Whatever be the precise content of His claims, He certainly does on this occasion assert them so uncompromisingly that the cry of blasphemy is immediately raised and the proceedings are abruptly terminated.

But there is still room for question whether it is Messiahship that He here claims. In Luke there is nothing corresponding to the " I am " in Mark ; and in Matthew the words used are : " It is you that said it," which may be taken to imply that Jesus flings all responsibility for the use of the name Messiah back on the man who had suggested it. The charge of blasphemy, moreover, creates a difficulty ; for whatever problems a claim to Messiahship might raise, the normal reaction to it would scarcely be to denounce it as blasphemous. What occasioned the outcry about blasphemy was not an assertion of Messiahship as such, but the emphatic declaration which Jesus proceeded to make about the Son of Man who would be seated at the right hand of the Power, i.e. of God. An important point which will come up for consideration later<sup>2</sup> is that in making this declaration about the Son of Man Jesus was not arrogating to Himself a title or office ; He was asserting His spiritual authority as the Lord of men. We may even go further and claim that the declaration which Jesus here makes about the Son of Man is incompatible with the traditional conceptions of Messiahship.<sup>3</sup> No doubt it is possible to argue that by thus linking together the two ideas Jesus transmutes the whole messianic conception. A

<sup>1</sup> Here as elsewhere (cf. p. 122) the words " I am " may convey a subtler meaning than appears at first sight, being less a direct reply to the question about Messiahship than a challenging assertion by Jesus that He speaks and acts in the name of the God of Israel.

<sup>2</sup> p. 192.

<sup>3</sup> see p. 66.

preferable interpretation is to say that Jesus sets aside the question of Messiahship and concentrates attention solely on the spiritual authority of the Son of Man.

(c) A third instance is provided by the attempt made before Pilate to embroil Jesus in a claim to Messiahship.<sup>1</sup> Pilate accordingly asks Jesus: "Art thou the king of the Jews?" But here again Jesus contents Himself with the reply: "It is you that say it." The narrative here, in which all the Synoptics agree, sheds a significant light on the corresponding incident before the high priest. For the whole context in this case shows that what is in question is kingship—we may compare Luke's reference to the political question of paying tribute to Caesar and his use of the phrase "king-messiah" (xxiii. 2). This serves to confirm the explanation we gave in the previous instance of the charge of blasphemy—to claim to be such a Messiah was not blasphemous, though it might have been declared treasonable. But more especially it establishes clearly that Jesus' reply cannot be taken to denote that he acquiesces in the claim which is attributed to Him.

From these various incidents, therefore, our conclusion is that, following on St. Peter's confession, Jesus asks His disciples to think of Him not as Messiah but as Son of Man; and that when the question of Messiahship is raised, firstly before the high priest and then before Pilate, Jesus refuses to commit Himself on it.

### III. DID HE USE THE NAME MESSIAH OF HIMSELF?

We pass next to consider whether in the Synoptic Gospels Jesus refers to Himself by the name Messiah (Christ). Three instances may be quoted, one in each of the Gospels; but the evidence in each case is of very doubtful validity.

(a) In Mark ix. 41 we read: "whosoever gives you a cup of water to drink on the strength of your belonging to Christ." This is the solitary instance in the Synoptics of the use of

<sup>1</sup> Mk. xv. 2-5

the Greek word *χριστός* without the definite article ; and we can scarcely doubt that Matthew's version (x. 42) gives the saying in a more original form : " whoever gives a cup of water to one of these little ones on the strength of his being a disciple."

(b) A similar process of modification lies behind the closing saying in Mt. xxiii. 10 : " One is your Master, even the Christ." If we read it in the light of the previous two verses, which language and thought alike proclaim to be genuine words of Jesus, we can scarcely doubt that the saying in verse 10 has been modified so as to bring out the authority accorded to the risen Christ in the life of the Church.<sup>1</sup>

(c) The solitary instance in Luke<sup>2</sup> is in a post-resurrection saying : " Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and so enter into His glory ? "

A careful study of those three passages leaves the undeniable impression that the introduction of the name Christ reflects in each case the messianic beliefs of the early Church.

#### IV. THE ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM

Deeds, however, speak more compellingly than words ; and if the sayings of Jesus yield only precarious evidence of a claim to Messiahship, surely (it may be urged) the whole development of His ministry in the closing stages, and more particularly the challenge of His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, provides evidence of a kind that cannot be denied. Dr. Rawlinson, in his commentary<sup>3</sup> on Mark, thus states the generally accepted view of the reason why Jesus rode into the Holy City on an ass : " On the whole, it seems to be the most probable conclusion that the entry in this peculiar fashion into Jerusalem was deliberate on the part of our Lord, and was meant to suggest that, though He was indeed the

<sup>1</sup> or is it a duplicate of verse 8 ? The Authorised Version reference to Christ in verse 8 is based on an inferior text.

<sup>2</sup> Lk. xxiv. 26 ; cf. also verse 46. On this saying see p. 141.

<sup>3</sup> p. 151.

Messiah and "Son of David," yet the Messiahship which He claimed was to be understood in a spiritual and non-political sense, in terms of the prophecy of Zechariah, rather than in terms of the "Son of David" idea as interpreted by contemporary expectation (e.g. in the Psalms of Solomon). The time had in fact come for our Lord to put forward His Messianic claims, and to make His appeal to Jerusalem in a deliberately Messianic capacity. 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."

This clear and careful analysis of the situation may be accepted as essentially sound, except that it might be preferable to use other language to describe what is here regarded as a claim to Messiahship. The contention that it is indeed Messiahship that Jesus is here asserting is one that is not easily refuted; for the early Church undoubtedly interpreted the entry messianically, and that interpretation is reflected more or less in all the Gospel accounts. Nevertheless reasons are not lacking why, here as elsewhere, we should pause before concluding that the mind of Jesus was dominated in any decisive measure by thoughts of Messiahship.

In the first place it is significant that, hard pressed as His opponents were in the next few days to find an adequate charge to bring against Him, they do not seem to have accused Him of making His entry into the city the occasion for a messianic demonstration. Further, a close study of the various narratives<sup>1</sup> reveals successive stages in the development of the messianic interpretation. Mark's simple reference to a colt becomes in Matthew "an ass and a colt" in conformity with the words of Zechariah ix. 9, which Matthew and John alone quote, though presumably Mark and Luke were fully aware of their relevance. The original request for the loan of the animal probably implied quite simply: "Our master asks leave to use it, and guarantees its speedy return"; but as the story came to be told the

<sup>1</sup> Mk. xi. 1 ff.; Mt. xxi. 1 ff.; Lk. xix. 28 ff.; Jn. xii. 12 ff.

master who issues the request is none other than the Church's Lord, and (as is made to appear in the Matthæan version) it is the owner who, in deference to a request from so authoritative a source, "will at once let the animals go." Mark refers to litter from the fields (reeds and leaves we may presume, or perhaps wild flowers) which some people scatter on the roadway; but in Matthew branches are cut from the trees, and these in the Fourth Gospel become "palm-branches," the appropriate accompaniment of a welcome offered to a king. Most significant of all is the development in the words of acclaim. Matthew has: "Hosanna to the son of David." Luke introduces a reference to "the king." But in Mark there is nothing to indicate that the people think of Jesus Himself as the Messiah. True, they do associate Him in some way with the coming Kingdom of their father David; but to them He is still primarily a prophet, their expectation being (in view of all the wonderful reports that had preceded His arrival in Jerusalem) that He might even be "the Coming One" (ὁ ἐρχόμενος), the prophet who should be sent before the Day of the Lord.

Whatever, therefore, was in the mind of Jesus, there is reason to think that at the time it took place the entry was not interpreted by others as an assertion of Messiahship. The Fourth Gospel<sup>1</sup> says explicitly that even His disciples failed at first to recognise its real significance, which indeed became clear to them only after He had been "glorified." Viewed in the light of that fact the variations in the different Gospel accounts become singularly instructive. A superficial criticism might be tempted to deduce from them that the original facts have been smothered under successive layers of fancy. A much saner and safer inference would be that the alleged fancy must itself have had a sure basis in fact.

Before attempting to determine the precise character of that factual basis, let us do justice to the conscientious truthfulness with which the early church set itself here to

<sup>1</sup>Jn. xii. 16

reconcile two apparent "irreconcilables"—the seeming insignificance of the episode at the time of its occurrence, and the transcendent significance which now was seen to attach to it in the light of the resurrection-faith. "It must have become ever harder for the little churches to believe that this coming, so much fraught with destiny, could have passed almost unnoticed at the time; that, in Professor Burkitt's words, to contemporary observers it may not have seemed more than a ripple on the surface. Was this the day of that coming of which the prophet had asked who could endure it, and who should stand at its appearing?"<sup>1</sup>

But was it so entirely "a ripple on the surface?" And to those who took note of it was it not also an indication of surging depths beneath? Public interest had for some time been alive to the fact that "the prophet from Nazareth"<sup>2</sup> was coming to Jerusalem for the Passover; and it was plain alike to populace and to rulers, to friends and to foes, that His presence would dominate the feast. Already speculation was rife as to the object of His mission and the power which was inherent in Him. Some whose hopes ran along nationalistic channels saw in Him, as the blind beggar at Jericho had done, "the son of David"<sup>3</sup> who should restore the glories of Israel. Others, adhering more strictly to the prophetic tradition, were prepared to see in Him "the prophet" who was expected to come before the End. More particularly, the disciples of Jesus (including not a few, no doubt, outside the band of the Twelve) still nursed the high hopes to which St. Peter had given expression months before near Caesarea Philippi. They had, it is true, been forbidden then to talk of Messiahship. But the old thoughts would in some measure come back to them when they saw their Master enter the Holy City in lowly state, accompanied by the acclamations of the people; and later, when their belief in His Messiahship had been confirmed for them by the Resurrection, they came to see, far more clearly than had been possible for them at the

<sup>1</sup> R. H. Lightfoot, *History and Interpretation in the Gospels*, p. 82.

<sup>2</sup> Mt. xxi. 11

<sup>3</sup>Mk. x. 47

time, the essential significance of the whole episode. *There*, if only men's eyes had been open to see it, was Israel's King coming to His royal city ; *there* was God's Messiah entering into His Kingdom. He was indeed riding on in majesty ; but, true to the essential character of His Messiahship, He rode on in lowly pomp as one for whom Messiahship meant service, suffering and death.

In this interpretation of the episode the Church followed essentially right lines. If it had justification (as assuredly it had) for its confident faith that Jesus was the Messiah, it could not but go on to maintain that by His mode of entry into the Holy City, as later by His death on the cross, Jesus gave to Messiahship a new connotation. To the intimate followers of Jesus it must have been plain from the first—and it became increasingly plain in the light of later reflection—that when their Master, with whom they had trudged so many weary miles on foot, chose to ride into Jerusalem on an ass, He was indulging in one of His acted parables, just as He had done in the feeding of the multitudes, or was later to do when He washed the disciples' feet and distributed to them the bread and wine. There is no escaping the conclusion that this act on Jesus' part was self-conscious and deliberate, and that it had a symbolical significance.

But though the Church, in the light of all that it knew and believed about Jesus, was justified in seeing in it an assertion of Messiahship, ought we to say that Jesus Himself so regarded it, or wished others to regard it ? Here, as in all the other cases considered in this chapter, we would do well to hesitate.

“ Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion ; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem ; behold, thy King cometh unto thee ; he is just, and having salvation ; lowly, and riding on an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.”<sup>1</sup>

Who can doubt that Jesus had this passage in mind when He chose to enter Jerusalem as He did ? Only let us note that the passage speaks, not of the Messiah, but of the King.

And though to many of the contemporaries of Jesus the two designations would have seemed identical, there were good reasons why Jesus, with His clear spiritual outlook, may have preferred to distinguish between them. For Him, of course, the distinction could never be simply a matter of words. Titles and designations had meaning for Him only in relation to the spiritual realities of which they were the expression. And whatever it was that Jesus asserted when He rode into Jerusalem, He asserted it not in words, but in symbolic action. In so far, however, as we can describe it in words at all, it would seem to have been an assertion, not of Messiahship, but of Kingship.

#### V. MESSIAHSHIP AND KINGSHIP

Messiahship was not a category in which Jesus could find satisfaction. Messiah was altogether too vague a designation. It indicated, no doubt, divine appointment for a God-given task; but in itself it left unspecified the character of the task or the means by which it was to be carried out. To Jesus the work which He was sent to do was of infinitely greater significance than the name which belonged to Him as the doer of it. Had He come before men as their Messiah, they would have been tempted to interpret what He did for them in the light of His official status rather than interpret His official status in the light of His work. Thereby they would not merely have missed the real secret of His person and mission; they would moreover have put themselves into an entirely false position in relation to Him, seeking presumptuously to test the evidence for His claims rather than in humility to receive the blessings which He brought and in repentance to order their lives in accordance with His demands. There was the further objection that Messiahship, while it carried with it the implication of Kingship, might point to a Kingship which was only to be realised in the future. Even the disciples of Jesus, when later they proclaimed Him to be the Messiah, regarded Him as entering on His Messiah-

ship in virtue of His resurrection and ascension—His earthly life, they felt, had been a mere prelude to His messianic glory ; He had then been, not Messiah, but Messiah-designate.

All this was directly opposed to the principles which guided Jesus in the prosecution of His mission. The same objections which applied to an assertion of Messiahship might, of course, in certain circumstances apply with equal force to an assertion of Kingship, for the one designation was as capable of misrepresentation as the other. But there was at least this difference, that Kingship, like Lordship, implied an authority *which was to be obeyed*. Jesus had no desire that men should call Him King unless they were prepared to render Him allegiance. And the very fact that He asserted His claims, not by arrogating the name of King, but by making plain in daily life what Kingship implied, carried with it the corollary that, for those who professed to follow Him, allegiance would be tested not by their professions but by their character and their actions. The old demand still stood—those who hailed Him as King, like those who called Him Lord, must learn to do the things which He commanded ; their lives must be conformed to His standards. There are reasons for thinking that, as the crisis of His life-story developed, Jesus became more bold and more open in the assertion of His Kingship ;<sup>1</sup> and when finally He was condemned and crucified, it was as King of the Jews. Yet by word and action He made it clear, for all who cared to understand, how His Kingship differed from that of earthly monarchs. As King He came clothed in humility ; as King He appeared among His subjects as one who sought to serve them. And in His Kingdom the rule held for subjects as for King that greatness was measured by capacity for loving service.

What then are our conclusions regarding the attitude of Jesus to Messiahship ?

<sup>1</sup> cf. Mt. xxii. 41 ff. ; xxv. 31 ff. Luke, who had emphasised Kingship in the Annunciation story (i. 32 f.), introduces the name King in connection with the entry into Jerusalem (xix. 38) and the charge before Pilate (xxiii. 2).

(i) Jesus certainly regarded Himself as entrusted by God with a commission which after His death His followers interpreted—and rightly interpreted—as messianic. On the strength of what they knew about His life, His death, and His resurrection they boldly declared Him to be the Messiah; and such a proclamation had a secure basis in the authority which He had exercised in His lifetime.

(ii) We cannot, however, safely deduce from this that during His lifetime Jesus had either Himself openly connected His authority with Messiahship, or had allowed others to do so. It was quite natural that the early Christians should have begun by declaring that Jesus, now raised from the dead and exalted to God's right hand, had been openly revealed as God's Messiah, and that with such a starting point to their message they should have worked their way back (so to speak) to the conclusion that it was necessary for the Messiah "to suffer these things and so enter into His glory" (Lk. xxiv. 26). But this was not a natural line of approach for Jesus Himself as He addressed Himself to the immediate demands of His redemptive mission.

Life as Jesus saw it consisted essentially in obedience to the will of God. Hence for Himself the decisive question could never be: "in what way shall I fulfil the role of Messiah?" It could only be: "what is the way of life which the Father has marked out for the Son?" He presented the same decisive test to those among whom He moved, and who were daily being challenged to find an explanation for the authority with which He spoke and acted. There were those, like the disciples near Caesarea Philippi, who felt convinced that any explanation short of Messiahship was inadequate; but neither from them nor from others would Jesus accept this or any other attempt to *explain* His authority until they had first had experience of the authority itself, realising in the depths of their souls both what it was that He was doing for men and what He demanded of them.

When once men had come under the sway of His authority

it mattered little indeed by what name they sought to describe it, except that there was always the danger that something might be lost in the process of description. For some designations, like those of which we read in Mark viii. 28, did not do full justice to the truth ; and even such a name as Messiah might in the end pervert the very truth which it expressed, as Jesus recognised when He followed up St. Peter's confession by His teaching on "the Son of Man." And the difficulty we are here considering is not to be avoided by contending that (either in the secret places of His own self-consciousness, or in His intimate teaching to devout followers) Jesus did accept Messiahship, but reinterpreted it in accordance with the prophetic conception of God's Suffering Servant. For Messiahship might so easily be associated with *future* dominion ; and while Jesus certainly did make claims for Himself which reached out beyond the present into the future and indeed into eternity, He made none which were not securely based on that spiritual authority with which He confronted men day by day during His earthly life.

(iii) Important, however, though it is to distinguish in this matter the outlook of Jesus during His lifetime from that of His Church after the Resurrection, it might be going too far to assert that the name of Messiah was one which Jesus Himself unreservedly rejected ; for He must have recognised that, properly interpreted, it was truly applicable to His person and mission, and as used by devout followers who had entered deeply into His mind and spirit He may have felt it to be not inappropriate. What the Gospels do make clear is that the responsibility for the use of the name was placed by Jesus on those who chose to ascribe it to Him. In this respect His attitude to the name Messiah is strictly in accord with His attitude to other titles and designations. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in Heaven."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mt. vii. 21

## CHAPTER XI

### THE SON OF MAN

**O**F ALL the names applied to Jesus in the New Testament none deserves closer study than the name "the Son of Man." If our Gospel sources are to be trusted, it was the name by which Jesus most frequently alluded to Himself; there are about seventy instances of its use in the Synoptics and over ten in John. Not less significant is the apparent reluctance of the followers of Jesus to refer to Him in this way; for in the Gospels no one uses the name except Jesus Himself,<sup>1</sup> and in other parts of the New Testament the solitary instance<sup>2</sup> of its use as a designation of Jesus occurs when the dying Stephen appeals to the words which Jesus Himself had used in reply to the high priest.<sup>3</sup> In these respects the use of the name Son of Man in the New Testament stands in emphatic contrast to the use of the name Messiah; for Jesus Himself refused to make any specific claims to Messiahship, whereas it was as Messiah that after His Resurrection He was most generally described by those who came to believe in Him.

#### I. HISTORY OF THE TERM

The phrase "the Son of Man" is Semitic in origin. Behind the Greek phrase found in the Gospels there obviously lies some such expression as the Hebrew *ben adam*, or the Aramaic *bar nasha* or *bar adam*; <sup>4</sup> it might be rendered in English simply

<sup>1</sup> In John xii. 34 the people ask Jesus what the name means; cf. ix. 35 f., where the reading "the Son of Man" is to be preferred to "the Son of God."

<sup>2</sup> Rev. i. 13, xiv. 14 are quotations from Daniel vii. 13 ("like unto a son of man").

<sup>3</sup> Acts vii. 56; cf. Mt. xxvi. 64

<sup>4</sup> This last, which is found in the Targum of Ezekiel and of Daniel viii. 17 (which appears to be dependent on Ezekiel, chap. ii), may conceivably have been the form used by Jesus. Being an unusual form, it would arrest His hearers and be remembered. Perhaps we have here an added link connecting the use of the phrase by Jesus with its use in Ezekiel; cf. pp. 145 f.

as "the man." It clearly denotes one who is human, in contrast it may be to a representative of the world of animals or of angels. This fact is of fundamental importance for an understanding of the New Testament usage.

Lietzmann indeed, with Wellhausen, went so far as to maintain that the Aramaic phrase *bar nasha* could not possibly have signified more than "man" in a quite general way; and he argued that if the Gospels represent Jesus as using the phrase to convey a definite reference to Himself their evidence must be set aside. Such a contention goes too far. The form *bar nasha*, with the definite article, was probably capable of meaning "the man," referring to a definite individual, as well as "man" in general. The difficulty would be lessened if we may think of Jesus as using the unfamiliar term *bar adam*. Apparently He used a phrase which, though its precise significance was not always obvious to those who heard it, was one in which devout Jews would sense a suggestion of the language and the thought of Scripture.

There is no insuperable difficulty in believing that Jesus could have used the name "the Son of Man" with reference to an individual, and even that the reference in question was to Himself; and we may go on to assert with confidence that He did use it, for on this point the Gospel evidence is too strong to be set aside. The question then arises as to the significance which He attached to the name, and to His reasons for making use of it; and it seems a reasonable presupposition that in some way which calls for fuller examination He intended it to express His relationship to "the sons of men." There was some sense in which He regarded Himself as "the Man"—a unique and true representative of His brethren of mankind, fully at one with them, while in some way also distinct from them.

Popular religion has for long been content to explain the New Testament uses of the terms "Son of Man" and "Son of God" as indicating the one the human, the other the divine aspect of our Lord's nature. We can no longer rest content with so superficial an explanation, though it may

perhaps represent an imperfect expression of a very real truth. If we would understand aright the term "Son of Man" we must view it in the light of Jewish religious usage. In this connection scholars have directed rather special attention (*a*) to the vision in Daniel, chapter vii, culminating in verse 13 in the appearance with the clouds of heaven of "one like unto a son of man," to whom "there was given dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve him"; and (*b*) to the development of Daniel's vision in the Similitudes of Enoch, in which the name "the Son of Man" is given to a supernatural figure who appears in apocalyptic glory to execute judgment.

Now it is true that parallels may be cited from the Book of Enoch to illustrate sayings in the Gospels regarding the coming of the Son of Man as Judge; but the widely accepted belief that the thought of Jesus was influenced by the Book of Enoch represents a doubtful and probably erroneous hypothesis. Jesus does, however, appeal at His trial to the Daniel passage (Matt. xxvi. 64), and on more general grounds we may recognise that passage as shedding real if indirect light on the interpretation of His teaching about the Son of Man. It does not, of course, in itself explain that teaching. Its significance rather lies in its triumphant assurance that the consummation of world-history is bound up with the fulfilment of God's purposes for *man*. In picturing how the world-empires of the past, represented as so many beasts, will yet be superseded by a true people of God<sup>1</sup> ("one like unto a son of man"), it shows how the violence and rapine that characterise the powers of heathendom are intimately linked up with the degradation of man to the level of the brutes, whereas the establishment of God's Sovereignty demands that man shall become the sort of being that God meant him to be and so attain under God to a position of Lordship in the universe.

<sup>1</sup> Described in verse 18 as "the saints of the Most High."

## II. SON OF MAN NOT PRIMARILY AN APOCALYPTIC TERM

In seeking to understand what the term "Son of Man" signified for Jesus we may classify the references in the Gospels as follows.

(a) A very large number of the sayings are of a definitely eschatological character, pointing forward to a mysterious being who is to come from heaven as God's vicegerent at the day of judgment. In some of these the reference is of an indefinite kind, and nothing in the saying necessarily implies that Jesus is alluding to Himself. As illustrations of this we may quote: "Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel till the Son of Man be come" (Matt. x. 23), "Ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh" (Matt. xxv. 13). In other cases it is obviously implied that the coming of this Son of man is linked (though in what way is not always defined) with the present mission of Jesus, e.g. "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed when He cometh in the glory of His Father with the holy angels" (Mark viii. 38). We need not doubt that Jesus did use the name in this eschatological sense so as to refer to Himself, though the question may still be left open whether He was thus referring to Himself exclusively, or whether He used the phrase in a corporate sense as including others with Himself in its reference.

(b) Other sayings point forward to the imminent betrayal and rejection of the Son of Man, e.g. "The Son of Man goeth, as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed" (Mark xiv. 21). Notable among these are the detailed predictions of rejection and death, to be followed by resurrection, as in Mark viii. 31, ix. 31, x. 33 f.

(c) Lastly there are sayings of a more general kind, referring in the main to certain characteristic features in

the present life of the Son of Man, e.g. "The Son of Man has come eating and drinking" (Lk. vii. 34); "The Son of Man hath not where to lay his head" (Lk. ix. 58); "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Lk. xix. 10).

Put more succinctly, the sayings may be grouped according as they refer (a) to the future Parousia, (b) to the approaching Passion, (c) to the earthly Life of the Son of Man.

It is not surprising, in view of the consideration given in the last fifty years to the apocalyptic element in the Gospels, that critics during that period should have come to rivet attention primarily on the sayings in class (a), and to read the other sayings in the light of them. Recognising an affinity between the Son of Man in the Gospels and the Son of Man in Enoch, they have too readily assumed that that affinity provides the one essential key to the interpretation of the phrase as used by Jesus. Jesus is filled, they say, with an apocalyptic expectation of a coming Judgment; and He dares to believe, and to lead others to believe, that He is the predicted Son of Man through whom that Judgment is to be exercised. And when at other times He alludes to His present humiliation and coming sufferings and death, such references spring, it is alleged, from the necessity of aligning the expectation of coming glory with the hard concrete facts of His present life on earth. Here and now the Son of Man, the Judge of all the earth, who is yet to appear on the clouds in glory, knows hardships that the very beasts do not know. He who is marked out for a heavenly throne must first be rejected by man and put to a shameful death. On this view the essential significance of the earthly life of the Son of Man is that it is a prelude to His appearing in judgment.

Such a line of approach will never by itself bring us to a right understanding of the mind of Jesus. Jesus was not likely to have adopted so completely the expectations of the apocalyptists. We may also question whether so individualistic an interpretation of the name Son of Man is in line with

His redemptive mission on behalf of a People of God. The idea frequently put forward that the name was adopted to suggest messianic authority without formally asserting it is quite out of harmony with facts. So far from encouraging suggestions of Messiahship with regard to Himself, Jesus set Himself strongly to discourage if not indeed to suppress them. And if He was opposed to any open assertion of Messiahship, we may be sure He would have been still more opposed to any claim which would identify Him (unless there was recognised to be an adequate spiritual basis for the identification) with the Son of Man of the apocalyptic hope ; for the Son of Man in this sense was a celestial being, while the Messiah, as generally conceived, was raised up from among men. Even if we could picture Jesus as reasoning in His own soul that His present humiliation might be a necessary prelude to His coming in glory as the Son of Man, we have to reckon with the evidence of the Gospels that He used the name, not merely when sharing His thoughts with intimate disciples, but even when He addressed the unbelieving multitude (e.g. Lk. xi. 30). And there is evidence that those who heard Him were mystified by His use of it (e.g. John ix. 35 f., where "the Son of Man" is the correct reading ; xii. 34). It was not by the arrogation of titles to Himself that Jesus addressed His appeal, and His challenge, to men.

There are, as we have seen, some sayings which tell how the Son of Man will come in judgment ; there are others which tell of His present sufferings, violent death, and resurrection. But if further evidence is required that the sayings about judgment do not in themselves provide an adequate key to the other sayings, we may find it in the fact that there is not a single saying in which the present sufferings and the ultimate coming in judgment are linked together as successive stages in the revelation of the Son of Man. In several of the predictions of His Passion Jesus does tell how the shameful death of the Son of Man will not be the end, for it will be followed by His *resurrection*. Why, if the fact of primary importance about the Son of Man is that He is to be the world's Judge,

are there no analogous sayings telling how His rejection and death will be followed by His *coming in judgment*? Or why, by a reversal of the process, is it never asserted that the Son of Man, who is destined to come to judge the world, must first face the world's rejection?<sup>1</sup>

The saying<sup>2</sup> which in Luke xxiv. 26 is put into the mouth of Jesus after the resurrection ("was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer in this way and so enter into His glory?") is a reminder that in emphasising the *Messiahship* of Jesus some of the early Christians were ready to see in the crucifixion a necessary stage through which He must pass towards the accomplishment of His messianic mission; but there is no similar saying in the Gospels with reference to the *Son of Man*, and His return after a violent death to be the world's Judge. We may further note how, in the interpretation of the parable of the Tares (Matt. xiii. 37-41) the Son of Man both sows the good seed and comes with His angels at the end when the tares are collected and burned; and there is no reason why we should say that the name Son of Man is appropriate (because of the reference to judgment) in the latter case, but is only appropriate by implication in the former. So too in Matt. xi. 18 f. a contrast is drawn between the Son of Man who came eating and drinking, and John who did not do so. In this case,<sup>3</sup> where it is plain beyond a doubt that Jesus is alluding to His own earthly ministry,<sup>4</sup> the Son of Man is one who is unmistakably human, and it is a perversion of criticism to explain the name by a hidden reference to a celestial being, destined at some future date to appear in apocalyptic glory.

<sup>1</sup> cf. Héring, *Le Royaume de Dieu et sa Venue*, p. 101. An apparent exception, as Héring notes, is Lk. xvii. 24, 25. But verse 25 has no parallel in Matthew at this point; and the grouping may be due to Luke, who elsewhere (as in xxiv. 26; see above) links together the sufferings and the glory of the *Messiah*. <sup>2</sup> cf. a similar saying in verse 46.

<sup>3</sup> T. W. Manson (*Teaching of Jesus*, p. 217 f.) thinks that here and in some other cases we must allow for a misunderstanding; in these cases Jesus meant merely "a certain man," namely Himself. The explanation, while tenable, is not wholly convincing.

<sup>4</sup> cf. the phrase "a friend of publicans and sinners" in verse 19.

## III. THE SON OF MAN AND GOD'S PURPOSES FOR HUMANITY

What explanation then can we offer why Jesus, sometimes if not always with a clear reference to Himself, should have made so frequent use of the name the Son of Man? We must dismiss the thought that He is *merely* taking over the name of God's expected vicegerent. Names as names meant nothing for Him; and He who refused to allow Himself to be called Messiah was not likely to arrogate to Himself a somewhat similar title—a title moreover which in its apocalyptic sense had come to be even more suggestive of celestial glory than Messiah was. Whatever light, therefore, may be gained from the use of the name in Daniel, Enoch or other sources, our first task must be to explore its religious connotation, and to trace the use which Jesus makes of it to a source in His own religious consciousness. We may expect also to find that His use of it will be in line with fundamental conceptions in the faith of Israel.

Here we may begin by stating the view which has been so challengingly put forward by Professor T. W. Manson in his book on *The Teaching of Jesus* (p. 227). It is that "the Son of Man is, like the Servant of Jehovah, an ideal figure and stands for the manifestation of the Kingdom of God on earth in a people wholly devoted to their heavenly King." According to this view it does not refer primarily or essentially to an individual; it is rather an expression of the idea of a divine People, such as may be seen also in Isaiah's doctrine of the Remnant, in the Second Isaiah's teaching on the Servant of Jehovah, and in the "I" of the Psalms. Jesus' use of the name therefore goes back, not to Enoch, but to Daniel, where it is clear that the Son of Man represents God's elect People, the saints of the Most High. Professor Manson himself raises the inevitable question: "How, then, does it come about that in the Gospels the term 'Son of Man' is so often and so obviously a designation of Jesus Himself?" And his answer is that "the restriction of the denotation of the term is the outcome of the prophetic ministry of Jesus.

His mission is to create the Son of Man, the Kingdom of the saints of the Most High, to realise in Israel the ideal contained in the term. This task is attempted in two ways: first by public appeal to the people through the medium of parable and sermon and by the mission of the disciples: then, when this appeal produced no adequate response, by the consolidation of his own band of followers. Finally, when it becomes apparent that not even the disciples are ready to rise to the demands of the ideal, he stands alone, embodying in his own person the ideal human response to the regal claims of God."

In some respects this interpretation of the Son of Man may be accepted as on essentially right lines—it has the merit of linking up Jesus with His followers, and the dominating idea in Jesus' interpretation of His mission is far more likely to be found in Daniel's truly spiritual conception of "the saints of the Most High" than in the elaborate conventional picture which Enoch gives of an individual (or individualised) figure who is to appear from heaven in apocalyptic splendour. But it undoubtedly raises difficulties. As we have seen, not all of the uses of the phrase "the Son of Man" admit of this interpretation, and Dr. Manson is driven to explain some of these as due to a misunderstanding of the original.<sup>1</sup> Is it likely, we may ask, that Daniel's simile, "one like a son of man," is by itself an adequate explanation of a concept which so thoroughly dominated the outlook and teaching of Jesus? And is it natural that a phrase, which by its very nature has primarily an individual reference,<sup>2</sup> should have been made by Jesus (apparently without explanation) to refer in the first instance to a people, and have only later, and in a derived sense, been made to refer to Himself as the individual and unique representative of that people? Such questions remind us that it is not enough that we should trace Jesus' use of the name back to Daniel. Daniel's vision is in line

<sup>1</sup> *op. cit.* p. 217 f.

<sup>2</sup> Though Daniel's vision refers to a people, he pictures it as like a man, just as the other peoples are like a lion, a bear, etc.

with the prophetic hope that God's righteousness will triumph over all opposing forces, and that His triumph will be seen in the emergence of a perfected people to whose authority all worldly powers shall bow ; and when he likens this people to a " son of man " in violent contrast to the savage beasts, we cannot but see in his language a testimony to Israel's unconquerable faith regarding the destiny which God had marked out for mankind.

In the faith of Israel, as we have already noted,<sup>1</sup> man has a central place in the purposes of God. He is the most precious of all God's creatures ; among them he is marked out for a position of lordship ; and in the main it is through man that God's purposes for His creation are to be advanced. These conceptions, expressed with unsurpassable nobility in Psalm viii, are implicit in all the prophetic teaching. The other side of the picture is of course never forgotten—man's rebellion against God, and his consequent shame, misery and helplessness. But where there is faith in the redemptive power and love of God, such faith is always accompanied by the hope of man's ultimate reinstatement to the condition of blessedness and glory and dominion which God has marked out for him. Then the soul of man will be wholly under the sway of the Spirit of God and enjoy perfect communion with Him ; and God's lost image will be restored. Then, too, man will be reinstated in the position of power which God meant him to have in the universe, and through him God's sovereign sway will be extended throughout all creation.

Thus, while in some quarters the thought of the triumph of God found definite expression in the expectation of a Messiah, in others it would seem to have expressed itself more generally in the expectation of a Man in whom God's purposes for mankind and for the world should be fulfilled. At the heart of such an expectation there is, of course, the group-consciousness which is never absent from Hebrew thinking on such matters—a perfected Man implies a perfected People, whether that People be interpreted primarily in relation to

<sup>1</sup> pp. 33 ff.

Israel or is to be gathered out of humanity as a whole. And in this connection we may recall that the prophetic teaching on the consummation of God's purposes did not necessarily point to a personal Messiah,<sup>1</sup> but it did demand that there should be a People dedicated to the will of God and filled with His Spirit.

Previous to Daniel there is singularly little in Jewish literature that can be cited as definitely anticipating the New Testament doctrine of the Son of Man.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless when the pious Israelite reflected on the destiny of mankind he was not likely to forget that, according to the first of the two creation-stories (Gen. chap. i), man's original state was one of perfect blessedness; that Enoch had walked with God; that many of the patriarchs had been privileged to speak with God face to face and to behold His glory; that the prophets had likewise been privileged to receive the Word of God and to declare it to their fellows; and more particularly that the prophet Ezekiel, confronted with the Presence of the Lord, had been addressed as "son of man."

In Ezekiel there are indeed over eighty instances<sup>3</sup> of the term "son of man" as used by God in addressing the prophet; and the manner of its use is singularly instructive. Thus in the opening vision<sup>4</sup> we see how the prophet, realising his insignificance as a child of man in presence of the glory of the Most High, falls down upon his face; but, being summoned by God to stand upon his feet, he becomes possessed with the Spirit of God, he listens devoutly to what God has to say to

<sup>1</sup> cf. pp. 61 f.

<sup>2</sup> From a study of Gnostic literature and of Mandæan and Manichæan religious texts scholars have in recent years raised the question how far the Jewish and Christian doctrine of the Son of Man is to be explained by reference to a widespread Oriental belief in an archetypal Man (see e.g. Kraening, *Anthropos and Son of Man*, and J. M. Creed's article on "The Heavenly Man" in *Journal of Theological Studies*, January 1925). No real light on our present problem is to be gained from a study of such sources.

<sup>3</sup> The very frequency of this use of the term is in itself an argument for tracing its use by Jesus back to Ezekiel rather than to the one phrase in Daniel vii. 13; and the way in which Ezekiel uses the name provides a still stronger argument.

<sup>4</sup> chap. ii

him, and then he is sent forth to proclaim the divine message to his brethren. Thus his "manhood" is turned by God from weakness into strength, from insignificance into dignity with accompanying responsibility; he becomes a prophet of God, a chosen vessel for the transmission of the divine Word and Spirit. There is moreover this other facet to his manhood, that when he addresses himself to his prophetic mission he is not merely an Israelite speaking to Israel, he is a "son of man" proclaiming how the children of men in every nation, in Babylon, Tyre and Egypt no less than in Israel, are subject to the jurisdiction of the Lord of Hosts. He speaks as one who has been given a message for humanity. 'Israel's birthright and privilege have been forfeited. A man is needed, a child of humanity is burdened with the misery and evil of mankind. Again and again this Old Testament son of man is commanded to "judge" both Israel and its prosperous enemies.'<sup>1</sup>

In both those respects we can see how Ezekiel's conception of himself as "son of man" may have had a special meaning for Jesus. In the discharge of His mission as the Son of Man Jesus speaks and acts with an awesome sense of the powers of judgment and salvation with which God has entrusted Him. He represents in Himself the climax of all God's purposes for man—not merely is His own personal life transfigured by the power of the Spirit of God, but He is one through whom God reveals His purposes both for Israel and for the whole family of mankind. It is in the light of Ezekiel's reminders of the way in which God deals with man—lifting him up from the ground, making known to him His will, filling him with His Spirit, and commissioning him to be His servant for the establishment of His kingdom throughout His whole creation—that we ought to seek to interpret the thoughts of Jesus regarding the Son of Man.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Curtis, *Jesus Christ the Teacher*, p. 140.

<sup>2</sup> The influence of Ezekiel on the mind of Jesus may be seen also in Jesus' teaching on the shepherd and his sheep; see p. 157, note.

## IV. THE MAIN LINES OF JESUS' TEACHING ON THE SON OF MAN

The above study prepares us for an examination of the main lines of Jesus' teaching on the Son of Man. At the basis of it all there lies, we may believe, the Biblical conception of man, together with His own high sense of the distinctive place which belongs to man in God's creation. In all such teaching He is, of course, not thinking of man as he is, a creature of flesh and blood separated from God the Father; He is thinking of man as he ought to be in accordance with the purposes of God, and as he may be when he becomes filled with the divine Spirit. The term "the Son of Man" has always on the lips of Jesus an eschatological reference.

(i) If such was the background of His thinking, it seems obvious that Jesus might conceivably have used on occasion the phrase "the Son of Man" without limiting the reference to Himself; and a more general reference would, of course, be in harmony with His mission as directed towards the creation of a true People of God, i.e. a new order of Humanity. And if there are few clear and unmistakable instances<sup>1</sup> of this more general usage in the Gospels, it would not be difficult to suggest a reason why it should be so. Those who heard Jesus refer in this way to the Son of Man were bound to reflect that the ideal which He had in mind was no doubt being realised in Himself, but it was not being realised in their own lives or in the lives of others. They came, therefore, to interpret all such sayings by reference to Himself, and to Himself alone.

But this restricted reference which the early Church found in these sayings, and which the writers of our Gospels found in them, need not in all cases have been the precise reference which Jesus intended them to have. The clearest example will be seen in Mk. ii. 28, where, following on the dictum that "the sabbath was made for man and not man for the sabbath,"

<sup>1</sup> The Fourth Gospel indicates that Jesus frequently spoke of the Son of Man in this way (e.g. i. 51).

it is further asserted that "the Son of Man is Lord even of the sabbath." Whatever the evangelist may have taken this latter saying to mean, it could scarcely have meant anything else on the lips of Jesus than that Man, who was ordained to be lord over God's creation, was ordained no less to be lord over God's holy day, and ought not to be made subservient to it. There is justification for tracing the same ideal reference in Mk. ii. 10 : if God gives Man power to heal diseases, He gives him power no less to forgive sin, and so to effect healing and deliverance in the spiritual as in the physical sphere.<sup>1</sup> In all such cases we are on wrong lines if we begin by looking for a conscious reference to the apocalyptic Son of Man of Daniel or of Enoch. But if the reference is not apocalyptic, it is nevertheless emphatically eschatological ; Jesus has in mind that in and through a new type of Man God's purposes for mankind are to be fulfilled.

(ii) But if in His public teaching Jesus *may* have used the term Son of Man to suggest generally to His hearers that He had in mind the embodiment of the divine purposes for mankind, the time was to come when, in His private dealings with His disciples, stern account had to be taken of the implications of this teaching. That time apparently came with the confession made by St. Peter in the neighbourhood of Caesarea Philippi.<sup>2</sup> From that time onward, if our sources can be trusted, these four features may be traced in Jesus' teaching to His disciples.

(1) The name "the Son of Man" now occurs frequently ; and both the frequency of its occurrence and the contexts in which it is used suggest that Jesus is seeking to train the disciples to understand more clearly what the phrase connotes. (2) Jesus now uses the name with a clear reference to Himself. A wider reference is indeed not always excluded ;

<sup>1</sup> For a fuller discussion of this saying of Jesus, see pp. 159 ff. These two instances (ii. 10, 28) are the only cases in Mark where Jesus uses the phrase "the Son of Man" prior to St. Peter's confession.

<sup>2</sup> Mt. xvi. 13 ff. ; Mk. viii. 27 ff. ; Lk. ix. 18 ff. ; cf. pp. 149 ff.

immediately after St. Peter's confession Jesus, as the Son of Man, is represented as calling on other men<sup>1</sup> to come after Him, and there are several sayings in which He links His disciples with Himself both in His sufferings and in His triumphs (e.g. Mk. xiii. 34 ff. ; Lk. xxii. 28 ff.). But even so the Leader is distinguished from His followers, and Jesus is Himself the Son of Man in a way that no other individual member of the fellowship is. (3) There is insistent teaching on the present humiliation of the Son of Man, and on the rejection and death which await Him at Jerusalem, though it is also asserted that death will be followed by resurrection. (4) There are many references to the ultimate glory of the Son of Man, and to His coming in Judgment.

(iii) With regard to the incident near Caesarea Philippi, expositors tend to find its central significance in St. Peter's confession of Jesus' *Messiahship*. But it is important to note that the mind of Jesus is dominated rather by the thought of the *Son of Man*. According to the Matthaean version, this is revealed even in the opening question ; for whereas in Mark Jesus asks, " Who do men say that I am ? ", in Matthew the question is, " Who do men say that the Son of Man is ? " Matthew's account clearly implies that St. Peter interprets the name Son of Man as referring to Jesus Himself, a fact which implies in turn that Jesus' previous teaching on the Son of Man had prepared the way for this interpretation. It also indicates that the name Son of Man as used by Jesus did not necessarily convey a claim to Messiahship ; for if it did, then St. Peter's answer would have been pointless. And there seems no good reason to question that in these

<sup>1</sup> In this connection Mk. viii. 36 (" what shall it profit a man ? ") deserves consideration. If with some MSS. we adopt the reading with the definite article, τὸν ἀνθρώπου, Jesus may here have spoken of " the son of man," not of course with definite reference to Himself, but rather with reference to man in his true relationship to God. God has marked out man for lordship in the universe, and ordained the path (viz. subjection to Himself) by which that lordship will be attained. But if, like the first Adam, man chooses the path of self-assertion, he may imagine himself lord of the universe ; but what profit is it if, cut off from God, he himself ceases to live ? cf. pp. 193 f.

respects Matthew represents the mind both of Jesus and of the disciples.

Jesus, according to all our sources, replied to St. Peter's enthusiastic confession of Messiahship by a warning note which was repeated often on the way to Jerusalem : " The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders, and the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again " (Mk. viii. 31, cf. ix. 31, x. 33 f.). But this teaching, be it noted, is not teaching regarding a Suffering Messiah ; it is teaching regarding the inevitable sufferings and rejection of the Son of Man. We need not doubt that such teaching was part of the training given by Jesus to His chosen disciples. Church tradition may have modified in certain unimportant respects (e.g. by the introduction of certain *post eventum* details) the original form in which these warnings were conveyed. But the warnings themselves did not originate in Church tradition ; they came unquestionably from Jesus Himself.

All our accounts assert further that the predictions of Jesus regarding His coming rejection and death were accompanied by the announcement that He would rise on the third day. Many critics have urged that here at least we must reckon with an unhistorical accretion. But we may well hesitate before accepting such a contention. Doubts, it is true, may be raised regarding the precise significance of the terms used in the prediction. There are undoubtedly grounds for interpreting the phrase " on the third day " as implying no more than an undefined interval, like our modern phrase " in due time." And by the reference to " rising," which the disciples came to interpret as emergence from the tomb, Jesus may rather have meant a triumphant reversal of the fate which He saw awaiting Him at Jerusalem. So interpreted, the various announcements reveal Jesus as advancing to Jerusalem with a confidence which nothing that may happen on earth can disturb. Rejection and a shameful death await Him, and He will not seek to evade them ; but rejection and death are merely the God-appointed prelude to ultimate triumph.

And both the rejection and the triumph are marked out for Him by God, not because God has anointed Him to be the Messiah, but because here and now He is resolutely faithful to the God-ordained standards of the Son of Man.

(iv) It is related in the Synoptic Gospels that before He set out to go to Jerusalem Jesus went up to a mountain, taking with Him three chosen disciples ; and there He was "transfigured" before them. This is not history in the ordinary sense of the term ; and the precise significance of the story is not easily grasped. It contains no recorded word of Jesus ; and there is no explicit reference in it to the Son of Man. But the narrative follows immediately on Jesus' first public announcement of the coming sufferings, death and resurrection of the Son of Man, and the first thing we are told after the episode is over is that the disciples are enjoined to keep silent about what they have seen "until the Son of Man rise from the dead." There is therefore good reason for thinking that, whatever else the story may be meant to bring out, it implies the transfiguration of the Son of Man. Though the path that is opening out before Him is one of humiliation and rejection, the glory of God envelops Him and is to go with Him all the way. The transfiguration, therefore, is an earnest here on earth of that fuller glory which will be His when He is raised from the dead and exalted to God's right hand. Meanwhile, like Ezekiel and all the other prophets of Israel, and more especially (as the story itself brings clearly before us) like the two chief representatives of prophecy in ancient Israel, viz. Moses and Elijah, the Son of Man has a prophetic mission to discharge, a word of God to declare ; and God's command sounds forth : "this is My son, the beloved ; hear ye Him."

(v) Lastly we may note that, though in speaking of the Son of Man Jesus would be regarded by those who heard Him as referring to an individual figure, viz. to Himself, nevertheless His language does not exclude the possibility that

others may share with Him in the destiny of the Son of Man.<sup>1</sup> The fate which He sees awaiting Him is a fate in which He knows that they too may be involved—indeed it is inevitable that in some degree they will be involved in it if they are faithful. That fate indeed extends not merely to the inner band of disciples, but to any<sup>2</sup> who are willing to accept the obligations of discipleship. It is not out of the question that at this stage in the ministry Jesus did believe that a band of loyal and devoted disciples might endure with Him to the end, sharing first in His trials and then in His triumphs, and that in all that He says here of the Son of Man He is thinking of Himself as the centre of such a Fellowship. If this corporate reference does run through the various sayings in which He predicts the Passion of the Son of Man, it will add significance to the interpretation which we have proposed for the prediction of His rising “after three days.” It may be held that by that confident proclamation Jesus is not thinking solely or even mainly how, having been put to death on the cross, He Himself will after a very brief interval rise from the dead, without waiting for the general resurrection “at the last day.” We are to think of Him rather as predicting a victorious consummation to His life and mission; and the victory which He is to achieve will be shared by that new “brotherhood of man” which He will bring into being—a brotherhood which will indeed, in union with Him who is its Lord, have to take to itself the sorrow and sin of all mankind, but which will also, in its witness for God in the world, attain in the end to supremacy and triumph. In support of this conception we may appeal further to one of the words of Jesus in the talk arising out of St. Peter’s confession :

“Whosoever shall be ashamed of *me and mine*<sup>3</sup> in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the

<sup>1</sup> see also p. 169; and cf. T. W. Manson, *The Teaching of Jesus*, p. 231.

<sup>2</sup> We may note that the call in Mk. viii. 34 is addressed to the crowd assembled along with the disciples.

<sup>3</sup> The Authorised Version, following the great majority of MSS., has “me and my words.” But there is reason to believe that “words” represents an addition to the original text.

Son of Man be ashamed when He cometh in the glory of the Father with the holy angels" (Mk. viii. 38).

Jesus associates His followers with Himself as forming a fellowship; and in some undefined way the sufferings which they endure now are related to the judgment exercised by the Son of Man.

(vi) The teaching of Jesus regarding the Son of Man comes to its most emphatic expression in what He says regarding (i) His sacrificial death, and (ii) the spiritual authority which He is called to exercise here and hereafter. These two themes are of so outstanding importance in any study of the ministry and message of Jesus that we reserve them for treatment in separate chapters. It is sufficient at this point to say that it was not as the Messiah, but as the Son of Man, that Jesus offered up His life on behalf of His brethren, and it was not as the Messiah, but as the Son of Man, that He regarded Himself as commissioned to exercise lordship and judgment. It is clear that any exposition of the name "the Son of Man" on the lips of Jesus must be tested by its adequacy to explain the frequent and emphatic references to His Passion and to the authority which belongs to Him as the world's Judge. But it remains no less true that the references to His sufferings and to the glory that arises from them do not provide the initial explanation for the adoption of the name "the Son of Man," and that the real reason for the adoption of such a name lies in the conviction which Jesus had regarding God's purposes for man and the part which He Himself had to perform in the working out of these purposes.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE SACRIFICE OF THE SON OF MAN

**T**HE mission of Jesus culminated in a shameful death outside the walls of Jerusalem. And for those whose interest is merely, as they say, in "historical facts," the death of Jesus seems to raise no difficult problems of explanation. Such a fate, they tell us, was clearly inevitable when one with His zealous religious temper came into serious conflict with the religious bigotry and the narrow nationalism of His fellow-countrymen. We need not stay here to recall how such an explanation, if regarded as complete in itself, is hopelessly out of relation to the interpretations of His death which so soon became current among His devoted followers. Our concern in this chapter is rather to show that some more adequate explanation is demanded by the authenticated facts of His life story.

#### I. WHY DID JESUS LAY DOWN HIS LIFE ?

In our search for an explanation of the death of Jesus Scripture provides us with certain valuable clues to which full justice is not always given.

(i) In the first place, the death of Jesus is not to be dissociated from His life. This fact, so obvious to the historian, has sometimes been ignored in theological reconstructions, as it is ignored too often in certain types of popular preaching, with the result that the death of Jesus has been represented as a mere "transaction" rather than as the inevitable culmination of a certain kind of life. Whatever were the motives which led Jesus to His death, they

were the same motives which inspired Him throughout His ministry.

(ii) Secondly, these motives had their roots in Jesus' communion with God. The historian is clearly in error if he thinks that the death of Jesus is adequately explained by reference to the purely historical setting of His life story. Jesus knew that death probably awaited Him if He went to Jerusalem. But He need not have gone there if He had cared to stay away. As it was, He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem, believing that it was His Father's will that He should not "save" His life, but rather "lose" it. We see this very notably if we analyse the sense of compulsion under which He advanced towards the Holy City. "The Son of Man *must* suffer many things." Such is the teaching which He gives to His chosen disciples at the very moment when, in the far northern regions near Caesarea Philippi, He first turns His face towards Jerusalem; and the same thought comes to frequent and emphatic expression in His talks with them from that day right on to the end.

Why "must" He go to Jerusalem? And what made Him so certain that He must lay down His life? In the religious history and thought of Israel there were undoubtedly parallels pointing in that direction, notably the picture of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah liii. But if the compulsion that drove Him to His death did not arise from the pressure of external circumstances, neither was it derived, primarily at least, from His reading of Scripture or from a following of precedents. Jesus was never a mere player of a fore-ordained role. Had Scripture been His primary guide, there was much in Scripture that might have led Him into a very different path from that which He was now to follow. In following out that path He was doubtless fortified by His reading of Scripture and by the experience of the saints in Israel; but the compulsion which urged Him forward had its springs in His own religious instincts, or (in more scriptural language) in His knowledge of and devotion to the Father's

will. Standing before God as the Son of Man He saw with unerring spiritual insight that He could only be true to Himself and true to God if He followed the path of service and sacrifice, and followed it to the end.

(iii) But if in His death, as in His life, Jesus identified Himself fully with the will of His Father in Heaven, He identified Himself likewise with the needs of His brethren of mankind. Indeed it was only in this way, He saw, that fulfilment of the Father's will was possible for Him. There is no hope of our understanding the death of Jesus fully if we think of Him in a severely individual aspect—whether as hero, saint, or martyr—solely concerned to steer His own rudder true, and to work out His personal destiny. Much may be gained, as we have urged in the preceding paragraph, by a study of the personal relations of Jesus with God the Father. But it is also essential to see that His whole ministry, His life as well as His death, was directed towards bringing men home to the Father, “gathering” them (to use His own metaphor) as a hen gathers her chickens or a shepherd his sheep. Matthew Arnold<sup>1</sup> has written regarding his father :

But thou would'st not *alone*  
 Be saved, my father! *alone*  
 Conquer and come to thy goal,  
 Leaving the rest in the wild.  
 We were weary, and we  
 Fearful, and we, in our march,  
 Fain to drop down and to die.  
 Still thou turnedst, and still  
 Beckonedst the trembler, and still  
 Gavest the weary thy hand!

. . . . .  
 Therefore to thee it was given  
 Many to save with thyself;  
 And, at the end of thy day,  
 O faithful shepherd! to come,  
 Bringing thy sheep in thy hand.

Such words could be applied to a follower of the Good Shep-

<sup>1</sup> *Rugby Chapel.*

herd only because they were true in the first instance of the Good Shepherd Himself. And the Good Shepherd of Scripture does something more than assist the trembler and the weary. When one of His sheep is lost He goes in search of it, not counting life itself too great a price to pay for its recovery. In our approach to the study of the death of Jesus we shall do well to begin by thinking of Him, not as the Messiah destined to suffer, but as the Shepherd ready to lay down His life for the sheep.<sup>1</sup>

While recognising unhesitatingly the path which was marked out for Him to travel, Jesus must have gone on to ask Himself what significance attached to His sufferings, rejection and death in the counsels of God the Father. Yet few of His sayings,<sup>2</sup> at least in the Synoptic Gospels, provide a clear interpretation of the meaning of His Passion. It is as if Jesus was content to leave His followers to discover in religious experience what was the place which His Passion had in the scheme of human life and what benefits He had procured for them by dying. But there are two sayings in which He goes some distance towards offering an explanation. In Mk. x. 45 He says: "Even the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many." And there is the saying (variously reported) in the narratives of the Last Supper regarding "the blood of the new covenant which is shed for many." Despite attempts which have been made to empty these two sayings of their obvious significance, we need not hesitate to draw from them the conclusion which is suggested by the Gospel

<sup>1</sup> Corresponding to the allegory of the Good Shepherd in John x, there are in the Synoptics the references to the sheep without a shepherd (Mk. vi. 34), to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Mt. xv. 24), to lifting a sheep out of a pit (Mt. xii. 11), and to the "little flock" (Lk. xii. 32); the parable of the Shepherd and the Lost Sheep in Lk. xv. 3 ff.; and the appeal of Jesus on the night of the betrayal to the words of Zech. xiii. 7, "I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered" (Mk. xiv. 27). We may trace here the influence of Ezekiel, chap. xxxiv.; cf. p. 145 f.

<sup>2</sup> For a valuable study of Jesus' sayings regarding His Passion see Vincent Taylor, *Jesus and His Sacrifice*, pp. 79 ff.

story as a whole, viz. that Jesus attached a sacrificial significance to His death. And it is worth noting that in both of them Jesus claims to give His life, not in defence of principles, but on behalf of men.

## II. "THAT HE MIGHT BRING US TO GOD"

The mission of Jesus, as we have seen, was to bring men to God,<sup>1</sup> to lead them into living communion with God the Father, and to get them to adjust their lives to the demands of His sovereign will. And by His preaching and His teaching, by His works of power and by the influence of His daily life, He had already accomplished much. Many had begun to see the way of life opening out before them again and to walk in it. Hope took the place of despair, confidence the place of fear; and light arose in the darkness for the godly. As Jesus Himself boldly declared:

"The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them" (Matt. xi. 5).

So great was the effect of His ministry that His followers were even ready to hail Him as the heaven-sent Messiah. But Jesus, who cared for His fellow-men as no other has ever cared for them, and who dedicated His life as no other has ever done to raising His brethren to the height of their divine calling, had none of those illusions about human nature which so often warp the vision and foil the hopes of the mere idealist. "He knew what was in man."<sup>2</sup> Like the best spirits in Israel He knew that over against the righteousness of God there stands the sinfulness of man. Eternal as were the promises of God, they were made to a people whose own rebelliousness rendered them incapable of inheriting them. Thus the sin of man constitutes a chasm between man and God. And there could be no true reconciliation between man and God until that chasm was

<sup>1</sup> So His mission is described, with special reference to His death, in 1 Pet. iii. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Jn. ii. 25

bridged or removed. Here, then, was the mission to which Jesus knew He was called as Son of God and Son of Man. In the Father's name He would go in search of the lost sons and bring them home.

III. “**THY SINS ARE FORGIVEN THEE**”

How then did Jesus set about His task? As a prelude to answering this question we may consider the episode related in Mark ii. 1 ff., where Jesus, confronted with a case of paralysis, turns to the victim with the unexpected and challenging words: “Son, thy sins are forgiven thee.” The narrative is full of difficulties which are by no means easy to solve, and not all of these concern us here. But for our present enquiry there is no more instructive and illuminating passage in the Gospels, partly because of the uncompromising boldness with which Jesus makes His declaration of forgiveness, and partly because we can see in it the beginnings of that steadily rising tide of opposition which was soon to carry Him to His death (cf. Mk. iii. 6).

A paralytic had been brought to Jesus in circumstances which revealed the most eager determination on the part of the man or his friends to secure that he should be healed. A crowd blocked the approach to the doorway; accordingly four friends carried the sufferer up to the housetop and lowered him through a hole which they made in the roof. Jesus was profoundly impressed by this exhibition of what is called “their faith.” Faith in what, we may ask, or in whom? If this question had been addressed to the men themselves, we can imagine them replying, in words analogous to those of the leper in the story which immediately precedes this in Mark:<sup>1</sup> “We believe that you have the power to help our friend, and we trust that you will be willing to exercise it.” If mixed up with their “faith” there was also a good deal that was credulous and unspiritual, Jesus preferred to ignore that fact, just as He did in the case of the centurion of whom

<sup>1</sup> i. 40 ff.

He said : " I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel " (Mt. viii. 10). It was His way to go straight for the wheat and to ignore the chaff. And He did not object that their faith in Him was primarily faith in a wonder-worker, that their thoughts seemed to be centred on what He, the prophet of Nazareth, could do, rather than on what God in His mercy *might cause to be done*. Jesus was apparently quite happy in the assurance that faith of the first kind could be made to lead on to faith of the second. And so, while their unspoken request was that He might heal their friend's physical infirmity, He addressed the sufferer with the assurance of the forgiveness of his sins.

It was certainly a bold pronouncement, all the more so because at the moment of utterance it must have appeared so completely irrelevant. Commentators have sought to explain away the apparent irrelevance by suggesting that Jesus, with that gift of spiritual insight which enabled Him so often to probe a human problem to its depths, saw in this case how the man's paralysis was the result of evil living. But it is undesirable to read more into the narrative than the words justify ; and, plausible as the suggestion may be, it is scarcely necessary. It is entirely in line with the teaching of Jesus that men should learn to " covet earnestly the best gifts " ; and, instead of turning the men away because they were thinking merely of a physical cure, He decided to bring them face to face with the redemptive power of Him who forgives men's iniquities as well as heals their diseases, and to lead them to see that even for the healing of the body a primary necessity may be that the wounds of the soul should be healed.

We miss the whole significance of the story if we do not see that Jesus is here in the most challenging of moods. The challenge would have been there even if the episode had taken place in secret, and there had been no one to hear the declaration of forgiveness but the sufferer himself in his misery. But in this case the challenge is intensified because of the scribes who are seated around, good men who believe (as

Jesus does) in God, but for whom, alas, God is a God who is far away, and not “a God at hand.”<sup>1</sup> Thus the episode becomes for Jesus a test case, as significant a test as that of Elijah on Mount Carmel; and the question at issue is, not whether Jesus might be able to heal this man’s body (that, after all, is a minor matter, something which, as Jesus sees it, is comparatively “easy”), but whether men who profess to believe in God can be made to realise that the love which God has for His children is a love which breaks every barrier down.

And so, when we read that Jesus said, “Thy sins are forgiven thee,” let us be careful that we do not merely skim the surface and leave the deeper meaning of His words unexplored. It is sometimes maintained that the words were merely declaratory, that seeing on the man’s face the lack of inward peace Jesus took it upon Himself to assure him that God is a God of forgiveness. It should not be necessary to point out that, had this been all, the scribes could have had no objection to offer. It is plain that Jesus is not merely *saying* something in the name of God; He is *acting* in God’s name. He is imparting forgiveness; He is making forgiveness a reality. Not that for a moment He would have denied the contention of His ecclesiastical critics that God, and God only, can forgive sins. Jesus was even more insistent than they were that in such a matter as forgiveness the initiative lies solely and wholly with God. But how is God to accomplish this work of forgiveness, meeting the need of man at the point where the burden of life presses on him most severely? And it is just because Jesus—acting, as He Himself says, as the Son of Man (Mk. ii. 10)—dared to step in at this very point, accomplishing for the sinner the deliverance which God wishes to be accomplished for him, that the scribes (quite consistently with their general conception of the relation between God and man) took violent umbrage, seeing in His action a claim to do what only God can do, and accused Him therefore of blasphemy.

In the story of the paralytic, therefore, we have a concrete

<sup>1</sup> Jer. xxiii. 23

illustration of the way in which Jesus was able to "bring men to God." More particularly, it helps us to see how, when the God into whose presence men are brought is such a God as Jesus has revealed Him to be, the God whom His followers learned to call "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," they inevitably recognise their own sinfulness and their need of forgiveness; but deeper even than the recognition of their own need is their experience of the redeeming mercy of God who wishes to bring about their reconciliation with Himself.

From this preamble we turn afresh to consider more precisely how it is that Jesus does accomplish this work of reconciliation.

#### IV. THE WAY OF RECONCILIATION

(i) He differed profoundly from the religious leaders of His day with regard to the first step that must be taken towards the bridging of the chasm. It was generally accepted in religious circles that the first step must be taken by the sinner, whose penitence (expressed perhaps through some sacrificial act) would be rewarded by the divine forgiveness. To Jesus' clear spiritual vision it was plain that God's redemptive love might manifest itself even in the evoking of penitence, that God Himself was suffering through the sin of man, and that therefore God was not merely waiting to be gracious, but was actively seeking to draw men to Himself, and to prepare them to receive the blessings which He was eager to bestow. It was also plain to Jesus that, if this redemptive love of God was to manifest itself to man, it must manifest itself *through man*. And what God could not do through men in general, who had not yet come to know Him truly or to order their lives in accordance with His Spirit, He could do through the Son of Man in whom all His purposes for man were now reaching their consummation. The Son of Man had come to seek and to save that which was lost (Lk. xix. 10). One of the most revolutionary effects of Jesus' earthly ministry was that He enabled men to grasp

in the depths of their religious consciousness what the attitude of God to sinners really is. As they saw how truly *Jesus* loved them despite the fact that they were sinners, they came to realise that *God the Father* loved them and had sent *Jesus* to accomplish their recovery. "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him" (1 John iv. 9). There is something here which we would do well to keep in mind. Following on a war, we discuss the question of the forgiveness of enemies.

(ii) One result of this was that, even in His lifetime, *Jesus* led men to a new conception of divine forgiveness, and to a new experience of it. It was not that, as a result of His teaching regarding the character and demands of God, they were filled with an urgent desire to amend their lives and so earn forgiveness; it was rather that He brought them face to face with a God whose whole purposes were redemptive, and in whose presence they knew at once that they were forgiven. He led them to see that when those who have wandered return to the Father, it cannot be the Father's desire to keep them at a distance till condemnation has been passed and punishment exacted. Rather God is so full of joy at their return that at once He takes their sins and puts them behind His back. "Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him" (Lk. xv. 22). So too everything that *Jesus* says about the Kingdom of God as a present reality implies that those who come under its sway experience as their initial blessing the assurance that the past is blotted out and a new life has begun.

And so, quite apart from any theological interpretation we may put upon His person, we see here one of the things which *Jesus* did succeed in doing, even in His lifetime, for those who came deeply under His influence. He did more than preach to men the possibility of forgiveness; He led them into an experience of it. When He proclaimed unconditionally to the paralytic "thy sins are forgiven thee," He clearly

meant to send the afflicted man away with the assurance that God Himself had drawn near to visit and redeem him. The same influence may be seen in many other stories of His human contacts, as e.g. in the case of Zacchæus, to whose house salvation came even though he was a recognised "sinner," or of the woman taken in adultery, who was sent away to begin life afresh. And this experience of forgiveness Jesus mediated to men not as Messiah (it was no part of the mission of the traditional Messiah to forgive sins), but rather as the Son of Man, who, in virtue of His perfect spiritual communion with His Father in Heaven, had been sent in quest of His "lost" brethren—seeking to "bear" their sins as well as their sorrows, and by "bearing" them to take them away.

(iii) It was this essentially redemptive method of dealing with sinful men that, more than anything else, led Jesus to the cross. The very attractiveness of His method is apt to blind us to its revolutionary character. It was a direct challenge to the legal system of the Pharisees; for by bringing the divine love to bear directly on human need it broke for ever the law of ordinances—enabling men (in St. Paul's striking phrase) to die to law that they might live to God (Gal. ii. 19). It was a direct challenge to the organised system of sacrificial worship; for what other response could men make to such love save to love Him who first loved them and to give their lives to His service? Further, the very authority with which Jesus spoke and acted seemed to His critics nothing short of blasphemous. Jesus Himself was fully conscious of the challenge; and in the spirit of the Lion of Judah He pressed it to the utmost limits, never doubting the ultimate issue. "Is it easier to say, Thy sins are forgiven thee, or to say, Take up thy bed and walk?" "Destroy this temple, and in three days I shall raise it again." When finally He gave His life on the cross, He did so in unswerving loyalty to the needs of sinful men. And if there were some in Israel who had already begun to see the redemptive love of God mirrored in the human life of Jesus, there soon were many

who saw it mirrored even more impressively in His death. "God commendeth His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Rom. v. 8).

#### V. THE DEATH OF JESUS A SACRIFICE

Christians have always viewed the death of Jesus as a sacrifice; and there is every reason to think that Jesus Himself did so too. In this connection, however, it is important to recall what sacrifice in Scripture really implies. The Biblical doctrine of sacrifice is grounded in the Biblical doctrine of God. In the noblest expressions of Israel's religion, therefore, sacrifice is never an offering made in fear to an offended Deity whose threatened wrath it is hoped thereby to avert; it is a glad response on man's part to a God whose mercy is in the heavens and whose loving-kindness is over all His works.

In its simplest form sacrifice in Scripture is eucharistic in character—an expression of man's gratitude to God for His goodness. As such the gift which man brings in sacrifice is merely a token-offering by which he acknowledges his utter dependence on the grace of God. The fiftieth Psalm reminds us how the mighty God, who "calls to the heavens from above and to the earth, that He may judge His people," needs nothing that men may bring to Him—"for the world is Mine, and the fullness thereof; every beast of the forest is Mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills." What such a God wants from men is the sacrifice of thanksgiving, the offering of loving hearts and dedicated spirits.

The whole significance of sacrifice in Scripture becomes immensely deepened when, in his approach to God, man recognises that he is a sinner, and that his first need is for forgiveness. Even here, however, the fundamental conception of sacrifice remains the same; it is a gift which man offers as an expression of his desire for fellowship with God. If that fellowship has been broken, the gift is still offered in contrition and trust as an expression of man's desire for

reconciliation. If that desire for reconciliation is deep and sincere, some means must be found for its expression, so that in organised religion the bringing of some concrete and visible gift is not without significance. Here, however, we encounter some of the dangers inherent in the sacrificial system. The primary danger is that, instead of approaching in penitence to a gracious and redeeming God, the worshipper should erroneously imagine that God is angry and demands a sacrifice for His appeasement; the other danger (to which indeed all organised religion is exposed) is that the material and visible offering should come to be regarded as efficacious in itself apart from the worshipper's spiritual attitude of which it is the symbol.

In the organised religion of His day, as regards both the observance of the Law and the worship of the Temple, Jesus saw much that in His eyes was a perversion of true religion. It was like the barren fig-tree, all appearance and no life. And He set Himself to overthrow it and to erect in its place something that would endure and be well-pleasing in His Father's sight. It would, however, be erroneous to conclude from this that He was wholly indifferent to those spiritual values which found expression both in the Law and in the Cultus, and which led so many devout souls in Israel to find joy in the observances of their religion.<sup>1</sup> He knew how real a place the sacrificial system had for long held, and continued to hold, in the religious life of His people; and with it, as with the Law, His concern was not to destroy, but to fulfil. He would dig down till He came to the spiritual foundations, and on these He would build afresh.

Jesus revealed both by His life and by His teaching that the true approach of man to God must always be sacrificial in character. In the presence of Him who is known as King and Father man can only fulfil his destiny in complete dependence on God's fatherly mercy and complete dedication to His sovereign will. Thus the life of Jesus Himself was from

<sup>1</sup> For a balanced examination of this question see Vincent Taylor, *Jesus and His Sacrifice*, pp. 67 ff.

first to last a sacrifice—He had no other object or desire but to do the will of His Father, and His whole being was dedicated to God in glad oblation. And at Calvary He carried the sacrifice to its utmost limit when, in the spirit of Jehovah's faithful servant (Is. liii. 12), He "poured out His soul unto death."

#### VI. JESUS DIES FOR HIS BRETHREN

The sacrifice which Jesus offered to God was not merely individual in character. He knew how self-indulgence and self-assertion had from the first<sup>1</sup> led mankind away from God and from the fulfilment of human destiny; and the life of perfect obedience which He now lived before God was an offering made in His representative capacity as the Son of Man, an offering in which He wished His brethren of mankind to share, even though as yet they were not fully able to make such an offering themselves. In His life and in His death we may see Jesus doing for His fellow-men something which they are unable to do for themselves, viz. to bring about reconciliation with God. Through the dense jungle of sorrow and suffering, sin and death, by which men are separated from the Father, He carves out for them a path by which they may follow; and when in His advance He lays down life itself, then those who follow Him and share His faith recognise that He has died, "a just man for unjust men, that He might bring us home to God." (1 Pet. iii. 18).

In facing the cross Jesus undoubtedly believed that His death was necessitated by the separation of His brethren from God; and He believed too that, by dying on their behalf, He would effect their reconciliation. Behind these beliefs we must learn to trace the most intense moral realism on His part. There is nothing here of that "transaction" idea which is associated in so many minds with the Christian doctrine of the Atonement. Indeed the term "Atonement" has now for so many people lost its original significance of "At-one-ment" that we would do well to begin rather by interpreting the death of Jesus in terms of Reconciliation. Yet even so

<sup>1</sup> cf. the narrative in Gen. iii.

a strong moral sense will lead us to recognise that His death has an atoning value for those on whose behalf He died. We see in daily life how a man will sometimes sacrifice himself to accomplish the deliverance of his fellows, and how those who owe their life to him live henceforth on a new plane of existence, as men whose lives are not their own, for they have been "bought with a price."

Israel with its strong community-spirit abundantly recognised this spiritual truth, and was led to believe that in the Providence of God the sufferings of the righteous might contribute to the salvation of sinners. The idea of human solidarity comes to frequent expression in Rabbinical teaching. "All the classes are to form a single bundle, and the one are to atone for the other. Why has God created the sinner and the righteous? That the one should atone for the other."<sup>1</sup> A notable example was found in the "holy war" against Antiochus, when the priest Eleazar and his seven sons, "having sanctified themselves for God's sake," laid down their lives, with the result that "through them the enemy had no more power over our people, and the tyrant suffered punishment, and our country was purified, they having as it were become a ransom for our nation's sin; and through the blood of these righteous men and the propitiation of their death the divine Providence delivered Israel that before was evil entreated."<sup>2</sup> Viewing life from a more spiritual angle Isaiah had pictured the Servant of Jehovah as bearing the iniquities of his brethren. Then came Jesus, combining with His own unique knowledge of God an overwhelming sense of the needs of His brethren of mankind. And daring to believe as He did that He was commissioned to effect man's reconciliation with God, He saw how the Son

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Montefiore in Jackson and Lake, *The Beginnings of Christianity*, vol. i, p. 57.

<sup>2</sup> 4 Macc. xvii. 20 ff. We may note the significance attached to this episode in the *Assumption of Moses* (ch. ix), a book possibly dating from the time of Jesus' ministry, in which the need is emphasised for an essentially spiritual religion in opposition to the secularising tendencies of the Pharisees of that day.

of Man must give His life as a ransom for many, and inaugurate by His blood a new covenant<sup>1</sup> between God and man.

Jesus nevertheless met His death alone. This is significant. All His ministry had been directed towards establishing fellowship with His brethren, and lifting them up to share His own life of perfect communion with God the Father. Had it ever, we may ask, been part of His hope that a band of devoted followers might identify themselves with Him in His crusade, becoming so thoroughly one with Him in spirit that they would even share in the sufferings and death which He saw awaiting Him? The question<sup>2</sup> is worth asking, however sure we may be that it cannot receive an affirmative answer. It is true that, at the beginning of the journey that led to Jerusalem, Jesus summoned His disciples to take up their cross if they meant truly to follow Him; and before the end there were conversations with St. Peter and with St. James and St. John which express a readiness on their part to share His fate. Nevertheless the Gospels never for a moment obliterate the distinction between Master and disciples, between the Shepherd and the sheep, between the Son who has direct personal knowledge of the Father and those others whose knowledge of the Father comes to them through the Son.<sup>3</sup>

Jesus Himself fully recognised the distinction. He certainly recognised it at the Last Supper—the occasion on which His fellowship with His disciples received its noblest expression—when He declared plainly that “*my blood*” is being shed “*for you.*” And the disciples had always fully recognised it. Even if they had gone to their death, as some of them were to do at a later date, along with their Master, this would not have changed their relation to Him as His disciples. Jesus had laid in their hearts a solid foundation for that life of Sonship to which He had called them; but though they had come to a new knowledge of God the Father, they had

<sup>1</sup> For this interpretation of His sacrifice, see p. 232

<sup>2</sup> cf. pp. 151 f.; and see T. W. Manson, *The Teaching of Jesus*, p. 231 f.

<sup>3</sup> Mt. xi. 27; Lk. x. 22

not yet learned to live always in His presence. Even while dissociating themselves from the "wicked men" (Acts ii. 23) who had caused their Master's death, they were ready to realise that they were among the sinners on whose behalf He had died. There was not one of them, we may be sure, who would not have echoed the words of St. Paul: "He loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Gal. ii. 20).

The Gospel narratives make it abundantly clear that it was not as the Messiah but as the Son of Man that Jesus went to His death. "The Son of Man must suffer many things." "The Son of Man came . . . to give His life a ransom for many." "The Son of Man goeth as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed." By His death Jesus was to accomplish a deliverance so glorious that it might be described as messianic; but in opposition to current messianic conceptions He saw clearly that His work must not be on behalf of Israel merely, but rather on behalf of humanity, and that it must be accomplished, not by the "activist" methods so often associated with the work of the Messiah, but by endurance, suffering and sacrifice. Now the prophets in Israel had not taught that God's *Messiah* should accomplish His mission through suffering. They had, however, taught that suffering might be the lot of God's servants, both individually and as a community, and that by suffering rightly borne they might glorify God on earth, advance His heavenly purposes, and even do something to expiate the sins of their brethren. And to the mind and conscience of Jesus it was clear that, if a dividing line was to be drawn between God's servants who suffer on earth and the Messiah who should come in glory, His choice must be to take His stand with the suffering servants. It might indeed be God's will for Him that He was to be God's Messiah, for the exercise of Kingship and Judgment; but here and now He was called to act in the fullest sense as God's Servant and God's Son. And only if He was faithful to that primary mission, and faithful even unto death, could there be any question of fulfilling the other mission of Messiahship.

The question may be asked: where was God when the powers of this world drove Jesus to a Cross? And what answer can we give but that God was present in Jesus. In the words of St. Paul,<sup>1</sup> "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." He was not, as the cynic might suggest, far removed from the scene of this dire human tragedy. Rather He was at the heart of it, in the sinless Son of Man who thus patiently, and with perfect confidence in the ultimate issue, took on Himself the consequences of the sins of His brethren, identifying Himself wholly with them in their need as sinners. In a measure God is always present where man, even sinful man, lives and acts in a spirit of faith and hope and love—for such a spirit in man implies the operation of the Spirit of God. How much more was He present when He, the Son of Man in whom all the divine purposes for mankind came to expression, offered up His life, "the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God."<sup>2</sup> And if, while He identifies Himself with us, we likewise identify ourselves with Him, we can see how God who has no sins to impute to Him has none to impute to us. "He Himself bore our sins in His own body on the gibbet, that having been loosed from our sins we might live unto righteousness."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. v. 19

<sup>2</sup> 1 Pet. iii. 18

<sup>3</sup> 1 Pet. ii. 24

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE TRIUMPH OF THE SON OF MAN

**J**ESUS went to His death with the sublime conviction that for Him rejection and death were inseparable from victory. In the last chapter we have seen how He realised that there could be no victory apart from the Cross—the Son of Man must suffer, and suffer up to the utmost limit. Now we turn to consider the obverse side of this conviction. In treading the path of the suffering Son of Man Jesus never wavered in His assurance that the end was full and final victory—not merely victory for Himself, but victory for all who were spiritually at one with Him, and victory also for God in the age long conflict which He wages for the soul of humanity and for the final establishment of His fatherly Rule.

#### I. RESURRECTION, EXALTATION, AND COMING IN POWER

This confidence of victory finds expression in the Gospels in three different types of saying.

(1) There are the sayings referring to the resurrection which is to follow rejection and death. Of these Mark viii. 31 is typical: "The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and of the chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again." There is no good reason to doubt that the words about His "rising" are as integral a part of these predictions as are the references to suffering, rejection and shameful death. There remains, however, the question<sup>1</sup> what precisely Jesus meant by resurrection.

(2) There are numerous sayings of a definitely eschato-

<sup>1</sup> cf. p. 178

logical character which in the main connect the Son of Man with the exercise of Judgment, e.g. "Ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh" (Mt. xxv. 18). We have already given general consideration to these sayings under section (a) on page 138; and our conclusion there was that, vitally important as these sayings are for an understanding of the outlook of Jesus, they are not adequately explained by saying that Jesus took over a traditional Jewish conception which associated the Son of Man with Judgment. We have therefore yet to ask why Jesus was so certain that, as Son of Man, He was called to be the world's Judge. In most of the sayings of this group there is a clear reference, implied where it is not definitely stated, to the "coming" of the Son of Man, e.g. "They shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Mt. xxiv. 30).

(3) Over against those sayings of group (2) where the Son of Man is represented as "coming," it is desirable for purposes of analysis to distinguish certain other sayings where the reference is not to a Coming but to an Enthronement and to the exercise of Dominion. The most notable of these is the bold declaration to the high priest which in the Lucan form reads: "From henceforth the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the Power of God" (Lk. xxii. 69).

The question naturally arises whether these three classes of sayings, dealing with the Rising again, the Enthronement, and the Coming (*Parousia*) of the Son of Man, represent in the mind of Jesus three different strands of thought which require to be kept separate. The early Christians in the expression of their faith clearly operated with a three-fold scheme of Resurrection, Ascension and *Parousia*. But did Jesus Himself look forward to His faith being fulfilled in such a chronological sequence? In raising this question we need not doubt that the scheme of early Christian expectations

drew support from some of the remembered sayings of Jesus, from a general appreciation of His message and mission, and also from certain happenings and experiences which believers accepted as witnessing to His Resurrection and Exaltation. But we have also to recognise that the spiritual hopes and convictions which Jesus quickened in the souls of His earliest followers were poured into temporary moulds of eschatological thought and expression which were part of their Jewish inheritance. And all that we have learned in our present study regarding the outlook of Jesus on the future leads us to believe that it was dominated by purely spiritual conceptions regarding the ultimate triumph of God in and through the life of the Son of Man, and not by a detailed realisation of the channels and events by which that triumph would receive demonstration.

(i) In this connection we may recall that even the scheme of early Christian expectation was not by any means so rigid and well-defined as it is sometimes made to appear. The narrative of the Ascension of Jesus is not recorded in any of the Gospels; it appears only in the Book of Acts, chap. i (the words "and he was carried up into heaven" in Lk. xxiv. 51 are a later addition). And the spiritual truth which is embodied in the Ascension story, that by His exaltation to the right hand of God Jesus has been raised to a position of Lordship in the universe, is a truth which in certain other traditions is guaranteed by the Resurrection. Thus St. Matthew's Gospel, which gives no account of an Ascension, represents the Risen Jesus as saying: "All power is given unto me in heaven and on earth" (xxviii. 18).

(ii) A detailed study of the relevant sayings of Jesus suggests also that the form in which some of them have come down to us has been influenced by the chronological setting into which the Church had come to fit its eschatological beliefs. Thus some of the sayings which tell of the "coming" of the Son of Man have parallel sayings in which the reference

to "coming" is absent. An interesting illustration of this may be seen in Mk. viii. 38 :

"Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and mine in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed when He cometh in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."

With this we may contrast the simpler version (derived from the source Q) which we find in Mt. x. 33 and Lk. xii. 9. Matthew has: "Whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven"; Luke has: "He that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God." This seems to suggest that the reference to a future Coming of the Son of Man which we find in the Marcan passage may represent a development in the eschatological outlook of the early Church. Certain other passages like Lk. xxi. 36 ("to stand before the Son of Man") which are generally taken to refer to a future Judgment may serve to remind us that the Judgment of Heaven as Jesus conceived it is eternally going on,<sup>1</sup> so that the authority entrusted to the Son of Man is exercised by Him within the course of human history and not solely after history has closed.

(iii) Especially significant in this connection is the declaration of Jesus to the High Priest (Mk. xiv. 62, Mt. xxvi. 64, Lk. xxii. 69). In the Marcan form, which Matthew follows, there is a two-fold description of the Son of Man :

"Ye shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of the Power, and coming in the clouds of heaven."

The early Church believed that the first part of this declaration was fulfilled when Jesus was raised to the right hand of God, and it confidently looked forward to the second part being fulfilled at the Parousia.

But did Jesus Himself mean that there would be two stages

<sup>1</sup> cf. pp. 196, 201

in the revelation of the Son of Man? It is noteworthy that the Lucan account reads: "From now shall the Son of Man sit on the right hand of the Power of God." In other words, the reference in Luke is to an Enthronement which is to begin now and to continue hereafter; and there is no reference to a future Coming. Moreover, the phrase in Mark and Matthew about "coming in the clouds" (which it must be remembered is a descriptive idea taken over from Daniel vii. 13) cannot be taken as necessarily implying a coming *from* the clouds; in itself it denotes something analogous to Wordsworth's phrase "trailing clouds of glory," the clouds being a sort of heavenly accompaniment.<sup>1</sup> When, therefore, Jesus makes His bold declaration to the supreme representative of the earthly powers which are about to condemn Him, the conviction that floods His soul is, not that at some undefined future date He will return to execute judgment, but rather that here and now He is being invested with permanent authority as God's supreme representative among men. He is here confronting His opponents with an assertion of Lordship similar to that which, after the Resurrection, He is represented as making to His disciples: "All power is given unto me in heaven and on earth" (Mt. xxviii. 18).

These considerations seem to indicate that all that Jesus has to say (*a*) about His rising again, and (*b*) about His coming in judgment, must be studied in the light of His claim to a spiritual authority which belongs to Him even now, and which neither death nor hell will be able to challenge. In other words, His fundamental conviction, which by the very nature of things must be about that which *is* rather than about that which *is to be*, is the essentially spiritual conviction which in the faith of the Church was vindicated by His Ascension. He knows that He is called to be Lord of human life and human destiny; and in that faith He anticipates with perfect confidence both His Resurrection and His Parousia. Seen in this light, His sayings on these two

<sup>1</sup> cf. Lowther Clarke's study on "The Clouds of Heaven" in his *Divine Humanity*, pp. 11 ff.

great themes are not to be regarded primarily as predictions of coming events ; they are proclamations of a present fact, and of the consequences that inevitably flow from it. And of these consequences there is one, the Resurrection, which is, so to speak, immediate ; the other, the Parousia, would appear to be more remote.

## II. RESURRECTION AND EXALTATION

Jesus' teaching about the Resurrection always arises out of His teaching about His rejection and death. We may trace in it therefore His reaction to the situation which will be created by the Cross. And if, in the first place, we seek to conjure up His own personal reactions to that situation, we may question whether in His own mind He anticipated any interval between dying and rising again. Did He not say to the penitent thief: "To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise" ?<sup>1</sup> What, then, are we to say of the fact that in our Gospel sources the predictions of the Resurrection are always associated with "the third day" ? The difficulties occasioned by this time-reference are many and serious, not the least among them being the difficulty of believing that, as He approached the supreme crisis of His life, Jesus allowed a computation of "times and seasons" to intrude upon His sense of spiritual issues ; and this difficulty is not measurably reduced even if we accept the reasonable and well-grounded interpretation of "three days" as implying an indefinite (but probably short) period of time. The situation is bound to remain complicated and obscure unless we recognise that in all His sayings about "rising on the third day" we have something more than the personal reactions of Jesus to the approaching crisis ; we see Him also anticipating the reactions of His loyal followers. His Resurrection will have become effective when His followers know Him as risen. All the Resurrection predictions, we may remind ourselves, are addressed to the disciples ; and to this we may add that it was

<sup>1</sup> Lk. xxiii. 43

only devoted followers who became witnesses of the Resurrection. Jesus recognises that for His followers the Cross must at first spell defeat. Strong, however, in the faith that He will rise again, He is perfectly convinced that in due course His disciples will come to share in the resurrection faith. Time will be required for them to rally from the blow which the Cross has inflicted on their faith; but "after three days"<sup>1</sup> they will be assured that He has risen.

If we ask ourselves what precisely it was that Jesus meant by "rising again," we have to admit that the question is more easily asked than answered. We have abundance of material to help us to decide what the Resurrection meant to the early Christians, in retrospect and in experience; what precisely it meant to Jesus in anticipation is another matter. It may be noted, however, that the sayings in which He predicts His Resurrection make no reference to the physical body. Taken by themselves they convey no suggestion that He expected His body to emerge from the tomb; nor is positive evidence to support any such suggestion to be found in any of His more general teaching<sup>2</sup> on the life to come. Jesus' references to resurrection, however, are something more than a confident "*resurgam*," pointing forward in a general way to a victory by which the verdicts of earth will be reversed. The resurrection of which He speaks is quite definitely a resurrection "from the dead," and it is so described in some of the relevant passages. Death for Jesus—and more especially such a death as He sees awaiting Him, a violent death at the hands of men—is an "enemy" which must be faced and overcome. The Resurrection therefore is a triumph over death and all the powers which are associated with death; but as such it points forward to that full and final triumph over all the powers of earth and of hell which in the Church's faith is linked up with the Ascension.

<sup>1</sup> Both in thought and in language Jesus may have been influenced by Hosea vi. 3

<sup>2</sup> See e.g. Mk. xii. 25-27; Lk. xxiii. 43

## III. EXALTATION AND COMING IN POWER

We pass next to consider Jesus' teaching on the great theme of His coming in power. In the thought of Jesus we may constantly trace the certainty of such a consummation. He refers quite definitely to "the Day of Judgment" (sometimes called simply "that Day"); and He clearly envisages that on that Day a decisive role will be played by the Son of Man. Hence we have such phrases as (in Matthew) "the Parousia<sup>1</sup> (Coming) of the Son of Man," and (in Luke) "the days<sup>2</sup> (or day) of the Son of Man." The sayings which describe how the Son of Man will appear in power and in judgment are deeply embedded in the Gospel tradition, and no account of the thought and teaching of Jesus which does not do full justice to them has any claim to acceptance.

But of all the sayings of Jesus these are the ones which occasion most difficulty for the modern interpreter. We can indeed make some headway against these difficulties by a detailed study of our Gospel sources. Thus, to take one example, the early source Q seems to dwell on the certainty and the suddenness of the Judgment rather than (as some other sources do) on the premonitory signs. We may readily believe that, in interpreting and transmitting their Master's sayings on so difficult a theme, the early Christians were influenced unconsciously by the eschatological ideas which they had inherited, and also, it may be, by certain historical happenings of their own time which seemed to them, rightly or wrongly, to be related to what Jesus had predicted. Thus it is very probable that in the so-called Little Apocalypse of Mark xiii certain genuine sayings of Jesus have been combined with others which reflect rather the outlook of the early Church.

It is probably true, however, that our surest guide as we approach this part of our subject will be found in the recol-

<sup>1</sup> Mt. xxiv. 3, 27, 37, 39. The word means literally "presence" or "arrival"; it was in common use to denote the official "visit" of some person in authority.

<sup>2</sup> Lk. xvii. 24, 26

lection of what is most central in the self-consciousness of Jesus. In other words, these sayings about His part in the Judgment of the world, like the sayings about His Resurrection, must be related to the profound conviction which He had of being entrusted by God with unique spiritual authority. Jesus dares to speak of the Day of Judgment, and of the Son of Man coming in the glory of the Father, just because, from first to last, He, the Son of Man, is confronting man in the name of God with a challenge to accept or reject the way of eternal life. He enforces this challenge by a series of dramatic pictures. But these pictures do not lend themselves to a process of logical harmonisation ; and if we would understand them aright, it must be in the light of that spiritual Lordship which Jesus is convinced belongs to Him as Son of Man.

Jesus had without doubt an extraordinarily vivid sense of the Divine Judgment that overhangs the present world-order ; and as a result He uses language which indicates, not merely that the Judgment when it comes will come suddenly, but also (apparently) that it is near at hand and may be expected soon. It is of cardinal importance that we should ask ourselves whether, as is so often asserted, Jesus did as a matter of fact look forward to an early consummation of His mission. We know that among the early Christians there arose at times a glowing expectation that the Coming of the Lord could not be long delayed ; and criticism has for long been ready to attribute a similar expectation to Jesus Himself. Has it been justified, we must ask, in so doing ?

Many earnest students of the Gospels feel instinctively that a criticism which can attribute to Jesus the deluded hope of an early Parousia is a criticism which has gone sadly astray. And the difficulty is not merely that Jesus is thus represented as nursing a conviction which history has disproved ; there is the added difficulty of harmonising such an outlook with what we otherwise know of the essentially

spiritual character of His teachings and claims. Jesus, with His overmastering sense of God, was indeed continually reminding men how "near" they stand at once to God's salvation and to God's judgment; but this nearness is not to be measured in terms of time any more than of space, and in itself it has no bearing on the question whether the final consummation of God's purposes (which must always be conditioned by man's response) will come early or late. There are, moreover, clear indications in the New Testament that the date of the Parousia was a matter about which Jesus emphatically disclaimed knowledge and discouraged speculation. In words of which the authenticity cannot be doubted, asserting as they do a limitation of the Son's knowledge, Jesus declared: "Of that day and that hour knoweth no man, not even the angels in heaven, not even the Son, but only the Father" (Mk. xiii. 32). And with this<sup>1</sup> we may compare the post-resurrection record in Acts i. 6 f., where the enquiry of the disciples, "Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" is met with the emphatic rejoinder, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father has determined by His own authority."

What then are the grounds for the widely prevalent view that Jesus looked forward to an early Parousia, and how far may we regard them as adequate? Nothing can be deduced from His frequent and emphatic injunctions to watchfulness; for in the teaching of Jesus the crisis that calls for watchfulness is not the final consummation of all things, it is the judgment which is ever at our doors. Equally irrelevant is the confident pronouncement in Mk. xiii. 26 and again in xiv. 62 about seeing the Son of Man coming with the clouds; for, apart from the fact that the words are in part a quotation, the reference in such a case may be taken to be to His Exaltation rather than to His Parousia.<sup>2</sup> The remarkable saying in Mt. x. 23, "Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel before

<sup>1</sup> cf. too the opening words of the discourse in Mk. xiii. 3-5, where the disciples ask, "When shall these things be?" and receive the warning, "Take heed lest any man mislead you."

<sup>2</sup> p. 176

the Son of Man has come," is not one on which it is safe to build much ; for (apart from the question whether this refers to the final Coming) this is a saying which occurs only in Matthew, and, appended as it is to a set of verses which have been taken over from Mark, it may represent the eager expectation of the early Jewish Christian Church.

A verse which in this connection has given rise to a great deal of discussion<sup>1</sup> is Mk. ix. 1 :

"There are some of those that stand here who shall not taste of death till they see the Kingdom of God come with power."

(a) In accordance with his interpretation of the Kingdom of God as being for Jesus already present, Professor C. H. Dodd<sup>2</sup> has contended that the concluding words of this verse imply : "till they see that the Kingdom of God has come with power." "The bystanders are not promised that they shall see the Kingdom of God *coming*, but that they shall come to see that the Kingdom of God *has already come* at some point before they became aware of it." It is doubtful, however, if the syntax of the passage can be made to bear all the weight that Professor Dodd seeks to put on it ; and it seems clear that the "coming with power" to which Jesus refers is not to be identified exclusively (if at all) with His earthly ministry, but is rather something which, at the time of speaking, He beholds in vision. A future reference is not to be ruled out, and indeed seems to be called for.

(b) This does not mean, however, that Jesus is necessarily referring to what we may call the full and final consummation of the Kingdom. Apart from the fact that history was to prove such an expectation to be a delusion, we may claim with confidence that an apocalyptic outlook of this nature was quite alien to the mind of Jesus. Such an interpretation of His words is a legacy from the criticism of a former generation,

<sup>1</sup> A useful study of various interpretations is given by T. W. Manson, *Teaching of Jesus*, pp. 279 ff. Dr. Manson's conclusion, however, is far from satisfying.

<sup>2</sup> *Parables of the Kingdom*, p. 53.

which in its presentation of His message of the Kingdom of God laid too much stress on the thought of the Kingdom and too little on that of the living God.

(c) It seems clear, therefore, that what Jesus has here in mind is something which, while less final than the consummation of the Kingdom, is nevertheless so decisive that men whose eyes are open will discern in it an unmistakable manifestation of the power of God in action. This "Coming in power" stands in obvious contrast to the present "Coming" which is associated with the humiliation and rejection<sup>1</sup> of the Son of Man; and when Jesus talks of power He means the power of the Spirit of God.

Are we then to say that He is here anticipating some quite definite event or experience such as is related in Acts, chapter ii, with regard to the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost? That would surely be to introduce precision where precision ought not to be looked for. And yet it is along this line that we ought to look for an interpretation of this prophetic utterance of Jesus. From first to last His earthly ministry was directed towards bringing the power of the Spirit of God to bear upon the conditions of human need in the present evil age; and while His life on earth, despite the fact that men denied and rejected Him, was even now a demonstration of the Spirit's working, there was to be a much more effective demonstration after the Son of Man was risen and glorified. Though His eyes are firmly fixed on the necessity for the Cross, Jesus is nevertheless fully assured that by His mission the Divine Rule is to be established among men, and that the beginnings of the new order will be effectively manifested within the lifetime of some of those who heard His words. Thus in this and in other similar sayings we are reminded that such phrases as "the coming of the Kingdom of God" and "the coming of the Son of Man" imply that a decisive act of God has inaugurated a developing situation; they do not imply that that situation has worked itself out to its conclusion.

<sup>1</sup> The saying follows closely on the first prediction of the Passion.

If this is so, the belief that Jesus anticipated an early consummation of the Kingdom of God and an early coming of the Son of Man in apocalyptic glory would seem to be based on a false exegesis. We may claim further that it is contradicted by various elements in His teaching, more especially His ethical teaching, which presuppose a period of continuance.

In this connection Professor Otto has an interesting and impressive section in his notable book *Reich Gottes und Menschensohn*.<sup>1</sup> "Jesus' preaching of a 'righteousness which is better than that of the Pharisees' was full of content and drew manifold examples from practical life and concrete situations; it presupposed life and time and duration. His preaching did not correspond with the circumstance of a 'last brief hour,' in which, before the inbreaking end, there was only just time for quick conversion, but with lasting relationships and attitudes. It required the loving forgiveness which was repeated again and again; love towards one's neighbour as a lasting attitude of the disposition. Hence it presupposed a variety of enduring and changing circumstances of life. It required humble service, of a kind that could not be discharged in a fleeting hour; trustful confidence towards the Heavenly Father; abandonment of anxiety, indifference towards the treasures of this world, a child-like disposition, and faithful service in God's vineyard." Otto goes on to appeal to the saying about building a new temple: "I will destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days build another, which is not made with hands" (Mk. xiv. 58). He rightly contends that what is here predicted is not the inbreaking of a supra-mundane order, but "something in the mundane period itself, opposed to, dissolving, and surpassing what has gone before. And it is indeed a something which will have a future, a stability, and duration, as against what had been wiped away, and was of a provisional and transitory character." It is not as an apocalyptic visionary that Jesus speaks of this new temple which He is to build, but rather

<sup>1</sup> p. 47; the quotation follows the English translation, *The Kingdom of God and the Son of Man*, p. 61.

as the spiritual prophet who, recognising that God's true dwelling-place is not in temples made with hands, proclaims that the time has come for God to be provided with a dwelling-place in the hearts of His people. The Epistle to the Ephesians<sup>1</sup> depicts the Christian Fellowship, the household of God, as a "sacred temple," "a habitation for God in the Spirit." And the Apocalypse of St. John<sup>2</sup> proclaims the fulfilment of the hope of Israel so frequently expressed in the Old Testament: "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God."

How is this undeniable assumption of continuance on the part of Jesus to be reconciled with that other element in His message which pictures in apocalyptic imagery the inbreaking from above of a new world order? The two elements seem indeed to be logically inconsistent. But, seen in the pure light which comes with a sense of God's own Presence, each provides the key for the understanding of the other. All that Jesus has to say about the near approach of the End springs from a faith in God which is prophetic rather than apocalyptic. The End is near because God Himself has drawn near to visit and redeem His people. So is it also when Jesus apparently implies that human life in many of its features and relationships is to continue. The continuance which He has in mind is not to be confined to the purely natural plane. Something new has entered into human life which lifts it up to a supernatural level. That "something new" is the power of the Spirit of God, manifested firstly in His own life and then through Him in the lives of His disciples. It is because through Him the Living God has become so truly operative in human history that we rightly regard the mission and message of Jesus as eschatological. And it is eschatological, not solely or even primarily because it points forward to a glorious consummation which with unerring insight He sees to be spiritually "at hand," but because through the power

<sup>1</sup> ii. 20-22

<sup>2</sup> xxi. 3

of God's Holy Spirit earthly life is being transfigured and all things are being made new.

#### IV. THE COMING OF THE SON OF MAN

Our contention in the preceding pages is that the expectation that the Son of Man *will come* is just another aspect of the two-fold conviction that the Son of Man *has come*, and that the authority which He wielded during His lifetime is an authority which belongs to Him *eternally*. Thus the Coming of the Son of Man, whether we think of His appearance on the earth, or His appearance with the clouds in judgment, is essentially one Coming, not two ; and His Coming on earth is as truly an eschatological fact as His Coming with the clouds. The same holds good of the Coming of the Kingdom of God. In and through Jesus the Kingdom of God *has come* among men ; and the fact that it *has come* is a guarantee that it *will come* in the plenitude of power. And these two conceptions, the Coming of the Kingdom of God and the Coming of the Son of Man, are indissolubly linked one with the other.<sup>1</sup> It is in the life and history of man that the Kingdom of God must come ; and it comes when there appears on earth One who is truly Son of Man, i.e. One in whose life God's purposes for mankind are perfectly manifested and fulfilled.

It is the Christian faith that such a Son of Man appeared in Jesus Christ ; He is in a unique way "*the Son of Man*," and in Him the Kingdom of God has come. But though we are right in associating the Coming of the Son of Man and the Coming of the Kingdom of God with that definite period of history when Jesus of Nazareth trod this earth, we do not limit their Coming exclusively to that period. For in each case the Coming is an eschatological event, which for all subsequent history has a reference that is at once past, present and future. In Jesus God's purposes for mankind entered decisively on the stage of fulfilment—in that sense the

<sup>1</sup> Note how, where Mk. ix. i. has : "the coming of the Kingdom of God in power," the parallel passage in Mt. xvi. 28 has "the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom" ; see also p. 175.

Coming is past. But each fresh generation must realise in its own experience the Coming of the Son of Man—to that extent His Coming is a present fact. And the final consummation of God's purposes through His Coming is likewise a future event to which men on earth must always look forward. Hence, while there are in the Gospels some sayings with a past reference like "the Son of Man came eating and drinking," and some with a present reference like "the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost," there are others which just as definitely connect the Coming of the Son of Man with the future, e.g. "the Son of Man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and then He shall reward every man according to his works" (Mt. xvi. 27).

It is not surprising that, confronted with those cases where the reference is so definitely to the future, the Christian Church should early have come to distinguish between a first and a second Coming of the Son of Man, and to relate the latter exclusively to an event in the future. There are certainly sayings in the Gospels which lend support to such an interpretation.<sup>1</sup> But if we are to understand them aright it is important to hold fast to the position which we have sought to establish in the preceding pages, that all the predictions of a future Coming represent a *dénouement* in the one Coming of the Son of Man.

(i) This future Coming is to be a coming "in glory." As such it stands in emphatic contrast with the conditions prevailing here and now, when the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head, is delivered into the hands of sinners, and gives His life as a ransom for many. In the language of the apostolic Church it is the contrast between future glory and present humiliation.<sup>2</sup> But this does not mean that there are two Comings. The Son of Man has come; and He is in the

<sup>1</sup> It is to be noted, however, that the phrase "the second coming" is not scriptural. In the Fourth Gospel Jesus speaks of "coming again" (e.g. xiv. 3.) Mt. xix. 28 has a reference to "the rebirth," when the Son of Man shall sit on the throne of His glory.

<sup>2</sup> cf. Phil. iii. 21.

conflict from first to last. And just because He has come, the Rule of God has begun ; and the final triumph is assured. Indeed, just because the Coming of the Son of Man is in itself an assurance of the full and final consummation of God's purposes for man, it follows that, if only we have the insight to see beneath the superficialities of earth and the vision that can penetrate beyond time into eternity, we ought to be able to trace the triumph of the Son of Man even in those events which, to those who lack such insight and such vision, appear as evidence rather of His humiliation and rejection. Hence the Fourth Gospel associates the glorification of the Son of Man as much with the Cross as with the Resurrection.<sup>1</sup>

(ii) There is also this significant feature in the way in which the Gospels describe the appearance in glory, that whereas the Son of Man has to face rejection alone, He is not alone in His triumph. Especially significant for our present study are the references to those who have been followers of the Son of Man and whom the Son of Man now acknowledges as His before the Father and the heavenly hosts.<sup>2</sup> Jesus does of course expect His disciples to share in the present sufferings of the Son of Man—only so can they hope to enter with Him into His glory ; but an essential element in His Coming in glory is that they shall then be openly gathered around Him as a victorious people sharing in the triumph of their King.

(iii) There remains the question whether this Coming in glory, which was a future event when Jesus referred to it, is still a future event for each fresh generation of His followers. In other words, was He thinking *exclusively* of that event which in the faith of the Church has come to be called "the second Advent," which will bring to an end the whole historical process ? Here we may well pause. For Jesus the interval between His appearance on earth and His coming in glory

<sup>1</sup> cf. p. 252.

<sup>2</sup> cf. Mt. x. 32. Lk. xii. 8 ; and the phrase "me and mine" according to what seems the preferable reading in Mk. viii. 38.

was not to be measured by the passage of time. If He could anticipate that some of those among whom He moved would in their lifetime see how the Kingdom of God had come with power,<sup>1</sup> so too He could anticipate that they would see how the Son of Man had come in His glory. Along with its confident anticipation of a second Advent, the Christian Church, acknowledging Jesus as its living Lord, has always believed that in a real sense the Son of Man has already been manifested in glory and power; and such a faith assuredly has its roots in His own teaching.

(iv) There is, however, a danger that this line of interpretation should lead to the elimination from the teaching of Jesus of anything corresponding to the second Advent hope. In his strikingly original book on "The Parables of the Kingdom" Professor C. H. Dodd<sup>2</sup> has rightly emphasised that the ministry of Jesus is from first to last a ministry of fulfilment, and that the *eschaton* which constitutes this fulfilment includes not merely the facts of the earthly life of Jesus but all the consequences which flow from it within the historical order; and in accordance with this view he regards it as a mistaken idea that Jesus foretold a period of waiting between His death and resurrection and His coming in glory.<sup>3</sup>

We may agree with this in the main, and yet ask whether it covers all the facts. The problem becomes acute in regard to the parable of the Sower and other parables of growth. Dr. Dodd refuses to see in these parables a picture of the future development in the world of the Kingdom of God. The fundamental position for him is "not that the Kingdom of God will shortly come, but that it is a present fact; and not a present fact in the sense that it is a tendency towards righteousness always present in the world, but in the sense that something has now happened which never happened before."<sup>4</sup> All references to the harvest are accordingly

<sup>1</sup> cf. p. 182

<sup>2</sup> So also in his other books *The Apostolic Preaching and its Development and History and the Gospel*.

<sup>3</sup> p. 154.

<sup>4</sup> p. 178.

interpreted in terms not of the future but of the present ; with the appearance of Jesus in history the harvest (i.e. the Kingdom of God) *has come*. The parables of growth, therefore, "are not to be taken as implying a long process of development introduced by the ministry of Jesus and to be consummated by His second Advent, though the Church later understood them in that sense. As in the teaching of Jesus as a whole, so here, there is no long historical perspective : the *eschaton*, the divinely ordained climax of history, is here."<sup>1</sup>

It is hard to believe that Dr. Dodd has not here carried his thesis too far. When Jesus taught His disciples to pray "Thy Kingdom come," was He not keeping alive before their minds, as before His own, the age-long hope of Israel that, God being God, the time would come when all the nations of the earth should know and obey Him ? Schweitzer had placed the Kingdom of God entirely in the future ; Dodd limits it to the living present. This seems to be a case where "futurist eschatology" and "realised eschatology" each needs the other as a complement if the progress and consummation of God's Kingdom are to be seen in true perspective.<sup>2</sup>

#### V. THE SON OF MAN AS LORD

The sayings in which Jesus asserts His claims to spiritual authority and to the exercise of judgment are undoubtedly among the most difficult in the Gospels. It is futile to attempt to trace in them a reasoned statement by Jesus of His philosophy of history. Equally futile, of course, is it to interpret their dramatic imagery with a literal and logical precision which ignores or obscures their glowing spiritual realism. In all that He says on these great themes Jesus brings men face to face with God, and confronts them with the alternative of life or death, salvation or destruction. If only we recognise this essentially spiritual basis, it is not difficult to trace the main lines along which His teaching is developed. A good illustration of His claim to supreme spiritual authority will

<sup>1</sup> p. 193.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 51 ; cf. pp. 257 ff. 284.

be found in the assertion which He made when, standing before the judgment seat of Israel's high priest, He was questioned about His status and credentials. Recalling the familiar passage in Daniel,<sup>1</sup> and linking it up with another from the Psalms,<sup>2</sup> He boldly declared :

“ Ye shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of the Power and coming with the clouds of heaven ”  
(Mk. xiv. 62).

Reasons have already been given<sup>3</sup> for refusing to regard such a pronouncement of Jesus as providing *in itself* the necessary key to an understanding of His use of the name Son of Man. On the other hand we need not be surprised if Jesus, recognising Himself to be, in a most truly spiritual sense, the Man in whom God's ideals and purposes for men were to be fulfilled, should have dared to believe that this and all such Scripture references to exaltation and authority, whether on the part of the Son of Man or some other such figure, were to be fulfilled in Himself. We may even go further. Even if there had been no such prophecies in Scripture, we may conceive that in all reverence and confidence Jesus would have dared to believe that it was in a life such as His that God's purposes for mankind were to be brought to their consummation. The very fullness of spiritual content which Jesus infused into the name Son of Man rendered indeed an eschatological interpretation inevitable. All man's past history on earth had been a preparation, under God, for the appearance of a true Son of Man whose position would be recognised by His brethren of mankind as one of unchallengeable authority.

In this reply to the high priest Jesus appeals to Daniel's prophecy regarding the Son of Man who is to come with the clouds of heaven. But He links with it an allusion to one whom the Psalmist calls “ my Lord.” “ The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool.” This combination of the two conceptions,

<sup>1</sup> Daniel vii. 13

<sup>2</sup> Psalm cx 1

<sup>3</sup> pp. 137 ff.

Son of Man and Lord, sheds a flood of light on the working of the mind and spirit of Jesus. We must dismiss the thought that He is *merely* arrogating titles to Himself; such a procedure, foreign to His nature at any time, would have been especially so when He stood facing the climax of His earthly mission. The authority which He here asserts so unequivocally must have its roots in His own spiritual consciousness. In claiming to be at once Son of Man and Lord He has in mind that, from the beginning of creation, God's destiny for man was that man should exercise lordship in the earth (Gen. i. 26); and His reply to the high priest is a declaration that in Himself that destiny is being fulfilled. He knows that He is truly Lord because He is truly Son of Man.

The faith of the primitive Christians was expressed not merely in the words "Jesus is Messiah," but also in the words "Jesus is Lord." What precisely did they mean when they ascribed to Him this "name which is above every name" (Phil. ii. 9), and from what source was their use of it derived? The contention of Bousset that the name was borrowed from contemporary heathen cults must be dismissed; for its application to Jesus belongs to a very early stage in the Christian tradition, and is almost certainly Jewish in origin.<sup>1</sup> In the Old Testament Jehovah is regularly designated as the Lord; and one of the most arresting facts with regard to primitive Christology is that the earliest followers of Jesus should have applied to their Master a name traditionally associated with God Himself. It is certainly unthinkable that they would have dared to do so unless they had been convinced that Jesus was in some way a revelation of God, the agent through whom Jehovah's Lordship was to be established and administered among men. But it is also unthinkable that this early application of the name "Lord" to Jesus originated *simply* in a daring transference to Him of a name which, for the devout, was the name by which God

<sup>1</sup> We may cite the devotional use of "Maranatha" (an Aramaic expression denoting "The Lord is coming," or "Come, O Lord," 1 Cor. xvi. 22), and the early designation, even in Jewish circles in Jerusalem, of St. James as "the Lord's brother."

Himself was known. The ascription of Lordship to Jesus carries us back, not merely to the Biblical doctrine of God, but even more to the Biblical doctrine of man.

One of the most illuminating expositions of the Lordship of Jesus in the New Testament occurs in what seems to be an early Christian hymn<sup>1</sup> quoted by St. Paul in his Epistle to the Philippians (ii. 6 ff.). Indifferent to its poetical rhythm and structure, theologians have too often erred by treating as a reasoned dogmatic statement what is primarily a sublime expression of religious devotion. If (as seems certain) it is a translation from an Aramaic original, then we may link up the hymn with an early stage of the Christian movement in Palestine, or more probably in Syria. We are not concerned here with the meaning which St. Paul may have read into the words, but rather with the thought implicit in the hymn itself. The way of life pursued by Jesus is contrasted vividly with that which the first man was tempted to follow. Made in the image of God, Adam was not content to remain subject to God, but succumbed to the temptation to eat the forbidden fruit, and so become like God Himself. "God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil."<sup>2</sup> So man fell, and lost that dominion over all things on earth and sea and in the air which God had marked out for him at the beginning (Gen. i. 26). But where the first Adam failed the second Adam triumphed, and triumphed because He pursued a wholly different path. Jesus too was made in the image<sup>3</sup> of God; but so far from snatching at equality with God He became in the fullest sense God's Servant, emptying Himself wholly

<sup>1</sup> See Lohmeyer's treatment of the passage in his Commentary (Meyer), and in his brochure *Kyrios Jesus*. English readers may refer to Lowther Clarke, *New Testament Problems*, pp. 143 ff., and A. M. Hunter, *Paul and his Predecessors*, pp. 45 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Gen. iii. 5

<sup>3</sup> ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων is generally interpreted as "divine by nature"; but (following Héring, *Le Royaume de Dieu et sa Venue*, p. 161) I take μορφῇ as representing the Hebrew *demouth* (Aramaic *demoutha*), i.e. "likeness" (Gen. i. 26). This is confirmed by the Peshitto rendering of the Philippians passage.

of self as Isaiah had prophesied that God's ideal Servant would do (liii. 12). So complete indeed was His subjection to the will of God that He allowed it to carry Him on, on, on<sup>1</sup> to death itself, and that, too, death on a cross. So far, however, from this being the end, it was but the prelude to that glorious victory which had also been foretold in Isaiah's prophecy (xlv. 23); for whereas Adam was expelled from the presence of God, Jesus was raised to God's right hand, and the "dominion" of which Adam had been deprived was now restored to man in and through Jesus, "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Here we may see the right line of approach to a study of the Lordship of Jesus. Lordship implies spiritual supremacy. Jesus would never allow men to call Him Lord unless their lives testified to the sincerity of their devotion. And so far from obtruding His claims on those who did not themselves recognise them, Jesus of set purpose moved about among men not as Lord but as Servant. It was only so that His own claims to Lordship, and men's recognition of His claims, would be based on a spiritual foundation. Yet in and through that life of humility, loving kindness and self-sacrifice there was manifested an authority and power before which every earthly authority and power seemed to fall into a secondary place. And it was not merely individuals, the Herods and the Pilates and the Caiaphases of His day, whose brief authority He challenged. He saw how all the ordered systems which men accepted as "established"—systems of religion, systems of government, systems even of ordinary everyday behaviour—were destined to give place to a higher order of existence more fully expressive of God's purposes for the world He had created. Thus He challenged the whole

<sup>1</sup> ὑπήκοος μέχρι θανάτου, obedient right up to death (Phil. ii. 8). The pictorial image behind the phrase may be that of an *advance* ("He marched breast-forward even to death") or a *descent* ("this man who was made in the image of God passed even from earth to the under-world").

body of scribal traditions ; He challenged even the Law itself on which the traditions were based ; He challenged the established ritual of the temple, saying : " Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it again." In regard to Sabbath observance He insisted that man must not be made a slave where God had designed him to be master : " The Son of Man is lord also of the Sabbath." He asserted His authority over against that of winds and waves, of suffering and disease, of sin and of death. Heaven and earth, He said, would pass away, but His words would not. There is little wonder that His disciples, living with Him day by day, and learning from His public preaching and from intimate personal talks, should have come to invest His authority with ever deeper and wider significance, and to see in it (as He Himself had seen) a manifestation on earth of the authority of God Himself. Their faith that Jesus was " Lord " of all things in heaven, earth and hell received for them divine corroboration when they were assured that He had been raised from the dead and exalted to the right hand of God ; but it was a faith which was rooted and grounded in their experience of the unchallengeable spiritual authority which He had wielded in His life on earth.

Jesus Himself was not indifferent to the authority which God the Father had committed to Him. There is abundant evidence in the Gospels that He was as fully conscious of His right to speak and act decisively as of His call to suffer meekly. His mission was essentially redemptive in character, but it was a mission for which He had been " anointed " by God as truly as any conqueror or king, and it was by its very nature a " messianic " mission even though it was in line with what the prophets had foretold of God's Servant rather than of God's Messiah. Thus He forgave men's sins and cast out demons, summoning men to recognise that now they had to reckon with something<sup>1</sup> greater than the wisdom of Solomon or the preaching of Jonah ; and His last words to His dis-

<sup>1</sup> Mt. xii. 41 f. ; Lk. xi. 31 f. The Greek word is neuter, not masculine. Jesus' appeal is to the authority behind His mission.

ciples, according to Matthew xxviii. 18, express His assurance that all power has been given unto Him in heaven and on earth.

#### VI. THE SEPARATION OF SHEEP AND GOATS

In connection with Jesus' teaching on Judgment no passage repays study more than the picture presented in Matthew xxv. 31-46 of the Separation of the Sheep from the Goats. The spiritual realism which pervades it throughout gives us confidence in believing that here we have to deal with an authentic word of Jesus. Its very simplicity, moreover, is the best guide to its interpretation; and difficulties arise only if we attempt to be over-subtle or to introduce conceptions which are alien to the original.

There is one prevalent misconception against which we ought to guard at the outset. What Jesus gives here is not strictly a picture of the Last Judgment. It is certainly very different from the Great Assize which under Jewish influence so soon became a conventional image in the Christian Church. Jesus knows that God is the Judge of men as well as their Redeemer; but as Judge He needs no final assize to enable Him to determine who are righteous and who are not. "According to the general teaching of the New Testament the real time of human trial is *now*. In so far as it is concerned with trial, judgment is present rather than future. The Gospel inevitably tries every soul to which it is brought, and the soul is inevitably discriminated towards salvation or condemnation according to its response. The real trial is not a process after the facts of the case have happened; it is a process which accompanies the facts as they happen, constitutes their eternal meanings, and determines their abiding consequences."<sup>1</sup>

In the New Testament passage under discussion the drama actually opens with the separation of men into the two classes, so that they appear not for trial but merely for sentence. And the sentence is automatically determined by the separa-

<sup>1</sup> Quick, *Doctrines of the Creed*, p. 253.

tion which has already taken place; the principles which had governed the one now govern the other. There is no suggestion that fresh facts may now be brought to light, enabling those who began on the left hand to be transferred to the right, and so be judged worthy of eternal life instead of eternal punishment. From first to last there is no judicial enquiry into facts. The body of the story, therefore, is in no sense the description of a Final Judgment; it is rather a pictorial explanation of the eternal principles in accordance with which judgment is enacted.

This raises the question of the position of the Son of Man in the story. If the picture is not one of Judgment it is scarcely accurate to say, as is so often done, that the Son of Man appears here as Judge. He is never so described in the narrative. He appears indeed in glory, with the splendour and the authority of a king; He is seated, too, on a throne, with the angels in attendance. But what He does is not so much to judge those who are marshalled before Him as to separate them into two classes according to a test against which there is no appeal, and then to declare to them their inevitable fate. And He speaks and acts throughout as the representative, firstly of Him whom He calls "my Father," and secondly of those whom He calls "my brethren." In other words He appears in His dual capacity as Son of God and Son of Man.

It is significant that the Son of Man is also described as "the King."<sup>1</sup> And when, in the name of His Father, the King invites "the blessed" to inherit the Kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world, His relation to the divine Kingdom is strictly in accordance with the prophetic tradition.<sup>2</sup> He is not the conquering Messiah commissioned to establish the Kingdom; He is rather the equivalent of the

<sup>1</sup> There can be little doubt that the King of verses 34, 40, while clearly distinct from the Father (verse 34), is to be identified with the Son of Man of verse 31—the Son of Man sits on a "throne of glory," as presumably the King also does, and the phrases "on the right hand" and "on his left hand" are used with reference to each of them.

<sup>2</sup> cf. p. 60

King-Messiah of the prophets, ruling as God's representative (cf. "my Father") over a people who have inherited the Kingdom which God Himself has prepared for them. Only, as Jesus tells the story, the name which He links with that of the King is not Messiah, but Son of Man. Here we have an implicit avowal that authority in God's Kingdom belongs to him who is in the truest sense man. And though the name Son of Man belongs *par excellence* to him who is King, it is implied that the Kingdom over which he rules, and the lives of those who inherit the Kingdom with him, are likewise an embodiment of God's purposes for humanity.

Though at no point in the story is this expressly stated, we cannot doubt, in the light of His other teaching, that by the Son of Man Jesus is here referring to Himself. He anticipates the time when for Him the humiliation of earth shall give place to the glory of heaven, and when He who has been despised and rejected among men shall be exalted as their Lord and King. And when He proceeds to drive a dividing line through the whole of mankind, setting some on His right hand and some on His left, He does so in the exercise of that same spiritual authority which had characterised all His ministry. In His earthly mission He had set before men a way of life and a way of destruction, according as they should adjust their lives to God's fatherly Rule or continue in rebellion against Him; but so perfectly were the ways of God revealed in His own life, and so complete was the authority with which He spoke and acted, that He was able to declare to men that their attitude to *Him* provided the decisive test of their attitude to *God*. Accordingly He had drawn a life-or-death distinction between those on the one hand who heard His sayings and did them, and those on the other who heard them and did them not (Mt. vii. 24 ff.), between those who confessed Him before men and those who denied Him (Mt. x. 32 f.). This authority He had wielded on earth as the Son of Man. And now that the Son of Man appears in glory, He acknowledges before the Father those by whom He Himself has been acknowledged on earth, and they

and He together, the King and His people, enter into the bliss prepared for them by the Father.

But what does Jesus mean by this claim that the decisive test in life is men's attitude to *Him*? And what are the implications of His words about "confessing" or "denying" Him before men? These questions remind us that in all His teaching Jesus regards Himself as linked to His fellow men by the closest of spiritual ties; and in the present story the King makes it plain that it is by the attitude adopted towards His "brethren" that He tests men's attitude towards Himself. "Inasmuch as ye did it to one of these brethren of mine, even to the least of them, ye did it to Me."

It may reasonably be held that, when He speaks of "these brethren of mine," Jesus is thinking of *all* His brethren of mankind, including those who are now marshalled on His left hand no less than those on His right. Dr. T. W. Manson<sup>1</sup> takes a different view. In accordance with his contention that fundamentally the Son of Man implies a fellowship of which Jesus is the head, he sees in Jesus' picture a threefold division, viz. the Son of Man, those on the right hand, and those on the left; and recognising rightly that the "brethren" cannot be identified exclusively with one of these two latter groups, he concludes that "they must be those for whom the King is spokesman, those who, along with Him, make up "the Son of Man." "The Son of Man," he adds, "is a corporate body, and the rest of mankind are judged by their treatment of that body in the days of their power and its weakness." But is it so certain that the King recognises as His brethren only those who already share with Him in the glorified fellowship of the Son of Man? Surely Jesus recognises as His brethren *all* the children of men, no matter what be their race or nation, creed or conduct. Among the brethren will of course be those who, though not personally conscious of standing in any intimate relationship with the exalted Son of Man, are yet deemed worthy to share His Kingdom; but it includes also those others on His left hand who are

<sup>1</sup> *The Teaching of Jesus*, p. 270.

marked out for a different fate. All men are brothers to the Son of Man. It is not to the "saints" only that we are called to give a cup of cold water (cf. Mk. ix. 41). The greatest rebel against God is still a brother for whom Christ died.<sup>1</sup> Jesus taught emphatically that there is no man who is not in the most real sense our neighbour. And the true nature of Jesus' teaching on this matter may be gathered from the interpretation of His mind and spirit given by the great apostle to the nations: "If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink" (Rom. xii. 20).

It has been suggested<sup>2</sup> that, when it is said (verse 32) that "all the nations" shall be gathered before the Son of Man, the reference is exclusively (according to the common Biblical usage) to the nations outside of Israel, the so-called Gentile world, the nations that are without a knowledge of God. If we accept such an interpretation, then the problem which Jesus here reviews in the light of the divine Spirit is one which has troubled many earnest enquirers, viz. "by what principles are men to be judged who have never known God?" St. Paul faced that problem in Romans, chapter ii.; and his answer is that just as Israel was given the Law (i.e. the Mosaic law), so other nations have the law of nature, which God has written on men's hearts. Jesus does indeed recognise the special position of the Gentile world; being without a knowledge of God they tend to have lower standards of value (cf. Mt. v. 47, Revised Version; vi. 32). But for Him the great decisive fact which separates "the Gentiles" from "those who know God" is not the gift to Israel of the Law, but the coming among men of the Son of Man. It may well be that in the parable under discussion He is indeed referring specifically to those who have not had the privilege of knowing God and the standards of conduct which come with a knowledge of God. But if this is so, He is thinking of them not in contrast with Israel, but in contrast rather with those who confess themselves to be followers of the Son of Man and are

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. viii. II.

<sup>2</sup> cf. Curtis, *Jesus Christ the Teacher*, p. 151 f.

acknowledged as such by Him. And in that case the distinction ceases to be a hard and fast one. The standards set by the Son of Man are ultimately the same for all men ; for though the Son of Man appeared uniquely in history as Jesus of Nazareth, He lives again (as Jesus teaches in this story) in all His brethren of mankind. There is therefore no lowering of moral requirements to suit the special case of "those who do not know God." Such men cannot justifiably plead : "Lord, when saw we Thee?" And the teaching given in the parable has a universal validity ; it is applicable to Jew and non-Jew, to Christian and non-Christian.

In the foregoing study certain facts have emerged which it will now be convenient to sum up. Judgment for Jesus is clearly universal. When it is said that "all the nations" shall appear before the Son of Man, this is not to be interpreted as applying solely to a judgment of the nations as nations. Individually and corporately, all mankind stands under judgment—including religious and irreligious alike, the heathen as well as the God-fearing. And, strictly speaking, this judgment is the judgment of God. God, and God alone, is the Judge of all the earth. Day by day and hour by hour, in all the myriad experiences of life, God confronts man, opening up for him the way of life if he will care to walk in it, but leaving him free if he so desires to choose the way of destruction. Thus the judgment of God is never an arbitrary act. In a real sense it is man himself who decides his fate ; and in the end God's judgment is an endorsement of man's decision.

Yet the fate of men is never a matter of indifference to the fatherly heart of God. Having planned salvation for His people even from the foundation of the world, God never allows the initiative to pass out of His hands. He may be the Judge of mankind ; yet He is primarily the Redeemer rather than the Judge. And so in the fullness of time He confronts man in a uniquely decisive way, giving to the world a true Man who represents in His personal life the

perfection of God's purposes for humanity, and whose perfect communion with His heavenly Father enables Him to speak and act with divine authority. In Jesus Christ, Son of God and Son of Man, God's salvation is brought to men's very doors. But so too, by a necessary corollary, is God's judgment. The greatness of the blessings which accompany the acceptance of the divine life must ever be a measure of the loss entailed by its rejection. And so Jesus stands among men, calling to them to come to Him that they may find rest for their souls, yet sternly pronouncing judgment over all those who persistently refuse to accept His Gospel: "Woe unto you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! . . . And you, O Capernaum! Exalted to heaven? No, you will sink to hell! . . . I tell you it will be more tolerable for Sodom in the day of judgment than for you." (Mt. xi. 21 ff., 28).

Thus by His message, and by His life, Jesus provides a test by which men are judged; they must be either for Him or against Him. That Judgment, moreover, is taking place here and now; and its results will be revealed when, in the day of His glory, all men will take their place on His right hand or on His left. In this sense, and in this sense only, does He "judge" men; He separates them, as a shepherd divides the sheep from the goats. His mission to men never ceases to be that of the Good Shepherd. And even at the end, when He appears in the glory of His Father with the holy angels, He is not the Judge of men, but their advocate and representative; the question is whether in the presence of His Father He will *acknowledge* them as belonging to Himself, or whether He will *disown* them (Mt. x. 32 f.). This same thought comes to expression in Mt. vii. 21 f. (cf. Lk. xiii. 24-29), where entry into the Kingdom is barred to those of whom Jesus can say "I never knew you"; and it is as "acknowledging" or "denying" men, not as "judging" them, that the Son of Man is depicted in the story of the Sheep and the Goats.

In the end the Son of Man will acknowledge those who on earth have acknowledged Him. But what are the standards by which that acknowledgment will be determined? This

question brings us face to face with the transcendently ethical character of the message of Jesus; and nothing shows up in clearer relief the difference between His teaching and that of conventional apocalyptic. "I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me . . . Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." Here surely is morality expressed in its most positive form. "Christ would never hear of negative morality; *thou shalt* was ever his word, with which he superseded *thou shalt not*."<sup>1</sup> Still more significant is the fact that the standards of judgment are not in any narrow sense "religious" standards; they are essentially human standards, such as would prevail in ordinary everyday life if men were living as God would have them live. The decisive test is found, not in men's professed attitude to God, but in their attitude to the Son of Man and His brethren; and this in the end means their attitude towards their own fellow men. No humanitarian prophet has ever proclaimed more emphatically than Jesus that a man must be judged by his behaviour towards his brethren of mankind. And it was in strict fulfilment of Jesus' teaching on this matter that one of His followers later wrote: "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" and "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death" (1 John iv. 20; iii. 14).

It is not surprising that the severely ethical character of Jesus' teaching on Judgment should appeal to many who remain unaffected by the traditional doctrines of the Church. But both the doctrines of the Church and the ethical teaching of Jesus have roots which "the man in the street" is apt to ignore. Nothing that Jesus says about the Son of Man and His brethren has any abiding meaning apart from the Heavenly Father whose eternal purposes are centred in the salvation

<sup>1</sup> R. L. Stevenson, *A Christmas Sermon*.

of humanity, and who in the fullness of time sent His Son to accomplish that salvation. Certain tendencies in modern thought and modern life have undoubtedly diminished man's sense of sin against God, and diminished, therefore, his sense of divine judgment ; but this is not all loss if man has also learned to understand better what is meant by sin against his brother man. There is without doubt an ever-increasing realisation of the solidarity of mankind. And in that solidarity man ought to find himself linked, not merely with his fellow men, but with God the Eternal Father, and with the Son of Man in whom God's eternal purposes for man have been revealed and are continually being advanced.

In his desire to see justice done to his fellow men "the man in the street" would also do well to remember that the standards of God, as these are presented by Jesus Christ, are far more exacting and inexorable than the standards that commonly hold sway among men. It is a terrible thought that men should be liable to what is called eternal punishment because they have been indifferent to the daily needs of their unfortunate brethren. Yet the true significance of this only becomes apparent when we turn to the positive side of the picture, and see how such simple acts as the feeding of the hungry and the clothing of the naked are rewarded by God with the gift of eternal life. With God mercy always seasons justice ; and it may be claimed that in His judgments "the scales are heavily loaded on the side of mercy. The saying that even a cup of cold water given to a disciple will be rewarded shows Jesus as eager to find the slightest indication that a man is 'for him.' The gift of a cup of cold water is just about the absolute minimum ; but even the minimum counts, if it be given from the right motive."<sup>1</sup>

In this last thought we may find something to reassure us when we come to ask, as ask we must, whether the judgments of God are final and irrevocable. God's judgments, as we have seen, are in a strict sense His endorsement of the fate which man has chosen for himself. "Once the process

<sup>1</sup> T. W. Manson, *The Teaching of Jesus*, p. 271.

of human response to God is complete, once its character in any human soul is finally fixed, there is no place left for anything but God's verdict. And the verdict is inevitable; it must be what it is . . . The ultimate rejection of God's love must be God's final abandonment of the soul to the consequences of its own corruption."<sup>1</sup> Yet *when* is man's response to God's call quite complete, and *when* can it be said that his character is finally fixed? God on His side cannot withdraw His gracious invitation or abandon His eternal purpose of salvation. And the gates of eternal life remain open to man so long as he is ready to learn in the very least the divine lesson of love. We recall in closing the words of Him who Himself had come as Son of Man to save that which was lost: "It is not the will of your Father which is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Quick, *Doctrines of the Creed*. pp. 253, 257.

<sup>2</sup> Mt. xviii. 11, 14



**PART III**  
**JESUS AND THE CHURCH**



## CHAPTER XIV

### JESUS AND HIS DISCIPLES

**J**ESUS as we see Him in the Gospels is more than a public preacher and teacher. An essential and significant element in His ministry is the calling and training of disciples. If we would appreciate the full significance of His action in this respect we must go on to examine the relation in which He stood to His disciples and the purpose for which He called them.

#### I. WHY DID JESUS CALL DISCIPLES ?

It was of course a normal thing for the scribes to have around them a band of pupils; and on this ground, as on others, it is easy to establish an affinity between Jesus and other religious teachers in Israel. Some critics, while fully recognising the eschatological character of Jesus' prophetic ministry, are at pains also to insist that Jesus did in fact live as a Jewish rabbi. "As such He takes His place as a teacher in the synagogue. As such He gathers around Him a circle of disciples. As such He disputes over questions of the hour with pupils and opponents or with other people seeking knowledge who turn to Him as the celebrated rabbi."<sup>1</sup> But it is important to see just where the affinity begins and ends. The very content of His message marked Jesus off decisively from the doctors of the Law.<sup>2</sup> His message was not just a preparation for the Rule of God, but a proclamation of its advent. By bringing men into communion with God, He gave them life and power and the assurance of victory.

<sup>1</sup> Bultmann, *Jesus*, p. 56 (English translation, *Jesus and the Word*, p. 58).

<sup>2</sup> We may recall how St. Paul in his Epistles insists that the Law merely regulates conduct within the present world order, and is quite powerless to impart "life" to men. cf. Gal. iii. 19-21

There was in His message an authoritative note which differentiated Him emphatically from the scribes.

The difference becomes still more clear when we consider His relation to His disciples.

- (a) It was not to a life of study that He called them ; it was to a life of consecrated action. "Fishermen were to become fishers of men, peasants were to be labourers in God's vineyard or God's harvest field. And Jesus was their Master not so much as a teacher of right doctrine, but rather as the master-craftsman whom they were to follow and imitate. Discipleship was not matriculation in a Rabbinical College but apprenticeship to the work of the Kingdom."<sup>1</sup>
- (b) We may note, too, the conditions which He places before those who consult Him on the way of life. "Sell all that thou hast." "Let the dead bury their dead ; go thou, and preach the Kingdom of God."
- (c) Most important of all, He asserts His personal authority in a way which has no adequate parallel in the case of other preachers and teachers. "Follow *me*." "Come unto *me*." "He who loveth father and mother more than *me* is not worthy of *me*." "For *my* sake." "Whoever shall be ashamed of *me*."

The relationship between Peter and Jesus is altogether different from that between Saul of Tarsus and Gamaliel.

We are not to be misled by the use which we find in the Gospels of the term Rabbi applied to Jesus. Rabbi in Jesus' day was not so much a title as a term of respect. Its use as a specific designation for a doctor of the Law became normal in the period subsequent to the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, when there remained no official representatives of the Jewish religion except the men who were trained to interpret the

<sup>1</sup> T. W. Manson, *The Teaching of Jesus*, p. 239 f., where it is argued that the Aramaic word which Jesus used for disciple was probably not *talmid* (pupil) but *scholya* (apprentice).

Torah. "Rabbi" in the Gospels as a form of address may therefore be compared with the modern use of "Sir" or "Father" in addressing clergymen; it indicates the deference paid in certain circles to the representative of religion, whether his task be that of the academic teacher, the parish priest or the travelling evangelist. Indeed, when we reflect how widely Jesus differed from the professional teachers of His day, and how he must have seemed to be a mere layman (*ιδιώτης*) as compared with them, we recognise that the real reason why He was called Rabbi (and He was called so by ecclesiastical opponents as well as by friends and disciples) was that, despite His lack of formal status as a religious teacher, He nevertheless wielded a religious authority which compelled men to take note of it even though they might not accept it.<sup>1</sup>

Jesus' action in calling disciples is clearly not to be understood except in relation to His prophetic mission. His disciples are not merely pupils to whom He imparts instruction; they are men who are being brought through Him *to know God*. The Greek *μαθητής*, like the Latin *discipulus*, implies no doubt a learner; but how many false ideas would have been engendered in our minds if our English Bible had trained us to think of Jesus and His *scholars*. The Christian disciple has always been more than a pupil; and scholarship is not the same thing as discipleship. We may therefore be thankful that a distinction which is not made explicit in Greek or in Latin has received expression in English; it corresponds undoubtedly to a vital distinction in the mind of Jesus.

If we care to look for parallels to His action in calling disciples, we may find one in Isaiah of Jerusalem who, in calling disciples around him, had sought to form a righteous remnant in Israel as the beginning of a new People of God. Nearer His own day there was the parallel of John the Baptist, seeking to sift out a people prepared for the Lord. And it was indeed a common custom for wandering preachers, notably in Galilee, to be attended by a band of regular or

<sup>1</sup> cf. Burkitt, *Christian Beginnings*, pp. 42 ff.

casual disciples.<sup>1</sup> But Jesus is differentiated from all of these by the claims which He made for Himself and the conditions which He placed before His followers. The disciples of Jesus are a fellowship bound to Him by the closest of spiritual ties. No doubt part of His action in calling them is explained by His need for missionary assistants, who should go hither and thither throughout the towns of Israel summoning men to receive and respond to the message which they bring. But the Gospels also reveal a purpose of a more intimate and personal kind. Jesus has a work to accomplish *in* His disciples before He can accomplish anything effectual *through* them. They must be trained to know the Father as He Himself knows Him. The spiritual experience of the Son must reproduce itself in the lives of those whom the Son calls to be His own.

In all this we may see again the need for a *via media* between the reconstructions of a Harnack and a Schweitzer. As against possible misrepresentations in the former case we must assert that Jesus is not leading His disciples to know certain truths about God, but to know God Himself; in their own lives, individually and as a fellowship, they must experience the grace and power of God the Father. As against the latter we must recognise that Jesus trains His disciples, not to proclaim the nearness of a coming Kingdom for which men must prepare, but to manifest the Rule of God as operative in human lives here and now.

## II. THE TRAINING OF DISCIPLES

The whole ministry of Jesus was an appeal for discipleship; and quite apart from the Twelve there were not a few, both men and women, who responded to His call to "learn of" Him and to "follow" Him. Even after He chose the Twelve Jesus went on with His public preaching; He could not but speak to the multitudes when they gathered round Him, and the Gospel He had to proclaim was for *all* who

<sup>1</sup> cf. Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, pp. 255, 256.

would listen to its good news and respond to its demands. "Come unto me, *all ye that labour.*" And so He is often attended by a number of followers in addition to the Twelve. But His aim of winning for God a righteous People demands in course of time that He should trust less to extensive than to intensive methods. More and more He is concerned to lay His foundations deep and sure in the lives of devoted followers, and more particularly in the lives of the Twelve.

The Gospels help us to trace the methods by which His training proceeded. The disciples were constantly learning from the unspoken sermon of His daily life—His tenderness to children, for example, and His unconquerable courage in the face of challenge and of danger. Episodes of everyday life were made to yield their deeper spiritual meaning, as when the sorrowful departure of the rich young ruler was followed by teaching on the danger of riches and the illustration of the camel and the needle's eye. He stimulated them to ask questions. They were made, too, to profit by their own mistakes—how frank the Gospels are in acknowledging the blindness and the blunders of the Twelve. There must have been abundant occasions, as when they were in some quiet retreat, or gathered together for a meal, when He gave them fuller instruction (dare we perhaps even say, more systematic instruction?) on the promises of God in the Sacred Books or the history of God's dealings with His people of Israel; then their hearts would burn within them as He opened to them the Scriptures. They heard also His public preaching, and in private they would have opportunities of asking Him to explain many things which called for elucidation.

In this connection reference must be made to Jesus' method of teaching by parables, and more particularly to those arresting and difficult words in which, following on the parable of the Sower, He explains why He adopts the parabolic method.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mk. iv. 10-12

“ And when He was alone, they that were about Him with the twelve asked of Him the parable. And He said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the Kingdom of God ; but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables ; that seeing they may see, and not perceive ; and hearing they may hear, and not understand ; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them.”

An immense amount of discussion has ranged round this passage. It has been contended that by the use of parables Jesus surely sought to make it more easy, not more difficult, for men to understand His message ; and the language as well as the thought of the passage has led many scholars<sup>1</sup> to conclude that this cannot be a genuine utterance of Jesus, but reflects rather the outlook of the early Church, faced with the problem of explaining how the mission and teaching of Jesus had accomplished so little except among a tiny band of adherents.

It is of course obvious that one purpose of Jesus in His parables was to make His meaning more compellingly clear, more easily assimilable. And it is further probable that if His *ipsissima verba* had been preserved for us in the original Aramaic, or if we could have listened to the tones in which He spoke, we might have been able to recognise that the latter part of the saying was primarily a statement of *fact*, and does not carry with it all that sense of deliberate *purpose* on His part which to our logical western minds the words seem to convey. But we ought never to forget that the parables of Jesus deal with profound spiritual truths—with what in the passage under consideration is called “ the mystery of the Kingdom of God.” It follows, therefore, that while some of His hearers, men of simple faith and teachable spirit, would instinctively apprehend the new teaching, there were others, men of duller vision (like Peter Bell, of whom Wordsworth says that “ A primrose by a river’s brim, a yellow primrose was to him, and it was nothing more ”) in whose hearts and consciences it evoked no great response. Jesus

<sup>1</sup> e.g. C. H. Dodd, *Parables of the Kingdom*, pp. 13 ff.

recognised that fact ; that explains why, at the end of a story, He would sometimes say, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." One *result* of the parabolic method, therefore, was that to some people who heard the story it remained a mere story, and its spiritual significance was lost to them ; they heard without understanding, they saw without perceiving. Jesus, following Isaiah vi. 9, 10, dares to say, in characteristically oriental fashion, that this result was the working-out of a divine *purpose*. Religious truth, no less than religious duty, provides a touchstone by which men are tested, and therefore a conscious aim which Jesus had in telling His parables was to discover among His hearers men of spiritual insight and understanding, and to sift them out from among the great mass of the unresponsive. The disciples of Jesus must be characterised not merely by a readiness to take up their cross and follow, but also by a simplicity and receptivity of soul which will enable them to receive every new revelation of divine truth and so apprehend "the mystery of the Kingdom of God."

### III. THE CALL FOR SPIRITUAL RESPONSE

The parable of the Sower, to which the above saying is appended, itself illustrates the interpretation of the saying for which we have been contending. Whatever be the central message of this parable, one lesson conveyed by it to anyone who had ears to hear was that the fortunes of the seed necessarily varied according to the nature of the soil on which it fell. And as Jesus told the story in connection with His "Gospel"—told it, in other words, as a message which demanded, not mere hearing or understanding, but an adjustment of life to meet its demands—the receptive hearer was bound to be faced with the searching question : "What must I do so that, instead of the thorns and stones in my life, there may be good soil which will bring forth fruit abundantly ?"

It will not be irrelevant if we recall here how forcibly this

call for response is conveyed through many a saying of Jesus where our common interpretations tend to ignore it. To take one illustration—when He calls on men to “consider the flowers of the field, how they grow,” we are not to think of Him primarily as the poet, or the artist, or the lover of nature; still less (need one add?) is He the sentimentalist. Above all else He is the prophet who, with true prophetic realism, points out to men the utter futility of a life which is not rooted and grounded in God; and that is why, almost in the next breath, He summons them to lift their thoughts above the mere embroideries of life and to concentrate their energies on seeking the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. “Ye cannot serve God and mammon.” For the God whom Jesus brings near to men is One whose sovereign will men must obey, whose love and grace and power they must receive with hearts which go all out to welcome Him.

Hence Jesus is uncompromising in the demands which He addresses to those who have not adequately considered the cost of discipleship. The same demand which is expressed in such unequivocal terms as “Take up your cross,” or “Sell all that you have,” is expressed no less emphatically in the demand that we must learn to receive the Kingdom of God as little children. When we hear Jesus telling men that they must hate father and mother for His sake, we are not to think of Him *merely* as the leader in a great crusade—reminding His would be followers, much as we know Garibaldi did, of the hardships that lie ahead and asking whether they will be fit to stand the strain. Rather He is forcing them to see that the only men who are fit to follow Him are men who first of all are willing to receive what God has to give them, men into whose souls there has come the power of the living God, so that nothing is left in their lives to dispute His claim to allegiance or to prove an obstacle to the working of His Spirit. The man who puts his hand to the plough and then turns back is not fit to advance the Rule of God just because the Rule of God is not yet a reality in his own soul.

The word "mystery" or "secret," which in the Gospels occurs only in the passage explanatory of parabolic teaching,<sup>1</sup> does not in the New Testament denote a riddle which is hard to understand; it implies rather a principle of God's working which, left to themselves, men would never have realised, but which, once they understand the nature of the God with whom they have to do, they grasp with clear perception and strong conviction. And whatever may have been the exact words in which Jesus expressed His meaning in that much-debated passage, we may remind ourselves that His teaching as a whole, more especially to those who aspire to be disciples, is shot through and through with "mysteries" of this kind. When He says that the meek shall inherit the earth, that to him that hath shall be given, and that the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to the childlike, He is talking language which is foolishness to those who do not know God, but which becomes compellingly clear to those who have been brought to know Him and to have a right relation to Him. Thus, though the only "mystery" specifically referred to in the Gospels is the mystery of the Kingdom of God, we may say that in all His relations with His followers, and especially with the Twelve, Jesus is constantly opening their eyes to see how the new life into which He is leading them is by its very nature full of such mysteries, just because the ways of God are so different from the ways of man. One such mystery concerns the Son of Man, who must be rejected and put to death before He can enter into His glory. And closely associated with this is that other mystery which all true brothers of the Son of Man must face—they too must take up their cross if they are to follow Him. Jesus is insistent that the way of life for all who follow Him is the way of sacrifice. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself." To deny oneself means to disown oneself: man must recognise that his life belongs not to himself but to his Lord.

<sup>1</sup> Mk. iv. 11

IV. DISCIPLESHIP AND CONDUCT: THE ETHICAL TEACHING  
OF JESUS

How will discipleship express itself in daily life? Here again we are in the realm of "secrets" hidden from all save those who know God as Jesus knows and reveals Him. The Law enjoined on the pious Israelite the duty of loving a neighbour; and in opposition to those who thus felt free to hate their enemies the injunction of Jesus was clear and emphatic: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you."<sup>1</sup> And why? Again the reason is clear; it is "that ye may be sons of your Father in Heaven; for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." "Sons of your Father"—in that phrase we have the whole basis and motive power of the Christian ethic. We may expand the thought of Jesus in some such words as these: "If in your souls you know God as the heavenly Father you will naturally want to be like Him, and in your daily life you will not behave towards Him as slaves in the employment of an imperious Master, but as sons in the home of a Father, rendering to Him a glad and willing obedience. You will in fact live, not merely as He would wish you to live, but in a measure as He Himself lives, allowing Him to reproduce His own life in you." With this we may connect Jesus' mystery-teaching on Righteousness. What a revolution in accepted standards lies behind His declaration that the people who seemed most concerned about Righteousness—e.g. the scribes who expounded from the Law what it meant, and the Pharisees whose whole life was regulated by the Law's teaching and requirements—had a standard of righteousness too low to be worth emulating.<sup>2</sup> For true righteousness consists in being like the Father, who Himself is perfect and calls on His children to be perfect too.

<sup>1</sup> Matt. v. 43 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Mt. v. 20

We should be spared many criticisms and misunderstandings of the Christian ethic if we would see that in the message of Jesus it is intimately connected with discipleship, and springs spontaneously from a right relation to God who is Father and King. If the message of Jesus had been primarily a proclamation that God's Kingdom was coming and a summons to men to prepare for it, then Christ's ethical teaching would have lost its sublimity and attractiveness; for then it would have been either an *insurance ethic*, the child of anxiety and dread, a summons to men so to live that it might go well with them in the coming judgment, or else it would have been (as Schweitzer teaches) an *interim ethic*, an ethic which is adapted to the stern conditions of a godless age that is soon to pass away, but which will have no authority when that age has been superseded by one of perfect blessedness. But the message of Jesus is not that the Kingdom of God is coming, but that the Kingdom of God has come—it is here now, because God is here; and His ethic is a call to men to order their lives as in the presence of the living God. So far from being an interim ethic, it is the ethic characteristic of a time of fulfilment. Those who accept and obey it do so, not as seeking by their good behaviour to hasten the coming of a better order of existence, but because that better order has already begun for them through the gracious and energising presence of the Father-God, whose influence necessarily comes to expression in their daily life and conversation. In a sense their ethic is based on an eschatological experience; for God is present and active now, not in virtue of His eternity and omnipresence, but because He has "appeared" in a way which could not have been postulated of Him previous to, or apart from, His appearance in Jesus.<sup>1</sup> But in no other sense is it eschatological. Its adherents do not say, in a spirit of enforced repentance: "We must prepare to meet our God." They say rather: "This is our God; we have waited for Him; we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation."<sup>2</sup> And just because He is not the dread King among

<sup>1</sup> cf. Titus ii. 11

<sup>2</sup> Is. xxv. 9

slavish subjects, but the Father among His children, their ethic is a spontaneous and glad reaction to His gracious Presence. They are not preparing anxiously for the unknown; they are responding gladly to the known.

It may be claimed for the ethical teaching of Jesus, based as it is on His revelation of the character of God and of God's relationship to man, that the principles which govern it are of universal validity, they are applicable to man as man. Nevertheless many of His sayings have in their context a specific reference to discipleship which it is important not to ignore. "It shall not be so among you" is a word addressed not to men in general, but to the chosen band of the Twelve.<sup>1</sup> It is clearly recognised that among the Gentiles who do not know God there will be other accepted standards which have acquired a certain conventional legitimacy just because the higher standards of God are not known. The saying with which in St. Luke's Gospel<sup>2</sup> Jesus clinches His discourse at this point ("I am among *you* as *the one* who serves") carries the particularising reference a stage further; for it not merely differentiates the Twelve from the world in general, but it differentiates Jesus also from the Twelve—and it is of course this latter differentiation which gives point to the former one. The Jesus who here addresses His disciples is one whom they themselves recognise as "Lord and Master," as is indeed expressly stated in the Johannine version<sup>3</sup> of the incident; yet He acts towards them as "the servant." It is indeed His attitude to them which provides the sanction for the attitude they must learn to adopt towards others.

The fact that so much of the ethical teaching of Jesus is directed in the first place to His immediate followers might seem to give it a more restricted application than the ethical principles which some other great teachers have laid down for the direction of men in general. But this apparent restriction is bound up with the depth of Jesus' fundamental conceptions and the far-reaching character of His ultimate aims. What

<sup>1</sup> Mt. xx. 26

<sup>2</sup> Lk. xxii. 27

<sup>3</sup> Jn. xiii. 13 f.

Jesus sets Himself to do is not simply to enunciate certain ethical principles, but to ensure that these principles are adopted and practised, and practised not out of compulsion, but in a spirit of full and ready obedience. From this it is only a step, as we shall see in our next chapter, to the founding of a Fellowship—a Fellowship whose basis is found, not in the formulation of laws and regulations and guiding principles, but in the dominance of a certain spirit, which makes certain principles of conduct appear obvious and obedience to them easy and natural. No amount of mere teaching, even teaching about God, would in itself accomplish the results which Jesus set out to obtain ; they could only be accomplished by the action of God in imparting His Spirit to those who would receive it and by their readiness to conform to God's Fatherly Rule.

Hence Jesus' ethical teaching was directed in the first place towards a body of men who had accepted and experienced the Fatherly Rule of God ; and it consisted in making explicit certain principles of conduct (e.g. as regards love, and forgiveness, and service) which, to those whose spiritual eyes had been opened, were obviously implicit in the acceptance of the Rule of such a God. But though its original reference might seem in this way to be restricted to a specific group, it possessed from the first a validity which was as wide in its range as the authority of God Himself. As the Rule of God spread its conquests more widely and deeply, so too did the ethic which was one of the ways in which that Rule expressed itself—in fulfilment of the prayer : " Thy Kingdom come ; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Hence the Christian ethic (in so far as it is specifically Christian) can never be compulsorily enforced by external authority, for the simple reason that no external authority can enforce the acceptance of the Divine Spirit. On the other hand it may happen—and in the Providence of God it happens not infrequently—that men who do not consciously know the Father God or acknowledge His Sovereign Rule come to recognise the attractiveness and power of the Christian way

of life, and through the Christian ethic are led in due course to know and acknowledge the living God whose power and love they have seen expressed in the lives and conduct of His children.

It is such a truth that Jesus enforces when he tells His disciples that they are "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world." Genuine Christian faith always expresses itself in Christian life; and the most effective demonstration both of the truth and of the power of the Christian gospel is to be found in the lives of those who in spirit and in truth are followers of Jesus.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE FELLOWSHIP OF JESUS

JESUS certainly called and trained disciples. But was it His intention that these disciples should constitute a fellowship, and that in and through them there should come into being that fellowship which we call "the Church"? To that question many people are disposed to return a negative answer because of what they know of the character and record of the Church—a society so divided against itself and so infected with the spirit of the world seems to them altogether out of harmony with the aims and ideals of Jesus. There is often also a more theoretical cause for their denial, though they may not always be conscious of it. Those on the one hand who have been affected by the "liberal" interpretation of the Gospel story, and for whom Jesus is primarily a leader in a great spiritual crusade, tend inevitably to think that it is in following His religious leadership that individual disciples find their fellowship with one another; whereas (according to the more "catholic" interpretation) it is in the fellowship which Jesus Himself brings into being that His disciples find life and go forth to prosecute and fulfil their mission. To those on the other hand who accept the eschatological interpretation of Schweitzer and his school the very conception of a Church will seem to be ruled out by the expectation of Jesus that the existing order of society was soon to pass away. In both of these cases we are forced to ask whether we are not in danger of being led astray by a false, or at least an inadequate, conception of the person and mission of Jesus.

One factor in the problem which ought to give us pause is the behaviour of the disciples once they had begun to rally

from the shock of the Crucifixion. If the record in Acts is to be trusted, they kept together. We read, at the beginning, of as many as one hundred and twenty.<sup>1</sup> Large numbers soon joined the fellowship, being admitted after accepting the rite of baptism. They met together in house parties for the breaking of bread. Their religious outlook, their preaching message, their worship, and their ethic all proclaim the early followers of Jesus to be a fellowship. This inevitably suggests the conclusion that their fellowship-consciousness goes back to the days of their association with Jesus in the flesh—it was part of the inheritance which they had received from Him. To put it otherwise, it must surely have been part of the mission of Jesus to bring such a fellowship into being.

#### I. THE CHURCH IN THE PURPOSE OF GOD

In approaching this question of the relation of Jesus to the Church, we may remind ourselves that the Church's story does not of course begin with Jesus. In the Old Testament we have the story of Israel—not Israel merely as one of the nations of the world, but Israel as the people whom Jehovah has chosen for Himself, that in it and through it He may reveal His character to the whole wide world and so in the end establish His Kingdom to the ends of the earth. He accomplishes the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt, the prototype of a still greater deliverance to be accomplished for humanity. He makes a covenant with Israel, and reveals His will to Israel in the Law, thereby pointing forward to a new and better covenant when His law will be written not on tables of stone, but in the hearts of all who know Him. He disciplines Israel even by its distresses, that so He may train it to obey His will, to rely on His grace, and ultimately to be ready to receive His Holy Spirit. Israel alas is a rebellious and backsliding people; but all its failures and perversity cannot stay the onward march of Jehovah's purposes for mankind. Israel as a nation may be brought

<sup>1</sup> Acts i. 15

under judgment and rejected ; nevertheless " there will be a tenth " <sup>1</sup> to respond to His demands, and Israel will have served His purposes if out of it there comes a faithful Remnant in which His name is hallowed and His will done. At last by the coming of Jesus, the true Son of God and Lord of men, the long centuries of preparation were to reap their reward ; seed time was to be succeeded by harvest ; prophecy was to give place to fulfilment. God's People can only come into life if God Himself puts forth His arm to redeem it. And in Jesus that redemption is accomplished. By bringing His brethren to know God the Father as He, the Son of God, knows Him, Jesus presents to the Father a family of sons. And the very fact that He began with twelve men suggests that this family was conceived by Him in terms of a new Israel. Thus the history of the Church is to be traced back, not merely *to* Jesus, but *beyond* Jesus to the divine purpose revealed throughout the history of Israel. That purpose was already at work when, at the call of God, Abraham went out not knowing whither he went, and thereby became the father of the faithful. We may indeed go further and say that the winning for Himself of a holy People was part of the purpose of God from the foundation of the world. <sup>2</sup>

If therefore we survey the mission of Jesus in the light of the Old Testament, we see how much may be missed if in our acknowledgment of His uniqueness we forget the work which He accomplishes on behalf of " the people of God." And if, having looked backward to the religious thought of Israel, we care also to glance forward to the religion of the early Christians, we cannot fail to see how their thoughts were dominated by the consciousness that in and through Jesus they had been called into a fellowship, and that they constituted in that fellowship the true Ecclesia of God. Taking over the phraseology of the Old Testament, the First Epistle General of Peter (ii. 9) declares that the Christians are " the elect race," " the royal priesthood," " the consecrated nation," " the people who belong to God." The

<sup>1</sup> Is. vi. 13

<sup>2</sup> Eph. i. 4

question remains, however, how far confirmation is to be found in the words of Jesus Himself that His mission was to bring such a people into being.

## II. THE CHURCH IN THE TEACHING OF JESUS

The word *ecclesia* (church) occurs only twice in the Gospels, both instances being in St. Matthew—"on this rock I shall build my church" (xvi. 18), and "tell it to the church" (xviii. 17). Admittedly it is undesirable to build too much on these sayings, for even if we accept them as authentic words of Jesus (and many are disposed to question their authenticity) there is considerable room for doubt as to their precise interpretation. If value be attached to them, it ought to be as buttressing a truth whose real foundation is elsewhere. Nevertheless in our anxiety not to attach too much value to them, taken by themselves, we ought to be equally careful that we do not attach too little.

Of the two sayings the first has special significance for our purpose, for in it Jesus is represented as using quite definitely the phrase "my church." Now it is of some importance to recognise that in thought and phraseology this whole passage breathes the air of Hebrew religious conviction; the opening word "blessed," the name Bar-Jona, the reference to "the keys of the kingdom of Heaven" and to "binding and loosing" all combine to suggest that here we have a saying which was originally current in the primitive Jewish Christian community. The metaphor of "building" in such a context has many parallels in the Old Testament—as an example we may recall the word of Amos (ix. 11, 12) to which St. James<sup>1</sup> appealed so cogently at the Council of Jerusalem: "In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old." And in connection with this metaphor of building we remember how often in Hebrew thought the two ideas of the house and the household

<sup>1</sup> Acts xv. 16 f.

merge into one another—a notable instance of this occurs in the closing verses of Chapter ii. of the Epistle to the Ephesians. And so in the verse under discussion, whether we connect the thought of Jesus with the *qahal*, the holy congregation, or (as some critics would do) with the Palestinian Aramaic word *kenishta*, which would give the meaning “my synagogue” in the sense of “my spiritual dwelling-place,” we can regard Jesus as seeing in vision the rise of a new and better House of God not made with hands, a holy People, in the midst of whom the Father is to find a dwelling-place of the Spirit.<sup>1</sup>

But the relation of Jesus to the fellowship of His disciples is not to be measured by the scanty use which the Gospels make of the term *ecclesia*. In the Fourth Gospel the conception of the Fellowship comes to clear expression. We find it notably in the Farewell Discourses—e.g. in the allegory of the Vine with its branches, with the added injunction “Abide in Me, as I in you,” and perhaps also in the pregnant use of the term “my friends”, i.e. “members of my fellowship.” But we can also trace it clearly in the Synoptics, in such expressions as “me and mine”,<sup>2</sup> “the same is my brother and sister and mother,”<sup>3</sup> “where two or three are gathered together in my name I am in the midst of them.”<sup>4</sup> We ought not to forget, too, that it is implied if not expressed in the teaching of Jesus about the Son of Man.<sup>5</sup> Most notable instance of all, we have the story of how, on the night before He suffered, He gathered the twelve disciples around Him, and passed to them the bread and the wine.

### III. THE LAST SUPPER

The full significance of the episode of the Last Supper will not be reached by a meticulous analysis of the few short sentences in which it is described in the Synoptic Gospels ;

<sup>1</sup> Reference may be made to Dr. Lowther Clarke's illuminating discussion of “The Church of God” in his book, *Divine Humanity*, pp. 151 ff.

<sup>2</sup> This is perhaps the correct reading in Mk. viii. 38

<sup>3</sup> Mk. iii. 35

<sup>4</sup> Mt. xviii. 20

<sup>5</sup> cf. pp. 142 ff, 152 f.

rather we must view it in the context of the ministry of Jesus as a whole, not omitting to relate it to certain dominant conceptions in the religion of Israel and to others which came to light in the history of the early Church.

We are certainly on wrong lines if we think of it as an isolated occurrence, a mere farewell supper, and argue (because in some of the accounts the words : " Do this in remembrance of me " are absent) that the supper was not meant to be repeated. It may help us to recapture something of the atmosphere of the Supper, and to explain why, after Pentecost, the Christian brotherhood still assembled " for the breaking of bread," if we recall how this so-called Last Supper must have been the last of many suppers, the solemn culmination of a long series of intimate fellowship meals. How often, more especially in the weeks and months which separated St. Peter's confession from the solemn entry into the Holy City, must Jesus and His disciples have sat down around a table ; and we can imagine how such meetings were made memorable for all who took part in them by the graciousness of the Master's presence, by the pervading sense of fellowship, by the prayers in which they all united, and by the uplifting discourses which carried their thoughts from the simple things of earth to the sacred mysteries of heaven. How many of the discourses in the Fourth Gospel in which our Lord speaks of Himself (as for example when He says : " I am the Bread of Life," " I am the True Vine") go back to occasions such as these.

We ought also to remind ourselves—and this is important in relation to the rapid extension of the fellowship meal among adherents of the new faith—that it was not merely with the Twelve that Jesus was accustomed to have this act of fellowship. When great multitudes came to Him, then even though the materials at His disposal were of the scantiest He would make them sit down and break bread, and so symbolise their fellowship with Himself and with one another as brethren in the family of God the Father. At least one such occasion is recorded in each of the Gospels ; and (as in

Mark and Matthew) there may have been more occasions than one. It is in connection with one such gathering that the Fourth Gospel (chap. vi) gives the discourse on the bread of life, leading to the talk about eating the flesh and drinking the blood of the Son of Man; and some such fellowship teaching (not necessarily in the form there preserved) may quite well have been given by Jesus to His followers long before the occasion of the Last Supper.

The term "the loaves" (*οἱ ἄρτοι*) came to have—and it may have done so even in the lifetime of Jesus—a definite significance, referring to those occasions when He and His followers broke bread together. We may recall that closely packed expression in Mk. vi. 52: *οὐ γὰρ συνήκαν ἐπὶ τοῖς ἄρτοις*, "they had not understood *at the loaves*," followed by the explanation: "for their heart was hardened." This sentence occurs after the story of one of those great gatherings at which the loaves had been broken, and all who were present had been united in a solemn act of fellowship with one another and with their Lord. Now the party had dispersed. The disciples were by themselves, "toiling in rowing" as a storm swept over the lake. Sadly conscious of loneliness and of danger they suddenly realised that even now they were not alone. Their Lord was with them. Across the waves there came to them His voice saying "It is I, be not afraid." And they were (we are told) amazed; for they had forgotten what He had revealed to them in the breaking of the bread, they had failed to learn the lesson of His abiding Presence.<sup>1</sup> Was it again on some such occasion as this that the two companions on the walk to Emmaus had previously broken bread with Jesus? We need not suppose that they had been present at the Last Supper; and yet, when they constrained Him to come in and abide with them, He was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.<sup>2</sup>

Setting therefore the Last Supper in this larger context we can well understand how, on that night on which He was betrayed, Jesus gathered His disciples with Him around a

<sup>1</sup> cf. pp. 122, 124 note 1.

<sup>2</sup> Lk. xxiv. 30-35

table. His whole soul cried out for fellowship. In this supreme hour He needed for Himself the spiritual fellowship of those who were "His own"; and He knew too how vital such fellowship was for them if they were to face with confidence the days of earthly separation. What a revelation of soul there lies in those words,<sup>1</sup> spoken within a few hours of the dread culmination of the Judgment Hall and of Calvary, to men so weak and fickle as He knew His twelve disciples to be: "Ye are the men who have endured with me throughout all my temptations." It is as if He had said to them: "in all the assaults that Satan has made upon Me with a view to the overthrow of God's cause and kingdom, I have always known that you were in the background, and I have been able to count on you." Jesus was confident that His Church had been built upon a rock. With sublime assurance He went on to declare that His fellowship with His followers would never be broken. "Let not your heart be troubled. If I go away, I shall send the Paraclete to you." His last prayer is that, living in fellowship with Him, they will maintain their fellowship with one another—"that ye all may be one." And as to the future, He gives them a pledge that the Kingdom is assured. Here He speaks as Lord. They too will overcome as He has done. "As my Father has assigned to me a kingdom, even so I assign to you the right to eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." "Where I am, there you shall be also."<sup>2</sup>

Looking forward, we may note how this assurance was vindicated in the faith of the early Church. Within a few hours of this meeting the disciples were to stand alone, overtaken by the tragedy for which their Master had sought so assiduously, yet as it seemed so unavailingly, to prepare them. For a time indeed they were scattered. But when the Resurrection came to confirm in them the faith that the Lord

<sup>1</sup> Lk. xxii. 28-30

<sup>2</sup> Jn. xiv. 4

was alive and in their midst as He had assured them He would be, is it surprising that they should still have continued to meet together for the breaking of bread, to keep alive as of old the sense both of *His* presence with the brotherhood, and of *their* participation (as His people) in His trials and in His triumphs? And when they met for such gatherings, did they meet *merely* because He had given them a specific injunction so to do, or was it rather because His Spirit working in their hearts made a continuance of the old type of meeting supremely natural and indeed indispensable for them? It was not merely the Twelve who so met; others who were admitted to the fellowship of believers took up the custom, meeting in parties in their several houses. No wonder that when they met for such gatherings they met "with gladness and singleness of heart", and that they recognised the Presence of their Lord in the breaking of the bread.

So thoroughly was the Lord present with them in those fellowship meetings that it was in such gatherings that the Church in the early days of the Gospel found one of the chief means of nourishing and developing its new-born life. For consider what their religion meant to those first followers of Jesus. They were good Jews—they believed in the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God who had given through Moses the Law to His chosen people, and who had chosen for Himself a habitation in the Temple on Mount Zion. But they were all men who (in the simple phrase still happily current in pious circles) had had an "experience." They had known Jesus, the Holy One of God—known Him in the flesh, and now they knew Him even more fully and intimately in the spirit. As to the relation in which their new-found experience of the spiritual presence and power of the Lord Jesus stood to their ancestral faith in the God of Israel, on that they had as yet no clear and defined theology—only they knew that the one in no wise compromised the other, but served rather to make it more vital and complete. And so the Law of God continued to be their delight, and they went up to the Temple to offer

sacrifice and prayer ; but their fellowship in Christ Jesus had also to be maintained, and for that they met together to engage in prayer, to listen to the teaching of the apostles, and above all to unite in the breaking of bread.<sup>1</sup> And when they met in sincerity they found that the Lord was ever in their midst.

#### IV. THE NEW COVENANT

There are many problems<sup>2</sup> connected with the Last Supper which need not detain us here—it is enough for our present purpose to find in it a vindication of the view that the mission of Jesus required for its completion a spiritual fellowship of which He was the centre. But before we close we must glance at some of the words and actions of Jesus by which this “last” supper was differentiated from all those other fellowship meals which were now to find in it their culmination.

He knows and warns His disciples that this is indeed to be the last of such earthly gatherings. “When next I drink of the fruit of the vine it will be in the Kingdom of God.” These words are a reminder that the Last Supper has its connections not merely backwards, but forwards ; it is not merely a culmination of the fellowship of earth, it is an anticipation of the fellowship of heaven. It is not in regret that Jesus speaks, but in confidence and joyful hope. His thoughts are no longer on the “temptations” (πειρασμοί) which He has endured, the last and the greatest of which He must face in a few hours ; His soul has soared away beyond all earthly conflicts, and in vision He sees the banquet prepared by God to celebrate how death and all the ills of life are swallowed up in victory. Such a feast, in which all nations were to participate, had been graphically described by Isaiah<sup>3</sup> in what Dr. Buchanan Gray has called “one of

<sup>1</sup> Acts ii. 42

<sup>2</sup> e.g. was Jesus here celebrating the Jewish Passover, either in reality or by anticipation ? The Fourth Gospel represents the Last Supper as taking place before the Passover had begun. The suggestion that it was a Jewish *Kiddush*, a “family-worship” celebration in preparation for a holy day, ought probably to be rejected.

<sup>3</sup> chap. xxv.

the most catholic passages in the Old Testament, and one of the tenderest presentations of Yahweh ”; and there are many indications in the Gospels that the image had deeply influenced the imagination of Jesus.<sup>1</sup> And so here Jesus sees in vision that great feast of victory at which He and all who have shared His conflicts and His triumphs will sit down together in the Kingdom of God.

A hope of this kind, we may remind ourselves, has its parallel in the Passover ritual; for the Passover, though it was designed to look backwards to the deliverance from Egypt, was probably celebrated in the time of Jesus, as it is celebrated still, in a spirit of confident hope<sup>2</sup>—that hope which in due course came to be expressed in the formula:

“ This is the bread of affliction which our fathers did eat in the land of Egypt. Let all who are hungry come in and eat . . . This year here, next year in the land of Israel! This year slaves, next year free men all.”

Need one add that such an assured hope is never absent from the spirit of true religion? Notably when Christians keep the Supper of the Lord their faces are turned forward; they proclaim the Lord’s death “ *till He come.* ”<sup>3</sup> The feast of which they partake is less a memorial of the original feast in the Jerusalem upper room than an anticipation of the culminating feast in the Kingdom of God.

But while He looks forward with confidence to His final triumph, Jesus knows too that victory must be purchased at the cost of sacrifice. And so, turning to those loyal disciples who will still have their “ trials ” to go through even after He has completed His, He began to tell them (and there is no need to think that He did so now for the first time) of a covenant to be ratified by His blood. The day had come

<sup>1</sup> cf. the frequent symbolism of the marriage feast, and perhaps also such a phrase as “ I came to call sinners,” not calling them to repentance but inviting them to occupy the place which God has prepared for them.

<sup>2</sup> cf. Buchanan Gray, *Sacrifice in the Old Testament*, p. 379.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor. xi. 26.

for the fulfilment of that word of Jeremiah<sup>1</sup> that God would make a new covenant with His people, a covenant by which He will break down every barrier that separates His people from Him and bind them to Him in the truest fellowship. Instead of merely obeying God's written behests they are now to have the law of God written on their hearts; their past sins too are to be blotted out, and being truly reconciled to Him they are all to know Him with an intimacy and directness which makes their fellowship with God complete and perfect. The new covenant however—like the old covenant enacted on Mount Sinai<sup>2</sup>—will necessarily involve the shedding of blood; and in this case nothing less is demanded of the people who are to inherit it than the willing offering of His life on the part of their King. And so, taking the cup, Jesus passes it to His disciples, indicating (in words the meaning of which is clear, though the precise form differs in the different Gospels) that it signifies the new covenant to be ratified in His blood. And His request that they should all drink<sup>3</sup> of it has probably a two-fold significance, (i) that they accept for themselves the spiritual benefits which He purchases by His death—in that respect they are representatives of the fellowship on whose behalf He dies; (ii) that now their lives are linked with His in a sacrificial fellowship; now they share in His sacrifice on behalf of mankind as they share also in His triumphs.

As He passes to them the cup, so too He passes the bread, and asks them to eat of it. It is an interesting problem whether the symbolism in the two cases is strictly parallel. The common view is that the bread, like the wine, is to be interpreted sacrificially; as the one is poured out, so the other is "broken for you." But the word "broken," which occurs only in 1 Cor. xi. 24, represents an inferior manuscript reading—Luke xxii. 19 has "given"; and in the shorter text of Luke the words are simply: "this is my body."

<sup>1</sup> xxxi. 31 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Exod. xxiv. 3-8

<sup>3</sup> The act of drinking, in contrast to the sprinkling of the blood on the people in the institution of the old covenant, serves to bring out the inwardness of true religion under the new covenant.

In the account of the Eucharist given in the *Didache* (ix. 4) there is the interesting and significant prayer :

“As this broken bread was scattered upon the mountains, and being gathered together became one, so may Thy Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into Thy Kingdom.”

And so it seems at least a tenable hypothesis (though from the nature of the case it can never be more than this) that behind the symbolism of the bread some place may be found for the conception of the unity of the believers who are welded together in Christ into a fellowship.<sup>1</sup> The grains of wheat must severally fall into the ground and die ; but when they come to fruition they attain to their place in the loaf. So while the disciples are asked to drink the wine as a symbol that they share in the death of their Lord, it may possibly be that they eat the bread to signify that they attain to completion in the fellowship of the one body. Thus in the teaching of Jesus Himself there may be a basis for the Pauline metaphor of the Church as the Body of Christ.

#### V. A FELLOWSHIP, REDEEMED AND REDEEMING

Jesus spent His days touching the lives of individual men and women ; nevertheless it was His constant aim to bring into being a true People of God. And it is not that He so impressed individuals that in due course His followers got together, saying : “Come and let us form a fellowship.” In bringing them to God He led them to see that God Himself had sought them out, and had brought them back from their wanderings to their rightful place in His family.

It is unscriptural to say that Jesus *founded* the Church.

<sup>1</sup> In a hymn entitled “A Thanksgiving after the Receiving of the Lord’s Supper” which appears in the English Psalter of 1562, and in the Scottish Reformation Psalter, there occurs the verse :

And as the corns by unity into one loaf are knit,  
So is the Lord and His whole Church, though He in heaven sit.  
As many grapes make but one wine, so should we be but one  
In faith and love in Christ above and unto Christ alone.

For long centuries before Jesus came God had been working to win for Himself a holy People. But his People had refused to obey His will; they had shown their incapacity to receive the blessings He was ready to give them; and they had become enslaved to the powers of this world. And now Jesus had come to ransom or deliver the Church, and to impart to it the life of God Himself. To put it otherwise, He had found the Church in ruins; but having dug down to solid rock, He was now building afresh on better foundations.

Thus the Church is the fellowship of those whom Jesus has redeemed out of bondage to the world into the liberty of the sons of God, a fellowship in which they seek, in union with their crucified and living Lord, for the redemption of their brethren of mankind and for the establishment unto the ends of the earth of the sovereign Rule of God the Father. It is a community rather than an institution or an organisation. This does not mean that it is a community without order or discipline. The Twelve are not merely the initial members of the community; they are "apostles," charged with the responsibility of continuing in their Master's name the work which He has begun—that work including both missionary expansion and the more specific kind of "building" (within the fellowship) which in the vocabulary of the Church goes by the name of "edification." But Jesus does not impose on His Church a precise constitution. His concern is not for the details of its organisation but for the character of its inner life.

While from the divine angle we see the Church as "a sacred temple, a habitation for God in the Spirit,"<sup>1</sup> yet the stones of which this temple is built are the lives of men and women. Alas that the Church, claiming in virtue of its divine call to be separate from the world, should tend so easily to become separate from the common everyday life of humanity. And, turning from the Church as we know it to reflect on the life of the Church's Lord, we recall by contrast how, despite His devotion to the God of His fathers, Jesus

<sup>1</sup> Eph. ii. 21 f.

was expelled from the synagogue, He pronounced a doom on the temple, and no people received from Him such denunciation as the scribes and the Pharisees ; yet He never ceased to be at home with simple men and women as they went about their daily tasks and bore their daily burdens. His parables, with their pictures of men sowing and fishing and trading, all deal with *human* life, scarcely ever (if we may use the phrase) with *Church* life. The one parable which deals at all with the latter (the story of the Pharisee and the Publican at prayer) is a trenchant exposure of the hypocrisy that so often accompanies religious profession ; and in His answer to the searching question “ who is my neighbour ? ” He selects a priest and a Levite as typical of those who are blind or indifferent to the needs of their fellow men.

There is something here to which the Church, preoccupied as it so often is with its ritual observances, its buildings and its organisations, must ever be prepared to give earnest heed. It must learn afresh how to touch human life at every point, not summoning men from afar to rise to the height of their divine calling, but in Christ’s name coming down among them that so in His name it may raise them up. It was as Son of Man that Jesus came to seek and to save the lost ;<sup>1</sup> and all that He says about the Son of Man has an applicability for the redeemed and redeeming Fellowship which He has called into being. The Church for which He gave His life is a Fellowship filled with the Spirit of God ; but it is also true that the Fellowship which God ordains is one in which the life of man on earth should find its perfect self-expression.

<sup>1</sup> Lk. xix. 10

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE FAITH OF THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH

**O**UR task in the preceding pages has been to excavate one end of the dark tunnel to which an allusion was made in the introductory chapter. We have been trying to see more clearly the essential truths about Jesus of Nazareth. In this chapter we turn to consider in a general way the work which is proceeding at the other end of the tunnel, where criticism is engaged in tracing the beginnings of the Church's faith and life. Can we discern from the far end some shafts of light that give promise of a through passage ?

#### I. THE PRIMITIVE EVANGEL

The faith of the primitive Church—here is a problem quite as dark and complex as is the rediscovery of the historical Jesus. There is firstly the difficulty of collecting our data. Much as we know of the teaching of St. Paul, we have nothing like the same wealth of material for an understanding of the teaching and outlook of the primitive apostles. Nevertheless we have in the early chapters of Acts a document of singular value which takes us back into the atmosphere of the primitive Christian community, with its centre first in Jerusalem and then in Antioch. Much too of the teaching of St. Paul was in line with the tradition which he had inherited from those who were in Christ before him : he tells us more than once that he is passing on what he has received. A good deal may also be gathered indirectly from other books of the New Testament, including the Gospels.

Even after we have collected our data, however, there is the further difficulty of interpreting them aright. For all

their spiritual greatness the apostles had their share of human limitations, and the Gospel as preached by them, interpreted in terms of their own limited experience, necessarily lacked some of the fullness and purity and power which we rightly associate with the gospel of Jesus Christ. For example, they were inclined as Jews to take it for granted that the gospel was primarily for Jews, and that for salvation even faith in the Lord Jesus Christ required to be supplemented by the keeping of the Mosaic Law. In this respect St. Paul, who is often misrepresented as an innovating, and even a corrupting, influence in Christian doctrine, was truer to the spirit of his Master's teaching than were the primitive apostles in the days of the beginning of the gospel. So too we may recall that what Jesus succeeded in doing above all else for His followers was to give them an abiding sense of the Presence and Power of God : and it may be that the New Testament teaching on the reality of the Holy Spirit, such as we find in St. Paul's Epistles and in the Fourth Gospel, is far more truly in accord with the mind of Jesus than the unbalanced expectation that the Messiah Jesus was soon to appear in apocalyptic splendour. If then we are to be helped by our enquiry into the faith of the early disciples, we must not think merely of the terms in which they formulated their belief. Behind all formulations we must get back to the faith itself.

There is one simple fact which it is important in this connection to keep steadily before us ; it is that the first Christian disciples were men who had known Jesus intimately in the flesh. It was from their association with " the historical Jesus," in whom, as they believed, the Hope of Israel was fulfilled, that their faith took its rise. They never doubted therefore that their faith was founded on fact. They had witnessed His works of power ; they had listened devoutly to His teaching ; they had been impressed by His faith in God and His life of lowly service and self-sacrificing love ; and from living in close association with Him their own lives had been transformed. His death had been a shattering blow

to them ; and apparently they did not have at the first any "theology of the Cross," beyond recognising that it must have happened in accordance with the foreknowledge of God. But they were aflame with the conviction that the verdict of the cross had been reversed. God, they declared, had raised Jesus from the dead ; of that fact, they added, "we are witnesses."

Here, on the testimony of the early disciples, we are brought face to face with a new fact about Jesus—a fact in the light of which all else that is known about Him becomes transfigured. His Resurrection was a fact of which they were assured—so much so, that in the strength of the faith which it evoked in them they succeeded in changing the course of civilisation and giving the world an assured hope which has never since been allowed to die. As to *how* Jesus rose from the dead, we have no evidence to guide us except the accounts in the Gospels ; and these accounts, difficult to understand and to harmonise, and clearly influenced by the faith of the Christian communities that gave them currency, are not sufficient to enable us to proceed with confidence to a scientific reconstruction of the historical facts. But they do help us to see both the amazement of the disciples and their certainty that they had been privileged to witness a stupendous act of God.

This certainty of the disciples that their Master had been raised from the dead is at once the most unchallengeable and the most important fact in the whole situation. A few days before they had seen Him nailed to a cross—He was crucified, dead and buried ; and with His death all the high hopes which He had quickened in their souls were buried in the grave beside Him. Now they were aflame with the conviction that He had burst the bonds of His prison-house, that God had raised Him from the dead. And on the strength of this conviction they went on to proclaim, with an assurance from which all questionings and hesitations had disappeared, that a new world order had dawned, that Jesus had been vindicated as God's Messiah, and that all who wished sal-

vation should acknowledge His messianic authority and receive through Him the life-giving Spirit of God.

The whole of our New Testament Scriptures are a testimony to the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. It was to the Resurrection that the early Christians appealed when challenged to give a justification for their new-found faith. But though their language in places might lead us to forget this, they never conceived the Resurrection of Jesus as a wholly isolated fact, unrelated to the life and death of which it was the culmination. If John the Baptist had been raised from the dead, they would not have proclaimed him as Messiah. The Resurrection of Jesus acquired for them its transcendent significance because it was the Resurrection of One whom even in His earthly life they had come to recognise as the Messiah, One who had so thoroughly entered into the secret of eternal life that death itself could have no power over Him, One who had exercised over the souls of men a moral and spiritual authority so penetrating, and so final, that He was able, because He was worthy, to take the book of life and break its seals, and to make His followers kings and priests unto God.<sup>1</sup>

Their message, therefore, was rooted in history. It was a testimony about *Jesus*. But it was a testimony which gave them a gospel of *God*. We are not to think of it as a philosophy of life which they had learned from Jesus as a teacher; it was a gospel which centred on what God had already accomplished, and was going on still to accomplish, in and through Jesus His appointed Servant. It thus had an anchorage and a guarantee in the past; but just because it was a gospel of the living God, it had its *foci* in the present and in the future. The message which the first Christian believers proclaimed with such boldness and radiance of spirit was not so much that Jesus their Lord *had* lived, or that He *had* died, or even that He *had* been raised from the dead (though all these were elements in their proclamation); it was rather that, in and through Jesus, God had now drawn near to

<sup>1</sup> Acts ii. 24; Rev. v. 1-10

establish His dwelling-place among men, and that in due time Jesus, now raised to God's right hand as His Messiah, would come in power to judge the world, to set up His Kingdom, and to call those who were His into His Kingdom and Glory. Such a message, whatever value we may attach to the imagery in which it finds expression, is at least a "Gospel," a piece of "Good News," in a way in which some modern presentations of Jesus, which interpret Him solely as an historical figure who appeared at a particular place and date in the world's history, can never provide a Gospel.

We turn now to look more closely into those two aspects of the primitive evangel—that concerned with the present and that which looked forward to the future. The former of these I take to be on the whole the more fundamental, both in the mind of Jesus and in the spiritual outlook of the early Church; but it may contribute to clearness of analysis if we reverse the order and take the other first.

## II. "THINE, O LORD, IS THE VICTORY"

In virtue of their association with Jesus the disciples began to proclaim with unchallengeable assurance that God's purposes for the world's salvation had now entered on the stage of fulfilment. A new age had dawned. Apart from the presence of God with His people through the gift of His Spirit, there were other facts, all concerned with the appearance on the plane of history of Jesus of Nazareth, from which men might clearly see that they were now living, as St. Peter claimed, in the "last days."<sup>1</sup>

Here we may take St. Peter's sermons in Acts ii and iii as a guide.

- i. Appeal was made firstly to the character of Jesus' earthly life—He was obviously a man approved by God, and ought therefore to have been accepted by His fellows.

<sup>1</sup> Acts ii. 17

- ii. Instead of acceptance, however, He had met with rejection and been put to an ignominious death. This was due to the wickedness of men ; but no theological explanation is as yet given of the death except that it must have happened with the foreknowledge of God.
- iii. But God raised Jesus from the dead, and exalted Him to His own right hand—the disciples asserted that they were themselves witnesses of the *fact* of the resurrection, and in the light of Scripture they interpreted its *significance* as a vindication by God of His Servant Jesus, who was thus set forth as Messiah and Lord.
- iv. All these facts about Jesus were elements of one great eschatological fact ; by the coming of Jesus God had laid bare His holy arm for the accomplishment of His righteous purposes, and final victory was now assured.

These religious convictions of the disciples were essentially in line with the faith into which their Master had sought to lead them, not merely by His teaching on the Kingship of God, but also by all that He had taught them regarding the authority entrusted to the Son of Man as the world's Saviour and Judge. As it was, however, the precious gift which Jesus had imparted to them was necessarily affected by the earthen vessels into which it had been poured. Hence, when the early Christians came to give expression to their faith, they frequently did so in ways which were not in strict accordance with the mind and spirit of Jesus. As a result of their Jewish upbringing, their faith in God had been dominated to a large extent by the expectation of a Messiah whom God should send for the inauguration of His Kingdom ; and it is therefore not surprising that the profound and vigorous religious faith which had been quickened in them by Jesus led them to declare that in Him the promised Messiah had appeared.

That Jesus Himself had not laid claim to the name Messiah, that He had in fact discouraged the application of such a name to Himself—these facts weighed as nothing with them in

comparison with their newly won conviction that, by raising Him from the dead and exalting Him to His own right hand, God had given an open and irrefutable demonstration that Jesus was in fact His Messiah. Hence, while their fellow Israelites who did not share their faith in Jesus still nursed the hope that some day God would send a Messiah (not knowing, however, who he might be, or when and where he might appear), the disciples of Jesus, who had companied with Him in the flesh, and had been witnesses of His resurrection, were able to declare boldly: "We know who the Messiah is, and he is none other than Jesus of Nazareth." Their message<sup>1</sup> was not so much that "Jesus is the Messiah" as that "the Messiah is Jesus." For such a faith and such a message they had indeed adequate justification; but it remains for us to consider whether in a variety of ways they were not introducing a subtle change into the form, if not the content, of the Christian gospel.

(i) In the first place there was here a danger of reversing the whole line of approach along which Jesus sought to win men to follow Him as their Leader and Lord. He came among men as Son of Man, calling on them to follow Him in the way which alone would lead to eternal life; and as Son of Man He claimed to have been entrusted by God with an authority that was decisive. Eternal life, as He made transparently plain, consisted in being reconciled to God; and as for Himself, what was He but the Good Shepherd who cared for His sheep? Men must therefore learn to follow Him before they ascribed titles to Him. With the proclamation of His Messiahship, on the other hand, men were summoned not so much to obey Him as to believe something about Him. The first step was being taken towards converting the faith into a creed.

(ii) This change of approach in regard to the way of salvation led to a similar change in regard to doctrinal ex-

<sup>1</sup> cf. p. 275

pression. Clearly some name must be given to one who does for men all that Jesus does for His fellows. Some day His followers must answer the question: “Who do you say that I am?” When, however, the early Christians came to ascribe Messiahship to Jesus, a dignity on which He had entered in virtue of His Resurrection and Ascension, they were driven to interpret everything previous to the Resurrection by a process of “reasoning backwards.” His earthly life came to be regarded as a period of humiliation, a necessary prelude to His entering on His messianic glory. His death on the cross became an apologetic problem which was met by the argument (for which a basis was claimed in Scripture) that there was a divine necessity that the Messiah should suffer.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast to this we may recall how Jesus had followed up St. Peter’s confession, “Thou art *the Christ*,” with the declaration that *the Son of Man* must suffer. The Son of Man Christology proceeds from fact to faith—the Son of Man lives His earthly life in accordance with the laws and the spirit of God, and thereby inevitably attains, under God, to lordship and victory. On the other hand the Messiah Christology (if we may use such a term) begins with a basis in faith—men are asked to believe that the risen and exalted Jesus is God’s Anointed; and it then proceeds to interpret the historical facts of His earthly life in the light of that faith.

(iii) The acceptance of the Messiahship of Jesus inevitably created in the early Church a confident assurance, which in certain circumstances became a feverish expectation, that in due time (which might not be long delayed) the Messiah would appear in glory and power. To their unbelieving brethren in Israel the messianic hope was apt to be nothing more than a hope, vague in outline, and destined to be realised only in an indeterminate future. The early Christians, on the other hand, took their stand on the fact that God had now revealed who it was who was to come as His Messiah, and from the nature of the case they therefore regarded it as certain that

<sup>1</sup> Lk. xxiv. 26; Acts xxvi. 23

His Coming was "at hand." In this confident hope we can again see the influence of the personality and teaching of Jesus ; but the form in which the hope was expressed was not His.

But if we are to have a true appreciation of the Christology of the early Christians we must not be content merely to examine the language and the imagery in which they expressed their faith. While they proclaimed Jesus as Lord and Christ in virtue of His Resurrection and Ascension, they did not forget their Lord's earthly life of love and power of which they themselves had in many cases been witnesses. St. Peter, quoting Isaiah, refers to Jesus as God's Servant, and calls Him the Holy and the Just One and the Prince of Life.<sup>1</sup> And in his survey of the early history of Israel St. Stephen, by his choice of topics and by his characterisation of the various patriarchs, seems to indicate that many of the great episodes in his nation's history were a prefigurement of the work of Jesus, and many of the patriarchs were a prefigurement of His character and person. Thus the rejection of Joseph by his brethren was a stage in the process by which Joseph was ultimately exalted so as to accomplish their salvation. The same was true of Moses, the man who was chosen by God to represent His people before the might and power of Egypt, who became a prophet of God and a deliverer of His people, and who brought to them living oracles which they would not accept.

Hence, before their thoughts were concentrated on a risen and exalted Lord, those early followers of Jesus had in mind One who was found in fashion as a man, whom God had raised up in the midst of His brethren to be their representative and their deliverer, who was full of lovingkindness to men in their need, full of power to help, full of the Spirit of God—and who had yet been rejected. This did not mean, of course, that Jesus was for them merely one in the long succession of national heroes. Those others were types of

<sup>1</sup> Acts iii. 13-15. St. Stephen also calls Him the Just One (Acts vii. 52).

a God-ordained salvation which reached its fulfilment in Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

Such a presentation of Jesus has much in common with His own description of Himself as the Son of Man, the supreme representative not of Israel merely but of God's human family ; and it is right to recall that the Son of Man Christology may be traced in the early Church alongside of, and in a subtle way modifying, the Messiah Christology. In St. Peter's early sermons, as well as in St. Stephen's apologia, the general picture of Jesus suggests the life story of the Son of Man. Though the designation "Son of Man" practically disappears from the New Testament outside of the Gospels, we can trace it in St. Paul's references to Jesus as the Second Adam, and very notably in that noble piece of early Christian poetry preserved in the Epistle to the Philippians (ii. 5-11), of which an examination was given in a previous chapter.<sup>2</sup> We see its influence again in the pen-portraits of Jesus in 1 Peter,<sup>3</sup> and it dominates the Christology of the Epistle to the Hebrews. The conception of the Son of Man would seem to have passed on through the first disciples into the Hellenist section of the primitive Church, but to have given way in the more strictly Hebrew section to the conception of Jesus as Messiah.

### III. "THE TABERNACLE OF GOD IS WITH MEN"

We pass now to consider that other element in the primitive evangel which deals, not with the *future* triumph of God, but with the revived sense of His power and goodness in the living *present*. Though we have given this element second place in our examination, it would be erroneous to think of it as a secondary or derived element. It was without doubt a fundamental factor in the faith of Jesus during His earthly ministry ; He sought to bring men to a living experience of God the Father before firing them with an assur-

<sup>1</sup> We may trace here a link between St. Stephen's speech and the Epistle to the Hebrews.

<sup>2</sup> p. 193.

<sup>3</sup> e.g. ii. 21 ff., iii. 18.

ance about the triumph of God's Kingdom. We ought probably to recognise that it was also a fundamental and abiding element in the faith of the early Church, though in times of spiritual stress and strain it might sometimes seem to count for less than the eager expectation of a coming deliverance and triumph.

In the first few weeks after their Master had been taken from them, it was natural that the minds of the disciples, now rejoicing in the Resurrection, should have been dominated by the recognition of His Messiahship and by all the high hopes which thus opened out before them. But in due course there came to them, more especially when they were no longer cheered by occasional appearances of their risen Lord, a deep and continuous sense of the Presence of God, and with it they became conscious (as individuals and as a fellowship) of a peace and radiance and power which nothing could disturb or shake. It was an experience of the Living God. The experience itself was the primary reality for them; it was only later that they attempted to explain it. The Book of Acts, which alone gives an account of the Ascension of Jesus, gives us also our only narrative of what has been called the Descent of the Holy Spirit; and it would be gratuitous to assume that this professedly historical account was necessarily known or accepted in all sections of the early Church.

There is little direct indication in the Gospels that Jesus during His earthly ministry had given explicit teaching about the coming of the Spirit. But His whole ministry had been a revelation of the reality and power of the Spirit of God. He Himself had been filled with the Spirit at His baptism; in the power of the Spirit He had lived and taught and done all His wonderful works; endowed with the Spirit He stood to God in the relation of a son to the Father. Moreover He brought to all those among whom He moved a sense of the living God—a God who draws near to men to bear their sorrows, to heal their sicknesses, to forgive their sins, to deliver them from bondage and to bring them to their place

in the fellowship of the sons of God. This experience of the living God the disciples of Jesus continued to have even after He had left them. They knew that they owed it to Him. They had been called by Him into His Fellowship; and now they were finding that the Spirit which had been in Him was being imparted to them. They naturally thought of it as a gift from God—the greatest and best of all God’s gifts, for in giving them His Spirit God was indeed giving them Himself.

The gift of the Spirit was not, be it noted, a gift given to men in general. It was the gift which had in the first place been given to Jesus as the Son of God; and now it was being given to those whom the Son had called into His Fellowship. Thus the Christian Church, for whose life Jesus had been content to die, was finally brought to the birth when it received the gift of the Holy Spirit. As regards the individual Christian, it came to be recognised that, just as the baptism of Jesus with the Spirit was linked with the water baptism which He accepted from John, so too it was in receiving water baptism into the name of Jesus that the new members would receive baptism with the Spirit. “Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts ii. 38). An essential element in the process, however, was “baptism into the name of Jesus.” The Spirit they were to receive was the Spirit of God; but it was only through incorporation into the Fellowship of the living and exalted Lord Jesus that they could receive it. Peter in his sermon (Acts ii. 33) pictures the pouring out of the Spirit as following on the exaltation of Jesus to God’s right hand: and we may recall how, in Ephesians iv. 8 ff., it is the Ascended Christ who gives gifts, including the Holy Spirit, to His Church.

As a further proof of the intimacy of the link between the influence of the historical Jesus and the operation of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church, we may cite the

ease with which the two conceptions of "the Spirit of God" and "the Spirit of Jesus" became practically interchangeable. Just as during the earthly ministry of Jesus the disciples had felt that God Himself was speaking to them through the life of their Master, so now the God whose Spirit was operative in their midst was the God whom they had seen and known in Jesus. In a very real sense it was as if Jesus Himself was still guiding them in their perplexities, strengthening them in their trials, breaking down all walls of separation and enabling them to love and serve one another. Thus through the power of the Holy Spirit the influence of Jesus continued to manifest itself in the daily character and conduct of the Christian disciples. Outsiders observed the new power at work in their lives, and took note of them that "they had been with Jesus" (Acts iv. 13).

Surveying the doctrinal conceptions current among the early Christians, we see how in one sense the teaching on the Spirit of God in the life of the Church falls into a distinct category by itself. The other conceptions form a unity of their own, telling as they do of the earthly life and shameful death of the Messiah-designate, then of His Resurrection and Ascension, of His Messianic Reign, and of His looked-for Parousia. In contrast to these messianic conceptions, which have their basis in Hebrew eschatology, this more "mystical" teaching on the gift of the Holy Spirit has sometimes been described as Hellenistic in character, representing a later spiritualisation of the early Hebrew eschatological hopes. We ought, however, to recognise that what is here called "mystical" represents a genuine, and indeed a fundamental, element in the teaching of Jesus. His saying about being present with the two or three who are gathered in His name is only one illustration among many of the spiritual tie by which He regarded Himself as linked to those who were His.<sup>1</sup> He preferred, too, to dwell on the spiritual relationship which, through the medium of the Son, the Father God had estab-

<sup>1</sup>cf. pp. 227 f.

lished between Himself and His children rather than to develop theories about the messianic kingdom.<sup>1</sup>

This sense which the early Christians had of the Presence of God with His people ought to be linked up with the teaching of Jesus as we have it in the Fourth Gospel. Nowhere else in the New Testament is the relation of Jesus to His followers expressed so fully or so forcibly. We see this more particularly in the detailed teaching of the Farewell Discourses (chapters xiv-xvii). But the Gospel as a whole reveals from first to last how Jesus ranges men into two categories according as they accept or reject the gift which God has to give them, a gift which (seen in its true light) is nothing less than the gift of Himself, the gift of His Holy Spirit. The Fourth Gospel describes this gift as “life,” or “eternal life”; it is the life of God Himself imparted to those who will receive it. Life of this kind is not something to which men can attain by their own efforts, or which, when they have attained to it, they can enjoy in isolation. Jesus Himself has the secret of it; it is of the very essence of His being. And so He calls on men to come to Him that they in turn may receive it, and He is amazed and grieved that they should seek for it elsewhere than from the living springs.<sup>2</sup> Jesus believes and claims that no man cometh to the Father save by Him;<sup>3</sup> and it is in and through fellowship with Him that men enter into life.

The same truth is further enforced in the Fourth Gospel in what is said regarding the relation between the Father and the Son, for sonship is an experience of God which Jesus desires others to share with Him; and we can trace it also in many of the sayings about the Son of Man. But the true character of the link which binds Jesus to His followers is defined more especially by reference to His saving death. His followers are enabled to enter into life only because He has died for them; and there is a deep sense in which they

<sup>1</sup> St. Paul too in his picture of the messianic reign in 1 Cor. xv. 24-28 thinks of Jesus not only as the Messiah but also as the Son of the Father.

<sup>2</sup> Jn. v. 39 f.

<sup>3</sup> Jn. xiv. 6; cf. Mt. xi. 27.

must share in His death if they are to share in the life which He has won for them. That is why the Fourth Gospel makes bold to connect the glorification of the Son of Man not merely with His resurrection and ascension, but in a very special way with His sacrificial death. The death of Jesus is not for the Fourth Evangelist (as apparently it was for those earliest disciples in Jerusalem who were called to walk under the immediate shadow of the Cross) a temporary triumph of human wickedness, which in the Providence of God was overruled by the resurrection; still less is it, as in the purely apocalyptic interpretation of the message of Jesus, a mere prelude to the ultimate revelation of the Son of Man who is to come as the world's Judge. Rather it represents the culminating point in the triumphant earthly life of Him who was at once Son of Man and Son of God.

In all this we can see how the Fourth Gospel, which is so often represented as being indifferent to historical truth, is emphatic in presenting the Gospel as rooted and grounded in history. And this fact has an important bearing on the problem of Christology. A Christology like that of the primitive church, which glories in the resurrection and ascension of Jesus as a vindication of His Messiahship, but cannot glory similarly in His death on the cross, is a Christology which, to that extent, abandons its hold on history and is content to look in faith to God, believing that though He may allow wickedness for a time to triumph, He will vindicate His righteousness in His own good time and way. The Fourth Gospel, on the other hand, sounds a much needed reminder that the ultimate triumph of God demands for its realisation a progressive advance of His Kingdom and His righteousness on the plane of history, and it can only be accomplished in so far as human life in all its varied aspects is brought into conformity with the holy will of God and becomes thereby a revelation of His mind and spirit.

Thus a determining factor at every stage is the response which man makes to the claims of the living God. We see this illustrated on every page of the Gospel story; in His

death as in His life Jesus is obedient to the will of Him who sent Him. We see it in the life of such an one as St. Paul, who, as he surveyed the vast field of service which opened out before him, was nevertheless content that Christ should be magnified in his mortal body, whether in life or in death.<sup>1</sup> And we see it reproduced in the life of every true Christian disciple. "It is the way the Master trod ; shall not the servant tread it still ? " We have here an essential element in the teaching of Jesus ; and it is one on which Jesus must have laid the very greatest stress in the training of His disciples.

#### IV. THE DEVELOPMENT OF EARLY CHRISTIAN ESCHATOLOGY

One significant conclusion emerges from this, viz. that in emphasising the abiding spiritual Presence of the Lord with His disciples the Fourth Gospel has preserved a very important original element in the teaching of Jesus. If that is so, then there is need to revise certain prevalent ideas regarding the development of early Christian eschatology. Ever since criticism began to emphasise the apocalyptic element in the message of Jesus there has been a tendency to trace the course of development along the following lines :

- i. The outlook of the primitive community, we are told, was dominated by a crude form of apocalyptic expectation.
- ii. Even St. Paul had not emancipated himself from it at the time when he wrote his early Thessalonian Epistles.
- iii. Later, as the expectation of the Parousia receded, a greater emphasis came to be laid on the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.
- iv. Finally the process reached its consummation in the mystical teaching of the Fourth Gospel, with the doctrine of Eternal Life replacing the earlier expectation of the appearance of the Messiah and the dramatic establishment of the Kingdom of God.

<sup>1</sup> Phil. i. 20

Superficially such an analysis may seem simple and reasonable ; but it is essentially perverse. There were undoubtedly crude elements in the earlier eschatology which yielded in time to a spiritualising process ; but the spiritualisation was made possible because it implied the assertion of an all-important element which had been present from the first. The eschatology of Jesus was essentially spiritual ; all that He had to say about the Kingdom of God and the Coming of the Son of Man in judgment was aglow with a burning, passionate conviction regarding the character and purposes of Him whom He called His Father. By His teaching and His life He led men to a knowledge and experience of the living God ; and it was this experience of God the Father, and not the confident assurance of His own return in messianic glory, which constitutes the fundamental legacy which Jesus left to His disciples. It is not to be wondered at that the purity of this original legacy should have suffered corruption at the hands of His early followers. Its spiritual message was made by them to conform to a scheme of Jewish expectations with which they were familiar ; and later (as in the Fourth Gospel) it had to be spiritualised afresh. But the eschatology of the Fourth Gospel, emphasising as it does how the Lord abides in His disciples and how they are called to abide in Him, implies not the import of an element which is new, but the return to an element which is primitive and original.

The two elements which we have been considering in the faith of the early Christians, viz. their certainty (based on the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus) about the fulfilment of God's purposes, and their consciousness of God's spiritual Presence with His people through the gift of the Holy Spirit, naturally reacted one upon the other ; and it is desirable to note more particularly how the second of these, which clearly was a vital factor in their faith from the beginning, and in which we can trace so vividly the influence of Jesus on those whose lives He touched, exercised a profoundly spiritualising effect upon the other, which apart from it might so easily

have lost contact with the spirit of Jesus and degenerated into fanaticism or unreality. It is a situation which has its parallel in the ministry of Jesus; for while proclaiming to men the Kingdom of God Jesus regarded it as of primary importance that men should come to know God as the living and loving Father. These interactions deserve closer study.

(i) In the first place we ought to be on our guard against the all too common assumption that the outlook of the early Christians was dominated by the expectations of an *early*, or indeed an *immediate*, Parousia. We have already urged<sup>1</sup> that such an expectation in this particular form had no real basis in the teaching of Jesus. On the other hand it has come to be accepted almost without question that it was an essential and dominating element in the faith of the early Church.

The main ground for this belief seems to lie in what I cannot but regard as a false interpretation of the evidence provided by St. Paul in his two Epistles to the Thessalonians. The position is thus stated by Professor Dodd.<sup>2</sup> "His first preaching had left the Thessalonians completely surprised and bewildered when certain of their fellows died and yet the Lord had not come. If Paul preached in these terms at least twenty years after the beginning of the Church, we may suppose that the announcement of a very speedy advent was even more emphatic at an earlier date." If this were a true picture of the situation, we may be sure that the problem raised by the death of members of the Christian fellowship would have asserted itself long before it arose to surprise and bewilder the Thessalonians.<sup>3</sup> In the early chapters of Acts there is only one clear reference to the Return of Christ, and it says nothing of an early Return: "He shall send Jesus Christ, who before was preached unto you, whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all

<sup>1</sup> pp. 180 ff.

<sup>2</sup> *The Apostolic Preaching*, p. 65.

<sup>3</sup> There is no reference to a speedy Advent in Galatians, which some scholars place earlier than the Thessalonian Epistles.

things.”<sup>1</sup> Instead of referring to the expectation of an *early* or an *immediate* Parousia we should be on safer ground if we referred to an *imminent* Parousia—not imminent in terms of *time* (for the times and seasons are hid from the knowledge of man), but imminent in the sense that, in view of certain things which had happened, the Coming was now seen to be certain.

Here an analogy may help us. In the course of a long and hard-fought war (as many readers will recall from their own agonising experience) a sense of God and the Right enables the long-suffering combatants to look forward eagerly to the day when the cause for which they fight will be triumphant. They see the end in vision; and the vision sustains them. In that sense they expect an *early* issue; if they jokingly observe that the first seven years are the worst it is because they feel that the end, however it may be brought about, is not likely to be delayed for seven years. In a sense the end may even be described as *immediate*, because certain events which have taken place, certain factors which have become operative, are already exercising so decisive an influence that victory is felt to be assured. But it would be a childish misrepresentation to imagine them staying their souls with the belief that in some quite inexplicable way the end might come at any moment. They are realistic enough to know that in a war with a grim enemy there can be no end till his power is broken.

So was it with the early Christians. All that they knew about Jesus Christ—His life, His sacrificial death, His resurrection and exaltation—constituted for them one great eschatological fact by which the Lord God of Hosts had vindicated His righteousness and His power; the warfare for His eternal kingdom had entered on its final triumphant stage, and the End to that extent was “at hand.” Not unnaturally they laid stress on the fact that in Jesus God had raised up His Messiah—how then could the End be long delayed? But a fact of no less significance for them was the

<sup>1</sup> Acts iii. 20 f.

extent to which the power of the Spirit of God was operative in their lives, and through them in their relations with their fellows. They had learned that something more is expected of Christian disciples than to gaze helplessly up into heaven. They were called to witness ; and there could be no End while the witness was as yet scarcely begun. The power of God in Christ was operating mightily in them ; but there could be no End till they had brought it to bear more widely and more effectively on the needs of a suffering humanity. Still more clearly was this seen when St. Paul arose with his stirring reminder that the witness must extend to the ends of the earth, and that the Gentiles who were marked out for salvation must be brought into the fellowship of the People of God.

Thus the End might be "at hand" ; but it was equally plain to those early Christians that the End was (as they said) "not yet." Their fundamental conviction might be expressed by saying that through the coming of Jesus Christ the world had passed from a peace to a war footing. Had not Jesus Himself said so—"I came not to bring peace, but a sword." And being at war, with the risen Christ leading them on,<sup>1</sup> they knew that the last stage in the great conflict with the powers of this world had begun.

(ii) But however sore the conflict, however long delayed the End, the early Christians preserved and handed on to succeeding generations an indomitable faith in the final triumph of God. Here again we may trace the influence of their experience of God the Holy Spirit. Had they been merely sustained by their belief in the Messiahship of Jesus and the expectation that, as Messiah, He would soon return in glory and power, their hope would inevitably have wilted under the long-continued stress of adverse circumstances. Something of the strain to which their faith was exposed when it was linked up unduly with messianic expectations revealed itself in course of time in their conception of the messianic kingdom inaugurated by Jesus. Believing that

<sup>1</sup> cf. Eph. i. 19 f.

Jesus had entered on His Messiahship by His Resurrection (or, more strictly, by His Exaltation to the right hand of God) they came in time to conceive the period between the earthly life of Jesus and the ultimate triumph of God's Kingdom as the period of the rule of the Messiah. In that sense the Kingdom of the Messiah was for them a present reality ; the establishment of the Kingdom of God still lay in the future. Such a conception lent itself to various developments under the influence of Jewish speculations. The messianic Kingdom came to be recognised as a time of acute tension, characterised by wars and plagues and the dread realities of sin and death ; and those who were Christ's were called to unrelenting war against the powers of this world. But the time would come when the last enemy would be destroyed ; and, the warfare of the Messiah being ended, the Rule of God would begin.

Jesus Himself would not naturally have expressed His message in such cut and dried terms ; yet, because the faith behind this presentation was combined with a consciousness of the Living Spirit of God, it did not differ essentially from the faith into which Jesus sought to lead His followers. He imparted to men an experience of the Rule of God here and now ; and He led them so to order their lives, in union with Himself, that its ultimate consummation would be advanced. He regarded Himself as sent to deliver men from enslavement to sin and death and all the powers of earth and hell. His own life had been one of ceaseless and victorious warfare ; and that warfare was still being continued by those whom He had called into fellowship with Himself, and who acknowledged Him as their exalted Lord, their Messiah-King. They did not claim, of course, that they themselves were no longer liable to sin and death ; what they claimed was that through Christ the power of sin and death had been broken, and that forgiveness was available for those who turned to God in contrition and trust. Hence they called their fellows to repentance, and assured them that baptism into the name of Jesus would be followed by the gift of the Spirit.

(iii) Thus their confidence in the nearness of God's final victory was saved from unreality by the genuineness of their day by day experience of the Living God. Times and seasons meant little to those in whose lives were already operative the powers of the world to come. On the other hand we do well to remember that this joy which they had continuously in the Holy Spirit never displaced or annulled for them the strong, radiant assurance with which they anticipated the ultimate triumph of the Lord God of Hosts. Because Jesus was their strength and stay in all their daily trials, they did not on that account cease to see in Him the conqueror over sin and death and fate, and to look forward with complete confidence to the day when sorrow and sinning should be no more, and when it might be said: "The kingdom of this world is become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever."<sup>1</sup>

We have already urged<sup>2</sup> that in the teaching of Jesus, though undoubtedly the main emphasis is laid on the revelation of the power and love of God in the living present and on the response which men must make to Him here and now, we need not exclude the confident faith in a final consummation when God's Kingdom shall indeed be fully established, and His will be done by men on earth as it is by the angels in heaven. Such a confident anticipation of final triumph, with all that it implies as regards the necessity for obedience and the certainty of judgment, is a faith which, in face of the world's superficial optimism on the one hand, and its liability to pessimism on the other, the Christian Church cannot abandon so long as it claims to have the word of the living God and aspires to a position of authoritative leadership.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Rev. xi. 15

<sup>2</sup> p. 189

<sup>3</sup> A wartime reminiscence may here provide an illustration. Immediately after the Armistice of November 1918 I was privileged as his Chaplain to spend some days with the British Commander-in-Chief, Sir Douglas Haig, in his railway train beyond Cambrai. And on the last morning, before we took the homeward way to his official Headquarters at Montreuil, I had an after-breakfast walk with him across the fields. The gist of our conversation was that here at last was the end for which we had so long looked forward. We recalled, as was natural, the long-drawn-out agony of the

Yet even here we come back to our fundamental position that the ultimate triumph of God is regulated at every turn by the response which men make to His invitation and His demands. When Jesus bade men pray "Thy Kingdom come", He no doubt anticipated a state of ultimate blessedness in which evil of every kind would be a complete anachronism. But He knew also that such an ultimate state can only be brought about if men who have come to know the Father God learn to react towards evil as the Father Himself does. Sin can only be removed if men take, as it were, the burden of it on their own shoulders—in union with Christ Jesus. Any other way of dealing with evil is pharisaical. When men merely condemn the sin of the world—daring, as Jesus would say, to "judge" their fellow men—they fall into a worse condemnation than those whose sins they condemn. And so, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, the early Christians learned that if God's Kingdom was to be established they themselves, individually and as a fellowship, would have to love their enemies, restore the fallen, die to live, and overcome evil with good. God's Kingdom cannot be advanced save through lives which are manifestations (however imperfect) of His Holy Spirit.

(iv) But while it is probably true that they looked forward with unwavering confidence to the final triumph of God's purposes, neither Jesus nor His earliest disciples indulged in explicit teaching as to what final triumph implied. Will the time ever come when all suffering and sinning shall be

preceding years, and the heroism and the sacrifices apart from which victory would have been impossible. With his usual sympathy and understanding he referred to the experiences of the men in the trenches—how limited their vision inevitably was, and how little there was many a time in the situation (so far as *they* could see it) to give them good cause to believe that victory was possible, and indeed (if only they "stuck it out") inevitable. Then he told me of the faith which throughout had sustained himself. In a tone of quiet confidence which so often characterised his deepest moods he said quite simply: "I always saw that it would come to this. I never doubted the final outcome." And then, as if in corroboration of his faith, he added the interesting military comment: "That is why I insisted on keeping some of my cavalry."

brought to an end, and when "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea?" In the face of such an ultimate problem wartime analogies no longer help us. For wars between nations are nothing more than manoeuvres on a field which is constantly changing; with the end of armed hostilities the conflict is resumed in an altered form; even unconditional surrender brings no finality. St. Paul wrestled with this problem of the End; and such was his faith in the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ that he saw in vision the time when all Israel shall be saved and the fullness of the Gentiles brought in, and God Himself shall be all in all.

It is hard to think that some such faith, which had burned brightly in the souls of some of the prophets of Israel, was not a living faith likewise for Him in whom all the hopes of Israel were brought to fulfilment, and a living faith also for His first disciples. It is significant, however, that Scripture here offers little certain guidance. There is almost nothing to show just *how* the early Christians believed that the final triumph of God would work itself out. But of this they were certain. In and through Jesus Christ God had taken to Himself His great power and had established His Sovereignty; no earthly power could ultimately withstand Him. Sin and death were still operative; but through Jesus Christ their dread power had been broken. The forces of evil continued still to exalt themselves; but they could never transgress the bounds set them by Almighty God. God's Kingdom, therefore was assured; but it was not given to men to know whether its ultimate realisation would be on earth, or (as we say) "in heaven."

## CHAPTER XVII

### “THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE”

It remains for us to take a bird's-eye view of the way by which we have travelled.

#### I. THE LINE OF APPROACH IN GOSPEL CRITICISM

In all critical study of the Gospel story a matter of primary importance is the line of approach. By way of illustration we may recall what was undoubtedly one of the most illuminating of the contributions published in English a generation ago, viz. Professor E. F. Scott's "The Kingdom and the Messiah" (1911). Written at a time when, in reaction from the "liberal" presentations of the Harnack school, there was a growing tendency to interpret the message of Jesus in the light of apocalyptic Judaism, it expressed the view that "criticism is gradually settling towards the conviction that the apocalyptic element is not merely accidental to our Lord's teaching, but is all-pervading and determinative," though the writer added a warning against a tendency to exaggerate its significance. "In the present work," he continued, "I have sought to interpret the Gospel record on the ground of the new hypothesis, with special reference to the attitude of Jesus towards the two cardinal apocalyptic ideas of the Kingdom of God and the Messiah."

To-day there would be a general readiness both to question whether the apocalyptic element in Jesus' message is as "all-pervading and determinative" as it seemed to many at that time, and also to put a rather different interpretation upon it. But should we still be inclined to accept the "cardinal apocalyptic ideas of the Kingdom of God and the Messiah" as cardinal also for Jesus? The Kingdom of God is certainly cardinal—though we ought to be careful to note

that for Jesus the emphasis always falls upon *God*. Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God is a proclamation that "God reigns." But what about Messiahship? Did it play anything like so decisive a part in our Lord's thinking as critics, influenced by the ideas of apocalyptic Judaism, have been apt to imagine?

Our plea in the preceding pages has been that, if we are to look for the two *foci* round which all the ministry and all the teaching of Jesus revolved, we shall find them, not in "the Kingdom" and "the Messiah," but in "God" and "man." In this respect Jesus is in full accord with the whole of the Biblical revelation from the book of Genesis to the Revelation of St. John the Divine. In the opening chapter of Genesis we see how God, who created the heavens and the earth, set man at the centre of His creation; and in the closing chapters of Revelation we see how, with the coming of a new heaven and a new earth, God is in the midst of a redeemed people—"the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God." And in the Gospels we read how this redeemed people of God is brought into being by the coming, not of a Messiah, but of one who is called "the Man" ("the Son of Man").

## II. GOD AND MAN

Scripture tells how at the beginning God made man in His own image, and by so doing He marked him out for a position of supreme responsibility and authority in relation to His whole creation. Such a destiny, such a mission can only be achieved if man remains in constant communion with God, obedient to His will and receptive of His Spirit. But the Bible story goes on to tell how man rebels against God, seeking to live his life apart from God and to acknowledge no higher authority than himself; and thereby he becomes separated from the presence of God. and, moreover, falls out of harmony with his brethren. The sin of Adam breeds in

turn the sin of Cain. And so, through the disobedience of man, the world comes under the sway of sin and death—

"till one greater Man  
Restore us, and regain the blissful Seat."

Thus God's fair creation—which, when He looked on it at its birth, He had declared to be good—becomes through man's sin the scene of an agelong conflict between the forces of good and evil; and, save to those who can see things with the eyes of God, it looks as if evil held the field. The magnitude both of the conflict itself and of the issues that are at stake has nowhere had more justice done to it than in the pages of the Old and New Testaments. Twentieth century idealism tends to feed itself with the optimistic belief that man, filled with a reforming zeal and armed with all the forces of modern knowledge, can go forward in his own might to bring in a better world. Scripture, on the other hand, insists that the conflict is of too transcendental a character for man to engage in it at his own charges. It is a conflict in which all the spiritual forces of the universe are engaged on one side or the other; in a deep sense, therefore, the battle is not man's, but God's. Man's hope is in God, and in God alone.

But while lifting up the whole issue to the super-human, supra-earthly level, Scripture also insists that in two ways man is at the heart of the battle.

- i. Man is at the heart of it because the soul of man provides, so to speak, the chief prize in the conflict; it is for the possession of Man's soul that the conflict is being waged.
- ii. Man is at the heart of it in another sense; for it is not in heaven or in hell that the decisive battle must be fought out, but in the soul of man. Man must choose whom he will serve; and on his choice and on his faithfulness in the decisive hour the issue will depend.

Thus man is not a spectator in this great warfare, but an active participant. He must either be on God's side, or on the devil's; and, if he is to conquer the devilish things in life,

he must be constantly drawing strength from divine sources.

It is of the essence of the Christian faith that by the coming of Jesus Christ into the world God Himself entered in a decisive way into this agelong conflict. "A second Adam to the fight and to the rescue came." Fully representative at once of the life of man and of the life of God, Jesus came to the fight as a strong man armed, yet as one whose weapons were not of earthly power but solely of the Spirit; and the forces of evil surged against Him and bore Him to a Cross. He was crucified, dead and buried. Yet by that Cross something effective was accomplished for the turning of the tide of human wickedness. Apparently the greatest of human tragedies, it was in reality a victory. Mankind learned to see in the Cross of Christ a revelation of the redeeming love of God. It told of the cost which human sin exacts from the heart of the Heavenly Father; and in this way it served to bring men back to Him who had made them in His own image and made them for Himself, but whom in their ignorance and folly they had so long forgotten or defied. The chain of sin was broken; the powers of evil were cast down. The reign of Satan was effectively challenged, and God was established as King in His own universe. As a guarantee of full and final victory the disciples of Jesus were, "by many infallible proofs," given an assurance that their Master had been raised from the dead and exalted (as they said) to God's right hand. That faith has been vindicated in the experience of disciples in each succeeding age. And rallying under the banner of His Cross they go forth still, as they have always done, to battle in the power of the Spirit for the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, confident that "Jesus Christ is Lord," and that there is no power in earth or hell that must not bow before His authority.

### III. THE NATURE AND DESTINY OF MAN

The distress occasioned by the world conflict of 1914-1918 led to Karl Barth's prophetic summons to the world to turn

from man and to bow before the flaming majesty of the Righteousness and Power and Love of God. On its positive side it was a message for which there is an even greater need now in our day than there was then. Yet, as Barth proclaimed it, it was a one-sided statement of the Gospel, which did less than justice to the links that bind God to man and man to God. Even fallen man does not wholly forget these links. And the fact that he was made in the image of God is not merely a matter of antiquarian interest; it is so to speak his birth-certificate, a proof of his lineage and a guarantee of his inheritance. Man's chief end may be to glorify *God*; yet, viewing the connection from the other end, we see that all God's purposes are centred on the salvation of *man*.

And now a tragedy even darker than that of a generation ago has overtaken the civilised world; and, vaguely and uneasily conscious though many are that the voice of God is sounding through the darkness, mankind as a whole seems too dazed or too indifferent to listen. It cannot be altogether loss, however, that while God may seem to them to be too far away to be an object of immediate concern, so many earnest men and women should, out of their sense of need, be pondering afresh on the nature and destiny of man. The questions thus raised about man may be new to many of those who are wrestling with them. But they are not new in the history of the Christian Church; and there is none of them to which Christian faith is not able to offer a clear and conclusive answer.

In the opening chapter of the Bible it is recorded how "God created man in His own image. And God said, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth." Nothing worth while can be known about *man* until we see him in his relation to *God*, who made him in His own image, imparted to him the divine spirit, and marked him out for a position of spiritual authority in the universe. The Christian doctrine of man implies that, even for his own

self-realisation, man requires to live in communion with God, and that in so far as he does not do so he falls short of God's standard of manhood. What in Christian thought is called "the Fall" is a fall away from God; and for a recovery of manhood man must return, or be brought back, to God. And, expressed in a simple form, the divinely-appointed mission of Jesus is to bring men back to God, overcoming effectively the things that separate them from Him. In the greatest of His stories Jesus tells how, when the lost son came to himself, he immediately said: "I will arise and go to my father." In a matter so essentially spiritual it is futile to enquire which comes first in sequence—the recovery of self or the recovery of (and by) God. The one implies the other.

At the centre therefore of all God's purposes for the world there lies the necessity for the salvation of man. God's final purpose may be described as the establishment of His Kingdom. His more immediate purpose is the creation, or the evolution, or (as Christian theology prefers to call it) the redemption of a new order of manhood; and this requires that there should be raised up a perfect Man. When man appears in his full stature (and this implies that he lives in full communion with God and is filled with the divine Spirit), then all the powers of the universe fall into their place before him; they are wholly subject to his will, just as he in turn is wholly subject to the will of God. But is there any real hope that man can attain to such a stature? The humanist attitude to life assumes that even without the help of God man is marked out to be lord of the universe. On the other hand stern realities are never lacking to challenge such an assurance; and in our own day there are even grounds for anxiety lest the forces of the universe, so far from bowing before the authority of man, will succeed in accomplishing his annihilation.

What has Scripture to say by way of answer to this? We may recall how the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews has dealt with the problem. In his second chapter he quotes

with a measure of exultation the devout panegyric on man contained in Psalm viii: "What is man, that Thou art mindful of him? Or the son of man, that Thou carest for him? For a little while Thou hast set him lower than the angels, crowning him with glory and honour, putting all things under his feet." This means, he adds, that there is nothing that is not to be brought under man's control. But he then goes on to face the fact that, in the world as we see it, that hope is still very far from being realised. He instances the power which death has to hold man in thrall. And he finds his answer in the appearance in history of One who has conquered death and all the other powers that enslave man, and in this way has shown himself "the Pioneer of man's salvation." "Not yet do we see all things controlled by man; we do however see Jesus, who for a little time was set lower than the angels and made to suffer death, and who now has been crowned with glory and honour." Thus it is through Jesus that all God's purposes for man are being brought to realisation. In Him the hope of Psalm viii, as well as the declaration in Genesis i. 28 on which the Psalm is based, are alike fulfilled. He has dominion over all created things. All power is given unto Him in heaven and on earth. He is Lord of all.

Christian teaching about the coming of Jesus parts company in several important respects with modern evolutionary thought. The appearance of this unique Son of Man does not mark a mere stage in human evolution; it is (as we say) an eschatological event, an act of God that marks a consummation, a fulfilment, a deliverance and a judgment. Further, such a Man is not to be explained solely, or even primarily, in terms of human origins; He must be explained by reference to the God whose image He bears, whose Spirit fills His being, and who therefore is in a very real sense incarnate in Him. Thus He has a place in the universe quite distinct from that of all created things; as the Creed says, he is "begotten, not made." His place in the Father's household is that of an only Son, with all the glory that an only Son has in the

presence of His Father.<sup>1</sup> Lastly, we may add that the appearance of such a Man would be meaningless—He would, in popular terminology, be a “freak-phenomenon”—unless in all essentials He was one with His fellow men, and unless in those respects in which He differed from His fellows they were (under God) enabled to become one with Him. He must share their temptations, their sorrows, and their sufferings; and yet stand fast where they waver, and triumph where they fail.<sup>2</sup> He must be, in Scriptural language, the “first-born among many brethren.”<sup>3</sup> He must bring many sons to share the glory that was originally His.<sup>4</sup> That intimate knowledge of the Father which is His, and His alone, is now made possible to others because He, the Son, reveals it to those who can receive it.<sup>5</sup> Thus in the fellowship of the Church mankind, united in the faith and knowledge of the Son of God, attains at last to the maturity of true manhood, to that developed stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.<sup>6</sup>

#### IV. THE SON OF MAN

When such a Man appears, religious faith will see in His coming an act of God. His appearance is in fulfilment of God’s purposes for mankind and for the world. And if a designation is to be found for Him, ordinary human categories will not suffice. He will not be “just a man” like other men. We may, if we care, say that He is more than man, though the truth will rather seem to be that He is truly man and that other men fall short of manhood. For that reason the Christian Church has been careful from the beginning to depict Jesus as exalted above the ordinary human level. He has been given “a name that is above every name.” Being lifted up, He draws all men unto Him. But He does not for that reason cease to be truly man. It cannot be too strongly asserted that One in whom God’s purposes for man are to be perfected must Himself be in the fullest sense man,

<sup>1</sup> Jn. i. 14

<sup>2</sup> Heb. iv. 15

<sup>3</sup> Rom. viii. 29

<sup>4</sup> Heb. ii. 10

<sup>5</sup> Mt. xi. 27; Lk. x. 22

<sup>6</sup> Eph. iv. 13

exposure of its falsehood serves to prepare the way for the revival of the hope that the salvation which man cannot accomplish in his own might can be accomplished through the power which God imparts.

Are the times then ripe for a new presentation of the messianic hope? Would modern Jewry, for example, in this hour of bitter anguish and despair, be more disposed to respond to the Christian Gospel if in proof of the Messiahship of Jesus emphasis were laid more on the spiritual quality of the life which Jesus lived on earth and which throughout the ages He has continued to quicken in His followers? Still as of old the Jews are saying: "If Thou be the Christ, tell us plainly." And still as of old<sup>1</sup> Jesus in reply appeals to the works which He accomplishes: "Though ye believe not me, believe the works; that ye may know and believe that the Father is in me and I in Him." As for our modern Christianity, one of its most obvious weaknesses is that under the deadening influence of an over-optimistic evolutionary outlook it has ceased to believe that a Messiah is needed, and it has therefore lost its messianic outlook. It holds in theory to the creed that Jesus is the Messiah, but it has ceased to have a live appreciation of what Messiahship implies. Will then the tragic developments in our modern civilisation lead to a revival of the messianic hope, setting men again to look for a Saviour? And will the twentieth century be ready to learn, as the first century did, that the Messiah whom the world needs is not just one who will appear at the end of the age to bring deliverance and to execute judgment, but is one who even now is in our midst, "to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."<sup>2</sup> The work of the Messiah, in other words, is to effect a reconciliation between God and man, breaking every barrier down and enabling man to triumph through the Presence and Power of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>1</sup> Jn. x. 24, 38; xiv. 11; cf. pp. 121 f.

<sup>2</sup> Lk. i. 77, 79

in the end it means following Jesus in the way of the Cross. It means that sooner or later we must bow before the authority of Jesus and find that our crucified leader has now become for us a risen and exalted Lord. It means above all that "through Jesus Christ our Lord" we are brought into the presence and under the sway of the Living God, and in the power of His Spirit we go forth to the task of extending the Rule of God, the loving Father and almighty King, in all the world around.

Following Jesus therefore never means that we make a heroic effort to order our lives in accordance with the principles of the Sermon on the Mount. It means rather that, in union with Him who gave Himself for us and who now is alive for evermore, we live as those whose ideals and motives and whose whole scheme of values have undergone a radical transformation. Those who patronisingly praise the teaching of Jesus but do not bow before Him as Lord have to learn that the principles of the Sermon on the Mount constitute as deep a "mystery" as do His death and resurrection. It is no more difficult to see in the Man Christ Jesus the Lord of life and the Saviour of the world than it is without such a faith to do the things which He commands us.

All this may be conceded. But there is another side of the truth to which it is no less necessary to give earnest heed. Jesus is the "originator" as well as the "finisher" of our faith;<sup>1</sup> and often His first task is to quicken and direct that quest for God which in the end He is to bring to perfection. But in its zeal to present Jesus in the plenitude of His authority as the Son of the Father and the Risen and Ascended Lord the Church too often fails to reveal Him adequately as the Son of Man who was "tempted in all respects like as we are, yet without sin."<sup>2</sup> There are to-day multitudes of earnest seekers who avow (and we need not doubt their honesty) that they would like to "learn of Jesus" and to follow His lead, but who are not yet ready to formulate

<sup>1</sup> Heb. xii. 2

<sup>2</sup> Heb. iv. 15

their beliefs about Him or to accept the Church's formulations ; and in the guise in which He appears in the Church's faith and worship He fails to appeal to their instinctive loyalty or to satisfy their conscious needs.

How is the Church to deal with such a situation ? It must speak, it is true, with authority ; but it must speak too with sympathy. The authority with which Jesus spoke and acted in the days of His flesh was always associated with the most intense sympathy for human needs ; and it was because, following Him as their leader, men were brought at last to God that they came to acknowledge Jesus as their Lord. We cannot remind ourselves too often that what He demanded of men was not a statement of belief but an attitude of faith and obedience ; and He never allowed them to call Him Lord or Christ unless they were prepared to have their lives transformed. It is only a partial answer to our problem to assert that a Christianity divorced from dogma will soon cease to be Christianity at all ; for though a rejection of the Christian Creed may indeed lead sooner or later (as the recent history of Europe has abundantly shown) to a rejection of Christian standards of conduct, it is also true that, where the living God is acknowledged, there may be a progress in the other direction, a progress not " away from faith " but " to faith " ; and we have the authority of Jesus Himself for holding that he who doeth the will of God will come to have knowledge of the teaching.<sup>1</sup>

It has become customary in certain Church circles to counter this plea for a more human approach to the Gospel by pointing to the tragic inadequacy of the scientific humanism in which modern civilisation has sought to find a substitute for the Gospel. There is, it is true, a form of humanism with which the Gospel can have no truce—a humanism which, denying the necessity for faith in God, glories in the ability of man to order all the varied activities of life in accordance with his own power and wisdom. But there is another kind of humanism (if the term may be used in this connection)

<sup>1</sup> Jn. vii. 17

which believes intensely in man because God believes in him and works out His divine purposes through him, and which enables man to declare in all humility: "I am adequate for anything through Him that strengtheneth me."<sup>1</sup> Humanism of this latter type finds its supreme representative in Jesus Christ.

Here we may see opening out before us a further issue of altogether illimitable significance. Facing the vast variety of interests, activities and problems which go to the making of our complex modern civilisation, the humanist of to-day, however baffled and bewildered he may be, can nevertheless exclaim with some exhilaration of spirit: *Homo sum; humani nihil a me alienum puto*. What in similar circumstances ought to be the reaction of the Christian? A like exhilaration ought surely to be his as he recalls how the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, and how there is no department of human life which does not come within the range of God's providential and redemptive care. But it cannot always be said that the Church encourages and develops this comprehensive outlook on life as it addresses itself to its tasks in the modern world. In one sense it has, it is true, come to have increasingly a world outlook, recognising that the Gospel knows no barrier of race or nation. But it tends all too readily to narrow its vision to those tasks which it accepts as specifically "religious," and to regard as lying beyond its immediate cognisance and concern those other multifarious movements and ministries which in their own way are seeking to purify, uplift and redeem the world in which man has to live. In so interpreting its mission can the Church claim to be true to the ideals and the spirit of the Son of Man, who as we see Him in the Gospels touched human life at every point and brought to bear on every human relationship the mercy and the judgment of God? "It is an irony of history," writes Archbishop Bernard in his Commentary<sup>2</sup> on the Gospel according to St. John, "that since the first century His most familiar designation by His

<sup>1</sup> Phil. iv. 13

<sup>2</sup> Introduction, p. cxxxi

disciples has been *Christ*, and the religion which he founded has been called *Christianity*, rather than the religion of *Humanity*, the religion of the Son of Man."

#### V. THE MESSIAH (CHRIST)

One of the pleas put forward in the present study is that, though the followers of Jesus hailed Him as Messiah and after His death and resurrection publicly proclaimed Him as such, it was not as Messiah that He thought of Himself or directed His appeal to men. This line of argument is not to be confused with the contention which lies at the base of much "liberal" thinking, that the faith of the disciples in the Messiahship of Jesus represents a development for which there is no adequate justification in the historical facts of His life. Again and again we have asserted emphatically that there *was* adequate justification in the life of Jesus for the honours which were paid to Him in the faith of the Church, but that Jesus preferred to avoid the ascription of titles to Himself, including some of those (like Messiah) which the Church rightly came to ascribe to Him. Jesus looked for disciples; and the true disciple for Him was "not he that nameth the name, but he that doeth the will."

It is important to recall that, in ascribing Messiahship to Jesus, the early Christians ascribed to Him likewise other honours and powers which were not traditionally associated with the Messiah; and in so doing they revolutionised the whole conception of Messiahship. The truth is that they saw in Jesus the divinely appointed agent through whom all the promises and purposes of God were being brought to fulfilment. By their proclamation of a Messiah who had suffered for the sins of men and after a shameful death been raised in power they came into violent conflict with the messianic expectations of their orthodox Jewish brethren; but they also brought to expression a new doctrine of Messiahship such as the Christian conscience can accept. The Messiah who appeared in Jesus had been sent by God to do for His fellows

something which they could not do for themselves—to release them from the chains of sin and from every other power that enslaved them, to bring them into a life of communion with God the Father and of brotherly relations with their fellow men, and to set before them an open door for the accomplishment of all God's designs for the human race and indeed for all creation.

It is worth reminding ourselves that in early Christian preaching to Jews the line of approach was not so much that "Jesus is the Messiah" as that "the Messiah is Jesus."<sup>1</sup> This is clearly the correct interpretation in the account of St Paul's preaching in the synagogue at Thessalonica (Acts xvii. 3); we may compare also St. Peter's addresses in Acts ii and iii. The preacher, in other words, did not begin with a proclamation about Jesus, in which his hearers might see little or nothing that had relevance for themselves; he began rather with something on which their thoughts were centred, namely the hope that God would send a Messiah, then went on to reinterpret that hope in more spiritual terms, and finally showed how the hope had been brought to realisation through the coming of Jesus. Those who heard the message were invited not so much to make a credal statement as to recognise a hope fulfilled.

Rightly interpreted, the messianic hope is an essential element in any religion that takes seriously the love of God and the need of man; for so tragic is that need and so transcendent are the divine purposes that if man is to be saved and raised to the height of his calling God Himself must intervene to bring His purposes to fruition. Half a century ago the conviction burned brightly in the soul of man that, despite occasional setbacks, modern history was on the whole the record of a progress upwards and onwards, each fresh advance bearing witness to the inherent nobility and glory of man. Two world wars have gone some distance towards giving the death-blow to that facile optimism; and the

<sup>1</sup> cf. p. 244

and that it will be by the character of His human life that He will discharge His mission and authenticate His claims.

Just as it insists that in this sense Jesus is more than man, so the Church insists that His work is not adequately described by such terms as prophet or teacher or leader; and it has accordingly to find some other term, such as Messiah, to express the uniqueness of His mission. And it is certainly true that, if we never get beyond the truths which Jesus proclaims, the lessons which He teaches, the ideals and demands which He sets before us, we shall miss "the many-splendoured thing" which constitutes the very essence of His mission, which was to reconcile men to God. But just as the fact that He is more than man does not make Him less truly man, so we shall never know how much He is more than prophet, more than teacher, more than leader, unless first of all we are prepared to see that He is indeed all of these—plus something more. If we are ever to know Him as Messiah, or Saviour, or Lord, it may be necessary for us to begin (as the disciples of old began) by listening to His message, by absorbing His teaching, by following His example and walking His steps. Long before St. Peter made the historic confession "Thou art the Christ" he had humbly sat at the Master's feet and responded to the summons "Follow me."

No man, however, can take Jesus seriously as his teacher or his guide without being made to realise that what Jesus sets before him is something far more than an ethical and spiritual ideal. To follow Jesus is to follow Him on *the way that leads to God*. It means, as Nicodemus had to learn, that we "must be born again"<sup>1</sup>—this "teacher sent from God" does not merely tell us about God, He leads us into God's very Presence, where we become as little children and God's Spirit enters into us to give us life anew. It means, as St. Peter and his fellow disciples came to recognise, that we have to learn how to live both in relation to God and in relation to our brethren of mankind; and this in turn means "denying ourselves," i.e. renouncing all claim over our own lives, and

<sup>1</sup> or, according to another translation, "born from above."

## THE UNDERLYING PRESUPPOSITIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

The deepest need of the world is a recovery of the sense of God—of God's character, of God's purposes, most of all, perhaps, of God's living Presence. And it is surely an evidence that the Spirit of God is brooding again on the chaos of a godless world that humanity in so many varied quarters is awaking to a sense of its desperate need, and is showing an increasing readiness to believe that somehow or other this need can be met in Jesus Christ and in Him alone. As we have reminded ourselves, however, many who are ready to turn their eyes in the direction of Jesus are by no means disposed to listen to the Christian message in the form which they regard as traditional, and it becomes therefore a matter of primary importance for Christian believers to ask themselves how far they can remain satisfied with the generally accepted presentation of Christian truth and even with their own apprehension of the Gospel message.

The Gospel is a message concerning God's relation to man and man's relation to God. As Jesus proclaimed it, it was essentially a revelation of *God in action*. He did not merely impart to men a series of doctrinal or ethical, precepts; rather He led them so to know God that they instinctively came to say: "Abba, Father," and hence a new quality of life began to manifest itself in their attitude both to God and to their fellow men. Thus *His* experience of God the Father became for them *their* experience; and the experience came to them (they said) "through Jesus Christ our Lord." Jesus was thus Himself an integral part of the Gospel. And the God whom He brought into men's lives was not One whose activity was primarily to be associated with an indeterminate future any more than it was with a remote past; He was a God whose Presence—or, as the Church came later to express it, whose Holy Spirit—was operative in their midst in all the experiences of everyday life. It was so too in the history of the Church as we see it in the New Testament. The Gospel which overcame the pagan world was far less than is generally

believed a proclamation of a coming Judgment and Deliverance ; rather it was the revelation of a God who, as St. Paul proclaimed Him to the Thessalonians,<sup>1</sup> was " alive " and " real " ; and men turned from the futilities of their pagan religion to serve One whose redeeming power and mercy they saw to be operative in the life of their own day.

Thus, underlying the Church's doctrines about Jesus as the Saviour and Lord of men, there are certain basic dogmas about human life (i.e. about God's relation to man and man's relation to God) which are required as a foundation if the preaching of the Gospel is to be effective. There are e.g. fundamental laws which hold in the moral and spiritual sphere just as other laws hold in the physical. " As a man soweth so shall he also reap. " " Do men gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles ? " There is " a way that leads to life " ; so too there is " a way that leads to destruction. " And the world may have to learn again the necessity of conforming to the laws of the spiritual universe before it can begin to have an appreciation of the Gospel. But just because God is a living God, there is nothing in the life of man which cannot be overruled for good if the power of God is allowed to enter in. " Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways ; for why will ye die ? " cries the prophet. " I am come, " says Jesus, " that ye might have life, and that ye might have it more abundantly. " And the Jesus who thus comes to impart life to men comes, it is true, at the behest of God, but He comes also in answer to the spoken and unspoken prayers of men. The Gospel is God's answer to human need.

The strength of the Gospel does not lie in the revelation of new and unexpected truths, but rather in its proclamation that the deepest yearnings and hopes of men may now find fulfilment. In this connection a few pungent sentences of Miss Dorothy Sayers<sup>2</sup> may be cited by way of illustration. After affirming that " Christian dogma was the one thing

<sup>1</sup> 1 Thess. i. 9

<sup>2</sup> In " *The Church Looks Ahead* "—Broadcast Talks (Faber and Faber), pp. 73 f.

tough enough to pull Europe through the dark ages that followed the collapse of the pagan philosopher," she formulates as follows the basic claims on which it rested its case. "It claimed," she says,

"First: that man's persistent belief in goodness and reason was justified: that such was the nature of God and the true nature of man—and that Christ was there to prove it.

"Secondly: that the things men called good were valid, not merely in some remote ideal heaven, but here and now, because the Kingdom of God was come already.

"Thirdly: that although men could never achieve perfection by their own efforts, there was a real link between God and man in the person of Christ, who was God and man at once.

"Thus Christianity offered the actual physical fact of the incarnation as, first, a *guarantee* that right and reason were valid, and, secondly, a *means* whereby the perfection that was impossible with man was made possible by God . . . It picked up, so to speak, all the scattered ideas about God and man and the universe which had been lying about like loose beads—beautiful but disconnected—and ran through them, like a string, the historical personality of the God who was made flesh."

Has the Church of the twentieth century something to learn from this regarding its presentation of the Gospel? Does it keep steadily enough in sight the fact that the Gospel is essentially a message of fulfilment—that it is God's answer to the age long cry of the human soul? In the historic Creeds the faith by which the Church lives has become formulated in a series of doctrinal affirmations about Jesus Christ, through whom (as the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews<sup>1</sup> reminds us) our faith in God is led at the first to pursue its quest and is brought at the last to perfection; and to these affirmations

<sup>1</sup> xii. 2

the loyal Christian gives reverent and glad assent, for they embody the faith of the Fellowship in which he has found salvation for himself and in which he sees the only hope of salvation for the world. But the Creeds do not provide the best introduction to the faith for the man who is still an "outsider"; indeed they must often give him a completely misleading idea of what the Christian faith implies, so unrelated do they seem to him to be to the conditions of human life as he knows it.

It is, e.g. an essential element in the Christian faith that Jesus has been raised from the dead; and we recall the song of triumph which on Easter morning spreads from land to land, from continent to continent: "Jesus Christ is risen to-day, Hallelujah!" Yet among those who join in that triumphal song there must be many, both within and without the Fellowship of the Church, who associate the message *solely* with the narratives of the empty tomb and the appearances of the Risen Christ to His disciples—construing the Church's faith, in other words, as if it were based *exclusively* on the recorded happenings of that first Eastertide, instead of seeing in all that happened then God's vindication of a faith for which the real foundation lies in the whole story of the life and death of Jesus, and indeed in the eternal purposes of God for man's salvation. Is it any wonder that even among Christians a faith which has so little spiritual depth must often lack the vitality, radiance and conviction that characterised the faith which once overcame the world, or that among non-believers a not unnatural disposition to question the evidence should lead in the end to a denial of the faith itself?

So, too, with the vindication of the Lordship of Jesus through what is called His Ascension or Exaltation. The historical problems of the narrative of the Ascension in Acts i. 6-11 are obvious to the most superficial enquirer. On the other hand there is no more significant element in the Church's message than that which declares that "Jesus Christ is Lord." The basis of the Church's faith is not to be found, however,

in the historical narrative which tells how, forty days after His Resurrection, He ascended up into heaven ; rather the Church believes that God (as we say) raised Him to a position of power at His right hand, putting the divine seal on His claim to Lordship, because already the character of His human life had given Him an authority as humanity's Lord. "He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Wherefore God hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name that is above every name."<sup>1</sup>

#### VII. THE WAY OF LIFE

The Gospel thus deals with a way of life, or rather with *the* way of life, the one way by which man can attain, even on earth, to that life which is full, free and eternal. It reveals not merely what God is like in His dealings with men, but what men ought to be like in their dealings with God and with their fellows ; for those who know God as Father are called to live as the Father lives.

Again and again in the preceding pages we have been brought face to face with the fact that, according to the Scriptures, the supreme test of faith in God is to be found in the character of the life which it produces. We saw this in regard to Jesus' message about God—His Kingdom and His Fatherhood. The Rule of God which Jesus proclaimed was not a future state of blessedness to which men were invited to look forward ; it was a present fact to which they must respond in trust and obedience, showing by the spirit of their lives day by day that they acknowledged the beneficent Rule of Him whom they knew as King and Father. We saw it again in the tests which Jesus applied to professing disciples. "Not every one that saith unto me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father." "Inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it not unto me." We saw it very notably in His discouragement of speculations

<sup>1</sup> Phil. ii. 8 f.

and affirmations regarding Messiahship. He found men asking : " How and when will the Messiah appear ? " " What signs will herald His arrival ? " " Is this man the promised Prophet, the expected Elijah, or even perhaps the Messiah Himself ? " To Jesus all such enquiries were vain, and worse than vain—they were dangerous and soul-destroying, serving to blind men's vision, to harden their hearts, and to make them incapable of recognising God in their midst ; for it was an essential element in the religious outlook and teaching of Jesus that God draws near to men in ways that they little dream of, and that men's response to His approach must be shown in the receptive character of their lives. So, too, after He had left the earth there was a tendency on the part of His disciples to gaze up into heaven and to await in eagerness the day of His reappearing. And they had to learn that the greatest gift He had bequeathed to them was the assurance of God's living Presence, leading them to yield their lives to be directed by His Holy Spirit.

#### VIII. THE RESPONSE TO THE GOSPEL

We began by seeing the Gospel first of all as a message about *God* ; but it is a message directed towards the salvation of *man*. It is the revelation of God's self-disclosure and redemptive activity on behalf of His human family. And in the final issue acceptance means life and rejection involves death ; for it is acceptance or rejection of God Himself. That being so, it is a matter of the utmost importance that those who have heard its appeal should ask themselves what is to be their reaction to it. More precisely, seeing that the revelation which it gives is a revelation of the living God Himself and not merely of certain truths about Him, the question at issue is : " How are we to respond to *Him* who has thus dealt with us ? "

When the Gospel is preached in its fullness there is always at or near the heart of it a message of the Cross ; for the Gospel is essentially a message of redemption. We men ought

never to forget the shame of our downfall and the enslavement from which we require to be released. There is one essential element in the Gospel of Jesus which is absent in every other message about God—the assurance of sins forgiven and a new start to be made in the power of God's Holy Spirit. And if in Jesus Christ we see One who by the triumph of His life sets before us the high hope of our calling, we see also One who Himself "suffered for men, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God."<sup>1</sup> In the story of God's redemptive love in Jesus Christ there are depths which the human mind seems powerless to fathom; yet some sense of its awesome significance is beginning again in our generation to dawn on the souls of men as they contemplate the sorrows and sins of humanity against the eternal background of the righteousness of God. Can the dread entail of evil be broken, so that a Promised Land of the Spirit will again open out before us and we can have the power to enter in to possess it? To that question the Gospel answers an unhesitating "yes." Jesus is humanity's Lord not merely because He is humanity's greatest Leader, but also because, stooping to conquer, He is humanity's Saviour and Deliverer. And as He calls to us to follow Him in the way of the Cross, we go forward firstly as those whose lives are not their own (for if we live, it is because He died for us), but also as those who are privileged in some measure to be soldiers of the Cross, meeting both life and death in union with Jesus Christ our Lord.

To us who are Christians the assurance that God reigns, and that in Jesus Christ our Lord He has done something full and final for the establishment of His Kingdom, is never merely a piece of good news which enables us to look out on the future with confidence and hope. It clearly implies also that for us, and for all who name the name of Christ, God's Sovereign Rule must even now be recognised, His authority acknowledged, His demands obeyed. We are men under authority. Jesus is our Lord.

<sup>1</sup> 1 Peter iii. 18.

Meanwhile the world goes its way, apparently indifferent to the Rule of God, or even defiant towards it. How far this indifference and defiance will continue—whether men will resist to the end the Rule of God and ultimately suffer rejection and destruction, or whether in God’s good time and way all men will come to a knowledge of the truth and enter into life eternal—that is a matter about which, however confident their faith and hope, it is not given to the subjects of God’s Kingdom to have clear and accurate knowledge. What they do know concerns God’s demands for themselves and for their generation in each fresh hour of judgment. They are called to be “ witnesses ” ; and this may mean to be “ martyrs.” It was as a witness to the righteousness and love of God that Jesus lived and suffered a shameful death, and was exalted to God’s right hand. “ Wherefore, seeing we are also compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, with our eyes fixed upon Jesus, our Pioneer in the race of faith and the One through whom we attain to the goal ; who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Heb. xii. 1, 2

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