Mark - Commentaries by William John Hocking

Studies in Mark, Mark 8:1-10: (69) Another Miraculous Meal

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

43.-ANOTHER MIRACULOUS MEAL

“In those days, when there was again a great multitude, and they had nothing to eat, he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat; and if I send them away fasting to their home, they will faint in the way; and some of them are come from far. And his disciples answered him, Whence shall one be able to fill these men with bread here in a desert place? And he asked them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven. And he commandeth the multitude to sit down on the ground; and he took the seven loaves, and having given thanks, he brake, and gave to his disciples, to set before them. And they set them before the multitude. And they had a few small fishes, and having blessed them, he commanded to set these also before them. And they did eat, and were filled; and they took up, of broken pieces that remained over, seven baskets. And they were about four thousand: and he sent them away. And straightway he entered into the boat with his disciples, and came into the parts of Dalmanutha” (8:1-10 R.V.).

The first two only of the Evangelists record that on a second occasion our Lord multiplied a few loaves, and therewith fed a great concourse of Galileans. Taught the gospel of the kingdom and fed by the King, these people may, in a sense, be said to have tasted, “the good word of God and the powers of the world to come.” For the two miracles constitute a double testimony to the coming blessing for the chosen nation under the direct rule of their Messiah—that time of relief from weary toil of which the great Year of jubilee was a type. The terms of the institution of this feast provided that while the people of Israel were not to sow nor to reap, yet they should “eat their fill,” and the children of the strangers sojourning in their land should likewise participate in the special bounties of the year (Lev. 25:8-55).The blissful era of the anti-typical jubilee is always in Old Testament prophecy associated with the reign of the Seed of David. The ancient men of God lived in joyous anticipation of the day when David's Son and David's Lord shall have dominion from sea to sea and from the river unto the ends of the earth, and when the blessings of sinless Eden shall be restored to mankind in a multiplied fullness.

As we read of the Lord taking in His hands the few loaves which were to satisfy the multitude before Him, do we not hear again these picturesque words of the millennial psalm: “there shall be an handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains: the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon” (Psa. 72:16)? For in the regeneration the primal penalty upon Adam and his race “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread” (Gen. 3:19) —shall be displaced, and the tree of life, yielding month by month her twelve manner of fruits, shall be constant evidence that the curse has gone from the ground forever (Rev. 22:2, 3). Of that day of abundance the Lord gave a pledge to the few Galileans before Him when, without waiting with long patience for the precious fruits of the earth, their hunger was satisfied by the bounty multiplied a thousand fold before their very eyes.

THE WEARY AND HUNGRY CROWD

The miracle was performed in the Decapolitan district which lies to the northward of the Sea of Galilee. The population of this neighborhood was numerous, and their race of a mixed character, giving rise to the term, “Galilee of the Gentiles.” There the Lord healed the deaf-mute who was one of a great company of persons, diversely afflicted, also brought to Him and restored to health. There, also, it would seem, the Lord “taught” those assembled, instructing them in the new kingdom-doctrines. Attracted by the sweetness of those lips of heavenly knowledge, they tarried and tarried around Him for three days, nor was He loth to continue His ministry.

The great multitude had assembled from far and near to see the works and hear the words of Jesus. These sheep of Israel and also other sheep not of that fold were “consumed with hunger in the land.” For the Pharisees and scribes were hireling shepherds, and their days were like those of which the prophet Amos wrote, saying, “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD: and they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, and shall not find it” (Amos 8:11, 12). Is it any wonder, then, that the crowds listened with untiring eagerness to the words of life from Jehovah's diligent Servant who spoke with authority and love, not as the scribes, nor indeed as any other man? How many of them, listening to the divine utterances, felt, though they could not express it as the Psalmist had already expressed it for them in the fullness and beauty of that stanza: “More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb” (Psa. 19:10). At any rate, they thought not of departure from Him, but waited for Him to conclude His discourses and His healings, and to dismiss them to their homes.

This attentiveness on the part of the simple peasantry of Northern Galilee to His heavenly message was surely gratifying to the soul of the Great Teacher, burning in His zeal that they might “hear,” and their souls live. He beheld a great company round Him, imbued to a degree with that fine spirit of the patriarch who said, “I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food” (Job 23:12).

But the Lord Jesus, while joying to serve them with the wonders of divine mercy and truth, marked their physical faintness. The bodily exertions of bringing their numerous invalids to the Great Physician, their excited joy at the recoveries, and the mental strain of attention to the prolonged discourses had a reactionary effect upon the physical condition of the great crowd. This weakness the Lord saw and pitied, for He who healed their diseases and forgave their sins knew their frame also, and remembered that they were dust. Was He not among them as the Servant of Jehovah, who was a God full of compassion and gracious (Psa. 111:4)? Nay, was He not Himself Jehovah, gracious and full of compassion? (Psa. 113:4; 145:8). According to the multitude of His mercies, therefore, His heart yearned over their frailty, and He purposed in Himself to satisfy their mouth with good things and renew their strength for their journey home.

The people were weary with listening, and foodless; but was not the Lord Himself weary with speaking and serving them throughout those three days? The Blessed Master, however, had come not to be ministered unto but to minister. He was most truly that Servant raised up to Israel “like unto Moses,” to whom the people in the wilderness came daily with their problems, and “stood by him from morning unto evening"? But in Galilee there was no Jethro to remonstrate with Jesus, and in love, if not in intelligence, to warn Him: “Thou wilt surely wear away... this thing is too heavy for thee” (Ex. 18:18). Consumed with zeal for the Father's will, the Lord was the Ideal Servant of God, flawless in perfection and glory. Paul spoke truly of his own ministry in the gospel carried on “in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness” (2 Cor. 11:27); but in all these respects he was but an imperfect imitator of the self-denying service of Christ, sustained in his devotion, however, like Him, by that secret food of which the world knows not (John 4:31-34).

THE LORD'S CALL FOR CO-WORKERS

The Lord then beheld this great company of famished men, women and children, with a full knowledge of the physical infirmities, the mental anxieties, and the spiritual cravings that brought them to His feet, of their reception of His ministry during the three days, and of the extent of the journey home. In the spontaneity of His love for them, His heart overflowed with compassion, and He who looked in vain for some to take pity upon Himself in His sufferings sought to awaken the sympathy of His disciples in the needy condition of this people. The Lord called His disciples to Him, and spoke to them, for He would not have them see their brethren in need, and shut up the “bowels of their compassion” against them, as if the love of God did not dwell in their hearts. He said, “I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and if I send them away fasting to their homes they will faint by the way; and some of them are come from far.”

But there was no sympathetic response on the part of the disciples. They, under the influence of Jewish prejudice possibly, expressed no pity for the people, and offered no suggestion for their help. Could the memory of the Lord's former goodness in feeding the seven thousand under similar circumstances have altogether gone from them? It would seem so. Helpless themselves, they utterly failed to realize what an inexhaustible fund of help there was in the Savior. The disciples had yet much to learn. When the Great Shepherd of the sheep was brought again from the dead, then they, as under-shepherds, would be responsible to “feed the assembly of God which he purchased with his own blood.” Then the same voice would come to them with a new significance, “Give ye them to eat,” and then they would not fail in the exercise of the ministry allotted to them.

The Lord had said to the disciples, “I would not send them away fasting” (Matt. 15:32), but they reply, “Whence shall one be able to satisfy these men with bread here in a desert place?” Foolish forgetfulness and unbelief! Whence was food given for the tribes of Israel in the deserts of Sinai? whence was it supplied to a similar company only a few weeks earlier, and not so many miles away? They themselves had wrought many mighty works in the name of the Lord (Mark 6:13), but while they must have known that divine power had been exercised in other circumstances, they failed to remember that divine power might be applied in this instance, and their captious words were not like the words of apostles. Even Satan knew that the Lord had but to command it, and the very stones would become bread.

THE KING SERVING AT HIS TABLE

The Lord thereupon called upon the disciples to mobilize their resources, saying to them, “How many loaves have ye?” He was about to illustrate before their eyes His own adage, “To him that hath shall be given.” They answer, Seven. And these loaves the Lord took as a nucleus of the food-supply for the people. He did not as of old call down bread out of heaven, but He made use of what came out of the earth (Job 28:5). To this fruit of human toil, already multiplied from the bare grain, He gave a further increase.

After Himself commanding the people to sit down on the ground (on the previous occasion the disciples were told to do this) the Lord took the loaves in His hands, and in consequence all eyes would be fastened upon Him. All the people would know that their food was coming to them from His hand. Would David's song of praise have occurred to any of them? “Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom... The LORD upholdeth all that fall and raiseth up all those that be bowed down. The eyes of all wait upon thee, and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing” (Psa. 145:13-16; also 104:27).

While the eyes of the multitude were waiting upon the Lord, they could but observe that His eyes were upturned to heaven, as He gave thanks. Had He not taught His disciples to pray to their Father in heaven, and in addition to petitions of a spiritual order to say, “Give us this day our daily bread"? Now He who had taught to pray for daily sustenance teaches by example to tender thanks for the same.

The Lord who was the Guest of Simon the Pharisee and of Simon the leper and of many others, sometimes welcome, sometimes, alas! unwelcome, acted as Host on that day to the great assembly. He it was who broke the bread. The disciples, as stewards of His bounty, distributed from His hand the broken pieces to the multitude, who ate and were satisfied.

Besides the loaves, there were a few small fishes. These the Lord also took and blessed, and the disciples passed them to the people. Thus He provided bread and fish for their repast, as after His resurrection He did for the seven apostles in Galilee (John 21 g). It was not then the day of the glory of the kingdom. When that day comes, He, as Melchidezek, will dispense bread and wine to the men of faith. When the ark is brought to its final resting-place in Mount Zion, the Lord will re-enact, but far exceed the bounty of David, who gave “to the whole multitude of Israel, as well to the women as men, to every one a cake of bread and a good piece of flesh, and a flagon of wine” (2 Sam. 6:17-19). But the joy of full victory over the sin of the world was still future; hence the Lord said to His disciples on the night of His betrayal, “I will not drink henceforth of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom” (Matt. 26:29). He also said, “Blessed are those servants whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching. Verily, I say unto you that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and come and serve them” (Luke 12:37).

THE RICHES OF THE LORD'S GOODNESS

The word “riches” conveys the idea of an excess of supplies beyond the bare necessity. The rich man of the parable, for instance, required larger barns wherein to store the goods not immediately in demand for passing needs. As applied to men and to their actions and possessions, riches must be understood in its limited sense, and but seldom in a good sense. For the Lord said that only with great difficulty can those that have riches enter the kingdom of heaven.

On the other hand the dealings and ways of God manward are ever characterized by richness and riches. Both His grace and His glory are revealed to men in their riches (Eph. 1:7; 3:16). And the Lord Christ in His unsearchable riches is rich unto all that call upon Him (Eph. 3:8; Rom. 10:12). Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound, and the free gifts of God are ever bestowed in overflowing profusion.

That affluence which marks the act which is purely divine was witnessed by the crowds that day in Galilee. The beneficent Power that causes the sower's grain to yield a hundredfold multiplied the seven loaves and the fishes until every one of the thousands present was satisfied, and even then there was abundance to spare. For “they did eat and were filled,” and gathered up of the broken pieces sufficient to fill seven large hampers.1

This miracle was a great and a special exhibition of the active love of God in a selfish world, and it would be worth while, in our private meditation, if we did not hurry past this beautiful picture of the grace of Christ who, though He was rich yet for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might become rich. It was in the days of His “poverty,” that our Lord gave these instances of divine compassion. He Himself, the Son of David, knew hunger outside the gates of royal Zion (Mark 11:12), and at Sychar weariness and thirst also (John 4:6, 7), as well as in the wilderness (Matt. 4:2). Humbled thus, bearing their infirmities and carrying their sorrows, He pitied the hungry and weary throng before Him on this occasion, while the people themselves found abundant grace in Jesus, the Prophet of Nazareth, to help in time of need.

There is none good save One, that is, God, said our Lord, and in the bountiful meal of His free provision, these Galileans beheld a vivid illustration of what the apostle in a striking verse calls the riches of the goodness of God. Appealing to those who neglect such evidences, Paul inquires, “Despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance"? (Rom. 2:4).

W. J. H.

(Continued from page 112) (To be continued)

Studies in Mark, Mark 8:27-30: (76) Jehovah's Anointed Servant, Disowned by Many, Confessed by Few

Chap. 8:27-30, 46.-Jehovah's Anointed Servant Disowned by Many, Confessed by Few

“And Jesus went forth, and his disciples, into the villages of Caesarea Philippi: and in the way he asked his disciples, saying unto them, Who do men say that I am? And they told him, saying, John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but others, One of the prophets. And he asked them, But who say ye that I am? Peter answereth and saith unto him, Thou art the Christ. And he charged him that they should tell no man of him” (8:27-30, R.V.).

Accompanied by His disciples, the Lord Jesus went northward towards the sources of the river Jordan. The neighborhood of Caesarea Philippi, some 120 miles from Jerusalem, was the most northerly point recorded among the scenes of the Lord's ministry. Thence the Lord turned southward to Capernaum first, and then to Judea for a final presentation of Himself to the “daughter of Zion” as the Anointed of Jehovah. The period of this visit to the vicinity of Caesarea Philippi coincides therefore with the commencement of the last year of His public service.

But up to the then present moment, what was the fruit of His labors? Jehovah's Servant had spent His strength in zealous and loving ministry among the lost sheep of the house of Israel, doing among them works such as man had never seen before. Truly God had anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power. The Great Prophet had preached the good tidings of peace, and had gone about doing good and healing all that were oppressed with the devil, God being with Him. What degree of conviction had this unique service of word and deed wrought upon the hearts of men? How did the people regard this Man approved of God unto them by the mighty works and wonders and signs which God did, by Him in the midst of them?

Such was the question raised in Northern Galilee at this juncture in the history of the Servant of Jehovah. And the Lord made inquiry of His disciples, not, of course, that He needed that any should testify concerning man, for He knew what was in man. But for their own sakes He put the queries, that they might share with Him the burden of unrequited love, and learn the secret of serving God in the face of apparent failure. It is noteworthy that the Lord's own knowledge of the obduracy of man's heart in no wise diminished His energy nor His love. Nevertheless the sorrow was there that the sons of Israel were not all prepared like aged Simeon to receive Him as the Lord's Christ, and His lament might be expressed in the recorded words of Jehovah to Jeremiah: “They have turned unto me the back and not the face; though I taught them, rising up early and teaching them, yet they have not hearkened to receive instruction” (Jer. 32:33).

IN THE WAY

It has been computed that the various journeys of our Lord in the course of His public ministry in Galilee and Judea extended considerably more than two thousand miles. These journeys would have been slowly accomplished on foot, and throughout them the Lord was, for the most part, accompanied by His disciples, and particularly by the twelve apostles who were specially chosen that they “might be with Him.”

Two thousand miles of heavenly intercourse with the Son of David and the Son of God! Well might one of the apostles as he recalled with adoring reflection those marvelous travels with his Master add to his Gospel that striking conclusion: “there are many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that should be written” (John 21:25.)

Of that antediluvian patriarch who “was not, for God took him” it is recorded that he “walked with God.” Here were twelve men who walked more than two thousand miles with Him who was God “manifested in flesh.” It was theirs to see, to hear, to contemplate, to handle the Word of life (1 John 1:1). As the Lord said privately to His disciples on one occasion, “Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see; for I say unto you that many prophets and kings desired to see the things which ye see and saw them not, and to hear the things which ye hear and heard them not” (Lu. 10:23, 24).

Very, very little of these communications is recorded. The effect of them upon the apostles was however abiding, and was manifested when the Lord had departed out of this world unto the Father. Then after the baptism of the Holy Spirit they became the foundation of that new spiritual building in the earth, growing now, as it is, unto a holy temple in the Lord (Eph. 2:19-22).

It was on such occasions that the Lord and His followers took “sweet counsel” together. Like the communications in the house at Capernaum (Matt. 13:36) and those also in the upper room at Jerusalem (John 13 et seq.), these conversations in the way near Caesarea Philippi were for the most part private, intimate, choice, personal, precious. Of a correspondingly private character, as we have already noted, are such of the Lord's works as are recorded in this part of the Gospel. A further instance of this sacred privacy we gather from that touching description of the incident which occurred shortly afterward, “in the way,” when the Lord was setting Himself steadfastly to visit for the last time that city so “beautiful for situation,” but defiled with the blood of Israel's martyred servants. “And they were in the way, going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus was going before them; and they were amazed, and they that followed were afraid. And he took again the twelve, and began to tell them the things that were to happen to him, saying, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be delivered unto the chief priests and the scribes; and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him unto the Gentiles; and they shall mock him, and shall spit upon him, and shall scourge him, and shall kill him; and after three days he shall rise again” (Mark 10:32-34; Matt. 20:17).

These intervals of seclusion were opportunities to be prized highly, and to be used to advantage, but on another occasion we find the apostles misused their privilege as companions of the Lord. While “in the way” with Him, they forgot that they were disciples of Him who was meek and lowly in heart, who was made a little lower than the angels, who had come, humbling Himself, not to be served, but to serve. The apostles had heated arguments among themselves, when traveling to Capernaum, on the question of pre-eminence. The Lord rebuked them, but not publicly. When He was in the house He asked them, “What were ye reasoning in the way? But they held their peace, for they had disputed one with another in the way, who should be greatest” (Mark 9:33, 34),

POPULAR OPINION

The ways of the Great Servant of Jehovah in instructing His co-workers beforehand concerning the true character of coming events are found full of interest as we meditate upon them. Before making the first announcement of His imminent crucifixion and death, He prepared them for the news by drawing from their own lips the general thoughts of men regarding Himself. The disciples, both in company with and apart from the Lord, had traversed the country in all directions, teaching and preaching the kingdom of God, the word being accompanied by corroborative signs. They had therefore come into personal contact with the crowds, and had special opportunities to ascertain their real feelings.

Now when the Lord was in a private place praying, as Luke tells us, bearing the burden of men's obduracy of heart upon His spirit in His Father's presence, He asked His disciples, “Who do men say that I am?” He Himself knew the answer, as He necessarily knew all things, but for their sakes He asked this question. It would be good for them not only to think vaguely in their hearts, but to say definitely with their lips that the world was against their Master's claims, that the best of men's judgments was short of the truth, and was therefore detrimental to the Lord's person and damaging to His glory and kingdom. The priests and the Pharisees, the professedly and zealously religious parties, were undoubtedly His strong opponents, but were the taught as well as the teachers antagonistic to the Lord? “Who do men say that I am?” was His question.

In reply, the disciples did not recite the worst sayings about their Master. There were those that said He was a Samaritan, that He had a demon, that He was mad, that He was a blasphemer, a gluttonous man and a winebibber. All classes were against Him, from the officials in the gate of justice to the drunkards in their ribald songs (Psa. 69:12).

The disciples knew these things, but their love for their Master filled them with a solicitous regard for Him. They were sensitive to His honor, and sought to shield Him to the best of their ability from what would be painful to His feelings. So, on another occasion, when He spoke of going into Judea, they, out of a similar regard, sought to restrain Him, saying, Rabbi, the Jews were but now seeking to stone thee, and goest thou thither again? (John 11:8). Now, as there was a division of opinion among the people concerning Him (cp. John 7:12), they gave Him the best of the common reports regarding His person and mission. Some, they said, declared that He was John the Baptist, others Elijah, and others, One of the prophets.

And yet how very far from the truth was the best of the thoughts of men: it was, indeed, the distance between heaven and earth, between God and man. John the Baptist as a man and a prophet was indeed highly-favored of God. And the Lord's own testimony regarding him was remarkable: “Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist.” But the greatness of John, however, was relative, not absolute, official not personal. He was a light-bearer (John 5:35), but not the Light itself, though he bore witness to the Light (John 1:7, 8). Nevertheless, he was preeminent among all prophets and messengers of God since the world began, in that he alone among them witnessed the fulfillment of his own Messianic predictions, and as the great forerunner, he was able to declare of One standing before him: “Behold the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world.” This office was the choicest service given to men; “yet,” the Lord added, “he that is but little in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he” (Matt. 11:11).

John himself, whom all the people held to be a prophet, gave no ground for the popular saying. His plain testimony was, “I am not the Christ. He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear” (Matt. 3:11; John 1:20; 3:28). And when John saw the Holy Spirit descending like a dove, and abiding upon Him, he knew that He was the Son of God. The thoughts of men in these matters were foolishness. Some said John the Baptist was the Christ, while others said Christ was John the Baptist. Some said He was Elijah, the prophet of stern judgment, but none said He was the minister of heavenly mercy and grace. The truth was as the Lord declared, “No one knoweth the Son, save the Father; neither doth any know the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him” (Matt. 11:27).

The opinions of the populace showed how they were under the leavening influence of the Pharisees and the Sadducees, of which evil effects the Lord had just previously bidden the disciples beware.1 They, while glad of the Lord's beneficent miracles, altogether missed the sweetness of the grace of Christ. How otherwise could they mistake the meek and lowly Savior for Elijah, the prophet of devouring fire from heaven and famine on earth, the precursor too, of the great and terrible day of the Lord (Mal. 4:5), or John the Baptist with his fierce denunciations of the sins of Israel. In their blindness the people utterly failed to discern the grace and truth that came by Jesus Christ.

PERSONAL CONFESSION OF THE CHRIST

The Lord then turned away from the unworthy thoughts of the multitude, who had ever been the special objects of His loving service, to the circle of His own immediate followers. He now appealed to the judgment of their love and intimacy, saying, “Who say ye that I the Son of man am?” The question was a direct challenge to their loyalty and affection, like that one in the Canticles: “What is thy beloved more than another beloved?” Do you regard your Master as a John, an Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the old prophets?

Their reply was undoubtedly refreshing to Him who was so depreciated and under-valued elsewhere. Peter answered and said unto Him, “Thou art the Christ.”

From Luke we learn that the Lord addressed these questions to the disciples after He rose up from private prayer. In hallowed communion with the Father, He bore upon His spirit the anguish of a baffled and spurned love. After all His service in the midst of the favored people He, their Messiah, was still unknown, and the Father whom He came to manifest was also unknown. The Lord could have said even then, as He did later, “O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me” (John 17:25).

Only that part of Peter's confession which bears directly upon the special character of the Gospel is given. In Matthew, the words, “the Son of the living God,” appear also, for there the announcement by the Lord of the building of the assembly upon that acknowledgment follows. Here the Lord was owned simply as the Christ, the Anointed One, for this is an essential feature of the Gospel which sets Him out as the Servant of Jehovah upon whom the Holy Spirit rested.

The disciples, whose affections the Lord had kindled towards Himself by His love were filled with the serene confidence that He was the Sent One of God, while in the uncertainty that unbelief, engenders the people were distracted with conflicting opinions. It is faith alone that gives assurance, and Peter and his fellows believed that Jesus was the Christ. They told the Lord so, even as Jonathan came to David in the wilderness of Ziph, while Saul sought his life, and expressed his confidence that David was anointed to be the coming king in Israel (1 Sam. 23:17). Jonathan's confession of allegiance, we read, strengthened David's hand in God, and may we not say that He who “sought for comforters and found none,” rejoiced at the confession of Peter, “Thou art the Christ"?

But the time of public testimony to His rights as Israel's Messiah was now past, and He charged Peter that he should tell no man of him.

W. J. H.

Courtesy of BibleTruthPublishers.com. Most likely this text has not been proofread. Any suggestions for spelling or punctuation corrections would be warmly received. Please email them to: BTPmail@bibletruthpublishers.com.

Studies in Mark, Mark 8:22-26: (75) What Does This Miracle Teach?

Chap. 8:22-26 (Continued):

45.—What Does This Miracle Teach?

The miracle was performed privately, and the Lord's expressed will was that it should be kept secret; clearly, therefore, it was not wrought for the wicked and unbelieving generation who had rejected his teaching. To them the Lord shortly before had said emphatically that no sign should be given: and the healed man was accordingly bidden not to advertise his cure, but to go straight home.

But it may well be inquired whether this miracle has any significance beyond the evidence it affords of the inexhaustible love and compassion of the Lord and of His ready power and will to relieve the afflicted; and, if so, in what way it illustrates the general purpose or design in this part of the Gospel; further, if it was not for the people at large, whether it had any significant application to the followers of Christ.

Clearly, the prominent features of this case of healing are (1) that the man was taken apart by the Lord and healed in seclusion, and (2) that the process of the cure was not instantaneous but in stages. Now a close analogue to this sight-giving miracle will be found in the preparation of the disciples to receive and retain the Lord's teaching, and by this means to become His competent witnesses in the world when He Himself was not bodily present.

The apostles were specially chosen by the Lord out of His followers, and led apart from others. “He ordained twelve that they might be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach” (Mark 3:14). They at their call saw sufficient of the supreme attractiveness of Christ to forsake all and to follow Him. They believed that He was the appointed and promised Redeemer come to restore the kingdom to Israel. But their vision of the true nature of that kingdom was by no means accurate and complete, as such of their sayings as are recorded amply prove.

There are many instances which show that these disciples of the Lord could not clearly see the true spiritual value of the kingdom of God: they were, as it were, confused between men and trees. And it will be noted that this defect of the apostles is one of the connected threads woven into the texture of the Gospel.

Let us take a few items from the preceding narrative which illustrate the imperfect spirituality of the apostles. In the first storm at sea they concluded that the Son of David and His followers were all about to perish, but at the same time they thought that only He could save them. Their despairing conduct was in striking contrast with that of the serene assurance of Paul throughout the storm of many days' duration.

Then, when a crowd of listeners was famishing with hunger, the disciples, so imperfectly understanding the love and the compassion of their Master, besought Him to send the multitudes away to shift for themselves.

Again, when the Lord came to the deliverance of the apostles in the second storm, walking to them on the waves, they were affrighted at His unexpected appearance, and cried out in fear, mistaking their Beloved Master for an apparition.

Afterward, when the Lord reproved the folly of the Pharisees in their ablutionary rites and their connected formalism and hypocrisy, the disciples confessed their ignorance of His meaning, showing themselves “without understanding” like the mass of the nation.

Further, when a large audience was again present and without food, the disciples, oblivious of their former experience of the Lord's resources, were unable to suggest any means of feeding the people. Also. when the Lord passed from the physical to the spiritual things of the kingdom, and spoke of the dangerous leaven of the Pharisees, their thoughts rose no higher than loaves of bread.

All these events follow one another closely in the earlier part of the narrative, and combine to exhibit the immaturity of the Lord's immediate followers as “co-workers” with Him. To state their spiritual condition in the Lord's own figure, they had eyes to see, but they did not perceive.

At this juncture in the history, the duplex cure of the blind man is introduced. He was taken aside, and, first of all, a measure of restoration was given to his organs of sight, so that they became susceptible to impressions of external objects. But, according to his own testimony, he was unable to discern the real nature of those objects, for he confused such dissimilar objects as men and trees. A further effusion of power was needed, and this the Lord bestowed, so that the man thereupon saw all things with clearness.

The application of this object-lesson to the undeveloped spiritual condition of the apostles is plain, and harmonizes with the plan of the Gospel, which not only shows the ministry of the Servant of Jehovah Himself but His preparation of His followers to carry on a divine witness in the earth when He should be absent. They had been chosen and ordained by the Lord to preach the gospel of the kingdom, but how could they efficiently undertake this service, if they were themselves unable to discern the mysteries of the kingdom? The new features which were to characterize the people of God were put before the multitudes in parables, but the underlying truths were fully explained to the believing remnant (Mark 4:34). These doctrines were placed before the apostles in word and illustrated by miraculous deeds, but in this last year of the Lord's ministry it is clear they still needed to have the eyes of their heart strengthened to discern “things new and old” —the teaching of Messiah Himself and the scriptures that foretold Him and His doings.

No subject seemed more difficult of apprehension to the disciples than that of the humiliation and sufferings of the Messiah as a prelude to His displayed glories. And this subject of all-surpassing importance the Lord was about to introduce to them. By a tableau in the holy mount, He would afford some of them a glimpse of the kingdom in its coming glory (9:1), but teaching them of the sufferings and death of the Son of man (8:31) which must necessarily precede that manifestation. Could their eyes bear the sight and their hearts receive its meaning? The result showed that their vision in these matters was indistinct, and like this imperfectly restored blind man, and like the disciples on their way to Emmaus (Luke 22:31, 32) a further application of the power of the Lord was necessary.

OTHER GOSPEL INSTANCES OF PHYSICAL AND MORAL BLINDNESS

The cure of the blind is used in other parts of the Gospels to illustrate the Lord's power to illuminate the mind and the heart. A striking instance occurs in Luke. He records several cases of spiritual blindness, and then brings in the healing of Bartimaeus, showing by this acted parable how the Lord delivered those who sought His mercy (Luke 18).

First, there is the Pharisee in the temple blinded by pride and self-sufficiency, a strong contrast with the publican whose eyes were opened to see the sinfulness of his own heart before God (vers. 9-14).

Secondly, there is a further contrast between the little children, on the one hand, who in their simple way saw enough of the divine winsomeness of the Savior to come to Him, and were suffered to do so, and on the other, the rich young ruler who had many moral and religious qualifications, but nevertheless was so blind that, like the nation as a whole, he saw no beauty in the Lord that he should respond to His call and follow Him (vers. 15-25.)

Thirdly, the apostles whose eyes were opened sufficiently to leave all and follow the Lord were still so blind of understanding that when He spoke to them of His coming sufferings and death in accordance with prophecy, they perceived nothing of His meaning (vers. 31-34).

Fourthly, we have the introduction of the healing of the blind beggar, in immediate sequence to these passages, showing that although men were blind (1) to themselves, (2) to the Savior, and (3) to the scriptures and the Lord's own teaching, there was One present who would open the eyes of all those who sought His power. Bartimaeus implored mercy like the sinner in the temple; he was brought to Jesus like the infants; he followed the Lord like the apostles. In contrast with the Pharisee he was aware of his poverty and his blindness; and in contrast with the young ruler he saw that Jesus of Nazareth was the promised Son of David.

Take another instance. In the Gospel of John the man blind from birth constitutes a typical example of the work of grace in the spiritual world, which is so fully presented by the Evangelist. In chapter 8 the Lord's revelation of Himself as the Light of the world is recorded, but the Jews did not follow Him, as is shown, and consequently they walked on in darkness. The Light was shining in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not. But in chapter 9 there is given the case of a blind man living from birth in a world of darkness, whose eyes were opened upon his submission to the Lord's directions. In his case there was an effect upon the heart as well as upon the eyes. His apprehension of the worth of his benefactor developed in ascending stages in contrast with the opinions of the Jewish teachers. He spoke of Him as the man called Jesus (ver. 11) as a prophet (ver. 17), as “from God” (ver. 33), and finally he confessed Him as the Son of God (vers. 35-38).

After this record, the Evangelist immediately makes reference to the perverse type of blindness which characterized the Pharisees who were spiritually blind, but who deceived themselves by assuming they could see. This condition of blindness was demonstrated by their attitude towards the Lord Himself. Perfect goodness was before them, but they discerned Him not. The Lord said of them, “For judgment am I come into this world that they which see not may see, and that they which see may become blind.” The Pharisees were saying, “we see,” therefore their sin remained (John 9:39-41). They were of that generation who in the language of prophecy, “call evil good and good evil: that put darkness for light and light for darkness” (Isa. 5:20).

CASES OF BLINDNESS IN THE GOSPELS

Omitting the general references to the healing of the blind, of which there are several, as in Matt. 11:5, there are seven specific cases mentioned in the four Gospels, viz:-

(a) Two whose eyes Jesus touched, Matt. 9:27, 28.

(b) One blind and dumb, Matt. 12:22.

(c) One at Bethsaida, Mark 8:22.

(d) One in Jerusalem, blind from birth, John 9

(e) Two near Jericho, Matt. 20:30; Mark 10:46; Luke 18:35.

(1) Of these seven cases, five are named by Matthew, two by Mark, one by Luke, and one by John. None of these cases is mentioned more than once with the exception of the two near Jericho. In this instance Matthew refers to both men, but Mark and Luke to one only. Matthew also records the greatest number of cases-five.

(2) These seven witnesses were distributed between the northern and southern provinces. Four (a, b, and c) occurred in Galilee during the earlier part of the Lord's ministry, and three in Judea (d and e) during the latter part, and these were three who sat and begged.

Three of these blind men (a and e) asked that they might be healed; three others (b and c) were brought to the Lord; and one who was blind from birth (d) was first addressed by the Lord.

In every case but one (b) the Lord laid His hands upon them, or touched their eyes. On one occasion (c) He touched twice. In two instances (c and d) the Lord made use of spittle.

Two blind men in Galilee (a), and two in Judea (e) acknowledged Jesus as the Son of David, and after the healing of another (b) the people said, “Is not this the Son of David?” Besides these four men, no one confessed Him in this character, except the Syro-phoenician woman (Matt. 15:22), and the women and the children upon the occasion of His public entry into Jerusalem (Matt. 21:9, 15). These testimonies to Jesus as the Royal Seed of David are recorded almost entirely in the First Gospel, Which from the outset (Matt. 1:1, 20) presents Him particularly as David's Son and David's Lord.

W. J. H.

Studies in Mark, Mark 8:22-26: (74) Dim Vision Made Clear

8:22-26

“And they come unto Bethsaida. And they bring to him a blind man, and beseech him to touch him. And he took hold of the blind man by the hand, and brought him out of the village; and when he had spit on his eyes, and laid his hands upon him, he asked him, Seest thou aught? And he looked up, and said, I see men; for I behold them as trees, walking. Then again he laid his hands upon his eyes; and he looked steadfastly, and was restored, and saw all things clearly. And he sent him away to his house, saying, Do not even enter into the village” 1 (8:22-26, R.V.).

In the course of His tour, the Lord and His party of followers reached Bethsaida. This appears to have been the town or village known as Bethsaida Julias, situated on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee, near to which the first miracle of the multiplied bread was wrought. Here the Lord opened the eyes of a blind man in private, as Mark only records.

A notable feature of this miracle is the gradual manner in which the sight was restored. He received first the faculty of sight, and secondly the ability to use the newly-given sight. The physical benefit granted to the sufferer affords an illustration of spiritual facts wrought by the power of Christ in the kingdom of God: Since man is blind by nature, and also blinded by willful works of evil, he requires inward eyesight of heart and soul, and moreover that his newly-given eyes should be able to perceive the glory of Christ's person and the truth of His teaching. This dual blessing, both in the physical and in the spiritual sense, was sometimes conferred by a single act of the Lord's power, but in this instance of miraculous healing successive stages are displayed. First, the power of vision was bestowed, and then the power of perception.

While those totally bereft of natural sight were figurative of the spiritual state of the nation at large, the man with partially restored sight illustrated the spiritual 'condition of those who so imperfectly apprehended the truths of the kingdom which the Lord was proclaiming. They represented the believing remnant of Israel as distinct from the mass. Truly they had come out to the Messiah, but they were in a transitional state until Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon them, and by Him they were guided into all truth. Then they saw the King in His beauty, and the “land that is very far off” (Isa. 33:17). Then their eyes were fully opened, and they beheld wondrous things out of Jehovah's law (Psa. 119:18). Previously, when Jesus came to them across the waves for their deliverance in the storm, they supposed He was a specter. And as they failed to recognize Jesus as their Deliverer, so they afterward failed to recognize Him as the King of kings. For when the three apostles in the holy mount saw their Master transfigured before their eyes, Peter with a confused judgment assigned Him no higher place than he did Moses and Elijah.

A unique panorama of heavenly deeds was daily moving before the gaze of these privileged men, but none of the apostles rightly discerned the wonder of Messiah and His ways. The Lord Himself said to His disciples privately, “Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see: for I say unto you that many prophets and kings desired to see the things which ye see, and saw them not; and to hear the things which ye hear, and heard them not” (Luke 10:23, 24). But to those thus blessed He also said reprovingly, “Having eyes, see ye not? Having ears, hear ye not?”

A SIGN WROUGHT IN SECRET

This miracle along with that of the healing of the deaf stammerer in the same neighborhood, form companion pictures. They are both peculiar to the Second Gospel, and the figurative reference of both of them seems specially to be to the “little flock” of Israel who welcomed Jehovah's Righteous Servant, and who followed Him in His services, while the great majority of the nation refused His gracious overtures, and, in consequence, perished in their unbelief. Some remarks upon the analogies of the two incidents have been offered in connection with that section (7:31-37), to which the reader may refer (supra, pp. 73-75; 88-91).

It cannot but be noted in these verses with what scrupulous care the Holy Spirit records in detail the gentle and loving service rendered by the Son, who had become the Servant of God. The Lord assumed personal charge of the afflicted man. He took hold of him by the hand, and led him in his blindness and darkness away from the habitations of men. What did this action suggest? To those whose hearts were filled with the ancient prophecies, would it not recall Jehovah's promise to the nation: “I will bring the blind by a way that they know not: in paths that they know not will I lead them: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked places straight” (Isa. 42:16).

The Lord then supplied moisture from His lips for the darkened eyes before Him, and laid His hands of beneficent power upon the blind man. Healing virtue was communicated, and the sightless orbs became sensitive to the light of heaven. Thereupon the Lord questioned him concerning the efficiency of his newly-given eyesight: “What dost thou see?” His organs of vision were made sound, but were they working in harmonious cooperation with their fellow-members? Along with ability to see, did he possess the faculty of perception, of discernment, of recognition? This the Lord tested by His question, “Seest thou anything?”

The man's reply showed there was still the incompetency of the inward eye. Images of outward objects were transmitted through the eyes, but the mind lacked the power of accurate perception and cognition. The man was able to see, but not to discriminate between the objects of sight. Looking up, he said to the Lord, “I now see the folk, because I see them walking as trees."2 The light of his body—the eye was no longer darkness (Luke 11:34), but its vision was obscured, veiled. There was new light for him, but it was the dawn, rather than the noonday (cp. Judg. 9:36).

The Lord, however, chased away these shadows by a second exercise of His healing functions. He again “laid his hands upon his eyes; and he (1) looked steadfastly, and (2) was restored, and (3) saw all things clearly.” The threefold result of this second imposition as thus expressed was that the man (1) instantly gained clearness of vision (2) recovered normal eyesight, and (3) began and continued to see even distant objects clearly.

As in some other cases of healing, we are told that the Lord imposed His commands upon the man before His departure. Men who received temporary benefit in recognition of their faith were required to exercise their faith yet further, and obey the Lord's directions in respect to their immediate movements. Like the sick of the palsy, and the Gadarene demoniac (Mark 2:11; 5:19), the restored blind man was bidden to go to his own house, and moreover not even to enter the town of Bethsaida, from which the Lord had led him.

To be continued

Studies in Mark, Mark 8:11-21: (73)

8:11-21

Let us now briefly consider these several points raised by our Lord with His disciples in this series of questions (vers. 17-21).

(1) Lack of confidence in the Master.-The Lord's first inquiry was, “Why reason ye because ye have no loaf?” The disciples had been discussing among themselves the meaning of the Lord's remark concerning the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod. Not understanding the figurative significance of the allusion, all or some of them (for it was a matter of discussion, and they may not have been unanimous) concluded that the Lord's reference was to their lack of bread for food. Uncertain of their interpretation, they sought enlightenment one from another, although the Source of all wisdom was in their midst. That they turned to one another for help was evidence that they lacked confidence in the love and sympathy of Christ for them. Otherwise, would they not have appealed direct to Him, owning their dullness, and seeking to be instructed? They, however, reasoned and questioned and debated and argued one with another.

The Divine Teacher was with them, and the promise was even then good: “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not” (Jas. 1:5). But the disciples did not ask, and therefore they did not receive. On the contrary, the Lord had to inquire of them, Why do ye debate the question?

He who opened the minds of the disciples to understand the scriptures (Luke 24:45) could He not open their minds to understand the things of the kingdom?

(2) Lack of perception.—The Lord said, “Do ye not perceive ()"? This verb implies the giving of earnest attention to what is passing so that the event is impressed upon the mind. Its sense is stated to be “to weigh with intelligence, so as to understand.” Levity and unconcern would hinder and even prevent perception.

An instance of its use in the sense stated occurs in connection with the prophecy concerning the future days when the ‘abomination of desolation' will be set up in the holy place. Whoever reads Daniel's prophecy, quoted by our Lord, is exhorted to “understand, or perceive,” i.e., to ponder, to consider seriously, to heed the prophecy (Matt. 24:15; Mark 13:14). Again, the apostle Paul states that the invisible things of God are “perceived” from the world's creation (Rom. 1:20). Due perception therefore of the Lord's teaching is the result of studied attention with the heart.

Had the disciples been attentive to the Master's service? If so, why was it that after His ministry had been exercised in their view for some two years so little impression had been made upon their minds?

Their education and training to become able ministers of the new covenant by actual experience of the Lord's ways of working and teaching was being frustrated by their own lack of interest.

Spiritual progress cannot be attained by mere outward contact with the workings of divine power and mercy. The doings of the Lord must be weighed and considered seriously. “Consider () what I say,” Paul said to Timothy, “and the Lord give thee understanding () in all things” (2 Tim. 2:7). In a like strain the Psalmist sang of what will be true in the coming kingdom, “All men shall fear, and they shall declare the work of God; for they shall wisely consider of his doing” (Ps. 114: 9).

(3) Lack of reflection.—Spiritual perception is followed by spiritual understanding. The disciples first failed to receive and retain accurate impressions of the many acts of our Lord's power, wisdom, and grace, and they further failed to meditate upon the significance of the abundance and repetition of His works, and their superhuman nature. They had seen miracles of healing, the exercise of the power of Christ over the forces of nature, over the spirit-world, over death itself.

They had heard the expositions of kingdom-truth, introducing what was altogether brighter and better than the law. But the apostles were not yet wise. “Whoso is wise shall give heed to those things, and they shall consider the mercies of the LORD” (Ps. 107:43).

Understanding is of the heart (Matt. 13:15). It was in her heart that Mary kept the deep sayings about the Christ, and in secret she kept pondering them that she might eventually understand (Luke 2:19, 51). The next question bears upon the right heart-attitude of a learner in divine truth.

(4) Lack of sensibility of heart.—“Have ye your heart hardened?” Hardness or callousness of heart was attributed to the Pharisees (Mark 3:5). But it is also used with reference to the disciples. And in this case we notice that the term is associated (a) with failure to perceive spiritual truth, and (b) with the first food-miracle. In that connection we read in an earlier passage that they perceived not concerning the loaves, and that their heart was hardened (Mark 6:52). The amazement of the apostles at the stilling of the storm was because they understood () not the miracle of the loaves, their hearts being dull and insensible in both instances.

It is most important to see that want of spiritual perception is the result of deadness of feeling in the heart. And from the questions which follow we see that spiritual sight, hearing and memory are all affected by grossness of heart. In commissioning the prophet Ezekiel to be His messenger to the house of Israel, Jehovah said to him, “All my words that I shall speak unto thee receive in thine heart, and hear with thine ears” (Ezek. 3:10).

(5)Lack of visual activity.-"Having eyes, see ye not?” The disciples are clearly credited with the possession of spiritual vision. Their eyes were gifted to see what the world could not. It is ever so with men of faith. Aged Simeon saw in the Holy Babe whom he took in his arms what the priests of the temple did not see. He discerned in the Infant the Lord's Christ, the salvation of Jehovah (Luke 2:26, 29). The eyes of faith, when in exercise, behold what is unseen and eternal (2 Cor. 4:18).

These eyes are not our mental faculties, but the eyes of our hearts (Eph. 1:18, R.V.). They are associated with the emotions rather than the intellect, and are inseparable from inward affection and loyal devotion. They are the eyes which see in the Christ of the Gospels a supreme Person for our worship and service. The apostles undervalued the ministry of Christ because they undervalued Christ Himself. A follower of the Lord may fall into the same weakness still if the eye be not single for the Master. He loses the vision of his soul, and becomes guilty of the blindness of Laodicea (Rev. 3:17). Having eyes, let us therefore, turn them in the right direction, and see Jesus, crowned and glorified.

(6)Lack of aural attention.-"And having ears, hear ye not?” It was an essential qualification of the apostles' service that therein they declared what they had seen and heard. So John wrote in his First Epistle: “that which was from the beginning which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the Word of Life... declare we unto you” (1 John 1:1-3). Paul's instructions were to the same effect (Acts 22:14,15).

The Lord's question thus revealed a serious defect in the conduct of the disciples; having ears, they did not hear. Those who turn away their ears from the truth are false and evil teachers (2 Tim. 4:4). There is a proper attitude in which to hear rightly, but they had neglected the Lord's warning, “Take heed how ye hear.” They should have listened attentively. Mary chose the good part of sitting at the feet of Jesus, and hearing His word. She had “ears to hear,” and she used them well. It is not sufficient to be in possession of ears, they must be exercised. Hence the recurring exhortation to each of the seven churches of Asia was, “He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear” (Rev. 2 and 3).

But the disciples had become “dull of hearing,” like some of the Hebrew Christians, and therefore the saying of the Lord was hard of interpretation to them (cp. Heb. 5:11, R.V.).

(7)Lack of recollection.-"Do ye not remember?” and then the Lord cited the two miracles of the loaves. The things which are behind, which relate to our former measure of attainment in the Christian life, we may usefully forget (Phil. 3:13). But the memory of the great goodness of the Lord should be ever with us to incite us to continuous praise (Psa. 145:7). The recollection of the Lord's ways with us in the past gives us guidance for the present. When we remember the food-miracles of yesterday we do not fear a famine today or to-morrow.

A vivid and accurate memory is a great factor of the spiritual life. The importance of an active remembrance of divine things is emphasized by Peter, who makes four references to the subject in his Second Epistle (1:12 13,15; 3:1). In thus exhorting others, did he recall his own experience, when the remembrance of the warning words of the Lord caused him to repent of his shameful denial of his Master? (Matt. 26:75; Lu. 22:61).

The Lord's Supper is an act appointed to perpetuate the remembrance of the death of Christ by the church. Two Psalms (38 and 70) were specially written “to bring to remembrance"; and the recollection of the marvelous works of the Lord is stated many times in the Psalms to be the basis of confidence and trust in God. To the assembly at Sardis, the Lord sent the solemn warning, “Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard” (Rev. 3:3).

In this instance in Mark, when the disciples were thinking that the Lord was chiding them for the shortage of their food-store, He reminded them of His double miracle so recently worked, and the number of baskets of broken pieces they were able to collect owing to His overflowing bounty. Might He not well say, O ye of little faith, do ye not remember?

THE FINAL QUESTION

When the Lord definitely inquired concerning the miracles of the loaves, their memories were refreshed. They could reply accurately when He asked the number of baskets of fragments they had taken up. Whereupon the Lord put the question which was a repetition and a summary of the preceding ones: “and he kept saying to them, Do ye not yet understand (; ver. 21)?”

The question embodied a charge of reprehensible dullness. How could they think that the Lord feared that He might have to make use of the bread of the Pharisees? Matthew, who does not record the sevenfold series, states the final question in a fuller form, “How is it that ye do not

perceive that I spake not to you concerning bread? But beware of the leaven of Pharisees and Sadducees" (Matt. 16:11). Did they suppose that the Lord who had taught them not to be anxious about what they should eat and drink was Himself anxious lest He and His disciples should be compelled to eat the bread of the Pharisees and the Sadducees?

We also learn from the same Evangelist that after these words light dawned on the hearts of the disciples: "Then understood () they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (Matt. 16:12). Their rabbis had leavened the holy bread of the law as it was given originally by the introduction of the leaven of the precepts of men (Mark 7:7). Their teaching was permeated by the traditions of the elders, and thus the unleavened bread of the scripture was spoiled for the children of the kingdom by the leaven of hypocrisy and formalism, making the word of God of none effect, as it did, by their tradition.

W. J. H.

(continued from p. 173)

Studies in Mark, Mark 8:11-21: (72) The Danger of Leaven in the Kingdom

CHAP. 8:11-21

(continued)

THE DANGER OF LEAVEN IN THE KINGDOM

The Lord thereupon turned away from the representatives of the "wicked and adulterous generation," and left them (solemn action!) in their obstinate unbelief, crossing again the Sea of Galilee. He then uttered one of His profound sayings to the apostles, bidding them to "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod." If the King was rejected, what would befall the kingdom? The influence of the Pharisees and of Herod aroused violent and insidious opposition to the spread of the ministry of Christ Himself; what a powerful and inimical influence would they not subsequently exercise upon the ministry of His servants? He bade them beware of these corrupting influences.

Looking back, the disciples might have remembered that before leaving the opposite shores they witnessed an example of the power of Pharisaism to befog the heart and prevent the acceptance of the Lord whom they loved and revered as the Messiah of Israel. Looking still further back, they might have recollected that terrible exhibition of the power of Herod when John, the prophet and forerunner, was murdered in circumstances of horrible barbarity. These forces of religious hypocrisy and of civil government at work in these typical instances were proved to be alike antagonistic to the progress of the truth, and the Lord had turned away in avoidance of both. For the future guidance of His followers, the Lord now warned them against these sources of contamination and corruption. The time had come when the children of the kingdom must break away from those who professed to be teachers of the law and who sat in Moses' seat.

The Pharisees were unreal pietists, and the Herodians were political time-servers. It behooved the disciples in the exercise of such power and authority as the Lord had given them as His apostles to take heed lest empty formalism and the fear of or undue subservience to worldly power should enter and vitiate the kingdom of God. Love of self and love of the world would, if allowed, work insidiously, like leaven, to the corruption of the followers of Christ, as it had already done in the Jewish nation. The warning of the Lord was uttered with a full knowledge of the coming menace, and, we find, historically, that evil afterward crept into the churches of Galatia and Corinth, and is alluded to under this figure of leaven (Gal. 5:9; 1 Cor. 5:7, 8).

When the Lord was with His disciples it was, as it were, the days of unleavened bread, for He Himself was the Bread of God come down from heaven to give life to the world. But in the succession of Jewish feasts, the feast of wave-loaves followed that of the unleavened bread and the first fruits, and it was provided from the time of institution that the two wave-loaves should be baked with leaven (Lev. 23:17). So the results of the public and united testimony of the Lord's followers, which would immediately succeed His own pure and untainted witness, would be leavened in character; and counseling them in view of His own absence, and of the coming dangers of corrupting influences, He bade them "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod."

Dullness Of Hearing

But the disciples did not apprehend the meaning of these cautionary words of our Lord. They did not, in the scriptural sense, "hear His word," and therefore they did not understand His phraseology (John 8:43). "Leaven" was the key-word to help them to the true explanation of the utterance, but, forgetting that their Master's kingdom was not of this world, they assigned to the word a physical not a spiritual significance: an error similar to that made by Nicodemus in a different connection (John 3:4).

The disciples could think only of their own negligence in stocking the food-baskets of the company. Their hearts had not yet grasped the inner purpose of His teaching, and, therefore, His figurative expression concerning leaven was of the nature of a parable to them. It was a "hard word" to them (cp. John 6:60, New Tr.). "And they reasoned among themselves, saying, It is because we have no bread."

Why were they so dull? Truly the words of the Lord were spirit and life, while the Great Teacher was skilful and wise in utterance, and spoke to the disciples as they were "able to hear" (Mark 4:33). They however failed to use rightly those "ears to hear" which they possessed as those born anew for the kingdom. They were engrossed with earthly or secondary matters, and missed the heavenly harmonies of His words. When the Lord warned against certain sources of leaven, their thoughts at once flew to food for the body. They had had but one loaf with them in the boat, and their conscience charged them with negligence in providing an adequate supply on reaching the other side (Matt. 16:5). No doubt they were the more concerned when they recalled the previous poverty of their stock on each occasion when the Lord inquired on behalf of the hungry multitude.

But if it was a good thing for the disciples to recall their former failures, it would have been better still for them to have remembered the Lord's teaching. For He had already in one of the parables which He specially explained to them, associated leaven with the kingdom of the heavens, and showed how its surreptitious introduction resulted in the leavening of the whole mass (Matt. 13:33). The three measures of meal

affected as a whole by the foreign element brought into it was set forth as a figure of the new religious organization which was about to be established in the place of Judaism.

The Lord taught thereby that the kingdom in its coming phase was not the ideal one. When the great city, the holy Jerusalem, shall have come down out of heaven from God, and become the seat of government in the earth for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb, the kingdom will then assume its incorruptible form, for “there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie” (Rev. 21:27). But until the dawning of that day of glory, the kingdom of God in the earth will not be homogeneous, but leavened by the presence of evil.

Nevertheless, the introduction of the leaven was the work of the enemies not of the faithful friends of the kingdom. Indeed, the faithful in the midst of a tainted assembly were held responsible for its presence, and exhorted to purge out the old leaven, and to “keep the feast, not with the old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Cor. 5:7, 8).

Seeing, then, that our Lord had delivered this parable of the leavened meal in the course of His public ministry, and interpreted its significance to the disciples privately (Mark 4:34), they possessed a key to the meaning of His words on this occasion. But as they had forgotten the first miracle of the loaves when the necessity for a second arose, so they forgot the parable of the leaven when the Lord used the figure to warn them against the evil influences of the spirit of Pharisaism and Herodianism—of insidious corruption, religious and political.

THE SEVEN-FOLD INTERROGATORY

The Lord corrected His disciples by a series of questions which gave them the opportunity for self-conviction and self-condemnation. The gentle and forbearing manner in which He dealt with them is instructive too. We see in the Prophetic Servant a perfect exemplification of those qualities afterward enjoined by the apostle Paul upon his dear son Timothy: “the servant of the Lord must not strive: but he must be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, forbearing, patient” (2 Tim. 2:24).

Let us proceed to inquire what was the cause of the erroneous thoughts of the disciples, and why they failed to profit by the Lord's teaching. It was needful for them that the true source of their dullness should be exposed, in order that their eventual spiritual progress might be secured.

The stumblingblock to their understanding could not lie in the matter nor in the manner of the Lord's instruction; for, with regard to the subject of His teaching, He taught them such things as they were able to bear (Mark 4:33; John 16:12), and, with regard to His method of teaching, His representation of His subject to His hearers could not but be perfect: “as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things” (John 8:28).

The fault and the failure to apprehend the meaning of the Lord's words therefore lay with the apostles themselves. They failed most of all in that they were not sufficiently appreciative of the incomparable worth of the One who was their Instructor, in whom were “hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” It was then, though they did not fully realize it, the day of their visitation. The Dayspring from on high was with them, but they did not set such store by His presence as they might have done. They slighted the Lord's testimonies, they disobeyed His precepts, and they forgot His wonderful works. The nature of the Lord's questions seems to imply that they were guilty of neglect, and that this was the real cause of their want of progress in divine things.

The skilful Physician of their souls by this exposure laid before them the inward cause of their weakness and spiritual backwardness. If they confessed their errors, as they were given opportunity to do, they would be forgiven and cleansed from their secret faults. For it is written, “If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged” (1 Cor. 11:31).

To bring before the disciples the truth concerning their hearts the Lord made use of the interrogative method, and His questions imply censure. It was by a similar but more extended “cross-examination” that Job's self-conceit was broken down. Jehovah's series of questions to the patriarch from the whirlwind is recorded in four lengthy chapters (Job 38-41), and, in result, Job confessed, “I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.”

We may observe a sevenfold succession in the questions put by our Lord to the disciples. They all imply condemnation, and “work wedge-like to the proof.” The series may be set out in the following order, and the implied charge is suggested for consideration in each case.

(1) Why reason ye because ye have no bread? implying a lack of confidence in the Lord on the part of the apostles.

(2) Do ye not yet perceive ()? implying lack of observation during their recent experiences.

(3) Do ye not yet understand ()? implying an absence of due reflection upon the Lord's words and acts.

(4) Have ye your heart hardened? implying a lack of sensitiveness to divine things.

(5) Having eyes, see ye not? implying the nonuse of their spiritual faculties in relation to the Lord's doings.

(6) Having ears, hear ye not? implying the non-use of their spiritual faculties upon the Lord's words.

(7) Do ye not yet remember? implying a lack of spiritual intelligence, and specifying their forgetfulness of the two recent food-miracles, especially of the bountiful supply of broken pieces over and above the amount required.

This series of seven is followed by another question, which is separately introduced, in the narrative, viz., Do ye not yet understand ()? This is in a sense a summary of the foregoing series, and it will be considered in its due order.

While considering this display of the dullness of the disciples, it is well to recall that there were many matters which the apostles were incompetent to understand until the Lord was glorified, and the Holy Spirit was bestowed upon them at Pentecost (cp. Luke 18:34; John 12:16). But their incapacity in some respects did not exonerate them from their slackness in others. And the Lord dealt with their responsibility to make good use of their exceptional privileges as special eye-witnesses and ear-witnesses of His ministry as the Great Prophet of the kingdom of God. They were apostles; should not they, as such, display some intelligence of their Master's ways? It was written in the law concerning the whole nation: “then is none that understandeth” (Rom. 3:11). If the same indictment was true in any degree of the twelve,

after their special opportunities, were they not the more blameworthy?

W. J. H.

Studies in Mark, Mark 8:11-21: (71) Grieved Servant of Jehovah

CHAP. 8:11-21

44.-THE GRIEVED SERVANT OF JEHOVAH

“And the Pharisees came forth, and began to question with him, seeking of him a sign from heaven, tempting him. And he sighed deeply in his spirit, and saith, Why cloth this generation seek a sign? verily I say unto you, There shall no sign be given unto this generation. And he left them, and again entering into the boat departed to the other side.

And they forgot to take bread; and they had not in the boat with them more than one loaf. And he charged them, saying, Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod. And they reasoned one with another, saying, We have no bread. And Jesus perceiving it saith unto them, Why reason ye, because ye have no bread? do ye not yet perceive, neither understand? have ye your heart hardened? Having eyes, see ye not? and having ears, hear ye not? and do ye not remember? When I brake the five loaves among the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces took ye up? They say unto him, Twelve. And when the seven among the four thousand, how many basketfuls of broken pieces took ye up? And they say unto him, Seven. And he said unto them, Do ye not yet understand?” (8:11-21, R.V.).

In this section the Evangelist shows how the Servant, of the Lord was tried from “within and without.” He was obstructed in His ministry (1) by the evil machinations of the leaders of the people and also (2) by the ignorant dullness of His immediate followers.

The Pharisees who had recently criticized the Lord Jesus because they saw His disciples eat bread with unwashen hands (chap. 7) now came forth to oppose Him upon other grounds. On the earlier occasion they sought to invalidate His teaching, now their attempt was to detract from the value of His miraculous works of mercy and power. Accordingly they sought by cunning questioning to discredit the Lord before the eyes of the Galileans to whom He had given such cogent evidence that the kingdom of God was among them. Tempting Him, they asked for a sign from heaven, as if the fame of His many miracles had not previously spread throughout the province. The Lord's works were not done in a corner. For instance, were there not at least five thousand witnesses to the second multiplication of the few loaves? And was not this sign, like all the Lord's works, of a heavenly order?

But these Pharisees had the will to doubt and disbelieve; otherwise the Lord might have said to them as He did to the messengers from John the Baptist, who asked Him, “Art thou He that should come?” The Lord's answer to these men was, “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 unto them. And blessed is he whosoever shall not be stumbled in me” (Matt. 11:2-6). The “honest and good heart” of John the prisoner was sincerely in doubt, and the Lord, though He did not work a fresh and special sign, sent to him the gracious reminder of the supernatural facts which none could deny, and which his messengers themselves witnessed (Luke 7:21, 22). The Pharisees, however (who came with the Sadducees, as Matthew tells us) were hostile in intent: “They began to question him, seeking of him a sign from heaven, tempting him.”

This request was made in shameless unbelief and hypocrisy on their part too, for in their heart of hearts these men knew that the Lord was “from above,” and not “from beneath.” Nicodemus confessed, being himself a Pharisee, “Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these signs that thou doest, except God be with him.” The evidences of the heavenly mission of Christ were ample and indisputable, and open to the sight of all men. So manifest were they that Peter charged the Jews on the day of Pentecost with a full knowledge of His credentials. When the apostle declared: “Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know” (Acts 2:22), not a single dissentient voice from the crowded audience was raised in protest. Indeed, during His ministry, the people said as they saw His wonderful works, “When Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than this man hath done?” (John 7:31). And the Lord Himself, when surveying the whole course of His service said, “If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin; but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father” (John 15:24).

The Pharisees willfully ignored all this display of loving power, and their obduracy of heart, particularly noticeable as it was after the repeated miracle of the multiplied loaves, was characteristic of the nation as a whole from the day when Jehovah brought them out of the land of Egypt. Then “they remembered not his hand, nor the day when he delivered from the enemy; how he had wrought his signs in Egypt and his wonders in the land of Zoan” (Psa. 78:42, 43; 106:7, 13, 21). The hardness and insensibility of their hearts to God's marvelous mercies which all the Old Testament prophets charged upon them, were still unchanged, even when Messiah Himself was in their midst.

A SIGN FROM HEAVEN

This occasion was not the only one on which the Pharisees sought from the Lord a sign from heaven. The first occasion was a plain indication that the nation would eventually reject their Messiah (Matt. 12:38; Lu. 11:16), and the Lord thereupon began in public to teach by parables that the kingdom of heaven would assume a new form. But on both the former and the latter occasions, the request of the Jewish teachers was a tacit denial that the Lord's miracles were signs from heaven, implying at the same time that His marvelous energy was Satanic in origin, as if He cast out demons by Beelzebub, the prince of the demons. For if the miracles were not from “above,” they must have been from “beneath.”

This foul aspersion arose from a gross form of willful unbelief in the Messianic miracles, wonders and signs, but, in point of fact, the Lord Himself, apart from His works, was a sign from above to the people. He was the Second Man, “the Lord from heaven,” come to them as Immanuel, according to the prophecy of Isaiah: To the house of David, Jehovah had said, “The Lord himself shall give you a sign, Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name, Immanuel” (Isa. 7:14). Hence the Incarnate Babe was the sign of the introduction of the promised gospel. This sign-character was mentioned expressly by the angel of the Lord to the shepherds of Bethlehem: “Unto you is

born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be the sign unto you; Ye shall find a babe, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger" (Luke 2:11, 12).1 Further, Simeon alluded to this same characteristic of the Heavenly Babe, saying, as he blessed Joseph and Mary, "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be spoken against that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed" (Luke 2:34, 35).

Looking ahead also to the future Advent there will be appointed premonitions from above. The second coming of Christ in power and glory for the redemption of Israel is to be heralded by the sign of the Son of man in heaven. This we learn from the prophetic discourse of our Lord to the disciples on the Mount of Olives. In reply to their query, "What shall be the sign of thy coming?" He said, after naming certain coming events, "Then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then shall the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matt. 24:30).

THE SIGH OF THE SON OF MAN

Mark preserves for our adoring contemplation a record of the profound emotion of the Master at this display of unbelief and malice on the part of the Pharisees and Sadducees. "He sighed deeply in his spirit." There was no expression of wrath nor of a desire for vengeance, but we are permitted to know how keenly He was affected by the evil purpose of those who "lay in wait for His soul." "His heart was wounded within Him." As Jehovah's righteous Servant, He bore the griefs and carried the sorrows of His people in loving sympathy, but this oppressive burden of griefs was augmented by the plottings of those who had become His enemies, and whose secret thoughts stood revealed before His holy eyes; and He "groaned upward" at the sight.

The Lord was the Great Prophet sent with a message of deliverance for the enslaved people of God, and their obstinate refusal to hearken to the pleadings of His love begat sorrows within Him too deep, as it were, for utterance then. Later this inward sorrow found articulation, and His weeping lamentation over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41-44) expressed the spirit of the Psalmist who said, "Rivers of water run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law" (Psa. 119:136). The faithful servants of Jehovah in a former day of apostasy were distinguished by their grief over the waywardness of their people: they were marked off as those "that sigh and that cry for all the abominations in the midst of Jerusalem" (Ezek. 9:4). Here in this Gospel, by this unique phrase, the veil over the inner feelings of the Master is lifted for a brief moment that we may catch a glimpse of His loyal zeal for God and His passionate yearning over the guilty people. The heart ever sighing over Israel's perversity was always before the eyes of Jehovah, and gave cause for His unbroken complacency in that elect Servant in whom His soul delighted.

It is a profitable reflection that our Lord had a perfect knowledge of the value of His own service as well as of the depravity of those opposing Him. Without thinking of Himself more highly than He ought to think, He accurately appraised the character of His labors among them. His "judgment was just," and He knew that His own works were such as man never did before, and also that His words perfectly presented the ineffable love of the Father to man as well as the earthly things of the kingdom. But He also saw with equal vividness that His unremitting service, His self-consuming zeal, His absolute surrender to the interests of His mission were barren in result. His enemies, tempting Him, ask to be shown a sign from heaven, while His friends and followers are blind and deaf to the true significance of His ministry. The great impulses of His loving heart towards the sons of men were thus doubly resisted and thrown back upon Himself. The joy of the Shepherd in rescuing His flock was denied Him. He could adopt the language in the prophecy: "All day long have I stretched out my hand to a disobedient and gainsaying people" (Rom. 10:21; Isa. 65:2). Accordingly, we read that at this juncture the Man of sorrows sighed deeply in His Spirit.

THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST

There are three recorded occasions on which the Spirit of Christ was perturbed. In each case human sin was the agitating cause, and in these instances He was confronted with its grievous effects: (1) upon the nation, (2) upon the family of Bethany, and (3) upon one of the apostolic band.

(1) The first instance is given in this section of Mark. Sin wrought so effectually in the midst of the chosen nation that its religious leaders refused to own the signs of His prophetic calling, and in malicious unbelief sought from Him a sign from heaven. He "sighed deeply in his spirit" at this unbelief.

(2) Sin wrought in the midst of the pious family of Bethany, where the Messiah was wont to turn aside to rest for a while, and where He was welcomed and honored. Death removed Lazarus, and plunged the sisters into sorrow. Coming with the bereaved to the sepulcher, the Lord groaned in spirit at their grief (John 11:33).

(3) Sin wrought in the midst of the chosen twelve, and one of them became a tool of Satan for the betrayal of his Master. On the night of the last Supper, the Lord expressed to His disciples His knowledge that the doer of this infamous deed was even then among them. He "was troubled in spirit, and testified and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you that one of you shall betray me" (John 13:21). One of you—one of my familiar friends—one of the holy circle (cp. Psa. 41:9; 55:12-14): this troubled His spirit.

These instances in some respects differ from each other, but their common origin may be traced back to the presence and action of sin in the world. Sin was always grievous and saddening in the eyes of the Lord, but these cases of its evil effects were the more deplorable because they occurred in a select circle, as it were, i.e., in the elect nation, in the godly household, in the apostolic band.

The pure and holy spirit must always be shocked in the presence of the horrid fruits of sin. It was so with the Lord: and it is a test of His followers, for "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Rom. 8:9).

NO SIGN TO BE GIVEN

In reply to the Pharisees, the Lord said, "Why doth this generation seek after a sign?" They were then in Magdala, and it was in this very locality that the Lord wrought His marvelous cure upon Mary the Magdalene out of whom He cast seven demons (Mark 16:9). What greater testimony could there be of the presence of the Mighty One subduing the power of the Evil One? Was not this the sign from heaven? But the blind Pharisees attributed all such signs of the Lord to the energy of Beelzebub, and not to Him as the Messianic Servant anointed by the Spirit of God.

It is noticeable how the Lord in declining to yield to the provocative request of His opponents speaks with the dignity and authority of His own right: “Verily I say unto you, There shall no sign be given unto this generation.” This language is not that of a delegate, even though commissioned from on high. The introductory formula of the Old Testament prophets was, “Thus saith the Lord"; but the Lord Jesus replied to these Pharisees who despised both His words and His works in His own name: “Verily I say unto you.”

In Truth, the Godhead was there amongst them in the Person of their Messiah in humble guise, and no more transcendent sign than this could be given them. The Lord therefore refused any further sign to that guilty generation which notoriously killed the prophets sent unto it. The Stone of Israel had been laid in Zion. If the nation stumbled upon it and rejected it, all hope must be abandoned. God anyhow would exalt that Stone, and it would eventually fall upon the wicked builders in Zion and grind them to powder. Thus the humbled Christ was the final test to Israel upon the ground of law, and no other Savior-Prince but He would be offered to them.

In seeking a sign the Pharisees were governed by an evil motive. It was altogether otherwise with John the Baptist. To him, as the Forerunner, a special sign from heaven was appointed for the identification of the Messiah. His own testimony on this head was that he saw the Holy Spirit like a dove descending from heaven, and it rested upon the baptized Jesus. And this public anointing constituted to him the promised assurance that Jesus was the Son of God (John 1:32-34). John's mission was to prepare the way of the Lord before Him, and the sign from heaven given at the Jordan indicated that the Deliverer had come to Israel, and that his own service, as the voice of the Forerunner crying in the wilderness was accomplished.

John the Baptist was a Nazarite devoted to the will of God, but the Jews were a wicked and adulterous generation, and their determined will was to disbelieve and resist the gospel. These Pharisees in Dalmanutha were imbued with the same spirit as those which afterward cried, “Come down from the cross, and we will believe” (Matt. 27:42). Had a sign been given they had no intention of believing. They were tempting the Lord to yield to them, as they did at other times (Matt. 12:38; John 2:18; 6:30). Their request was modeled upon that of Satan in the wilderness, who said to the Lord, “If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread” (Matt. 4:3). The Lord, therefore declined to accede to their request, and told these adversaries, that no sign would be given to them, except (as Matthew adds) the sign of the prophet Jonah. That prophet of Galilee, after being three days and three nights in the belly of the sea-monster, preached to the Ninevites their imminent doom, and they repented at his preaching. The Son of man would lie three days and three nights in the heart of the earth (Matt. 12:40), and if the men of Israel, even after the sin of crucifixion, would repent at the preaching of His apostles, God would send again to them His Servant Jesus, whom they had crucified, that He might restore all things (see Peter's address, Acts 3:19, 20). But as the people refused the sign of a humbled Messiah in His life: so they rejected the sign of His crucifixion and death. To them, a veil being upon their hearts, He was a stumbling block, and the apostle so described their state, when writing to the Corinthians: “Jews ask for signs and Gentiles seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, unto Jews a stumbling block, and unto Greeks foolishness” (1 Cor. 1:22, 23).

But those who reject the signs of truth are open to receive the signs of error. The studied resistance of the Jews to their Deliverer who came to them as the Virgin's Child, and who like the prophet of Galilee lay three days and nights in the heart of the earth will duly receive in the governmental dealings of God its meet and merited punishment. The generation, not yet passed away, who refused the appointed signs of the Holy and the True will be blinded to accept the signs of the Evil and the False. For when Antichrist comes he will show signs ostensibly from heaven in imitation of those the Christ did, and men will believe the lie. Paul declares that the coming of this Lawless One will be “according to the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders” (2 Thess. 2:9). The apostle John prophesies in like terms concerning the False Lamb who is yet to appear. Speaking in the predictive present, he says, concerning the Antichrist, that “he doeth great signs that he should even make fire to come down out of heaven upon the earth in the sight of men, and he deceiveth them that dwell upon the earth by reason of the signs which it was given him to do in the sight of the beast” (Rev. 13:13, 14).

W. J. H.

Studies in Mark, Mark 8:1-10: (70) Another Miraculous Meal

8:1-10

FIRST THE KINGDOM, THEN PERISHING BREAD

In this incident we may observe that the Lord acted in harmony with His own previous teaching concerning the kingdom of God. He had publicly taught the supreme importance to men that they should in the formation and prosecution of their aims and plans place first the broad principles of the coming kingdom of the heavens. The dominating love of God in the heart, love for one's enemies as well as for one's neighbors, self-denial, secret prayer to the Father in heaven, and almsgiving purely done as in His sight-such qualities as these were pleasing to God rather than the all-absorbing pursuit of temporal benefits and possessions which is common to mankind. Having set in their true relative proportion eternal verities and physical necessities, the Lord declared to His hearers a new commandment, as it were, with promise: “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these [temporal] things shall be added unto you” (Matt. 6:33).

The Lord, then, as the Expounder of the polity of the new kingdom and as its anointed Administrator, was publicly pledged to redeem this promise to those who acknowledged Him to be the Teacher sent from God. This congregation of people had sought the face of the Lord that He might graciously remove the infirmities of their bodies and the ignorance of their hearts. In their zeal they continued with Him three days, beholding His marvelous works and hearing those heavenly precepts which were beautified with a grace unknown to those of Sinai. From one point of view the people might well be charged with imprudence for neglecting to provide themselves with food for the three days in the desert. But what had the Lord taught in respect to this matter? He had said, “Be not anxious for your life, what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink.” “Is not the life more than food? The birds of the air do not reap nor gather into barns: your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Be not anxious therefore. Your heavenly Father knoweth ye have need of 'these things.' Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you.”

Whether the people remembered these assurances by the Lord or not we do not know. But the Lord did not forget His own word. Waiting in His presence their stocks of food were exhausted; would He, who had publicly counseled them not to be anxious for the morrow, fail or

forsake them in this extremity? On the contrary, having first loaded them with spiritual and physical benefits, He gave them bread to eat in the overflowing measure of the coming kingdom.

COMPARISON OF THE TWO FOOD-MIRACLES

There are many resemblances between the accounts given of the two food-miracles wrought in Galilee, but only such as might be expected to be found in records of two successive incidents so similar in their nature. There are, however, definite points of distinction between them, which should not escape us. The beauties of creation in many cases possess striking similarities, but they are never found to be exact duplicates. For instance, the glories of two sunsets may be analogous in general character, but only the casual observer would pronounce them to be identical. Upon careful scrutiny, individual features of beauty are invariably discovered, as in all the works of God.

In like manner, while there is given in the first two Gospels a double testimony to the divine beneficence, present in the person of the Servant of Jehovah, each miracle is represented with its own special characteristics. Some points in each record are placed side by side to facilitate the study of the two miracles in this respect.

Mark 6:34-44	Mark 8:1-9
1. The compassion of the Lord was moved towards the shepherdless multitude, and He taught them and healed their sick. The question of food arose at the close of the day’s ministry.	1. The compassion of the Lord was awakened after three days of service and healing, because He saw the people were hungry and weary.
2. The disciples take the initiative, and suggest the dismissal of the crowd, because of the lateness of the hour.	2. The Lord draws the attention of the disciples to the condition of the people, and to the distance many are from.
3. The Lord bids the disciples provide food, but they object on the score of cost and of the difficulty of purchase.	3. The disciples express no compassion, and although not asked to supply food, mention the difficulty of purchase in the wilderness.
4. Five loaves and two fishes were brought to the Lord.	4. Seven loaves and a few small fishes were brought to the Lord.
5. The company numbered five thousand men, besides women and children.	5. The company numbered four thousand men, besides women and children.
6. Twelve baskets of the broken pieces were collected after the meal.	6. Seven hampers of the broken pieces were collected after the meal.
7. The Lord sent away the disciples across the sea.	7. The Lord went with His disciples across the sea.

These various points of difference are perhaps of a more suitable character for personal study than for general exposition, and only a few remarks upon them of a general nature are now offered. The predominating feature of the latter incident as compared with the former seems to be the Lord's sovereign compassion and mercy towards those who sought Him and continued with Him three days. As before, He made use of His disciples in dispensing His blessing to the crowd, but it was He who remarked their fainting condition and who arranged the details of the feast.

The occasion of the miracle as it is presented in the Gospel history is striking. The Lord, at this period of His ministry, was journeying in Galilee as an outcast, for Herod the Idumean king of that province had but recently beheaded John the Forerunner, and sought His life also (cp. Luke 13:31), while Pharisees and scribes had come down from Jerusalem seeking some ground, too, for His apprehension. But His hour was not yet come, and the Lord retired from this personal hatred which had not grown to its climax. Nevertheless, in face of this opposition of evil in the high places of earthly government and power, the Lord was still willing and ready to exhibit His rich stores of grace to the poor.

It is good for us to note the royal demeanor of the lowly Nazarene in these days of His humiliation. Though an exile from the throne of Zion, He scattered in profusion His regal gifts, recalling, by contrast, an Old Testament passage.

David, in hasty flight from Absalom, “hungry and thirsty and weary in the wilderness” at Mahanaim, was, with his companions, made the honored guest of the Gileadite and the Ammonite (2 Sam. 17:27-29). Then the Gentile strangers across the Jordan prepared a sumptuous feast for the outcast king of Israel, but in Decapolis David's Son and Jehovah's Servant, though possessing no more than a handful of loaves and fishes, spread therewith an ample table in the wilderness for the hungry crowd gathered to Him in those outskirts of the favored land.

In this impressive manner, the Anointed One offered Himself to the people as their Savior King, proving Himself to be such to those who had eyes to see. For in this little picture of the personal government of the Messiah, it might be clearly seen that Jehovah was in the midst of the people as the Shepherd of Israel, seeking the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and leading His flock into the “green pastures” in the spirit recorded in that ancient prophetic song of praise: “He maketh peace in thy borders, and filleth thee with the finest of the wheat” (Psa. 147:14).

Another feature of this miracle which may be remarked is the character of the multitude. The company on this occasion was not composed mainly of pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem to keep the passover (John 6:4, 5), but of the poor populace from the Gentile borders of Northern Galilee. Nevertheless, the Lord displayed His transcendent grace to them as He had formerly done to those who were zealous and devout enough to journey up to Jerusalem to observe the feast. Thus His mercy is here seen to overleap the narrow boundaries of the law.

And this overflow towards those not wholly of Israel was anticipated in the prophetic word, though this miracle was no more than a trickle, as it were, in comparison with the floods of blessing which are to be poured out upon the “pleasant land,” and to extend even to the ends of the

earth.

This kind of open-hearted ministry towards all men by Jehovah's Servant was particularly foretold by Isaiah, in language to which this incident is allusive. According to his prophecy, the Great Servant should not only raise up the tribes of Jacob and restore the preserved of Israel, but also be a light to the Gentiles. He whom man despised and the nation abhorred would cause the people to “feed in the ways and their pastures shall be in all high places.” They should no more hunger or thirst. And in that reclaimed company the prophet in vision saw, as the Lord saw in Decapolis, those that came from far (Isa. 49), for the gospel of the kingdom embraces the dispersed among the Gentiles.

Whether some such were actually among the assembly before the Lord that day in Galilee it is not stated, but He Himself noted that divers of them came from far (ver. 12). And as Peter declared in Jerusalem at Pentecost, the word of the promise was to the Jews and to their children, and also to them that are afar off (Acts 2:39).

The provision of needful sustenance by divine power is a frequently recurring figure in Scripture, and one other instance may be cited in this connection. In one of the Apocalyptic visions, John saw a great company gathered out of all nations, clad in white robes, and bearing palms in their hands. They had come up out of the great tribulation, and their robes had been made white in the blood of the Lamb. They are before the throne of God in His temple, and they worship Him day and night. Immanuel is among them, and they hunger no more: for the Lamb in the midst of the throne feeds them and leads them into living fountains of water (Rev. 7:9-17).

The following extract may help in the understanding of this passage, in its relation to the dispensational character of this Gospel:-

“Power was not exercised [by our Lord] in the midst of manifest unbelief. This clearly marks out the position of Christ with regard to the people. He pursues His service, but He retires to God because of Israel's unbelief but it is to the God of all grace. There His heart found refuge till the great hour of atonement.

“It is on this account, as it appears to me, that we have the second miracle of the multiplication of the loaves. The Lord acts again in favor of Israel, no longer as administering Messianic power in the midst of the people (which was implied, as we have seen, in the number [of baskets] twelve), but in spite of His rejection by Israel, continuing to exercise His power in a divine manner and apart from man. The number seven 1 has always the force of superhuman perfection—that which is complete: this, however, applies to what is complete in the power of evil as well as good, when it is not human and subordinate to God. Here it is divine. It is that intervention of God which is unwearied, and which is according to His own power, which it is the principal object of the repetition of the miracle to display.” 2

W. J. H.

(Continued from page 525)

Studies in Mark, Mark 7:31-37: (66) The Deaf Stammerer Healed

CHAP. 7:31-37

“And again he went out from the borders of Tire, and came through Sidon unto the sea of Galilee, through the midst of the borders of Decapolis. And they bring unto him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech; and they beseech him to lay his hand upon him. And he took him aside from the multitude privately, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat, and touched his tongue; and, looking up to heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened. And his ears were opened, and the bond of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain. And he charged them that they should tell no man; but the more he charged them, so much the more a great deal they published it. And they were beyond measure astonished, saying, He hath done all things well: he maketh even the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak” (7:31-37, R.V.).

From the neighborhood of the districts of Tire and Sidon, the Lord journeyed in the way of His ministry towards the northern shores of the sea of Galilee, leaving behind Him the grateful woman and her delivered daughter as witnesses of His mercy to the stranger who had sought refuge “within the gates” of Immanuel's land. This tour in its circuit brought Him through Decapolis, where His fame as the Prophet of Nazareth had been previously spread abroad. For it was in this locality that the healed demoniac of Gadara proclaimed the love and power of Jesus his Deliverer. In the fullness of his gratitude the restored man had sought to follow the Lord when He crossed the sea, but was not permitted, but bidden to go home to his friends and tell them what great things the Lord had done for him, and what mercy He had shown him. And we are expressly told that this disciple thereupon published in Decapolis his account of what the Lord was doing, with the result that “all men did marvel” (Mark 5:19, 20).

Decapolis seems to have been a place where the word of the Sower fell into “good ground,” and brought forth fruit abundantly. The name occurs in the comprehensive summary of the labors of the Lord given by Matthew in the early part of his Gospel. Of five districts there mentioned, Decapolis is one of those where multitudes were gathered by His ministry; the others being Galilee, Jerusalem, Judea, and “beyond Jordan” (Matt. 4:23-25). For this territory was the Galilee of the Gentiles, concerning whose inhabitants Isaiah prophesied: “The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined” (Isa. 9:2).

This benighted neighborhood was at that time a very populous one. Modern explorers of Galilee find evidence of crowded cities and villages spread over wide areas in the northern territory, so that the extent of the population in the days of the Lord must have been far greater than is usually conceived. And the “large crowds,” mentioned by the first Evangelist may therefore be understood from this point of view. Referring to this visit of the Lord to Decapolis mentioned by Mark, Matthew records that these great multitudes came unto Him, bringing with them the dumb, and many others, and He healed them all (Matt. 15:29-31); while Mark specifies one case only. We must not fail, in comparing the two narratives, to note the wide and lavish display of Messianic grace characteristically set forth in Matthew's account. The people of the Decapolitan district were no doubt much debased by heathen influence, but nevertheless, the Lord, seated on the mountain, received and, in the regal affluence of His power and mercy, blessed all those who thronged to Him. Matthew's record (to which we may again refer) is that

great multitudes came unto Him, having with them the lame, blind, dumb, maimed and many others, and laid them down at the feet of Jesus, and He healed them all; while this gracious and abundant exercise of the prerogative of mercy by the King of the Jews so moved the populace that they glorified the “God of Israel” (Matt. 15:29-31).

Mark, however, does not summarize the manifold activities of the Lord in this locality as Matthew does, but selects a single typical instance, which he narrates in much detail, portraying the Patient and Faithful Servant of Jehovah in His unutterable love, concerned intimately in the individual case before Him, and displaying the utmost interest and pains in the exercise of His healing grace.

It is noteworthy that this miracle and that of the opening of the eyes of the blind man of Bethsaida (7:22-26) are two which are mentioned in the Gospel of Mark only. Both miracles were Wrought privately, and do not appear to have a special sign-character to the nation like those which were given a more public display.

THE DEAF STAMMERER

Here then we learn that some unnamed friends brought to Jesus a man who was deaf, and who also had an impediment in his speech. The afflicted person was without a sense of hearing, and if he was not absolutely mute, he was unable to speak intelligibly because of some defect in the organs of articulation. Previously to this occasion the Lord had cured many deaf persons (Matt. 11:5; Luke 7:22), and subsequently He cast a dumb and deaf spirit out of a lad at the foot of the Mount of Transfiguration (Mark 9:25).

The friends implored Jesus to lay His hands upon the sufferer, as Jairus also, on behalf of his little daughter, besought the Lord to do; though the latter, in his paternal distress was the more importunate, for he besought Jesus “greatly,” saying, “My little daughter is at the point of death; I pray thee that thou come and lay thy hands on her that she may be made whole and live” (Mark 5:23).

It was a way of the Lord to adopt this gracious attitude in the bestowal of blessing. In the early days of His ministry, when the crowds came to Him at Capernaum for succor, He laid hands upon all who were needing relief: “And when the sun was setting, all they that had any sick with divers diseases, brought them unto him: and he laid his hands upon every one of them, and healed them” (Luke 4:40). On another occasion He “laid his hands upon a few sick folk and healed them” (Mark 6:5). Similarly, He laid His hands upon the blind man at Bethsaida (Mark 8:23, 26), and upon the bowed woman (Luke 13:13).

Love and sympathy were conveyed by this act, but not necessarily the power of cure, for this went with His word and will, as we see from those instances in which He sent forth His word and healed; even at a distance. This distinction is of importance to note always, for there are still many who erroneously attach a primary value to the formal act of this nature on the part of those who unwarrantably claim to be the Lord's delegates for the purpose.

(continued from page 12)

(To be continued)

Studies in Mark, Mark 7:31-37: (68) Ears and Tongue in Divine Service

CHAP. 7:31-37 (continued)

Ears and Tongue in Divine Service

It may be of some help and interest to bring together a few remarks by way of suggestion on the subject of the connection between dumbness and deafness, and of the general analogy in spiritual things presented by them. The subject of service, too, has a direct bearing upon the special feature of the Second Gospel.

Deafness and dumbness are frequently associated as disorders in the same person, and, except in cases where there is malformation in the organs of speech, inability to speak is the direct result of an inability to hear. So that, generally speaking, the deaf man is also dumb. And, in consulting the various occurrences in the New Testament of the word , usually in the A.V. rendered “deaf,” we find that in some instances it is translated “dumb.”

Thus, in the case of a certain demoniac brought to Jesus for healing, we read, “They brought to him a dumb man possessed with a devil. And when the devil was cast out the dumb spake” (Matt. 9:32, 33; Lu. 11:14). Literally, in these instances the word “dumb” might be translated “deaf,” the fact being that the man was both deaf and dumb.

Take the case of another demoniac. A father came to Jesus with his lad, saying to Him, “I have brought unto thee my son which hath a dumb () spirit.” But the boy appears to have been deaf as well as dumb, and presumably he was dumb because he was deaf. At any rate, the Lord, in ejecting the demon, addressed him as, “Thou dumb and deaf spirit ( )” (Mark 9:17, 25). It will be noticed that in the narrative of this incident a distinct Greek word () is translated “dumb.”

Further, the dumb persons in the Decapolitan region who were made to speak by the Lord's power were, according to the literal translation of the description, deaf (Matt. 15:30, 31). Also, Zacharias became speechless (), but it is clear from Luke's account that he was deaf at the same time (cp. Luke 1:22 with 62).

In connection with these foregoing examples of Scriptural usage, it may be useful to quote from modern encyclopedias the following extracts, which present the intimate relation of deafness and dumbness from a physiological standpoint. One authority states: “It is not an uncommon supposition that deaf mutes are dumb on account of some vocal or organic defect, whereas the dumbness arises, with very rare exception, from the deprivation of hearing caused by some natural or accidental disease.” Another says: “Dumbness is the consequence of deafness. Children ordinarily hear sounds, and then learn to imitate them, i.e., they learn to repeat what they hear other persons say. It is thus that every one of us has learned to speak. But the deaf child hears nothing; it cannot therefore imitate, and remains dumb.... The ear is the guide and directress of the tongue; and when the ear is doomed to perpetual silence, the tongue is included in the ban: though if we could by any

means give to the ear the faculty of hearing, the tongue would soon learn for itself to fulfill its proper office. To correct the error involved in this apparent misnomer, some authorities use the term deaf simply, others speak of the deaf-dumb and deaf-mute. The latter term is common in America, as in France is its equivalent Sourds-muets. In the Holy Scriptures the same original word is translated ‘deaf ' in some places (as in Mark 7:32) and ‘dumb' or 'speechless' in others (see Matt. 9:33 and Luke 1:22).”

It is therefore well-established that the function of speech is dependent upon the function of hearing, and in order to communicate rightly to others it is necessary to hear well. The two faculties are indispensable to a person who acts as a medium between one and another.1

Applying this principle in the spiritual plane, the faithful and useful servant would be the one whose ear and voice are so accurately attuned that he transmits without failure the exact message he receives. Accordingly, Jehovah, in commissioning Jeremiah to be His prophet, said to him, “Whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak” (Jer. 1:7). Also, the Lord, when sending forth the twelve Apostles, said to them, “What ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops” (Matt. 10:27; Lu. 12:3). The Apostle Paul writes in one of his epistles, “I received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you” (1 Cor. 11:23). And again, John writes similarly, “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard ... of the word of life... that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you” (1 John 1:1-3). In the Apocalypse the Lord's “servant John” (as he terms himself in the first verse) on about thirty different occasions states his record to be what he “heard.”

THE SON AS HEARER AND SPEAKER

The Incarnate Son of God in the exercise of His office of Mediator between God and man was pleased to exhibit an absolute dependence upon God in the presentation of the grace and truth that came by Him. His ear and His tongue were ever in perfect accord with the divine will with respect to His service.

This obedient attitude was fore-determined in the eternal counsels when the Son voluntarily elected to take the place of the coming Servant to do the will of God with great delight. The Holy Spirit revealed this secret planning in one of the Psalms: “Mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come, in the volume of the book it is written of me: I delight to do thy will, O my God” (Psa. 40:6-8). This great purpose, originating in eternity, was fulfilled by the incarnation of the Son and by His sacrifice, as the apostle expressly declared (Heb. 10:5-10).

The marvelous spirit of meek submission assumed by the Creator Son is also the subject of one of the prophecies of Isaiah. Looking forward in the power of the inspiring Spirit, he saw that the ear of the Servant of Jehovah would be opened continually to receive directions from the Lord God, and His tongue guided from on high to speak the words of divine comfort. The beautiful passage runs thus: “The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary; he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned. The Lord God hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back” (Isa. 50:4, 5).

The New Testament records the fulfillment of these predictions, for in the Gospels the acts of the Lord Jesus all testify how He “emptied Himself,” and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. And in the Fourth Gospel especially, where the Son of God stands most revealed of the four, there are written many of His own verbal testimonies to this subjection of His own will to that of the Father.

Thus, surveying at its close the execution of His earthly mission, the Son, in the outpouring of His heart to the Father, declared, “The sayings which thou gavest me I have given them” (John 17:8). Similarly, the Lord instructed His disciples concerning the true source of that stream of heavenly wisdom which had come down to them: “All things that I heard from my Father, I have made known unto you": “The word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's who sent me” (John 15:5; 14:24).

To the Jews the Lord testified that God was then speaking to them in a manner different from the days of old, for they were, in His teaching, listening to the Son (Heb. 1:1), who had assumed a relation of obedience for this purpose. On one occasion He said to them, “My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me” (John 7:16). Again, “the things which I have heard of him [the Father], these speak I unto the world": “For I speak not from myself; but the Father which sent me he hath given me a commandment what I should say and what I should speak” (John 8:26; 12:49).

These passages all combine to show that the Servant-Prophet in His work as Jehovah's Spokesman to the nation was Himself first of all the Hearer of God, illustrating thereby for all time the essential nature of true and approved service.

So absolutely was this attribute true of the Lord, that even when speaking of the exercise of the divine prerogative of judging which the Father had committed to Him as Son of man, He said, “As I hear, I judge.” The whole passage reads, “I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just: because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which sent me” (John 5:30).

ISRAEL A DEAF SERVANT

The term “servant” is frequently used in Scripture with reference to persons commissioned by God for the performance of some special duties for Him. Amongst others it is applied to Abraham, Moses, Joshua, David, Job, and even to the first great head of Gentile dominion, Nebuchadnezzar (Gen. 26:24; Num. 12:7; Judg. 2:8; 2 Sam. 7:8; Job 1:8; Jer. 25:9; 43:10). Each of these men was called of God to serve Him in some particular capacity.

The same term is employed in a national sense with reference to the chosen people of God. As Adam was set in the world to be the representative of his Creator, and to rule for Him over the works of His hands, so Israel was elected from among all other nations to be the accredited representative of Jehovah in the earth. They were formally appointed as a people to execute certain important functions of direct service to the Lord.

This high purpose with regard to the seed of Abraham was clearly enunciated by Jehovah to Moses in mount Sinai, when He said, “For unto me the children of Israel are servants: they are my servants whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt” (Lev. 25:42, 55). This national relationship was recalled by Isaiah in words which Jehovah spoke to the people through him: “But thou Israel, my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend; thou whom I have taken hold of from the ends of the earth, and called thee from the corners thereof, and said unto thee, Thou art my servant” (Isa. 41:8, 9; cp. also 44:1,2). Accordingly, this favored people, in their capacity as God's agents, were made the recipients and custodians of His holy oracles, the exponents of the worship of the One and Only Deity, and the seat of

Jehovah's earthly government among the nations of mankind. In consequence of the service due from them in these and in other respects, it was necessary that Israel should be faithful to this trust and obedient to all the precepts of Him who dwelled between the cherubim in their Holy of holies.

The people, however, did not possess a circumcised ear for the messages which came to them from on high. Their attention was continually claimed by Jehovah, and the great declarations by Him when they became the repository of the divine law were prefaced by that significant formula which they vainly made their boast: “Hear, O Israel” (Deut. 5:1; 6:3,4; 9:1; 20:3). But Israel was deaf to all the revelations made. Their condition of irresponsiveness to the divine communications is the charge brought against them by the prophet Isaiah, who said to the Servant-nation, “Thou heardest not; yea, thou knewest not; yea, from of old thine ear was not opened” (Isa. 48:8). Again, deploring their spiritual deadness, the same prophetic messenger said, “Hear, ye deaf; and look, ye blind, that ye may see. Who is blind, but my servant? or deaf, as my messenger that I send? his ears are open, but he heareth not” (Isa. 42:18-20). They had a separate and favoured position given them as a nation, and they are accordingly described as the “blind people that have eyes, and the deaf that have ears” (Isa. 43:8), inasmuch as they utterly failed to utilize the privileges and opportunities afforded them.

Clearly then, the Jews were spiritually incapable of hearing the voice of God, even as the Lord said to them, “Why do ye not understand my speech? Even because ye cannot hear my word” (John 8:43). Still mere inability to hear was not a condition without remedy. There was a Great Physician for those who were not obdurate. He had come to make such as were not willfully deaf “hear joy and gladness.” Did not the prophetic Spirit of Christ invite the nation to listen to the voice of mercy? saying “Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live” (Isa. 55:3). And when Messiah was present in Jerusalem, He said, “The hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live” (John 5:25).

But in addition to those who were so incapable of hearing that they are even described as “dead,” there were those who would not hear. They were deaf also, but willfully so. Like the deaf adder, they deliberately stopped their ears (Psa. 58:4; Isa. 33:15; Zech. 7:11), lest they should hear the words of wisdom and truth and life spoken unto them by the Great Prophet of God. They were the rebellious people who had ears to hear but heard not (Jer. 17:23; Ezek. 12:2). This obstinate refusal on the part of the Jews to hear their Messiah aggravated their guilt to the utmost, as the Lord declared, “If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin” (John 15:22).

The stage of willful deafness is followed by serious results. For Scripture speaks of a third category which consists of those who, having refused to hear the word of God, become subject to the terrible infliction of a judicial deafness. Having exceeded the limits of the divine forbearance by closing their ears in the day of their visitation, they are no longer permitted to hear.

Isaiah warned the people of Israel that such a judgment would come upon them if they failed to receive the messages of Jehovah. The sentence pronounced upon them would be, “Make the heart of this people fat and make their ears heavy... lest they hear with their ears... and be healed” (Isa. 6:10). This solemn prophecy is cited by each of the four Evangelists in connection with the stubborn unbelief of the Jews in the face of the Lord's teaching and miraculous signs (Matt. 13:13-15; Mark 4:11, 12; Luke 8:10; John 12:37-40).2

A comparison of these passages shows that the quotations from this prophecy made in the Synoptical Gospels, as well as that by the apostle Paul in his address to the Jews at Rome, refer to the willful closing of the ears on the part of the nation. “Their ears are dull of hearing and their eyes have they closed” (Acts 28:27); this wording being taken from the Greek version of the Old Testament which gives this turn to the passage. Their sin therefore was due to their own deliberate action, for which the nation is accordingly held responsible.

John, however, views their conduct in a stage subsequent, as it were, to their willfulness. Having hardened their own hearts, their hearts are thereupon hardened penally. They would not believe, therefore they could not believe. John's words are emphatic that a judicial infliction from God had fallen upon the people. He says, “For this cause they could not believe, for that Isaiah said, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart, lest they should see with their eyes and perceive with their heart, and should turn, and I should heal them” (John 12:39, 40). This quotation is made from the Hebrew text of Isaiah, where the ultimate result of unbelief upon the nation is the prominent theme.

It will be observed that only a part of the original prophecy is quoted in the Fourth Gospel, and that the clause relating to their hearing is not included. From the context we see that the Evangelist is speaking of the signs of Jesus rather than of His teaching (ver. 37), and His miracles were for the eyes of the people while His doctrine was for their ears. John brings forward therefore only the clauses referring to their eyes and heart, which God had blinded and hardened because of their stubborn opposition to the gospel of the kingdom. But the principle of judicial penalty is equally applicable to the ear, as the actual form of the prophecy of Isaiah shows.

THE SEA OF GALILEE.

As this occasion is the last one in which the Sea of Galilee is mentioned in this Gospel, it may be of interest and help for further study to bring together the various passages where the name occurs. They serve at any rate to skew how large a portion of the recorded ministry of Jesus was exercised in the northern province.

1:16, walking on its shores, Jesus called Simon, Andrew, James, and John;

2:13, Jesus taught the crowds gathered by the seaside;

3:7, Jesus withdrew to the sea from the plottings of the Pharisees and Herodians;

4:1, from a boat Jesus taught the people who were assembled on the shore;

4:39, Jesus stilled the storm upon the sea;

5:1, Jesus crossed the sea to the country of the Gerasenes;

5:13, the herd of swine under the impulse of the demons stampeded into the sea;

5:21, Jesus re-crossed the sea;

6:47, Jesus walked upon the sea to His disciples during a storm, and stilled it;

7:31, Jesus returned to the sea of Galilee after His journey to the vicinity of Tire and Sidon.

This beautiful lake, which is a striking natural feature of the North of Palestine, is only mentioned three times in the Old Testament, where it is referred to as the Sea of Chinnereth in connection with the division of the land of Israel among the several tribes (Num. 34:11; Josh. 12:3; 1327).

Studies in Mark, Mark 7:31-37: (67) The Way of the Lord in This Healing

The Way of the Lord in This Healing

The Lord displayed a special, personal interest in this case of the deaf stammerer, and the record shows very fully how the Lord performed this cure, and how deeply He was affected by the sad condition of the sufferer. It is interesting to note in the next chapter that a similar fullness of detail is found in the narrative of the other miracle peculiar to this Gospel. There is also a general correspondence in the Lord's procedure in the two cases, as may be seen from the following comparison of the sevenfold descriptions of the recorded actions and words, though it also reveals peculiarities in each of the cases.

Placing the clauses of the two accounts side by side, we find that the Lord-

1. took the deaf man aside,	1. took the blind man by the hand,
2. put His fingers into his ears,	2. led him out of the town,
3. spat,	3. spat on his eyes,
4. touched his tongue,	4. put His hands on him,
5. looked up to heaven,	5. inquired whether he saw,
6. sighed,	6. put His hands again on his eyes,
7. said, Ephphatha (7:33, 34).	7. made him look up (8:23-25)

Taking the features which are analogous, the Lord in both instances,

(a) healed privately,

(b) touched the afflicted members,

(c) spat,

(d) spake.

But, distinctively, the Lord, in the first instance, looked up, sighed, and said, “Ephphatha"; and in the latter case He took the man by the hand, inquired whether he saw after He put hands on him, and made him look up. Thus, there is general agreement in four of the clauses, and differences in three.

A few remarks upon these various points are offered by way of suggestion.

(1) Privacy. The Lord took the deaf man aside (’). This Greek phrase is used in several instances in the Gospels, and is variously translated “apart,” “privately,” “when alone,” as well as “aside.”

On seven occasions the Lord sought privacy for Himself alone; or in company with a few of His disciples, separately from the multitudes. They were as follows:-

(1) when He went into the mountain to pray (Matt. 14:23);

(2) when He called His disciples into a desert place to rest awhile (Matt. 14:13; Mark 6:31, 32; Lu. 9:10);

(3) when He took Peter, James and John into the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17; Mark 9:2);

(4) when He expounded the parables to the disciples (Mark 4:34);

(5) when He impressed upon the disciples their exceptional privileges (Lu. 10: 23);

(6) when He instructed His disciples concerning His coming death (Matt. 20:17);

(7) when He took the deaf man aside for healing (Mark 7:34).

In addition to these, there are two instances of the use of the same phrase, when the disciples sought the Lord in private, viz.-

(1) when they failed to cast out a demon (Matt. 17:19; Mark 9:28);

(2) when they inquired concerning the future (Matt. 24:3; Mark 13:3).

From these references, as well as from other instances where the exact Greek phrase under consideration is not used, though the occasion was similar, it appears that retirement was sought by the Lord (1) at specially solemn epochs in His ministry in order that they might be spent in communion with His Father, and (2) for the communication of such instruction as was of particular interest and special importance to the disciples as distinct from the crowds. It was on such occasions that the apostles were prepared for their future service in the world as the

Lord's witnesses, when He Himself should be absent.

In the present case it would certainly be for the, man's own moral and spiritual benefit that he should be alone with the Divine Healer, while the Lord, with delicate regard for the acute sensibilities common to most persons so afflicted, spared him in this way from the coarse and curious gaze of the gaping mob. With a similar observance of due propriety in circumstances of solemnity and sorrow, He removed the hired mourners from the death-chamber of the daughter of Jairus. While in a matter of moral wrong and personal offense, the Lord taught His disciples the value of a private interview, enunciating His golden rule for the adjustment of differences between man and man: “If thy brother sin against thee, go, show him his fault between thee and him alone” (Matt. 18:15).

If privacy has its value in an interview between man and man, how much more was this so when the interview was between the man and His Savior? There were spiritual impressions, of the rarest character to be received as well as a physical benefit. The Messiah of Israel was present; was it not important that the man should experience for himself the loving regard which He showed in the case of every individual sufferer? Such an experience would be ineffaceable. Hence the deaf man was taken apart from the curious crowd and from his excited friends, so that his attention might not be distracted from the Master, and that His demeanor, His words and His doings, in their full sweetness and power, might ever live in his memory.

(2) The touch.-The kindly friends besought the Lord to lay hands upon the man. Accordingly, when He had gone aside privately with him, He put His fingers into the deaf ears, and touched the fettered tongue. Without pretending to assign specific motives to the Master for these actions, we may surely, without presumption, learn from the incident how thoroughly the Lord in His exquisite sympathy placed Himself in contact with the infirmities of those whom He blessed. If in Him there had been power alone, He might have exhibited it from afar, but there was love also, and this in its exercise must be near at hand.

Hence the Savior in His compassion came near enough to touch the ear and the tongue, that in an undisturbed privacy the deaf and the dumb might learn the marvelous ways of the God of love present to restore His sin-blighted creation. For the divine love for the sinner was even more wonderful than the divine power to heal. Had He not, by that same power, first fashioned the organs of hearing and speech? Should He not therefore well understand how to recover them when their functions were deranged?

The Lord therefore touched, communicating healing and strength, but contracting no defilement. It was as the touch of the sunlight upon the noisome places of the earth, which vivifies and purifies, but is never soiled. In the service of His healing mercy, Messiah fulfilled what was spoken by Isaiah the prophet: “Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses” (Matt. 8:17).

(3) The upward look and the sigh.-With His hands upon the five loaves and two fishes, the Lord had looked up to heaven and blessed, and thereupon the tiny store of food was multiplied to satisfy the famished multitude (Mark 6:41). Here with His hands, as it were, upon the ears of the deaf and the tongue of the dumb, He looked up to heaven and sighed. As food and gladness are associated gifts of God (Acts 14:17), awakening thanksgiving, so sickness is accompanied by sadness and sorrow, which are audibly expressed by sighing.1 The perfect adaptability of Christ is seen in each of the two instances. Looking up to heaven was His habit, whether the occasion called for joy or grief. We also see that while He rejoiced to dispense divine bounties to the hungry and the weary, He mourned to see before Him the mutilated image of God without a tongue to bless His Maker's name, or ears to hear the voice of His Sent One.

Heaven, as we learn from the Lord's attitude is the only resource for the sin-stricken earth. There the Father is, and thence His kingdom will in due course come. Meanwhile, the presence of sin abides below, and sighing over its grievous fruits is the lot of all, wittingly or unwittingly. The prevalence of this under-current of sadness the apostle expressed when he declared that “the whole creation groaneth [lit., is sighing] and travaileth in pain together until now, and not only, so, but ourselves also who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves, groan [lit., are sighing] within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body” (Rom. 8:22, 23). In another Epistle, Paul wrote, referring to the body and its infirmities, “In this we groan [sigh]... for we that are in this tabernacle do groan [are sighing], being burdened” (2 Cor. 5:2, 4).2 It is to be observed that in each of these instances the Spirit, in conformity with the action of our Lord in the presence of the deaf man, directs the eye of hope upwards for that release from bodily imperfection to be granted when the Father's kingdom shall come.

For in the day of God's glory in the earth, this constant burden of the spiritual heart will certainly be removed, and the sigh or groan of the needy and of the imprisoned (Psa. 12:5; 79:11) will no longer be known. Then will be the fulfillment of that prophecy of which this Galilean miracle was the earnest: “Behold your God... will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped... and the tongue of the dumb shall sing... and the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come with singing unto Zion... and sorrow and sighing shall flee away” (Isa. 35:4-10).

(4) The word of authority.-Following His touch of sympathy, the Lord uttered His word of command, Ephphatha. The Servant of Jehovah, in the plenitude of His rights as the Son of God, spoke, and it was accordingly done, for His word was equally potent to control and to correct as it was to create. Had He not “planted the ear” (Psa. 94:9)? If He made the hearing ear (Prov. 20:12), should He not cause the deaf ear to hear His voice? Addressing therefore the impotent member rather than the man himself, the Lord said, Be opened, and accordingly the ears of the deaf man were unstopped, and the bond of his tongue loosed, so that he spake aright.

The miracle was wrought in secret, and not as a public sign. Hence the Lord, having opened the ears and mouth of the man brought to Him, gave direction that no one should be told. But this command fell upon the deaf ears of disobedience, for the more He charged this upon them, so much the more a great deal they published it.... Being beyond measure astonished they said, “He hath done all things well: he maketh even the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak.”

[W.J.H.]

Studies in Mark, Mark 7:24-30: (65) The Mother's Prayer

CHAP. 7:24-30

THE MOTHER'S PRAYER

It was a mother who sought the presence of, Jesus on the borders of the land of Israel. As a parent, she was torn with anxiety and distress for the sufferings of her little daughter, who was “grievously vexed” with a demon. “A woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit, having heard of him, came and fell down at his feet. Now the woman was a Greek, a Syro-phoenician by race. And she besought him that he would cast forth the devil out of her daughter.”

We cannot but observe in the Gospels what respect the Lord paid to parental concern for their families. In dispensing His blessings, He had special regard for the institutions of family life. Among the comparatively few specific cases of the Lord's miracles of healing which are recorded, we find that the Lord hearkened to the prayer of: -

(1) a mother for her daughter (Matt. 15:21-28);

(2) a father for his daughter (Matt. 9:18-26);

(3) a father for his son (Matt. 17:14-18);

(4) a courtier for his son (John 4:46-53);

(5) the mothers for their infants (Luke 18:15, 16);

(6) a centurion for his servant (Luke 7:2-10).

In the home life the influences of natural affection are mightily powerful upon the young for good or for ill. In the same circle the terrible effects of the presence and operation of sin are perhaps more visible than anywhere else. There, too frequently, alas, cases are found where example and counsel are unavailing to deliver from corrupting and destroying evil. But mothers, fathers, masters, the responsible ones of the household, are encouraged by the cases given in the Gospels to make believing appeals for their charges to Jesus who is able to control and heal the evils of the soul, even as He did the diseases of the body.

The woman of Canaan had heard of Jesus; we read that for some while before this date His “fame had spread abroad throughout all the region round about Galilee” (Mark 1:28), and when the multitudes flocked to Capernaum because “they had heard what great things He did” those about Tire and Sidon were among them (Mark 3:7, 8; Luke 6:17). It was a wealthy queen among the Gentiles who heard of the wisdom of Solomon and came to him with her choice gifts from the ends of the earth that she might see and hear for herself. A greater than Solomon was now lodged in an obscure corner of Galilee, but it was only one of the descendants of Canaan, weighted from the days of Noah with a curse (Gen. 9:25), who came to do homage at His feet and to present her petition. The Psalmist prophesied that when Jehovah's King came to Zion the daughter of Tire would be there with a gift (Psa. 45:12), but this poor woman had nothing to bring to Jesus save the fruit of her body, possessed, alas, by an evil demon. Baffled by the power and subtlety of the wicked spirit, she, in her womanly weakness, and in her mother's love, cried out to Him who had blessed so many of the afflicted daughters of Israel, “Lord, help me” (Matt. 15:25).

(Continued from vol. 11.)

Studies in Mark, Mark 7:24-30: (64) Crumbs of Grace for Gentile Dogs

Chap. 7:24-30

“And from thence he arose, and went away into the borders of Tire and Sidon. And he entered into a house, and would have no man know it: and he could not be hid. But straightway a woman, whose little daughter had an unclean spirit, having heard of him, came and fell down at his feet. Now the woman was a Greek, a Syro-phoenician by race. And she besought him that he would cast forth the devil out of her daughter. And he said unto her, Let the children first be filled: for it is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs. But she answered and saith unto him, Yea, Lord; even the dogs under the table eat of the children's 1 crumbs. And he saith unto her, For this saying go thy way; the devil is gone out of thy daughter. And she went away unto her house, and found the child laid upon the bed, and the devil gone out” (7:24-30, R.V.).

The time was now approaching when the Servant of the Lord would complete His ministry of grace in Galilee, and would go up to Jerusalem to deliver His final testimony to the “daughter of Zion.” And we find from the Gospel records that in the later journeyings of Jesus in Galilee, there were some notable occasions when the grace and truth of which He was “full” overflowed to those of Gentile blood. These examples, amongst which that of the Syro-phoenician woman is not the least striking, were foreshadowings of the (then) coming time of unrestricted grace when it would be proclaimed to all men that the Lord of all is rich unto all that call upon Him (Romans 10:10).

At Capernaum the Pharisees in their religious pride stumbled at the saying of the Lord (Matthew 15:12) that the heart of man is the true seat of his spiritual defilement, sin spreading outwards from this inward source like a leprous disease. These Jewish teachers refused to believe in Jesus and in His word, condemning their tradition as it did: hence they were “confounded,” and missed receiving that purification of heart which comes alike to Jews and Gentiles who believe (Acts 15:9).

But it was made clear in the days of the Lord that if they of the favored nation stumbled at the Stumbling-stone through unbelief, heathen strangers, humbly Confessing the extremity of their needs, would stretch out arms of entreaty and faith to the mercy of Jehovah that was then visiting the people of His covenant. And in His zeal to help the needy He showed that no plaint for pity should be addressed in vain to the just and lowly King of Israel, not even the voice of a Canaanite. In accordance with this purpose we here read that “from thence he arose, and went away into the borders of Tire and Sidon.”

TIRE AND SIDON

The geographical limits of our Lord's ministry were much circumscribed in comparison with those assigned by Him to His followers at His departure. His own service was confined to the “cities of Israel,” that of the apostles in His absence was extended to the ends of the earth. When Paul and Barnabas were preaching the word of God to the Jews in Antioch, and the audience refused their testimony, the apostle said to them, “Seeing ye thrust it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles” (Acts 13:46). But though our Lord's words and deeds were rejected in Capernaum and elsewhere in Galilee and Judea, the Lord did not Himself preach the gospel of the kingdom to Gentiles, nor did He enter Gentile territory. He, however, on this occasion approached the borders of His own country. The branches of the fruitful bough ran over the wall of partition (Gen. 49:22), though the millennial day was, in fact, far distant, when the leaves of the tree of life would be for the healing of the nations everywhere (Revelation 22:3). Nevertheless, those of Tire and Sidon, who even then cared to seek help and healing from God's Minister of grace, would not be denied, as the record of the Evangelist proves.

Tire and Sidon, or Zidon, were cities of great antiquity, the latter being the elder; for Zidon, the first-born of Canaan, founded the city, and called it by his own name (Gen. 10:15, 19). Hence, in Matthew the woman of Tire and Sidon is called a Canaanitess (15:22). In the time of Joshua, it had grown to be a place of considerable size and importance, and was known as “great Zidon” (Joshua 11:8; 19:28). Zidon was included in the inheritance apportioned to the tribe of Asher (Joshua 19:24-31), but the Asherites failed to take full possession of their inheritance. They did not drive out the inhabitants of Zidon, but dwelt among the Canaanites (Judg. 31, 32).

Tire, twenty miles distant, though the younger city, excelled its neighbor in commercial prosperity and influence, and its worldly grandeur is described in vivid terms by the prophet Ezekiel (Ezek. 27), and Hiram its king was a useful ally of David and Solomon, and provided workmen and materials for the building of the royal palace and the temple at Jerusalem.

But Tire broke away from the “brotherly covenant,” and incurred the divine displeasure (Amos 1:9). Because of their sinful pride God's judgments came upon these two cities, according to the prophecies of Isaiah (23) and Ezekiel (26-29), by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, and subsequently by Alexander the Great of Greece. This punishment came to pass in the words of another prophet: “Tire did build herself a strong hold, and heaped up silver as the dust, and fine gold as the mire of the streets. Behold, the Lord will cast her out, and he will smite her power in the sea, and she shall be devoured with fire” (Zechariah 9:3, 4).

Their wickedness was so great that they are classed by our Lord with Sodom as monumental examples of the world's iniquity and departure from God (Matthew 11:22, 23). And yet the Lord also declared that if the mighty works done by Him in Chorazin and Bethsaida had been done in Tire and Sidon they would have repented in sackcloth and ashes, even as Nineveh did at the preaching of Jonah.

THE HOUSE OF MERCY

“And he entered into a house, and would have no man know it: but he could not be hid.” At the dedication of the magnificent temple on Mount Zion, Solomon, contrasting its significance with the infinite and essential glories of Jehovah, exclaimed, “Will God indeed dwell on earth? Behold, the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee: how much less this house that I have builded” (2 Kings 8:27). Neither could the house on the borders of Tire and Sidon contain nor confine the glory of Jehovah's Servant. “He could not be hid,” though in His humility and the lowliness of His heart, He retired from the populous districts bordering the Sea of Galilee, where He was unwanted, and sought some privacy in a house (as Mark alone tells us) near the land of the Gentile.2

This voluntary seclusion illustrates to us the amazing perfection of this Servant of God who accepted so meekly the rebuffs to His service. Though arising directly from the men of Israel, the hand of His God was seen by Him to be above all. He bowed to them therefore, as to the will of Him that sent Him. Finding Jerusalem and Galilee leagued against Him, He sought a secret place away from the face of His enemies, where He might spread out the disappointment of His heart of love before the face of His Father. There was a further display of the same spirit later, when the crucifixion became still more imminent, and we read that as the Lord and His disciples “passed through Galilee, he would have no man know it” (Mark 9:30, 32).

This self-abnegation was of great moral beauty. The act of self-effacement, but most of all the spirit of the act, was rare and choice among men. It was not yet the effulgence of the glorified Son of man shining upon the willing and unwilling, like the lightning from the east unto the west, nevertheless, the glow of this heavenly gem in its earthly setting “could not be hid.” It was not yet the appointed time when all flesh should see the glory of Jehovah, but one here and another there, like this Canaanite, discerned and owned in Jesus the Hope of Israel, and the Blesser also of all men.

Lingering still, for a moment, over this phase of moral glory, it will appear to us to be a special feature of Mark's Gospel to record occasions when our Lord withdrew Himself from men because of their opposition and persecution, and when the very act of retiring before the power of His enemies was accompanied by further witness to His glory from needy suppliants who pursued Him unto His solitude. Thus, when Jesus withdrew from the synagogue of Capernaum to the sea, great multitudes followed Him 6-8). When he crossed the Sea of Galilee to the wilds of Gadara, a man with an unclean spirit met Him for healing and conversion (5:1, 2). When the Lord with His apostles went apart into the desert place after the execution of John the Baptist, great multitudes followed Him (6:30-33). And in this instance, when Jesus retired to a house after encountering the willful obduracy and blindness of the guides of Israel, as well as the ignorance of His own disciples, the Syro-phoenician stranger sought Him out, and by her earnest solicitations obtained mercy and found grace to help in time of need.

This unnamed house on the borders of Israel became by reason of the Illustrious Presence tarrying there, a tenement of heavenly mercy — a Bethsaida indeed. The house itself, honored as it was, has passed into oblivion, but the fame of its Heavenly Visitant abides. To this house the woman of Canaan came, lifting up her hands in dim but true faith, not to the temple on Mount Zion where no Shekinah then dwelled, but to the Word of God made flesh and tabernacling among men. In the millennium the house of God “shall be called of all nations the house of prayer.” And in these requests made by Gentile strangers direct to Jesus we have individual instances of Jehovah's comprehensive reply to the petitions of Solomon at the dedication of the temple, when he besought the LORD, saying: “Concerning a stranger that is not of thy people Israel, but cometh out of a far country for thy name's sake (for they shall hear of thy great name and of thy strong hand, and of thy stretched-out arm), when he shall come and pray towards this house; hear thou in heaven thy dwelling-place, and do according to all that the stranger calleth to thee for” (1 Kings 10:4.1-43). When this “stranger” woman “heard of Him” she, who was forbidden to enter the temple at Jerusalem, came to Jesus as to the true Temple of God upon the earth, and He answered her according to all that she sought of Him.

W. J. H.

(Continued from page 330)

(To be continued)

Studies in Mark, Mark 7:14-23: (63) God's Kingdom Not Eating and Drinking, Continued

Chap. 7:14-23

40.—God's Kingdom Not Eating and Drinking

The use of the word “thoughts” () to express inward cogitations is illustrated in the following passages, in which the same Greek word occurs, though it is not always translated “thoughts.” (1) Mary “cast in her mind” what manner of salutation that made by the angel was (Lu. 1:29). (2) The people “mused” in their hearts whether John the Baptist was the Messiah or not (Lu. 15). (3) Jesus said to the disciples when He appeared in their midst, Why do thoughts arise in your hearts? (Lu. 24:38).

When the chief priests asked Jesus concerning the baptism of John, they “reasoned” with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven: he will say unto us, Why then did ye not believe on him ? But if ye shall say, Of men; we fear the people, for all hold Jesus as a prophet (Matthew 21:25, 26). (5) The rich man whose crops were plentiful elaborated his plans for future ease after he had “thought within himself” (Lu. 12:17).

The wicked husbandmen, when they saw the heir of the vineyard, “reasoned” among themselves, saying, This is the heir: let us kill him that the inheritance may be ours (Luke 20:14).

Caiaphas advised the council to “consider” how expedient it was that one man should die for the people (John 11:50).

In these instances the inward tendencies of the thoughts of men's hearts are plainly indicated. They are opposed to God, and also to His Son. In this latter respect the Messianic prophecies were fulfilled which said, “All their thoughts are against me for evil"; “their thoughts are thoughts of evil"; “all their imaginations are against me” (Psalm 56:5; Isaiah 59:7; Lam. 3:61).

Evil deeds.-There now follows after the mention of “evil thoughts” a brief catalog of sins, springing out of the evil heart of man, enumerated by the Lord to His disciples on this occasion. Comparing the first two Gospels, seven evils are named by Matthew (15:19) and twelve by Mark. The agreements and differences in the two lists are as follows—

(1) Six are mentioned by both Evangelists, viz., adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, wickednesses, blasphemy1.

(2) One by Matthew only, viz., false witness.

(3) Six by Mark only, viz., covetousness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, pride, foolishness.

(1) The six sins recorded by both Matthew and Mark are the grosser forms of man's evil doings, and, with the exception of blasphemy, which is Godward as well as manward, they relate to the ways in which man does hurt to his neighbor.2 In the variety of action here specified man shows his habitual breach of the second table of the law, the provisions of which are mainly manward (Matthew 22:39; Mark 12:31). Love is the fulfilling of the law; it thinketh no evil, and no harm. Love of one's neighbor therefore secures the observance of the several prohibitions against trespassing upon his rights. The apostle Paul sums up obedience to these particular commandments in this one act. He writes thus to the church at Rome: “For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment it is summed up in this word, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Romans 13:9). This is the “royal law,” which if we fulfill, we shall do well (James 2:8).

This commandment is “good” (Romans 7:12), but the will of man is opposed to obeying it. The mind of the flesh is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be (Romans 8:7). The inward impulse is to infringe its precepts, and this unruly disposition results in a succession of overt acts of a gravely criminal nature, such as are here specified for condemnation. This disobedient nature is characteristic of all the sons of Adam, who in consequence are in absolute contrast with God's Righteous One of whom it was prophetically written, “The law of his God is in his heart: none of his steps shall slide” (Psalm 37:31).

(2) False witness.-This form of sin is named by Matthew only, and while it is at all times prevalent among all men, it is specially characteristic of the Jews as a nation. A man or a nation may become false as to witness (1) for God, or (2) in the mutual responsibilities among men. Thus (1) Israel was as a nation selected to become the depositary of the truth of Jehovah's Godhead and of Jehovah's law, and to testify to these great truths among other nations who were idolaters. “Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, that I am God” (Isaiah 43:10, 12; 46:8). In this trust however, they notoriously proved themselves false witnesses, for they openly worshipped idols in imitation of neighboring nations, and dishonored the law. In the points of Israel's failure as a witness for the truth, because of their evil heart of unbelief, their Messiah was perfect throughout; and when the righteous government of an evil world is to be undertaken, He is introduced for the purpose, and one of His titles which express His competency is that of the Faithful and True Witness (Revelation 1:5; 3:14).

Untrue testimony by one man against another (2) is also pernicious. The law of Sinai expressly forbade the Israelite to bear false witness against his neighbor (Ex. 20:16), and it was written that a false witness should not go unpunished,(Proverbs 19:5, 9), but should perish (Proverbs 21:28). He was a menace to the nation, and is figuratively described as “a maul and a sword and a sharp arrow” (Proverbs 25:18), for lying testimony bore down its victim by sheer force, and cut asunder the very vitals, and wounded even from afar.

Moreover, as a nation, Israel was specially guilty of false witness against the Messiah. This sin was foreshadowed by the Spirit of Christ in the prophets: “False witnesses are risen up against me, and such as breathe out cruelty": “they laid to my charge things that I knew not” (Psalm 27:12; 35:11). And so it came about when in the fullness of time the Anointed One presented Himself to the chosen people, not the rabble, but the religious chiefs of the Jews sought to find false witness against Jesus to put Him to death, themselves breaking in this respect the law they were set to administer (Ex. 23:1); as we read, “Now the chief priests and the whole council sought false witness against Jesus

that they might put him to death: and they found it not, though many false witnesses came. But afterwards came two and said, This man said, I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days” (Matthew 26:59-61; Mark 14:56).

On this false evidence, the Lord was condemned to death by the Sanhedrin. Taken next to Pilate, the chief priests themselves bore equally lying witness against Jesus before the Roman governor in order to secure His crucifixion (Lu. 23:2). This sin against judicial equity lies even now upon the nation, and upon them will yet come the just retribution of God. Under the law it was enacted that if a man “be a false witness and hath testified falsely against his brother, then shall ye do unto him, as he had thought to do unto his brother” (Deuteronomy 19:15-19). And if false witness against a man's neighbor was regarded with such gravity, of how much greater guilt was it to deny the Holy and the Just One? As Jesus was betrayed into the hands of the Gentiles, so Israel is trodden down of the nations until their times be fulfilled.

(3) Sins named by Mark only.-These six offenses—covetousness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, pride, foolishness—are intimately associated with the inward workings of man's heart. If the others previously named may be described as the lusts of the flesh, these are the desires of the mind (Ephesians 2:3); if they illustrated the filthiness of the flesh, these show the filthiness of the spirit (2 Cor. 7:1). These inward propensities are the dead bones, the uncleanness of the hypocrisy and iniquity within the whited sepulchers, of which the Lord spoke in another place (Matthew 23:27, 28).

Covetousness.-This is the selfish greed within a man's heart which desires to appropriate other things than those God has given him and are therefore his legitimate possession. The Gentiles fell into this snare no less than the Jews (Romans 1:29). The covetous man is called an idolater (Ephesians 5:5; Colossians 3:5), for he sets up another god within himself whom he serves with his whole heart. Hence the apostle John exhorted the followers of Christ, “Little children, keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21)

Deceit.—This word is often translated “guile” in the New Testament, and is expressive of cunning, of craftiness, of plotting to deceive, while it is usually associated with a person's words. There was no guile found in the mouth of Christ (1 Pet. 2:22), nor will guile be in the mouth of the future Jewish remnant who follow the Lamb (Revelation 14:5), of whom Nathanael was a figure (John 1:47). But it was by guile that the Jewish council sought to arrest Jesus and put Him to death (Matthew 26:4; Mark 14:1). Elymas the sorcerer was full of it, for it was part of his nefarious stock-in-trade (Acts 13:10). While it is declared of Jew and Gentile alike that “with their tongues they have used deceit [guile]” (Romans 3:13), the apostle Peter quotes the Psalmist who says, “He that would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile” (Psalm 34:13; 1 Pet. 3:10).

Lasciviousness.-The indulgence of impure subjects in the imagination promotes the performance of corresponding acts of impurity.

An evil eye.-The eye is the principal organ whereby impressions from without are received by us. And an “evil eye” would seem to be one habituated to seek out and dwell upon unworthy and noxious objects. The epithet, “evil” is (malignant), and not merely (defiled, corrupt). The same term is applied to Satan as the principal agent in the infliction of harm upon man. He is called the Evil one (Matthew 6; 13:
John 2:13, 14).

The eye, therefore, is a main thoroughfare to and from the heart. Through the eye sinful lusts are awakened and put into exercise, so that as the Lord taught on another occasion, “If thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness” (Matthew 6:23).

In the Scriptures, the evil eye is frequently regarded as a close companion of covetousness and selfishness and envious jealousy. The sufferings of others are disregarded by the evil eye if personal gain is thereby secured. Jehovah warned the people of Israel against having an evil eye towards a poor brother in need and withholding due succor from him (Deuteronomy 15:7-9; 28:54, 55). Men were counseled to avoid stinginess of spirit and to cultivate the bountiful eye which gives liberally to the needy (Proverbs 22:9). The eye is never satisfied with riches, and the man, hasting to be rich and having an evil eye, is warned that poverty shall come upon him (Proverbs 28:22; Ecc. 4:8).

King Saul is a personal example, for he was filled with jealous hatred against David because the daughters of Israel praised the slayer of Goliath more than they praised himself, and he “eyed David from that day forward” (1 Samuel 18:9). A similar spirit of envy against others who appear to have been better favored than themselves was displayed by the laborers who murmured against their fellow-workers who having been hired only at the eleventh hour received as much as those who entered the vine-yard at the beginning of the day. “Is thine eye evil,” said the householder to one of the grumblers, “because I am good?” (Matthew 20:15).

Another and somewhat different example of the evil use of the eye is recorded in the history of the crucifixion of our Lord. This is an instance, not so much of envy and jealousy, as of a morbid interest, if not a pleasurable satisfaction in viewing the sufferings of another. We read that while the rulers derided and the soldiers mocked the Savior on the cross, the “people stood beholding” (Lu. 23:35). To the multitude the occasion was as a public show. They had come to, Golgotha for a holiday spectacle.

Many eyes saw the Holy Sufferer on the cross, as many will see Him on the clouds of glory. By-and-by they will see Him with guilty fear and trembling, as of old they beheld Him in callous indifference. Then their vulgar gaze gave an added pain to the sensitive spirit of the Christ, as we learn from the plaint of the prophetic Spirit of the Messiah recorded in the Psalm — “All they that see me laugh me to scorn"; “They look and stare upon me” (Psalm 22:7).

Pride.-There are several words so translated in the Greek Testament. The one used here () conveys the sense of a spirit of self-exaltation in a man coupled with the disparagement of others. The Pharisees who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others (Luke 18:9) are flagrant examples, but the Gentiles are not free from guilt in this respect any more than the Jews (Romans 1:30). This arrogance displays itself in boastful words and vainglorious deeds, but its origin is within the heart, as is shown by that sentence from the Magnificat: “He scattered the proud in the imagination of their heart” (Luke 1:51). This particular form of haughtiness is obnoxious to God and amenable to His summary judgment, for both James and Peter write that “God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble” (Jas. 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5).

The root idea of the word is that of lifting up oneself to show oneself off above one's fellows, a personal puffing up which brings into the condemnation of the devil (1 Timothy 3:6). The full development of this sin of unmitigated arrogance in man was not seen in the Pharisee, but will be fully displayed in the coming “man of sin,” the son of perdition, who “opposeth and exalteth himself” exceedingly against everyone that is called god, or object of veneration: so that he sitteth down in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God (2 Thessalonians 4). That great personage having exalted himself to heaven in the folly of pride, will be brought down to hell in swift abasement by the epiphany

of the coming in glory of Him who humbled Himself to death, even the death of the cross (2 Thessalonians 2:8).

Foolishness.-Folly or lack of sense closes the catalog here given of the foul emanations of man's evil heart. It does not follow, as some have thought, from its position on the list that foolishness is the most serious sin' of all, as if the list was arranged to express degrees of gravity. Neither, on the other hand, is foolishness negligible in importance, so that it may be passed over without concern.

Foolishness seems to be that gross form of stupidity which excludes God from the regulation of the life. In the words of the Psalmist, “The fool hath said in his heart, No God” (Psalm 14:1). Though the natural heart is the seat of uncontrollable passions which impel the whole man into courses of vile action, the senseless refuse that divine help and guidance which alone can enable them to live lives of purity and obedience. Can there be greater folly than this? Foolishness is placed last in the list, says one writer, because it renders all the others incurable.

This foolishness arising from man's own nature is defiled and defiling, in contrast with that wisdom that comes down from above and is “first pure” (James 3:17). Counsel and instruction are to be had of God for the seeking, but the natural man willfully disregards them. This is his foolishness. He allows himself to be carried away by the violence of his sinful desires, and ignores the mercy and grace of God which would lift him above himself into the plane of light, life and holiness. Such is his foolishness.

PURE IN HEART

“All these things proceed from within and defile the man,” were the Lord's concluding words to the disciples here. How futile therefore was it for the Pharisees to contend for the ceremonial washing of the hands and the person, forgetful of that inward defilement which is moral and from the heart, and cannot be cleansed by the washing of water. The Lord's teaching with regard to the kingdom of the heavens was opposed to this, for He said, “Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8).

And the Jews should have known how this essential purification of heart could be effected. Ezekiel had declared that the cleansing of the nation was Jehovah's work and promise: “And I will sprinkle clean water upon you and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you” (Ezek. 36:25, 26). The water is a figure of the word of God, as the Lord Himself shows, referring to the effect of His own word upon the disciples who received it by faith. He said, “Already ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you” (John 15:3).

But the ritualistic practices of the Pharisees in this respect were vain and delusive as the Lord taught, yet in spite of that teaching, and heedless of His warning, some in the early church fell into the snare of relying upon human ordinances for purification. Against such Titus was warned: “Not giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men who turn away from the truth. To the pure all things are pure; but to them that are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their mind and their conscience is defiled” (Titus 1:14, 15). According to the “proverb of the ancients,” quoted by David to Saul, “Out of the wicked cometh forth wickedness” (1 Samuel 24:13).

Religious lustrations are highly esteemed among men, but not seldom they are an abomination to God in their vanity and hypocrisy. James writes “Pure religion and undefiled before God and our Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction and to keep himself unspotted from the world” (James 1:27).

W. J. H.

(Continued from page 310) (To be continued)

Studies in Mark, Mark 7:14-23: (62) God's Kingdom Not Eating and Drinking

7:14-23

The kingdom of God therefore concerns itself with matters above the range of eating and drinking. Its domain, as the apostle Paul says, is characterized by righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost (Romans 14:17). The moral and spiritual traits of the sons of the kingdom abide forever, but foods of whatever nature perish in the using; “Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats, but God shall bring to naught both it and them” (1 Cor. 6:13).

THE FOUNTAIN OF UNCLEANNESS

We have in the verses which follow (vers. 20-23), a second statement of our Lord introduced in the narrative by the words, “And he said,” the preceding statement being prefaced by the slightly different phrase, “And he saith unto them” (ver. 18). The first deals with the truth that man does not contract spiritual defilement by means of his material food and drink. In the second saying the complementary truth is presented that spiritual defilement is contracted by the evil thoughts, words, and deeds which emanate from the heart within: “That which proceedeth out of the man, that defileth the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, evil thoughts proceed....”

Therefore, whatever ethical teachers may say, the heart of man is the seat of his uncleanness. “As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7). This was so from the beginning, for before the flood God declared of man that “every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5; 8:21). In consequence of his overt acts of wickedness men of that epoch became so perniciously corrupt that the direct judgment of God swept the ante-diluvian world away.

Always and everywhere scripture testifies to this inward taint. Man is said to be shapen in iniquity, conceived in sin, and estranged from the womb (Psalm 51:5; 58:5). It is in the heart that man erred from the ways of God (Hebrews 3:10), for the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked (Jeremiah 17:9, 10), being filled with all unrighteousness (Romans 1:29). “Ye are they,” the Lord said to the Pharisees, “which justify yourselves in the sight of men; but God knoweth your hearts” (Luke 16:15).

Unquestionably therefore, man's heart is regarded by God as the source of evil, and because a man's sinfulness arises primarily from within himself he is held personally responsible to bear his own burden of guilt before the Judge of all the earth.

MOUTH, TONGUE AND LIPS

“Proceeding out of” is a simple but expressive term occurring three times in this short section (vers. 2o-23), and is used in connection with both thoughts and acts. Elsewhere in the New Testament it is frequently used with reference to the spoken utterance, and in a good as well as in an evil sense. Thus, we learn that the scriptures form the spiritual food of man who lives by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4; Luke 4:4). The Lord's solemn pronouncements of righteous judgments upon human sin are likened to a sharp sword proceeding out of His mouth (Revelation 1:16; 19:15, 21), But the term is also used with sinister associations. as, for instance, when the believer is warned to be careful lest any corrupt communication should proceed out of his mouth (Ephesians 4:29). And in the lurid visions of the Apocalypse John saw the destructive powers of judgment proceeding out of the mouths of the appointed agents in the emblematic forms of fire and smoke and brimstone (Revelation 9:17; 6:5), John further saw unclean spirits proceeding out of the mouths of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet, that trinity of evil power which may soon appear (Revelation 16:13).

The tongue therefore is regarded in scripture as a mighty instrument which a man may wield for good or ill among his fellows. Speech is the great means for the publication of the thought which arises in the heart and of the dissemination of its purifying or defiling influences among others. The mouth is the medium whereby man may worship God or blaspheme His holy name. So James says, “Therewith bless we God, even the Father, and therewith curse we men who are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be” (Jas. 3:9, 10). Hence, he that ruleth his spirit is mightier than he who taketh a city, and “whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles” (Proverbs 16:32; 21:23). But who can bring a dean thing out of an unclean? The seriousness of this problem James teaches when he says, “The tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly member,” and, further, “So is the tongue among our members that it defileth the whole body” (James 3:6, 8). In the sense of this guilty contagiousness, Isaiah confessed that he was a man of unclean lips, and accordingly it was upon his mouth that the coal of cleansing was laid (Isaiah 6:7).

Clearly, it is in agreement with the whole tenor of the word of God, that in the matter of guilty uncleanness, the functions of the mouth in speaking are of greater moral importance than those for eating, for “meat will not commend us to God: neither if we eat [things offered to idols] are we the better: neither, if we eat not are we the worse” (1 Cor. 8: 8), but for “every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account in the day of judgment” (Matthew 12:36).

THE ISSUES OF LIFE

In reply to the questions put to Him in the house, the Lord declared to his disciples (1) what was the root, and (2) what were the fruits of evil in men. The root was the evil thought of the heart, and the fruits were the specific acts of wickednesses some of which He named. In the evil thought therefore the evil deed is contained in embryo. Jesus said to them, “From within out of the heart of men evil thoughts proceed...;” then He enumerated a list of some of the vile deeds which spring from man's inner motives, adding, “all these evil things proceed from within, and defile the man.”

Evil thoughts.-These are the inward reasonings and debates of man's mind. Within himself he deliberates, he calculates, he plans his schemes of sinful indulgence or willful rebellion. “Things come into his mind, and he devises an evil device” (Ezek. 38:10.; Micah 2:1, 2). Thus, in describing the appalling moral degradation of the human race, the apostle traces it to this inward source: “knowing God they glorified him: not as God, neither gave thanks; but became vain in their reasonings [thoughts] and their senseless heart was darkened” (Romans 1:21). Hidden within the heart, it is one of man's strange delusions that his thoughts are thereby concealed from Omniscience, yet it is written, “The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise that they are vain” (1 Cor. 3:20; Psalm 94:11). The incarnate Son possessed and displayed this omniscience; indeed, according to the word of Simeon to Mary, one of the purposes of His mission was that “the thoughts of many hearts might be revealed” (Luke 2:35).

There are several recorded instances wherein our Lord showed an intimate acquaintance with the secret workings and motives of men's minds—that is, their inward thoughts and lusts whereby they are drawn away and subdued (Jas. 1: 13). Jesus perceived those of:

(1) the disciples when He bade them beware of the leaven of the Pharisees (Matthew 16:7, 8; Mark 8:16, 17);

(2) the scribes when He forgave the sins of the palsied man (Mark 2:6-8; Luke 5:22);

(3) the scribes when He was in the synagogue where was a man with a withered hand (Lu. 6:8);

(4) the disciples when they had been discussing who should be the greatest (Lu. 9:45; Mark 9:33).

W. J. H.

(Continued from page 295)

(To be continued)

Studies in Mark, Mark 7:14-23: (61) True Source of Man's Defilement

Chap. 7:14-23

“And he called to him the multitude again, and said unto them, Hear me all of you, and understand: there is nothing from without the man, that going into him can defile him: but the things which proceed out of the man are those that defile the man. And when he was entered into the house from the multitude, his disciples asked of him the parable. And he saith unto them, Are ye so without understanding also? Perceive ye not that whatsoever from without goeth into the man, it cannot defile him: because it goeth not into his heart, but into his belly, and goeth out into the draft? This he said, making all meats clean.1 And he said, That which proceedeth out of the man, that defileth the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, evil thoughts proceed, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, covetings, wickednesses, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, railing, pride, foolishness: all these evil things proceed from within, and defile the man” (Mark 7:14-23, R.V.).

The Lord on this occasion unsparingly condemned the traditions of the Jews which, though totally unauthorized by divine authority, were rigorously imposed by the religious chiefs upon the people of the day. But He established truth as well as exposed error. In His doctrine the Great Servant-Prophet of Jehovah was destructive of all evil forms and corrupt tendencies, but was also constructive of what was good and of God, preaching continually the gospel of the kingdom of God. He swept away the delusion of a cleansing from spiritual defilement by material means, and proclaimed the deep-seated cause of man's moral uncleanness. There was, He taught, an overflowing spring of pollution within, and men were self-deceived by the habit of attending solely to external means of purification. Even if all avenues of contamination from without were closed, man would still possess the inward disposition and desire and impulses to sin which spread corruption through his being.

In this manner of teaching we find no pandering to the notions of the times; and herein we see one notable difference between the false teachers and the True. The false prophet prophesies smooth things and deceitful things which conceal the ugly facts of sin and judgment. But the Servant of Jehovah unveiled the whole truth before the eyes of priests and people alike, and this plainness of speech incurred the bitter hatred of that evil generation. “Now ye seek to kill me,” said Jesus to the Jews, “a man that hath told you the truth” (John 8:40).

THE SAYING ADDRESSED TO THE CROWD

Both in word and deed, the Lord displayed a special loving interest in the welfare of the masses, oppressed as they were by the Pharisees and scribes who shut up the kingdom of heaven against them, neither entering themselves nor suffering the people to enter (Matthew 23:13). It was foretold that a characteristic feature of the ministry of the Messiah would be that the poor should have the gospel preached to them (Luke 4:18; 7:22). The humble in heart often have a poor purse, and Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3).

The Lord, then, had been speaking to the teachers of Israel and reproving them for foisting an empty tradition upon the people to the displacement of the law and prophets of God. They were not true men but evil shepherds of the sheep-thieves and robbers indeed (John 10:8-13), since they had taken away from the people the word of God which was their heritage and their salvation. But the Lord was the Good Shepherd of Israel. It was His delight “to stand and feed his flock in the strength of the LORD.” He had come out of heaven to give His people the true bread of life—the word which proceeded out of the mouth of God.

Accordingly, the Lord called the crowds together again and communicated to them the truth on this subject in simple and concise language such as they might “hear and understand.” He spoke to the multitudes direct without an intermediary, so that these simple peasants of Galilee were able to drink from the well-spring of truth itself. Everyone was called to give heed to Him, and to seek to lay hold upon His words. Hearken unto me every one of you, He said, and understand: “there is nothing from without the man, that going into him can defile him: but the things which proceed out of the man are those that defile the man.”

The Lord's subject in this saying is not the means of cleansing, but the cause of defilement. He does not here speak of the futility of ceremonial purification, and of the use of water to remove immoral stains (Job 9:30, 31). Of this He had already spoken to the Pharisees, but He now instructs those uninstructed in the law2 with regard to the true source of defilement. Cleansing pre-supposes defilement. How then does man become unclean? Is it by the polluting influences of external things entering his physical organization? The Lord declared that the inner motives from which man's words and actions spring are the cause of his uncleanness, none being able to bring a clean thing out of an unclean.

The soul was distinct from and superior to man's body, and what went into a man was for the nourishment and maintenance of his body—the tenement of the soul and spirit. The things which mattered most were those which proceeded from a man. His schemes, his motives, his desires, his character, his moral color-these made a man a center of power, radiating influences either for good or for evil.

In speaking to the multitude the Lord did not enter into any details of the controversy recently held with their teachers, but placed the truth of the subject before them in a simple, antithetical way after the manner of many of the Proverbs of Solomon so that by this means its wisdom and truth might be retained with comparative ease in their memories.

Moreover, the style of His speech was not after the manner of the scribes but with authority: “there is nothing from without the man which going into him can defile him.” He did not, as in His discussion with the scribes, cite scripture to support His statement, but delivered the truth as one who taught of His own inner fullness: “We speak that we know, and bear witness of that we have seen” (John 3:11). The Master knew so well the source of corruption which was “in man” (John 2:25). He saw not as man sees, for He looked not at the outward appearance, but on the heart (1 Samuel 16: 7). His words, accordingly were words of truth, and, by reason of this testimony from Him, His hearers were left without excuse. As He said, “If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin, but now they have no cloak for sin” (John 15:22).

FURTHER INSTRUCTION IN THE HOUSE

A fuller explanation of this teaching was made to the apostles at their own request. They came to Jesus privately in the house, saying that the Pharisees were stumbled at His saying with regard to washing (Matthew 15:12). With all the technical knowledge of scripture which the religious leaders possessed they failed to comprehend the Lord's utterance. This failure proved their incompetence and indeed their added guiltiness, since they were the appointed custodians and expositors of the oracles of God. The Lord pronounced their coming doom. Every plant, He said, not of His heavenly Father's planting (cp. Isaiah 61:3) should be rooted up. The ax was laid at the root of the trees. The fig tree should wither away and become a dry tree. They had not profited by Moses, neither would they by the Messiah. They were to be let alone. They were blind leaders of the blind who said, We see, but their sin remained, and both teachers and taught would fall into the ditch. (Matthew 15; John 9:41.)

Peter said to the Lord, “Declare unto us the parable” 3 (Matthew 15:15; cp. 13:36). It was the same apostle who afterward at Joppa and Antioch failed to put into practice this teaching of the Lord (Acts 10:14; Galatians 2:12). He was now the spokesman for the rest, all the disciples making inquiry through him, as Mark informs us (7:17). None of them had grasped the significance of the Lord's saying, but they differed in spirit from the Pharisees, inasmuch as not knowing they yet desired to know. They came questioning therefore, believing the Lord would make the matter plain to them, and that they would then see a beauty and value in the Master's teaching which at the moment was not clear to them. Like multitudes since they had much to unlearn before they could learn. Their habits of mind and trend of thought induced by their instructions from childhood in the law of Moses and in the rites and ceremonies of that law blocked the way for the entrance of the Lord's

words into their hearts, giving them the needed light and deliverance.

We find the Lord said to the disciples who thus came to Him, seeking further instruction, “Are ye so without understanding also?” There seems some reproach in this question. The Pharisees had not understood; the populace did not understand (Isaiah 6:9; Mark 4:12); but how was it the Lord's own company did not understand Him? He said to the people, Hearken and understand (ver. 14), but the apostles also failed to understand. And the Lord by His question to them implies that it was blameworthy on their part to confess such ignorance. Why was this?

The explanation appears to be that in New Testament usage lack of understanding 4 may arise (1) from a lack of capacity to receive divine truths, and (2) from the non-employment of this capacity by those who possess it. Thus, in the first sense (1) this lack is true of the whole world, Jews and Gentiles alike, for “there is none that understandeth” (Romans 3:11). The same sense is also attributed to the word in the Lord's parable of the Sower and the seeds: the wayside hearer receives the word of the kingdom, but understandeth it not, and the wicked one catches it away (Matthew 13:19). But the term is used in the second sense of those who were brought into the kingdom, but yet failed to receive its wisdom. For example, the stilling of the night-storm on the Sea of Galilee followed immediately upon the feeding of the five thousand, and yet the disciples failed to reflect upon this marvelous exhibition of the power and goodness of the Son of God in their midst. “They considered [understood] not the miracle of the loaves for their heart was hardened” (Mark 6:52).

Now in the sequence of his narrative the Evangelist proceeds to show that, having failed to understand His works of mercy and power, the apostles had also failed to understand His words about purification. There were hindrances, such as infirmities of nature, carnal prepossessions and selfish interests; these clouded the spiritual vision. But the Patient Teacher was ready to repeat His words and to amplify His teaching, so that hearing yet again they might understand. The things of the Lord were hidden from the wise and prudent (the understanding ones of this world, Matthew 11:25; Luke 10:21; 1 Cor. 1:19), and revealed unto babes. Simplicity of heart was the character suited to the kingdom of God. The disciples though they had entered the kingdom were not maintaining the childlikeness of those to whom it was given to know the mysteries of that kingdom. Moreover, all knowledge would be partial until the Spirit came at Pentecost, when the truth would be declared in parables no longer. “These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs [parables]: the hour cometh when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but shall tell you plainly of the Father” (John 16:25; cp. also Matthew 15; 13:36).

GOD'S KINGDOM NOT EATING AND DRINKING

The Lord stated afresh to the inquiring disciples the law of that kingdom of God which He had come to establish. Its essence was spiritual not carnal. It was founded not on temporal matters such as food and drink, but upon spiritual truths which affected the inner life and relation-ship of man to God, in whose sight the state of the heart is of greater importance relatively than the state of the body. Apart from the question of artificial restrictions which the Lord had already condemned in their hearing, He would have them know that “whatsoever from without goeth into the man, it cannot defile him.” A man would not become morally unclean by the consumption of certain meats, as the Jews held. From the bondage of this tradition, the truth which came by Jesus Christ set them free.

This deliverance is an important doctrine for the followers of the Lord to maintain today as ever. The Son has Made us free, and we are exhorted to “stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and not to be entangled again with the yoke of bondage” (Galatians 5:1). The ordinances to handle not, nor taste, nor touch, are after the precepts and commandments of men, from which we have been delivered by the death of Christ (Colossians 2:20-23).

So far as partaking of food is concerned the Christian is enjoined to discharge this as well as every other physical function in a manner becoming to one whose body is a possession of the Lord, a member of Christ, and a temple of the Holy Ghost (1 Cor. 6:13, 15, 19). The glory of God should be our ultimate object in the maintenance of physical vitality; “whether ye eat or drink or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). On the other hand, the absence of self-control and the abuses of the appetites are positive sins, and the glutton and the drunkard alike are the subjects of the stern reprobation of God (Deuteronomy 21:20; Proverbs 23:21; Philippians 3:16).

W. J. H.

(To be continued)

Studies in Mark, Mark 7:9-13: (60) Word of God and Tradition of Men

7:9-13

The word “tradition” occurs in scripture both in a good sense and in a bad sense. Broadly, the usage of the term is with reference to religious instruction passed from one to another. The root idea is of something delivered to men. If the instruction is derived from God, the tradition is obviously of supreme and undeniable authority; but if derived from a purely human source, its authority is questionable, and its truth requires to be substantiated, before it can claim our acceptance.

Before the canon of holy Scripture was completed and became accessible in a written form, much of the apostolic teaching was circulated in the early church in the form of tradition either by word or letter. Hence we read of Paul exhorting the Thessalonian saints to “hold the traditions wherein ye have been taught, whether by word or our epistle” (2 Thessalonians 15); similarly also in 2 Thessalonians 6. Again, the same apostle, writing to the Corinthians, praises them that “ye remember me in all things, and hold fast the traditions as I delivered them to you” (1 Cor. 11:2). Whatever truth was delivered to the saints through the medium of the apostles was necessarily a tradition, whether written or oral, and being inspired, had a paramount claim over them (1 Cor. 11:23; 2 Peter 2; Jude 3).

But our Lord here spoke of Jewish tradition which emanated, not from holy men speaking by the Holy Ghost, but from fallible Rabbis who foisted upon their fellows their own views and interpretations. And on account of their human origin, the teaching and ceremonies of the Pharisees are described by Him as “the tradition of men,” “the tradition of the elders,” and as “your own tradition.”

These traditions were held with great tenacity by the scribes and others, and, so far as reputation among men was concerned, a Jew became distinguished in proportion to his zeal for their propagation and development. Saul of Tarsus before his conversion acquired distinction in

Jerusalem by reason of his devotion to the tradition of his fathers. Alluding to this feature of his early days, he wrote, “I advanced in the Jews' religion beyond many of mine own age among my country-men, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers” (Galatians 1:14, R.V.). Tradition, therefore, acquires its evil sense when it is formed by an addition to, or a subtraction from the word of God, and, when fully developed, it becomes a pernicious substitute for the word of God. The scriptures, however, constitute a permanent standard of reference, and are always available for the correction of the vagaries of tradition, if we will but use them for this purpose.

We have in the New Testament an instance of the origin and spread of an unwarranted tradition. At the Sea of Gennesareth, Simon Peter, having received from the Lord some particulars relating to his own future life and service, made inquiry concerning John, saying to Jesus, “Lord, what shall this man do?” Jesus saith unto him, “If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me.” Such was the word of the Lord to Peter. But from it the erroneous tradition arose that John should not die. For we read in the Gospel, “This saying therefore went forth among the brethren that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die: but if I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?” (John 21:21-23).

For our warning this instance, occurring in the earliest days of Christianity, is recorded of a false gloss put upon our Lord's words gaining currency among the saints either in an oral or in a written form. We are, moreover, shown by the same incident that the correct version of our Lord's words formed a criterion for the false tradition which said what Jesus said not. The report that the Lord would return in the lifetime of the apostle John was an incorrect deduction from the Lord's words to Peter. The effect of this un-authorized tradition upon the hearts of the disciples would be to deaden the hope of the Lord's return as an ever imminent event. Human tradition is in essence an enemy to divine truth, and it invariably comes about in practice that man's inclination is to side with the former rather than the latter. Hence the apostle, writing to the saints at Colosse, exhorts them against the evil influence which man's tradition would exert upon their allegiance to Christ: “Take heed lest there shall be any one that maketh spoil of you through his philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of man, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ” (Colossians 2:8). In Colosse therefore, as well as formerly in Judea, there were many who were “teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.”

In pursuance of this subject, it is instructive to observe that a particular and uncommon Greek word is used in the New Testament for commandments when derived from man. The usual word so translated is , but occurs three times only, viz., in Mark 7:7; in the parallel passage, Matthew 15:9; and in Colossians 2:22, in each case forming part of the phrase rendered “the commandments of men.” This word also occurs three times in the LXX. One of the passages (Isaiah 29:13) was quoted by our Lord on this occasion (Mark 7:6, 7; Matthew 15:7-9). In all these passages the word appears to be used with special reference to those ethical maxims and formularies of conduct which men sought to lay as heavy burdens upon the shoulders of their fellows, but which the Lord showed to be lacking in authority.

FILIAL RESPECT

The ablutionary rites introduced by the elders and maintained so rigorously by the Pharisees were of the nature of pure ceremony, but the Lord also charged them with a serious abrogation of the moral law. Not that they sinned under this head in one respect only, for there were “many other such like things” of which they were guilty (ver. 13), but the destruction of the filial bond which their tradition permitted, if not enjoined, was the one selected by the Lord for their condemnation at this juncture.

The conclusion of the incident shows that, in result, the religious leaders who came to the Lord to convict Him as a Teacher of the people were themselves convicted by Him. It affords an instance, in accordance with the special purpose of Mark's narrative, of the absolute perfection of the Servant of Jehovah, in that He used the written word of God as the instrument of conviction, rather than His own personal authority. Matthew, setting out the King of the Jews come to administer the kingdom of the heavens according to the law and the prophets, records the same instance (Matthew 15). When, therefore, the Lord spoke as the Prophet like unto Moses, and brought out of His treasure-house “things new,” His utterances were in His own authority, and not like those of the scribes of the day. On such occasions He taught after this manner: “Ye have heard that it was said to them of old time... but I say unto you....” At such times He was depositing with the people the word of Him who sent Him—a word which in the course of the progress of Divine revelation was given to supplement and to amplify the communications of old. But when the Lord opposed the false teachers of Israel His appeal was to the Scriptures. To their confusion He confronted them with what was on record and what was read by them on sabbath days in their synagogues. The proud Pharisees then found themselves in the presence of the One out of whose mouth went a sharp sword, and for their condemnation, as it were, the books were opened, and they were judged out of the things written in the books.

Accordingly, the Lord then referred the Pharisees and scribes to the law which they professed to teach. What was found in the book of Moses? How did they read therein?

The specific command was, “Honor thy father and thy mother” (Ex. 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16). This was one of the “ten words,” and is called the “first commandment with promise” (Ephesians 5:2), for this injunction was specially distinguished by the assurance of Jehovah, that prosperity and longevity should be the portion of those obedient to it. See the special reward granted to the house of Rechab for filial obedience (Jeremiah 35:18, 19).

Further, the Lord quoted to the Pharisees the severe sentence pronounced by the same law against the one who did despite to his parents: “Whoso curseth (or, revileth) father or mother, let him die the death” (Ex. 21:17).

Thus, as not one of His hearers could deny, had Jehovah encouraged and warned every son in Israel to keep the commandment of his father, and not to depart from the law of his mother (Proverbs 6:20). The word of God declared there should be prolonged and prosperous days in the land for the obedient, but a criminal's death for the disobedient (cp. Leviticus 20:9; Deuteronomy 27:16; Proverbs 20:20; 30:11). And the solemn charge uttered from Mount Ebal was, “Cursed be he that setteth light by his father or his mother” (Deuteronomy 27:16).

But what said the elders? They contradicted both the letter and the spirit of the law of God.1 They devised, in the name of piety, a wicked scheme whereby a man might release himself from every obligation towards his parents. Whatever benefits were due from him to his father and mother, let him consecrate those benefits to the service of the temple, and the Jewish council would thereupon absolve him from all filial responsibilities. “But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or his mother, it is Corban (that is to say, a gift) by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me.... And ye no longer suffer him to do anything for his father or his mother.”

Having thus contrasted their practice with the original precepts of the law, the Lord summed up the effect of their conduct in one of His pregnant sayings, charging His accusers with making the word, of God of none effect through their tradition. They virtually repealed the law from heaven, and at the same time outraged the instincts of nature. It was not meet that they should take the parents' bread and devote it to the altar. In the Proverbs it was written, “Whoso robbeth his father or his mother, and saith, It is no transgression; the same is the companion of a destroyer” (Proverbs 28:24).

We learn, therefore, from this portion of the Gospel that the Lord condemned this innovation, so inimical to the reciprocal duties of family life, on the ground that it contravened the tenor of the law given by Moses, which was their boast. But, reading the Gospels as a whole, we also know that the tradition of the Jews was contrary to the grace and truth that came by Jesus Christ. The Lord did not come to bear witness of Himself, and He did not in this instance refer the Pharisees to His own example in the home of Joseph and Mary. But human history knows no instance of filial perfection to set alongside that seen by men and angels through long years in the carpenter's house at Nazareth. Scripture says little of the youth of Jesus, but that little means much. We read that He went with His “parents” to Jerusalem, and that He returned to Nazareth, and was “subject to them,” thus “rendering honor to whom honor was due” (Luke 2:39-52). The Evangelist who records that Jesus, said to Mary at Cana in Galilee, “Woman, what have I to do with thee?” also records His words to her at Golgotha, “Woman, behold thy son” (John 2:4; 19:26) “Corban” applied to the service of our Lord in the fullest sense of the term, for He devoted Himself in sacrifice upon the altar, yet the committal of His mother to the care of the beloved disciple proves that, even upon the cross, He did not neglect to make provision for her future; magnifying the law in this respect and making it honorable (Isaiah 42:21).

We may note in passing that the obligations of Christian children to their parents are stated to be equally binding with those of the Jews (Ephesians 6:1, 2; Col. 3:20; 1 Tim. 5:4, 8).

It has sometimes been alleged that there is inconsistency between the Lord's defense of filial ties on this occasion, and His call made elsewhere to His disciples to forsake father and mother for His sake. This inconsistency is, however, only an apparent one.

The Lord said, “He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me” (Matthew 10:37); and again, “If any man come to me, and hate not his father and mother and wife and children and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26). In these words the Lord declared the condition of discipleship. This condition was based upon the acknowledgment of His authority as paramount and absolute. No human tie should have a superior claim to that of the Lord Jesus. And in the utterances quoted, He contemplated a case where family authority sought to override His word as Master. Even in national government parental claims or filial responsibilities are not allowed to absolve a subject from allegiance to the Crown, or to screen a criminal from retributive justice. Must the Lord of all ask less than this from the subjects of His kingdom? If patriotism demands that a man tall leave all to serve his country, who should complain when the Master calls His disciples to leave all to serve Him?

There is, therefore, no inconsistency in our Lord's teaching. In the one case, He set the divine call above the claims of filial duties, while in the other, He condemned the Pharisees who set human tradition above filial duty, an inversion for which there was no adequate warrant. The question of mutual obligation in the family is one which can only be finally settled by divine authority. God alone, who established the responsibility of children to their parents, can abrogate that responsibility, and from the beginning He recorded His permission that a man should leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife (Gen. 2:24). The parental home might be quitted to form a new relationship of a natural order. In the New Testament we have a relationship of a spiritual order entered by a similar renunciation. At the call of Jesus, James and John left their father Zebedee in the ship with their hired servants and went after Him. It was so with others, as Peter said, “Lo, we have left all and followed thee.” But we read that the Lord said to another, “Follow me,” and he was ready with an excuse. He took refuge in his filial responsibilities, and desired that he might be allowed to wait until his father was dead and buried. Clearly this man, judged by his own confession, was not prepared to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. And accordingly the Lord said to him, “Leave the dead to bury their own dead; but go thou and publish abroad the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:59, 60). He had yet to learn the absolute supremacy of the One who said to him, “Follow me.”

CORBAN

“Corban” is a Hebrew, or rather an Aramaic, word whose equivalent in Greek is , which means a gift. In the Old Testament the word is used in connection with the service of the law, and is translated “offering” and “oblation” (Leviticus 2:1, 5; Numbers 7:35). “Corban” was applied to the offering especially in the aspect of its dedication to Jehovah. In this sense the word was applied at a later day to the sacred treasure of the temple; and to that consecrated store the chief priests decided that Judas' pieces of silver might not be added (Matthew 27:6). Compare the distinction made by the Pharisees between the temple, and the gold of the temple, and between the altar and the gift on the altar (Matthew 23:16-22).

Apparently the Jews were urged to contribute dedicatory offerings to the temple service, and out of an inordinate zeal on the part of the teachers which was not according to truth, the traditional custom arose. If a man said to his father or mother, “That wherein thou mightest have been profited by me is Corban,” that is Given to God, his goods were regarded as consecrated by this formula to the service of God, and, according to the tradition of the elders, might not be thenceforth diverted to the relief of his parents. It is said that the scribes held that if this word was pronounced over any of a man's possessions he was exempt from the performance of any natural duty, even though he withheld the goods temporarily from the service of the temple. This accords with our Lord's word, “Ye suffer him no more to do aught for his father or mother.” A writer commenting on this practice of the Jewish leaders remarks, “A more striking instance of the subversion of a command of God by the tradition of men can hardly be conceived.”

But the Lord's warning to the hypocrites of that day has its application equally to the conditions of the present day. “May we all bear in mind how deeply we need to watch against the spirit of tradition. Wherever we impose with absolute authority a thing that does not proceed from God Himself, it is a tradition. It is all very well to take counsel of one another, and it is not a happy feature to oppose others needlessly; but it is of all consequence that we should strengthen each other in this, that nothing but the word of God is entitled or ought to govern the conscience. It will be found that when we let go this principle, and allow a rule to come in and become binding, so that what is not done according to that rule is regarded as a sin, we are gone from the authority of the word of God to that of tradition, perhaps without knowing it ourselves.

“The Lord here shows convincingly where these Pharisees and scribes were. They had never considered that their principles of Corban made void the word of God. But let us, too, bear in mind that after we have had any Divine truth pressed upon us we are never the same as before. We may have been simply and honestly ignorant then, but we are thenceforth under the increased yoke of God's known mind, which we either receive in faith or reject, and harden ourselves by rejecting in unbelief. Therefore, let us look to the Lord, that we may cherish a good conscience. This supposes that we have nothing before us which we cleave to, or allow inconsistent with God's will. Let us desire and value nothing but what is according to His word, lest peradventure any of us be left where Christ leaves these Pharisees, under the terrible censure that they made void the word of God through their tradition. If but one example was taken up it was a sufficient example of the things they were doing continually.”

THE WORD OF MOSES

In a day of declining regard for the great law-giver of Israel, it is instructive to recognize the manner in which our Lord paid honor on this occasion to Moses, as the accredited representative of God in his time. Even in quoting from the decalogue itself, written as it was by the finger of God upon the tables of stone, Moses is named as the honored medium through whom the law received in the holy mount was promulgated. The Lord declared to the Pharisees, “Moses said, Honor thy father and thy mother.”

We are not to suppose that the Lord in any sense detracted from the purely divine origin of the law. On the contrary it is dear that Moses was at the same time presented as the mediator between God and His people. This we may see by comparing this passage with its parallel in Matthew. The report of the words of Jesus there given is, “God said, Honor thy father and mother” (Matthew 15:4. R.V.). Both records are, of course, true, the full statement of our Lord being that (1) God spake and (2) He spake by the mouth of His servant Moses. Each evangelist embodied that portion of the Lord's utterance which was most consonant with the purpose of the particular narrative. Matthew shows that the tradition of the elders was in conflict with the words of God, while Mark lays stress upon its discordance with the sayings of the law-giver of the nation.

Remembering that the Second Evangelist is used by the inspiring Spirit to portray the humble servitude of Jesus, we discern a beautiful touch of His perfections in this part of the narrative. The Prophet's championship of the truth of God was undertaken in meek unassertiveness of His own personal glory and authority. As the Servant of Jehovah He did not strive nor cry, but paid, if we may so express it, a dignified deference to Moses that former servant of God (Revelation 15:3), whom He was to resemble according to the prophecy of Moses himself (Deuteronomy 18:15; Acts 3:22). God had honored Moses, as the scriptures testified, and the Son of man honored him too, teaching us also, by a quiet example, to render honor to whom honor is due. The Lord maintained that honor must be paid to the word of Moses, while He condemned utterly the word of the elders. The word of Moses was the word of God (cp. ver. 10 with ver. 13), while the tradition of the elders was but the word of man, and more unreliable than that—of misguided man.

The Lord approved of whatever was true and commendable in the belief and conduct of those who came within the scope of His ministry, and He fully recognized their professed regard for Moses. He said to the people, “The scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat” (Matthew 23:2), and they said of themselves, “We are Moses' disciples. We know that God spake unto Moses” (John 9:28, 29). But on account of the hypocrisy of the religious leaders, the word of God became, as in this instance, the instrument of their condemnation. They misused their boasted privileges to the destruction of their souls. Having Moses and the prophets, they had in them sufficient witness of the eternal verities to compass their salvation if they would but hear them (Luke 16:29-31). In the holy oracles were also written the “things concerning” the sufferings and the glories of the Messiah, as Jesus Himself showed both before and after His resurrection (Luke 18:31; 24:27, 44). But in this very thing their blindness was made manifest. Professing to believe Moses, they failed to perceive Him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets wrote. Moses accordingly became, not their savior, but their judge, as the Lord said to them, “Think not that I will accuse you to the Father; there is one that accuseth you, even Moses on whom ye have set your hope. For if ye believed Moses ye would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?” (John 5:45-47, R.V.).

W. J. H.

Studies in Mark, Mark 7:9-13: (59) Word of God and Tradition of Men

7:9-13

“And he said unto them, Full well do ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your tradition. For Moses said, Honor thy father and thy mother; and, He that speaketh evil of father or mother, let him die the death: but ye say, If a man shall say to his father or his mother, That wherewith thou mightest have been profited by me is Corban, that is to say, Given to God, ye no longer suffer him to do aught for his father or his mother; making void the word of God by your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things ye do” (7:9-13, R.V.).

On the ground of its purely human origin, the Lord declared the true relative value of the rite of purification by water, of which the Pharisees were making such improper use in their doctrines. Moreover, He went further than the condemnation of this particular item of their religious practice, which was not authorized by the law, and showed that the whole system of Judaism was corrupt and hypocritical before God. Using the written word for their convictions, the Lord adduced the testimony of Isaiah the prophet to show that they, the favored people, outwardly nigh by national election, were far off from God in heart and spirit, as much so as the Gentiles, who were without law, being both Jews and Gentiles, equally under sin, as the Holy Spirit subsequently demonstrated to all men by means of the pen of the apostle Paul (Romans 3:9).

In the words cited at the head of this article, the Lord of light and truth pronounced solemn judgment upon the profession made by the Jews that they were the accepted worshippers of God. In the divine estimation they were but dead formalists, and, worse even than this, they were active rebels against the truth of God. For, under an assumption of excessive zeal for the commandment of God, they destroyed its real value by the adoption of human tradition, which was in effect an evil and destructive substitute for the holy law.

On consideration of the Lord's words, it will be perceived that His charge here, as elsewhere in the Gospels, was that in the matter of the possession of the law, which was their proud boast, the Jews has corrupted themselves. The Pharisees are accused, not of a riot of their carnal passions, but of religious hypocrisy. The law was in their mouths, but not in their hearts.

It is strikingly true that in the general decadence of their national history the custody of the living oracles of God, retained in their original purity by the Jews, constituted their chief remaining glory. What other institution for their boasting remained to them at that time? The temple of Solomon had long been desolated, and the building then standing on Mount Zion was erected by that foul Edomite tyrant, Herod the Great. The Aaronic office was occupied by two high-priests of evil fame, Annas and Caiaphas. The sacred character of the Levitical services and of the round of feasts and sacrifices was obliterated by the violent contentions of those powerful fanatics—the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The land of promise itself groaned beneath the iron yoke of a heathen empire, and many of the seed of Abraham were scattered as strangers in strange lands.

But while it might be truly said that Ichabod was written upon the people and upon their ancient institutions, they, in spite of all their vicissitudes and of their spiritual declension, had faithfully preserved the manuscripts of the law, the prophets and the psalms. And the apostle was careful to note the fact of this sacred trust when summing up the respective responsibilities of the Jew and the Gentile and their failures therein, at the tribunal of divine inquiry. Paul made no reference to Mosaic ritual or sacrifice; but, having asked, “What advantage then hath the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision?” replied: “Much every way; first of all that they were intrusted with the oracles of God” (Romans 3:1, 2). There were, undoubtedly, other privileges, some of which are enumerated later in the same Epistle (Romans 9:4, 5). But while much had been debilitated or lost, the Jew had some ground for his boast that the law had been maintained intact in spite of its oft-threatened destruction. If there was no Shekinah of glory in the Holy of holies, the voices of the prophets were still read in the synagogue every sabbath day.

It is sad to reflect therefore that the Jews, highly-favored as the custodians of the word of God and jealous to conserve its every jot and tittle, should stultify this priceless benefit by human glosses so that its inward power and sweetness were no longer known and enjoyed.

THE TERMS OF CONDEMNATION USED BY OUR LORD

Collating the words of Matthew with those of Mark, we find that this sin of the Jews is described by our Lord in a fourfold manner. By the undue prominence given to their tradition (a) concerning the rite of purification, and (b) concerning the manner of release from filial obligations, He declared that they had—

(1) laid aside the commandment of God (Mark 7:8);

(2) rejected the commandment of God (Mark 7:9);

(3) transgressed the commandment of God (Matthew 15:3);

(4) made void the word of God (Matthew 15:6; Mark 7:13).

And by these four terms employed with reference to this particular transgression, there appears to be indicated an ascending scale of error. At the point of departure, as it were, the commandment is (1) left on one side or ignored; it is then (2) rejected and its claims refused; next, the commandment is (3) traversed and violated; while, lastly, it is (4) rendered ineffective and void by the substitution of a human ordinance.

Let us briefly consider each of these terms.

(1) The Lord said to the Pharisees, “Ye leave [or, lay aside] the commandment of God and hold fast the tradition of men.” In these words is to be traced the primary cause of the failure of the nation as a faithful exponent of the divine ordinances of old. Theirs was not a sudden and violent rebellion against the authority of God, but a quiet and gradual declension from their fidelity. Turning aside, almost imperceptibly at first, they had wandered out of the way of God's commandments. Their regard and reverence for the expressed will of God was allowed to weaken, and they strayed from the green pastures and the still waters, forgetting His precepts. Forsaking the voice of Jehovah their Shepherd, they followed the voice of strangers. Slipping away from the commandments of God and leaving undone the weighty matters of the law, judgment and mercy and faith, they clung with the greater tenacity to the tradition of men (Matthew 23:23).

A similar departure is a continual menace to the people of God. Silent deterioration and decay creep upon the Church as they stole upon Israel. The assembly at Ephesus did not make a formal and deliberate renunciation of her profession, but she did, nevertheless leave her first love (Revelation 2:4), as the Jews “left” the authority of God's command. Individually, we are still exposed to the same danger, and we should take to ourselves the warning of the apostle to the Hebrews: “Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things that were heard, lest haply we drift away from them” (Hebrews 2:1 R.V.).

Further, these boastful zealots had rejected the commandment of God. The sense of the verb used in the original appears to be that of slighting or disregarding the claims the law had upon them, as if they were unworthy of recognition (cp. Hebrews 10:28, Gk.). The Lord also used the same word in His address to the Seventy with reference to their preaching, saying to them, “He that despiseth [rejecteth] you despiseth [rejecteth] me, and he that despiseth [rejecteth] me, despiseth [rejecteth] him that sent me” (Luke 10:16). On another occasion Jesus spoke of one who rejected Him and received not His sayings (John 12:48).

These were the words of Him who was Himself the despised and rejected of men, by whom He was regarded as “a root out of a dry ground.” There was thus on the part of the nation no recognition of the claims either of Himself or of His words. The rulers formally refused to accept His teaching as the “counsel of God.” Luke says of the Pharisees and the lawyers, in contrast with the people that they “rejected” for themselves the counsel of God (Luke 7:29, 30).

We see therefore, that those of New Testament days who ignored the word of Jehovah through Moses of old, also ignored the word of Jehovah spoken by the Son of God. Lifted up with pride of heart, they despised the commandment of the living God. Such is also the spirit of those condemned by the apostle for setting aside their “first faith” (1 Timothy 5:12), as well as of those who set at naught dominion and rail at dignities (Jude 8), the same Greek word occurring in these passages, all of which show how prevalent is this tendency of the human heart.

Clearly then, to despise the commandments of God is an indication of greater intensity of opposition to His will than to lay them aside. And those who despised Moses' law died without mercy on the word of two or three witnesses (Hebrews 10:28).

We now come to the third stage of departure from God, viz.-that of positive transgression. In this charge the Lord made use of their own term addressed by them to Him. The scribes had said, “Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders?” The Lord answered by asking them, “Why do ye also transgress the commandments of God because of your tradition?” Transgression is that form of sin which involves the willful disregard of known instructions; for where no law is [i.e., no prescribed rule] there is no transgression (Romans 4:15). The Pharisees were guilty of transgression, for while they raised the question of the violation of a human tradition, the Lord brought home to them the startling indictment that in and by means of that very tradition they who boasted in the law had become transgressors of the law (Romans 2:23, R.V.). In their inordinate zeal for the human innovation they have dishonored the law of God, given through angels, every transgression and disobedience of which would receive “a just recompence of reward” (Hebrews 2).

Transgression then, is the fruit of passing by, and then of despising the explicit commandment of God. It is in fact the willful infraction of a known rule of conduct. Such was the form of the sin of Adam and Eve (Romans 5:14; 1 Timothy 2:14). Our first parents violated the single restriction laid upon them in the garden of Eden, Adam not being deceived, but partaking of the forbidden fruit with his eyes open to the fact of the disobedience involved in the act.

Transgression, therefore, constitutes a grave and serious offense. It is the sin of the servant who, knowing his master's will, nevertheless disobeys, and on that account must be punished with many stripes (Lu. 12:47). The sin of Israel was transgression in distinction from the sin of the Gentiles, which is lawlessness. The sin of those who gloried in divers washings and in votive offerings to their temple, but who in these very things contravened God's holy law, was also transgression. And by that transgression they not only dishonored their parents but God also (Romans 2:23).

Fourthly, these formalists among the Jews had disannulled the word of God by their tradition. The Lord had made three previous references to the “commandment,” viz. to God's precise and definite injunctions. These He declared they had (1) neglected, (2) rejected, and (3) transgressed. He further referred to the divine oracles as “the word of God” (see also John 10:35; Romans 9:6), and charged them with canceling it or making it void by their tradition. This change of designation for the law is significant. We are carried back to the Author of the Scriptures, which are the communication of His mind and will concerning men. The “word of God” expresses the spiritual intent of the “ten words,” for instance. It points not so much to the letter of the law, as to its inmost interpretation—its spirit. Thus, by this expression the Lord showed that, in addition to the transgression of God's commandment, their tradition rendered void or disannulled the essential mind and meaning of His communications to them.

It was possible, we learn, for the letter of the law to be exceeded, while its spirit was maintained. This the Lord enunciated in connection with His own acts of healing on the sabbath day. But the scribes were guilty of the infraction of both the word and the commandment of God. The two terms applied to the divine communications are distinguished elsewhere in the New Testament. And the greater depth and fullness of the former may be observed in a passage of the Gospel of John (14:21-23). Herein we are instructed that to keep the word of Christ is evidence of greater fidelity than to keep His commandments, and the more faithful correspondence to the Master's will implied in the former case will receive the greater reward. Of one case the Lord said, “He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me.” This is commendation, but not of such a high degree as that awarded in the second case. In this instance the Lord promised the signal honor and felicity that the Father and the Son would dwell with the one keeping His word: “If a man love me he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.” Keeping the commandments is a proof of obedience; but keeping His word is a proof of devotion.

On reflection upon our Lord's words to the Pharisees, it is startling to learn that it is possible for puny man to render ineffective the word of the living God. We know that word is eternal, immutable, “settled in the heavens,” its stability exceeding that of the heavens and the earth. Its inward power is illustrated by the figure of the living and incorruptible seed. This is its true and unique character; and yet, such is the seeming paradox of the truth, as expressed in a notable parable of our Lord's, birds of the air can carry it away, the sun can wither it, and thorns, springing up, can choke it.

(To be continued)

Studies in Mark, Mark 7:1-8: (58) Vain Ablutions, Continued

7:1-8

This may be the explanation, but whatever the Jews thought of Pilate's act, they accepted full, responsibility. Whether it reminded them of the provision of the law in the case of an uncertain homicide (Deuteronomy 21:6) or not, they cried out, in reckless hardihood, “His blood be on us and on our children.” Theirs therefore was the greater guilt, though the Gentiles were not exonerated, as the Lord said to Pilate, “He that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin.”

In conclusion, let us observe that whatever else is not fully established, it is certain that material water could never remove the defilement of the Jew, nor the blood-guiltiness of the Gentile (Job 9:30, 31). And the appeal of God still goes forth, “O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from. wickedness, that thou mayest be saved. How long shall thine evil thoughts lodge within thee?” (Jeremiah 4:14). “Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes” (Isaiah 1:16). “Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double-minded” (James 4:8). But there can be no real national response until they look to Him whom they pierced. Then will they mourn for Him. And “in that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and uncleanness” (Zechariah 13:1). Then Jehovah Himself will undertake their purification, as He promised long ago to do, saying, “I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness and from all your idols, will I cleanse you” (Ezek. 36:25).

W. J. H.

Studies in Mark, Mark 7:1-8: (57) Vain Ablutions

7:1-8

“And there are gathered together unto him the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, which had come from Jerusalem, and had seen that some of his disciples ate their bread with defiled, that is, unwashen, hands. For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands diligently, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders: and when they come from the market place, except they wash themselves, they eat not: and many other things there be, which they have received to hold, washings of cups, and pots, and brasen vessels. And the Pharisees and the scribes ask him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with defiled hands? And he said unto them, Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, hypocrites, as it is written,

This people honoureth me with their lips,

But their heart is far from me.

But in vain do they worship me,

Teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men.

Ye leave the commandment of God, and hold fast the tradition of men” (7:1-8, R.V.).

Attention has already been directed in previous papers to the manner in which a general opposition to the progress of the gospel of the kingdom was foreshadowed by the wind-storm which swept down upon the apostolic band of its preachers during their voyage across the Lake of Galilee. The adverse forces depicted by this sign-miracle possess the distinguishing feature of being external to the kingdom itself. The winds and the waves therefore would be figurative of violent powers of evil which would assail the “little flock” of disciples from without.

We now come to a section in this Gospel which still deals with threatening dangers, but points in this case to that form of evil which would arise from within, that is, to an insidious and corrupting foe to the truth of God which in its attacks would be masked under the guise of piety. Hypocrisy, garbed in exceptional religious zeal and austere devotion, had even then corrupted the Jewish nation beyond remedy, and the record forewarns that a similar dead formalism would not fail to envelop Christendom—that form of the kingdom of God which would immediately succeed the earthly people in its responsibility to maintain the light of testimony for God among men. Man's natural heart, the ever-present and ever-active fountain of evil, would then, as it had done in the generation of that day when Christ was present, elevate to the seat of supreme authority its own deceitful imaginations, displacing the commandments of God by the traditions of men.

It is not to be imagined that evil is any the less effectual in destroying the accredited witness for God because its attacks are subtle and not openly violent. The great enemy of the truth adopts tactics of both kinds, seeking either to affright the followers of Christ as a “roaring lion,” or to insinuate his deadly errors among them in the guise of an “angel of light.” And we may remark for our personal profit how the Lord on this occasion showed that a punctilious formalism expressed in the form of an inordinate piety was, even then, nullifying the authority of God in the house of Israel.

THE ACCUSATIONS OF THE PHARISEES

The disciples were accused of eating bread with unwashed hands. This criticism of their behavior was made by certain Pharisees and scribes who had come up to Galilee from Jerusalem. Among the simple and unlettered peasantry (John 7:48, 49), they assumed the professional role of authoritative exponents of the law of Moses, and of the whole body of precepts contained in the Old Testament scriptures. In the exercise of this judicial capacity they condemned the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom of God as being contrary to the first principles of Jewish knowledge. Confronted with the undeniable fact that multitudes of the Galilean folk were flocking to hear the Prophet of Nazareth, they had come down from the center of religious learning and zeal formally to investigate the claims and teaching of Jesus, and to denounce the preacher and the doctrine as being contrary to the approved standards of the Sanhedrin.

Such official inquiries with regard to the ministry of our Lord seem to have occurred at intervals throughout the term of His ministry in Galilee. It is recorded that on previous occasions He had been charged by the Pharisees and the scribes as follows—

(1) With blasphemy, for pronouncing the forgiveness of sins (Mark 2:7).

(2) With keeping evil company, because He ate with publicans and sinners (Mark 2:16).

(3) With neglecting the customary fasts (Matthew 9; Mark 3:18).

(4) With desecration of the sabbath day (Mark 2:24).

(5) With being possessed by Beelzebub, and casting out demons by him (Mark 3:22).

These charges were to all appearance serious, and involved questions of godliness, such as, (1) blasphemy, (2) “sitting in the seat of the scornful,” (3) avoidance of the self-discipline of the fast, (4) disregard of Jehovah's holy day, and (5) direct service to the prince of the demons. Every one of these false and wicked accusations the patient Servant of God refuted with gentle and holy wisdom.

The indictment now made against Him was founded on a trivial point in itself, and seems to have been intended to show how Jesus came short of the standard of devoted sanctity practiced by the Pharisees and scribes. These pietists would not permit themselves to eat bread with unwashed hands. They found that some of the disciples of the Lord did so, and in this particular they therefore fell below the conventional standards of religious practice established among the Jews by their religious chiefs. “For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands diligently, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders.”

The charge made against the Lord on this occasion appears to have arisen mainly out of His practice of mingling with the crowds in the exercise of His ministry of teaching and healing, accompanied by His disciples. At the close of the previous chapter, these activities of divine

mercy are summarized and described. Wheresoever the Servant of Jehovah was to be found-in country, or village, or town—the people brought their sick into the marketplaces, that they might touch the border of His garment and be healed (Mark 6:56). In this service of healing the disciples may well have borne an active part. And it was after this promiscuous intercourse with many classes of sick and needy folk that the Pharisees, having seen that some of the disciples ate bread with defiled, that is, with unwashed hands, found fault. Such an omission, they asserted, was in direct contrast with the tradition of the elders and with their own practice, for when they came from the marketplace where people congregated most, they would not eat until they had washed themselves (vers. 3, 4; cf. vi. 56, R.V.).

The pious Jews were careful to observe this ceremony whether they were conscious of having contracted defilement or not. But the followers of the Lord deliberately came into contact with all sorts of persons in the exercise of their office, in the marketplaces and elsewhere, and yet failed to purify themselves according to the recognized ritual. The Pharisees therefore embraced the opportunity, and sought by means of this charge to depreciate the value of the services of the apostles, since the latter openly disregarded the tradition of the elders, and therein fell short of the recognized Jewish canons of piety. On another occasion a similar charge from the same source was made against the Lord Himself (Luke 11:37).

THE JEWS

The evangelist explains that the custom of washing was not peculiar to the sect of the Pharisees, but was common among all the Jews, He says, “For the Pharisees and all the Jews, except they wash their hands diligently, eat not.” In this sentence we have an instance of the use of the term, “Jews,” which is rare in the Synoptic Gospels, while of frequent occurrence in the Gospel of John. In the latter, this term is found about seventy times, but in the first three Gospels only seventeen times; some of these being parallel passages. All four evangelists, however, record Pilate's question to Jesus, “Art thou the King of the Jews?” and also that this title formed part of the superscription placed on the cross.

Of the seventeen occurrences of the word “Jews” in the first three Gospels, twelve of them consist of the title, “King of the Jews,” applied to our Lord

(a) By the wise men of the East (Matthew 2:2).

(b) By Pilate, in the course of the trial (Matt. 27:11; Mark 15:2, 9, 12; Luke 23:3)

(c) By the soldiers (Matt. 27:29; Mark 15:18; Luke 23:37)

(d) By Pilate in the superscription (Matthew 27:37; Mark 15:26; Luke 23:38).

The other occasions in the narratives are of its ordinary historical usage, such as, “among the Jews,” “all the Jews,” “elders of the Jews,” “a city of the Jews,” etc. The passages are the following—Matthew 28:15; Mark 1:5 (Judea); Mark 7:3; Luke 7:3; 23:51.

The term “Jews” does not arise in the divine history until after the deportation of the ten tribes by the king of Assyria. It is then applied to those of the seed of Abraham who continued in the southern part of the land of the promise, under the rule of the descendants of David, and consisted mainly of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin (2 Kings 16:6; 25:25 Chronicles 32:18): The use of the name is specially characteristic of the writings of Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, and Jeremiah in the Old Testament, as it is of the Gospel of John in the New Testament.

Israel is the name connoting the divine promises to the earthly people, and the future day of their national blessing during Messiah's reign is associated with this name. It is to the Israelites that pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises (Romans 9:4). And before the millennial day, Jehovah will bring the children of Israel from among the nations, and Joseph and Judah shall be one nation, and the sure mercies of David shall be their portion forever (Ezek. 37). So shall all Israel be saved, and not the Jews only.

THE WASHING OF HANDS1

The Jews had fallen into the prevalent and perilous snare of performing their acts of divine service for the sight and approbation of their fellows. They were attracted by the instant recompense which is “awarded to a man by his friends and neighbors for deeds of a religious nature” done under their notice. For men readily and unstintedly avow their appreciation of acts of almsgiving to which their attention is directed by a flourish of trumpets, of prayers performed at the street-corners in public view, and of tithes of goods voluntarily extended in scope to include even the lesser herbs of the garden. The synagogue and the street alike observe and generously appraise such deeds. And the Pharisee of every age seeks with much pains to obtain this praise of man rather than the praise of God. Mostly he is successful in his pursuit, and secures the adulation of his fellows, according to the words of the Psalmist, “Men will praise thee when thou doest well to thyself” (Psalm 49:18). Herein, as the Lord said, the Pharisee receives his reward, i.e. the glory that comes from men, but misses that glory which comes from above, which the Father who sees in secret will bestow upon those who serve Him in spirit and in truth.

In His reply to the Pharisees the Lord did not pronounce any decision as to the legitimacy of their practices, but showed that they had invested the rite of washing with a spiritual significance and value which were unwarrantable. For the alleged principle involved was one not of physical cleanliness on sanitary grounds, but of ceremonial pollution. “They shrank not from dirt, but from defilement.” They considered it possible that they might have come into contact with a Gentile or a tax-gatherer in the public footways. They might have handled something ritually unclean. Their cups might have been touched by the lips of strangers. Their couches might have been used by those who, according to the tradition of the elders, were defiled. These and many other things they had “received to hold,” their elaborate ritual for maintaining “purity” being enforced by them with the inflexibility of a divine mandate.

Writers on Jewish customs tell us how elaborate the traditional rite became.

“It was laid down that the hands were first to be washed clean. The tips of the ten fingers were then joined and lifted up, so that the water ran down to the elbows, then turned so that it might run off to the ground. Fresh water was poured on them as they were lifted up, and twice again as they hung down. The washing itself was to be done by rubbing the fist of one hand in the hollow of the other. When the hands were washed before eating they must be held upwards, when after it, downwards, but so that the water should not run beyond the knuckles. The vessel must be held first in the right, then in the left hand; the water was to be poured first on the right and then on the left hand; and at every third time the words repeated:

‘Blessed art Thou who hast given us the command to wash the hands.' It was keenly disputed whether the cup of blessing or the handwashing should come first; whether the towel should be laid on the table or on the couch; and whether the table was to be cleared before the final washing or after it.”

The answer of the Lord to the question of the Pharisees stamped this rite with its true character. In essence, it was a commandment of men, not of God. And their ablutions had an external effect only, not an internal. The six stone water-pots, each holding about twenty gallons, standing empty during the marriage banquet at Cana of Galilee, illustrate what ample provision it was customary to make for the sacramental purification of the guests (John 2:6). Yet to the Omniscient eye, this ritual so scrupulously enforced by the Jewish elders contemplated nothing further than the purity of the hands and of domestic utensils, the outside of the cup and the platter (Matthew 23:25), while it ignored the condition of the heart, that ever-flowing, and over-flowing spring of pollution.

DIVERS WASHINGS UNDER THE LAW

In the Mosaic ritual various ablutionary rites were definitely prescribed, and the brazen laver, which was a prominent feature of the court of the tabernacle, was an abiding witness to the necessity of cleansing by water before there could be approach to God in sacrificial worship. The holocaust or whole burnt offering, particularly, was to be purified thoroughly by water before it could become upon the altar a fire-offering of a sweet savor unto Jehovah. And by other similar ceremonies, including the washing of garments (Leviticus 13:6; 14:8), the nation was taught symbolically that the removal of defilement was an essential preparation for intercourse with God. See also Exodus 30:17-21; and compare Psalm 26:6.

But these ritualistic performances, while they were based on divine authority transmitted through the mediator, Moses, were imposed for a limited period only. Types and shadows of deep moral and spiritual realities, they constituted as a system “a parable for the present time,” looking forward in their typical scope and application unto the time when the promised Christ should come. As ceremonies of divine origin, they were insufficient to perfect the conscience of the worshipper, the entire scheme, with its “meats and drinks and divers washings” being but ordinances of the flesh, imposed until the time of rectification (Hebrews 9:9, 10). And even the Psalms and the Prophets united to teach how inefficient were the ceremonies apart from the inward change of the worshipper (Psalm 51:16, 17).

There had arisen, however, at the time of our Lord, a foreign accretion upon this body of Mosaic rites. It was now enjoined (but not through angels, by the hand of an appointed mediator, as the law at Sinai was) that men must wash before eating after visiting the marketplaces, and that cups and pots, and brazen vessels must be ceremonially cleansed.

These injunctions were founded upon the opinions of the elders of Israel, and, by a spiritual authority unwarrantably assumed by the rulers, were made binding upon the people equally with the commandments of God. Sitting in Moses' seat, the scribes and Pharisees invented these heavy burdens “grievous to be borne” which, without mercy, they bound upon the people's shoulders.

This punctilious but misdirected zeal was founded upon hollow pretense, which the Lord of truth and grace unsparingly exposed (Matthew 23). Those who outwardly appeared so righteous unto men were inwardly full of hypocrisy and iniquity. To the pure and fiery eyes of heavenly holiness, they were neglecting the weightier matters of the law of God-judgment, mercy and faith, while insisting upon trivialities of conduct which were but human in their origin. The spirit of the divine commandments was ignored, while their authority was supplemented and therein usurped by the tradition of man. The Pharisees had forgotten the solemn warning through Moses of old: “Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you” (Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32). Into this snare of meddling with God's word, man of every age is liable to fall; hence we find in the conclusion of the Apocalypse, similar warnings addressed to any who should add to, or take away from, the words of the prophecy of that book (Revelation 22:18, 19).

The particular sin of the Jews condemned in our chapter was that of adding to God's word. Legal ablutions were definitely prescribed in the Pentateuch, and had their temporary use as well as their pictorial significance. The error of the Pharisees and of all the Jews consisted of the extension of those rites beyond the provisions of the law, and also of the merciless condemnation by them of every breach of their man-made rules with reference to purification by water.

HYPOCRISY IN DIVINE THINGS

The Lord did not reply to the Pharisees in His own authority, but condemned the cavilers by a citation from the prophecy of Isaiah. He did not discuss with them the legality of this particular tradition, but brought the written word of God to bear upon their spiritual state. They were manifesting an undeniable zeal, but it was not according to God. With much earnestness they were going about to establish their own righteousness by works which were outside the Mosaic ritual. They were deceiving both themselves and others. And the Lord said to them, “Well did Isaiah prophesy concerning you, hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men.”

This prophecy of Isaiah was delivered at a time when religious formalism pervaded the life of the people. Their land was menaced. Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, threatened the destruction of Jerusalem. Jehovah for His name's sake promised to frustrate this purpose of the enemy (29:7, 8), but the prophet did not conceal from the people their terrible moral condition in His sight. There had been an outward cleansing from the abominations of idolatry. During the reign of Hezekiah there had been a considerable reformation. There was a suppression of open idol-worship (2 Chronicles 31:1), and a revival of the passover, and of the sacrifices, and of the temple services.

Thus there was a general outward conformity to the provisions of their ancient law, but, alas, to the eye of Jehovah this was but a form of piety without the power. The prophet declared that a spirit of deep sleep was upon them and their rulers and their prophets, and the vision of Jehovah was a sealed book to the learned and to the unlearned alike. And the Lord said, “Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear towards me is taught by the precept of men: therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people, even a marvelous work and a wonder: and the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid” (Isaiah 29:13, 14).

Thus in Isaiah's day there was an outward regard among the people of Judah for the law of Moses, and for the worship of God, but no inward reverence for Jehovah Himself. In the Lord's day it was so again with the people. Their house was swept of idols and garnished with “pious”

deeds, but it was an empty shrine. Though God was on their tongues, He was not in their thoughts. Hence the Lord delivered this solemn warning to, those who were walking in a vain show. How could the lip-service of the Pharisees, and the eye-service of the men-pleasers be acceptable with Him who looks not on the outward appearance, but judges the heart?

It will be seen that two evils are indicated for condemnation in this citation-

(1) Insincerity before God—honoring Him with the lip, but not regarding Him in the heart.

(2) Substitution of human authority for divine, seeking to worship Him after the commandments of men rather than according to His own will.

Into one or both of these pitfalls man in his religious service is liable to fall. For the person who forgets the Omniscience of the God to whom he comes is also likely to forget the supreme authority which belongs to Him. “He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Hebrews 11:6). When the Pharisee, praying in the temple, said, “God, I thank thee I am not as other men are,” his lips betrayed the fact that his heart was far from Him who desires truth in the inward parts. But the man who had learned by bitter experience to have high thoughts of God and low thoughts of self, said in the presence of the Lord, “Thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee” (John 21:17). And Simon Peter's heart and lips having been brought into unison as a worshipping servant of the Lord, he was in a fit spiritual condition, recognizing the authority of His Master, to receive after such a confession His command to feed His sheep and His lambs.

We may be sure that the poor and contrite spirit trembling at the divine word will not mistake the commandments of men for the commandments of God. And we may guard ourselves from the twofold danger specified in the citation from Isaiah (1) by that self-discipline which tends to keep the soul in a, true sense of God's greatness and of man's unworthiness, and (2) by unqualified subjection to the scripture, which is our sole guide to the revealed will of God for man.

PILATE'S HAND-WASHING

Before leaving this section we may briefly refer to the striking public act of the Roman governor before he pronounced sentence that Jesus should be crucified. This took place after the proposal of the procurator to release Jesus instead of Barabbas had been refused by the priests and the people. “So when Pilate saw that he prevailed nothing, but rather that a tumult was arising, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this righteous man: see ye to it. And all the people answered and said, His blood be on us and on our children. Then released he unto them Barabbas: but Jesus he scourged and delivered to be crucified” (Matthew 27:24; 26, R.V.).

Scripture is silent with regard to the inmost motives of the unjust judge in performing this futile ceremony. Since, however, Pilate was the accredited representative of the responsible Gentile authority in the tragedy of that day, we may seek whatever light is thrown upon his conduct by the narrated events. It is unquestionable that he sought by this means to transfer from himself the blame for the crucifixion of Jesus. This much is implied in his language: “I am innocent of the blood of this righteous man,” and this significance is confirmed by the united rejoinder of the Jewish multitude, “His blood be on us and on our children.”

But amongst other inquiries we may ask why he sought to emphasize his words in this particular manner-taking water and washing his hands very assiduously () in the presence of the assembled people? Did he adopt a symbolical practice prevalent in his own Gentile lands? or did he imitate the rite of purification so widely practiced in the land of the Jews?

Moreover, what prompted Pilate to this action? Was he full of forebodings that this was no ordinary magisterial inquiry? and was his conscience uneasy with regard to his own share in the matter? Twice in his judicial capacity he had definitely declared of Jesus, “I find no crime in him” (John 19:4, 6). Now, sensible of his own weak inconsistency, he may have sought by this public avowal to silence the accusations of his own conscience, awakened by the injustice of condemning to death a man in whom he could find “no cause of death.”

Again, the warning of his wife increased the apprehensions of Pilate, and he may have hoped by an open disclaimer of responsibility to satisfy the scruples raised in the minds of them both. She had “suffered many things” that day in a dream because of Jesus, and her message to the governor was, “Have thou nothing to do with that righteous man.” We cannot but note the echo of her warning in Pilate's official declaration. The wife testified that the prisoner was a “righteous man,” and Pilate re-affirmed this verdict when he said, “I am innocent of the blood of this righteous man.”

Further, it has been suggested that Pilate adopted this public device with the intention of making a final and effectual appeal to the eyes as well as to the ears of the infuriated Jews. He had made previous efforts to release Jesus, expostulating with them upon the baseless nature of the charges they were bringing against the prisoner, and their final reply to these efforts was, “If thou release this man; thou art not Caesar’s friend.” Pilate, seeing a tumult arising, yielded to their clamor, but sought by this public sign to impress upon them that the entire responsibility of the crucifixion would be upon them. In case the imperial government of Rome should institute judicial inquiries regarding this criminal deed, it was to be understood thereby that the Jews, not Pilate, must bear the political penalty. Before the eyes of all assembled, the governor washed his hands of all complicity.

But if Pilate hoped to influence the people by this dramatic appeal to their fears of the pitiless power of their conquerors, he was mistaken. The people were in no sense deterred by the prospect of any civil punishment to which they might be subjected by their cruel rulers, for they answered him unanimously, recklessly defying all consequences, saying, “His blood be on us and our children.”

Still remembering that we can do little more than suggest what were Pilate's real motives, we recall that he had displayed the characteristic Roman contempt for Jewish customs, and that he loved nothing better than to outrage where he might the susceptibilities of the people whom he governed. It was he who mingled the blood of the Galileans with their sacrifices (Luke 13:1), thus adding sacrilege to massacre. And on this very morning he did not conceal his scorn for this vassal people. After his examination of Jesus in the Pretorium he brought Him forth to the people assembled without the hall, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe (John 19:5). It was as if he had said, This is your Prophet, This is your King. And by this parade of the Teacher who had become so popular in Judea and Galilee Pilate mocked at the people whom he knew were eager above all things to throw off the yoke of the Romans, and to be governed by one of their own nation. In the same spirit of cynical disdain, he wrote the superscription for the cross, “This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews,” refusing to modify the terms of the

taunt, which in their very protest the Pharisees had to confess they admitted to be such.

The governor detested the people with all the strength of his Roman pride, and the attitude of the Jews at this inquiry brought Pilate into renewed contact with the irritating exclusiveness of their religious practices. They had led Jesus to him from Caiaphas, but they would not enter his palace lest they should be defiled, and be thereby prevented from observing the great festival of the passover. It became necessary, therefore, for the Roman governor to go out to them to hear their charges. Such a concession would be galling to the Roman soldier accustomed to compel unqualified homage to the Imperial eagle whose representative he was. Who were these Jews who affected to become polluted by entering the halls of imperial justice? Moreover he well knew that this was no isolated instance of their fanaticism. He was not ignorant that every time they returned home from the marketplace they were in the habit of washing themselves that they might be freed from any possible defilement contracted by contact with the Gentile. This domestic rite of the nation was therefore a daily witness by the Jews to the “uncleanness” of the uncircumcised Gentile. The governor saw an opportunity for retaliation. In solemn irony he washed his hands before this multitude too prudish to enter his palace lest they should be defiled. If the Jew claimed to cleanse himself by water from the taint of uncircumcision, could not the Gentile in like manner rid himself by water of the guilt of the blood of a righteous man condemned by him under protest?

[W. J. H.]

(Continued from page 202, VOL X., N.S.)

(To be continued.)

Studies in Mark, Mark 6:53-56: (56) The Allegorical Aspect

6:53-56

Mark represents, in similar terms, the hard case of those faithful Jewish preachers struggling against the stormy billows of worldly hate and cruelty. We there read, “For those days shall be tribulation, such as there hath not been the like from the beginning of the creation which God created until now, and never shall be” (Mark 13:10). On the occasion of the tempest the apostles had but just returned from their first tour of gospel preaching in Galilee. It was needful for them to learn that before the kingdom which they were proclaiming would be set up in power, and during the absence of their Master, they would find themselves beset by the most powerful adversaries. May we not, therefore, regard, this storm on the lake as illustrative of the Satanic fury with which the authorities of this world will by-and-by make their onslaught upon the Jewish witnesses of the coming kingdom? But at the same time it is shown that the onslaught will be in vain, for the little flock will find that there is an Intercessor on high and a Deliverer at hand.

(2) In the second place, we cannot but mark the special effect that was exercised by the appearance of Jesus. As soon as the apostles knew their Master, as soon as they, in effect, said, “Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord,” the tempest ceased, the danger was passed, the goal of their hopes and aims was realized. Such was the effect upon the turbulent sea; what was the effect of His appearance on shore? As soon as the inhabitants knew that Jesus was there, they proved Him to be their Deliverer from their sicknesses and from the sorrows that followed in their train. The tree of life was in the garden, and they found no flaming sword to terrify the weak and timid. All who would might eat of its fruit and live, and not die. Thus in Gennesaret a sample was given of the powers of the age to come, only in that future age the tree of life shall not be for Israel only, but its leaves shall be for the healing of the nations also (Rev. 22:1, 2).

The passage forms a striking illustration in miniature of the prophetic words of the sweet psalmist of Israel when he spoke of the, coming of the Blessed One to usher in the great day of peace, and joy: “He shall be as the light of the morning when the sun riseth; a morning without clouds; when the tender grass springeth out of the earth through clear shining after rain” (2 Sam. 23:4, R.V.).

It is beautiful to observe how in this favored land the mercy of the Lord was available for any and for all. They brought their sick for healing wherever they heard He was. It was truly a gospel to the needy people when one said, Lo, here is the Christ; or, Lo, He is there. They found they were free to touch Him and be blessed. And this liberty of access recalls, by force of contrast, Eve's false report of God's word concerning the tree in the garden, when she said, “neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die” (Gen. 3:3). Here the dying touched and lived.

TOUCHING AND SEEING

“Touching” seems more applicable, as a figure, to the faith of a Jew than to the faith of a Christian. It is concerning those who believe on Christ hidden in the heavens that Peter wrote: “whom not having seen, ye love: on whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice greatly with joy unspeakable and full of glory” (I Peter 1:8).

The faith of the future day of the Lord's presence will be associated with an Object of sight and of touch, as it were. It will be of the sort signified by the action of the Jewish women who, when they saw the Lord after His resurrection, “took hold of his feet and worshipped him” (Matt. 28:9). But Mary Magdalene on the same day was instructed by the risen Christ in the exercise of faith of a higher order—faith which requires nothing visible or tangible in its object, but penetrates even unto the Unseen Presence on high. To her the Lord said, “Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my Father” (John 20:17). She was surely to learn from this utterance that earthly relationships with the Messiah were suspended, and heavenly ones about to be established between the ascended Savior and His own.

This faith which introduces us to present heavenly realities is declared to be more blessed than that of Thomas Didymus, who insisted on seeing and touching before he would believe. Thomas would not accept the testimony of the apostolic body that they had seen the Lord. “Except,” he “I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.” This disciple was therefore a representative of the unbelieving class who will not believe on the testimony of others, but who require to see for themselves. Jesus said to him, distinguishing for all time the two orders or degrees of faith, “Because thou hast seen me thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed” (John 20:24.29).

The latter order or character is that of to-day, for we “walk by faith, and not by sight.” The former order is that of the future—the day of the coming of the Lord, when every eye shall see Him, and the Jews particularly shall look on Him whom they pierced (Zech. 12:10; Rev. 1:7). Both classes are happy and privileged, but the Lord, by His words to Thomas, has placed a special mark of approbation and favor upon those who believe on Him in the period of His absence.

PETER WALKING UPON THE WATERS

The incident of Peter leaving the boat and walking in that strange pathway upon the waters along with his Master is not recorded in any of the Gospels except that of Matthew, although the account of the Lord's doing so is to be found in all the four. Strictly, it does not fall within the scope of our present consideration, which is confined to the Second Gospel, but in view of its close historical connection with this section, it may not be unprofitable to seek some enlightenment upon the moral significance of this miracle.

The account of the episode as given in Matthew is as follows— “Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. And Peter answered Him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee upon the waters. And he said, Come. And Peter went down from the boat and walked upon the waters to come to Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink, he cried out, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand and took hold of him, and saith unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? And when they were gone up into the boat, the wind ceased” (Matt. 14:27-32, R.V.).

It must now suffice to draw attention to the main features of this record, and these are twofold. (1) Peter walking on the waters is a triumph of faith over insuperable obstacles of nature; and (2) Peter sinking in the waters is the collapse of nature so soon as faith was replaced by doubt. So far as Peter was concerned, faith was the essential quality which enabled him to occupy this position in humble imitation of his Master.

It will at once be seen that the bold and impulsive apostle by his enterprise stands out in remarkable contrast with his fellows. In the boat they remained in the place of usual security under such circumstances. On the waters Peter had abandoned all earthly means of safety, and was relying exclusively upon the superhuman power of the Lord to sustain him.

The apostle, however, did not take up this position of his own accord, but sought and obtained permission to do so. Jesus had said to them all, “It is I.” Peter answered, “Lord, if it be thou, bid me come to thee upon the waters.” That passionate love was burning within him which caused him on a later occasion to leap from the boat at the sight of his beloved Master upon the shore, and make his way, strong swimmer as he was, to be the first to greet Him (John 21:7).

And now Peter, having recognized the voice of the Good Shepherd, desired to demonstrate before the eyes of all that it was no phantom form which they saw upon the waves, but the One who was all-powerful to sustain and to deliver. At an early day he left his nets at the call of Jesus to follow Him upon the land (Mark 1:18); now he was prepared to leave the boat at his Masters call, and follow Him upon the sea also. The Lord gave the single and sufficient word, “Come"; and the apostle obeyed. In thus abandoning the boat and walking upon the waters to come to Jesus, the apostle did but carry into effect the principles of faithful service laid down by the Lord Himself in another place: “If any man serve me let him follow me: and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honor” (John 12:26).

It is, therefore, true of Peter that he went forth to the Lord in response to His call, “Come"; and He is thus an apt illustration, to that extent, of the believer to-day. This character is also figuratively expressed by the Lord in the parable of the ten virgins,, to whom the cry was, “Behold the bridegroom! Come ye forth to meet him” (Matt. 25:6, R.V.).

In distinction from the other disciples, Peter left the boat while the storm was still raging, and walked upon the waters to Jesus, and returned with Him to the boat; and then the storm ceased—a vivid figure of the return of Christ with His church to bring peace to the troubled earth. Matthew only of the four Evangelists makes specific reference to the church. This we find in his record of Peter's confession of Jesus as the Son of the living God. “Upon this rock,” Christ says, “I will build my church” (Matt. 16:18), It is therefore in keeping with this character, of the First Gospel that it is only in it we have the figure of the church supplied by the same apostle walking on the waters.

It was a great wonder to see Jesus walking in this manner, but it was even a: greater wonder to see Peter “follow His steps.” In the Master there was inherent power to do so; but in Peter there was only imparted power; and that power was imparted to him because he trusted in. the Lord, who afterward said to His disciples, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto the Father” (John 14:12).

Apart from faith, Peter was as another man. upon the waters. And when he considered the fury of the winds and the waves he began to sink, as any man would do. But even when he had lowered himself to the level of those who lack faith, he was not abandoned when he cried out in his extremity, “Lord, save me.” On the contrary, Jesus immediately stretched forth His hand, saying, “O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” The Lord remained faithful to the one who had followed him in obedience to His word, and who had honored Him in this manner by his confidence. This deliverance by the Lord is in. accordance with the words of the apostle Paul, who wrote, “If we are faithless, he abideth faithful; for he cannot deny himself” (2 Tim. 2:13). The Lord was the same both in Peter's triumph and in Peter's failure; the only change was in the disciple into whose heart doubt had crept.

The following extract gives an admirable summary of the wider significance of this incident.

Jesus “sent away the Jewish people, who had surrounded Him during the period of His presence here below. The departure of the disciples, besides its general character, sets before us peculiarly the Jewish remnant. Peter, individually, in coming out of the ship, goes in figure beyond the position of this remnant. He represents that faith which, forsaking the earthly accommodation of the ship, goes out to meet Jesus, who has revealed Himself to it, and walks upon the sea—a bold undertaking, but based on the word of Jesus, ‘Come.'

“Yet remark here that this walk has no other foundation than 'If it be Thou'; that is to say, Jesus Himself. There is no support, no possibility of walking, if Christ be lost sight of. All depends upon Him. There is a known means in the ship; there is nothing but faith, which looks to Jesus, for walking on the water. Man, as mere man, sinks by the very fact of being there. Nothing can sustain itself except that faith which draws from Jesus the strength that is in Him, and which therefore imitates Him. But it is sweet to imitate Him; and one is then nearer to Him, more like Him. This is the true position of the church, in contrast with the remnant in their ordinary character.

“Jesus walks on the water as on the solid ground. He who created the elements as they are could well dispose of their qualities at His pleasure. He permits storms to arise for the trial of our faith. He walks on the stormy wave as well as on the calm. Moreover, the storm makes no difference. He who sinks in the waters does so in the calm as well as in the storm, and he who can walk upon them will do so in the storm as well as in the calm—that is to say, unless circumstances are looked to and so faith fail and the Lord is forgotten.

“For often circumstances make us forget Him where faith ought to enable us to overcome circumstances through our walking by faith in Him who is above them all. Nevertheless, blessed be God! He who walks in His own power upon the water is there to sustain the faith and the wavering steps of the poor disciple: and at any rate that faith had brought Peter so near to Jesus that His outstretched hand could sustain him.

“Peter's fault was that he looked at the waves, at the storm (which, after all, had nothing to do with it) instead of looking at Jesus, who was unchanged, and who was walking on those very waves, as his faith should have observed. Still, the cry of his distress brought the power of Jesus into action, as his faith ought to have done: only it was now to His shame, instead of being in the enjoyment of communion, and walking like the Lord.

“Jesus having entered the ship, the wind ceases. Even so it will be when Jesus returns to the remnant of His people in this world. Then also will He be worshipped as the Son of God by all that are in the ship with the remnant of Israel. In Gennesaret Jesus again exercises the power which shall hereafter drive out from the earth all the evil that Satan has brought in. For when He returns, the world will recognize Him. It is a fine picture of the result of Christ's rejection, which this Gospel has already made known to us as taking place in the midst of the Jewish nation."1

(Continued from page 186)

[W.J.H.]

Studies in Mark, Mark 6:53-56: (55) The Morning Without Clouds

6:53-56

“And when they had crossed over, they tame to the land unto Gennesaret, and moored1 to the shore.2 And when they were come out of the boat, straightway the people knew him, and ran round about that whole region, and began to carry about on their beds3 those that were sick, where they heard he was. And wheresoever he entered, into villages, or into cities, or into the country, they laid the sick in the market-places, and besought him that they might touch if it were but the border4 of his garment;5 and as many as touched him were made whole"6 (6:53-56, R.V.).

The sequel to the narrative of the miracle on the lake, as recorded both in Matthew and Mark, is remarkable, though our interest and attention are apt to be so powerfully attracted by the display upon the waters of our Lord's power in the physical world that we overlook those beneficent effects that followed in profusion when He came to the shore and that equally proved Him to be the Lord from heaven. During the ministry of Jesus, the activities of His mercy were incessant, and were spread alike over land and sea, by night and by day. The Servant of Jehovah never wearied in His task of spreading out the lovingkindnesses of Heaven before the dull eyes of Israel, taking up in spirit the Psalmist's words, “Oh, that men would praise the LORD for his goodness and for his wonderful works to the children of men” (Psa. 107:31).

There was still among the people of Galilee an outward interest in the Lord and a widespread belief in Him as a wonder-worker. Before He set out from Capernaum on the boat-journey the people came flocking to Him (ver. 31), and during that journey on the previous day a multitude followed on the land (ver. 33) that they might hear Him again. Now when the boat was moored to the western shore after the night of tempest the Lord was recognized, and a crowd quickly gathered again that His healing power might be exercised upon them; and they did not seek Him in vain.

These two or three verses form a comprehensive summary of the Lord's service at this period. Judging from the narratives of Matthew and Mark, the miracles began directly after the crossing of the sea, and thus constitute the immediate sequel to the stilling of the storm. But it is not implied by either of the Evangelists that all the cases of healing contemplated in the summary took place on a single day7. On the contrary, the interest is said to have been aroused throughout the whole region of Gennesaret, and wherever the Lord went, whether into a village, or town, or district, the sick ones were brought into the market-places that they might touch the border of His garment; and as many as touched Him were made whole.

THE SHADOWS FLEEING AWAY

The dark watches of the tempestuous night were ended, the roaring of the mighty billows had ceased, the storm-tossed boat was at its desired haven, the rising sun chased every gloomy cloud away and beamed in peace and joy upon a smiling land.

The Lord with His disciples came to the land of Gennesaret, as Matthew and Mark tell us. This was the name given to the strip of country lying along the north-western shore of the Sea of Galilee. The district is described by Josephus, the historian of the Jews, as one of singular beauty and fertility. Its name, Gennesaret8, is said to signify the “king's garden,” and, if so, it is singularly appropriate in this Connection, forming a pictorial allusion to the glad time when the Lord shall come, and the whole land shall be as the garden of the Lord (Isa. 51:3).

However that may be, we may see here, without an undue exercise of imagination, some partial fulfillment of that long-promised day breaking and the shadows fleeing away. Certainly across this fertile Galilean country the shadows of death were lying, shadows sinless Eden never knew. Indeed, this district in the neighborhood of Capernaum by the sea was described by Isaiah in one of his prophecies as the land of the shadow of death (Isa. 9:2), and the fulfillment of that particular prophecy so far as it related to the ministry of the Lord, is stated by Matthew. Speaking of the preaching of Jesus, he says, “the people which sat in darkness saw a great light, and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is spiting up” (Matt. 4:12-16).

It is true that the sad phrase, “the shadow of death,” is of frequent occurrence in Holy Writ, and is found no less than ten times in the Book of Job, where the terrible devastation wrought in a single household by the “king of terrors” is the main topic. But it is a matter of special interest to note that the phrase is definitely applied by the prophet and by the evangelist to this land on whose shores Jesus landed after the storm.

Here the stroke of death menaced men in every direction, whether in an exceptional degree we are not informed. But there were sick persons in every town and village and along the countryside. Dark shadows were in the streets, in the homes, and in the hearts of these Galileans everywhere; But when the people recognized Jesus, they carried the sick ones on their beds to the place where He was. They laid them in the market-places that they might touch if only the border of His garment, and as many as touched Him were made whole.

It was thus that the shadows were dispersed. The pain and infirmity of the sufferers, the fears and anxieties of the watchers were alike dispelled by the presence of the Lord of abounding mercy. Many a one that day proved that while weeping may endure for a night, joy cometh in the morning. The good Shepherd who had fed the flock of Israel, literally and figuratively, the previous evening, now appeared again to His people, and walked with them, as it were, comforting them with His rod and staff, more potent in mercy than those of Moses and Elisha.

THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD

There is a striking outstanding feature in this short section of the Gospel. This feature is the beneficent effect produced directly by the presence of Jesus upon the dwellers upon that favored shore. They brought the sick to the place where they heard He was. It was sufficient that the suffering ones should touch Him or the hem of His garment, and they were healed. We are not told that the Lord touched them or even spoke to them. But power went out from Him, drawn forth to relieve the circumstances of needy faith.

This outgoing of His personality was also the manner of His service in the storm. There was then no recorded word or act, but on going into the boat where the disciples were, the wind ceased. Thus His presence was recognized. The unruly elements on the sea, pain and sickness on the land, alike confess Him in effect as Jehovah-Shammah, the true seat on earth of Jehovah's power.

We have elsewhere in the Gospels another instance of the spontaneous effluence of remedial mercy from the Lord. This was on an earlier occasion when great crowds had gathered to Him. Then “all the multitude sought to touch him: for power came forth from him and healed them all” (Luke 6:19, R.V.). But with regard to the present instance we ask whether we may not learn something from the fact that the incident appears to be arranged, apart from its chronology, as an appendix to the stilling of the storm. For it cannot be denied that the work of the Servant of Jehovah on this occasion was in essence that which the prophecies declare He will yet do for the nation as a whole, and indeed for all the world.

In the evening the Lord satisfied the hungry mouths of the people with good things; and in the morning He healed all their diseases. He thus fulfilled to some extent to Israel (those in Galilee being for the time representative of the nation) that ancient promise of Jehovah: “Ye shall serve the LORD your God, and he shall bless thy bread and thy water; and I will take sickness away from the midst of thee” (Ex. 23:25).

But it is to be noted that the two clauses of this promise were separated, as regards their fulfillment, by the events of the intervening night. Before the morning of blessing dawned upon the people, the little band of Messiah's followers had to pass through the terrors of the storm, and on each occasion the presence or absence of Christ gave its character to the event. The Lord was present in Bethsaida, and their bread was multiplied. He was present in Gennesaret, and their infirmities were banished. He was absent from the ship, and the adverse forces of winds and waves baffled their progress. He entered the boat, and immediately the storm ceased, and they were at the “king's garden.”

THE ALLEGORICAL ASPECT

From the point of view taken in these suggestions, we see that these happenings upon the lake and shore of Gennesaret, while they may not be considered to be exactly types, have their allegorical aspect as to future events in the history of the kingdom. And this aspect we may now briefly consider under two heads, viz.—

(1) The violent storm which effectually opposed the progress of the followers of the Lord;

(2) The effect of the coming and presence of Jesus on sea and on land.

(1) In the first place, then, the disciples, in crossing the lake in obedience to the Lord towards the place to which He had directed them, were so fiercely opposed by winds and waves that they were usable to go forward. It has already been observed that in general principle these conditions are applicable, as an illustration, to the history of the church of Christ in the midst of its difficulties and in, face of the antagonism of the world. But the general principle has, without doubt, a more direct application to the fortunes of the faithful and pious Jewish remnant in the troublous times which immediately precede the establishment of millennial glory upon the earth.

There will be in that period zealous and courageous witnesses for Christ who will proclaim the gospel of the imminent kingdom in the face of persecution which will be unparalleled in its severity. This struggle in the teeth of the storm is plainly set forth by our Lord in His prophecy delivered on the mount of Olives. He at that time declared that His coming for the deliverance of Israel would be preceded by tribulation such as the world had never known. The various political organizations of that day would be thrown into a state! of indescribable uproar and confusion and conflict, a condition of things of which the storm on the Sea of Galilee is a striking figure.9

This widespread conflict of national forces must necessarily bring about general hardship and suffering. But the special feature for our present consideration is the effect of this upheaval upon the followers of the Lamb. And the Lord showed in His discourse on the mount of Olives what this effect would be. He warned the faithful that they would be persecuted and betrayed and killed, being hated of all the nations, and the trial would be so severe and exacting that many would not endure to the end.

The Lord's words, as we have them in Matthew, who presents the prophecy in its amplest and furthest scope, were as follows: “For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines and earthquakes in divers places. But all these things are the beginning of travail. Then shall they deliver you up unto tribulation, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many stumble, and shall deliver up one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall arise, and shall lead many astray. And because iniquity shall be multiplied, the love of the many shall wax cold. But he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony unto all the nations; and then shall

the end come” (Matt. 24:7-14, R.V.).

The “end” will bring judgment upon the habitable world, and all the tribes of the land shall wail at the coming of the Son of man. But the faithful followers of Christ will be preserved throughout this great tribulation, and will be delivered at His coming from all their sorrows.

Speaking generally, tribulation has been the lot of every Christian since the days of Pentecost, even as the Master forewarned His disciples: “In the world ye shall have tribulation” (John 16:33). But in this prophecy of the Lord's we have what is exceptional and unequaled, and what will only be terminated by the appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. And the words quoted above from Matthew describe the sort of opposition that those who go out to preach the gospel of the kingdom in all the nations will inevitably encounter.

[W.J.H.]

(To be continued)

Studies in Mark, Mark 6:45-52: (54) The Appearance of Jesus

6:45-52

The Appearance of Jesus

Jesus on the mountainside was not in ignorance of the precarious position of His followers. From the place of prayer He saw them toiling hard in rowing. May we not believe, indeed, that they in the extremity of their trial were the subject of His intercession? At a later day we know He said to Peter, “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not” (Luke 22:31, 32). So that we have reason for boldly thinking that the Lord was the Unseen Helper of these distressed ones throughout that night.

We believe, in short, that He who prayed that the faith of Simon might not fail prayed in like manner for the faith of the twelve. Their trial was permitted to extend through the long hours of darkness that the tribulation might work out patience, and patience experience, and experience hope—the hope that maketh not ashamed.

Such being the divine purpose, there was the occasion for much soul-discipline throughout the night-watches. The apostles must have often thought, and possibly often spoken of their absent Master. How they then desired the presence of Him who had formerly stood up in the boat during a similar storm, and rebuked the wind and the sea. Surely they must have had some expectation that He would come to their relief. Blessed servants would they be if when their Lord did come He found them watching, counting upon Him in faith that He would not utterly' forsake them. But He came to them not in the second watch, nor in the third watch. Nor was it until the dark hour before the dawn that the bright and morning Star appeared. “But they when they saw him walking on the sea supposed that it was an apparition and cried out; for they all saw him, and were all troubled.”

The Lord's method of approaching the disciples was altogether superhuman.1 The manner, it is needless to say, was unexpected on their part. Among all the wonders related in the Old Testament there was no parallel to this one. At the national crisis which arose at the passage of the Red Sea, Jehovah, in the morning watch, looked forth upon the hosts of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud, and delivered the people of Israel from their foes. But the wonder on the Galilean Sea was of another order.

The sight of the Master of the elements making His way to them across the heaving billows must have been overwhelming to these men. There was, in this instance, no forerunner to prepare the way of the Lord, to make His paths straight. Unannounced, He approached the little band, treading His way through the surge of the mighty waters. They were troubled on seeing Him thus, for as yet they. had not understood Jesus who He was. They did not realize that the sea was His; He had made it. Truly, His way was in the sanctuary, but equally His way was in the sea and His paths in the great waters (Psa. 77:13, 19). They had yet to hear His promise, “I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you,” though He anticipated the enunciation of it by His appearance to the storm-tossed mariners, as He had done in a former day to the three bound men in the furnace of fire (Dan. 3) coming, as we may say, alike through fire and water to the relief of His own.

But when the Lord came across the sea He sought a response from His disciples. He came within their ken, and He would have passed them by. He looked that His appearance should awaken some impulse of appeal to Him (cp. Luke 24:28), for they all saw Him, as Mark tells us. There was, however, no intelligent recognition of their Master on the part of the apostles. We read that they cried out in fear, for they supposed they saw a phantom. The vision on the waves, they thought, was not real—an apparition—the creation of their own imagination.

Such was the delusion of the little company, notwithstanding the power they had lately received and which they had exercised over evil spirits. The appearance of their Master filled them with more alarm than the fury of the storm seems to have done. That fear—the fear of the unknown—possessed them of which Eliphaz spoke when he said, “Fear came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones to shake. Then a spirit passed before my face; the hair of my flesh stood up: it stood still, but I could not discern the form thereof: an image was before my eyes” (Job 4:14.-16).

THE LORD'S WORD OF GOOD CHEER

But the Lord never failed in the supply of His gracious help in the needful measure and at the needful moment. The disciples uttered no direct prayer to Him for aid, but their cry of fear and distress arrested Him, and instantly He wrought for their relief, allaying their fears with His word. “He straightway spake with them, and saith unto them, Be of good cheer: it is I: be not afraid.”

The Lord's first word, on this occasion, was addressed to the apostles, while in the previous storm it was first addressed to the waves and the sea. The actual necessity, therefore, for the Lord's interposition was distinct in the two cases. In the first instance, there was imminent peril to be averted. In the second, a tempest of fear was sweeping over the men's hearts; their courage, nerve and assurance were apparently exhausted. Then, the Lord remarked upon their lack of faith. Now His words show there was a lack of peace in their hearts. It would seem that

in the one case the chief trouble was without and around, while in the other the more pressing need was within the troubled hearts of the disciples. At any rate, we have the historical fact that the Lord's words, with their threefold message from the waves, were addressed to His distracted followers. He said to them—

(1) Be of good cheer (courage);

(2) It is I;

(3) Be not afraid.

(1) The Servant of Jehovah was commissioned to bring “consolation” to Israel (Luke 2:25). This He did individually as well as nationally. There were many hearts stricken with fear among those with whom the Lord came in contact during his ministry. And we find the exhortation “Be of good cheer” was one. He loved to speak. “Cheer” is that comfort of heart which springs from implicit confidence in the love and power of God. And who could impart this sustaining virtue like our Lord? Besides the present occasion, Jesus used these words in the following four cases, two being cases of physical weakness and two of mental distress; two being in the midst of trouble, and two full of apprehension of what was imminent—

(a) To the sick of the palsy whom the four men of faith laid at his feet (Matt. 9:2).

(b) To the feeble and trembling woman who touched the hem of His garment (Matt. 9:22).

(c) At the close of His valedictory address to His disciples on the night in which He was betrayed: “In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

(d) In the hour of great persecution at Jerusalem, the risen and ascended Lord stood by Paul and said, “Be of good cheer, Paul; for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome” (Acts 23:11).

(2) In the next place, the Lord, by His words “It is I,” corrects the error of the apostles regarding Himself. Most probably they failed to recognize Him, because they were not expecting Him to come to them at that particular time or in that particular manner. Hence they imagined they saw a phantom until the Master said, “It is I.” Similar cases of non-recognition occurred after the Lord's resurrection. When Jesus appeared to Mary and spoke to her, she supposed Him to be the gardener until He called her by name (John 20:15). And again, when He subsequently presented Himself in the midst of His disciples and said, “Peace be unto you,” they were terrified and affrighted and supposed they had seen a spirit (Luke 24:37). Speaking generally, we may say that it is the latent incredulity of man's heart which prevents him from accepting the operation of divine power and love in superhuman ways, and such sluggish comprehension was often displayed by the apostles.

The Lord dispersed the unbelief of those in the boat by a word which awakened their dull memories to a recognition of Himself. He is One whom they knew. Hence His words were, “It is I.” It was as if He said to them, “Your Master and Lord is before you.” And it will be remembered that He used similar words to them after His resurrection, “Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself” (Luke 24:39).

(3) The third exhortation to the agitated disciples was “Be not afraid.” It is one of the many offices of perfect love to cast out fear (1 John 4:18). And the Lord during His ministry often used His assuring words of love and power to deliver trembling ones from the bondage of fear. The sense of His presence was and is all-sufficient to banish the dread of coming calamity. The Lord knew this when He gave the verbal promise of His abiding presence to those He was leaving in the world: “Lo, I am with you always.” And the pious heart knows this from experience when he sings—

The apostles realized the same blessed truth on that stormy night. For after He had spoken to them these words, He went up unto them into the boat and the wind ceased. The Lord's word of comfort was succeeded by His act of deliverance.

CALLOUS HEARTS

At this miraculous display the apostles “were beyond all measure amazed, for they bethought not on the loaves, for their heart was hardened” (T. S. Green's rendering). Thus they failed to exercise that degree of faith and confidence in their Master which might be expected from men who were privileged followers of Jesus and eye-witnesses from the beginning of His ministry of many phases of His divine power. The Lord exhibited before them His personal control of the unruly elements, and they were filled with wonderment such as the multitude often displayed in their unreflecting ignorance (Mark 2:12). Like Israel of old whose tendency was to forget Jehovah and their deliverance from Egypt (Psa. 78:7, 11), the anxieties of the moment obliterated the marvelous mercies of the past from the minds of the disciples. Even the miracle of the previous afternoon, in which they had the honor of being distributors of the Lord's bounty was forgotten by them. Such is the natural disposition of our hearts, for they were but men of like passions with ourselves.

This failure of the apostles is said to be because (1) they understood not the loaves, and (2) their heart was hardened. The verb used in the text for “understanding” has been variously rendered, but it appears on the whole to imply the putting together of matters in the mind and heart in order to ascertain by spiritual reflection their true significance. Like other scriptural words it seems to be employed with great breadth and with various shades of meaning. It occurs, for example, in the address of Stephen. Speaking of Moses slaying the Egyptian, he says, “He supposed his brethren understood how that God by his hand was giving them deliverance; but they understood not” (Acts 7:25). So also Joseph and Mary understood not a certain saying of Jesus (Luke 2:50). The Lord opened not the minds of the disciples that they might understand the scriptures (Luke 24:45). It became true of Israel nationally in the day of their visitation that “they hear not, neither do they understand” (Matt. 13:13), and on account of their wilfulness judgment came upon them, and the heart of the people waxed gross lest they should understand with their heart (Acts 28:26, 27).

In this passage of Mark we are instructed that the apostles failed to glorify the Lord in a great crisis because they had not sufficiently considered the miracle of the loaves. They saw in the miracle the work of His omnipotent hand, but they neglected to perceive in it the intense love of His heart for needy men. They had been witnesses of and participants in the labor of feeding the five thousand, and that deed of mercy was done not only to satisfy hungry mouths but also to awaken slothful hearts. It was another proof that Jehovah Himself was present in Israel giving His people bread. But the hearts of the disciples were so dull that they missed the significance of His presence, and consequently they lacked that source of comfort in the hour of their trial.

If their hearts were not hardened, if they had but considered the loaves, would they have set limitations to the love and power of the Servant of Jehovah? Would they have thought that He who had displayed omnipotence on the land, lacked omniscience on the sea? Would they have thought that He who had showed such solicitude could so change in a few hours as to forget in their peril the band of servants whom He had chosen to be His companions?

The Lord came over the waves seeking a spirit of fidelity and confidence in the hearts of the disciples, but He found instead deadly dullness and spiritual insensibility. There was hardness or blindness of heart in them as well as in the Pharisees (Mark 3:5), in Israel (Rom. 11:7, 25; 2 Cor. 3:14.), and in the Gentiles (Eph. 4:18). Thus Jesus discovered no response in the apostles to the labors of His love, and when He delivered them from the fury of the storm, against which they were vainly battling, they were excessively astonished. If they expected deliverance at all, they did not expect it in that manner. However, their hard hearts were melted, and “they that were in the boat worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God” (Matt. 14:33).

THE LESSON FOR TO-DAY

The lesson of unwavering faith and confidence in the Lord is one needing to be learned again and again and afresh by us. We readily enough recognize the greatness of our foes and the weakness of our might, but not so quickly the power and grace of our Friend and Deliverer. The apostle Paul “considered” the miracle of the loaves and of the waves, as it were, and has expressed the teaching of them in terms of the spiritual world for the comfort of us all. He wrote to the saints at Corinth, “we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning our affliction which befell [us] in Asia, that we were weighed down exceedingly beyond our power, insomuch that we despaired even of life: yea, we ourselves have had the answer of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God, which raiseth the dead: who delivered us out of so great a death, and will deliver: on whom we have set our hope that he will also still deliver us” (2 Cor. 1:8-10, R.V.).

Let us then exercise faith in face of the adverse forces of this world which we must needs encounter. He who has power to deliver has also sympathy for us in our infirmities, and can give us peace within before He gives peace around. And though we may not be immediately delivered, He will bear our infirmities and carry our sorrows. So that from our sea of tossing billows we may look upward to our Intercessor on high, and say—

[W.J.H.]

Studies in Mark, Mark 6:45-52: (53) The Pathway Over the Stormy Sea

6:45-52

“And straightway he constrained his disciples to enter into the boat and to go before [him] unto the other side to Bethsaida, while he himself sendeth the multitude away. And after he had taken leave of them, he departed into the mountain to pray. And when even was come, the boat was in the midst of the sea, and he alone on the land. And seeing them distressed1 in rowing, for the wind was contrary unto them, about the fourth watch of the night he cometh unto them, walking on the sea; and he would have passed by them; but they, when they saw him walking on the sea, supposed that it was an apparition2, and cried out: for they all saw him, and were troubled. But he straightway spake with them, and saith unto them, Be of good cheer:3 it is I; be not afraid. And he went up unto them into the boat; and the wind ceased: and they were sore amazed4 in themselves; for they understood not concerning5 the loaves, but their heart was hardened” (6:45-52, R.V.).

The service of love to the famishing multitudes having been rendered, the Lord did what the disciples suggested He should do earlier in the day (ver. 36). He sent the people away. But, first of all, He constrained His disciples to embark in the boat and to precede Him in crossing to the other side of the lake near to Bethsaida.6

An unwillingness on the part of the disciples to obey seems implied in the terms of the narrative, such as “demanded a certain loving violence on His part to overcome.” And from John (6.) we learn what in all probability was the reason why the apostles needed to be “constrained,” or forced to put to sea. The miracle of the loaves had awakened great popular excitement in the desert place, and the multitude were desirous to take Him by force and proclaim Him the Prophet and King of the Jews. The disciples had not sufficiently imbibed the spirit of their Master to judge rightly of this momentary impulse, and they would probably have taken sides with the mob to place Him on the throne of David. Jesus therefore sent them away, while He Himself calmed the turbulence of the people and dismissed them to their homes before night came on. The Lord valued this ebullition of popular feeling aright. He would not receive honor from men, nor would He commit Himself to man, for He knew what was in man. A year later, a crowd, not then of Galilee but of Jerusalem, would, He knew, follow Him and cry “Hosanna, blessed is the kingdom of our father David that cometh,” while a few days later the same crowd would cry, “Crucify Him, crucify Him.”

Messiah's hour was not yet come. The Servant of Jehovah would not, therefore, consent to be hurried to the throne by popular clamor. God in due time would give His judgments to the King, and then the anointed of the Lord would judge the people in righteousness and the poor with judgment (Psa. 72). For the moment, the marvelous multiplication of the loaves and fishes seemed most attractive to the indigent peasantry of Galilee who were accustomed to earn their small morsel of bread by much sweat of the face. Jesus therefore seemed to them to be most desirable—a king after their own heart. But when they sought Him the next day that they might exalt Him, the Lord unveiled to them the secrets of their inner selves, saying, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the signs, but because ye ate of the loaves and were filled” (John 6:26).

Because Jesus had so liberally fed the multitude they were prepared to come in their zeal, and by force to make Him a king. “But the Lord would not take the kingdom from zeal like this. This could not be the source of the kingdom of the Son of man. The beasts (Dan. 7:2, 3) may take their kingdoms from the winds striving upon the great sea, but Jesus cannot (Dan. 7:13). This was not His mother crowning Him in the day of His espousals (Song of Sol. 3). This was not, in His ear, the shouting of the people bringing in the head-stone of the corner; nor the symptom of His people made willing in the day of His power. This would have been an appointment to the throne of Israel on scarcely better principles than those on which Saul had been appointed of old. His kingdom would have been the fruit of a heated desire of the people, as Saul's had been the fruit of their revolted heart. But this could not be.”

PRAYER IN THE MOUNTAIN SOLITUDE

The disciples having embarked and the crowds having been dismissed, Jesus departed into the mountain alone to pray. This reference is the second one made in this Gospel to the prayers of the Lord. On the first occasion we are told that “in the morning a great while before day he rose up and went out and departed into a desert place, and there prayed” (Mark 1:35). This was in Capernaum at the beginning of His public ministry, and was the sequel to a day of strenuous toil. The present occasion was after some two years of His public service had passed, during which the multitudes of Galilee had everywhere welcomed Him and His preaching of the kingdom. But a change was now imminent. The Evangelists unite to show us that at this juncture the spirit of envy and malice began to display itself more openly against Jesus. The opposition that had hitherto slumbered now awoke to a vigorous action which grew in intensity until it finally reached, a year later, the climax of the cross.

In view of this definitive rejection by His beloved people, Jesus took up the burden of it upon His spirit before His Father. And may we not believe that as He most surely felt in the silent midnight the poignancy of a despised love, so the lonely mountain-altar smoked with the fragrant frankincense of a submissive will: “Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight?”

It seems the way of the Spirit of God in the Gospels to give us momentary glimpses of Jesus such as these in order that we may see the historical fulfillment of prophecies which were given long before concerning the Servant of Jehovah. These holy men of old were not silent concerning the apparent failure of the Sent One of God when He should come to introduce Israel to the blessings of the new covenant. It was said that the Servant would labor for the name of Jehovah, but that His assiduity would be in vain so far as outward result would manifest. He would spend His strength without stint, but for naught in seeming effectiveness. The Messiah would come to gather Israel under His wings, but Israel would refuse to be gathered. Surely we see these things outlined in the praying Christ, and we see Him there upon the mountain-side learning obedience to the written will of Jehovah by the things He was suffering in His spirit.

But after the long dark night comes the glad day. In those sacred solitudes the blessed Savior was wrapped in secret communion until the morn approached. The night watches were passing, the day would break, the shadows would flee away. The same prophecy that foretold failure also foretold triumph. “But I said, I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for naught and vanity, yet surely my judgment is with the LORD, and my work with my God. And now, saith the LORD that formed me from the womb to be his servant to bring Jacob again to him, Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and my God shall be my strength. And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the, preserved of Israel. I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles that thou mayest be my salvation unto the ends of the earth” (Isa. 49:4-6). There was thus a joyful issue set before the face of the Lord; and in the morning watch He came to His disciples, walking on the sea.

THE DISTRESS OF THE DISCIPLES

A storm was no unusual phenomenon on the Sea of Galilee. Indeed, this inland lake was noted for the prevalence of violent tempests which arose with great suddenness. The apostles were natives of the surrounding districts and were therefore familiar with this feature. And those of them who had been fishermen must often have experienced similar storms in the course of their regular occupation. On this occasion we are told that the sea arose because of the great wind that blew against them. The boatmen had intended to skirt the northern coast, but they appear to have been driven in the opposite direction towards the southern shore. Consequently, though they spent a great part of the night laboring at the oars they made but very little real progress towards their “desired haven,” because they were pitting themselves against the forces of Nature. And though they struggled zealously to gain their destination, they were no match for the opposing elements.

There was undoubtedly a great tempest, but it is not to be gathered directly from the narrative that the apostles were in imminent personal danger. In the case of the storm recorded earlier in the Gospel the waves washed into the boat, and the apostles felt themselves perishing when they aroused their Master. Here it is not stated that the storm threatened to overwhelm the barque, though there must always be danger in an open boat with winds and waves running high. But we do read that the Lord saw the disciples distressed with rowing. Such was the particular difficulty of the moment. They had been pulling at the oars with all their might without making any headway. This was weary work, and dispiriting too. And yet had not the Lord constrained them to embark that evening? And they might have reflected that, in effect, it was He who had set them at this work of rowing in the teeth of a strong gale, and such a reflection would give rise to disparaging thoughts of Him.

But was there not some ulterior purpose in the trying experiences of that night? Had not these fishers of men to learn thereby that there are times in Christian history when no fishing can be done, when no sail can be set to run easily before the breeze, when, in fact, every muscle must strain at the oar to keep the boat's head in the right direction and to prevent drifting, while no real progress seems possible? What the Lord was facing in spirit on the mountain top, the apostles were learning upon the stormy waters in a manner more suited to the measure of their understanding. The servants, like their Master, were laboring in vain and spending their strength for naught.

There was an essential difference, however, in the two cases. On the one hand, the Lord submitted to apparent failure in His service; on the other hand, the apostles lacked the needful strength to secure for themselves a victorious combat. The Lord forebore to exercise His power; His servants did not possess that degree of power which the occasion demanded. But before the morning broke, while they had proved their own insufficiency, they had also proved the almighty power of their Lord and Master to make them easy conquerors in spite of themselves.

(To be continued)

[W.J.H.]

Studies in Mark, Mark 6:35-44: (52) Servant of Jehovah as the Shepherd of Israel

6:35-44

Continued Marshalling Into Order

No spectacle, perhaps, exhibits greater disorder and confusion than a crowd of excited persons. Such a concourse is described most graphically in the reference to the mob assembled in the theater at Ephesus, which cried for the space of two hours, “Great is Diana of the Ephesians.” We read of them that, “Some cried one thing and some another, for the assembly was in confusion; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together” (Acts 19:32).

A multitude has no conscience to condemn the wrong, and no humane consideration for the weak Many an outrage has been wrought by a hungry mob in a struggle for food. When the famished people of Samaria thronged out of the gates in quest of the food left in the deserted tents of the Syrians, they trod to death the supercilious captain who was set there to regulate the traffic.

The Lord would not permit any such confusion. He was preparing a table in the wilderness for these Galilean folk, and He arranged the guests according to a definite plan. He would have no haste, no disorder. He Himself knew what He would do. He commanded the assembled thousands to be seated as at table, not where they would, but where and how He would. He was the Lord of the feast, and He would say to one, Sit here and to another, Sit there, as it pleased Him.

The mass of persons was divided systematically by Him according to a simple plan which all could understand and follow. The men were to sit in one place, and the women and children in another by themselves. They were disposed in companies and ranks; in fifties, counting in one direction, and in rows of hundreds, counting in another; fifty hundreds, making five thousand, so far as the men were concerned.

Such an arrangement obviated confusion, and enabled the distribution of the bread and the fish to be made with equal fairness to all, while the task of distribution was made less laborious for the disciples. Even under these circumstances, considerable physical exertion was involved in handling the amount of food required to satisfy the hunger of all the company. Assuming for the purpose of making a rough estimate, that each person present ate one pound of bread, more than two and a quarter tons would be necessary for the men, omitting all provision for the women and children, and making no allowance for the fish, nor for the fragments that remained at the close of the meal. These items would increase the total weight beyond three tons. There was therefore a considerable bulk of food for the twelve apostles to handle.1

The pre-arranged system materially lightened the labor incurred, and moreover enabled the people to take their meal without distraction. Looking back to the occasion of the Lord leaving Capernaum to come to this spot, we see that the unjealous Lord protected His guests from such interruptions and disturbances. as those which prevented Him and His apostles from eating their food in peace, and which led Him to seek seclusion in the wilderness.

THE LORD'S FELLOW-HELPERS

When they were all seated in orderly array upon the green grass (for it was the springtime, and the, herbage of the hillside was shooting up in young and beautiful life), the Lord took up the five loaves and the two fishes, their size being such that He could probably hold them all at once. In the presence of the assembled multitude He raised His eyes to heaven, as He did when He healed the deaf and dumb man (Mark 7:34), and when He came to the grave of Lazarus (John 11:41). This was an attitude of prayer and heavenly communion (John 17:1), and He had taught His disciples to pray, saying, “Our Father, which art in heaven ... Give us this day our daily bread,” assuring them at the same time that the heavenly Father who feeds the birds of the air would not forget His more valuable creatures. By this act the Perfect Servant sets an example before all, acknowledging His dependence upon the One who sent Him, and in general effect taking up the language of the Psalmist: “Unto thee do I lift up mine eyes, O thou that sittest in the heavens. Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their master, as the eyes of the maiden unto the band of her mistress, so our eyes look unto the LORD our God until he have mercy upon us” (Psa. 123:1, 2).

The Lord also “blessed.” In John 6:11 we read that He gave thanks. Luke says that He blessed the loaves and fishes (Luke 9:16), while Matthew and Mark speak only of blessing without naming the object. In Scriptural usage, blessing and the, giving of thanks are closely joined. Both terms are used in connection with the Lord's Supper, e.g., blessing (Mark 14:22 Cor. 10:16); and giving thanks (Mark 14:23; Luke 22:19 Cor. 11:24). To bless () seems to combine (1 Cor. 14:16) the ascription of praise and thanks to God with tire sanctification of food for healthful use (1 Tim. 4:4, 5).

The Host then broke the victuals, and the distribution began with Him. The multiplication and the extent of it were altogether in His hands. Under His superintendence the little did not become less. He opened His hand and supplied the need of every living person before Him.

But the disciples were made sharers in this benefaction, which they had not been able to anticipate. He gave of the loaves and the fishes to them to set before the people. It was the Lord's part to bless the provision abundantly, and to satisfy these poor folks with bread (Psa. 132:15). But while the apostles could not multiply the five loaves into a bounty for five thousand men, they could transport the bounty as it accumulated to the hungry mouths of their brothers in Israel. This service they were called to perform under their Master's eye, and it was analogous to their subsequent spiritual service as the “fellow-laborers of God” (1 Cor. 3:9). The apostles, though forming the foundation of the church, were never originators. They acted in the name of the Lord. As with the physical, so with the spiritual food; what they received of the Lord, they delivered to others, either for their physical or their spiritual nutrition, just as the case was, the Spirit, in the latter case, dividing to each one severally according to His will (1 Cor. 12:11).

THE OVERFLOWING BOUNTY

James, writing of the Giver of wisdom, says “He giveth to all liberally, and upbraideth not.” Another contemplating His great riches of goodness, says, “Of his fullness, have all we received, and grace for grace.” A transcendent generousness is the divine habit. Hence we read that at this feast in the wilderness, “they did all eat and were filled.” Not one was overlooked. The weak women and children were not crowded off by selfish men, but all were supplied with an ample sufficiency, of which they were able to partake with ease and comfort as they sat upon the green grass. Philip's way would have been to provide enough bread for the meal, so that each might take “a little"; the Lord's way was to provide a superabundance, so that every one might have “as much as he would.” We may not regard the superfluity as the result of a too liberal estimate on the part of the Lord. He who increased the scanty store by His omnipotence, knew, in His omniscience, the exact measure of the appetites of the multitude. But He did not stay the exercise of His multiplying power at that point. He gave them “good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over.” Was He not showing forth the Father, and the plenty of His house, where there

is surely “bread enough and to spare"? He was, as it were, opening the windows of heaven and pouring out a blessing, and there was not room enough to receive it.

“There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth,” says the proverb, and there was an exemplification of it that day. The abundance was such, that they were able at the close of the meal to gather together for future consumption twelve basketfuls of the portions which the Lord had broken off and divided. When Jehovah multiplied the widow's oil in the days of Elisha there was sufficient, when sold, to pay her debts, and also something for her to go on with. The same Lord was here, and was spreading before these weary and hungry Galileans the largess of Heaven. The very profusion of the gifts marked that they came from above. And the same feature of amplitude is true of spiritual things as of temporal, for where sin abounded, grace did superabound. “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God!”

THE LESSON OF FRUGALITY

The Lord who exhibited such plentitude in the provisions He spread before the multitude gave special directions for the care of such overplus as would be found when all needs were met. It is from John only of the four Evangelists that we learn of Jesus saying to His disciples, “Gather up the broken pieces which remain over, that nothing be lost” (John 6:12). That nothing be lost! The Lord would not have us lose His gifts by waste or neglect because we have more than sufficient for the moment. When God gave seven years of plenty in Egypt, it was the spirit of divine wisdom in Joseph that devised efficient measures to gather up the superabundance, and store it for the days of famine. Nothing was to be lost! When the people of Israel reached the land of Canaan, the Lord promised, in view of the rest of the sabbatic year, that He would command. His blessing during the sixth year, so that the land might bring forth fruit sufficient for three years (Lev. 25:21). But of what value would this abundance be to the nation, if the bounteous harvest was not carefully garnered? Again, we observe that in spite of profusion nothing was to be lost. In short, the lesson is one of general application. It is not pleasing to God that we should neglect or squander His bounties. To waste is to despise, to lose, His gifts. Economy is not contrary to, but consistent with true liberality, and thrift with benevolence and benefaction. That person who lays by in store as God has prospered him, is the person who is thereby prepared to bestow his gifts bountifully when occasion arises (1 Cor. 16:2).

The superabundant broken pieces were those which the Lord had broken off for distribution, and of these each apostle had a basketful over and above what was required by the people. The whole scene is eloquent of the rich goodness of God, provided by the Servant of Jehovah, and administered by the twelve apostles. It recalls the words of Paul written to the Corinthian believers: “God is able to make all grace abound unto you; that ye, having all sufficiency in everything may abound unto every good work... being enriched in everything unto all liberality which worketh out through us thanksgiving to God” (2 Cor. 9:8-11). W.J.H.

Studies in Mark, Mark 6:35-44: (51) Servant of Jehovah as the Shepherd of Israel

6:35-44

“And when the day was now far spent, his disciples came unto him and said, The place is desert, and the day is now far spent send them away that they may go into the country and villages round about, and buy themselves somewhat to eat. And they say unto him, Shall we go and buy two hundred pennyworth of bread, and give them to eat? And he saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? Go and see. And when they knew, they say, Five, and two fishes. And he commanded that all should sit down by companies upon the green grass. And they sat down in ranks, by hundreds and by fifties. And he took the five loaves and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed, and brake the loaves; and he gave to the disciples to set before them; and the two fishes divided he among them all. And they did all eat, and were filled. And they took up broken pieces, twelve basketfuls, and also of the fishes. And they that ate the loaves were five thousand men” (6:35-44, R.V.).

The Lord, having been, so far as the spirit of the people was concerned, rejected in Galilee, revealed Himself to the company that sought Him out in the character of the promised Shepherd of Israel. He was there to feed both the hearts and the bodies of His hungry flock if they would but come to Him. They had come to Him, and, accordingly He led them into green pastures.

This title of Jehovah's Sent One—the Shepherd—first appeared in the prophetic pronouncement of Jacob upon his sons. Israel upon his dying bed was inspired to declare what should befall the twelve tribes in the latter days. But, according to these predictions, it was in the offspring of Joseph that blessings for the seed of Jacob would culminate—blessings of the heaven above, and of the deep beneath, blessings unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills. Moreover, it was out of the loins of Joseph, who was “separate from his brethren,” that the Shepherd should come, the Stone of Israel, to establish the tribes in these blessings (Gen. 49:24). Now that Shepherd, whom the departing patriarch dimly saw in vision, had appeared in the midst of His people to stand and feed His flock in the strength of the LORD and in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God (Mic. 5:4). It is part of the good tidings promised to Zion that the LORD God shall come to her and “shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs in his arm and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that give suck” (Isa. 40:11).

There seems to be some distinction between the Lord viewed as Shepherd and as King. The nature of the offices of the Shepherd, regarded as a whole, are more peaceful than those of the King of Israel. It is true they each have a double character, so that the titles blend into one another in that harmony of perfection and glory which is inseparable from our Blessed Master. Thus, the Messianic King is both a man of war and a man of peace—a David and a Solomon. On the One hand, He will subdue the oppressor of His people, striking through kings in the day of His wrath, dashing them in pieces like a potter's vessel. On the other hand, He will come down like rain upon the mown grass, as showers that water the earth, introducing world-wide peace and prosperity. And as the King's energies are exercised in a twofold direction, so the Shepherd exercises a twofold care. In the first place, He protects His own from the predatory foes of the flock. The wolf cannot snatch the feeblest lamb out of the Shepherd's hand, and according to the prophecy of the days to come He will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land.” But He not only protects, He also preserves and provides food. The Shepherd brings His flock into the green pastures and beside the still waters. He comforts them with His rod and His staff, and is with them in the valley of the shadow of death.

This beautiful figure of our Lord is used throughout both Old and New Testaments, and it will well repay the devout heart to pursue the study of it in the law, the prophets and the psalms; in the evangelists and the apostles. And, what is best of all, the Shepherd's compassions still abound. towards His hungry, weary flock, and, as on the Galilean shore of old, His voice still teaches His flock “many things.”

THE SUGGESTION OF THE TWELVE

As the Lord proceeded with His discourse to the assembled crowd the day began to wear away, and the apostles thereupon grew anxious in regard to the situation. They themselves had apparently planned to return in the boat to Capernaum. But what would the multitude there in the wilderness do for food and lodging? They therefore interposed with their difficulty. Going to the Lord, they pointed out that the place was a desert one, the day was far spent, and the people had nothing to eat. They suggested that the Lord should dismiss the audience at once, so that they might go to the neighboring homesteads and villages and purchase food for themselves.

The suggestion of the apostles was wise enough perhaps as a measure of purely human policy. Commonsense, that much vaunted factor in the affairs of life, could invent nothing better than self-help as a means of supplying the needed. food under the exceptional circumstances. The proposed scheme relieved the disciples of any responsibility as to the welfare of the people, but it fell woefully short of the compassionate spirit inculcated in the law. “If there be with thee a poor man, one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: but thou shalt surely open thine hand unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need in that which he wanteth.... Thou shalt surely give him, and thy heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all thy work, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto. For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt surely open thine hand unto thy brother, to thy needy, and to thy poor, in thy land” (Deut. 15:7-11).

If the disciples were lacking in this spirit of compassion for their poor and needy brothers in Israel, it was not so with their Master. He had come into the midst of the nation to exemplify the tenets of the law in their fullest perfection. Only we cannot fail to note that the band of privileged followers of the Lord showed in this instance how utterly unable they were to apprehend the motives animating their Master. Indeed, how frequently they are shown in the Gospel running counter to Him. When little children were brought to Him for a blessing which He was ready to bestow, the disciples rebuked those who brought them. When they saw one casting out demons in the name of Jesus, they, contrary to the will of their Master, forbade him because he followed not with them.

When a certain village of the Samaritans refused to receive the Lord, James and John desired the Savior of men to destroy the villagers by fire from heaven. When the Lord spoke to His disciples of His journey to Jerusalem to suffer, Peter took it upon him to rebuke his Master. Well might the Lord say to them, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. They continued in His company, but did not adequately learn of Him. Even at the last, on the night of His betrayal, He had to say to one, Have I been so long time with you and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?

The Lord did not receive the suggestion of the twelve that the multitude should be dismissed, but said to them, Give ye them to eat. And He addressed Himself especially to this same Philip, saying, Whence are we to buy bread that these may eat? He said this to prove him (John 6:6), knowing Himself what He would do.

The twelve had been recently constituted apostles, preachers, miracle-workers. Here then was an occasion for them to test their resourcefulness. The Lord bade them feed the hungry people, but neither Philip nor any of the apostles were capable of grasping the true bearings of the situation, and counting upon help from the only possible source. The statistician of the company estimated that two hundred denarii spent in bread would only provide a little for each person. This would be equal to a pennyworth of bread for each twenty-five men in the company, and nothing for the women and children. Besides, where was such a great quantity of bread to be obtained in a country place but sparsely inhabited, as that was? Shall we go and buy? they ask, scornfully.1 Yet did they not know the Scriptures? Had they forgotten what Jehovah had done in the days of Elisha? Then the loaves of a man from Baalshalisha were multiplied so that a hundred men were satisfied (2 Kings 4:42-44). And a greater than Elisha a as there, even Jehovah Himself, who put to shame the unbelieving objections of His servant Moses in somewhat analogous circumstances (Num. 11). Jesus also shamed the twelve; for out of His own love He cared for and fed these people.

This miracle is remarkable as being one of the Lord's few spontaneous ones. In contrast with the majority of recorded instances, He did not wait to be solicited to put forth His power, but acted straightway out of the fullness of His compassion.

The sum of money named, two hundred pence, was a considerable one, and may have been in the common purse of the Lord's company. It is estimated to have been equivalent to some seven pounds of our currency, but at the same time it must be remembered that the purchasing power of money was then greater. The ' penny' was the Roman denarius, and the pay of a soldier was a denarius a day. This was also the liberal wages of a liberal master to the laborers in the vineyard, as we read in the parable (Matt. 20). A hundred denarii was a common currency multiple, as we may speak in round numbers of so many hundred pounds. We read in the New Testament of—

a. 100 denarii in the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matt. 18:28).

b. 200 denarii in the answer of Philip (John 6:7).

c. 300 denarii in the valuation of the ointment used upon the Lord (Mark 14:5; John 12:5).

d. 500 denarii in the parable of the two debtors (Luke 7:41).

WHAT A MAN HATH

On the failure of the apostles to provide any scheme for the relief of the people, the Lord Himself took up the case. He would not allow them to go empty away. And as was His custom, He made use of what they possessed, though this in itself was totally inadequate. He inquired of them how many loaves there were. And having ascertained, they reported that a lad who was present had two barley loaves and two fishes. Bar y bread on account of its coarseness was the god of the poorest peasants only, the dried fish being eaten with it as a relish. In Solomon's day barley was the food of horses (1 Kings 4:28). And the Midianite's dream of a cake of barley bread rolling into the camp was a vivid metaphor of the dire straits to which the famished poverty-stricken Israelites were reduced; nevertheless, by Jehovah's aid the despised cake

overturned the tent of the oppressor (Judg. 7:13). Here also the Lord took up what were poor, weak and contemptible as things of the world, and used them in the plenitude of His power and of His grace to satisfy the hunger of the assembled multitude.

It is instructive to observe that the Lord did not feed the people with bread from heaven, as manna came down day by day to Israel in the desert, but He multiplied the few loaves which they found in store until the wants of all were supplied. In like manner He changed the contents of the waterpots into wine for the marriage-feast at Cana. By such events the Lord showed how the power of God can magnify human inefficiency and insufficiency to the praise of the glory of His grace and to the liberal satisfaction of human need. He could, of course, in His own inherent power make all things new in His kingdom, but the time of the new creation had not then come, nor would it come until He Himself, its Head, rose from the dead. The Lord therefore made use of the five barley loaves, sad testimony as they were of the poverty of Jehovah's ancient people, and by means of them gave a demonstration of the future plenty of the promised land wherein they should eat bread without scarceness, and should not lack any good thing (Deut. 8:9).

However, a great lesson lies here of perennial importance. In the matter of usefulness, God looks at what a man has, and not at what a man has not. And it is His way to use what a man has, if there be a willing mind. “What is that in thine hand?” Jehovah said to Moses, who was so full of excuses of his own unfitness to go to Egypt. Under Jehovah's power and direction the rod became a serpent, to the confusion of Pharaoh and his magicians. Shamgar had but an ox-goad, but in the might of the Lord he smote six hundred Philistines with it, and saved Israel. David had but a sling in his hand, but a smooth stone from it slew Goliath the giant, and the enemies of Israel were discomfited. The Philadelphian church is said to have but little strength but like the widow's handful of meal and the drop of oil, it shall suffer no diminution. The Lord sets before this assembly with its modicum of power an open door which is impregnable, for no one can shut it (Rev. 3:8).

(To be continued) [W.J.H.]

Studies in Mark, Mark 6:30-34: (50) Taken Aside

6:30-34

Taken Aside

On the one hand, we find that the apostles returned of their own accord to Jesus at Capernaum after their tour of service; on the other hand we find that the Lord upon their return took them aside for a season of privacy. This was the Lord's own arrangement for their well-being as His servants. An Eastern house is open to any one who will enter, and meal-times form no exception to the freedom of general access which every one expects to be allowed. Jesus said therefore to the apostles, “Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest awhile. For there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat.” They had no ‘leisure,’ or rather they had no convenient opportunity to eat, on account of the incessant intrusions of the people. 'Leisure' may be thought to imply absence of occupation, but the turn here seems to be that there was no suitable occasion even for meals, on account of persistent interruption.

It is well to note that the Great Master, who sent out these men into active enterprise, also led them apart to rest awhile. Not that their work was all finished. The harvest was as plenteous as ever: the laborers were still few. A world of need was around them. But the same voice that said on one occasion, “I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day, for the night cometh when no man can work” (John 9:4), also said to the same persons, “Come ye yourselves apart and rest awhile.” Need it be said that He is the Lord, and that He will say to us 'Work' or ‘Rest,' as He in His perfect wisdom sees best. It is ours to respond cheerfully and readily to either of these calls or to any.

In point of fact the apostles had been passing through a perilous experience: They had been preaching their first sermons, and performing their first miracles. They were therefore exposed to the deadly snare of the novice (1 Tim. 3:6). Is it extravagant to suppose that they, like the seventy shortly afterward, were highly elated at the outward signs of what appeared to be their brilliant success? “The seventy returned with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject to us in thy name” (Luke 10:17). But the Lord showed them how, by reason of their immature, judgment, they had failed to grasp the true proportion of things. The endowments of grace far exceeded in value the equipment for service. Their names were written in heaven and not in the dust of the earth; and this enrollment for heavenly blessing was the fit subject for their rejoicing rather than their delegated power over unclean spirits. For a like reason, mayhap, the Lord said to the twelve, Come ye yourselves apart, and rest awhile. The rest would sober their spirits.

The Lord had many things to say to His servants, but He could not say them there where so many were coming and going. Communications that could not be made to the twelve on the seashore were made on a former occasion indoors (Matt. 13:36), but when the house became overcrowded privacy must be sought elsewhere. An individual might secure this privacy by entering into his closet, and barring his door (Matt. 6:6), but the circumstances were different in this case. There were a number of them, and the Lord turned wide to the solitudes of the wilderness with His little company.

Instances are not wanting in Scripture history which establish the necessity for seasons of retirement in the public life of men of God. In the presence of fellow-men, the manifold activities and responsibilities of mutual relationship tend to exclude the sense of the invisible and the eternal; but in privacy, faith, hope and love are quickened into exercise and strengthened for the day of conflict. It was by the river Chebar that the heavens were opened to Ezekiel the priest, and he saw visions of God. And it was while exiled in Patmos that John beheld the glorious Son of man among the seven golden candlesticks, and saw vistas of the future depicted in the gorgeous imagery of the Apocalypse. Moses found the “burning bush,” not in Egypt but in Horeb, and forty years of sheep-tending on the untenanted slopes of the mountain was a needful part of his training to become the leader and lawgiver of Israel.

And so the Lord's call, Come apart and rest awhile, was no new element in the method of divine training; but the call is the more impressive, coming as it does, from the lips of the assiduous Servant of God whom Mark portrays. Let it be the more carefully to be remembered that it is in seclusion that the deep-lying principles of divine life are deepened, strengthened and developed for days of activity. Apart from these seasons of silent and secret growth such fruit as may appear is likely to be unripe and untimely.

SHEPHERDLESS SHEEP

The Lord accordingly went away with His apostles in the boat, which, apparently, was one allotted to their use (cp. 3:9; 6:45, 51). Their destination was an uninhabited district on the shores of the Sea of Galilee where the required privacy might very well be found. It was, as Luke tells us, near the town of Bethsaida (Luke 9:10). This was not the Bethsaida near Chorazin upon which the Lord's woes were pronounced (Matt. 11:25), but is generally believed to be a town some miles to the eastward known as Bethsaida Julias.

They did not depart unnoticed. The people were too much alert. They had received many benefits through the mercy of the Master, and some seem to have kept watch upon His movements. The embarkation of the little band was observed, and many “knew Him.” They recognized the Benefactor, and with characteristic impetuosity, and with some labor and fatigue, they followed on land for some ten or twelve miles the progress of the boat, being joined by many others from the neighboring villages. Mark, with his customary graphic detail, records that the people “ran” such was their earnestness; and, moreover, that they ran “afoot.”

And Jesus coming forth either from the boat on landing, or from the place of retirement having arrived first, saw this great multitude, and was filled with compassion. He knew their case, marked their eager and laborious pursuit of Him, appreciated their mute but eloquent prayer that He would do them some good, and as a consequence He was filled with compassion. What an heart of infinite capacity His was to be filled! How great the volume of pity when He was filled!

The multitude was a great one, but the Lord knew the burden and the need of each person present. God's love was there below, and there is

But this occasion however was more than an illustration of His universal love. It exemplified His particular concern. In His general providence the heavenly Father feeds the birds of the air (Matt. 6:26). But this company was of more value in His eyes than they? They were not like the busily curious idlers in Capernaum from whose incessant coming and going' the Lord had turned away. These persons had been seeking Him with some pains and inconvenience to themselves. They had traveled some miles to reach Him. They were now before Him, faint in body and weary in spirit. Had they not been as sheep going astray?

Were they not now returning to the Shepherd and Bishop of their souls? And He was filled with compassion for them.

Who was there in all the earth to care for these poor ones of the flock of Israel? A Gentile emperor at Rome ruled them with a rod of iron. An Edomite sat on the throne of David. Were Annas and Caiaphas high priests such as the people needed—men who would bear gently with the ignorant and with them that were out of the way (Heb. 5:2)? There was no compassion in the hearts of the scribes and Pharisees who devoured widows' houses and loaded men's shoulders with heavy, burdens grievous to be borne. The grave had but just closed upon the mutilated corpse of the last of the line of the prophets of God. Truly Israel was without prophet, priest, or king. The people were as sheep not having a shepherd (Num. 27:17;1 Kings 22:17; Ezek. 34:5, 6). All this the Lord saw very fully, and He was filled with compassion for them. Their own shepherds did not pity them (Zech. 11:5), for they were but hirelings, and did not own the sheep, who were therefore afflicted because there was in point of fact no shepherd (Zech. 10:2).

We may ask ourselves who was it there by the Galilean sea with these compassionate thoughts for Israel? Was not this Jehovah echoing what He spake of old through the prophet Isaiah? He was saying, Surely, these are my people; I will be their Savior. He had come down to be afflicted in their affliction, to redeem them in His love and pity, to bear them and carry them as in the days of old (Isa. 63:8, 9). His arm was not shortened that it could not save; His ear was not heavy that it could not hear.

The Lord's heart of pent-up goodness needed but to find a channel, and it found a suitable channel in this indigent friendless people; so He “began to teach them many things.” They were to Him the poor of the flock, and He began accordingly to feed them. He was Himself their living food, come down from heaven. As He said, “He that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.”

“Blessed Master, how lovely to have Thy character to rest on, to study, to feed on! Oh, may we feed so richly on it, that when we meet Thee, Thou mayest be to us a known Jesus, and the sympathies of Thy Spirit may be with what Thy Spirit has already matured in our hearts, and seeing Thee in glory as Thou art, all the inward springs and depths of Thy character may then be revealed to us.”

[W.J.H.]

Studies in Mark, Mark 6:30-34: (49) Seeking a Short Seclusion

6:30-34

“And the apostles gather themselves together unto Jesus; and they told him all things whatsoever they had done and whatsoever they had taught. And he saith unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while. For there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat. And they went away in the boat to a desert place apart. And the people saw them going, and many knew them, and they ran there together on foot from all the cities. And he came forth and saw a great multitude, and he had compassion on them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and he began to teach them many things” (6:30-34, R.V.).

The execution of John the forerunner constituted an epoch in the ministry of the Blessed Lord. It showed that Israel would not receive divine testimony. From this point onwards He instructed His disciples plainly concerning His own sufferings and death which would follow at Jerusalem.

In the appointed order of God John was constituted the pioneer of the Faithful and True Witness, bearing testimony to Him in a remarkable manner from his earliest history. Was it not through the son whom she had not seen that Elizabeth was first able to hail Mary as the mother of her Lord?

(Luke 1:41-45). That light of witness which shone so feebly at the outset rose to the zenith of its full brilliance when John's clarion call rang out for all who had ears to hear, “Behold the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world.” From that moment the lamp of prophecy waned, for John was soon delivered up to prison, and Jesus Himself came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God (Mark 1:14). And the preaching of Jesus continued up to the period to which we have arrived—some two years later.

During this lengthy period—for him—John had languished in confinement, waiting for the day to break and the shadows to flee away.

The voice of the Messiah was heard in the land, throughout Judea and Galilee. When he himself had cried in the wilderness, multitudes had flocked to his preaching and to his baptism. Now One was speaking whose shoe-latchet he was not worthy to stoop down and unloose. Yet week after week, sabbath after sabbath, new moon and passover went by, and the kingdom was not restored to Israel.

As we consider John's long and dreary imprisonment, can we chide him as an impatient man because he sent disciples to Jesus, asking, Art thou he that should come, or look we for another? The Master did not upbraid him nor may we. The truth was that the lofty ideals of Messiah's glorious kingdom were not to be realized in a human fashion, and since signs of immediate deliverance from the oppressor were wanting, many of the sons of Israel would on that account stumble at the Stone Jehovah was setting in Zion.

The humble guise of the Messiah caused the thoughts of many hearts to be revealed, and the Baptist's among others. Nevertheless the Lord said to the disciples of John, “Blessed is he whosoever shall find none occasion of stumbling in me” (Matt. 11:6).

It would seem that God in His inscrutable wisdom delayed the final removal of John from the earth until Messiah had delivered an adequate testimony to the people of Israel, and that testimony was seen to be unheeded and rejected.

The martyrdom of John was in effect a public act, signifying that Israel was not ready to receive the One of whom John spake (Mark 9:12, 13), just as the martyrdom of Stephen was the public act which proclaimed that the nation would not accept the crucified Messiah whom God had glorified and whom Stephen was preaching.

The coincidence of the testimonies of John and Jesus, and the personal love Jesus had for the Baptist are special features of Matthew's Gospel more than Mark. It is there noted how the news of his death affected Him. “Accomplishing in lowly service (however personally exalted above him) together with John, the testimony of God in the congregation, He felt Himself united in heart and in His work to him; for faithfulness in the midst of all evil binds hearts very closely together; and Jesus had condescended to take a place in which faithfulness was concerned (See Psa. 40:9-10). On hearing therefore of John's death He retired into a desert place.”

The kingdom which John proclaimed was not then to be set up in power, and he was therefore taken away, for the time of his public reward as a righteous prophet was deferred until the Son of man should come in His glory, and the people should say, “Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.” Thus the powers in authority wrought their evil will upon the Baptist, as they would shortly do upon Jesus. This the Lord knew, though His apostles did not. Hence we find that about this period the Lord began to withdraw Himself more from the populace, and to devote Himself to the instruction of the apostolic band in regard to the sufferings and death that awaited Him at Jerusalem. It was needful for them to know the mysteries of His person and work, and thus in measure to be equipped to become able ministers of the new covenant in the particular form in which it was soon to be introduced.

A summary showing the connection referred to may be helpful. Comparing the first three Gospels, it will be observed that following immediately upon the account of the death of John the Baptist we have a record of the events named below—

(1) Jesus taking His disciples apart (Matt. 12; Mark 6; Luke 9).

(2) Jesus feeding the crowds who sought Him out, but leaving the apostles to cross the lake alone, though He eventually came to their deliverance in the storm (Matt. 14; 15; Mark 6; 7; Luke 9).

(3) Jesus inquiring what men said of Him, and eliciting personal confession from the apostles (Matt. 16; Mark 8; Luke 9).

(4) Jesus speaking precisely of His sufferings and death at Jerusalem, and of the cross of discipleship.

While the general order of this sequence is found in the three Synoptists, the several events enumerated are brought into closest juxtaposition in the Gospel by Luke.

GATHERING TO JESUS

The apostles at the bidding of their Master had gone in various directions in the service of the kingdom. That particular service being now completed they “gather themselves together unto Jesus.” It is not stated that they were directed to do so. In a sense it was the natural thing to do. To assemble to Him was the instinctive act of their spirits. To whom else should they go? For them there was now but one Master upon the earth, and accordingly they spontaneously gathered themselves together to the Lord and told Him all their doings and all their sayings.

The act was a simple, natural, obvious one historically; but it is often forgotten that the principle of it abides true, so long as there is service to Christ in exercise upon the earth. Are there deeds to be done, and words to be said in His Name in an unfriendly world? When the mission is ended let the report of the proceedings be made at headquarters: whether the necessity arises daily, weekly, or yearly, the principle underlying it is the same. The Master tells His servants what to do; the servants tell their Master what they have done. In a well-known promise, He Himself has shown that this practice was to be continued during the time of His absence. Laying down the general principle, He said, “Where two or three are gathered together unto my name, there am I in the midst” (Matt. 18:20). [W.J.H.]

(To be continued)

Studies in Mark, Mark 6:21-29: (48) The Death of the Forerunner

6:21-29

“And when a convenient day was come, that Herod on his birthday made a supper to his lords, and the high captains, and the chief men of Galilee; and when the daughter of Herodias herself came in and danced, she pleased Herod and them that sat at meat with him; and the king said unto the damsel, Ask of me whatsoever thou wilt, and I will give it thee. And he sware unto her, Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I will

give it thee, unto the half of my kingdom. And she went out and said unto her mother, What shall I ask? And she said, The head of John the Baptist. And she came in straight Way with haste unto the king and asked, saying, I will that thou forthwith give me in a charger1 the head of John the Baptist. And the king was exceeding sorry; but for the sake of his oaths, and of them that sat at meat, he would not reject her. And straightway the king sent forth a soldier of his guard, and commanded to bring his head: and he went and beheaded him in the prison, and brought his head in a charger, and gave it to the damsel; and the damsel gave it to her mother. And when his disciples heard thereof, they came and took up his corpse, and laid it in a tomb." (vi. 21-29, R.V.).

The ways of God with men are altogether removed in their nature and character from human ideas. Though we so frequently forget the truth, it is impossible for us to foretell what the end of a man's career upon the earth will be, even though that man is an honored serve it of God. The common opinion is that the last days of the pious and upright will be days of honorable peace and prosperity.

Such a thought may have given rise to the vain wish of Balaam, that consummate hypocrite, who loved the wages of unrighteousness, when he said, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his" (Num. 23:10). But the prayer of the wicked is declared to be an abomination to the Lord, and certainly the end of Balaam the soothsayer was not peaceful, but violent, for he perished by the sword of the people whom he sought to curse (Num. 31:8).

John, the prophet of righteousness, the harbinger of the Messiah, was an utter contrast to Balaam, yet his end was one to call for serious contemplation. The Lord said of him that he was the burning and shining lamp (John 5:35), He Himself being the true Light come into the world to light every man. Hence it might well have been expected that the Old Testament principle would have been applicable in John's case, and that his earthly testimony would have closed in a climax of brilliance. Was it not said of old that "the path of the righteous is as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day" (Prov. 4:18)? And yet the greatest of the prophets appears to end his life in dark disaster, and is put to a violent death. And of this gloomy close he himself seemed to have had some premonition, when he said of his Master, "He must increase, and I must decrease."

John saw the salvation of God like aged Simeon, and he was, as Simeon was not, the chosen herald of the Lamb of God; yet it was not John's like the venerable father of Israel, to depart in peace—the portion of the perfect and upright man (Psa. 37:37). The crown of martyrdom was for John, not the hoary head, the earthly crown of glory, for he did not live out half his days. He was slain ignominiously by a woman, like Sisera the cursed Canaanite, and like Abimelech, the Murderer of seventy of his brethren. Like Elijah, in whose spirit and power he came, John too was hated by a Jezebel. Elisha saw Elijah disappear in a blaze of transcendent glory, but the disciples of John had to save the bleeding and headless corpse of their master from the vultures and the dogs. The truth explaining the seemingly contradictory facts is that God was not then vindicating the righteous in the earth, as He will yet do (Psa. 58:10, 11).

Thus John the Baptist, the last of the line of the prophets to Israel, was slain by Israel's Edomite king in Galilee. But Jesus, who was pre-eminently the Prophet of Jehovah was crucified at Jerusalem, the city so favored of God. yet notorious for killing the prophets and stoning those who were sent to her (Luke 13:33). Not but what Herod would fain have killed Jesus as well as John; so the Pharisees said (Luke 13:31), and we may well believe it. Only it was to Zion that Messiah offered Himself, and upon her would rest the guilt of His rejection and delivery to the Gentiles for crucifixion.

THE DEED OF DARKNESS

The scriptural narrative touches lightly and without emphatic force of language the tragic particulars of the Baptist's death. The circumstances are eloquent in themselves of the terrible power of sin and Satan over the human heart.

Herod, as seen in the Gospels, was a weak-minded, impressionable man. Thus, the straight talk of the prophet impressed him. The presence of his lords and captains at his feast excited him. The dancing of the daughter of Herodias before him and his guests carried him away in a whirl of exuberant pleasure. Devoid of all self-control, he gave utterance to the most extravagant promises: "Ask of me whatsoever thou wilt, and I will give it thee," he said, adding no qualifications. And to show that this was not mere Eastern hyperbole, he confirmed his promise with oaths. The man who inherited a fourth of his father's kingdom swore to the damsel, "Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me I will give it thee unto the half of my kingdom." In such a wild impetuous way do infatuated and inebriated men sometimes speak. So Ahasuerus more than once promised Esther to grant her petition up to the half of his kingdom (Esther 5:3, 6; 7:2), and Herod may have foolishly. thought to emulate the great world-emperor in this boastful pledge.

Receiving such an unlimited promise, the damsel sought advice from her mother, who according to Eastern custom was not present at the banquet. Such consultation was in itself a proper step to take. Alas, that her mother could only counsel her for evil and not for good. It would seem that Herodias had plotted for this issue. She had set a trap for Herod and baited it with her own daughter. Knowing his disposition, she counted upon some such promise from the monarch when well in his cups. And now the "convenient" moment had come. The sweets of revenge being more to her than half Galilee, she instructed her daughter to ask for the head of John the Baptist.2

The depraved instincts of Herodias appear also in the daughter, for returning with haste to the king, she delivered the message of her mother, with additions of her own. On comparison of the words of the mother with those of the damsel, it would seem that it was the daughter who desired that the gruesome reward should be handed to her upon a dish in the presence of all the guests. She demanded also that the hideous gift might be made to her immediately, being fearful lest the weak-minded king might repent of his rash vow, and recall his promise. Give it me here, she said with incredible savagery (Matt. 14:8); let me have it at once on a platter. A guardsman was accordingly sent there and then on the errand of execution, and in the presence of the assembly of rank and nobility, the shameless damsel received her chosen reward, and carried the trophy of blood on the dish to her mother as her share of the feast.

David took the head of Goliath, the uncircumcised enemy of Jehovah and His people, to Jerusalem, but that was an act of retributive justice, and a witness to the deliverance of the nation. The repulsive action of Herodias and her daughter was the gratification of their private revenge on John the Baptist because he had condemned Herodias' uncle, Herod, whose wife was still living for having his niece, Herodias, whose husband was also alive.

HEROD SORRY BUT NOT REPENTANT

Herod was a man of extreme but superficial feeling. He heard John gladly, though the prophet denounced the sin of which he was guilty. We also read that he was sorry, “exceeding sorry,” 3when he discovered to what a cruel outrage he had committed himself. So was the rich young ruler sorry to refuse the call of Jesus, but in neither the king nor the ruler did the sorrow work repentance (Luke 18:23 Cor. 7:8, 10). When Pilate sent Jesus to Herod he was glad, 'exceeding glad,' to see Him (Luke 23:8). But the result of that interview was only to demonstrate the callous ferocity of his nature. Herod “with his soldiers set him at naught and mocked him, arraying him in a gorgeous robe and sending him back to Pilate.” With all his sorrow, Herod slew the servant in Galilee, and with all his gladness he derided the Master at Jerusalem.

“We have in Herod the history of a soul that had his conscience reached by the word of God, but nothing more. We know well that there is such a thing as resisting the Holy Ghost on the part of unconverted men; it is the commonest thing possible where God's word is known, though it is not only resisting the word, but the Spirit of God. Therefore it was that Stephen said, when addressing the Jews, “Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.” The Holy Ghost so far uses the word as to touch the conscience, and whosoever refuses this resists both the word and Spirit of God.

“In Herod's case it was only John's testimony, but it was a mighty one, so far as the conviction of sin was concerned. John the Baptist did not pretend to bring in redemption; his main object was to point to One who was coming. But there was a mighty work produced through him in leading men to the sense that they could not do without the Lord.

“Thus he brought before men that all was ruined in the sight of God, and that, so far from things being prosperous or happy, the ax was lying at the root of the tree, judgment was at the door And so it was, only that, first of all, the judgment that man deserved fell, by grace, upon Christ. That was the unlooked-for form in which Divine judgment took place then—in the cross. It was a most real dealing of God, but it was a judgment for the time stayed from falling upon the guilty, which fell upon the guiltless Son of God, and thereby redemption is accomplished. The whole work of Christ for the church of God has come in during the time of man's—Israel's—being left by the Lord to Himself. It is the time of God's long-suffering, the world being permitted, to follow its own way in the rejection of the Gospel as much as in the crucifixion of Christ. This is what the world is doing now, and is soon to consummate, when judgment will come.

“Thus [in the case of Herod], conscience is shown in a man that felt what was right, and heard the word gladly for a time. But there was no repentance, no submission of his soul to the conviction that for a moment passed before his mind of what was true, just, and of God. The consequence was that circumstances were so managed by the enemy and permitted of God that Herod should evince the worthlessness of natural conscience, even as regards the very person whom he had owned as a prophet. But at any rate all was lost now, and a guilty hour at a banquet, where the desire to gratify one as bad or worse than himself ensnared his weakness and involved his word. There is the end of natural conscience. Herod orders what he would not have conceived it possible for him to do."4

THE DISCIPLES OF JOHN

The followers of the Baptist appear to have kept in touch with him during his imprisonment. Thus John sent from the prison two of his disciples to Jesus to ask Him, “Art thou he that should come, or look we for another?” And the messengers carried back to their master the answer of Jesus (Matt. 11).

At the time of John's execution they were near enough to the place of imprisonment to learn quickly the sad fate of their master, and were able to perform for him their last loving office. They took up the poor mutilated remains, and laid them in a tomb. The Lord who buried His servant Moses and took away Elijah provided honorable interment by reverent bands for John the Baptist.

The disappearance of the body being noted by the servants of the king may have given rise to Herod's surmise of John's resurrection when, he heard of the miracles of Jesus.

Moreover, the fact that the disciples of John carried away the body of their master may have given support to the false story circulated by the Jews to explain away the reported resurrection of Jesus (Matt. 28:13). There was no real analogy between the two cases, but the suggestion was plausible enough for those who wished to evade the truth.

From the Gospel of Matthew we learn that these disciples, having buried their master, went and told Jesus (Matt. 14:12). May we not conclude that thenceforth they followed Him of whom John said, “Behold the Lamb of God"?

[W.J.H.]

Studies in Mark, Mark 6:14-20: (47) John's Rebuke of Herod's Sin

6:14-20

32.-JOHN'S REBUKE OF HEROD'S SIN

“And king Herod heard thereof; for his name had become known1: and he said, John the Baptist is risen from the dead, and therefore do these powers work in him2. But others said, It is Elijah. And others said, It is a prophet, even as one of the prophets. But Herod, when he heard thereof, said, John, whom I beheaded, he is risen. For Herod himself had sent forth and laid hold upon John, and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife; for he had married her. For John said unto Herod, It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife. And Herodias set herself against him3, and desired to kill him; and she could not; for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous man and a holy, and kept him safe4. And when he heard him, he was much perplexed; and he heard him gladly5“ (6:14-20, R.V.).

The activities of the Lord Himself and the separate testimonies of His apostles at this period reached the ears of king Herod. The name of Jehovah's Servant was becoming famous through His own mighty works, and now through the labors of His servants. Herod did not know Jesus of Nazareth, but his memory was full of John the Baptist, for he had but recently pronounced the cruel sentence of his execution. And when tidings came of one who was working the works of God in Galilee, he could only think of the righteous and holy prophet who had been as the

mouth of God to him.

But how were these miracles of Jesus Christ, so numerous and striking as they were, to be explained? The testimony of the Baptist was not accompanied by signs; as the people said of him on one occasion, “John did no miracle,” his service differing in this respect from that of the Messiah. But the superstitious king had an explanation satisfactory to himself, an explanation which his own terrified conscience supplied. John in the flesh wrought no miracles, but John returned from the grave must be, and was, full of supernatural energy. Herod said, “John the Baptist is risen from the dead, and therefore do these powers work in him.” And yet though this wicked ruler professed to believe there was a messenger from the dead in the land he did not repent, and he is therefore a solemn example of the truth of “father Abraham's” words in our Lord's parable— “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead” (Luke 16:30, 31).

Popular opinion said of the Lord that he was Elijah, the promised prophet (Mal. 4:5), or one of God's prophetic messengers. There was no unanimity in the estimates of the public, as the apostles also stated in their reply to the Lord's question concerning current opinions (Matt. 16:14; Mark 8:28; Luke 9:10). Herod however had personal reasons for his own theory. It was he who beheaded John. And he now believed that John lived again in the prophet of Galilee.

There was some substratum of truth in Herod's opinion, though he was 'unconscious of it. He was wrong as to the identity of the Person who was preaching the kingdom of God, but he was right in that John's testimony of truth and holiness was still being declared. He had removed the head of the Baptist, but the voice that spoke of righteousness and purity was not silenced. The witnesser for the truth may be slain, and his gory head displayed in the orgies of the wicked, but truth itself is not put to death by the sword. And Herod was not mistaken in thinking that the Voice then preaching in Capernaum and Chorazin was saying to him, “It is not lawful for thee to have her.”

It is well to note that the Gospel history here becomes retrospective. Mark, in the early part of the book, mentions the imprisonment of John in connection with the commencement of the ministry of Jesus (1:14), but makes no further mention of the Baptist until now, when he turns back to narrate his violent end. John was truly the forerunner of the Messiah the righteous Servant of Jehovah, to the very last act of public testimony. He witnessed to the Anointed Sufferer not less in the prison than in the wilderness; for both he and his Master were cut off in the midst of their days. Peter and others followed the Lord to a martyr's end, but John had the unique privilege of immediately preceding Him.

THE JEWS UNDER THE POWER OF DANIEL'S FOURTH EMPIRE

The historical references here to the death of John the Baptist by Herod, bring in the subject of the civil government of the Holy Land at the time of our Lord. The people and country were tributary to Rome, that Western power which had then but recently assumed absolute supremacy in the political world. This subjection was not a surprise to those in Israel who had drunk of the spirit of prophecy. The Roman Empire was prefigured in the Image-vision of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 2), the “iron government being the fourth in order of succession of the Gentile empires there portrayed. Daniel also saw it in prophetic vision under the figure of the fourth beast, terrible and powerful “with great iron teeth” (Dan. 7:7).

In the New Testament history we find this “iron” rule in exercise at the time of the birth of Christ. Caesar Augustus issued a decree that “all the world should be taxed,” or enrolled (Luke 2:1). In obedience to this edict Joseph and Mary, lineal descendants of the royal line of David, went up submissively from Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem in Judea. The position of servitude in which the chosen people stood to the great Empire is further shown by the circulation in their midst of the Roman currency in which they paid taxes to their over-lords (Luke 20:19-26).

Again, the supremacy of the Roman government in the land of Israel was demonstrated by their exclusive exercise of the function of condemning prisoners to the extreme penalty After the flood the authority of man in government to punish the murderer by death, previously reserved by God,. was conferred by Him upon Noah and his descendants. God decreed that “Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God made he man” (Gen. 9:6). This power was recognized and in use throughout the successive forms of government in Israel, and after Israel's subjugation it was exercised by the Gentile empires. For instance, Daniel testified of Nebuchadnezzar, the “head of gold,” that “all peoples, nations, and languages, trembled and feared before him; whom he would he slew, and whom he would he kept alive” (Dan. 5:19).

And the Roman emperors, though not so absolute in their rule as their Babylonian predecessors, reserved to themselves and to their local representatives the right of judicial execution. The Jews admitted to Pilate their lack of this authority: “It is not lawful,” they said, “for us to put any man to death” (John 18:31). This authority was in the hands of the Roman governor who arrogantly and insolently said to his Just and Holy prisoner, “Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power, [authority] to crucify thee, and have power (authority] to release thee?” (John 19:10). This authority of Pilate Jesus. did not deny, but rather traced that authority to its true source—not to his imperial master at Rome but to the Sovereign Ruler of all: “Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above” (John 19:10; cp. Rom. 13:1-4). Never was this judicial authority more flagrantly abused than it was by Pilate, the representative of the Roman empire. Weakly submitting to the will of the Jews, he freed Barabbas the malefactor whom he should have executed for murder, and condemned Jesus the Benefactor to be crucified.

THE HERODIAN RULE

The rule of the Herods was subservient to Rome. Several members of the Herod family are mentioned in the New Testament history, but most were enemies to Christ and to those who bore His name.

1. Herod the Great, one of the worst tyrants of all time, massacred the children of Bethlehem (Matt. 2:16).

2. Archelaus was the son of Herod the Great whom Joseph feared (Matt. 2:22).

3. Herod Antipas executed John the Baptist (Matt. 14:1-12), and mocked Jesus (Luke 23

4. Herod Agrippa I. executed James, the brother of John (Acts 12:1, 2).

5. Herod Agrippa II. had Paul brought before him as prisoner (Acts 25:13-27).

The Herods were Idumean in origin, and were placed in the position of titular rulers in Judea and Galilee by the Roman government. The name Idumea is the Greek equivalent of Edom, the land of the descendants of Esau. So that the position of the Jews in the days of the Gospels was humiliating in the extreme. They were not only under the dominion of the Gentile power at Rome, but a son of Esau ruled over them in the land. This order was not according to the purpose of God announced from the beginning—that, of Jacob and his brother, the “elder should serve the younger” (Gen. 25:23). But through the unfaithfulness of the chosen people, this divine order was for the time reversed, and Esau was in the ascendant, though an enemy of God and His truth. Indeed hatred and jealousy and bitter animosity against God and the people of God characterize the Edomites throughout the Old Testament records. The last of the prophetic “burdens” declares them to be the people against whom Jehovah has indignation forever (Mal. 1:4). And the New Testament opens with the effort of the Edomite, who was ruler of Edom as well as of Judea and Galilee, to destroy Him who was born King of the Jews (Matt. 2). The bloodthirsty Herod was a true descendant of Doeg the Edomite, the murderer of the priests at Nob (1 Sam. 22:9-19).

HEROD ANTIPAS AND JOHN

Herod Antipas6, son of Herod the Great, was tetrarch of Galilee, the northern part of his father's dominions, when John the Baptist came into the country round about the Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins and the immediate coming of the Messiah (Luke 3:5-3). This voice crying in the wilderness resounded in the palace of the king. John spoke of an Anointed One whose coming was imminent, and Herod, may have feared in Him, who was announced to appear, a possible rival to his throne, the tenure of which was so notoriously frail. He could hardly have entirely forgotten the incident which happened less than thirty years before when there came Eastern magi to his father's court in Jerusalem, seeking Him who was born King of the Jews. He may also have remembered, amongst other of his father's deeds of blood and cruelty, the horrible slaughter of the babes of Bethlehem perpetrated to ensure the death of the Royal Child. We think it must have been so, for conscience stimulates the most sluggish memory, and Antipas was not altogether dead to conscience.

Moreover, that conscience was appealed to by the dauntless testimony of the Baptist. For John came “in the way of righteousness.” Like Noah, he was a “preacher of righteousness” in a day of unnatural corruption. Like also, his prototype Elijah, he delivered his words of truth in a profligate court. John reproved the king for the many notorious evils he had committed; but perhaps his blackest crime was to marry his brother Philip's wife, and the intrepid prophet did not shrink to denounce the incestuous adulterer to his face, although he sat upon a throne, condemning him by the laws of God and man (Lev. 18:16; 20:21). “It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife” summed up his charge. The king's guilt was trebly great; for the wife of Herod was alive, the husband of Herodias was alive, and Herod and Herodias stood in the relationship of uncle and niece. But there was no repentance. The words of John did not turn this disobedient one “to the wisdom of the Just” (Luke 1:17). Herod hardened his heart, and as the Spirit of God says, in view no doubt of the ancient precept, “Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm,” that he “added yet this above all, that he shut up John in prison,” and would have done worse to him, but “when he would have put him to death he feared the multitude because they counted him as a prophet” (Matt. 14:5). This popular opinion in favor of John was so strong that the chief priests and elders also feared to oppose it (Matt. 21:26).

HEROD'S FEAR OF JOHN

The king was of a weak and vacillating nature, but not without a susceptibility to influences for good. We read that “Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous man and a holy, and kept him safe. And when he heard him, he was much perplexed: and he heard him gladly.” The invincible nature of truth and, righteousness is exemplified in the king's attitude toward the Baptist. It was Herod, not John, who feared. The empurpled voluptuary was a moral coward in the presence of the prophet, as such must be before the righteous and the holy. The licentious monarch had abandoned himself to the luxurious gratification of his every evil passion, for which the manners of his court gave him every facility. In contrast with this royal self-indulgence, John had learned the difficult lesson, of self-denial and self-conquest in the solitudes of the wilderness. His hairy garment and his frugal diet were outward indications of the moral attitude of the man who by severe self-discipline, qualified himself (so far as man may do so) for his dignified mission. John, who called the people to sackcloth and ashes, was not a man “clothed in soft raiment” himself. He came neither eating nor drinking, for it was a day of fasting, and a day for men to afflict their souls.

His practice corresponded with his preaching. The divine object, announced in the song of his father Zacharias, was that the people of Israel might serve God “in holiness and righteousness” all their days. And accordingly the forerunner of the Messiah was a righteous and a holy man himself, and this character of John was so well-known and well-established that even the evil and suspicious king knew it, and feared him in consequence.

Nevertheless, in spite of this admission, the unrighteous and unholy ruler did not release his righteous and holy prisoner, but held him in custody. Yet this attitude was no strange event in the world's history, for evil's enmity of the good it sees in another has repeated itself from the beginning. Why did Cain slay Abel? Because his own works were evil; and like Herod he knew that his brother's were righteous (1 John 3:12). It was so also in the history of Israel when their Messiah came, He whom they denied, and delivered over to Pilate for crucifixion, was pre-eminently the Holy and the Righteous One (Acts 3 it), concerning whom even the crucified robber testified, “He has done nothing amiss.” And is it not the constant experience, of those who are the possessors of the kingdom that they are persecuted for righteousness' sake? (Matt. 5:10; 1 Peter 3:10-14). It is true that the followers of Christ are called to a higher standard of suffering-testimony, viz., that which arises out of a confession of the name of Christ; but this highest standard cannot be truly attained unless it is based upon righteousness and holiness of truth, the twin principles of the new creation, (Eph. 4:24).

Herod then feared John, if not as a prophet of God as a righteous and holy man, and kept him safe7 from the malice of his paramour Herodias who sought to kill him. And during the Baptist's imprisonment Herod appears to have summoned his prisoner before him on several occasions, and the faithful words and fearless bearing of the prophet were not without their effect upon the profligate king. “When he heard him, he was perplexed,” or as many read it, “he did many things.” He sought to compromise with the truth by carrying out some minor reforms. But of the foul sin of which he was guilty before the eyes of his kingdom and before the eyes of his God, he was impenitent. He did many things, but not the one thing. He heard John gladly too; and it is also said elsewhere, that the common people heard Jesus gladly (Mark 12:37). But such gladness is not associated with the hearing by which faith comes.

W.J.H.

Studies in Mark, Mark 6:6-13: (46) The Twelve Commissioned

6:6-13

THE TWELVE COMMISSIONED

“And he went round about1 the villages2 teaching. And he called3 unto him the twelve, and began to send them forth by4 two and two; and he gave them authority5 over the unclean spirits; and he charged6 them that they should take nothing for their journey,7 save a staff only; no bread, no wallet,8 no money in their purse;9 but to go shod10 with sandals: and, said he,11 put not on two coats.12 And he said unto them, Wheresoever ye enter into a house, there abide13 till ye depart thence.14 And whatsoever place15 shall not receive you, and they hear you not, as ye go forth thence, shake off the dust that is under your feet for a testimony unto them.16 And they went out,17 and preached that men18 should repent. And they cast out many devils,19 and anointed with oil many that were sick,20 and healed21 them” (vi. 6-13, R.V.).

The re-iterated rebuff which the Lord received at Nazareth did not deter Him from continuing His service. In unabated diligence He went on with His work, going round the Galilean towns and villages teaching. This Gospel throws into special prominence the zealous activities of the Servant of Jehovah. At the same time it shows that the end of His labor, judged from the common standpoint of human life, was not such as is usually seen in the careers of busy public men. “Seest thou a man diligent in business? he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men” (Prov. 22:29). The Lord stood before kings truly, but He stood before them not for reward, but for unjust condemnation. From the outset He knew that He was going on to be “numbered with the transgressors"; but He shunned no man, standing in lowly submission before the obscure men of Nazareth to serve even them—only they could not endure Him.

These men of Nazareth were full of unbelief, and “where there was this unbelief, our Lord would not remove it by dazzling feats of power, because there would have been no moral worth in a result so produced. He had given already abundant signs to unbelief; but men had not profited by them, neither was the word that He spake mixed with faith in them that heard it. The consequence was that He ‘could there do no mighty work’; as here only it is recorded—yes, of the Man before whom no power of Satan, no disease of man, nothing above or around or beneath could prove the smallest difficulty. But God's glory, God's will governed all; and the display of perfect power was in perfect lowliness of obedience. “Therefore this Blessed One could there do no mighty work. It is needless to say that it was no question of power as to Himself. It was not in any wise that His saving arm was shortened; not that there was no virtue in Him any longer, but there was the lovely blending of the moral glorifying of God with all that was wrought for man.

“In other words, we have not here the mere setting forth of the power of Jesus, but the gospel of His ministry. Therefore it is a weighty part of this, that because of unbelief He could do no mighty work there. He was really serving God; and if man only is seen, not God, we may wonder that He could do no mighty work there. But what at first sight seems strange, the moment you take it in connection with the object of God in what He is revealing, becomes striking, plain and instructive.”

THE TWELVE SUMMONED FOR ACTIVE SERVICE

During, or at the conclusion of this Galilean circuit, the Lord called the twelve to Him, and formally despatched them in various directions for the work of preaching. They had hitherto been “with Him” to learn from His own lips the nature and character of His teaching. Thus we read that He “went about through the cities and villages preaching and bringing the good tidings of the kingdom of God; and with him the twelve” (Luke 8:1). This companionship with the Master was specified in the original terms of their apostolate. The record of their call is that the Lord “appointed twelve that they might be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach, and to have authority to cast out demons” (Mark 3:14, 15).

Mark accordingly shows how the chosen band accompanied the Master and how they were instructed by Him in the things of the kingdom of God, set out in parables which He afterward expounded to them (chap. 4), while they were also made witnesses of His power over the elements of nature (4:35-41) and over unclean spirits and disease, and even over death (chap. 5). This comprised their training for service. At the fountain-head they learned what they were to preach, and, more important still, what a transcendent power was behind the ministry of the kingdom to make it effectual.

The discipline of the inward man for days of suffering and disappointment is not noted here as elsewhere. The immediate object of their mission on this occasion was to announce the gospel of the kingdom of God—to make known what they had seen and what they had heard. And this feature of personal acquaintance must, of necessity, characterize all divine testimony (1 John 1:1).

The twelve disciples were now sent forth by the Lord in twos, Mark alone recording this arrangement. The lists of the names of the apostles are arranged in pairs (Matt. 10:2-4; Luke 6:14-16), and this dual arrangement may therefore indicate the order adopted by the Lord in sending them to preach. At any rate two ensured mutual help and adequate testimony.

As the Lord's purpose was to send them to preach, so it was to bestow upon them power over demons (3:15). They were able to exhibit the credentials of apostles— “signs and wonders and mighty works” (2 Cor. 12:12). They were able to produce marvelous acts which were samples of the “powers of the age to come.” They were sent into the domain of the prince of this world to announce the imminence of the kingdom of Jehovah and His anointed; and in the commission for this service the Lord showed His divine power and Godhead by bestowing upon His followers authority over the demon-servants of Satan. A mere man could never delegate to others such power over unclean spirits; but Jesus possessed this authority Himself (1:27), and moreover imparted it to the twelve.

PERSONAL DIRECTIONS

The Lord gave the apostles precise directions with regard to their outfit for this traveling mission. Their preparations were to be marked by lowliness and simplicity. How incongruous any appearance of luxury and pomp would have been in the emissaries of the poor and despised Nazarene. Accordingly the apostles were to take nothing for their journey, save a staff only. This article was essential to the poorest traveler. Jacob, referring to his poverty when fleeing to Padan-aram, and contrastedly to the riches he possessed on his return, said, “With my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two companies” (Gen. 32:10).

Further, the apostles were prohibited from taking with them any bread, or any bag to carry provisions, or any money in their girdle to purchase necessaries even. They were to use ordinary footwear, and not to put on two coats. Though invested with inimitable power over unclean demons, they were to be in circumstances which would make them outwardly dependent upon the “cold charities” of a selfish world.

By these directions the apostles were prepared to learn by experience the elementary but fundamentally important lesson of spiritual service, viz., dependence upon God for those things after which the Gentiles habitually seek (Matt. 6:32). They would find during their mission that their Master had the control of providence as well as of winds and waves and demons. And we know historically from their own confession that the Lord did care for them without fail. He Himself said to them on the night of His betrayal, “When I sent you forth without purse and wallet and shoes, lacked ye anything? And they said, Nothing.” But from that time onward their circumstances would alter, for He said, intimating the approaching change, “But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it and likewise a wallet; and he that hath none, let him sell his cloak and buy a sword” (Luke 22:35, 36).

These instructions of the Lord all point to the simplicity which, it was His will, should mark them as His servants. So Paul wrote to Timothy, “No soldier on service entangleth himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who hath enrolled him as a soldier” (2 Tim. 2:4). The absence of luggage would enable them to be more expeditious in their traveling. Their work was among the simple peasantry of Galilee where signs of affluence would hinder the reception of their preaching. Besides, if they possessed two coats, for instance, would it not have been their duty to have imparted one to him that had none (Luke 3:11)?

The following remarks on the subject were made by a traveler in the East. “The entire ‘outfit' of these first missionaries shows that they were plain fishermen, farmers or shepherds; and to such men there was no extraordinary self-denial in the matter or the mode of their mission. We may expound the ‘instructions ' given to these primitive evangelists somewhat after the following manner: “Provide neither silver, nor gold, nor brass in your purses. You are going to your brethren in the neighboring villages, and the best way to get to their hearts and their confidence is to throw yourself upon their hospitality. Nor was there any departure from the simple manners of the country in this. At this day the farmer sets out on excursions quite as extensive, without a para in his purse; and the modern Moslem prophet of Tarshiha thus sends forth his apostles over this identical region. Neither do they encumber themselves with two coats. They are accustomed to sleep in the garments they have on during the day, and in this climate such plain people experience no inconvenience from it. They wear a coarse shoe, answering to the sandal of the ancients, but never take two pairs of them; and although the staff is an invariable companion of all wayfarers, they are content with one.”

THE PREACHING OF REPENTANCE

These twelve men went forth therefore in six different directions, and the burden of their message wherever they went was that men should repent. The verb “repent,” and its related noun, “repentance,” only occur three times in the Gospel of Mark; for the words, “to repentance,” in 2:17, are omitted in critical editions of the New Testament. The occurrences, however, illustrate the unity of purpose in the Gospel. They are the following:

(1) “John came who baptized in the wilderness, and preached the baptism of repentance unto remission of sins” (1:4).

(2) “Now after that John was delivered up, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe in the gospel” (1:15).

(3) “And they [the twelve apostles] went out, and preached that men should repent” (6:12).

The continuity of the testimony to the fundamental necessity for man's repentance in view of the coming kingdom is strikingly shown by this sequence. What John the Baptist declared, the Lord emphasized, and the twelve echoed: Except men repented they would all perish. But should one sinner only repent on earth, this would become an occasion of rejoicing in heaven, as the Lord Himself declared (Luke 15).

But scripture is clear that repentance was and is a necessity for men—not only in the land of Israel but in all the world. It is therein placed on record that the Lord before His departure instructed the apostles that “repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name unto all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47). Paul also, “the apostle of the uncircumcision,” in harmony with this commission to the twelve, announced in Athens that now, in contrast with the former times, God “commandeth all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30).

There is therefore a necessity, and an urgent necessity, enforced by divine command, and laid upon men without exception for that radical change which is implied by the scriptural term “repentance.” It is, however, outside our present purpose to discuss whether this change is one (1) of heart or disposition, (2) of mind or thought, (3) of aim or purpose, or (4) of life or conduct. The essential fact to note is that repentance involves change, and that of the most Momentous nature. Inwardly, this change extends to the deepest springs of a man's conduct; outwardly, it corrects his attitude Godward, for repentance is primarily “toward God” (Acts 20:21), being also manward by inevitable consequence.

This need for repentance was insisted upon in view of the earthly kingdom as it was presented in the days of our Lord, and it was no less pressed in the preaching of the heavenly kingdom in the days of the apostles. Paul himself declared how he testified to Jews and Gentiles that they should repent and turn to God and do works worthy of repentance (Acts 26:20), the last phrase being an echo of the preaching of John the Baptist (Matt. 3:8).

This necessity rests, not upon the avowedly impenitent only, but upon those who bear the name of Christ. Witness the messages of the Lord Himself to the seven churches of Asia. Five of them, Ephesus, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis and Laodicea, are definitely exhorted to repentance (Rev. 2:5, 16, 22; 3:3, 19). Judgment will begin with the unrepentant in the house of God, therefore let every man beware lest he cherish the vain delusion that he is one of the “ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.”

STAFF AND STAVES

The prohibition of the Lord having reference to a staff shows some variation in the records of the first three Evangelists. The passages are as follows—

(1) Matt.. 10:9, 10: “Provide neither gold, nor silver... nor yet staves.” The Revised Version reads, “Get you no gold nor silver... nor staff.”

(2)Mark 6:8: He charged “them that they should take nothing for their journey, save a staff only." The R.V. and the A.V. are in agreement here.

(3) Luke 9:3: “He said unto them, Take nothing for your journey, neither staves, nor scrip.” The R.V. reads “staff” not “staves.”

The variation in the phrase, taking the readings adopted by the Revisers, may thus be set out—

(1) MATT.: Do not get a staff.

(2) MARK: Take a staff only.

(3) LUKE: Do not take a staff.

Thus, the critics allege that according to both Matthew and Luke, the apostles were forbidden to take a staff, while according to Mark they were permitted to do so. It is true also that Matthew and Mark differ in their phraseology. The former forbids the apostles to get or to provide a staff, that is, in addition to the usual one, while the latter grants permission to them to take a “staff only,” but not one additional to the ordinary one. Understood in this sense, the difference in the phrases does not constitute any essential disagreement between the two statements.

The expression in Luke at first sight raises a difficulty, since it seems to say, Do not take a staff at all, in opposition to Mark. But the “discrepancy” is only an apparent one, for it will be observed that the prohibition is directed entirely to the preparation for the journey contemplated, and the staff is included with the scrip and bread and money: “Take nothing for your journey, neither staff nor scrip nor bread nor money.” The very commonest article was not to be procured by the twelve in view of their mission. They might make use of the ordinary walking staff, but they might not provide one specially for their new enterprise.

This seems to be the simple and unstrained solution of the problem, and preferable to the elaborate and forced hypothesis of McClellan, who supposes that the word staff is used in these passages in a double sense, viz., (1) the staff for traveling, and (2) the staff of apostolic office. The latter they were enjoined to take, but not the former. This is pure assumption, and is altogether unnecessary for adequate explanation of the passages; for the plain import of the phrases in all three evangelists is that the apostles were not to make any special preparation for the journey.

ANOINTING WITH OIL

The apostles in the course of their ministry “cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many that were sick and healed them.” The circumstance of the anointing is only mentioned in Mark, but the healing of the sick is also associated with oil in the Epistle of James: “Is any among you sick? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith shall save him that is sick, and the Lord shall raise him up” (James 5:14).

It is known that oil was used throughout the East as a remedial agent. Not to make reference beyond the Bible, the Good Samaritan administered oil as well as wine to the wounded man (Luke 10:34). Isaiah refers to the mollification of wounds with oil (Isa. 1:6). Is it not therefore reasonable to suppose that the disciples and the elders of the church applied oil to sick persons, as a natural remedy, this being a simple specific within the power of those lacking medical knowledge and skill? And they did so, relying on the power and blessing of the Lord to make the means efficacious. Further than this we have no warrant for imitating their example in these days.

THE WORDS OMITTED IN VERSE 11 BY THE REVISERS

The latter part of verse 11 in the Authorized Version (161.1) contains the solemn warning by our Lord against such as refused the preaching of the apostles: “And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear you, when ye depart thence, shake off the dust under your feet for a testimony against them. [Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment than for that city].”

The Revisers (1882) substitute “whatsoever place” for “whosoever,” and omit, without any marginal comment, the whole of the words placed between the brackets []. It is true that the words thus deleted in this Gospel are found in substance in two others, viz., in Matthew (10:15) and in Luke (10:12), so that the general truth of the warning clause expunged in Mark is still maintained by these passages; but the question may well be asked on what grounds the omission is made in the Second Gospel.

It is not, however, proposed to discuss in these notes the adequacy or otherwise of the evidence upon which these words are denied a place in Mark's Gospel, but it may sufficiently serve a useful purpose to point to this passage as one among many others in the New Testament where, in the opinion of scholars competent to judge in matters of textual authority, the Revisers were unduly influenced by the testimony of a few ancient witnesses to disregard that of the more numerous documents.

The late Mr. Kelly, writing in July, 1881, on the “Revised New Testament,"22 a month or two after its publication, said in reference to this passage, “The latter half of chapter 6:11 seems an accommodation from Matthew 11 and Luke 10 with changes. Yet the ancient testimony is so ample (eleven uncials, nearly all the cursives, and some of the best versions) that it surprises one to see no remark in the margin on such a difference,” that is, on such an extensive omission in the face of weighty evidence for its retention.

The summary treatment of this passage by the Revisers is adversely criticized, but more decisively than by Mr. Kelly, in a posthumous work of Dean Burg-on, arranged and edited by Prebendary Miller. He rightly points out how destructive of the individuality of the Gospels such unwarranted excision becomes. These are his words: “The value—may I not say the use?—of these delicate differences of detail becomes apparent whenever the genuineness of the text is called in question.” He then goes on to refer to the words withdrawn from Mark. “It is pretended,” he says, “that this [passage] is nothing else but an importation from the parallel place of Matthew's Gospel (10:15). But that is impossible for, as the reader sees at a glance, a delicate but decisive note of discrimination has been set on the two places. Mark writes, ; Matthew, . And this threefold, or rather fourfold, diversity of expression has existed from the beginning; for it has been faithfully retained all down the ages; it exists to this hour in every known copy of the Gospel, except of course those nine which omit the sentence altogether. There can be therefore no doubt about its genuineness. The critics of the modern school (Lachmann, Tischendorf, Tregelles, Alford, Westcott and Hort) seek in vain to put upon us a mutilated text by omitting those fifteen words. The two places are clearly independent of one another.

“It does but remain to point out that the exclusion of these fifteen words from the text of Mark has merely resulted from the influence of the parallel place in Luke's Gospel (9:5), where nothing whatever is found corresponding with Matt. 10:15, [or] Mark 6:11."23

The passage in Luke 9:5 refers to the rejection of the apostles' preaching, but has no warning based on the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrha. The Revisers have made Mark agree with Luke by omitting the clause. It must be noted, however, that the warning occurs in the following chapter of Luke, though in slightly different terms, being applied to the city rejecting the witness of the Seventy: “It shall be more tolerable in that day for Sodom than for that city” (Luke 10:11, 12).

It will be gathered from the above criticism that the internal evidence for the exclusion of this passage is very weak, just as the external evidence is very scanty. The assumption that the words were inserted in the Gospel of Mark by some scribes in order to agree with either Matthew or Luke rests upon a most slender basis.

(1) If the words were taken from Matthew, why is there such diversity still remaining? Matthew reads “for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah,” but Mark reads “for Sodom and Gomorrah.” In the Greek the distinction in the words is more apparent still, because the proper names have different case—endings in the two Gospels—in Matthew the genitive case is used, and in Mark the dative. The conjunction differs also: in Matthew (and), in Mark (or). These points of difference are not likely to have occurred if the phrase in question was copied into Mark from Matthew, as the critics allege.

(2) Neither does it appear that Mark copied from Luke, for the latter names only Sodom, but Mark both Sodom and Gomorrah. Again, Luke has “in that day,” but Mark has “in the day of judgment.” These verbal distinctions make it most improbable that the sentence was added from Luke. Besides, it has already been noted that the Lord's warning is given in Luke in connection with the preaching of the Seventy and not with that of the Twelve as in Mark.

It seems therefore incredible that the received text in Mark 6:11 should possess so many indications of originality if of spurious origin. And we may still reflect upon the significant fact that all three Gospels unite to show that not temporal only but eternal issues hung upon the acceptance or rejection of the apostles' preaching.

W. J. H.

Studies in Mark, Mark 6:1-6: (45) Rejection at Nazareth

6:1-6

30. Sabbath Service in Nazareth

It was the practice of the Lord to teach and to preach the word in the synagogues where the Jews habitually assembled (John 18:20) upon the sabbath. The fact of the people coming together in this manner afforded an opportunity of placing the truth before many at once, and of this opportunity the Lord continually availed Himself (Matt. 4:23; 12:9; Mark 1:39; Luke 4:44). It was His “custom” to do so (Luke 4:16).

By this service in the word of Jehovah on the seventh day the Servant-Prophet most truly did the will of Him that sent Him, and most effectually honored and observed the sabbath. Such a spirit was enjoined in the prophecies of Isaiah: “If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, and honorable, and shalt honor it, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words; then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD” (Isa. 58:13, 14).

In none was this fulfilled in the degree that it was in Him who said, “I delight to do thy will, O my God.” His ministry to others in word as here and in deed as elsewhere was a perfect observance of the holy day and also the occasion of His own ineffable joy arising from the accomplishment of the Father's will in spite of the unbelief with which His service was received by man.

The audience in the synagogue at Nazareth was “astonished.” Apparently the amazement was not only at what the Lord Jesus taught but also at the manner in which He taught it; for He “taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes” (Matt. 7:28, 29). Those who were present knew Joseph and Mary, and Jesus was to them as “a root out of a dry ground.” They had observed Jesus as He grew from boyhood to manhood. And they would not suffer one they knew so well to teach them. Where was His authority? Who made Him a teacher? How knoweth this man letters? (cp. John 7:15; Matt. 21:23; Mark 11:28). What was the wisdom given to Him? Why were such mighty works wrought by His hands? Was He not the carpenter, and the son of a carpenter? They knew His brothers, and were not His sisters in their midst?

THE STONE OF STUMBLING

The inhabitants of Nazareth were destitute of belief in the Lord. The evangelist says, “They were stumbled in him.” It had come upon them already as it was quickly coming upon both the houses of Israel, for the national stumbling had been foretold. The Lord of hosts was in the midst of the nation even then, in accordance with Isaiah's prediction, as a sanctuary for those who would come to Him. But He was there also “for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offense to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.” And many would “stumble thereon and fall and be broken and be snared and be taken” (Isa. 8:13-15). The Stone of Israel was in lowly form then, and the proud Pharisees stumbled at Him and His sayings (Matt. 15:12), but He was soon to be exalted and to become the headstone of the corner (Psa. 118:22). In the day of His glory Messiah will be “marvelous” in the eyes of His people, though in His humiliation they saw no beauty in Him that they should desire Him. They will be a humble people then and the stumbling-block will be removed, and they will find that the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity dwells also with him who is of a humble and contrite spirit (Isa. 57:14, 15). And then will be brought about the full accomplishment of the prophecy of aged Simeon spoken to Mary, “Behold, this child is set for the falling and rising up of many in Israel” (Luke 2:34).

The unbelief at Nazareth was therefore the precursor of the unbelief of the nation which delivered Him to the Gentiles to be crucified. The builders thought they knew the Stone well, and it did not please them, and they rejected it.

We may find this hostile spirit foreshadowed in the historical types of Messiah. Was it not so foreshadowed in the house of Jacob? God communicated visions of his coming power and wisdom to the elder son of Rachel. This was offensive to his brethren. “Shalt thou,” they said, “reign over us? or shalt thou indeed have dominion over us?” And they envied Joseph, and hated him for his dreams and his words.

Did not the same evil spirit animate the hearts of the brethren of David when he spoke of the dishonor which the name of Jehovah was suffering from the vaunts of Goliath the idol-worshipper? They hated him, and their anger was kindled against him for his words: “Why camest thou down hither? and with whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness?” The sons of Jesse stumbled at the stumbling-stone; they were not prepared to accept that their shepherd brother was the anointed of Jehovah though, the prophet Samuel had declared it. Thus the proverb was true then also: neither a king nor a prophet is accepted in his own country and among his own kin.

MARY'S UNBELIEVING HOUSEHOLD

The human imagination in poetry and art has in its retrospect woven many sensuous legends around the private life of our Lord. But scripture is strikingly reticent upon this subject. Where so many holy mysteries are thrown open for our learning, such a reservation should be regarded as a warning to us to avoid any intrusion into what is thus guarded. The Spirit of God makes some few but brief references in the Gospels to the early days of our Lord which “were spent in the physical and mental growth of the true humanity which He had assumed.”

But the general tone of the allusions throughout the Gospels to Mary and her family suggests that their attitude towards Jesus as the Messianic King and Savior was one of incredulity if not of actual hostility. Mary in her canticle of praise as we have it in Luke (1:46-55) expressed her confidence in the immediate coming of Him who was God her Savior, but this seems subsequently to have been overshadowed somewhat. Her faith diminished like that of the austere prophet of the Highest who testified, “Behold the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world,” but afterward sent from prison to Jesus his depressed inquiry, “Art thou he that should come, or look we for another?”

The humble guise and ways of the Lord Jesus seem to have been to Mary and to John the Baptist as well as to the mass the stumbling-block, and their early visions of His majesty and dominion and earthly power all faded into dimness, if not into obscurity.

On this occasion the lack of interest on the part of Mary and her household appears to have been cited by the men of Nazareth as evidence against the divine claims of the Master. They said, “Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Jude and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us?” And in another connection we are told definitely that His brethren, whose names are all so strikingly patriarchal, did not believe on Him (John 7:5). The Lord's words in the synagogue therefore created great astonishment among the audience by their wisdom, but His lowly origin and His poor relations confounded them, and they “fell backward into a deadly snare.”

Their inconsistency illustrates how ill men reason when they lack faith. They could see there was nothing in the household of Mary, with all of whom they were well acquainted, to account for the extraordinary nature of the ministry of Jesus, but they failed to seek a divine origin. They could see His power was not derived from man, but they would not see it was derived from heaven.

Such misunderstanding arising among His own and developing into hatred and persecution was foretold by the Spirit of prophecy: “And one shall say unto him, What are these wounds in thine hands? Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends” (Zech. 13:6). But though this detraction sprang not from strangers, but from those who might rank as “familiar friends” the pain of it was borne by our Lord with the utmost patience and without retaliation. He looked not to men, but committed Himself to Him who judgeth righteously, as it was written again: “A man's enemies are the men of his own house. Therefore I will look unto the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me” (Mic. 7:6, 7).

But Jesus had come to bless men, and unbelief could not altogether prevent the accomplishment of this work. It might diminish the stream of blessing for a time or divert its channels, because faith is essential to its outflow. “And he could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them. And he marveled because of their unbelief.” In a future day the righteousness which is by faith will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea; for the just shall live by faith. But now the unbelief of Nazareth was as phenomenal in its nature as the faith of the Roman centurion, and Jesus marveled at both (Matt. 8:10).

(continued from page 291).

Studies in Mark, Mark 6:1-6: (44) Rejection at Nazareth

6:1-6

30.-Rejection at Nazareth

“And he went1 out2 from3 thence; and he cometh into4 his own country; and his disciples follow him. And when the sabbath was come,5 he began to teach in the synagogue: and many hearing him6 were astonished,7 saying, Whence hath this man these things?8 and, What is the wisdom that is given9 unto this man, and what mean such mighty works wrought by his hands?10 Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James, and Joses, and Judas,11 and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended12 in him. And13 Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honor,14 save15 in his own country, and among his own kin,16 and in his own house.17 And he could there do no mighty work,18 save19 that he laid20 his hands upon a few sick folk,21 and healed22 them. And he marveled23 because24 of their unbelief” (6:1-6 (R.V.).

HIS OWN COUNTRY

“And he went out from thence; and he cometh into his own country: and his disciples follow him.” Nazareth was His country, His fatherland (), and is so called elsewhere in the Gospels (Matt. 13:54, 57; Luke 4:23, 24; John 4:44). And Nazareth was a despised town or village in the despised province of Galilee. Remote from Jerusalem and Judah, it was in the most northerly part of those tribal districts of Israel which in the days of idolatrous Jeroboam revolted from the rule of David's royal line. In the prophecies of Isaiah it is described as Galilee of the nations—the land of darkness and the shadow of death (Isa. 9:1, 2; Matt. 4:14-16).

There in the purpose of God Jesus was brought by Joseph. “Directed by God in a dream Joseph carries Him into Galilee whose inhabitants were objects of sovereign contempt to the Jews, as not being in habitual connection with Jerusalem and Judah—the land of Judea—the land of David, of the kings acknowledged by God, and of the temple, and where even the dialect of the language common to both betrayed (Matt. 26:73) their practical separation from that part of the nation which by the favor of God had returned from Babylon. Even in Galilee Joseph established himself in a place, the very name of which was a reproach to one who dwelt there, and a blot on his reputation.” While people of Judea looked down upon Galilee, the people of Galilee looked down upon Nazareth. The “guileless” Nathanael, who was himself a Galilean, said of Jesus in mild contempt, “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?”

Men were loth to think that the northern province should be the scene of the ministry of the Prophet of Jehovah. Some said, “What! doth the Christ come out of Galilee? Hath not the scripture said that Christ cometh of the seed of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was? Out of Galilee ariseth no prophet” (John 7:41, 42, 52). But the speakers forgot that another scripture definitely foretold concerning Galilee of the Gentiles that its people who walked in darkness should see a great light—upon them the Light should shine (Isa. 9:1, 2).

Many prophets had testified that Messiah would become an object of scorn to men when they saw Him. And their united witness to this character of the King of Israel in His first presentation to the nation was fulfilled by the Lord's residence in Nazareth, the village of Joseph and Mary (Luke 1:26; 2:39). This fulfillment is explicitly stated in the first Gospel: “And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene” (Matt. 2:23).25

There in the darkest corner of a benighted province, the Lord remained for some thirty years till the time of His manifestation to Israel, increasing “in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.” Of the events of those years we are not permitted to know more than a fragment (Luke 2:39-62). But who can tell whether we may not learn the marvelous story in a day which is to come?

The Evangelist now records the visit of the Lord Jesus to His own “country” after a period of extended ministry in Capernaum and the neighborhood. Mark had at the commencement of this Gospel showed that the public life of Jesus began from Nazareth: “And it came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan” (1:9). The history then recounts the manifold service of the Prophet of Jehovah throughout Galilee, but especially in the favored town of Capernaum, which was the scene of most of the Lord's miracles and parables mentioned in the early part of this Gospel.

And it was to Capernaum that His kinsfolk, His mother and His brethren came to expostulate with Him in reference to His service (3:21, 31-35). The Lord who on that occasion publicly repudiated the right of human relationship to interfere with Him as the Servant of Jehovah doing the will of Him that sent Him, now visits with His disciples the place where He was brought up. The former incident showed that He was above the human weakness that would swerve from perfect rectitude through the influence of natural ties. The latter proves the Lord's own consistency with His own instruction to the delivered demoniac in Gadara, “Go to thy house unto thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and how he had mercy on thee” (Mark 5:19).

The Lord did not neglect Nazareth, despised and debased though it was reputed among men to be. He went to His own, though His own received Him not.

Jesus of Nazareth (the Nazarene) is the term of reference to the Lord most frequently used by contemporary persons of all classes. He was so known not only in Galilee but also in Judea; for when the whole city of Jerusalem was stirred at His final visit, the multitude said, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee” (Matt. 21:11). This name too was the one used on the inscription placed in mockery by Pilate upon the cross: “This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.”

But if this title is one of dishonor and disrepute among men, angels are not ashamed to use it. The angel at the tomb said to Mary Magdalene, “Be not affrighted: ye seek Jesus of Nazareth which was crucified; he is risen; he is not here; behold the place where they laid him” (Mark 16:6). To Jesus of Nazareth the apostles in their preaching testified expressly under this designation as the crucified but risen and glorified Messiah and Lord (Acts 2:22; 3:6; 4:10; 10:38). And more striking still, the exalted One Himself speaking from the glory to Saul of Tarsus, the bigoted Jew and haughty Pharisee, declared Himself under that name of reproach “I am Jesus of Nazareth whom thou persecutest” (Acts 22:8).

WAS THIS A SECOND VISIT?

The Lord went to Nazareth on this occasion in His public capacity as the Prophet of Jehovah and the anointed King of Israel, accompanied by the apostles who had devoted themselves to His service. In this respect this official visit seems to be distinguished from the previous occasion when the Lord made the announcement of His Messiahship in the synagogue there (Luke 4:16-21).

The two accounts, however, are supposed by some to have reference to the same event. And there are undoubtedly points of resemblance between the narratives as given by (a) Matthew and Mark, and (b) by Luke. For instance,

(1) In both cases, the words of our Lord uttered in the synagogue excite the astonishment and envy of the townsfolk of Nazareth.

(2) In both cases the Lord cites the same proverb, viz., “A prophet is not without honor save in his own country.”

(3) In both cases allusion is made by the audience to the humble origin of the parentage of Jesus.

But there are differences certainly as striking as these resemblances, among which are the following—

(1) In one case the Lord is alone (Luke); in the other He is accompanied by His disciples (Matthew Mark).

(2) The proverb as recorded by Matthew and Mark has the added reference to His kindred and to His house: “No prophet is acceptable in his own country” (Luke 4:24); “A prophet is not without honor save in his own country and in his own house” (Matt. 13:57); “A prophet is not without honor, save in his own country and among his own kin and in his own house” (Mark 6:4).

(3) In one case His life is threatened (Luke). In the other case, after marveling at the unbelief He heals a few persons before His departure (Matt., Mark).

(4) In one case He left Nazareth to go to Capernaum (Luke); in the other He left Nazareth to go round the villages teaching (Matt., Mark).

The exact chronology of events of the Gospels is a matter of minor importance, and in many cases must remain an open question. But here the records seem to point with sufficient distinctness to two separate visits to Nazareth. The similarities enumerated above are such as might naturally occur in connection with His ministry in the synagogue there on successive occasions. A parallel case in the Gospels is that of the cleansings of the temple-courts at Jerusalem by the Lord, John recording the one at the beginning and the Synoptics that at the close of His ministry.

(To be continued). [W.J.H.]

Studies in Mark, Mark 5:35-43: (43) The Dead Child Restored

5:35-43

The Dead Child Restored

“While he yet spake,1 they came from the ruler2 of the synagogue's house, saying, Thy daughter is dead:3 why troublest4 thou the Master any further? But Jesus, not heeding5 the word spoken,6 saith unto the ruler7 of the synagogue, Fear not, only believe. And he suffered8 no man to follow with9 him, save Peter, and James and John the brother of James. And they come10 to the house of the ruler of the synagogue; and he beholdeth11 a tumult,12 and many13 weeping and wailing greatly.14 And when he was entered in,15 he saith unto them, Why make ye a tumult,16 and weep? the child is not dead,17 but sleepeth.18 And they laughed him to scorn.19 But he, having put20 them all forth, taketh21 the father of the child and her mother and them that were with him, and goeth in22 where the child was.23 And taking24 the child by the hand,25 he saith unto her, Talitha cumi;26 which is, being interpreted, Damsel,27 I say28 unto thee, Arise.29 And straightway30 the damsel rose up,31 and walked; for she was twelve years old. And they were amazed straightway32 with a great amazement.33 And he charged them much that no man34 should know this; and he commanded35 that something36 should be given her to eat” (v. 35-43, R.V.).

There had been what appeared to the impatient and distressed ruler many vexatious delays to the visit of Jesus to his house where his sick daughter lay. It would seem, as already noted, that Jairus37 made two separate applications to Jesus before He acceded to the request and accompanied him. The crowd that gathered in the narrow streets—that multitude who, not knowing the law, were regarded by the rulers as accursed (John 7:49)—made progress slow and difficult. The episode of the healing of the woman appeared to be a further impediment in the way of the Master's mercy for him. And now while Jesus was pronouncing His final benison upon the woman (cp. Gen. 26:29) some arrived from the ruler's house with the sad tidings, anticipated but dreaded by him, that death had supervened. “Thy daughter is dead” was the message, closing, as he supposed, the last door of his hopes. He felt like Martha and Mary of Bethany, and might have expressed his feelings in their language, “Lord, if thou hadst been there, my daughter had not died.”

In the estimation of the messenger38 who delivered the message, the incident of the appeal to Jesus was of necessity closed. There now was no more to be done. “Thy daughter is dead: trouble not the Teacher” (Luke). And as if the distracted father was seeking to attract the attention of Jesus while He continued speaking to the woman, some said to Jairus, “Why art thou still troubling the Teacher?”

They gave expression to what would be the practical matter-of-fact opinion of the populace, if not of the apostles also, “What could the prophet of Nazareth do when death had seized its prey?” Believing He could do nothing, they would trouble Him no further. But, as an old writer quaintly puts it: “Here were more manners than faith; 'Trouble not the Master.' Infidelity is all for care, and thinks every good work tedious. That which nature accounts troublesome is pleasing and delightful to grace. Is it any pain for a hungry man to eat? O Savior, it was Thy meat and drink to do Thy Father's will; and His will was that Thou shouldest bear our griefs, and take away our sorrows. It cannot be Thy trouble which is our happiness that we must still sue to Thee.”

THE COMFORTING WORD TO JAIRUS

The rendering of the Revisers here, “But Jesus, not heeding the word spoken,” etc., has been justly questioned, since it is in direct conflict with the context. Jesus did heed the word spoken to Jairus and spoke in reply to counteract it, as the verse shows.

The verb, , translated “hear” in the Authorized Version, occurs also in Matt. 18:17, where it is rendered “neglect to hear.” But in this connection (Mark 5:36) many scholars see sufficient ground for rendering it “over-hearing,” as the Revisers have done in their margin, and McClellan in his translation.

The general sense of the word seems to be that Jesus heard what the speaker did not intend He should hear, but He ignored the literal remark, and said what expressed His own purpose and allayed the anxiety of Jairus. Referring to this passage W. Kelly wrote, “It is doubtful whether the marginal 'overhearing ' should not rather have taken the place of the Revisers' text, ‘not heeding,' which would have suited if the Lord had said nothing. But He heeds the word spoken enough to bid the synagogue-ruler, “Fear not, only believe.' “39

The Lord who prayed for Simon Peter that his faith might not fail in the hour of temptation and trial (Luke 22:32) also knew what untoward influence would be exercised upon Jairus by the tidings of the messengers and their abandonment of hope. “Perhaps the father's hope would have perished too and no room have been left for this miracle, faith, the necessary condition, being wanting, if a gracious Lord had not seen the danger, and prevented his rising unbelief. 'As soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken, he saith unto the ruler of the synagogue, Be not afraid, only believe.' There is something very gracious in that 'as soon as.' The Lord spake upon the instant, not leaving any time for a thought of unbelief to insinuate itself into the father's mind, much less to utter itself from his lips, such as might have altogether stood in the way of a cure, but preoccupying him at once with words of encouragement and hope.” In like manner He said to another father, “All things are possible to him that believeth” (Mark 9:23).

Thus He strengthened the wavering faith in the ruler's heart by His word of comfort and assurance, “Fear not, only believe,” adding, according to the narrative by Luke, “She shall be made whole.”

THE MOURNERS WHO SCOFFED

The Prince of Life passed onwards to the house of death. Mourners were already there, making a great tumult with their weeping and wailing. It is a divine injunction to “weep with those that weep,” and examples are not wanting in scriptural history. The house of Joseph and his brethren mourned for the death of Jacob with a “very great and sore lamentation” at Abel-mizraim (Gen. 1:10, 11). Job's three friends wept for him in his sorrow, with loud voices, rending their mantles and sprinkling dust on their heads, and then sat with him in silence for seven days (Job 2). Jeremiah lamented the death of king Josiah (2 Chron. 35:25), and also for the desolation of Jerusalem and of the temple in the book of his Lamentations.

These examples possessed sincerity, but genuine mourning which arises from neighborly sympathy became perverted into shallow professionalism. Lamentation degenerated into an art, in which some acquired eminence by reason of their skill (Amos 5:16). Mourning women held themselves in readiness to come and take up a wailing for the departed (Jer. 9:17, 18), sometimes expressing themselves in elegies (2 Chron. 35:25).

The Lord who was Himself ever tender and gracious to the distressed and afflicted rebuked the display of perfunctory grief over the daughter of Jairus. Entering the court of the ruler's house, He said to the hirelings, “Why make ye this tumult and weep? The damsel is not dead but sleepeth.” This severity of the Lord was directed against their hypocrisy and sham, for their sympathy was not sincere like that, for instance, of which the Psalmist wrote, when he says, “As for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth: I afflicted my soul with fasting; and my prayer returned into mine own bosom. I behaved myself as though it had been my friend or my brother: I bowed down mourning as one that bewaileth his mother” (Psa. 35:13, 14, R.V.).

The words of the Lord drew forth only laughter and derision from the ignorant and insolent attendants. In the house of the ruler of the synagogue there would be an exceptional number of these owing to his rank, and the menials would be more insolent to the prophet of Nazareth because of the contrasted social position of their employer. His words, “The damsel is not dead,” came into direct conflict with their professional knowledge, and they had no faith in Him nor reverence for His sayings to counterbalance His seeming contradiction of fact. Hence the Lord's dignified reproof of their clamor only awakened in them a sense of the grotesque coupled with some malice at His interference; and they laughed Him to scorn.40 It was the laughter of folly, as that of Abraham and Sarah was the laughter of incredulity (Gen. 22:17; 18:12).

Alas, that it fell within the scope of the appointed sufferings of the Messiah to be exposed to such ridicule from man. But it was written of Him, “All they that see me laugh me to scorn” (Psa. 22:7), and the climax in the fulfillment of this scripture was reached at the cross. He was the Servant whom man despised and the nation abhorred (Isa. 49:7).

It is profitable to study in the New Testament records the variety of forms in which man exhibited his scorn and contempt for the patient and gentle Savior. Some passages are collected below. We read that men

(1) mocked () Him, Matt. 20:19; 27:29, 31, 41; Mark 10:34; 15:20, 31; Luke 18:32; 22:63; 23:11, 36.

(2) reviled Him (), Matt. 12:31; 27:39; Mark 3:28; 15:29; Luke 22:65; 23:39.

(), Matt. 27:44; Mark 15:32.

(), John 9:28 Peter 2:23.

(3) derided Him (), Luke 16:14; 23:35.

(4) spoke evil of Him () Mark 9:39.

(5) spoke against Him (; “contradiction"), Heb. 12:3.

(6) wagged the head at Him (T. K.), Matt. 27:39; Mark 15:29.

(7) laughed Him to scorn () Matt. 9:24; Mark 5:10; Luke 8:53.

The perusal of the above passages will induce the sad and humbling reflection that divine goodness when manifested in the Incarnate Son of God became an object of malicious mirth and insensate mockery to all classes of men. As the Psalmist foretold, He was the song of the drunkards, and those that sat in the gate spoke against Him (Psa. 69:12). Yet Eternal Love triumphed over all such obduracy and hatred, and the testimony for God shone ever brightly, and never more so than amid the gross moral darkness displayed at Calvary.

THE WITNESSES

The multitude which had followed Jesus through the town were not allowed by Him to approach the house of Jairus, which indeed was already occupied by another crowd. The Lord having entered the house put forth the noisy mourners, as Peter afterward did in the case of Dorcas. They, accustomed through their ill-favored calling to the sight of the dead, knew that the damsel was certainly dead, and it was beyond them to understand that what was death to man was sleep to the Lord. They were quite out of place where the Quickener of the dead was, and accordingly they were ejected, like the chaffering traders from the temple-courts at Jerusalem. Not all the apostles even were admitted to the death-chamber; three only were selected-Peter, James and John. The raising of the widow's son and of Lazarus was done before the eyes of the public. In this case the dead child was within doors, and therefore the circumstances must necessarily be more private. The three disciples chosen were adequate to render testimony to the fact of the resurrection. For while two witnesses were sufficient to render evidence valid from a judicial standpoint, three ensured an amplitude. Two witnesses, according to the Apocalypse, will be raised up to testify of imminent judgment (Rev. 11), but there are now three that bear witness in the world to the gospel of the grace of God—the Spirit, the water, and the blood (1 John 5:8).

The father and mother were present also; for the Lord recognized the prior claims of natural affection. This feature is particularly prominent in connection with the miracles of the resurrection. Those raised by Him were this damsel, the only daughter of Jairus, twelve years old; the only son of his mother, and she a widow; and Lazarus the only brother of his two orphaned sisters. In each of these instances there were special

reasons for the poignant grief of the bereaved.

And now with what tender compassionate solicitude did the Blessed Master lead the grief-stricken parents into the presence of the silent dead, accompanied by the three wondering apostles. The number of the company was six, but this was quickly increased to seven, for, to the astonishment of the spectators, the little maid was brought back to the “land of the living.”

THE DAMSEL RAISED

The Lord acted at once with simple directness. He took the child by the hand—a similar action is recorded in the restoration of Peter's mother-in-law. He then called to her, saying, “Damsel, arise,” Mark preserving the actual Aramaic words employed, “Talitha cumi.”

There was an immediate response from the spirit-world. In the words of Luke, “her spirit came again.” This is in accordance with the general phraseology of scripture wherein death connotes the departure of the soul and spirit from the body. Rachel, “as her soul was in departing,” named her son Ben-oni (Gen. 35:18). Elijah prayed concerning the dead son of the widow of Zarephath, “Let this child's soul come unto him again” (1 Kings 17:21). Stephen at his stoning said, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit” (Acts 7:59).

The re-animated body of the daughter of Jairus rose up instantaneously, strengthened as well as vivified, for she was able to walk about, as Mark states with the detail characteristic of his style. She was twelve years old, and therefore able to walk in the ordinary course of nature, but here the action demonstrated that her restoration was as perfect as it was immediate.

It is instructive to note that the Lord in this instance, as in others, recognized the identity of the person with the body. He took the child by the hand, and called to her, not to it, “Damsel, arise.” At Nain He said to the body on the bier, “Young man, I say unto thee, Arise.” At the grave in Bethany, He said, “Lazarus, come forth.” This is also the scriptural usage elsewhere: thus in the Acts we read that “devout men carried Stephen to his burial” (Acts 8:2). And at the appointed moment the Lord will come with a shout (that is, a call of relationship) and the dead in Christ will rise first (1 Thess. 4); according to the Lord's own words, those that are in their graves will hear His voice and come forth (John 5:28, 29).

The simple and dignified conduct of the Lord on this occasion is in striking contrast with that of the Old Testament prophets in the performance of similar miracles. The Lord spoke and acted in His own right, while the prophets had to look above with earnest fervor for the power that was not in themselves to raise the dead. Elijah stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the LORD.... And the LORD hearkened unto the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived” (1 Kings 17:21, 22). So also Elisha, after prayer, “lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands; and he stretched himself upon the child; and the flesh of the child waxed warm. Then he returned and walked in the house once to and fro; and went up and stretched himself upon him; and the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes” (2 Kings 4:34, 35). How different was the procedure of the Lord: taking the child by the hand, He said, “Talitha cumi,” and immediately she arose.

The Lord having restored the damsel's life by His own inherent power, directed the parents to give her food. For the life restored needed the usual means of sustenance, and it was in their power to supply this, no miracle being required. The Lord expects us to do what we are able of ourselves to do, and only exercises His own might where our impotence is displayed.

Eating a meal afforded, in a simple manner, further evidence of the reality of this resurrection, and such a test the Lord applied in His own case (Luke 24:41-43).

RETICENCE IMPOSED

The small company of beholders was amazed with a great amazement at this miracle. Giving life to the dead was a climax to the mighty miracles and wonders and signs wrought by Jesus. The public raising of the widow's son probably preceded this case in point of time, and with it constituted the two witnessing works of this kind in Galilee, the third of these miracles being performed at Bethany in Judea.

The Lord charged them (presumably those present in the room where the damsel was) that no one should know this. The injunction seems to be in the sense that they were not to set themselves to spread the news of the miracle. It could not imply that the raising of the child was to remain a secret; for the fact of the dead daughter of a public personage such as Jairus coming back to life could scarcely be hidden.

A similar injunction laid on the disciples by the Lord on another occasion is recorded in this Gospel, and in that case the context throws some light upon the reason for this prohibition. After the Transfiguration, speaking to the same three witnesses, the Lord “charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen, save when the Son of man should have risen from the dead” (Mark 9:9). This restriction was removed after His own resurrection, for He said to them, “Ye shall receive power when the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Accordingly at Pentecost Peter testified in Jerusalem to the Jews of “Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God unto you by mighty works and wonders and signs which God did by him in the midst of you” (Acts 2:22). In like manner Peter testified to Cornelius of the same wonderful works (Acts 10:38).

Before the coming of the Holy Spirit the apostles had not learned the secondary value which miracles have in the dealings of God with men, as compared with the moral and spiritual power of the word of the gospel. The Lord had to rebuke the exhilaration of the Seventy because they found themselves able to work miracles (Luke 10:17-20). Here He restrained their natural impulse to spread the news of this marvelous work of His.

THE SIGN-CHARACTER OF THIS MIRACLE

The raising of the daughter of Jairus, together with the episode of the healing of the woman in the crowd, forms a further illustration of the character the service of the Messiah would and did assume in consequence of His rejection by the nation at large. In the fourth chapter He is set forth, by parables, as the Sower; in this as the Healer and Life-giver, by miracles. And while He demonstrated, in the country of the Gerasenes, His power over Satan who had the power of death, He showed, in the house of Jairus, that one actually dead was not beyond His salvation.

The dead damsel was a true figure of the daughter of Zion when her King came to her. A few “babes and sucklings” cried, Hosanna, when Messiah came to Jerusalem in fulfillment of the prophecy of Zechariah, but the nation, through the mouth of its leaders, solemnly denied Him in the presence of Pilate, and declared, “We have no king but Caesar.” Israel, knowing not the anointed Son of David, was like Nabal of old, whose “heart died within him, and he became as a stone.”

This figure of death applied to the Jews is a stronger metaphor than that of the unfruitful soil employed in the preceding parable. Indeed no more impressive term is used throughout scripture to describe the hopeless spiritual condition of the people, beyond all human remedy as it was. But the Lord was able to restore even in such a case as this. For this purpose He had come, and He was on His way to accomplish redemption for Israel. And during His progress to the house of death He was accessible to any needy person who had faith enough to touch Him as He passed by.

But in a coming day all Israel shall be saved in accordance with divine promise. The Lord will yet bless the daughter of Zion, and will give life to His people, even though they be not only dead like the daughter of Jairus but in the grave like Lazarus. This figure of resurrection was applied by the prophets to the national restoration of the chosen people. Daniel spoke of the day when “many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake” (Dan. 12:2). And Ezekiel prophesied still more precisely of the time of Israel's future blessing, under the vision of the valley, full of dry bones which lived and stood upon their feet an exceeding great army. This vision was explained to be a token of what Jehovah meant to do. He: said to the people through the prophet, “I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel” (Ezek. 37:12).

In the New Testament the apostle Paul used the same figure in connection with the same subject. Writing, in the Epistle to the Romans, of the setting aside of the children of Israel, and of their future restoration, he says, “If the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?” (Rom. 11:15).

Studies in Mark, Mark 5:35-43: (42) The Reward of Confession

5:35-43

The Reward of Confession

It was not the purpose of the Lord Jesus that His mighty works should be done “in a corner,” but openly and before all the people. Accordingly the public confession of the woman was made. She then received the additional and inestimable benefit of the assuring words of the Lord addressed personally to her. She learned from His own lips that her application to Him for healing was not unwelcome, and that His gift of mercy was not made grudgingly but with His whole heart. Her fears were calmed and her soul set at rest. And the words spoken were such as would be her inward strength and stay when the Messiah was no longer present. The Lord said to her:

(1) Daughter, be of good comfort,

(2) Thy faith hath made thee whole (saved thee);

(3) Go in peace,

(4) Be whole from thy plague.

The last phrase occurs only in Mark. The tense (perfect) of the verb employed was a guarantee for the future. It indicated the thorough nature of the cure and precluded a recurrence of her trouble. The words implied, “Be permanently whole [hale, healthy] from thy plague.”

(1) The considerate words of comfort used by the Lord are illustrative of that tender compassion of His, ever in active exercise towards those who sought Him in their distress. He knew the intense mental depression which accompanies protracted physical suffering, and especially so when, as in this case, the disease repeatedly baffles human attempts to cure. The heart is sick with oft-deferred hope, and the debilitated frame is further weakened by the added burden of nervous anxiety and worry. But while “heaviness in the heart of a man maketh it stoop, a good word maketh it glad” (Prov. 12:25).

There are many instances of the Lord removing such feelings of distress by His word. To the trembling woman before Him, whether her fears were the indirect result of the wasting disease from which she had now been freed, or whether they arose from her apprehension that she had offended the Great Physician, He addressed her with the words, both tender and strength-giving, “Daughter, be of good comfort.”

The term of address, “Daughter,” recalls His words to the weeping women who bewailed and lamented Him as He was led to the place of crucifixion. “Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children” (Luke 23:28). To the bowed woman, He said, not “Daughter,” but, “Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity,” though He also spoke of her, referring to her faith, as “a daughter of Abraham” (Luke 13:12, 16). But this occasion is the only recorded one on which the Lord used this title of “Daughter” simply, and it soothed the woman's tremors and fears. She caught a glimpse of that “perfect love which casteth out fear” (1 John 4:18).

(2) It is here recorded for the first time in the course of this Gospel that faith is the means of obtaining blessing. There is no encouragement of any superstitious veneration for the tassel of His robe which was touched. The Lord declared to the woman in the hearing of all that the faith within her had saved her, or made her whole. Her cure was not a right which she could have claimed as an Israelite, but the blessing was accorded to her because she had exercised faith in Jehovah's Servant. This faith of hers the Lord undoubtedly “saw,” as He did that of the paralytic and his friends (Mark 2:5); only in this case by His words to the woman, “Thy faith hath saved thee,” He made it clear to all concerned that faith on the part of the recipient is essential whether the salvation is physical, or moral as in the case of another woman (Luke 7:50).

The report of the sayings and doings of the Prophet of Nazareth had spread abroad throughout Galilee, but with little effect upon the people generally. Isaiah might well ask in prophetic view of this time, “Lord, who hath believed our report?” But this woman had believed the report,

for we read, “having heard the things concerning Jesus she came in the crowd behind and touched his garment.” And having believed the report, the strength of the arm of Jehovah for healing was revealed to her and in her (Isai. 53:1).

Faith in the heart may express itself in a variety of ways—in importunate earnestness, like Abraham pleading for Sodom and Gomorrah, or in patient endurance of suffering, as in the cases of Job and Joseph. Here the mute appeal of the woman's touch shows how eloquent before God the very silence of faith may be. In like manner the dumb posture of Hannah did not escape the pitying eye of Jehovah (1 Sam. 1). For it is with the heart man believes, whatever the mode in which faith expresses itself before man.

It is worth noticing that the word , usually translated in the New Testament “save,” is employed in its general sense of deliverance in regard to the healing of this woman in all three accounts: Matt. 9:21, 22; Mark 5:28, 34; Luke 8:48. It is also applied to the restoration of the daughter of Jairus, Mark 5:23; Luke 8:50; to the healing of Bartimus, Mark 10:52, Luke 18:42; of the Gadarene demoniac, Luke 8:36; of the Samaritan leper, Luke 17:19; of many that touched Jesus, Mark 6:56; of the impotent man at the temple gate, Acts 4:9; of the cripple at Lystra, Acts 14:9. In these instances the Greek word is translated “made whole,” or, “healed.” The disciples, speaking to the Lord concerning Lazarus, also made use of the word, and in this passage it is rendered “do well,” or, “recover “: “If he sleep he shall do well” (John 11:12).

The utterance by our Lord of this form of benediction, “Go in peace,” is only recorded in one other instance in the Gospels, and there, as on this occasion, it is associated with the faith that saved. To the woman who sought the Lord in Simon the Pharisee's house for the forgiveness of sins He said, as He did to this woman who came to Him for a temporal benefit, “Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace” (Luke 7:50). On account of this connection we are fairly entitled to regard these words as of greater significance than the ordinary farewell salutation of the East, such as we find in Ex. 4:18; Judg. 18:6 Sam. 1:17; 20:13, 42; 2 Kings 5:19; Acts 15:33. The Lord was infinitely above human conventionality in speech, such as James condemns (James 2:16). He had come to “ordain peace” for His people in the best and surest sense.

Peace, as it is here regarded, is an inward possession of the soul. It is the antithesis of fret, and anxiety which, in its gravest forms, may arise within a person from the sense of guilt before God or from the fear of death. Divine assurance alone can dispel this anxiety; hence peace is the sequel of faith, and is associated with the mind and heart. Confidence and calmness are connected in the oft-quoted promise, “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee” (Isa. 26:3). And, in the New Testament, the apostle Paul wrote to the Philippians, “The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall guard your hearts and thoughts in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:7).

Here the woman who came to the Lord in fear and trembling is bidden to depart in peace. The Prince of peace bestowed His royal boon upon her whose spirit had been broken by sorrow of heart (Prov. 15:13); while He, at the same time, proved Himself to be the Jehovah of prophecy giving first strength and then peace; “The LORD will give strength unto his people; the LORD will bless his people with peace” (Psa. 29:11).

In the phrase already noted as peculiar to Mark's Gospel, “Be permanently recovered from thy plague,” we observe another of those minute touches which emphasize the special object of this Evangelist. Mark was inspired of God to show how thoroughly the divine Servant did His work. And it is in his Gospel therefore that it is recorded that the people said of Him, “He hath done all things well” (7:37). The cure of this woman is an instance in point; hers was not a temporary relief but a complete deliverance from the disease which had afflicted her throughout the previous twelve years.

[W. J. H.]

Studies in Mark, Mark 5:25-34: (41) The Woman's Touch of Faith

5:25-34

“And a woman1 which had2 an issue3 of blood twelve years, and had suffered many things4 of many physicians, and had spent all that she had,5 and was nothing bettered,6 but rather grew worse,7 having heard the things8 concerning9 Jesus, came in the crowd behind, and touched his garment.10 For she said, If I touch11 but his garments,12 I shall be made whole.13 And straightway14 the fountain of her blood15 was dried up; and she felt in16 her body that she was healed17 of her plague.18 And straightway19 Jesus, perceiving20 in himself that the power proceeding from him had gone forth,21 turned him about22 in the crowd, and said, Who touched23 my garments?24 And his disciples said unto him, Thou seest the multitude thronging25 thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me? And he looked26 round about to see her that had done this thing. But the woman fearing27 and trembling, knowing what had been done in her,28 came and fell down29 before him, and told him all the truth. And he said unto her, Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole;30 go in peace, and be whole31 of thy plague32“ (v. 25-34, R.V.).

On the way through Capernaum to the house of Jairus the Lord was approached by a weak and ailing woman who sought and found healing for her body by secretly touching the border of His garment. How plenteous and overflowing is the mercy found in Him! It is like the fruitful bough of Joseph, “whose branches run over the wall.” The Spirit of power and mercy in Him was “like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments: as the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore” (Psa. 133:2, 3).

THE TOUCH AND THE PUSH

This woman came to Jesus, so far as the Gospel narratives inform us, without any intervention on the part of other persons, and she thus affords an instance of what simple, direct, personal faith in Christ may effect. Her case was sad and desperate, as well as distressing (Lev. 15:19-27). Her issue of blood had continued for twelve years without relief, though she had spent all her living upon physicians. They took their fees and she took their potions, yet she was nothing bettered but rather grew worse. The continual drain upon her life's blood weakened and dispirited her, but the news of the marvelous works of healing wrought by the Prophet of Nazareth awakened new hopes within her. She resolved to seek His face, and implore His mercy. But the crowds that beset Jesus and followed Him thwarted this purpose. Besides how inopportune the moment! Who was she to hinder the Master when upon such an urgent errand on behalf of the ruler of the synagogue?

There are usually difficulties and obstructions of some sort in the way of a needy person seeking the aid of the Savior. But faith is only quickened and strengthened by the presence of obstacles. And it was so in this case. Seeing that a formal interview with the Teacher was impracticable under the circumstances, surely something less would suffice. She believed that the plenitude of His power was such, that the slightest contact with Him would be sufficient for her recovery. So the woman kept on saying in her heart, “If I may but touch his clothes, I shall be made whole.” She knew that, according to the Mosaic prescription, when a sacrifice was brought to Jehovah for an unclean Israelite, the offerer laid his hands upon the animal, and it was acceptable and vicarious for him. In some inexplicable manner the virtue and efficacy of the sacrifice was communicated to him who touched it. She determined therefore to touch Jesus in order that the power of healing so abundant in Him might be communicated to her.

Thus faith wrought within the heart of this suffering woman, and she, weak as she was, struggled through the crowd, and, coming up behind Jesus, she contrived to touch the fringe of His garment, edged, as probably it was, with its riband of blue (Num. 15:37-41; Deut. 22:12). The heavenly mercy which had come down to earth at once responded to the touch of faith. Immediately she was healed and felt within herself an accession of new life and strength. And profiting by her example, many others were subsequently encouraged to seek to obtain blessing in a similar manner, and they, like her, did not seek in vain (Matt. 14:36). For it was the day of grace now, not of law. Sinai, the symbol of that great legal system instituted under Moses, affrighted the people of Israel. There was fire and darkness and tempest to deter any that would approach; and then there was death in a touch, for if so much as a beast touched the mount it was to be stoned (Ex. 19:10-13; Heb. 12:18-21). But Jehovah set no such bounds to mount Zion. Grace said, “Come unto me all ye that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28).

WHO TOUCHED ME?

This miraculous recovery from a wasting disease obtained by the woman in a surreptitious manner did not, however, escape the perception of Jesus. He knew (as He knew [] the unuttered thoughts of the Pharisees and scribes, and as He knew all things) that power had gone out of Him. His service, therefore, was not a blind mechanical distribution of merciful power. The power truly went forth from Him,33 but with it was blended love and interest and compassion. And this constituted a revelation of God to man, for it exemplifies in a striking manner the operation of the providential powers of God in the terrestrial creation. The mighty forces of nature in their silent and systematic movements do not form a gigantic mechanism merely but are directed and controlled by divine love and wisdom to the accomplishment of the purposes of divine beneficence.

The Lord who responded so readily to the touch of faith by an act of healing did not require for His own information the answer to His question, “Who touched my clothes?” He inquired primarily, we may suppose, for the instruction and enlightenment of the woman herself; secondarily, for the benefit of His disciples and the attendant crowd; and finally, for the profit of all readers of Holy Writ.

The disciples viewed the question of the Lord from the standpoint of “common sense,” which is always a source of deception in divine things. Faith, not common sense, was certainly required in this case where the whole of the circumstances were the reverse of “common.” They ignored the unique personality of the Questioner, or Peter and the others would not have said in that deprecatory manner, “Master, the multitude throng thee and press thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me?”

But Jesus distinguished between the touch of faith and the jostle of idle curiosity. It has been said, “Flesh presses; faith touches.” The multitude were there to hear or see some new thing. They were impelled by the common craze for novelty. Such a superficial desire could be satisfied for the moment by any unusual event—by the occult wonders of Simon Magus, by some strange natural phenomenon, by a fairy tale, by anything out of the common. But the touch of the woman was of a different order. The contact of her finger gave expression to a deeply-felt need for the interference of Jehovah's mercy on her behalf. It also expressed the confidence that the requisite mercy of Jehovah was available for her in the person of Jesus, and nowhere else in this sad and disappointing world.— The Lord recognized what motive impelled the woman to touch His robe, and He said with gentle gracious dignity in answer to the harsh ungracious remarks of His followers, “Someone did touch me; for I perceived that power went forth from me” (Luke 8:46). “This was not a result of His taking careful note of peculiarities of action and character manifested to the eye by those around Him, but of His ‘perceiving in His spirit' and ‘knowing in Himself' the unuttered reasonings and volitions which were taking shape, moment by moment, within the secret souls of men, just as clearly as He saw physical facts not ordinarily appreciated except by sensuous perception.”

The woman began now to enter upon the second stage of her lesson. She had learned the Savior's omnipotent mercy; she was now to learn His omniscient love. “She saw she was not hid.” In the language of the Psalmist—Whither should she flee from His Spirit? Adam and Eve under the trees of Eden learned the futility of seeking to conceal themselves from the divine eye, and so did Nathanael under the fig tree. David's psalm expresses the same experience in lofty diction (Psa. 139). The friends of Jesus learn His attribute of omniscience to their blessing, but His adversaries to their shame and confusion. Of the latter many will, in a coming day, call to the mountains and rocks in their terror, “Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb” (Rev. 6:16). But how salutary for the followers of Jesus to live habitually in the consciousness that His eye is ever upon them. It was in this consciousness that conscience-stricken Peter was ultimately brought to rest, when he confessed to the Lord, “Thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee” (John 21:17).

The woman, flushed with the joy of a wondrous healing, saw now that Jesus was aware of her cure, and that His question, though couched in general terms such as might apply to any in that crowd, was addressed especially to her and indeed to no one else. She came therefore to the Lord to confess to Him what she had done, and she went “fearing and trembling.” For she now knew she had done a bold thing, and she feared what the consequences might be. In the fact of His knowledge of her secret act she had gained a glimpse of the divine majesty of Him whose garment she had touched. And while He was so holy and so mighty, how unworthy was she! Was she not, according to the prescription of Jehovah's sacred law, a polluted and defiled woman (Lev. 15:19)?34 Had not the stern prohibition gone forth that if either man or beast touch the mountain of Jehovah's holiness, it should be stoned (Ex. 19:12, 13)? Jehovah who came down on mount Sinai of old was now in Capernaum; and the woman, as she came to Jesus, feared and trembled, for though she had become the vessel of His power, she knew not, as yet, the word of His grace—that He was there in the midst of the poor of His land to heal and bless and save.

She who had stolen behind Him to gain her blessing, now fell down before Him and told Him all the truth. And the disciples of Jesus heard her declare “for what cause she had touched him, and how she was healed immediately.” The faith in her heart was thus supplemented by the confession of her lips in the hearing of all present. And this combination of faith and confession, illustrated in this instance, is, in the Epistles,

enforced doctrinally as the twofold requisite from man for his blessing through the gospel: “With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed” (Rom. 10:10, 11).

[W. J. H.]

(To be continued)

Studies in Mark, Mark 5:25-34: (40) Dying or Dead

5:25-34

27-Dying or Dead? (Continued)

Now in the incident under consideration, if we were in possession of the whole of the events of that day the particulars recorded would fall into their due chronological order, and the apparent discordance would disappear. However, without claiming that the following hypothesis has a historical basis, an examination of the various accounts will reveal phrases which afford strong probability to the explanation advanced. And this explanation, it is believed, will be sufficient to meet the demands of even this case, which has been described as “the most perplexing difficulty in the whole of the Gospel history.”

(1) In the accounts of Mark and Luke we read that Jairus came to the Lord after He had landed and while He was still near the lake: “And he was by the sea. And there cometh one of the rulers of the synagogue, etc."; “And as Jesus returned, the multitudes welcomed him; for they were all waiting for him. And behold, there came a man named Jairus,” etc. (Mark 5:21, 22; Luke 8:41). In the absence of direct proof to the contrary, it seems clear that before the Lord went to the feast of Levi He received the petition of the ruler who besought Him “much” to come and lay His hand upon his little daughter who was at the point of death.

(2) Matthew describes the Lord as seated in Levi's house and instructing the disciples of John the Baptist on the question of fasting when Jairus presented his request: “While he spake these things unto them, behold, there came a ruler and worshipped him, saying, My daughter is even now dead; but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live. And Jesus arose and followed him” (Matt. 9:18, 19). It has already been noted that this interrupted interview with the Baptist's disciples took place in the house of Levi, it would seem therefore that Matthew, in his account, is not referring to the occurrence chronicled by the other two Evangelists, but relates how the anxious ruler sought the Lord's presence a second time. If this was so, we must suppose that the Lord did not respond at once to the first prayer of Jairus, even as in His perfect wisdom He did not immediately respond to the urgent message of the sisters of Bethany concerning Lazarus. Therefore while Jesus was at the feast, Jairus renewed his petition in somewhat altered terms. He had become impatient at the seeming delay of the Master. She who at his first application was at her last gasp had by this time died. This he may have judged from her condition when he left her. At any rate he seems on the second occasion to have worded his request from this point of view."My daughter is even now dead,” was his plea this time. Yet even in this extremity there remained in his heart hope and trust in the Great Physician, for he added, “Come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live.” The Lord tarried no longer, but “arose” (an expression not found in the parallel passages) and followed him.

The fact of the damsel's death was subsequently confirmed by the messenger. The child was dead, and the mourners were already in the house; why should the Master be troubled further? Thus ran the message.

Viewed in this light, the terms of the petition of Jairus as stated by Matthew are in perfect accord with those recorded by Mark and Luke, and no further remarks are necessary. But it may be added that some have questioned whether the precise meaning of the original phrase in Matthew is conveyed by the usual rendering, “My daughter is even now dead.” It is to be remarked that the verb used here is and not the same as that employed by the messenger (); moreover, the adverb is not , but , which may be translated, “just about to happen” (Rev. 12:10). There is not the precision in the coincidence of time indicated by as by . Such a distinction between these adverbs may be observed in John 2. Speaking at Cana of the waterpots, the Lord said to the servants at the marriage feast, “Draw out now (),” i.e., draw out at this very moment. Later, the ruler of the feast, having tasted the wine, said to the bridegroom, “Thou hast kept the good wine until now (),” i.e., until the conclusion, as opposed to the commencement of the feast. There is less exactitude of time implied in the latter than in the former instance. But it is doubtful whether this distinction in usage is invariably observed in the New Testament, and it is only named here for the consideration of students.

Many translators have attributed this greater latitude of meaning to this adverb in the phrase in question, as if Jairus had said, My daughter by this time has come to her end. This is in agreement with Mr. Darby's rendering, “My daughter has by this died.” In a footnote to the Translation he adds, “ is what comes up to , says Suidas, quoted by Wetstein in loco; as , what in the future joins now. Mark has 'is at extremity'; Luke ‘was dying.' Nor has ‘now died' any other sense, only it is less clear. It is, however, quite possible that Matthew may give the result of the servant's message and all.

It may be translated, ‘has just now died,' or, ‘has even now died.' Chrysostom and others give it as in text” [that is, “has by this died"]. In another place1 Mr. Darby wrote: “ , now at her end, 'dead by this.' We know that the father received the news that she was actually dead on the way. is the point up to which time reached, the thing exists already.”

THE FATHER'S PETITION

It is noticeable that the prominent person in this episode was not one of the common people, as was the case in the events narrated in the former part of this Gospel history. Jairus, the petitioner, was a man of social and religious eminence, and moreover of that class from which the active opposition to Jesus sprang. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea were honorable exceptions, but of the rest, it was once scornfully asked, “Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him?” (John 7:48). Here then the Lord's mercy to the ruler shows that He is rich towards all who call upon Him, and that the testimony of good works which Capernaum was so obdurate in refusing (Matt. 11:23) ranged throughout all grades from the chiefs of the synagogue downwards.

Jairus, coming to Jesus in his distress, did him reverence by falling at His feet, a mark of respect the more striking, coming, as it did, from a person of local distinction such as a ruler of the synagogue was. The trouble of Jairus concerned his affections as a parent. He had one only daughter about twelve years of age, and she lay a-dying. He therefore kept beseeching the Lord that He would come to his house and lay His hand upon her and heal her. Did the ruler recollect that in that very town not so long before, Jesus had entered the house of Simon where his wife's mother lay sick of a fever, and taking her by the hand, lifted her up and healed her? At any rate such was the request he made. But Jesus did not immediately go to the sick child; for He was never swayed by secondary considerations. Personal friendship did not hurry Him to the sick man at Bethany, and his sorrowing sisters (John 11:3, 36). His movements then, as ever, were regulated as to time and place only by the glory of God which would accrue. In this case He who would pause in His progress at the cry of a blind beggar by the roadside was not to be induced to alter His plans because a chief of the synagogue knelt at His feet. The ruler might have supposed that the party of tax-gatherers at Levi's house might very well wait until his own case was dealt with. But Jehovah's perfect Servant was above all such motives of worldly policy. He Himself was learning obedience by the things He was suffering; here was an opportunity for Jairus also to learn a lesson of patience and submission to the will of God. And thus his sorrow and anxiety over his daughter would be turned to account in his spiritual development. He would become possessor of that inward peace which is the result of patient submission to the divine Will. For this priceless boon we shall all do well to pray:-

Jesus then arose from the table of Levi, and accompanied the sorrow-stricken ruler. The disciples of the Lord went with Him, and a crowd of people also followed him and thronged Him as He passed through the narrow winding thoroughfares of Capernaum.

[W. J. H.]

Studies in Mark, Mark 5:21-24: (39) The Petition of Jairus

5:21-24

“And when Jesus had crossed over1 again in the boat2 unto the other side, a great multitude was gathered3 unto him: and he was by the sea. And there cometh4 one of the rulers5 of the synagogue, Jairus by name;6 and seeing him;7 he falleth8 at his feet, and beseecheth9 him much, saying, My little daughter is at the point of death:10 I pray thee, that thou come11 and lay thy hands12 on her, that she may be made whole,13 and live. And he went14 with him; and a great multitude15 followed him, and they thronged16 him” (v. 21-24, R.V.).

At this point in the course of the gospel narrative, events in Capernaum are introduced which illustrate yet another phase of the ministry of Jehovah's Servant, exercised in connection with Israel. It will be recalled from what precedes that (1) the parables in the fourth chapter, (2) the stilling of the storm in the presence of the apostles alone, and (3) the healing of the demoniac in Gadara beyond Jordan, all combined to instruct the followers of Christ concerning the singular nature of the ministry of the kingdom. Taking the three points as enumerated, it is shown (1) that the word of God as preached by the Lord would not be immediately and invariably successful in fruit bearing, (2) that the difficulties and opposition to the gospel would sometimes he so great that the servants of the kingdom would be in danger of complete destruction, (3) and that the witnesses of Christ may expect to be left alone in a world that had rid itself of the presence of the Servant of Jehovah Himself.

Evidence is now furnished by the raising of Jairus's daughter of the positive nature of the Lord's gracious mercy in His ministry which was then proceeding. Jesus was the Lord of life and death. And let Israel be so dead in all spiritual perception as to be oblivious to the advent of the Messiah, He would, in answer to faith, bestow life upon the dead. Moreover, if only touched in faith He was ready to respond in healing power to the weak and ailing. The Lord came to save Israel's life, though the condition of the nation in reality proved to be death when He came. But beside this main purpose such was the fullness of grace that wherever there was faith in the midst of the surrounding crowd, healing flowed forth from the Fountain of mercy present.

Another new feature of divine ministry is introduced in that the incident shows that the Lord was accessible on behalf of others. A person whose name (in contrast with the usual practice in the Gospels) is recorded,17 approached the Prophet to solicit mercy for his daughter. In the instances mentioned previously, the Lord dealt directly with the persons whom He blessed, and though it is recorded that the inhabitants of Capernaum brought their diseased to Jesus for healing (1:32), and that the sick of the palsy was borne to Him by four, nothing is stated of any intercession being made by the interested friends of the afflicted. Here the parental anxiety of Jairus for his only daughter who lay dying is manifest in the earnest solicitude of his petition for her recovery. We are shown how Jesus graciously responded to this request; but most striking of all is that part of the narrative which contains the words of comfort and assurance addressed to the agitated father upon the receipt of the news that his daughter had died before Jesus reached the house: “Be not afraid, only believe."18

We thus have illustrated that feature of the ministry of the Servant of Jehovah which is of such value in a world of suffering and sorrow, still groaning beneath the distressing effects of the presence of sin. The previous portion of the Gospel demonstrated that the word of Jesus had power to heal disease, to deliver from Satan, and to still the storm. Here it is displayed that the Servant had come to administer the word of comfort which was suited to sustain the wounded spirit until the actual deliverance is effected. Such words of support and cheer are specially needed by those who walk by faith, and not by sight.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER

It may be of some interest to inquire in what chronological order this miracle occurred; though it is admitted that as a general rule the exact order of occurrence is a point of subsidiary importance in the reading of the Gospels, and in many instances the notes of time given in the narratives are altogether inadequate as determining factors in settling the chronology. In examining such indications of relative order as exist in this case, it is found that by Mark and Luke the healing of Jairus's daughter is placed in immediate juxtaposition to the Lord's return from Gadara, while in the First Gospel the two events are separated by the healing of the sick of the palsy, the call of Levi, the feast in his house, and the conversations with the Pharisees and with the disciples of John the Baptist. Is it then possible to ascertain the exact sequence of these various events?

In the narrative of Matthew it is shown distinctly that the Lord's words to John's disciples about the piece of cloth and the wine-skins were immediately followed by the petition of Jairus. It is there stated that “while he yet spake these things unto them, behold, there came a ruler and worshipped him, saying, My daughter is even now dead” (Matt. 9:18). Now this interview with the disciples of the Baptist was held in Levi's house where the newly-called apostle had made a feast in honor of Jesus, inviting many publicans and sinners to be present. And it was the social standing of these guests which awakened the contempt of the Pharisees (Matt. 9:11-13). Now it is to be noticed further that the objection made by the Pharisees to the character of these guests immediately preceded the visit of John's disciples. This is determined by the connective phrase, “Then () come to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not?” (Matt. 9:4). At this juncture, therefore, while the conversation was proceeding in Levi's house, Jairus came, and in response to his request, Jesus left the “house of feasting” to visit the “house of mourning.”

The cure of the sick of the palsy and the call of Levi precede the feast, in Matthew's account.19

They are there interpolated for topical reasons, since the strict order of occurrence (in the case of the first two events) is shown by Mark and Luke to have been before the Lord crossed the sea of Gadara. Although in all three Gospels the notice of the feast which Levi made immediately follows that of his call, this position in no way proves that the feast was arranged on the same day. Some time would be necessary to make preparations and to invite the guests. But though the call and the feast were not immediately consecutive in the happening of events in Capernaum, they are placed together in the narrative to show that one was the outcome of the other; the feast expressed the gratitude of the tax-gatherer to Him who had called him.

The Lord's journey across the sea to the country of the Gerasenes does not appear to have occupied more than twenty-four hours. He seems to have left Capernaum towards the evening of one day, and returned in the course of the next. And the sequence of the events that immediately ensued was probably as follows, the last four taking place in the house of Levi—

(1) The return from Gadara by boat

(2) The welcome of Jesus by crowds on landing

(3) The feast in the house of Levi

(4) The criticism of the Pharisees

(5) The question by the disciples of John the Baptist

(6) The application of Jairus concerning his child

DYING OR DEAD?

In comparing the three accounts of this incident it is observable that the words of Jairus to the Lord appear to be reported differently. In these reports Matthew and Mark give the language used by the ruler, while Luke records them in the third person: thus we read—

Matthew— “My daughter is even now dead” (9:18)

Mark— “My little daughter is at the point of death” (v. 23)

Luke— “She lay a-dying” (8:42).

The ostensible difference is that according to the first Evangelist Jairus told the Lord that his daughter was actually dead, but according to Mark and Luke it would seem that she was at death's door. This variation is in itself an unimportant one, especially as we learn from the Gospels that a messenger brought the news of the child's actual death, while Jesus was on the way to the ruler's house—a circumstance, be it observed, not named by Matthew who represents the daughter's death from the outset of his narrative.

Apart from an explanation, this difference is valuable inasmuch as it proves the absence of collusion between the several Evangelists; but the antagonists of the Gospels have made much of this, so-called discrepancy, alleging that their credibility is weakened if not destroyed thereby. But it is quite possible to justify both expressions, and to produce more than one reasonable explanation of the difference in phraseology.

As already remarked, the Synoptic Gospels were evidently not written in collaboration to satisfy the demands of critics that they should be in exact mechanical alignment. And indeed the remarkable brevity of these memoirs is such that difficulties like that now under consideration are inevitable. The severe compression of both matter and style is phenomenal. Consider the comparative length of the Gospels as biographies. In an ordinary octavo Bible, with double columns of references, the Gospels of Matthew and Luke occupy about forty pages each, John about thirty, and Mark about twenty-five pages only. And these slight pamphlets constitute the sole authentic memoirs of the life and ministry of the Incarnate Son of God whose public service was characterized by incessant activity. How insignificant these seem in point of size when compared with the ponderous biographical tomes of the world's nonentities! Confessedly, brevity is one of the striking features of the divine Gospels.

Bearing this characteristic in mind it will be admitted to be impossible, under such stringent restriction, that the whole of the minor details necessary to a complete picture of a given incident should be recorded. A selection must be made, subject, of course, to the purpose of the narrative; and the briefer the allotted space the more extensive the exclusion must become. Thus each Evangelist in his selection (under the superintendence of the Holy Spirit) was governed by the special object before him, and not by the details recorded by his fellow-evangelists, with whose compilation he may or may not have been familiar. In other words, each writer was, in this sense, independent.

[W. J. H.]

(To be continued)

Studies in Mark, Mark 5:1-20: (38) The Grosness of Gadara

The Grossness of Gadara

When the inhabitants of the district beheld Jesus who had delivered the demoniac, but who was, in their estimation, the destroyer of their swine, they were unanimous in expressing their desire that He should leave the neighborhood immediately. It was an ungracious, and indeed an insolent, petition, but it was granted, as was that of the demons when they besought Him that they might enter the swine and not be consigned to the abyss. Like Legion, the besotted Gadarenes said, in effect, What have we to do with Thee? There was with them an utter absence of appreciation of either His power or His grace. And they preferred to remain undisturbed with their naked, howling, demonized men and with their filthy swine.

This callous spirit was really a gloomy but accurate reflection of the attitude of the whole nation towards the Messiah, who “came unto His own, but His own received Him not.” And the Lord expressed His sense of this refusal in His lamentation over Jerusalem, “How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not” (Matt. 23:37). They did not desire His presence, and were ready enough to raise the cry, “Away with him, away with him; crucify him, crucify him.” It is happy, however, to remember that there were exceptions to this general feeling, While those at Gadara besought Him to depart, those at Capernaum, seeing His miracles, “stayed him that he should not depart from them” (Luke 4:42). And while at a certain village of Samaria the inhabitants refused to receive Jesus (Luke 9:53), at Sychar, another Samaritan town, they besought Him that He would tarry with them (John 4:40).

But whatever the attitude of the few, the spirit of Gadara prevailed throughout the favored land. The Lord had entered the domain of the strong man and spoiled his goods, as the people could not but admit. In spite of this, such was their obstinacy, that they did not desire that this Deliverer from the great and cruel oppressor should dwell in their midst. This rejection of absolute goodness in the person of Christ was the culminating feature of the sin of man. It proved that he not only did what was evil, but hated what was good. The will and the affections were equally alienated from God.

However debased man may become, he is still capable of pride. The degraded Gadarenes were well satisfied with themselves, and wished for no help. To overvalue self is to undervalue Christ. “He who thinks he hath no need of Christ hath too high thoughts of himself. He who thinks Christ cannot help him hath too low thoughts of Christ.”

THE WITNESS FOR DECAPOLIS

The delivered man, on seeing Jesus enter the boat to cross the sea and leave the country, besought the Lord that he might accompany Him. Who can wonder at this desire? The poor fellow owed everything to his Deliverer. And what a relief was his to be freed from the power of such tormentors. And how safe he would feel in the presence of Jesus from any further attacks of the demons. Now he had a pure heart and a right spirit, and nowhere could their renewed aspirations find such satisfaction as in the Person at whose feet he sat. He, like so many others then and since, was irresistibly attracted to the Prophet of Nazareth, and he was ready to leave everything to follow and be with him.

But the Lord had other duties for him. The Servant of Jehovah, in the spirit of omniscient wisdom, regarded the future of this delivered demoniac as it affected the service of the gospel, and not according to the personal inclination of the suppliant. Here was a district which prayed to be relieved of the ministrations of the incarnate Son of God. To this offensive request the lowly Nazarene acceded. But it was a feature of the divine plan for man's eternal blessing that when God's “Faithful and True Witness” was rejected and slain, the place of testimony in the world should be filled by those who, having received of His “fullness,” were His loving and loyal followers. Such a phase of divine service is indicated here by the post of duty which the Master assigned to this recipient of His mercy in Gadara. He was to remain as a witness. If the gross darkness of Decapolis comprehended not the shining of the Light of life, it should still have a light-bearer in the person of the healed demoniac. So the Lord said to him, “Go to thy home unto thy friends and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and how he had mercy on thee.” His home he had formerly abandoned for the charnel-house. His friends he had outraged by his violence. His domestic circle, including these friends and acquaintances, had witnessed his excesses under the demoniacal influence, and to these he was now bidden by the Lord to return that they might judge of the reality of the change wrought in him. As the Lord sent the cleansed lepers to the priest that the genuineness of their healing might be authoritatively attested, so the Lord sent this man to his house that his friends might have opportunity of judging by his conduct what a complete deliverance was his, and moreover that they might hear for themselves from his own lips, eloquent in the enthusiasm of his gratitude, what the Lord had done for him. He was to testify to the Lord's power and to His mercy. For it was a great thing for Jesus to deliver him from the power of Satan with a word, and it was also a merciful thing inasmuch as the man had willfully and wickedly abandoned himself to the power of the evil one.

Such a simple strain of gratitude is acceptable to God. For we find in the Psalms that “great things done” will be the keynote of the song of thanksgiving adopted by the blessed and delivered remnant of Israel when they enter into their millennial joys, as it also was when Jehovah brought back the exiles from Babylon: “When the LORD brought back the captivity of Zion we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongues with singing: then said they among the heathen, The LORD hath done great things for them. The LORD hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad” (Psa. 126:1-3).

The man owned the right of the Lord to direct his movements, and obeyed His commands. He thus became a preacher of Christ in ten cities (Decapolis), where he rendered a testimony which resembled the present preaching of the gospel. For while preaching is not itself a miracle, it is essentially a testimony founded upon a divine work.

The witness concerning the miracle created a sensation in the district, for we read “all men did marvel,” as it is the way of man to do at things he can neither comprehend nor imitate. But such an emotion does not affect either the heart or the conscience. This characteristic is several times recorded of the unthinking populace (Matt. 9:33; Luke 11:14; John 7:21), but not of them only, for it was true of the Pharisees and Herodians when they received the Lord's wise answers to their cunning questions (Mark 12:17), as well as of the apostles when they beheld the storm stilled at the word of Jesus (Matt. 8:27; Luke 8:25). On the other hand, the word is applied to our Lord, for we read that Jesus marveled at the obdurate unbelief of men's hearts (Mark 6:6), an application which may well form a topic for our meditation.

THE SIGN TO ISRAEL

There are elements in the narrative of the Gadarene miracle which appear to have a striking analogy to the future history of Israel, and this imparts to it the character of a sign. In scriptural teaching from early days, idolatry is considered a form of demon-rule and demon-worship (Deut. 32:17; Josh. 24:2, 15; Psa. 106:37). The apostle Paul thus speaks, “The things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons, and not to God,” and going on to refer to the Corinthians eating that which had been offered in sacrifice to idols, he adds, “I would not that ye should have fellowship with demons” (1 Cor. 10:20). And what the Gentiles did as idol-worshippers, Israel had done (Ezek. 20:7, 8), and will yet do again. Idolatry, which had been intermittent in the chosen land, was established as a national rite by Jeroboam and continued as such until the captivity. From that time until the present the nation has preserved itself from the pollutions of idolatry. But according to prophecy the abomination of desolation shall yet stand in the holy place, and the apostate mass of the Jews shall yet unite in the worship of Antichrist and his image. Israel will again, become Gentile in religion.

The Lord set out this future lapse of the Jews into idolatry parabolically. He said, “When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man it walketh through dry places, seeking rest and findeth none. Then it saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when it is come it findeth it empty, swept and garnished. Then goeth it and taketh with itself seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they enter in and dwell there; and the last state of that man becometh worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation” (Matt. 12:43-45). This prediction has not yet been fulfilled, but according to it, the unclean spirit of idolatry expelled from the nation some five centuries before the advent of Christ will return, and in a sevenfold greater degree defile and abase the people in the uncleanness of idol-worship.

Using, therefore, the language of this narrative, the herd of swine—the unclean majority or mass of the Jews—possessed by the powers of darkness, will be irresistibly impelled to their own perdition. “Wheresoever the [unclean] carcass is, thither will the eagles [of judgment] be gathered together” (Luke 17:37). Mary Magdalene, out of whom the Lord cast the seven demons, well represents the delivered remnant of that day. The undelivered ones perish in their uncleanness before the millennial dawn. For in the important prelude to the reign of peace, both mercy and judgment will be in exercise. And while the idolaters are swept away, the nation will be purged from the uncleanness of idolatry in accordance with the prophecy of Zechariah: “In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and uncleanness. And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the LORD of hosts, that I will cut off the names of the idols out of the land, and they shall no more be remembered: and also I will cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to pass out of the land” (Zech. 13:1, 2). With this a prophecy in Ezekiel agrees. There Jehovah promised the people: “Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you” (Ezek. 36:25; see also ver. 18).

The following extract1 has reference to this aspect of the narrative. “The world beseeches Jesus to depart, desiring their own ease, which is more disturbed by the presence and power of God than by a legion of devils. He goes away. The man who was healed—the remnant—would fain be with Him; but the Lord sends him back (into the world that He quitted Himself) to be a witness of the grace and power of which he had been the subject.

“The herd of swine, I doubt not, set before us the career of Israel towards their destruction, after the rejection of the Lord. The world accustoms itself to the power of Satan—painful as it may be to see it in certain cases—never to the power of God.”

[W. J. H.]

Studies in Mark, Mark 5:10-20: (37) Legion Delivered and the Swine Destroyed

5:10-20

Legion Delivered and the Swine Sestroyed

“And he besought him much1 that he would not send them away out of the country. Now there was there on the mountain side2 a great herd of swine feeding. And they besought him, saying, Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them. And he gave them leave.3 And the unclean spirits came out,4 and entered into the swine: and the herd rushed down5 the steep6 into the sea, in number about two thousand; and they were choked in the sea.7 And they that fed them8 fled, and told9 it in the city,10 and in the country.11 And they came12 to see what it was that had come to pass.13 And they come to Jesus, and behold him that was possessed with devils14 sitting, clothed15 and in his right mind,16 even him that had the legion: and they were afraid. And they that saw it17 declared unto18 them how it befell him that19 was possessed with devils, and concerning the swine. And they began to beseech20 him to depart from their borders.21 And as he was entering22 into the boat23 he24 that had been possessed with devils besought25 him that he might be with him. And he suffered him not,26 but saith27 unto him, Go to thy house28 unto thy friends,29 and tell them30 how great things the Lord hath31 done for thee, and how he had32 mercy33 on thee. And he went his way, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him: and all men did marvel” (v. 10-20, R.V.).

In the conversations which took place on this occasion, especially as they are reported by Mark and Luke (who refer to one only of the two Gadarene demoniacs), there is evidence of the significant fact that the personality of the possessed man was overridden by the indwelling demons. It is not intended to investigate the psychological effects of this fact. The result, however, is noted because of its serious importance; and while this condition no doubt exists in every case of possession, it is here thrown into unusual prominence, since not a single demon but many had entered into this man. We have, therefore, alike in the dialog and the narrative, the use both of the singular number (indicating the man himself) and the plural (indicating the evil spirits). The phrases used and the speakers are shown in the following statement—

Singular Number:

(1) By the man to Jesus: “What have I to do with thee?” “Torment me not"; “My name is Legion.”

(2) By Jesus to the man: “Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit34 “; “What is thy name?”

Plural Number:

(1) By the man to Jesus: “We are many.”

(2) By the demons to Jesus: “All the demons besought him, saying, Send us into the swine that we may enter into them.”

(3) By Jesus to the demons: “Jesus gave them leave.” He said unto them, “Go,” using the plural form of the verb (Matt. 8:32).

The two forms, singular and plural, are to be seen in close juxtaposition in verses 9 and 10: “And he asked him (sing.), What is thy (sing.) name? And he (sing.) answered, saying, My (sing.) name is Legion; for we (plur.) are many. And he (sing.) besought him much that he would not send them (plur.) away out of the country.”

The Lord addressed the man as the responsible person, asking him, “What is thy name?” and He also distinguished between the man who was oppressed and the evil powers which possessed him, saying, “Come forth out of the man, thou unclean spirit.” The man is regarded as tenanted by the evil spirit.

This distinction and identification is found in another connection of an opposite nature. As this case was one of a man indwelt by unclean spirits for purposes of evil, so we learn from the Epistles that those who believe the gospel of salvation (Eph. 1) are indwelt and sealed by the Holy Spirit of God, who is assuredly distinct in His personality from those whom He indwells, bearing witness indeed, as He does, with our spirit that we are the children of God (Rom. 8:16). At the same time He, in a blessed way, identifies Himself with us, helping our infirmities, and making intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. The Lord Himself declared to His followers, referring to their testimony, “It is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you” (Matt. 10:20).

Such facts as these shed some light upon the higher part of man's complex nature, and show that it is subject to that comprehensive law enunciated by the apostle Paul, when he said, “Know ye not that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are whom ye obey, whether of sin unto death or of obedience unto righteousness” (Rom. 6:16)?

INTO THE SWINE BUT NOT THE ABYSS

The demons who feared the time of future torment had their requests to prefer to Him whom they knew and addressed as the Son of the most high God. They acknowledged His supreme authority even as Satan did when he came before Jehovah in the matter of His servant Job (Job 1). Here they besought the Lord that He would not send them out of the country, and, as Luke states, that He would not command them to go into the deep, or the abyss (Luke 8:31).

The abyss is the Scriptural term for the place of confinement of evil spirits. The word in the original Greek is translated “bottomless pit” in the Apocalypse (Rev. 9:1, 2, 11). From thence the “beast” will arise who will make war upon the two witnesses and overcome them (Rev. 11:7; 17:8). According to the same series of prophecies, Satan will be imprisoned in the abyss during the thousand years of glorious peace under the reign of Christ (Rev. 20:1-3).

Possibly the abyss is the place of constraint, mentioned by Jude, in which certain evil angels have been already placed: “And the angels which kept not their first [proper] estate but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day” (Jude 6).

There was at any rate an evident fear on the part of these evil spirits, lest they should be forthwith condemned to confinement in the abyss, and thus be prevented “from going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it.”

They admitted that Jesus had authority to eject them, for, as Matthew reports, they said, “If thou cast us out” (Matt. 8:31); and their desire was to enter the unclean swine, as if to exhibit and gratify their love of destruction. As Satan disguised himself as the serpent for subtlety (Gen. 3), and, to deceive the unwary, now transforms himself into an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14), also walking about as a roaring lion to devour the unresisting (1 Peter 5:8), so here the unclean spirits sought permission to enter the herd of unclean swine. “Suffer us,” they said, thus owning, like Satan of old (Job 1), their impotence apart from the Supreme Will.

The Lord acceded to their request, and immediately they abandoned their human prey, and took possession of the herd of swine, wherein to display their destructive aims and thus to inspire men with a fear and dread, apart from which they have no power over them. Their maleficent propensities were at once exemplified; for the whole herd of animals was irresistibly impelled down the steep cliffs and perished in the sea. This destruction of property by Satanic influence acting through secondary causes is not without its parallel in Old Testament times. In the history of the calamities which came upon Job we are permitted to see that the sudden losses of his flocks and herds and children were attributable to the malice of Satan. To outward seeming the Sabeans captured the oxen and sheep; the Chaldeans carried away his camels; the fire from heaven burned up his sheep; the hurricane slew his sons and daughters; but all these casualties arose, as we learn from the inspired narrative, from the evil plottings of Satan which were permitted by Jehovah, who, however, overruled them all for the eventual and enhanced blessing of the patriarch.

In the instance at Gadara the fate of the swine forms a plain and unmistakable example of the tendencies and objects of Satan and his demons. The violent end of the beasts was but an analogy of the ultimate end of those who are under the direction and power of darkness. Only in the absence of that superior nature which man possesses in contrast with the brutes, destruction followed immediately after the entrance of the demons into the swine. They at once rushed to their death. In the case of man the end is similar though it may be reached more slowly. Whatever men may be deceived to think, the object of the evil one is to destroy, while that of the Holy One of God is to deliver and save.

The question of the loss incurred by the keepers of the swine, who were probably faithless Jews, is not discussed in the Gospels, neither is the question whether this loss came upon them by way of retribution for keeping the unclean animals contrary to the law of Moses. Indeed the “utility” argument, sometimes used as an objection that this destruction of animal life should be permitted by the gracious Savior, is irrelevant; since the wholesale loss of property has ever been of frequent occurrence through those inexplicable catastrophes which form such noticeable features in the inscrutable ways of divine Providence. Until we know the ultimate intention of Sovereign Wisdom, we are not in a position to understand nor to discuss the righteousness of such events, or of the miracle in question. Without knowing, faith is confident that all is working for good.

It may be added that another point concerning this and analogous cases is made clear by this incident. Demon-possession has a specific character. It is not, as some would allege, a form of disease nor the result of overpowering sinful propensities; the behavior of the animals when possessed proved the contrary. They were not carried away suddenly by some disease nor as suddenly filled by a swinish perversity to compass their own destruction. The truth was that the power of Satan was acting in a special manner to destroy them.

THE DELIVERED MAN

Those who witnessed the mad rush of the swine over the precipice spread the news in town and country, and numbers ("the whole city," Matt.) flocked to Jesus to see the Author of this thing. They beheld not only the Prophet of Nazareth but the wild untamable man of the hill-tombs. In the latter they could not but observe the pacific change wrought by the Lord's word. They found him sitting at the feet of Jesus clothed and in his right mind. He now possessed that demeanor characteristic of the mental sobriety () which is enjoined in the Epistles as a necessary element of Christian character (Rom. 12:3; 1 Peter 4:7; et al.). The inward influence of that hateful power for evil and self-destruction had been withdrawn. The man was now under the benign and gracious influence of the meek Man of sorrows whom demons fear and obey. The voice that had hushed the riotous elements the previous night had spoken peace to this troubled spirit. And he who had hitherto resisted all human efforts to curb his violence is seen to have succumbed to the word of the Master.

Thus the deliverance was complete; and this mental and physical emancipation is an illustration of the liberating effect which the gospel ever exercises upon the whole man who comes to the Savior. There is a spiritual liberty wherewith Christ makes men free. The Lord Jesus delivers the believer from the power of darkness (Col. 1:13), from the course of this age, from the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience (Eph. 2), bringing him from the power of Satan to God (Acts 26:18).

[W. J. H.]

(To be continued)

Studies in Mark, Mark 5:1-9: (36) Legion's Homage to Jesus

5:1-9

Legion's Homage to Jesus

The primary effect of the presence of Jesus upon that desolate shore was to draw the demoniac to Him. When he saw the Lord at a distance he came running, with great cries. Did he come in a paroxysm of fury, intending to do Him a mischief? or did he come with eagerness to seek deliverance from his miserable condition? Whatever may have been his original impulse, in the presence of Jesus he prostrated himself before Him, doing Him homage, and saying with a loud voice, What have I, enslaved of Satan as I am, to do with Thee, Jesus, Thou Son of the Most High God? art Thou come to punish me before the time? I earnestly entreat Thee before God, do not torment me.

In these words of the demonized man we may recognize—

(1) a sense of his personal uncleanness

(2) an acknowledgment of the Incarnate Deity

(3) a knowledge and fear of future punishment

(4) the absence of any appeal for mercy. We will consider these points seriatim.

(1) In the first place, the demoniac, by the phrase, “What have I to do with thee?” expressed his own feeling of the incompatibility of darkness and light. He was conscious that there was nothing in common between himself and Jesus. This question occurs elsewhere in both the Old Testament and the New with a similar significance. For example, it was used by Jephthah to the king of Ammon, by David to the sons of Zeruiah, by Elisha to Jehoram, by the Lord to Mary at Cana of Galilee (Judg. 11:12 Sam. 16:10; 19:22; 2 Kings 3:13; John 2:4).

Here, however, the narrative at this period shows that unholiness recognized the Holy One; uncleanness confessed its contrariness to divine purity; deception and lying shrunk from the presence of Him who was the Truth. Belial could have no concord with Christ.

(2) The demoniac prostrated himself before Jesus and did Him homage (). It is the only recorded instance of demons acknowledging the Lord Jesus in this way. (See also Mark 15:19; Luke 24:52; John 9:38).

Moreover, the Gadarene addressed Him aloud as Jesus, Son of the Mst High God, condemning utterly by the use of this title the false charge of the Pharisees that Jesus was under the control of the prince of the demons. And it is striking to observe what was the particular divine title used by the demonized man. For the “Most High” occurs in special connections in the Scriptures. It is the title of supreme sovereignty in the earth, and is particularly associated with the promises of divine rule during the millennium when the evil agents of Satan will be removed from the earth and Beelzebub himself confined in the bottomless abyss.

We find this association early in Genesis. Melchizedek, the priest of the Most High God, met Abram returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him in the name of the Most High God, possessor of heaven and earth (Gen. 14:18-20). This event appears to prefigure the millennial day when the saints of the Most High shall take the kingdom and possess it forever (Dan. 7). Again, Balaam, through “the knowledge of the Most High,” prophesied of the same time (Num. 24:16). The prophetic Spirit in the psalmist employs the same title in songs the theme of which is the reign of Jehovah in the coming age (Psa. 91:1, 9; 92:1); and incidentally the subjection of the Evil One is alluded to in this scripture which declares that Messiah shall tread upon the lion and adder, and trample under foot the young lion and the serpent (Psa. 91:13).

The “Most High,” therefore, throughout the range of scripture, is an expressive title of God as the Sovereign Ruler in the kingdom of men (Dan. 4:17), and the demoniac confessed Jesus as the Son of the absolute Lord of the universe, even as the Pythoness owned Paul and Silas to be the servants of the Most High God (Acts 16:17). And they thus anticipate the divine decree that all infernal beings shall bow the knee to Jesus and confess Him Lord to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:9, 10).

(3) As in the case of the demoniac in the synagogue of Capernaum there was a manifest dread of the judgment of God, and of the consequent punishment of evil: “I adjure thee by God, torment me not.” The unclean spirits knew that punishment must inevitably fall upon them, and, moreover, that the Father judgeth none, but that their sentence must come from the Son of the Most High, who is the appointed Judge of all.

Fear therefore characterized this utterance, not the fear of God which is the beginning of wisdom, but that fear of the chastisement of evil with which Satan always inspires man. Fallen Adam said at once to God, “I was afraid, and hid myself.” Fear also is inseparable from idolatry, which is demon-worship (Deut. 32:17). And is this a matter of wonder when the demons themselves believe God and shudder? They who are the cause of torment to others, dread it for themselves (Matt. 18:34; Luke 16:23; Rev. 20:10).

(4) This confession made by the Gadarene was of the power but not of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ; for His mercy was not sought in it. It was the confession not of a contrite sinner but of an evil spirit. The apostle John wrote, “Every spirit that confesseth Jesus Christ come in the flesh is of God; and every spirit that confesseth not Jesus Christ come in flesh is not of God” (1 John 4:2, 3). To confess Jesus Christ come in flesh is to seek Him as the Savior of sinners, since this was the purpose of the incarnation. But no word fell from the lips of the prostrate man beseeching for mercy and forgiveness. The publican in the temple, and blind Bartimaeus, cried for mercy, and were heard; for grace and truth had come for the deliverance of such. But apostate spirits are already doomed and beyond the pale of mercy. They wait only for the execution of their just sentence. Nevertheless the gracious Lord extended His mercy to this miserable man though not to the unclean demons.

UNCLEAN SPIRITS

In the Gospel narratives the terms “unclean spirits” and “demons” are in many instances used with reference to the same case. Thus, we read that the daughter of the Syrophenician woman “had an unclean spirit,” and that she besought the Lord that He would “cast forth the demon out of her daughter” (Mark 7:25-30). Again, in the account of the boy at the foot of the mount of Transfiguration, we are told that when he was coming to Jesus “the demon dashed him down and tare him grievously. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit and healed the child” (Luke 9:42). Without citing other instances, these will suffice to show that the terms are used synonymously.

The unclean spirit, therefore, was a demon. In other words the form taken by the demons in the cases of possession recorded in the Gospels was that of unclean spirits. They exercised their evil influence upon their subjects as invisible agents. This will also occur in a coming day, as the prophet John foretells from the vision he saw. He says, “I saw coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet three unclean spirits as it were frogs: for they are spirits of demons working signs which go forth unto the kings of the whole world to gather them together unto the war of the great day of God Almighty” (Rev. 16:13, 14). In a further vision he saw Babylon, the apostate church of the future, to be the “habitation of demons, and the hold of every unclean spirit” (Rev. 18:2).

TWO DEMONIACS, OR ONE?

The corresponding account in Matthew states that two persons afflicted by demons encountered the Lord on this occasion: “And when he was come to the other side into the country of the Gadarenes there met him two possessed with devils, coming forth out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man could pass by that way” (Matt. 8:28).

It has been frequently observed by students of the Gospels that it is a peculiarity of the First Evangelist to note plurality in certain incidents which are narrated in the singular by others. For example, Matthew mentions two blind men (Matt. 20:29-34), while Mark and Luke only name one (Mark 10:46-52; Luke 18:35-43). He also mentions two cases in connection with the Lord's progress into Jerusalem (Matt. 21:1-5), where the other Evangelists speak of one only (Mark 11:17; Luke 19:29-35; John 12:14, 15).

The naming of one only in these cases is not a denial or contradiction of the record by the other Evangelists, the greater including the less; but it may fairly be taken to imply that in the cases of the two demoniacs in Gadara, and of the two blind men at Jericho, one of the two was more notable than the other, and on that account was selected for mention in Mark and Luke. At any rate the presence of two persons in these particular instances was an important feature in itself, since it established the fact that there was more than a single witness to the genuineness of the miracle. This form of corroboration was calculated to meet the prejudices of the Jews based upon their law of evidence which demanded two or three witnesses in a matter of valid testimony (Deut. 17:6; 19:15; Matt. 18:16).

The following instance out of many others shows this Jewish character of the First Gospel. In the record of the Lord's entry into Jerusalem, Matthew shows, by naming both the ass and the colt, how punctiliously the prophecy of Zechariah was fulfilled, “Tell ye the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and riding upon an ass and upon a colt the foal of an ass” (Zech. 9:9; Matt. 21:5). This is one of the points of detail we might very naturally expect, in accordance with its general scope, to find elaborated and emphasized in this Gospel, the purpose of which is to prove from the Scriptures that “Jesus is the Christ.” In the companion narratives a more general reference was sufficient.

The following quotation1 expresses the same view of the question. “We know from else-where there were two [demoniacs]. The Gospel of Matthew, not in this only, but in various other cases, speaks of two persons; as, I suppose, because this fact fell in with his object. It was a recognized principle in the law, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word should be established; and he among the Evangelists on whom, so to speak, the mantle of the circumcision fell—he it was who, speaking in view of the circumcision, gives the required testimony for the guidance of those in Israel that had ears to hear. Nothing of the kind was before Mark. He wrote not with any special aim of meeting Jewish saints and Jewish difficulties; but, in truth, rather for others that were not so circumscribed, and might rather need to have their peculiarities explained from time to time. He evidently had humanity before him as wide as the world, and therefore singles out, as we may fairly gather, the more remarkable of the two demoniacs.”

[W. J. H.]

Studies in Mark, Mark 5:1-9: (35) The Pitiable Plight of Legion

5:1-9

25.—The Pitiable Plight of Legion

“And they came to the other side of the sea,1 into the country of the Gerasenes.2 And when he was come out of the boat,3 straightway there met him out of the tombs4 a man with5 an unclean spirit, who had his dwelling in the tombs6 and no man7 could any more8 bind him, no, not with a chain;9 because that10 he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been rent11 asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces:12 and no man had strength to tame him13 And always,14 night and day, in the tombs and in the mountains, he was crying out, and cutting15 himself with stones. And when he saw16 Jesus from afar, he ran and worshipped him;17 and crying out18 with a loud voice, he saith,19 What have I to do with thee,20 Jesus, thou21 Son of the Most High God? I adjure thee by God, torment me not.22 For he said23 unto him, Come forth, thou unclean spirit, out of the man.24 And he asked him, What is thy name? And he saith unto him, My name is Legion;25 for we are many” (v. 1-9 R.V.).

After the supernatural calm of winds and waves that ensued upon the word of Jesus, the remainder of the night was most likely spent by the occupants of the boat upon the waters, and in the morning-light they landed upon the shore of what was called the country of the Gerasenes. If upon the sea they encountered the fury of the storm, they now encounter upon the land the mad and ungovernable fury of a man under the influence of a malign and demoniacal power. Satan, we know (Job 1) raised the storm of wind which slew the children of Job; and, though it is not so stated, Satan, who was to bruise the heel of the woman's Seed, may have brought about the tempest on the lake in one of his futile attempts to destroy the Son of man. But at any rate, here in the wilderness of Gadara was a sad example of the enthralling and debasing power of the devil over the sons of men. This diabolical influence was exemplified on both sides of the lake. In Capernaum, the town from which they sailed, a demoniac was found in the synagogue itself (Mark 1:23-27). Here one26 runs to meet them, whose dwelling was in the tombs, himself the abode of unclean spirits.

In Mark's account three main facts are specified about this man's state—

(1) He dwelt in the tombs;

(2) He exercised superhuman strength, so that it was impossible to restrain him by fetters and chains;

(3) He was a self-tormentor, inflicting injuries upon his own body. To these facts another may be added from Matthew's Gospel:-

(4) He was so excessively fierce that no one could pass that way. A further addition is made from the Gospel by Luke—

(5) He wore no clothes, and he had been “possessed” by demons for a long while.

These facts combine to show what an utter wreck this man had become through the malicious and uncontrollable power of evil by which he was ruled. He was an exceptional case; his whole tripartite nature—body, soul and spirit—was affected.

Body. The man tormented and injured himself physically. He gashed himself with stones. He had lost all the self-respect that nature itself teaches, wandering shamelessly in nakedness, finding shelter in the caves of the hillside, which were the sepulchers of the dead.27

Soul. The language the demoniac used to the Lord showed that he had abandoned his own personality. His own will and his individual responsibility were lost, so that the demons speak and act in and by him: “My name is Legion; for we are many,” was his reply to the question of Jesus.

Spirit. The highest part of human nature within him was dethroned. That “inspiration of the Almighty,” the in-breathed spirit whereby man, as distinguished from the brutes, is capable of religious feeling, is shown to be debased also; so much so that there was an utter disregard for even the most ordinary and most easily-obeyed prohibitions of the law of Moses. According to that law in which without doubt he had been well instructed, even a momentary contact with that which was dead defiled (Numbers 19:16). This man was so lacking in the feelings of an Israelite, as well as in those of a man, that he made his abode in the sepulchers. His spirit ‘‘as in revolt against the divine will and paid no heed to the injunctions of God's word.

But the deplorable effects upon the Gadarene of his “possession” may be looked at in another way by viewing the maleficent influence of the demons from the five standpoints already named, the effects being practically identical, though differently arranged. This influence is shown by the Gospel narrative to be destructive

(1) of the religious sense. By dwelling among the tombs, he cut himself off entirely from the worship of Jehovah as enjoined by the law.

(2) of the sense of his duty to the laws of social and civil government. He would not, nor could not be restrained by chains or fetters, any more than by the love of home or of friends or of fellow-citizens.

(3) of the sense of his duty to himself physically. He voluntarily injured himself,

though he was responsible to care for the body as the servant of his higher nature.

(4) of the sense of his duty to others. Instead of loving his neighbors, he was “exceeding fierce,” and, like some ravening beast, terrified them by his savage aggressiveness.

(5) of the sense of decency and propriety. “He wore no clothes” is the significant description of his appearance. The gloom of this picture is deepened by the fact that it was the manner of the man's life which is portrayed here. This was no sudden outbreak of evil passion, but the symptoms had been such for “a long while.” They had become habitual. And he was wont night and day to express his forlorn and hopeless misery by loud, inarticulate cries.

WHAT THE DELIVERANCE OF LEGION PROVED

It is clear that in this case of Legion28 we have an impressive example of what a man may become when under the direct influence of the evil one. By his miraculous deliverance wrought before their eyes the apostles were instructed that the word of the kingdom of God (which they were about to preach) was directed to the emancipation of captives such as he from the kingdom of darkness. It was another stage in their education as servants of Christ. The Lord had now shown them by parable and miracle the various characters which the opposition of Satan to the ministry of the gospel would assume. In His parables He taught that his emissaries would steal away the good seed when sown, scatter tares among the wheat, and make the grown tree a habitation of evil. On the lake they had to learn how Satan would awaken the tempestuous passions of lawless men for the destruction of the servants of the kingdom of God. In all these cases, however, they were at the same time assured of the ultimate triumph of the word of the kingdom. Here the converse side of the invincible nature of the gospel is exemplified. An extreme instance of Satan's cruel power over men is seen to be amenable to the word of the Servant of Jehovah. With but a sentence He set the poor bond-slave free. So that the word of Christ is shown to conquer by its active power in deliverance from evil as well as by its passive resistance to the insidious corrupting forces of wickedness.

Further, this narrative displays how far removed the spirit of evil, rampant in the Gadarene, was from the Spirit of Christ. The character of the deeds of the possessed are stated in lurid detail, and they are opposed in nature to the deeds of the Servant of Jehovah. Works of darkness and destruction characterize the man indwelt by unclean spirits, while works of life and mercy characterize the One indwelt by the Spirit of God.

The Gadarene, dominated as he was by Satan, afforded a perfect contrast with the Prophet of Jehovah. The Son of man had come not “to destroy men's lives, but to save them” (Luke 9:56), but the demoniac was under the control of the Evil One who “cometh not but for to steal and to kill and to destroy” (John 10:10). He was destroying himself, and his impulse was to destroy others of his kind also. This destructive tendency is the true Satanic nature, as Scripture reveals it. Saul, under the influence of an evil spirit, sought the death of David, the anointed of Jehovah (1 Samuel 19:9,10). In the Apocalypse, Satan, or one of his chief agents, is named Apollyon, that is, the Destroyer (Revelation 9:11)—a name in contrasted significance with that of Jesus the Savior of men. Satan is destructive of that which is good, but Jesus is destructive of nothing but what is evil. For the Son of God was manifested that He might annul both the devil and his works (Hebrews 2:11; 1 John 3:8). And the Servant-Prophet demonstrated this purpose of His in the country of the Gadarenes by the deliverance of this notorious victim of Satan.

Was this deliverance the action of one in league with Beelzebub? On the contrary the miracle, by its divine power and by its beneficent nature, was a perfect reply, in deed, not in word and argument, to the blasphemous cavils of the Pharisees and scribes who said, “He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils [demons] casteth he out devils [demons]” (Mark 3:22).

(To be continued) [W. J. H.]

Studies in Mark, Mark 4:21-29: (32) Shining in Public: Growing in Secret

(Continued)

This saying of the Lord therefore has reference, not to the eventual discovery of secret sins, but to the character of the period begun by His own ministry, which was an epoch of disclosure and promulgation of divine truth previously concealed. The Prophet of Jehovah was bringing out of His treasure-house “things new and old,” and in view of the consequent importance of such an occasion He reiterated His word of warning, first addressed to the multitude at large, now spoken to the disciples: “If any man hath ears to hear, let him hear."1 In the first case there was the general responsibility applying to all Israel to hear their Messiah for their individual enlightenment, but in the second case there is the further responsibility of those who have heard in the former sense to hear in such a manner as to be able to communicate faithfully and fully to others what they heard. This agrees with the final message to the church and the individual in the Apocalypse, “The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come” (Rev. 22:17).

What is the special significance of the reference to the bed and the bushel? If the bed may be considered to point to self-ease and self-indulgence, the bushel, or corn-measure, may indicate those domestic and other duties, legitimate in themselves, but which, equally with selfishness, may seriously interfere with an effective testimony. But, whatever may be the exact meaning, it is certain that both duty and recreation are liable, apart from necessary precautions, to obscure or even to extinguish the witness of discipleship. And by such a lapse from faithfulness, the truth, divinely revealed for diffusion throughout the world, is virtually placed again in a place of concealment. In another context the Lord specifically warned against such secretion of the light, “No man when he hath lighted a lamp putteth it in a secret place, neither under a bushel, but upon the stand, that they which enter in may see the light” (Luke 11:33). In contrast with others mentioned in a subsequent parable, the “wicked and slothful servant” having received the talent went away and hid his lord's money to his own reprobation.

HEEDFULNESS IN HEARING

Another saying immediately follows that relating to the lamp, and this is introduced by the phrase of frequent recurrence in this section, “And he said unto them."2 For the disciples it was pre-eminently the day for them to sit at the Master's feet “to hear.” Moreover, in their hearing they were to beware of the leavening influence of the teaching of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees (Matt. 16:12). They were not to be carried about by every wind of human opinion as to who He, the Son of man, was. “Take heed,” said He, “what ye hear,” supplementing this warning as to the matter of their hearing, by another as to the manner of it: “Take heed how ye hear” (Luke 8:18).

The Lord next applied the principle of divine righteousness to their future ministry of what they heard. God would not be unrighteous to forget their work and love and service in this respect (Heb. 6:10). In proportion to their zeal and energy in transmitting what they received to others, they should receive still further communications of truth. Let them therefore use the corn-measure not to cover up the lamp, but in useful service to others. “With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you, and more shall be given unto you.” According to the ancient proverb, “There is that scattereth and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty. The liberal soul shall be made fat; and he that watereth shall be watered also himself” (Proverbs 11:24, 25). In the terms recorded by the Evangelists, grace was giving a revised version of the “lex talionis.” The Lord was not saying to them, “Eye for eye, tooth for tooth,” but laying upon them

a newer and nobler injunction, “Give and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, shall they3 give into your bosom. For with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again” (Luke 6:38).

Those to whom “more is given” are those who hear, as it is expressed in the A.V. This “hearing” implies a reception of the new teaching in the truest and deepest sense of the word, receiving the testimony as of God (John 3:34; 1 Thessalonians 2:13). Such persons are the good-ground and fruit-bearing hearers. These enter into possession of the word. They make it their own by faith. They have it. And the Lord added, “He that hath, to him shall be given; and he that hath not, from him shall be taken away even that which he hath.” Was not this so with the wayside hearer? The good seed was immediately snatched away, since it lay upon the surface. In a formal sense this class of hearer had the word; in a vital sense he had it not.

The infallible evidence of vitality is fruit-bearing, and we are taught in this section that “ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4) is one of the forms of spiritual fruition. The word enters the heart of the disciple by the ear (Rom. 10:17), and is transmitted from thence to the eyes of others by the lamp of testimony for Christ, shining out, as this does, in every good work and word (2 Thessalonians 2:17).

THE SPONTANEITY OF THE SEED'S GROWTH

Another saying of the Lord is next introduced in the Gospel, and this is of the nature of a parable. And, as has been previously stated, it is noteworthy that this parable is not recorded elsewhere in Scripture. Dealing, as it does, with the inherent vitality of the word of God, its beautiful appropriateness in this section is not difficult to observe when it is remembered that the general subject of this chapter is the ministry of the kingdom.

Such a view, however, is not always held or sought. “What follows [the parable in question] has the special interest of being the only parable peculiar to St. Mark, one therefore which had escaped the manifest eagerness of St. Matthew and St. Luke to gather up all they could find of this form of our Lord's teaching.” This remark, taken from a popular commentary, illustrates the disparaging manner in which the professed friends of the Gospels are apt to speak of them. It is assumed in this comment that the Evangelists compiled their histories after the manner of a schoolboy essay, without any purpose or special design, eager only to record every item they could collect or remember, stringing their paragraphs together with an utter disregard of chronological order. According to this degrading theory we are asked to believe that of Matthew's seven parables (Matt. 13) Mark was ignorant of five, though he knew one which had escaped both Matthew and Luke; and that the latter (Luke) was only acquainted with three out of seven, one of which he inserted in one connection and two in another (Luke 8 and 13). In opposition to this unworthy hypothesis, which regards each of the Gospels as imperfect and fragmentary, we believe that the Spirit of God superintended both the inclusion and the exclusion of the facts of the Sacred Biography, and also the arrangement of the narrative, so that the particular design of each of the Gospels is secured. We believe, in short, that the writers were inspired of God (2 Peter 1:21), and also their writings (2 Tim. 3:16).

Returning from this digression, let us briefly recapitulate the main features observed in our examination of this chapter. We saw, first, the varied and but partially successful results of sowing the word of the kingdom portrayed in the parable of the Sower, the meaning of which the Lord communicated in private to His disciples. This is followed by some of the sayings of the Lord to His followers, assigning to them in metaphorical language the responsibility of duly and diligently publishing abroad for the benefit of all what they had learned in secret. Now, further instruction upon the same theme is added in the form of a parable to show the apostles that the propagation of the gospel depended not so much upon the skill and efficiency of the laborers who do no more than cast the seed upon the ground, as upon the self-contained vitality of the seed itself, it being the word of God.

This parable, like the earlier one of the Sower, is founded upon the phenomenon of growth in the vegetable kingdom, the main features in this case being that during the period between the sowing and the reaping manual labor is excluded so far as the parable is concerned. It is thus with the kingdom of God, the Lord said. A man scatters seed upon the land. He then pursues his other occupations, waking and sleeping, night and day; but apart from any intervention on his part, and without his possessing any real knowledge of the mysterious processes which were active within the seed, it sprouts and germinates and develops. Automatically the fruit is produced; first the blade appears, then the ear, and finally the fully ripened corn. Thereupon the time of harvest having come, the husbandman resumes work, using now the sickle to gather the grain.

This pastoral picture presents an analogy of the kingdom of God, especially in the form in which it was introduced by the Servant of Jehovah in view of His rejection. The millennial kingdom of the future will be founded upon the righteous judgments of the King; but the present moral kingdom is founded upon the teaching of the Lord the Prophet. And the great lesson taught here is that the word of the Lord carries with itself a power to effect the divine purpose altogether apart from external agencies. The seed is shown to have its foes in the thievish birds, the torrid sun, the luxuriant thorns; while the light of the lamp may be dimmed or destroyed by the bushel or the bed. But the Lord assured the hearts of His followers that, in spite of the activity of its enemies and the feebleness of its friends the word of the kingdom will inevitably make progress and prevail. So it came about, as we read, that in the days of the apostles “the word of God grew and multiplied” (Acts 12:24). And so Paul wrote to the Colossians of “the word of the truth of the gospel, which is come unto you; even as it is also in all the world, bearing fruit and increasing, as it doth in you also, since the day ye heard, and knew the grace of God in truth” (Col. 1:5, 6, R.V.).

THE SEED LEFT TO GROW

Thus while the duty of the servants of Christ was to let the truth shine in their actions, and to measure it out generously in their words, they were without power to produce any living result from their work. Let Paul plant and Apollos water, the increase is of God alone (1 Corinthians 3:6,7). The spirit and the life are in His word. It is the word itself, not the ministry of it, that works within those that believe (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

This was a comforting assurance for the timorous disciples, seeing that everything in connection with their Messiah was going contrary to their expectations. They herein learned that the word of the Master would ultimately succeed, and however unpromising the day of sowing might seem, the day of harvest would follow at its appointed time. Such a truth as is conveyed in this parable would, on the one hand, encourage them to trust in God to work out His plans by the invisible and invariable agencies of His word and Spirit, and, on the other hand, condemn any feelings of vanity and self-satisfaction, as though the preachers of the gospel by their own power or godliness caused its spread among men.

It has been a matter of debate among students of the Scriptures whether the “man” in this parable was intended to represent the Lord Himself or His servants. Those who contend for the latter view point out that it cannot be imagined of the Lord that “He knoweth not how” the seed grows, nor that He leaves it to take care of itself. On the other hand, others urge that it could not be predicated of the servants of Christ that they will put in the sickle and reap the corn in the day of harvest.4

The truth is that neither the one nor the other of these interpretations is exclusively correct. The exact meaning lies, as it so often does in Holy Writ, between the two extremes. The Lord was conveying the important principle that in the ministry of the word its growth and ultimate fructification depended upon the intrinsic vitality of the word itself, irrespective of the personality of the minister. The central thought of the parable is the service, not the servant. This spontaneous activity of the seed's growth is equally true of the preaching of the Lord Himself and of His delegates.

But what a beautiful example is here afforded of the unobtrusive humility of Jesus! In this self-effacement of the Servant of Jehovah, we are permitted to behold one element of the perfection of His service. Consumed with zeal for the glory of God, yet seeming to labor in vain and spend His strength for naught (Isaiah 49:4), He committed the results of His ministry to Him who gave Him the word to declare (John 17:8, 14). Having sown the seed, He waited patiently for the fruiting time. We cannot but observe how peculiarly appropriate this feature of the Lord's ministry is in the Second Gospel, where alone it is so strikingly recorded by parable.

Such a spirit of meek dependence and patient perseverance in service in view of the long-distant harvest is, by implication, to be acquired by all those whom the Lord sends forth to serve. The apostle Paul had this outlook. Writing to the Thessalonians, he thus expressed himself, “What is our hope or joy or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy” (1 Thessalonians 2:19, 20). His eye was upon the distant future day of “bringing in the sheaves,” like his Master, who, in the pathway of the Faithful Witness, had His eye upon “the joy that was set before Him” (Hebrews 12:2).

In this manner the spirit of true service first known in Christ was in measure reproduced in the apostles, and perpetuated in those who believed on Him through their word (John 17:20). In such a sense there is genuine “apostolical succession” in service, though not in ecclesiastical authority. So far as labor “in word and doctrine” is concerned, the words of the well-known epitaph apply, “God buries His workmen, but carries on His work.” The servant will continue to sow until the day of harvest, but all the while the germination, the growth, and the ripe grain are incessantly wrought by an invisible and infallible Agent.

[W.J.H.]

Studies in Mark, Mark 4:21-29: (31) Shining in Public: Growing in Secret

“And he said unto them, is the lamp brought to1 be put under the bushel, or under the bed,2 and not to be put on the stand?3 For there is nothing hid, save that it should4 be manifested; neither was anything made secret,5 but that it should come to light. If any man hath6 ears to hear, let him hear. And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete it shall be measured unto you: and more shall be given unto you.7 For he that hath,8 to him shall be given: and he that hath not, from him shall be taken away even that which he hath.

“And he said, So9 is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed10 upon the earth; and should sleep and rise11 night and day, and the seed should spring up12 and grow, he knoweth not how. The earth beareth13 fruit of herself14 first the blade, then the15 ear, then the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is ripe,16 straightway he putteth forth17 the sickle, because18 the harvest is come” (4:21-29, R.V.).

This section is one which, upon consideration and comparison, will be found to afford, like many other passages throughout the historical narratives, a striking illustration of the varying purpose of the several Gospels. With the object of gathering what instruction we may on this particular point it is proposed to make a brief reference to the context of the parable of the Sower, comparing the records in Matthew and Mark as to their designs.

In the First Gospel (Matt. 13) the parable of the Sower is followed by six others, each of which is specifically stated to be a similitude of the kingdom of the heavens. The obvious fact that this group of parables numbers seven, a numeral which in scriptural usage signifies completeness and adequacy of representation, coupled with the further fact, easily ascertained by inspection, that the period covered by the series of parables extends from its beginning to the close, that is to say, from the sowing of the seed to the harvest at the end of the world [age] (Matt. 13:39, 49), points unmistakably to the conclusion that the selection and arrangement of these parables was made with the definite object of presenting a synopsis of the various phases which the kingdom of the heavens would assume in consequence of the rejection of the King.

Now, in Mark's narrative, we have, in connection with the parable of the Sower, what is altogether different, and, as we shall see, distinctive. Here it is followed by, not six, but two parables only, the first of which is found nowhere else in the Gospels, while the second (that of the mustard seed) is one of the six following this parable in Matthew. Moreover, these two parables are separated from that of the Sower by two sayings of the Lord which in the First Gospel are recorded in entirely different associations.19

Having noted these important differences, let us now proceed to inquire what their significance may be. And in the first place it will be evident that the meaning of the variations in the records must, in each case, lie in close relation to the main purpose of the inspired Evangelist. For, be it observed, the “harmony” of the Gospels is not to be sought, as is frequently done, by the construction of a single continuous narrative, composed by combining the accounts of the four writers to the utter destruction of the individuality of each of them. On the contrary, the true “harmony,” using the word now in the sense of the consistency of the Gospel with itself, will be discerned by the discovery of the manner in which the various historical episodes are disposed by each of the four biographers in order to set forth his special design. Hence it is that in this particular inquiry the differences in the several narratives are of greater importance than the resemblances. These differences then are the subject of our present study.

It will be admitted that the object of Mark was to compose a biography of the Lord Jesus in His character as the Anointed Servant and Prophet of Jehovah. And we may therefore expect to find that, in order to display Him in this aspect, the nature and characteristics of His service and ministry will be more prominently and fully expressed than in the other Gospels, and that this will be more especially the case with regard to that modified form of teaching as to the kingdom which He adopted because the nation had, in effect, refused Him as the Messiah.

THE LORD'S MINISTRY AND ITS EFFECT

Now, it will at once be observed that in this fourth chapter all the parables relate to the Lord's ministry and its effects. In each of the three parables the seed is the central object of the picture. In the first the diverse results of sowing the seed are shown; in the second the seed grows spontaneously; and in the third the seed develops from a state of outward insignificance to one of prominence. These parables, then, are correlated delineations of that ministry of the good news of the kingdom of God which was begun to be spoken by the Lord, and was continued by the apostles and their successors; and on this account these parables, as they are here arranged, could appear in no other Gospel with the same propriety as in that which sets forth Jesus as Jehovah's Servant.

In the series of Matt. 13 we have the new earthly system which was about to arise presented variously, e.g., by the field, the measures of meal, the great tree, the hidden treasure, the costly pearl, and such figures; but in Mark we have brought forward the power which accomplishes the outward effects rather than the thing itself which is produced. The third parable of the Second Gospel is only an apparent exception to this generalization, the spreading tree being introduced to show the magnitude of the visible results of the presence and operation of the word of God in the world in contrast with its appearance at the beginning. In brief, the main theme of Matt. 13 is the kingdom itself, and that of Mark 4 the gospel or word of the kingdom.

Bearing in mind, then, that this section of Mark is designed to teach what is the nature of the ministry of the new covenant by Jehovah's Servant (in general terms, of course, not in detail as in the Sermon on the Mount), we proceed to inquire concerning the meaning of the two sayings of the Lord which are interpolated between the first and second parables. And it will be seen that they have a direct bearing upon the truth brought out in the immediately preceding verses. In these we have that part of the Lord's ministry which was couched in a parabolic form. And this mode of discourse was employed, as we learn from the Lord Himself, in order that the mystery of the kingdom might be hidden from the unbelieving nation at large, although it was revealed by special interpretation to the disciples (Mark 4:34, 10-13). Now the sayings which follow guard against a misconception which this form of teaching might cause in the minds of the apostles. They were not to assume that, because the Master had begun to speak publicly in parables, these wonderful communications of the Great Prophet would always be enveloped in obscurity. If there was darkness abroad as to divine knowledge, the darkness was not in or from the Sower, but in the people themselves. He was the true Light, come into the world to lighten every man. Is it not the function of light to shine abroad in radiant testimony—whether this light exists absolutely in the Prophet, as it did, or in the apostles, the sons of light, as deriving it from Him? So that the veiling of the truth in parables by the Lord was but a temporary measure.

These sayings of Jesus therefore are not introduced immediately after the parable of the Sower at haphazard; on the contrary, they have a direct relation to the main theme of the chapter. They assign a responsibility to the hearers of the word to communicate to others what they themselves receive. The truth must not be covered from view. Though the character of the coming kingdom was concealed from those whose will was opposed to its reception in the heart, the ultimate object of the Lord's ministry was that the gospel might be spread abroad, not hidden under a bushel or a bed. The light was to be placed on a lampstand. And in proportion to the zeal of His servants in imparting the truth to others, further revelations would be made to them.

THE LAMP AND THE STAND, THE BUSHEL AND THE COUCH

The Lord, in this saying here recorded, made reference to the common objects of a Galilean household to impress upon His disciples their responsibility with regard to what they heard. A lamp was among the essential furniture of the poorest home, and where means forbade the possession of more than one there the necessity was the most apparent that for its greatest usefulness it should be set upon a stand and not be obscured beneath a couch or extinguished under a bushel measure. Let the lamp be placed upon its appropriate stand,20 and it would shed its light upon all in the house (Matt. 5:15), as well as upon all who might enter (Luke 8:16).

Here then we find the Lord preparing His followers for the missionary work to which He had called them, and to which He would soon send them forth, first to the cities of Israel and then to the ends of the earth (Mark 6:7-13). Light was given them that it might shine to others. John the Baptist, the forerunner, was a burning and shining lamp (John 5:35); now the testimony of the kingdom was transferred to the apostles. They were His witnesses, and what He told them in the darkness they were to preach in the light, and what they heard in the ear they must proclaim upon the housetops (Matt. 10:27). The essence of Christ's gospel was its publicity, and also, as was subsequently developed, its universality. Its ultimate scope was to all men and not to a few only.

And the Lord declared, referring generally to divine communications, that nothing was concealed except to be manifested eventually, and everything made secret for a time and for a purpose would assuredly be brought to light in due course. The dimness of the typical shadows would disappear in the light emanating from the perfect Priest and Sacrifice. That which was dark and involved in the predictions of the Old Testament would be fully elucidated by application and fulfillment in the New. The Lord Himself was not a lamp, but the LIGHT, shining in a darkness which was not dispelled but was deepened thereby (John 1:5). But to those who would receive it He had come to reveal the unknown. In His teaching was fulfilled the double prophecy of the Psalmist: “I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things hidden from the foundation of the world” (Psa. 78:2; Matt. 13:35). And the apostles, in their turn, did not obscure or c6nceal the light of testimony, but by the Spirit preached God's wisdom and taught the heavenly calling of the church previously hidden from all ages and generations (Col. 1:26; Eph. 3:9). Paul, as a good steward of the manifold grace of God, addressing the Ephesian elders, reminded them that in his ministry he had kept back nothing that was profitable, and that he had not shrunk from declaring to them the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:20, 27).

[W. J. H.]

(To be continued)

Studies in Mark, Mark 4:35-41: (34) The Servant's Word Stilling the Wind and Sea

4:35-41

24-The Servant's Word Stilling the Wind and the Sea

“And on that day, when even was come,1 he saith2 unto them, Let us go over unto the other side. And leaving the multitude,3 they take him with them,4 even5 as he was, into the boat.6 And other boats7 were with him. And there ariseth a great storm of wind,8 and the waves beat9 into the boat,10 insomuch that the boat11 was now filling.12

And he himself was in the stern, asleep on a cushion:13 and they awake him,14 and say unto him, Master,15 carest thou not that we perish?16

And he awoke,17 and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still.18 And the wind ceased,19 and there was a great calm. And he said unto them, Why are ye fearful? have ye not yet faith?20 And they feared exceedingly,21 and said one to another22 Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?” (4:35-41, R.V.).

The general subject of the ministry of the kingdom is continued in this section. The parables and the sayings of the Lord narrated up to this point show the characteristic features of the new preaching, and what would be the effects of this preaching in the world. The account of the miracle that now follows shows, by illustration, to what insurmountable dangers the witnesses of the kingdom will be subject, and, moreover, what striking deliverance out of such dangers those that trust in the humble and lowly Messiah will experience. This incident with its painful impressiveness was a needed training for the twelve, and formed a part of what may be truly called their “education for the ministry.” The apostles had that day been alone with the Messiah in the house where they were privately inducted into the mysteries of the kingdom, but now they were called to accompany Him across the stormy sea, and in the course of the perilous journey to witness a demonstration of His omnipotence staying its “proud waves.” Ashore they were taught that the word of Christ would, in spite of thievish birds and scorching sun and choking thorns, and apart from human agency and aid, grow secretly, silently, slowly, but surely, until the time of its maturity and fruitfulness; at sea they learned that the same word was effectual to quell into instant submission the mightiest forces of nature. In the parables the newly-called “fishers of men” were instructed what dangers beset the service of the gospel of the kingdom; and in the miracle what dangers confront the servants themselves, though at the same time they learned what an all-powerful Deliverer was with them.

THE EVENING OF A LABORIOUS DAY

It was written in ancient time, “Man goeth forth unto his work and to his labor until the evening” (Psalm 104:23). This indeed is the common lot of humanity, and the incarnate Lord accepted the conditions fully. Only His arduous and unremitting service in the days of His public activities was peculiar in this respect, that it consisted of the alleviation of man's physical and spiritual suffering. This beneficence comprised His healing works and His illuminating and quickening words. Of many busy days and weeks and months of the Lord's ministry we are given no record whatever in the Gospels (John 21:25). But the day of this narrative was a particularly busy one. So far as we are able to recognize the chronological sequence, its events included among other incidents elsewhere recorded, those contained in this Gospel from chap. 3:20 to the end of this chapter (4).23 To consider now no more than Mark's account, we have (1) the contest with the Pharisees which, Matthew tells us, arose out of His expulsion of a blind and dumb demon (Matthew 12:22-24); (2) the expostulatory visit of His mother and His brethren; and (3) the proclamation to the multitudes as He sat in the boat of the similitudes of the kingdom and their subsequent interpretation to His followers in the house.

After these things, when evening had come, the Lord said to His own disciples, Let us cross over to the other side of the lake. Many mighty things had been said and done in favored Capernaum that day. The good seed of the kingdom had been duly sown. That word was now left by the Sower to germinate and fructify. Previously in this same town the Lord had wrought many deeds of mercy in the evening shadows (Mark 1:32-34); but not so on this occasion. After the time of speech, the night drew on—the time to “keep silence,” as well as the time for rest, the time “when no man can work.” He therefore bade His disciples to sail across the lake in search of retirement on its more solitary shores.

The apostles, having dismissed the crowds who apparently were still waiting to see and hear more of the Great Prophet, obeyed His word and launched forth in their little boat to cross the Sea of Galilee, accompanied by other little boats.24

The distance to the other side, as the crow flies, was but a few miles, and under ordinary circumstances the journey might have been quickly accomplished. But a great hurricane suddenly arose, and the waters of the lake were quickly agitated into furious and mighty waves which dashed over and heat into the little bark, so that it was rapidly being filled. Some of the disciples, as Simon and Andrew and James and John, were local fishermen accustomed to the navigation of the lake, and they had no doubt encountered many a tempestuous night in the pursuit of their calling. But this storm was of such severity that their strength and skill were alike baffled, and they, as well as their less experienced colleagues, were filled with alarm.

Their Master, wearied with the toils of the day, lay asleep on a cushion in the stern, amid all the turmoil and confusion of the terrified crew, and also amid the noise and discomfort of a tossing boat upon a billowy sea. Nothing is more illustrative of a state of peace than the sleep of the living. Here was such a spectacle, though in strange circumstances. The active faculties of divine beneficence were all quiescent, while the disciples were in a state of frenzied excitement. In the boat the prone Man of Sorrows was at rest; in the pitch darkness around was a scene of the wildest uproar and riotous contention between the forces of air and sea, threatening each moment to swamp the frail vessel and its precious burden.

The twelve were at their wits' end. Calmness and courage deserted them. They lost all confidence in their own seamanship, but what was more serious still, they lost faith in their sleeping Master. Why did He sleep in the hour of their need? They awoke Him therefore with querulous cries, an overpowering anxiety pervading every heart. Some said one thing and some another. But with them all there was the despairing refrain of selfish interest, “We perish.” Those whose words are reported by Matthew expressed the conviction that He had the power to help them, for they said, “Lord (), save us; we perish” (Matt. 8:25). Others complained of His indifference to their welfare, seeing He slept in the face of their peril; they said, “Teacher (), carest thou not that we perish?” (Mark 4:39). Others again were apparently more

completely overcome by their fears. These showed their intense importunity by repeating His title of address, “Master, Master (), we perish” (Luke 8:24).

The first words of our Lord were a reproof to His disciples, “Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?” (Matt.). He then arose, responsive to their cry of distress, and immediately alleviated their fears. Speaking in His own right as Lord of the sea and the land, He addressed both the winds and the waves; for “the sea is his, and he made it,” and He “walketh upon the wings of the wind.” There was no rod of delegated authority stretched towards the troubled elements, as in the case of Moses at the Red Sea. Neither was there a smiting of the waters with the mantle of the prophet's office, as in the case of Elijah at the Jordan. In the majesty of omnipotence He issued His brief but peremptory mandate—to the roaring hurricane, “Silence!” to the surging billows, “Cease, be at rest!” The response of both wind and sea was immediate and perfect. Man, nominal head of the earthly creation, for the most part, had no “ears to hear” the voice of the Son of God, but the inanimate forces of nature yielded their instant and implicit obedience. The rushing storm-blast became the soft zephyr, the mountainous wave sank to a gentle ripple. In the simple but sublime words of Matthew and Mark, “there was a great calm.”

But the service of the Lord did not end with the stilling of the tempest. There was a violent agitation in the breasts of those who formed the. ship's company. The Lord had a word for the mental conflict also.

This personal deliverance from imminent destruction afforded the apostles a profitable lesson in more than one particular. The incident revealed to them much concerning their Master; it also brought to light much concerning themselves. The former revelation the Lord had set before them in His miracle; the latter He proceeded to fasten upon their memories by His word.

Along with a lack of faith in Christ, the twelve exhibited a selfish concern for themselves which did not become the disciples of the lowly Nazarene. Moreover, they assumed that He was regardless of their danger, for they said, Dost Thou not care that we are perishing? The ungracious question arose, in point of fact, from a spirit of cowardice. This spirit He at once rebuked, even before silencing the winds and the waves, in the words already quoted, “Why are ye so cowardly, O ye of little faith?” He did not chide them for appealing to Him for help, but He would have them know that they were doubly wrong, (1) in being filled with fear, and (2) in being of little faith.

Hence when the calm ensued at His word, and the evidence of His interference was displayed to their senses, He reproached them by further questions, in which He repeated the charge of craven-heartedness, saying, “Why are ye cowardly? Have ye not yet faith?” Surely His ministry and His miracles in Galilee, of which they were chosen witnesses, afforded ample ground for their confidence. Yet in this crisis they had failed to trust Him.

From Luke we learn that the Lord put to them a further question which revealed another aspect of their failure. He said to them, “Where is your faith?” They were following Jesus because they professed to believe in Him; where then was their professed faith in Him on this occasion? Their faith should be ready for use in emergencies such as this. If they had ears to hear, let them hear; if they had faith, let them believe.

The apostles were dumbfounded at what they saw, and they had no reply to make to the questions of the Lord. They were awed into silence, as on a later occasion (John 21:12). Filled with great fear, they could only express their amazement one to another, saying, “What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”

JESUS IN THE STORM

This miracle is one of the few which were wrought in the presence of the disciples only, most being public occurrences. But this case was for the especial benefit of the apostles, and in the record of it we are permitted to observe three things concerning our Lord—

(1) The Man sleeping

(2) God commanding

(3) The creature obeying

(1) The incident is remarkable by the fact that there is, beside this, no other specific reference in the Gospels to the sleep of Jesus. That the Lord did take rest is without doubt implied in such passages as Mark 1:35; but here the homeless Son of man, who Himself said He had not where to lay His head, is set before us asleep in an open boat during a raging tempest.

True manhood was there, and, moreover, the Man of perfect trust who, even in these singular circumstances of peril, exemplified the words of the Psalmist, “In peace will I both lay me down and sleep; for thou, LORD, alone makest me to dwell in safety” (Psalm 4:8). As a man whose mind was stayed on Jehovah, He slept the sleep of absolute confidence in God, and was in this respect a contrast both with Jonah sleeping in guilty shame, and with the disciples sleeping for sorrow in the garden of Gethsemane.

(2) But while on the one hand we see the weariness of the Servant of Jehovah after the toils of the day, on the other we witness His instant readiness at a call for aid to serve yet more. And, again, we behold a further wonder: not only was the Servant of Jehovah in the boat, but Jehovah Himself was there. For He who spoke with such authority to the winds and the waves was indubitably God; and the One who spoke thus was He who slept and awaked at the cry of distress. This was indeed the God of Israel, for as the Psalmist said, none but Jehovah is “mightier than the noise of many waters, yea, than the mighty waves of the sea” (Psalm 93:4). It was a great revelation. And, no doubt, in after years, as the disciples recalled the thrilling experiences of this night, as they looked again in memory from the tossing billows to the face of the placid Sleeper, from the fury of the creature to the repose of the Creator, they recalled also the later words of the Lord: “That in me ye may have peace. In the world ye have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

Here also was the rare spectacle of the inanimate creature obeying the voice of its Creator (John 1:3). Such obedience is of course observable continually in the operation of what are known as the laws of nature, though these phenomena, by reason of their regular repetition from age to age, have diminished in wonder to the majority. But the sudden stilling of this storm was unmistakable evidence that there was a voice which was heard above the roar of the wind and the waves, and which was supreme in command. This divine Voice emanated from the lips of Jesus of Nazareth, and was audible to His terrified disciples.

What a revelation was thus made to the followers of Jesus! What a Master was theirs!

What a One to love and follow, to reverence and adore—but not to doubt!

THE JEWISH REMNANT SAFE AMID THE STORM OF OPPRESSION

Many of the mighty works of Jesus are described as “signs.” Indeed, in the Gospel of John this term () is invariably applied to the miracles, showing that the same work may be viewed as a sign as well as a miracle, and from yet another standpoint as a “wonder.” The term, “sign,” in the expression, “the signs of the times” (Matt. 16:3), was used in the sense of a portent of what was in the future. And, employing the word in a similar signification, the disciples asked the Lord what was the sign of His coming (Matt. 24:3).

In view of these considerations, it is not altogether unwarrantable to seek for a didactical, as well as a historical, purpose in the record of this miracle, which would then, as a sign, depict some national or other deliverance of the future upon a larger scale than the actual incident on the lake.

Now, for example, we find in Isaiah prophecies of a promised deliverance from the crushing power of a national enemy, and the language of the prophet in its imagery contains striking allusions which are allied in character with the history of this miracle (Isaiah 8:5-18).

Jehovah warned of the power of the king of Assyria, whose aid Ahaz was seeking, and compared his oppressive inroads into the land of Israel to a flood of waters which should overflow, reaching even to the neck (vers. 7, 8). But while this overwhelming calamity would come upon the nation as a whole, there would be a faithful and godly remnant who would be delivered. And the pledge of this deliverance was that the virgin's Son, Immanuel, is with them (ver. 10). The land is Immanuel's, and He will be in the midst of His people as He was with the three Hebrew children in the fiery furnace, and as Jesus was with His disciples on the sea. The pious are therefore exhorted not to fear with the fear of the ungodly, but to “sanctify the LORD of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. And he shall be for a sanctuary” (Isaiah 8:12-14).

Now what was taught in precept by Isaiah was exemplified by this practical exhibition of the Lord's power in the storm. In both the prophecy and the Gospels there is training for faith in view of a dark and cloudy day ahead, when to sight alone it would appear that inevitable destruction was before the little flock. Indeed many of the apostles who witnessed this miracle lived to see the Roman armies overwhelm the holy city in unutterable horrors, and to see their ungodly nation scattered to the four winds of heaven, while they and other believers were preserved amid all these calamities; for “the Lord was with them.”

But Isaiah did not refer to the Roman power but to the Assyrian, though the assurance of the protecting Christ for the pious and persecuted remnant is equally applicable in both cases. In a day yet to come the enmity of that northern foe of the people of God will break forth again, and his armies like an overflowing scourge will sweep through the “glorious land.” In that day of direst distress there will be the occasion for the little flock of godly ones to trust implicitly in Immanuel. He most truly will be with them, though His delivering power may seem to slumber. However, there will then be those who will cry out in the language of a prophetic Psalm, “Yea, for thy sake are we killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter. Awake, why sleepest thou, O Lord? arise, cast us not off forever. Wherefore hidest thou thy face, and forgettest our affliction and our oppression?... Rise up, for our help, and redeem us for thy lovingkindness' sake” (Psalm 44:22-26). In response to this appeal, the Man of Bethlehem, whose “goings forth have been of old, from everlasting,” will become their peace, and will deliver them from the Assyrian (Micah 5:1-6), whom He will destroy by the “breath of his lips,” and cast headlong into Tophet (Isaiah 30:31-33).

We also find the main features of this miraculous deliverance used figuratively in another place by Isaiah. He portrays the gathering together of many nations against the people of Israel to swallow her up like a mighty sea-storm. But God rebukes the enemies of His people, and, as it was upon the Galilean lake, what at eventide was trouble, in the morning was “not": “Ah, the uproar of many peoples which roar like the roaring of the seas, and the rushing of the nations that rush like the rushing of the mighty waters; but he shall rebuke them.... At eventide behold terror, and before the morning they are not” (Isaiah 17:12-14).

Other analogies occurring elsewhere may be recollected by the students of scripture, but those mentioned above are doubtless sufficient to suggest the line of comparison.

THE NEEDLESS FEAR OF THE DISCIPLES

The behavior of the disciples on this occasion was such as called forth the strictures of the loving and gracious Lord. The tenor of their complaining words showed that the coward's fear had seized upon them. Hence His sharp reprimand, “Why are ye cowardly, O ye of little faith?”

This reproof may seem to us stern and even excessive until we remember what the disciples, with little excuse, forgot—the power and love of the God of Israel, and also that this power and love was present in the boat in the person of Jesus. They, as alas, we too may do, overlooked the unanswerable reasoning of faith, “If God be for us, who (or, what) can be against us?*

To fear a foe much mightier than oneself is not reprehensible, but to fear without occasion—when one is invincible, is cowardice indeed, and such a spirit is stigmatized in scripture. It is solemn to learn that the “fearful” (cowardly)25 are classed with the “unbelieving” in the enumeration of those condemned to the lake of fire (Revelation 21:8). An evil conscience makes a coward. “The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are as bold as a lion” (Proverbs 28:1).

To fear God is well, and this is enjoined throughout Scripture; and in the sequel we read that the disciples “feared exceedingly,” when they beheld the effect of the word of Christ upon the stormy sea. This was a wise fear, for they were then conscious of what unworthy thoughts had possessed them in the immediate presence of Infinite Power and Goodness. It was the fear of reverence, not the cowardice of unbelief, which it had displaced in the hearts of the disciples.

Fear is opposed to the normal spirit of the follower of Christ, which is one of strength and courage and resolution. This bold and vigorous confidence is described in the well-known lines of T. Kelly—

LITTLE FAITH

In addressing His disciples the Lord said, “O ye of little faith.” He recognized that they were not absolutely devoid of faith, for they appealed to the Master for help; it was, however, but a very little faith, for they conceived that they were perishing, although Jesus was with them. Faith must be feeble if it cannot trust until the cause of anxiety and alarm is removed. For them the storm was stilled that their apprehensions might be quieted, so that their faith did not rise to the level of that of Paul, who was confident of being brought safely through the storm. In the hour of peril, they lacked that strength of faith which could sit still in quietness and confidence, as the prophet enjoined (Isaiah 30:7, 15).

But their little faith which wrought this fear had a further evil consequence. In their selfish distress, they so far forgot themselves as to utter upbraiding words to their Master. Such language is always improper upon the lips of a servant to his master, but much more so when addressed to such a Master as He was. “Carest thou not that we perish?” Was He then like some hireling shepherd who abandons his charge and flees when the wolf comes, because he cares not for the sheep? Theirs was the selfish, petulant spirit of Martha of Bethany, who so rudely said to Him, “Carest thou not that my sister has left me to serve alone?”

This evil suspicion of the divine nature is directly descended from those doubts of God's goodness first insinuated into the heart of man by the serpent in Eden (Gen. 3:5). It is a sinful human failing to doubt the God who cares even for the oxen and the birds of the air, and who has expressly invited dependent men to cast their care upon Him who cares for them (1 Corinthians 9:9; 1 Peter 5:7). And the disciples joined the common throng of humanity in suspecting the love of God; and in their unbelief they reproached the Servant of Jehovah, saying in the hour of trouble, “Carest thou not that we perish?*

In this event we may see that ancient scripture in course of fulfillment which anticipated the cry of the Messiah upon the earth, “The reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me” (Psalm 69:9; Rom. 15:3). But how sad to observe that in this instance these reproaches emanate from His apostles! By this mistrust of their Master they were found among those who added to the sorrows of Him who had to say, “Reproach hath broken my heart” (Psalm 69:7, 20). Yet as to this phase of their complaint He “opened not his mouth,” making no mention of it for the ear of man, enduring this unmerited suspicion as part of the yoke of His servitude to Him that sent Him. And of this form of meek submission to the will of God, the Spirit of Christ had already spoken through the psalmist, “For thy sake I have borne reproach” (Psalm 69:7).

[W. J. H.]

Studies in Mark, Mark 4:30-34: (33) Surprising Growth of a Tiny Seed

4:30-34

23.-The Surprising Growth of a Tiny Seed

“And he said, How shall1 we liken the kingdom of God? or in what parable2 shall3 we set it forth?4 It is like a5 grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown upon the earth, though it be6 less than all the seeds7 that are upon the earth, yet when it is sown, groweth up,8 and becometh greater than all the herbs,9 and putteth out10 great branches; so that the birds of the heaven can lodge under the shadow thereof.11

“And with many such parables spake12 he the word unto them, as they were able to hear it: and without a parable spake13 he not unto them: but privately14 to his own disciples he expounded15 all things” (4:30-34, R.V.).

This section is introduced by the phrase, “And he said.” But whether the audience then addressed by the Lord consisted only of His disciples, or comprised also the multitudes at large we are not specifically informed. It is not, however, extravagant, judging from the nature of the questions which precede the parable, to assume that the Lord was speaking to the apostles. A point bearing upon the character of His ministry, as the parable does, would hardly be laid before promiscuous listeners in the crowd.

The Lord had chosen the twelve that they might be “with Him.” They were His personal attendants, and He constantly associated them with Himself in His service. When emergencies arose He at times consulted them as to what should be done. Not that He needed advice from any, but to question them as He did was to educate them in the understanding (1) of their own natural inefficiency in matters of the kind, and (2) of the vast resources at their Master's command. For example, when He saw the hungry multitudes He said to Philip, “Whence are we to buy bread that these may eat? And this he said to prove him, for he himself knew what he would do” (John 6:5, 6). Again, we often find that, during His itinerary He graciously included them with Himself when expressing His intentions for the future, e.g., “Let us go into Judea again” (John 11:7); “Let us go over unto the other side [of the sea]” (Mark 4:35); “Behold, we go up to Jerusalem” (Matt. 20:18).

On this occasion the Lord said, “How shall we liken the kingdom of God? or in what parable shall we set it forth?” How gracious this speech was! What did the simple fishermen know of the real nature of the coming kingdom? Yet in this manner He acknowledged them as His fellow-servants, and even as more than this, for a “bond-servant knoweth not what his lord doeth” (John 15:15). They were admitted to the intimacy of His friendship, and He assumed that the object of His love would be the object of their love also, as He said on one occasion to them, “Our friend Lazarus is fallen asleep.”

This beautiful expression uniting the apostles with the Servant of Jehovah in divine ministry is only found in the Gospel of Mark. Matthew and Luke both give the pronoun in the singular: “Whereunto shall I liken it?” (Matthew 11:16; Luke 13:18, 20). And in point of fact the Lord, as we know, provided the similitude Himself, needing no prompting from the twelve; yet it is good for us, as it was for them, to learn the lowly grace of the Savior who put the matter so that the apostles might learn that they were chosen to share His service of declaring the kingdom of God.

THE PARABLE

This parable of the grain of mustard seed has the distinction, shared only by that of the Sower and that of the wicked husbandmen, of being recorded in all three of the Synoptic Gospels. It is

short and simple in character, teaching by illustration what wide spreading results may follow from a small and unpretentious beginning.

A grain of mustard seed was proverbially minute in size; and on this account was, on another occasion, chosen by our Lord as a simile when referring to the least modicum of faith a person might exercise and yet remove mountains therewith (Matthew 17:20; Luke 17:6). Here the basis of the parable is the mustard seed. This a man took and sowed upon the earth ("in his field," Matthew; "in his own garden," Luke). But in spite of its relatively small size the seed grew until it exceeded in magnitude the herbs, and was worthy of being classed among the trees of the field. In the shadow of its spreading branches the birds of the heaven, which once might easily have devoured it as a seed, found shelter and shade.

The mustard of the parable is generally supposed by students of Scriptural botany to be the variety known as sinapis niger, from which the popular condiment is obtained. Though small in this country, the shrub, in the more southern latitudes in which Palestine is situated, attains a considerable size. Travelers report having observed it growing as high as a man on horseback. This is no great height for a tree, but it must be remembered that the main feature of the similitude is not the vast bulk of the tree, but the relative minuteness of the seed when compared with its subsequent development.16 What from the size of the seed might he expected to grow no larger than a garden herb, in point of fact becomes a tree. Neglect of this consideration has led some to seek to identify the tree of the parable with members of another botanical family.

THE TREE AS A SCRIPTURAL METAPHOR

Trees were of comparatively rare occurrence in the Palestinian landscape, and by reason of this fewness were objects of greater prominence. And various striking metaphors used in scriptural language are founded upon them. It must now suffice to refer to two of the senses in which such allusions are made. A tree is used (1) as an emblem of fruitfulness; and from this point of view the tree of the field was said to be "man's life" (Deut. 20:19); it is used also (2) as an emblem of greatness; "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree" (Psalm 37:35). These two qualities might possibly be found combined in the same tree, but not necessarily so; and it is important to bear in mind these distinct characteristics of fruitfulness and of greatness in the consideration of this parable.

Of the fruit trees mentioned in the Bible perhaps those of most frequent occurrence are the ones named by Jotham in his parable of the trees desiring a king (Judges 9:7-18), viz., the olive with its fatness, the fig with its sweet and good fruit, and the vine with its wine, cheering God and man. Each of these, as is well known, is employed on many occasions in figurative reference to the people of God and their responsibility to bear fruit for Him. The "blessed" man of the first Psalm is also compared to a tree with unwithering leaf, bearing fruit in its season. And the Lord Jesus, using the same metaphor, solemnly declared that good trees bring forth good fruit, and also that every barren tree shall be hewn down and cast into the fire (Matthew 7:16-20; cp. also 21:17-22).

Now it is clear that in this parable of the mustard seed the former of the two senses named is not implied, since fruitfulness is not the point at issue here, though it is in both of the preceding parables. But, as we have already remarked, a tree may also be regarded as an object of verdant beauty in an arid country, all the more noticeable because of its conspicuous size in comparison with commoner and lesser shrubs and herbs; and hence, emblematically, it may be regarded as an object of eminence. In the Old Testament a tree, viewed in this aspect, is used, in more than one instance, as a symbol of political power and earthly greatness. Thus, the Assyrian empire was compared by one of the prophets to a cedar of Lebanon, excelling in height all the trees of the field, the fowls of heaven nesting in the boughs, and great nations dwelling in the shadow. And the prophet applied the same simile to Pharaoh and the hosts of Egypt (Ezekiel 31). Again, the rapid rise and the vast extent of the Babylonian empire were presented to its king, Nebuchadnezzar, in a dream under the figure of a tree which "grew and was strong, and the height thereof reached unto heaven, and the sight thereof to the end of all the earth; the beasts of the field had shadow under it, and the fowls of the heaven dwelt in the branches thereof" (Dan. 4). And in the New Testament we read, at this point, that the Great Prophet likened His kingdom to a small seed becoming a great tree, evidently teaching thereby that the kingdom was to develop into an earthly power conspicuous in the eyes of men by the magnitude it would attain in comparison with its initial exiguousness.

THE LITTLE BECOMING GREAT

In all three of the parables narrated in this chapter, the ministry of the kingdom of God by the Servant of Jehovah is presented under the figure of the growth of seed. In the first it is shown that fruitfulness depended upon the suitability of the soil into which the seed was cast; in the second the parable illustrates how the growth and eventual fruitfulness of the seed was independent altogether of human aid. In the third parable, however, quite a different feature is prominent. Nothing is said of fruit for God which will be of so much account in the day of harvest. It is not the Godward side of the kingdom which is brought forward in this instance, but the man-ward. The rapidly-growing tree is the aspect which the kingdom was to assume in human eyes speaking of man generally. For man, apart from any divine revelation, would be able to appreciate the outward development and marvelous expansion of what was originally as insignificant in appearance as a grain of mustard seed.

Though the interpretation of the parable given by the Lord to His disciples is not recorded in the Gospels, the general facts of the remarkable growth of the kingdom in the days of the apostles, through the spread of the word of the gospel, may be gathered from the later scriptures. And we need not, for our present purpose, refer to the testimony of other history as to subsequent times. At the time of the parable, it was truly the "day of small things," and the disciples were but "a little flock," yet it was the Father's good pleasure to give them the kingdom (Luke 12:32), and this divine purpose could not fail of accomplishment.

It seemed a small thing in the eyes of men when the Savior of the world was found as the Babe in Bethlehem's manger. It was asked with scorn whether any good tidings could come out of Nazareth. The labors of Jehovah's Servant appeared to the eye of flesh to be for naught. But the preaching of the gospel, at first restricted to the cities of Israel, was even in the days of the apostles carried into all the world to every creature under heaven (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15).

And, according to the Lord's own word, men came from the east and the west and the north and the south, and sat down in the kingdom. God chose the weak things of the world to the confusion of what was mighty. And the preaching which began at an obscure village of Galilee spread in a couple of generations to the confines of the known world (Col. 1:6, 23). Thus the tiny seed became the landmark of the countryside.17

BIRDS FINDING SHELTER AND SHADOW

Branches of trees provide for birds a natural shade from the burning rays of an Eastern sun, as well as a suitable site for their nests. This simple phenomenon, familiar to all, is frequently alluded to in the Old Testament (Psalm 104; 12 Ezekiel 17:23; 31:6; Daniel 4:12, 21). It is also introduced in this parable of the mustard tree, which, it is said, “putteth out great branches, so that the birds of the heaven can lodge under the shadow thereof.” The birds find a harbor of refuge among the leafy branches.

What is the signification of this part of the parable? It has already been noted that we do not possess a record of the interpretation given by the Lord to His disciples. It remains, therefore, in this case, as in some others, to seek what light may be afforded by other parts of the scripture, and especially by the immediate context.

Take then the two parables that immediately precede this one. In each of these seed-time and harvest constitute the beginning and the ending of the tableau. The seed is sown with the object that it may ultimately bear fruit. But in the third case the question of fruit bearing does not come into view in the parable. Here the salient feature is the degree of the tree's growth at its maturity when compared with its original size as a seed. In this stage it becomes the haunt of independent agents, which do not originate from the seed as fruit would do, but are altogether separate from the tree as an organism. The birds find protection in the tree, but in no sense do they form an integral part of it. As a seed, they were its natural enemies, and the first parable shows that the good seed was in certain instances devoured by the birds. This act of destruction the Lord interpreted to mean that the word of the gospel when preached was sometimes carried away by Satan. If then the birds of the air mentioned in the first parable represent the emissaries of the devil, we may, by easy analogy, regard them in the third of the same series as representing powers of evil.

This parabolic intimation of future greatness has passed out of prophecy and become a familiar item of ecclesiastical history. The powers of the political world persecuted the church in its infancy, but upon its astonishing development, numerically and geographically, they ceased to persecute, and sought, not in vain, to patronize the power that could no longer be despised for its insignificance. Thus Christendom became a great world-system, the resort, the lodging-place of the forces of evil. This apostate condition of the professing church is delineated in vivid colors at the close of inspired testimony, and the language there employed echoes the figure of the birds employed in this parable. The declaration made in vision concerning this great system is, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, and is become a habitation of demons, and a hold of every unclean spirit, and a hold of every unclean and hateful bird” (Revelations 18:2, R.V.).

That the birds set forth agents of wickedness appears therefore to be the simple and unforced explanation of the parable. But such epithets cannot be applied to many of the interpretations offered of the passage. To say that it teaches how the gospel supplies shelter and protection from worldly oppression and the power of Satan is surely to distort the imagery in a manner that cannot be acceptable to the earnest student. Nor is Dean Alford's somewhat vague explanation of the parable more satisfactory. He says, “We must beware of imagining that the outward church-form is the kingdom. It has rather reversed the parable, and is the worldly power waxed to a great tree, and the churches taking refuge under the shadow of it."18 The Dean sees that the tree cannot display the true church of Christ, and he alleges that it does set forth the worldly power under which the churches take refuge. There is here a confusion of ideas which arises from assuming that the church and the kingdom are synonymous terms. The latter is the heterogeneous mass of professors, as depicted in several of the Lord's parables. In other words, Christendom, not the church, is the kingdom in its existing form, though the Dean would have us “beware of imagining” such a thing. The kingdom is not the incorruptible church but the mixed system which it became at a very early date, and which the Lord will finally cleanse by removing out of it all stumbling-blocks and persons that practice iniquity (Matthew 13:41).

We may conclude therefore that the most consistent explanation of the parable is that the tree is emblematical of the outward profession of Christianity, particularly in those vast proportions which the system has assumed among the various human institutions for many centuries, while within this extensive organization are harbored many evil persons and principles which are totally opposed to the spirit of its Founder.

MEASURES AND MANNERS

What a fund of truth accompanied the Prophet of Jehovah! There was truth concerning Old Testament mysteries, concerning the Messiah's mission, His ministry, His sufferings, and death, and concerning the kingdom-glories of a future day, as well as much beside concerning the Father and His love. And it was a part of the mission of the Servant of the Lord to communicate these things to His disciples. This He did, so that at the close of His public service He could say, addressing the Father, “The words which thou gavest me I have given them” (John 17:8).

But at this juncture in Mark's Gospel we learn an important principle regarding the manner in which these communications were made by our Lord, and at the same time we may recognize that the principle is the same as that which characterized divine revelations in former days. During the forty centuries preceding the coming of the Messiah God had spoken to His people in divers measures and divers manners (Hebrews 1:1). And these varying portions and methods of instruction throughout the ages were such as in the great wisdom of God were suited to the need of men at the respective epochs, and also such as prepared the hearts of men to expect with a growing intensity the advent of the Redeemer.

In accordance therefore with this principle of dispensational accommodation, the Heavenly Teacher, in speaking the word to His disciples, considered their capacity and the degree of their spiritual development, and adopted that succession of “measure and manner” in His teaching which was best suited for them. The parable and its interpretation was the medium employed by the Lord to impart the “word of the kingdom” in the proportion that their minds and hearts were ready to receive them, thus giving them “meat in due season.” “With many such parables spake he the word unto them as they were able to hear.” Their capacity for hearing was the measure.

We thus see that the Lord recognized spiritual growth in His hearers. On one occasion He had many things to say, but the apostles were then unable to bear them (John 16:12). When, however, the Spirit of truth came at Pentecost they were led forwards into all truth. But in the Epistles, as in the Gospels, we find that individual progress was considered in the ministration of the truth. Paul fed some with “milk,” and others with “meat” (1 Corinthians 3:2; Hebrews 5:12). Wisdom the same apostle spoke only among the perfect [full-grown] (1 Corinthians 2:6). And a believer's responsibility for walk is said to be in proportion to his individual measure of attainment (Philippians 3:16).

It may therefore be accepted that now, as then, there are progressive stages in the divine life, and the word of God is unfolded to the individual believer to suit the varying capacity. When the Lord by His Spirit teaches knowledge and makes men understand wisdom, He does not impart an ordered and codified system of divinity, but presents the truth by degrees, “precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line

upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little" (Isaiah 28:9, 10).

To His disciples the Lord constituted Himself the sole judge of what and of how much it was best for them to know. And His mode of communicating the word of the kingdom was by parables, as Mark writes, "Without a parable spake he not unto them." This style of discourse was after the manner of the ancient prophets of Israel, concerning whom Jehovah said, "I have also spoken unto the prophets, and I have multiplied visions, and by the ministry of the prophets have I used similitudes" (Hosea 12:10, R.V.).

The people at large heard the parables, but lacking faith, they could not understand, and remained in darkness as to the divine purposes. But to His own immediate circle of followers, the Lord expounded everything in private. For to those who "had" more was given, according to His own word. Hence this section closes with the statement, "But privately to his own disciples he interpreted all things." [W. J. H.]

Studies in Mark, Mark 4:13-20: (30) The First Parable Interpreted, Concluded

4:13-20

21-The First Parable Interpreted (Concluded)

Wayside Hearers

Both Mark and Luke refer to the various classes of hearers in the plural, but Matthew specifies the individual, "This is he which received seed by the wayside." The former lay down what is true generally, while the latter applies the truth particularly and personally to those who heard the word.

In this case the result of the sowing is purely negative. The seed falls upon a hard and unreceptive heart: it does not even germinate, but is removed immediately by the spiritual enemy of man. The cause of the failure is not in any degree ascribed to the Sower or to the seed. These, on the contrary, are perfect, without defect of any kind. But the ground was hard and beaten—unploughed, while the birds of the air were alert to steal the good seed.

The trodden pathway across the Galilean hillside is an apt simile of multitudes of mankind, then and now. Out of the heart of man are "the issues of life." It is the avenue of his being. Duty and enterprise as well as pleasure and pain, all throng daily in ceaseless procession along the highway of the heart. The continual succession of these earthly objects, each claiming concern, if not concentration of mind, wears down the heart into the ruts of a dull routine. When truth from above falls in such a street, it lies unheeded, and is "trodden under foot," as Luke says in the parable.

Under these circumstances, the word being sown in a heart irresponsive to its claim, and oblivious of its value, a personal and active foe of the truth appears and snatches it away. This foe is named Satan in Mark; the devil () in Luke; and the evil or wicked one in Matthew. And it is noticeable that in the threefold power which hinders the growth and fructification of the seed Satan is placed first. The Lord shows by the three classes that

(1) the power of the devil removes the seed (the birds)

(2) the power of the flesh prevents the seed rooting (the rocks)

(3) the power of the world prevents the seed fruiting (the thorns)

The Pharisees had blasphemously charged the Lord with being in alliance with Satan (3: 22-30); the Lord here declared Satan to be the foremost enemy of the word of the kingdom, who "immediately," so energetic in his opposition is he, catches away the word. In Luke, where he is represented as the devil, the adversary of man, in contrast with the Savior of men, his object in stealing the word is given— "lest they should believe and be saved." In Matthew it is as the wicked one that he snatches away the good seed. This expression seems to emphasize the moral contrast between the kingdoms of light, and or darkness, and their respective heads.1 The wayside hearers then are the careless and indifferent persons, too absorbed in other things to receive the truth in the love of it. The Athenians seem to have been, among others, an example of this class (Acts 17: 15-32). They had habituated themselves ever to be telling or hearing some new thing. The novelty of the gospel, therefore, awakened a passing superficial interest in the preaching of Paul, but no more. Heathen philosophy, like formal Judaism, was unreceptive of the gospel of Jesus.

STONY GROUND HEARERS

The main difference between this class of hearers and the preceding, with which it is coupled by the adverbial phrase, "in like manner," is that in the former instance the hardness and impenetrability were found on the surface, but in this case the density occurred at a little distance beneath. In outward appearance the exterior of the soil was actually more promising, but the resistance by the rocky subsoil to the growth of the seed was none the less effectual. Under normal conditions the sun's rays should have caused the seed to root more firmly and deeply as it struck downwards in search of moisture. But under these circumstances the heat exercised a withering influence, hastening the total destruction of the growth.

These persons are characterized by superficiality. When they hear the word, immediately (Matt., Mark) they receive it with joy (Matt., Mark, Luke). The conscience, that fierce self-accuser within the heart, is clearly not awakened. Repentance does not rejoice, as these are said to do, but sits in sackcloth and ashes. Confession of sins is made in tears, not with joy. Peter's audience, when they heard the word on the day of Pentecost, were "sawn asunder" in their hearts.2 These in the parable, however, receive the word because of the pleasure it affords by its novelty, or its beauty, or the like. The result is a rapid growth which by its fair promise may deceive some, but such profession, as soon as tribulation or persecution on account of the word arises, quickly withers away3.

There were many such shallow fickle hearers in our Lord's days; there have been many such since. It is written that the common people heard Him gladly, but the priests soon persuaded them to ask Pilate to spare Barabbas and to crucify Jesus. A sign in Jerusalem, and many crowded

to follow Him! A “hard saying,” and many turned back to walk no more with Him (John 2:23; 6:60, 61)!

They “endured for a while,” but it is a little while only, even as they rejoiced in the testimony of John the Baptist “for a season” (John 5:35). Many put their hands to the plow, but quickly looked back, proving their unfitness to produce fruit. And the Lord, in the interpretation of this parable, unveiled the cause of this failure. The hindrance was within—the unbroken spirit, the adamantine heart. “To this man will I look,” saith Jehovah, “even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word” (Isa. 66:2).

THORNY GROUND HEARERS

This would appear to be a more promising class than either of the former. The seed germinates, and grows and develops to a certain degree. But it is nevertheless unfruitful, on account of a powerful external influence. The thorns grow more vigorously than the good seed, and eventually suffocate it.4

The Lord explained what the thorns signify. They set forth the adverse influence which present things may exercise upon eternal things—a possible influence so great as to extinguish and exclude the latter entirely from the human heart. This influence is not manifestly hostile like that of affliction and persecution 'in the previous class; but it is none the less deadly, and much more dangerous because of its insidious nature. The thorns were growing too near the seed; a mile away it would not have mattered; and consequently they were able secretly, but effectually, to rob the good seed of its necessary light, air, moisture, and nutrition from the soil. Similarly, the cares, riches, and pleasures of this life, if allowed the supremacy in the heart, choke the good seed, and unfruitfulness is the dire result.

Thorns are emblematical of the world outside of Eden. The thorns introduced through the fall of the first Adam formed the insignia awarded by his children to the last Adam. The kingdoms of man and of God are in a state of irreconcilable enmity. And here the Lord shows that the employments, the successes, and the enjoyments of this present age may have a blighting and destructive effect upon the work of the word of God within a man.

Mark records the fullest description of these worldly forces. Luke summarizes them as the “cares and riches and pleasures of this life.” Matthew mentions only two of these three, which, however, he amplifies— “the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches.” The second Evangelist has a yet ampler category, adding, moreover, that the mischief is wrought through their entering into the heart, where the word of God should be hidden (Psalm 119:11)— “the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches and the lusts of other things entering in choke the word.”

These hearers lack singleness of eye and heart. The attention becomes absorbed by the incessant occupations of a busy world, by the distracting anxieties of everyday life and by the excitements of a restless and reckless age. Such divided efforts to serve God and mammon invariably result in luxuriant thorns and withered wheat.

The “cares” have a particular reference to the “poor man's toil how to live at all, to keep the wolf from the door,” the struggle for a daily subsistence, the cares of this life, which, if not met in faith, hinders the thriving of the spiritual word in the heart.” The affluent are specially susceptible to the “deceitfulness of riches,” particularly when the love of money accompanies its possession (1 Tim. 6:9, 10). The “lusts of other things” cover all the ambitious strivings after temporal objects, however innocent the objects may be in themselves, to which all conditions of men are liable, and which may fill the heart to the consequent exclusion of what is divine.

FRUITFUL HEARERS

The main object of sowing is the subsequent reaping. And fruitfulness is the indisputable evidence of effective growth. The Lord was preeminently the Sower, and, as He said, others reaped (John 4:34-38). Pentecost and onwards, were reaping times, as also, in a fuller measure, the coming day of glory will be. And in all cases the divine Husbandman alone is a competent judge of the quality and quantity of the fruit (John 15:1, 5, 8), though, in a general way, we may be able to recognize the fruitful effects of the word (Col. 1:6; Phil. 4:17).

In this instance the word is heard in a prepared heart—in an “honest and good heart,” as the Lord said (Luke). And in examining the three Gospels it will be observed that three inward actions are stated to precede the fruit-bearing.

1.The word is understood (Matt.).

2.The word is received (Mark).

3.The word is held fast (Luke).

(1)It has already been pointed out that lack of understanding was specially attributed to the nation of Israel, who had Moses and the prophets before the coming of the Lord. And it is from the First Gospel therefore that we learn that in order to bear fruit it was necessary to understand (). This was so in the case of the apostles themselves. After His resurrection the Lord opened their minds that they might understand the scriptures, particularly in that case, those relating to His death and resurrection (Luke 24:45). Those disciples who understand what the will of the Lord is are those who know what things are pleasing in His sight, and by doing such yield fruit to His praise.

In Mark, the word is received into the heart, that is, it is taken to oneself, welcomed and cherished. The truth is received not in a formal sense as in verse 16, where a different Greek word is used, but in the love of it. The Bereans were more noble than those in Thessalonica in that they received the word of the gospel in all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily whether those things were so; “therefore” we are told, “many of them believed” (Acts 17:12, 13).

Further, it is necessary to keep, or to hold fast, the word. This expression implies the energy Of active resistance against all opposing influences. Spiritual fruit bearing has its particular enemies. In view of these, therefore, there is an individual responsibility to use a special endeavor to preserve a sense of joy in the word and a love for it in the heart. To do so demands spiritual energy.

But there are degrees of fruitfulness in the good ground. All do not bear fruit in equal profusion. The power of Satan, and the seductions of the world, which altogether extinguish the growth in other cases, are here shown to have the effect of reducing the amount of fruit borne. Some, the Lord said, bring forth fruit thirty-fold, and some sixty-fold, while others, like the seed Isaac sowed (Gen. 26:12), yield a hundred-fold.

Luke only mentions the full degree of fruition, and it is there explained that seed on good ground brings forth fruit “with patience” (8:15). A hundred-fold is the “perfect work” of patience or endurance (James 1:3, 4). There must be not only well doing, but patient continuance in it5 (Rom. 2:7). The faithful disciple is called to endure a “great fight of afflictions,” for tribulation and patience are inseparable adjuncts to the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, as the exiled apostle in Patmos testified (Rev. 1:9). Those in Philadelphia whom the Lord commended because they had “kept the word of his patience” (Rev. 3:10), are surely such fruitful ones as He contemplated in His parable of the Sower (Luke 8:15).

[W. J. H.]

Studies in Mark, Mark 4:13-20: (29) The First Parable Interpreted

4:13-20

21.-The First Parable Interpreted “And he saith unto them, Know ye not this parable? and how shall ye know1 all the parables? The sower soweth the word. And these are they by the way side,2 where the word is sown; and when they have heard,3 straightway4 cometh Satan, and taketh away the word which hath been5 sown in them. And these in like manner are they that are sown upon the rocky places, who, when they have heard6 the word, straightway7 receive it with joy; and they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while;8 then, when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of9 the word, straightway10 they stumble11. And others are they that are sown among the thorns; these are they that have heard12 the word, and the care of the world,13 and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful. And those are they that were sown14 upon the good ground; such as hear the word, and accept15 it, and bear fruit, thirtyfold, and sixtyfold, and a hundredford “16.

The apostles came to the Lord to seek enlightenment with regard to the meaning of the parable of the sower. He told them that the mysteries of the kingdom, though concealed from the unbelieving mass, were committed to them. But it was one thing for them to have these mysteries in a parabolic form, and another thing to know the true inwardness of the parables. The ignorance of the disciples upon the latter head stood confessed in their inquiry concerning the parable of the sower. This parable was, in comparison with others, elementary in nature, and introductory in character. If they were unable to comprehend the initial lesson regarding the hitherto unrevealed phases of the kingdom, how much less would they be able to understand further parables of a more advanced and more complex nature? The Lord said to them, “Know () ye not this parable? how then will ye be acquainted with ()17 all the parables?”

This inability of even the apostles to understand the significance of the parables apart from the Lord's own exposition shows that they were not used as are figures of speech, in the ordinary acceptation of this term. They were not like similes or metaphors or allegories introduced in order to illuminate or embellish or simplify a discourse. The parables, on the contrary, however deeply they might be impressed upon the memory, presented the truth shrouded in a veil, which was impenetrable to the disciples and to the multitude alike. The Prophet lifted the veil for the instruction of His followers; as we read, “Without a parable spoke he not to them [the populace]; and in private he explained all things to his disciples” (Mark 4:34, New Trans.), so that when He said to them, Have ye understood all these things? they were able to reply, Yea, Lord (Matt. 13:51). What the disciples failed to retain of the parables and their interpretations unfolded to them during the term of their Master's ministry, the Holy Spirit (so the Lord promised), should bring to their remembrance after His descent at Pentecost (John 14:26).

It is remarkable that but few of the Lord's own interpretations of His parables are recorded in the Gospels. Those of the sower and of the wheat and tares are given (Matt. 13:18-23; 37-43), as well as that relating to the true nature of defilement (Matt. 15:10-20; Mark 7:14-23). It may also be said that we have the explanation of the parable of the drag-net (Matt. 13:47-50). With regard to the others, however, we are left to seek to understand their meaning in the light of the subsequent revelations of the Spirit, transmitted through the medium of the apostles in the Epistles.

THE SOWER AND THE SEED

It has been suggested that “the parable of the sower” is not altogether a suitable title for the Lord's first parable, since there is no definite statement of the identity of the sower, while a lengthy explanation is given regarding the behavior of the seed in the various soils; and that a preferable description would be the parable of the seed and the soils. This remark must have been made without adequate reference and reflection. For the former is precisely the designation bestowed upon it by the Lord Himself. According to Matthew He prefaced His interpretation by the words, “Hear ye the parable of the sower.” And evidently the parable is so described by the Lord to indicate that it unfolded the relationship He Himself was assuming towards the kingdom of God in its altered character. He, so to speak, laid aside the sword of the King and Judge and took up the word of the Prophet and Teacher.

This new function, as about to be exercised, possessed also a special feature which the parable made clear. This feature was that the work of the Sower would, to outward seeming, be a partial failure. When Messiah reigns in power His rule will be successful, without exception, in subduing all things to Himself. When the Sower sowed the word, three-fourths would be absolute failure, and the remainder fruitful only in varying degrees.

The Sower therefore is the subject of this parable, and, in agreement with the second parable, it may be understood that “He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man” (Matt. 13:37). Subsequently, the apostles, in their ministry of the truth, became sowers themselves in a secondary sense. For example, Paul used this figure when writing to the Corinthians: “If we sowed unto you spiritual things, is it a great matter if we shall reap your carnal things?” (1 Cor. 9:11; cp. also 1 Cor. 3:6).

The Lord's declaration that He was among them as the Sower implied that His errand of seeking fruit in Jehovah's vineyard was futile, as it was definitely expressed in another of His parables (Luke 13:6-9). It was not yet the glorious year of jubilee to which the ancient type pointed when there should be no need of sowing (Lev. 25:11); nor was it that millennial day of extreme fruitfulness when, according to the prophecy, “the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed” (Amos 9:13). But it was a day to “sow beside all waters” —a day when the Great Husbandman must, in fulfillment of the purposes of God, wait patiently for the precious fruit of the earth. It was, moreover, a day of shame and suffering for the Servant of Jehovah, when the Sower must sow in tears; yet, in the words of the Psalmist,

“though he goeth on his way weeping, bearing forth the seed; he shall come again with joy, bringing his sheaves with him” (Psa. 126:6, R.V.).18 For if He was the patient Sower, He was also the Lord of the harvest. Israel then, having been found barren and unfruitful, the Lord came bringing that which would produce fruit, and this good seed He scattered broadcast, upon good and bad soils alike. He had come to serve, and, as the Perfect Servant, He left the results of His work with Him who sent Him, according to the promise of Jehovah concerning His word of grace, “For as the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, and giveth seed to the sower, and bread to the eater; so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it” (Isa. 55:10, 11). In the strength of this assurance the Prophet of God sowed in the morn His seed, and in the evening withheld not His hand.

In Mark the seed is called the word simply, without any qualification; but in Luke we read more definitely, “The seed is the word of God.”

This phrase predicates the divine origin of the word. It is of God. “I have given unto them thy word,” the Son said to the Father. The word of God has the germ of life within itself.

It is living and operative. It is incorruptible and eternal. It possesses life, and it bestows life. In the Gospel by Luke where the kingdom of God is treated in its world-wide aspect, this designation is on this account the most appropriate. But in Matthew we have not the generic but the specific term. The seed is there described as the “word of the kingdom.” This phrase covered the subject of the word, while that of Luke looked to its Author. Christ's word had special and particular reference to the kingdom. We learn therefore from the First Gospel that in the parable of the sower the Lord made direct allusion to His own teaching on the topic of the kingdom. And it is well to remember that while the instruction in regard of the hindrances to the germination and fruitfulness of the seed is of general application to spiritual matters at all periods, primarily it referred to the gospel of the kingdom, preached by the Lord and His apostles.

On comparing the accounts in Matthew and in Luke, it will be further noted that the former emphasizes the necessity for understanding the word, and the latter the necessity of believing it. The hollowing extract refers to these differences in mode of expression between the two Evangelists.

“There is, of course, a great deal in common between the two; but the Spirit had a wise reason for using the different expressions. It would have been rather giving an opportunity to an enemy, unless there had been some good grounds for it. I repeat that it is ‘the word of the kingdom' in Matthew, and ‘of God' in Luke. In the latter we have ‘lest they should believe,' and in the former 'lest they should understand.'

“What is taught by the difference? It is manifest that, in Matthew, the Holy Ghost has the Jewish people particularly in His mind, although the word is going out to the Gentiles in due time; whereas, in Luke, the Lord had particularly the Gentiles before Him. They understood that there was a great kingdom, which God was about to establish, destined to swallow up all their kingdoms. The Jews being already familiar with the word of God, their great point was understanding what God taught. They had His word already, though superstition and self-righteousness never understood it (you might have been controverted had you said to a Jew, You do not believe what Isaiah says); and a serious question came, Do you understand it? But if you looked at the Gentiles — they had not the lively oracles, so that among them the question was believing what God said; and this is what we have in Luke. The point for a Gentile was that, instead of setting up his own wisdom, he should bow to what God said.

“Hence you will observe that, looking at people who had not the word of God, and who were to be tested by the gospel going out to them in due time, the question was believing something that had not been brought out to them before. In Matthew, speaking to a people who had the word already, the great thing was to understand it.

This they did not. The Lord intimates that, if they heard with their ears, they did not understand with their hearts. So that this difference, when connected with the different ideas and objects of the two Gospels is manifest, interesting, and instructive.

“When anyone heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not.” Another solemn truth we learn from this — the great thing that hinders spiritual understanding is religious prejudice.

The Jews were charged with not understanding. They were not idolaters, or open infidels, but had a system of religion in their minds in which they had been trained from infancy, and which darkened their intelligence of what the Lord was bringing out. So it is now. Among the heathen, though you would find an evil state morally, yet at least there would be that kind of barren waste where the word of God might be freely sown, and by grace, be believed. That is not the case where people have been nurtured in ordinances and superstition: there the difficulty is to understand the word.” 19[W. J. H.]

(To be continued)

Studies in Mark, Mark: 4:9-12: (28) The Hearing Ear and the Mystery of the Kingdom

The Mystery of the Kingdoms

It was not altogether a new thing for divine predictions to be conveyed to men in a form which concealed its import from the many and revealed it to the few. In the Old Testament we read of dreams, of visions, and, though not as frequently, of parables wherein God spoke to man. But we can only refer now to one or two of such instances in which He revealed matters affecting the government of the world. Take, for example, the dreams of Pharaoh. He who gives fruitful seasons, and in His providence fills the hearts of men with food and gladness, foretold events which were of the utmost importance in the administration of the great empire of Egypt. That seven years of phenomenal fruitfulness were at hand, and further that these were to be succeeded by a like period of absolute barrenness, were facts of incalculable value to the statesmen of that land. God who knew and gave these things was pleased to communicate them beforehand to the responsible governing head of Egypt. But the prediction came to Pharaoh in dreams, the significance of which he could not unravel. The heathen monarch and the wisest men of the land were alike constrained to confess their impotence, and compelled to solicit the aid of Joseph, the pious servant of the most high God. He came forth from the dungeon and interpreted Pharaoh's dreams which to human wisdom were otherwise in soluble.

Again, when Israel was displaced and God had granted universal dominion to the Gentiles, we find Him communicating with Nebuchadnezzar, the first head, but in the form of a dream. This forgotten dream presented an outline-sketch of the four great world-kingdoms (Dan. 2), but, apart from Daniel the prophet, it was unintelligible to the mighty king. In the writing on the wall of Belshazzar's banqueting hall we have another instance of a cryptic message, needing special interpretation; while the visions subsequently received by Daniel himself required to be explained to the prophet by an angel from heaven.

These examples are sufficient to illustrate the nature of what is called in Scripture a “mystery.” It may consist of a dream, a vision, a parable or a verbal prophecy, the essential feature being that the divine communication cannot be understood without a subsequent divine communication which explains the first. And it will be found that the Greek word, , mystery, first occurs in the chapter of Daniel to which reference has been made (Dan. 2). In the Septuagint version the term is applied repeatedly to the forgotten dream of Nebuchadnezzar and its interpretation. Daniel and his friends “sought mercies from the God of heaven concerning this mystery.” “Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night.” Daniel said, “The mystery which the king asks the explanation of.” “There is a God in heaven revealing mysteries.” “He that reveals mysteries has made known to thee what must come to pass.” Nebuchadnezzar said, “Of a truth your God is a God of gods, and Lord of kings, who reveals mysteries; for thou past been able to reveal this mystery”
(Dan. 2:18, 19, 27, 28, 29, 30, 47; 4:6).1 It may be seen therefore that a mystery is a secret thing which would, remain such apart from divine revelation a matter to the knowledge and understanding of which initiation is necessary.

Now, as there was the mystery concerning the Gentile monarchies, so, the Lord said, there was a mystery concerning that kingdom which, according to Daniel (ii. 44) the God of heaven would establish, never to be destroyed. This mystery He set out in His teaching by parables, thereby concealing from the multitude for the time being the meaning which He afterward revealed to His apostles. For He said, “Unto you is given [to know] the mystery of the kingdom of God; but unto them that are without, all things are done in parables; that seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear and not understand.” He thus added a solemn warning to the people. Upon the nation at large the sentence of judicial blindness would fall, as Isaiah had prophesied (Isa. 6:9, 10). For the Light of the world was among them, yet they refused to see light in His light; hence darkness would come among and upon them, and even as He was speaking, the truth as to God's provision in view of their rebellion was veiled from their eyes in parables.

Just what was signified by the mystery of the kingdom will appear in the interpretation of the parables that the Lord Himself gave. The altered character of the kingdom consequent upon the rejection of the Anointed One and the absence of the King is delineated most fully and categorically in the series of parables recorded in Matt. 13. Here we only emphasize the essential element of mystery in the Scriptural sense, viz., not that which in itself is difficult of understanding, but rather that which in both its communication and its reception is dependent upon divine revelation, and, as must necessarily follow, that which is only made known to a selected few who are fitted to receive it.

The New Testament, associated as it is with the advent both of the Son and the Spirit, contains the revelation of many mysteries. Many matters kept secret from the foundation of the world, many truths concealed in Old Testament prophecies are therein brought to light and made known. We read of the mystery of God, of Christ, of God's will, of godliness, of faith, of the gospel, of iniquity, of the seven stars, of the scarlet woman, Babylon the Great. The secret rapture of the church is called a mystery (1 Cor. 15:51), and so its union with Christ the Head (Eph. 5:32). The setting aside of Israel and the admission of the Gentiles to equal privileges in the gospel is a mystery (Rom. 11:25). Eye had not seen, nor ear heard these things in the ancient oracles. They are now freely given us by God's Spirit.

THOSE WITHOUT

Those not following Jesus are described as “them that are without,” and no explanation of the parables is offered to them. The term2 is one peculiar to Mark, not occurring in Matthew or Luke. It is used similarly, however, in the Epistles, where it refers to those outside the assembly of believers. Thus Paul writes, “What have I to do with judging them that are without? Do not ye judge them that are within, whereas them that are without God judgeth?” (1 Cor. 5:12, 13). He exhorts the Colossian saints to “walk in wisdom toward them that are without” (Col. 4:5), and also the Thessalonians to “walk honestly toward them that are without” (1 Thess. 4:12). One instance of its adverbial use is so striking and solemn that it may be quoted here: “Blessed are they that wash their robes that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter in by the gates into the city. Without are the dogs, and the sorcerers, and the fornicators, and the murderers, and the idolaters, and every one that loveth and maketh a lie” (Rev. 22:14, 15). This instance is one of its final and irrevocable sense, no passage being possible from one side of the fixed gulf to the other.

THE JUDICIAL BLINDNESS

Isaiah centuries before had prophesied of the obduracy of the nation and the spiritual darkness that should fall upon it as a people in consequence. The prophet recorded the words of Jehovah to him. He was commanded to “go and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not.” Such was their condition—in the position, and having the privilege, of hearing and seeing, but utterly oblivious to heavenly sights and sounds. The message went on to warn of what would come upon the nation as a righteous retribution of this gross abuse of their privileges. “Make the heart of this people fat and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn again, and be healed” (Isa. 6:9, 10).

In the Septuagint version of Isaiah, this insensate condition is declared to be the result of the people's own neglect rather than of a divine infliction, as in the Hebrew text. The Greek version runs as follows: “Go, and say to this people, Ye shall hear indeed, but ye shall not understand; and ye shall see indeed, but ye shall not perceive. For the heart of this people has become gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them."3

Now, in turning to Matthew's Gospel it will be seen that the Lord, speaking of the complete fulfillment() of this prophecy, quoted from the Greek version and not from the Hebrew text (Matt. 13:13-15). The people had themselves closed their eyes. Mark and Luke (8:10) only record the reference to the former part of the prophecy which states the condition of Israel—hearing and not understanding; while all three agree in showing that the Lord adopted the parabolic form of teaching in view of their insensate moral state.

John also quotes Isaiah's prediction, but in a different connection. It is cited at a later stage in the history of Israel's opposition to their Messiah. Though Jesus did so many signs before them yet they believed not. And since they would not believe, it came to pass that they could

not believe. And the Evangelist brings forward the ancient oracle which warned of this blindness which came as a divine judgment upon the nation. “For this cause they could not believe, for that Isaiah said, He hath blinded their eyes and he hardened their heart, lest they should see with their eyes, and perceive with their heart, and should turn, and I should heal them” (John 12:37-40). This quotation, it will be observed, is from the Hebrew text, and is introduced historically immediately before the final act of unbelief—the crucifixion of Christ. The truth was there hidden from their eyes, even the eyes of the wise and prudent (Matt. 11:25; Luke 19:42).

Through sovereign grace the gospel was offered to the guilty people by the testimony of the Holy Ghost, as is recorded in the Acts. But there was no response from the nation. In the concluding chapter of this book we have the final appeal of Paul at Rome to the Jews as such; but they closed their eyes and ears to this call also. And the apostle applied to them the witness of the Holy Spirit in the same scripture from Isaiah, quoting as in Matthew the Septuagint version, and laying the responsibility upon their own shoulders (Acts 28:25-27). The nation was thereupon abandoned. So far as Holy Writ speaks, no further opportunities of repentance were offered them. And less than ten years later, Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans, and the Jews scattered over the face of the earth.

By the testimony of the Son of God, and of the Spirit of God, Israel had been summoned to hear the message of God. They refused to hear, and the apostle told them in his final address what was the consequence: “Be it known, therefore, unto you, that this salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles; they will also hear” (Acts 28:28). It was sent to such as would hear.

Thus we see that the prophecy is quoted in the Synoptical Gospels and in the Acts to show that the blindness of Israel was due to their own willful obstinacy, and in the Gospel of John to show that it was the result of the judgment of God. Both aspects are of course true and necessary to a complete presentation of the truth.

W. J. H.

(To be continued)

Studies in Mark, Mark: 4:9-12: (27) The Hearing Ear and the Mystery of the Kingdom

20. the Hearing Far and the Mystery of the Kingdom

“And he said, Who1 hath ears to hear, let him hear. And when he was alone, they that were about him with the twelve asked of him the parables. And he said unto them, Unto you is given2 the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all things are done in parables: that seeing they may see, and not perceive 3 and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest haply4 they should turn again,5 and it6 should be forgiven them” (4:9-12, R.V.).

The Lord had by His miracles and signs fully established His title to be heard as the Prophet of Jehovah. But in the result He might adopt the language of Isaiah, and inquire, “Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed?” For the nation was like “the deaf adder [asp] that stoppeth her ear, which will not hearken to the voice of charmers, charming never so wisely.” Jesus, as the anointed King and Redeemer, had called, but there was no response, save blasphemously to ascribe His works of mercy and might to the power of the evil one. The Servant of the Lord did not, however, in view of His repulse both in Juda and in Galilee, abandon Himself to despair like the despondent Elijah of old, and flee from the place of testimony to Horeb. If the nation at large refused to listen, He was mindful of the simple and faithful ones who were “looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.” And from this period onward He addressed His ministry not to the mass as such, but to the individuals who were desirous of divine instruction. “And he said, Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.” EARS TO HEAR. This phrase was used by our Lord more than once, and in each case His accompanying utterance contained a meaning which did not, so to speak, lie upon the surface, but needed faith and love in the heart, as well as the Spirit's unction, for its true apprehension. In Matthew an abbreviated form of the words is found, “Who hath ears, let him hear.” And in that Gospel it is recorded in one other connection besides in that of the parables. The Lord was speaking to the multitudes concerning John the Baptist and his super-eminence as a prophet, being none other than the messenger of Jehovah and the forerunner of the Messiah, as Malachi had foretold. “And,” said He to His audience, “if ye will receive it, this is Elijah which is to come He that hath ears, let him hear” (Matt. 11:14, 15). Only faith discerned that the King had come in humiliation, and also that the predicted forerunner had preceded Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, not yet, however, to introduce the day of God's vengeance, but the day of His salvation.

Those who had the ears of faith were called to hear this revelation concerning the extended scope of the prophecy of Malachi, and to know that Elijah was yet to come and restore all things, and also that he had come and that the nation “did unto him whatsoever they listed” (Matt. 17:11, 12).

Luke also records the phrase in one other association besides in that of the parables (Luke 8:8). The Lord was speaking to the great crowds that went after Him with reference to the stern and uncompromising self-denial and endurance which would be the lot of such as became His disciples. The follower of the humbled Messiah, He declared, must renounce all things. Yet His disciples were the salt of the earth, the sole preservative against the universal spread of the corrupting influences of evil. And the Lord concluded this saying by the words, “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear” (Luke 14:25-35). For all had not faith, and only faith could understand the new teaching that the way of divine service was not yet in the exercise of power but in the endurance of suffering and shame.

In Mark this brief but striking call occurs in the seventh chapter as well as in this. There we learn of the Lord teaching, in contrast with the law of Moses which concerned itself with man's overt acts, that man is defiled by the evil thoughts and motives which proceed from his heart. “He called to him the multitude again, and said unto them, Hear me all of you, and understand. There is nothing from without the man that going into him can defile him; but the things which proceed out of the man are those that defile the man. If any man have ears to hear, let him hear” (Mark 7:14-16).7 The saying was weighty, and only the sons of faith, now as well as then, receive this truth by which men are condemned down to the very core of their being. There must be the “ear to hear"; in other words, the experience of Rom. 6 and 7 as well as of Rom. 3.

In this chapter the phrase occurs again (ver. 23), but it comes with special emphasis at the close of the parable of the sower. And this force appears the more striking when we connect it with the Lord's call for attention at the beginning of the parable. “Hearken,” He said, and having portrayed Himself as the Sower, He added, “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.” It was a summons to the individual to free himself from the heedless mass. And as the Lord addressed this appeal to His earthly people, so was His cry reiterated to each of the seven churches in Asia; “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches” (Rev. 2 and 3). Amid general ecclesiastical declension, the Lord requires individual faithfulness in regarding His word and His warning.

WHO HEARS?

Who then were those who heard the Prophet of Jehovah? There need be no doubt regarding the correct answer to this question, since the Lord Himself gave it. Speaking to His disciples, He said, “Blessed are your eyes for they see; and your ears for they hear” (Matt. 13:16). They were His followers, for they had heard Him. As the sheep of the “little flock” they had heard the voice of the good Shepherd (John 10:3, 27). When He was instructing His disciples, He described them as those who heard. “I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you” (Luke 6:27). Again, the Lord said, “My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God and do it” (Luke 8:21). These had hungered and thirsted after the word of righteousness and were blessed indeed, for by the Prophet's ministry they were filled.

It is instructive to observe that the Lord Himself took the place of subjection. As the Servant of Jehovah He had the opened ear in both His ministry and His suffering, waiting for directions upon Him who sent Him. This spirit of subjection and obedience was according to prophecy: “The Lord God hath given me the tongue of them that are taught, that I should know how to sustain with words him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as they that are taught. The Lord GOD hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away backward. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair” (Isa. 50:4-6, R.V.). His ear was open as the true Prophet to hear, and what He heard He communicated to men. Thus He said to His disciples, “All things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you” (John 15:15).

The believing followers of Jesus, then, were those that “heard,” and what they heard they declared, as the apostle John wrote (1 John 1:1). But the nation would not hear. It is true that Israel boasted in their great “Shema,” wherein the prophet Moses recalled them to the privilege and responsibility of the revelations under the law (Deut. 6:4; Mark 12:29). “Hear, O Israel,”

Moses exhorted, “the LORD our God is one LORD,” following this call with a summary of the ten words. But Israel was the “deaf servant” of Jehovah; and now God had raised up another Prophet, of whom it was written, “Him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall speak unto you” (Deut. 18:15; Acts 3:22, 23; 7:37). And as Moses had solemnly adjured the people, “Hear, O Israel,” so now One greater than Moses cried, “Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.” What if they did not hear? For those who refused to hearken, that ancient prophecy contained a warning equally solemn. “It shall come to pass that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him” (Deut. 18:19).

THE PROPHET'S PRIVACY

The Lord Jesus, amid His multitudinous and multifarious services for Jehovah in the midst of His chosen people, preserved to Himself seasons of retirement from, or cessation from, public activities, wherein there was opportunity either for personal private communion with His Father (Matt. 14:23; Mark 1:35; Luke 9:18; John 6:15), or for intercourse with His friends and followers. On the latter occasions there were peculiarly sweet and choice communications confided by the Heavenly Teacher to His own intimate circle, chosen by Himself “out of the world.” After the execution of John the Baptist, and the return of the apostles from their mission journeys, Jesus said to them, “Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while; for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat. And they went away in a boat to a desert place apart” (Mark 6:31, 32; Matt. 14:13; Luke 9:10). So also when the Lord saw fit to grant unto the favored trio a glimpse of His personal glory He led them up into the privacy of the mountain side. “Jesus taketh with him Peter and James and John his brother, and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart; and he was transfigured before them” (Matt. 17:1, 2; Mark 9:2). The Lord had matters for the eyes and ears of His own which were not for the populace. This accords with what on one occasion He said to His disciples, “privately, Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see; for I say unto you, that many prophets and kings desired to see the things which ye see, and saw them not; and to hear the things which ye hear, and heard them not” (Luke 10:23, 24).

The apostles sometimes utilized moments of His privacy to lay before Him their difficulties. They came to Him “apart” to know why they were unable to cast the demon out of a young man (Matt. 17:19; Mark 9:28). And again, at the close of His ministry, when certain of them desired to know more concerning the destruction of the temple, and what would be the sign of His coming and the end of the age, they came to Him privately with their questions as He sat on the mount of Olives (Matt. 24:3; Mark 13:3). These were not exceptional instances, for they had been accustomed to such private tuition, as we read, “without a parable spake he not unto them [the multitude]; but privately to his own disciples he expounded all things” (Mark 4:34).

Here we find the disciples under similar circumstances seeking instruction in the significance of the parable of the sower and others. “When he was alone8 they that were about him with the twelve asked of him the parables.” It is interesting to see that others besides the twelve apostles were desirous of being taught, and none of them were denied. And while this teaching may be regarded as exclusive, esoteric, and committed in this manner to these chosen witnesses in order that after the Lord's ascension it might be promulgated throughout the world, the general truth is important that the ways of God are made known in the hush of the sanctuary rather than in the noise of the camp. The impending destruction of the cities of the plain was imparted, not to Lot in the bustling streets of Sodom, but, to Abraham in the quiet of a torrid noontide at his own tent door. David in the wilderness with his sheep, not Eliab in the camp of Saul, learned the mind of God about Goliath. So it was that not to the surging crowds by the Galilaean lake, but to the disciples who came to Him as He was alone in the house, the Prophet of Jehovah revealed the truth concerning the peculiar character of the coming kingdom.

[W. J. H.]

(To be continued)

Studies in Mark, Mark: 4:1-9: (26) The Seed and the Soil

19. The Sower, the Seed, and the Soils

“And again he began to teach by the seaside.1 And there is gathered2 unto him a very great multitude, so that he entered into a boat,3 and sat in the sea; and all the multitude were by4 the sea on the land. And he taught5 them many things in parables, and said unto them in his teaching,6 Hearken:7 Behold, the sower went forth to sow: and it came to pass, as he sowed, some8 seed fell by the way side, and the birds came and devoured it. 9And other10 fell on the rocky ground, where it had not much earth; and straightway it sprang up, because it had no deepness11 of earth: and when the sun was risen, 12it was scorched; 13and because it had no root, it withered away. And other 14 fell among the thorns, and the thorns grew up, and choked it, and it yielded no fruit. And others 15 fell into the good ground, and yielded fruit, growing up and increasing; 16and brought17 forth, thirty-fold, and sixtyfold, and a hundredfold. 18And he said, Who19 hath ears to hear, let him hear” (9:1-9, R.V.).

In the fourth chapter a marked change is indicated in the ministry of the Servant of Jehovah. And it will be seen that a modification in His teaching was made at this juncture by the Lord both as to what He taught and as to the manner in which He communicated His message. At the first Jesus announced with authority that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, the appointed time being fulfilled, and all classes were invited to repent and believe these good tidings. But now the Lord commenced to teach that there would be only a partial acceptance of the gospel, and much hostility would be aroused by it, so that the external form of the kingdom would be changed in consequence. This change the Lord placed before His audience in a series of parables, a method of teaching in strong contrast with the plain statements of the Sermon on the Mount, spoken previously, as we learn from Matthew's Gospel.

Why was this change made? This question may be answered to some extent from the history of the Lord's ministry up to this point, as it is presented by Mark. Brief and compressed as his narrative is, we are therein shown that the responsible leaders of the people made a studied and determined resistance to the prophetic testimony of the Servant of Jehovah, regardless of the holy and benignant nature of His words and works. Thus, the scribes inwardly condemned Him as a blasphemer because He absolved a man's sins (2:6). They also with the Pharisees discredit Him because He ate bread with publicans and sinners (2:16). They further accused Him of countenancing a desecration of the Sabbath, because His disciples plucked corn on that day (2:24). The Pharisees and Herodians conspired to take His life (3:6). His relations declared that He was demented (3:21). The scribes from Jerusalem ascribed His power over demons to Satan (3:22). This last charge the Lord said was evidence of a spirit of animosity of such a nature that it could not be forgiven, and would cause the nation to be set aside. So that in these two chapters (2 and 3) there is delineated a complete outline of that implacable hatred to our Lord by the chosen nation which culminated in His death. The hour was not come for His crucifixion, but the spirit that ultimately condemned Him to be crucified was before His eyes. He was thus a rejected Messiah already, so far as the nation as a whole was concerned. He came to the vineyard seeking fruit, and there was none. But if He could not gather fruit for the Father who sent Him, He would sow seed so that a remnant in Israel might bear fruit for the Husbandman. Accordingly, He virtually abandoned the nation at large, and offered His word to any who had ears to hear it.

TEACHING IN PARABLES

Coincident with this recognition by the Lord of a faithful remnant in Israel who would do God's will in contrast with the rebellious nation as a whole, we find that the Teacher and Prophet of Jehovah adopted a new style of address, presenting the doctrine of the kingdom in the form of parables or similitudes. In the parabolic form the truth was presented in a manner easy of retention by those who heard it. Who does not recollect with ease the simple yet striking parables of the Gospels? Their meaning is not so apparent, however, and, in point of fact, was only to be apprehended in so far as an explanation or interpretation was given by the Teacher Himself to those in a moral and spiritual condition to receive it. The parables were spoken publicly to the multitude, and their meaning unfolded privately to the disciples only.

In Matthew's Gospel there is an ample record of the Lord's statement upon this very point, in which he shows the distinction between the mass of the people and the believing remnant, and that this distinction was foretold by the prophet Isaiah. “And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance, but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is being fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive; for this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have 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 (Matt. 13:10-17).

By these words the Lord placed it beyond question that parables were used by Him for the: delivery, of truths concerning the kingdom in a form which could only be understood upon His own exposition of them to those who received Him by faith. Quaint Thomas Fuller compared the parables to the divine appearance at the Red Sea which was at once light to the Israelites but darkness to the Egyptians.

The quotation from Isaiah shows that the adoption of this form of teaching was in view of the judgment imminent upon the nation. In the prophet's day Israel was about to be subjugated to the power of the Gentiles and brought into captivity to heathen kings. In the Lord's day a severer judgment was at hand because the nation rejected and crucified its Messiah. Jerusalem would be trodden under foot of the Gentiles, the nationality of the people destroyed, and a gospel universal in its scope proclaimed. This national judgment, with its far-reaching consequences, was of course foreknown of the Lord, and He communicated the same to His disciples for their instruction before it came to pass, but not to the multitude at large save in parables only, because He was still presenting Himself to the daughter of Zion in both Galilee and Judea as the promised King. Until the Jews had finally rejected their King and delivered Him to the Romans for crucifixion, the Lord continued to offer Himself to them, although the hardened and hardening spirit that refused Him was ever before His gaze. His ministry in parables of the impending change in no wise interfered with their responsibility to receive Him, seeing they did not understand. Therefore “all these things spake Jesus unto the multitudes in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them” (Matt. 13:34), but when they were alone He expounded all things to His disciples (Mark 4:34).

XV. A SUMMARIZED STATEMENT OF SERVICE

“And Jesus with his disciples withdrew to the sea; and a great multitude from Galilee followed:1 and from Juda, and from Jerusalem, and from Idumea, and beyond Jordan, and about Tire and Sidon, a great multitude, hearing what great things he did, came unto him. And he spake to his disciples that a little boat2 should wait on him because of the crowd lest they should throng3 him: for he had healed many; insomuch that as many as had plagues pressed upon4 him that they might touch him. And the unclean spirits, whensoever they beheld him, fell down before him, and cried, saying, Thou art the Son of God. And he charged5 them much that they should not make him known” (3:7-12, R.V.).

The Lord who knew the thoughts of those around Him in the synagogue, and was grieved at the hardening of their hearts against the many gracious testimonies of the gospel, knew also the evil intentions of the Pharisees and Herodians who left the synagogue in company that they might together concoct some scheme for His speedy destruction. This intimate knowledge of the secret plottings of His enemies aroused no animosity in the heart of the Savior, neither did He, to counteract their plottings, organize some “plan of campaign” amongst His adherents, as a political or social agitator might have done. But in the serene dignity becoming the Servant of Jehovah who was governed alone by the will of Him by whom He was sent, He withdrew Himself from the immediate neighborhood. Supremely trustful in the perfection of His manhood, omniscient also as to His Godhead, yet He did not adventure Himself where danger threatened.6 As He had refused to cast Himself down from the binnacle of the temple, so He retreated from the vicinity of those who sought His life. The hour wherein to deliver Himself into their hands had not yet come.

Jesus therefore, accompanied by His disciples, betook Himself to the coast of the Sea of Tiberias, as the inspired history states. Then in a pregnant sentence, the more striking because of the account of Pharisaic unbelief and enmity which immediately precedes, the evangelist sums up the widespread interest which the words and works of the Lord had awakened. If the religious leaders despised Him, the toilers and sufferers of the house of Israel congregated to hear more of One who healed the sick and preached the gospel to the poor. Crowds flocked to Him from all parts —from Tire and Sidon in the north, from Perea beyond Jordan on the east, from Idumea in the south, and even from Judah and Jerusalem in the center of the land. The report of Him that traversed every part of Galilee (Mark 1:28) spread beyond in all directions, and multitudes, hearing what things He did, gathered to Him7 (see also 1:45). But how few had real faith in Jehovah's Servant! How soon were the words of the prophet Isaiah fulfilled, “Who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Loan been revealed?”

It was a simple arrangement most certainly; and for this reason the incident is commonly passed over by those who are in search only for profundities, and who imagine that only what is vague and mysterious is to be prized. But a great feature of the Gospels is that both here and elsewhere they show how our Blessed Lord glorified the common and ordinary things of daily life. Pity it is if we miss the truth that divine power and love reach down to the humdrum— “the daily round, the common task.” The Servant of Jehovah required no accompanying “pomp of circumstance,” no gorgeous ceremonial, no cumbrous paraphernalia. His service was in simplicity, making use of just what was at hand. A madly impetuous crowd was hindering Him in His labors. A little boat rocking on the Galilaean lake is therefore commissioned to serve His purpose who was speaking words such as man had never heard, and doing works such as the world had never seen. There was a time to speak in the synagogue; there was a time to speak in Solomon's porch. But at this time it was most fitting that the small boat should be the pulpit. Let us learn the lesson of heavenly wisdom, and amid the throng and hubbub of life be ready to avail ourselves of the humble vessel near at hand from which to speak to the glory and praise of the Master.

THE MISSION BOAT

The great crowds that sought Jesus to hear or to see or to receive somewhat from Him were selfish, as all crowds are. They had no consideration for others, nor for Him whose benefits they desired. The afflicted ones especially, in their eagerness to obtain healing, pressed upon (literally, “fell upon") the Lord, to His great inconvenience, if not danger, besides interfering in this way with the activities of His service. The Lord therefore instructed His disciples to arrange that a small boat should attend upon Him; so that He might from a point of vantage declare the gospel of peace to the multitude, and be secure from the thronging of the disorderly people.

The Lord here, by His action, gave no countenance to the dreams of ascetics, and of such as seek to glorify God by the “neglecting of the body.” The body was His instrument of service, and He adopted prudent measures to prevent injury to it from the struggling crowds. The means were simple yet effective, and at the same time forbid the notion that the Lord despised the corporeal substance. Was it not the body “prepared” for Him, and in which He had come to do the will of God? It is true that subsequently wicked men scourged and smote Him, and He submitted to their contumeliousness with unexampled meekness. For then the will of God led the obedient Son of man to deliver Himself into their hands. But before this hour had come we learn, as in the passage before us, which, be it noted, is found in this Gospel only, that the Lord took such precautions as were needful in this emergency, if we may call it such, so that He might the more effectively perform Jehovah's service. It may surely be inferred that the servants of Christ, while not allowed to pamper or indulge the body, are not, on the contrary, permitted to despise it, but rather enjoined to present it “a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God.” In the natural order of things the outward man decays, but there is no scriptural warrant for the belief that it is well-pleasing to God to hasten that decay either by our wilfulness or by our neglect.

TOUCHING JESUS

The numerous cures wrought by the Lord Jesus incited those that had plagues to push forward among the crowd in the hope that they might get near enough to touch Him and obtain healing for themselves in this manner.

Plague is an uncommon word in the New Testament. It is used in Luke's Gospel in speaking of the works wrought by Jesus in the presence of the two disciples sent to Him by John the Baptist from prison: “In that hour he cured many of diseases and plagues and evil spirits” (Luke 7:21). The word is also twice applied by Mark to the disease of the woman suffering from an issue of blood (Mark 5:29, 34). Literally meaning a scourge, it probably included the severer forms of complaint from which relief was sought.

This effort to touch Jesus was evidence of strong faith on the part of those that sought healing in this way. The bold faith that stretched out weak hands to Him was mute, inarticulate indeed, but nevertheless genuine as the Savior knew, and could never deny. “He filled the hungry with good things.” The poor were feeble, pain-racked, dying. They touched Him, the great Physician, in blind trust as little children. And in the words of another evangelist, describing a similar occasion,8 “power came forth from him and healed them all” (Luke 6:19).

This action is the converse of the touch by Jesus Himself which was so significant of the outflow of healing power to the patients whom He blessed. The touch is used in the Old Testament as expressive of the divine communication of power to individuals, as in the case of Isaiah (6:7), of Jeremiah (1:9), of Daniel (10:10, 16, 18), while in that of Job is used with reference to the infliction of personal trial (1:11; 2:5).

It will be of interest to summarize here the instances recorded in the Gospels where we find the Blessed Lord bringing Himself in this manner into personal contact with the sufferers whom He healed. He touched—

(1) a leper (Matt. 8:3; Mark 1:41; Luke 5:13).

(2) the hand of Peter's wife's mother (Matt. 8:15).

(3) the eyes of two blind men (Matt. 9:29).

(4) the eyes of two other blind men (Matt. 20:34).

(5) the eyes of the blind man of Bethsaida (Mark 8:22).

(6) the tongue of the deaf stammerer (Mark 7:33).

(7) the ear of Malchus (Luke 22:51).

(8) the bier of the widow's dead son (Luke 7:14).

(9) the terrified disciples on the mount of transfiguration (Matt. 17:7).

In addition to this phrase ("He touched"), which is so beautifully expressive of the intimate way in which Jesus identified Himself with the circumstances of suffering and pain from which He delivered those who sought Him, we find another which is closely related. We also read that He laid or put His hands on persons for healing or for the communication of strength. In some cases these terms appear to be used synonymously. Thus it is stated in Mark and Luke that babes were brought to Jesus that He might touch them (Mark 10:13; Luke 18:15), while in Matthew the desire is said to have been that He should put His hands on them (Matt. 19:13). In recording the grant of this request, Matthew and Mark say He laid His hands on the infants (Matt. 19:15; Mark 10:16). Mark uses the two terms similarly in his accounts of the cure of the deaf stammerer, and of the blind man of Bethsaida (compare. Mark 7:32 and 33; 8:22 and 25).

Other instances in which it is recorded that Jesus laid hands on persons in the bestowal of healing or power are in the case of—

1. the daughter of Jairus (Matt. 9:18, 25; Mark 5:23, 41; Luke 8:54).

2. the demoniacal youth (Mark 9:27).

3. the bowed woman in the synagogue (Luke 13:13).

3. a few sick folk (Mark 6:2, 5).

4. every sick one that came to Him at Capernaurn (Luke 4:40).

5. Peter on the waves (Matt. 14:31).

These numerous cases in which He either touched or laid hands upon those whom He healed testify not only to the striking activity of Jehovah's Servant, but to His personal interest in the individuals who came to Him to be blessed. And in this feature of His character we all have the most intimate concern, while the contemplation of this grace which cares even for the individual need, should lead us to adoration.

DEMONIACAL WITNESS REFUSED

This great concourse of persons that came to Jesus from all parts of the land was evidence that a report of Him as the Healer of Israel had spread in all directions, and that there was an eagerness among the poor of the flock to seek His face for blessing, in spite of the evil judgments pronounced upon Him by the religious leaders. Here also were voices loudly testifying to Him before all as the Son of God. But alas! this testimony was “from beneath.” It was not of man, but of Satan, whose works He had come to destroy. “Unclean spirits whensoever they beheld Him, fell down before Him, and cried, saying, Thou art the Son of God.” In like manner, the demoniac in the synagogue at Capernaum acknowledged Him, but there He was owned as the Holy One of God (Mark 1:24).

The Lord refused both the one and the other. “He charged them much they should not make him known.” The time had not come for their confession. In a future day infernal beings shall publicly bow to the name of Jesus (Phil. 2:10). But in the day of His humiliation the lowly Son of man will not have evil spirits to speak forth His praise as the Holy One or the Son. He chose other witnesses, as the narrative goes on to show. And one of them, Simon Peter, taught by the Father above, confessed Him in this double character—Son of God (Matt. 16:16) and Holy One of God (John 6:69, R.V.).

Such testimony the Lord valued and honored, and proceeded to choose twelve of His disciples who should be His accredited witnesses, not only during the term of His earthly ministry in the favored land, but in a more active sense in all the world after His ascension.

[W. J. H.]

Studies in Mark, Mark: 3:19-30: (25) Obedience the Test of Relationship

Doing God's Will the Basis of Relationship

The religious trust of the Jews was in their pedigree. They boasted that they were lineal descendants of Abraham (John 8:33, 39)—an idol that John the Baptist sought to hew to pieces with fierce invective, “Think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father; for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham” (Matt. 3:9). The Lord here declared that in the kingdom of God vital relationship with the King was demonstrated not by nationality, but by personal obedience and individual fealty. The mass were obdurate and irresponsive to the Lord's teaching, but whoever separated himself from the disobedient nation proclaimed himself thereby on the Lord's side.

It will be remembered that Israel as a nation placed themselves at the beginning upon the ground of obedience, and it was because they proved themselves in this relationship to be a disobedient and gainsaying people that they were set aside. Jehovah said to them through Moses, “If ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me from among all peoples: for all the earth is mine. And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.” In their self-ignorance and self-satisfaction they readily accepted this condition: “All the people answered together, and said, All that the LORD hath spoken we will do” (Ex. 19:5-8; 24:3). Thus it came about that at the people's desire the law was imposed with its defined responsibilities of unqualified love to God and man, its conditions being summed up in the phrase, “This do, and thou shalt live.”

But the recorded history of Israel under the law is one of dismal failure. Like sheep they all went astray and turned every one to his own way. They were the sons of disobedience. In the concluding words of the Book of Judges, every man did what was right in his own eyes. John the Baptist was sent to prepare the way of the Lord by turning the hearts of the “disobedient to the wisdom of the just.” For Messiah's kingdom, as the Lord here intimated, is characterized by doing the will of God.

For this consummation the Lord taught His disciples to pray to their Father in heaven—a new title of God evidently contrasted with that of Abraham their father on earth as to the flesh. The Lord had come to set up the promised kingdom, and He instructed His followers to pray to Him whose it was ("Thine is the kingdom") for its due establishment, so that the will of the Father might be done on earth even as in heaven (Matt. 6:9-13). On high there is the harmony of perfect desire among the angelic hosts to do the divine pleasure, as it is written in a psalm of praise, “Bless the LORD, ye his angels that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word. Bless ye the LORD, all ye his hosts; ye ministers of his that do his pleasure” (Psa. 103:20, 21). And in Messiah's kingdom this spirit of obedience to the divine will shall also be seen below. When it comes about that Jehovah's anointed rules in the midst of His enemies His people “shall be willing” in that day of power (Psa. 110:3).

Enough has now been written to show what a far-reaching principle obedience to the will of God is. And it is as essential in the present as in the past and in the future. Relationship to God is inseparable from subjection to His will. “This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.” And the Lord said, “If ye love me, ye will keep my commandments.” Recipients as we are of His illimitable grace, we may not ignore His authority, but are called to do the will of God from the heart [soul] (Eph. 6:6). And to quote again the Master's words, “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” (Matt. 7:21). This is the divine purpose with regard to us, who are “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience” (1 Peter 1:2). And the impulse of the new nature begotten of God within us is to cry with the psalmist, “Teach me to thy will, O God” (Psa. 143:10). So Saul of Tarsus, convicted in the dust, exclaimed, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” nor was he disobedient to the “heavenly vision.”

It may be asked, How can I ascertain the will of God? First of all there must in such a case be the willing mind. This the Lord Himself declared — “If any one willeth to do his will he shall know of the teaching whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself” (John 6:17). Coming to the scriptures with the prayer, already quoted, of the psalmist, “Teach me to do thy will, O God” (Psa. 143:10), the docile spirit is instructed, so that he may stand perfect and fully assured in all that will (Col. 4:12). The apostle Paul desired on behalf of the saints at Colosse that they might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding (Col. 1:9). There is first the hearing and then the doing. In the Lord's words, “My mother and my brethren are those which hear the word of God, and do it” (Luke 8:21).

But while to understand what the will of the Lord is (Eph. 5:17) is obviously essential, it is required further in order to prove that good, acceptable and perfect will, that we present our bodies a living sacrifice, not fashioning ourselves according to this present evil age (Rom. 12:1, 2). Self-denial and suffering are mostly involved in doing the will of God, as Peter reminds us (1 Peter 3:17; 4:19; 2:15). The obedience of Christ was of this nature, and we also are to have that “mind,” as is exhorted in the verses which speak of His Great Renunciation unto the death of the cross (Phil. 2:5-8).

It is important to mark this, since the Incarnation is an insoluble enigma apart from the fact that the Son was here in human guise to do the Father's will. “Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered” (Heb. 5:8). As God He was essentially exempt from the responsibilities of the creature. These He assumed that as the Second man He might become the federal Head of a new creation which should be characterized by obedience, even as the first creation was by disobedience (see Rom. 5:12-19).

Until the Father's kingdom is fully established, and a spirit of unvarying obedience to His will pervades the whole earth, obedience to His word by the minority must be attended by the renunciation of selfish interests and by the persecuting opposition of the disobedient ones. But the faithful Christ will publicly confess as akin to Himself, who came to “do and suffer” the will of God. His obedience had a double character—an active and a passive side—the doing and the suffering. In our case the will of God involves, on the one hand, the active and diligent performance of assigned tasks, and on the other hand, the patient endurance of privation and suffering for the sake of righteousness and the name of Christ. Thus we do () the will of God from the heart, and we also say in the spirit of the Lord Himself, “Thy will be done” (), (Matt. 26:39, 42; Acts 21:14).

However, in spite of the world's fierce enmity and powerful antagonism, the obedient believer is the only stable person in the world. “The world passeth away and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever” (1 John 2:17). The Lord taught this same truth by a parable concerning the obedient disciple: “Whosoever heareth these words of mine and doeth them shall be likened unto a wise man, which

built his house upon the rock: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon the rock. And every one that heareth these words of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the wind blew, and smote upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall thereof" (Matt. 7:24-27). Though there may be temporary defeat, there will be eternal victory for the obedient. Whoso suffers with Christ shall also reign with Him.

The Lord then, in these weighty words, indicated what was before Israel after the flesh, who boasted in the possession of the law but forgot that not the hearers of the law are just before God, but that the doers of the law shall be justified (Rom. 2:13). As the Servant of Jehovah He acknowledges as His associates those who follow Him in the pathway of obedience to the will () of God, which is "that which God decides to have done because it is pleasing to Him." "God's good pleasure is everywhere [in scripture] regarded as the law whereby all things, human and divine, are ordered. Christ is regarded as its embodiment and manifestation; and the Christian, being—by profession at least—one with Christ, is supposed to be conformed to that will in all things."

And regarding this incident in its connection with what precedes it, we believe that in the words He used we have not so much His absolute renunciation of natural relationship as His enunciation of obedience to the will of God as the only valid basis of spiritual relationship with Him. Thus we take the yoke of Christ upon us, and learn to love, to do, and to suffer the will of God.

[W. J. H.]

(To be continued)

Studies in Mark, Mark: 3:19-30: (24) Opposition by Friends and Foes

Unpardonable Blasphemy

It is important to observe that the sin concerning which our Lord made such an unqualified pronouncement is a specific one. It is in no sense vague and indefinite, but on the contrary it is here, as well as in the parallel passages of Matthew and Luke, stated in precise terms to be blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. This terrible guilt rested upon the Jewish generation of that day. Most cogent evidence of the power of the Holy Ghost was before their eyes in the words and works of Jesus; but they denied the validity of that evidence, and going further in their malice they ascribed this power for good to the energy of Satan. For this willful blindness and obduracy of heart there was no remission. Such perverse unbelief was the sure sign of that impending doom to the nation which could not be averted. Could there be a more perfect testimony than that which was rendered by the Spirit through the holy Son of man in whom every act and word and motive were in absolute accord with His divine energy? The generation to which the Lord ministered had "done despite to the Spirit of grace" by describing this testimony as Satanic, and was "guilty of an eternal sin."

This last phrase is peculiar to Mark. And the expression is one pregnant with deep significance. It teaches by a word the unalterable character of the unforgiven. There is an eternal fixity in the unholy character of such rebellion against the authority and love of God. The penitent is forgiven, but the guilt of the impenitent is eternal. And eternal sin implies eternal punishment.

A COMMON ERROR

The following remarks are helpful in elucidating the correct interpretation, and thus preventing erroneous views of this passage, some of which have caused unnecessarily much personal distress, as in the case of Peter Williams and of many others.

"Our Lord most solemnly pronounces their doom [the scribes], and shows that they were guilty—not of sin, as men say, but of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. There is no such phrase as sin against Him in this sense. People often speak thus, Scripture never. What the Lord denounces is blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. Keeping that distinctly in view would save many souls a great deal of needless trouble. Flow many have groaned in terror through fear of being guilty of sin against the Holy Ghost! That phrase admits of vague notions and general reasoning about its nature. But our Lord spoke definitely of blasphemous unforgivable sin against Him. All sin, I presume, is sin against the Holy Ghost, who has taken His place in Christendom, and, consequently, gives all sin this character. Thus, lying in the church [the case of Ananias and Sapphira] is not mere falsehood toward man, but unto God, because of the great truth that the Holy Ghost is there. Here, on the contrary, the Lord speaks of unforgivable sin (not that vague sense of evil which troubled souls dread as 'sin against the Holy Ghost,' but blasphemy against Him).

"What is this evil never to be forgiven? It is attributing the power that wrought in Jesus to the devil. How many troubled souls would be instantly relieved if they laid hold of that simple truth! It would dissipate what really is a delusion of the devil, who strives hard to plunge them into anxiety, and drive them into despair, if possible. The truth is, that as any sin of a Christian may be said to be sin against the Holy Ghost, what is especially the sin against the Holy Ghost, if there be anything that is so, is that which directly hinders the free action of the Holy Ghost in the work of God, or in His church. Such might be said to be the sin, if you speak of it with precision.

"But what our Lord referred to was neither a sin nor the sin, but blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. It was that which the Jewish nation was then rapidly falling into, and for which they were neither forgiven then, nor will ever be forgiven. There will be a new stock, so to speak; another generation will be raised up, who will receive the Christ whom their fathers blasphemed; but as far as that generation was concerned, they were guilty of this sin, and they could not be forgiven. They began it in the lifetime of Jesus. They consummated it when the Holy Ghost was sent down and despised. They still carried it on persistently; and it [this persistency] is always the case when men enter upon a bad course, unless sovereign grace deliver. The more that God brings out of love, grace, truth, wisdom, the more determinedly and blindly they rush on to their own perdition. So it was with Israel. So it ever is with man left to himself, and despising the grace of God. He that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness.' It is the final stage of rebellion against God. Even then they were blaspheming the Son of man, the Lord Himself; even then they attributed the power of the Spirit in His service to the enemy, as afterward still more evidently when the Holy Ghost wrought in His servants; then the blasphemy became complete."1

XVIII.-OBEDIENCE THE TEST OF RELATIONSHIP

“And there come his mother and his brethren;2 and, standing without, they sent unto him, calling him. And a multitude was sitting about him;3 and they say unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren without seek for thee. And he answered them, and saith, Who is my mother and my brethren? And looking round on them which sat round about him, he saith,4 Behold, my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother” (3:31-35, R.V.).

The kinsfolk of Jesus had set out for Capernaum with the intention of restraining Him in His active service by word and work (ver. 21). They arrived after the interview in the house between Jesus and the scribes from Jerusalem had taken place. On account of the multitude, His mother and His brethren were unable to obtain access to Him, and they accordingly sent a message to announce that they were seeking Him. They must have known that scribes, to whom naturally some reverence and regard were due as teachers of the law of Moses, were among the audience. But this they disregard and send their peremptory message as if to assert the paramount claims upon Jesus of natural ties.

But the Servant of Jehovah, in that wisdom which had come from above, turned the occasion to account in His preaching of the kingdom of God. He did not meet with an angry rebuff this unwarrantable interference which sprang from natural affection, although it was ignorant affection, blind to His heavenly mission. But the Lord used the incidents as text, so to speak, for the announcement of the fundamental principle of the kingdom which was at hand. The effort made by His kindred to influence Him led Him to declare that obedience to the will of God is the only reliable foundation of divine relationship, while it necessarily takes precedence of every other claim. “Looking round on them which sat round about him, he saith, Behold, my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.”

“Looking round” () is a characteristic expression of Mark, and is only used once by any other New Testament writer (Luke 6:10). By Mark it is used six times, and on all but one occasion it has reference to the Lord Himself (3:5, 34; 5:32; 10:23; 11:11). In the remaining instance it is applied to the disciples (9:8). The term seems here to imply the intense personal and individual interest the Lord took in those who sat around Him in the attitude of discipleship.

JESUS HIMSELF DOING GOD'S WILL

This simple and profound saying of the Lord (ver. 35) embodied truth applicable to man from the beginning. For obedience to the will of God must ever be inseparable from man's well-being and happiness. Historically, the will of God forbade eating the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and disobedience to that expressed will involved the forfeiture of the bliss of Eden and the inheritance of a world of sorrow and sin. Of Adam's descendants, whether enlightened Jews or darkened Gentiles, it is written comprehensively, not of a particular era, but of every age, “They have all turned aside, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not so much as one.” So that disobedience to God is declared to be perpetuated among men, His will being universally slighted and despised.

Now the Lord Jesus came not only to recall man by His instructions to a sense of his individual responsibility to God as the moral Governor of the world, but to afford in Himself an instance of perfect human obedience to the will of God. He came as a man truly, but also as the Incarnate Servant of Jehovah, which no man beside Him was or could be. Upon every sentient creature service to God is not a matter of choice but of incumbency, but upon the Son there was no obligation of servitude. He chose to take upon Himself “the form of a servant.” This He purposed to do before the world was, as was intimated by the prophetic Spirit through the psalmist, “Then said I, Lo, I am come: in the roll of the book it is written of me: I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart” (Psa. 40:7, 8). This utterance is definitely declared in the Epistle of the Hebrews to have been fulfilled by the coming of Christ (Heb. 10:5, 9). In Him the will of God was done in this world, where the will of man was and is ever struggling for supremacy. And no Gospel sets forth with greater precision than the Fourth—that which portrays Him especially as the Son of God—His absorbing devotion to the will of God. After His ministry of the water of life to the woman at the well of Sychar, He said to His disciples, “I have meat to eat that ye know not.” “My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to accomplish his work” (John 4:32, 34). Again, testifying to the Jews of Himself as the appointed Judge of living and dead, He said, “I seek not mine own will, but the will of him that sent me” (John 5:30). And once again, He declared, “I am come down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me,” going on to make known what is that will with regard to those who come to Him, “And this is the will of him that sent me, that of all that which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. For this is the will of my Father that every one that beholdeth the Son, and believeth on him, should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:38-40). What subjection was this! In the matter of receiving poor vile sinners, loving them as He did, about to die for them as He was, He acknowledged that He could not cast them out because it was the Father's will that they should come to Him and receive eternal life. In His joy, as in His suffering, He was the submissive One—in all the worthy Object of our admiring and adoring wonder and worship.

But, moreover, we have been permitted to see how His submission was subjected to the most rigorous of all tests. Three only of the apostles were allowed to accompany the Lord in His vigil in Gethsemane. But sleep overcame these, so that there were no human witnesses of that agony of the Holy Servant. Yet we have the record of the prayers and supplications, the strong crying and tears, the bloody sweat, the threefold repetition, communicated to us in the Gospels as well as by allusion in Heb. 5:7. As a Son He learned obedience, and His obedience was unto death. In the garden the consummation of that obedience in atoning sufferings and death was immediately before Him. He anticipated the cup that His Father had given Him to drink. He gauged its bitterness with absolute perfection. He measured the immeasurable burden of guilt to be laid upon Him. The sting of death as for none else was before His spirit. It was in the anticipative realization of all this and of much besides, that He fell prostrate and prayed, “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass away from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.” In this perfect resignation we have the triumph of holy obedience. “Thy will be done” was soon followed by “It is finished,” and the will of God was indeed done. That obedience was thereby accomplished through which many were made righteous.

[W. J. H.]

(To be continued)

Studies in Mark, Mark: 3:19-30: (23) Opposition by Friends and Foes

17Opposition by Friends and Foes

“And he cometh into a house.1 And the multitude cometh together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread. And when his friends2 heard it, they went out to lay hold on him: for they said, He is beside himself.3 And the scribes which came down from Jerusalem said, He hath Beelzebub, and, By the prince of the devils4 casteth he out the devils.5 And he called them unto him, and said unto them in parables, How can Satan cast out Satan? And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand.6 And if a house be divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand.? And if Satan hath risen up against himself, and is divided, he cannot stand,7 but hath an end. But no one can enter into the house of the strong man, and spoil8 his goods, except he first bind the strong man; and then he will spoil9 his house. Verily I say unto you, All their sins10 shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and their blasphemies11 wherewith soever they shall blaspheme;12 but whosoever shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit hath never forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal 13 sin: because they said, He hath an unclean spirit” (3:19-30, R.V.).

Immediately after the call and appointment of the twelve it would seem that the Lord delivered an exposition of the principles of the new kingdom, such as is recorded by Matthew (5-7.) and Luke (6:20-49). But Mark does not mention what is commonly known as the “Sermon on the Mount"; he states briefly that the Lord and the band of apostles came home, or to the house. This house was one habitually occupied by Jesus and His disciples when they came to Capernaum. Here on a previous occasion the crowd had gathered, and the paralytic let down through the roof was healed (2:1-11). In the house He explained the parable of the sower to His disciples (7:17). In the house also the Lord questioned the apostles privately as to the subject of their disputations among themselves by the way (9:33).

This practice of Jesus appears to have been recognized in Capernaum, for, as a crowd quickly assembled upon a former occasion, so we read they did so “again"; “the multitude cometh together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread.” The open doors of Eastern houses and the liberal hospitality of the domestic circle would explain as customary much of what in this incident the Western mind might regard as an unwarrantable intrusion. But making due allowance for local custom, it is clear from this passage and others (Mark 6:31-33) that there was a great eagerness on the part of the people to know more of the Prophet of Nazareth, while on His part an absolute disregard of self and an absorbing love to do good to the needy led Him willingly to forego meal-time when an occasion such as this arose for service.

IS HE OUT OF HIS MIND?

The news that Jesus was again at Capernaum spread quickly beyond the town itself into the surrounding country and to Nazareth where He was brought up. His relatives received these tidings with feelings of apprehension. They were alarmed at the growing interest and the excitement displayed by the populace, and possibly more so by the fact that a deputation of scribes and Pharisees from Jerusalem (3:22) was even then in Capernaum to investigate the practices of the Prophet of Nazareth and to ascertain whether anything in the new teaching was antagonistic to the religion they had received from Moses and the fathers.

As soon as they heard,14 they started out, presumably from Nazareth, to go to Capernaum in order to prevent this mischief, for so they conceived it, spreading further. In their blind ignorance and blinding unbelief they said, He is beside Himself, or, out of His mind.

There is no ground for understanding the term “friends” in the above translation in the sense of a relation based mainly upon feelings of love and regard. When the Lord said to His disciples, “Ye are my friends, if ye do the things which I command you” (John 15:14), He used a different word altogether (), which does signify those who love. But here the Evangelist employs a peculiar phrase (, literally, those from Him, or, from His home. It means no doubt His relatives or kinsfolk, and certainly included, as we find from the account in this chapter of their subsequent arrival (3:31), His mother and brethren. Cranmer's Version (1539), following Tyndale's (1534), translated the phrase expressively enough as, those belonging unto Him: “And when they that belonged unto him heard of it, they went out to laye handes vpon him. For they sayde: he is madd.”

We are shown here by this outrageous comment of the relatives how utterly unable “flesh and blood” under the most favorable conditions was of appreciating the true nature of the service of Jesus. It might be supposed that the family at Nazareth would have supported Him. And yet sacred history is not without examples of family ties covering family feuds, even though the enmity existed upon one side only. Cain slew Abel his brother; the sons of Jacob sold Joseph into Egypt; and the sons of Jesse scoffed at David the shepherd who slew Goliath before their eyes.. And the Spirit of Christ in the prophets said, “I am become a stranger unto my brethren, and an alien unto my mother's children” (Psa. 69:8); and again, “Because of all mine adversaries, I am become a reproach, yea, unto my neighbors exceedingly, and a fear to mine acquaintance” (Psa. 31:11, R.V.).

The Gospels illustrate the fulfillment of this predicted estrangement. Mary, in her overweening anxiety that Jesus should do some great thing to signalize Himself, said to Him suggestively at Cana, “They have no wine.” Before the feast of tabernacles, His brethren said to Him in Galilee, “Depart hence, and go into Judaea, that thy disciples also may behold thy works which thou doest.... If thou doest these things, manifest thyself to the world” (John 7:3, 4).

Here, as Mark shows, mother, brethren and others came out to restrain Him, for such zeal, they said, bespoke an unsound mind. Thus in every case, whatever appearance of aid their actions had, there was real opposition to Him in His path of service.

How full of bitterness was the cup of the Lord, who endured not only the “contradiction of sinners” against Himself, but the mistaken and evil judgments of His own kinsfolk. He trod first and foremost in that pathway wherein, as He warned His disciples, a man should find that his foes included his own household.

It has seemed to some that to translate by “out of his mind,” “beside himself,” or “is mad,” is to give the word a stronger sense than is justifiable. And it is true that in John 10:20, where His enemies say, “He hath a demon and is mad,” a different word is used. But whatever may be an exacter rendering here in Mark the general sense is certainly that they thought Jesus was actuated by an extravagant enthusiasm which altogether exceeded the bounds of soberness and propriety. This was a false judgment which arose because they failed to understand what Person had now undertaken service for Jehovah in the midst of His chosen people.

THE INFAMOUS CHARGE OF THE SCRIBES

With that austere impartiality which is indubitable evidence of the divine inspiration of the sacred Gospels, the Evangelist, after showing that the Lord's zealous activities awakened in His kinsfolk a suspicion of mental derangement, states, in immediate juxtaposition, the awful charge preferred against the Servant of Jehovah by the religious leaders of the Jews. They were unable to disprove or to deny the reality of the signs and wonders wrought by Him. They therefore, with horrible perversity, attributed this power to a Satanic origin. They could not condemn Him as guilty of this charge by the test laid down of old in the Scriptures of failure in the fulfillment of His words. For in their presence the Lord spoke the word of healing to the palsied man who was so helpless that only by a most extraordinary method was the prostrate sufferer brought before the Prophet of God. His word was immediately effective, as crowds in Capernaum could testify, and the man was able to carry away his bed before their eyes. This proved conclusively the validity of the Lord's claims. Was it not written, “When the word of the prophet shall come to pass, then shall the prophet be known that the LORD hath really sent him” (Jer. 28:9). And Moses had previously written of the converse, “When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken: the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously; thou shalt not be afraid of him” (Deut. 18:22). In the case of the Lord, however, there were abundant instances that His word was fulfilled, so that a fair-minded teacher of eminence in Israel was constrained to confess, “Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these signs that thou doest, except God be with him” (John 3:2).

The Pharisaic scribes from Jerusalem,15 unable to accuse Jesus of failing to comply with these tests divinely laid down in former days for an alleged prophet, resort to a charge of complicity with evil spirits. Such a charge, if established, would have rendered the Lord liable to the death-sentence of the law. For Jehovah had commanded through Moses, “A man or a woman that hath a familiar spirit, or that is a wizard, shall surely be put to death; they shall stone them with stones” (Lev. 20:27). The Jews did, as we learn elsewhere, say of the Lord that He had a demon (John 7:20; 8:48, 52; 10:20), and they also sought to stone Him (John 8:59). Here they went further, for they said, “He hath Beelzebub,” and “By the prince of the demons casteth he out demons.” The degree of aggravation in this charge will be seen when we remember, on the one hand, that Judas, the perfidious traitor, in his act of betrayal, was possessed not of a demon but of Satan himself (Luke 22:3; John 13:27), and, on the other hand, that the Man Christ Jesus was anointed for service by the Heavenly Dove, the Holy Spirit of God (Mark 1:10-12). By this statement of theirs which attributed the works of Jesus to the power of Satan, the scribes incurred the guilt of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

There seems to have been a special commission sent from Jerusalem by the Sanhedrin to investigate the words and deeds of Jesus in Galilee. See also Matt. 4; Mark 7.

THE LORD'S REPLY TO THE SCRIBES

The Servant of the Lord did not contend with those that opposed Him so unscrupulously, but He gently, meekly, patiently, instructed them (see 2 Tim. 2:24, 25). He called them to Him and showed them (1) the absurdity of their charge, using for this purpose plain and forcible figures of speech (vers. 23-27), and (2) the gross wickedness of their charge, and the peril of it to themselves (vers. 28-30).

(1) Their folly. The Lord demonstrated that these learned scribes whose opinions by reason of their eminence would possess a weighty influence upon the people, were devoid of even ordinary wisdom. He set this forth in “parables” or pithy metaphors stated in the form of interrogatories. “How,” said He, “can Satan cast out Satan?” The prince of the demons is a liar and a murderer (John 8:44), and his purpose is to rob and kill and destroy. How unthinkable therefore that Beelzebub should be the author of the merciful and beneficent deliverances from the power of the demons wrought in the cases they had witnessed. The prince of darkness could not be the agent of such works of light. Besides, as the Lord proceeded to point out, such a policy involved self-destruction on the part of Satan. All worldly experience proves that disunion and faction in a community result in disintegration. That union is strength is a universal maxim. Whether it is a kingdom or a household that is divided against itself it will not be able to subsist. And if Satan had risen up against himself, as the words of the scribes implied, he could not continue, but must destroy himself. Thus the Lord exposed the folly of His accusers and then added another truth which the many instances of the expulsion of demons by Him proved. Every demoniac was a witness of the power Satan wielded over men; while every such miracle of Jesus was evidence of the superiority of His power to that of the Evil One. As the Lord said, “No one can enter into the house of the strong man and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man; and then he will spoil his house.” This He Himself had already done. He had resisted the temptations of the strong and crafty one in the wilderness. He had also delivered a great number of demoniacs. And shortly He would bruise the serpent's head, through death bringing to naught him that had the power of death (Heb. 2:14). The hand of Jehovah was thus upon the Man of His right hand, the Son of man whom He made strong for Himself (Psa. 80:17). And if only Israel had faith, they might well sing praise with the Psalmist, “All my bones shall say, LORD, who is like unto thee, which deliverest the poor from him that is too strong for him, yea, the poor and needy from him that spoileth him?” (Psa. 35:10). But the scribes and Pharisees could not deny the gracious mercy in exercise in their midst, yet would not believe it to be the power of God, bringing rather the baseless and improbable charge of Satanic influence against the Lord.

(2) Their wickedness. This gross charge was not only foolish, it was worse; it was impious and blasphemous. They said of Jesus, He hath an unclean spirit; and this statement was blasphemy against the Holy Spirit by whom the Son of man was indwelt, anointed and sealed. And the Lord warned of the gravity of their sinful speech, prefacing His warning by the solemn and impressive phrase, “Verily I say unto you."16 He said to the scribes, “Verily I say unto you, All their sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and their blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme; but whosoever shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit hath never forgiveness but is guilty of an eternal sin.”

The Lord, speaking as the anointed Servant of Jehovah, shows that He regarded the railing of the scribes as directed not so much against Himself as against the Holy Spirit by whom He wrought His miracles. In like manner Ananias, in lying to Peter, lied to the Holy Ghost dwelling in the newly-formed church; and, taking another instance, the Sanhedrin, in refusing the testimony of Stephen, resisted the Holy Spirit (Acts vii, 51, 55). Only here the sin was greater; for those that sat in Moses' seat, in the obstinacy and virulence of unbelief, called the Holy Spirit an unclean spirit.

Though they knew it not, these scribes were tools of the great enemy of God and man. They were carrying into effect the scheme of Satan to cause that the Lord should be regarded among men as his emissary. The awful character of this design will become more apparent to us when we recollect that, according to apostolic teaching, Satan will even yet succeed in imposing upon men for a time a modified form of delusion. If he then sought to persuade men that Jesus was his Servant, he will yet delude men into accepting his agent as the object of divine worship. Such temporary success over men Satan will accomplish in the days of the coming apostasy, which will affect both Judaism and Christendom. This agent is in the prophetic word called the “man of sin, the son of perdition,” and in evil arrogance will impersonate the Messiah Himself to

the deceit and destruction of many. It is said of this personage that at his future coming he “opposeth and exalteth himself exceedingly against every one called god or object of veneration; so that he sitteth down in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God,” his coming being “according to the working of Satan in all power and signs and wonders of falsehood, and in all deceit of unrighteousness” (2 Thess. 2:4, 9).

Scripture is clear that this gross imposture will be accepted by the mass of Christendom as well as of the Jews, and this servant of Satan will be successful in luring multitudes to destruction. But think of the enormity of this evil scheme, originated in the days of the Lord, to characterize Jesus, the meek and lowly Servant of Jehovah, as One under the power and direction of Satan! And according to the subtle policy of the serpent, that the slanderous accusation might fall with greater force upon the hearts of men, this declaration concerning the Prophet of Nazareth was made by the religious leaders who had come down with authority from Jerusalem to Galilee.

Such a sinful charge, directed as it was against the eternal Spirit of holiness, was of such heinousness that there was no forgiveness, neither in that age nor in that to come (Matt. 12:29).

[W. J. H.]

(To be continued)

Studies in Mark, Mark: 3:13-19: (22) The Appointment of the Twelve

16.-The Appointment of the Twelve

“And he goeth up into the1 mountain, and calleth unto him whom lie himself would: and they went unto him. And he appointed twelve, that they might be with him, and that he might send them forth2 to preach, and to have authority3 to 4cast out demons: and Simon he surnamed5 Peter; and James the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James; and them he surnamed6 Boanerges, which is, Sons of thunder: and Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and “Thaddaeus, and Simon the Cananean, and Judas Iscariot: 7 which also betrayed him” (3:13-19, R. V.).

We now arrive at what was an important juncture in the ministry of the Servant and Prophet of Jehovah. His continuous and indefatigable labors in Galilee, proclaiming the coming kingdom, have been recorded in the previous verses of Mark, along with the marvelous testimonies which accompanied His preaching, of His goodness and His power. This witness to the gospel awakened an interest which spread in every direction throughout the country, so that crowds came to Jesus from all parts. Clearly there was a general desire abroad to hear and to know more of the Prophet of Nazareth. If many journeyed to the place where He was, there were presumably many more unable to travel who were equally desirous to hear for themselves the wonderful works of God. “But how shall they hear without a preacher?” To meet this difficulty the Lord of the harvest selected certain of His followers whom He authorized to proceed in various directions and proclaim in every town and village the good news of the kingdom.

THE OCCASION OF THE CALL

In the First Gospel the call of the twelve is narrated in connection with the great need that sprang up for more extensive service among the masses of the suffering poor of the land. “But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion for them, because they were distressed and scattered, as sheep not having a shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that he send forth laborers into his harvest” (Matt. 9:36-38). Such was the sympathy of the Good Shepherd for the distresses and infirmities of the lost sheep of the house of Israel, that He desired that others should co-operate in the work of speedily gathering together those that were scattered abroad. And immediately, being Himself the Lord of the harvest, He proceeded to send forth laborers into the harvest.

Luke, in recording the call, states quite another circumstance which brings into emphatic prominence the perfect dependence of the Man Christ Jesus upon God. “And it came to pass in these days, that he went out into the mountain to pray; and he continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, he called his disciples: and he chose from them twelve whom also he named apostles” (Luke 6:12, 13). In this Gospel, the immediate context portrays the intensified hatred and opposition of the religious leaders to Christ. In view of this enmity Jesus retired to the solitudes of the mountainous country, and spent the night in prayer. At dawn, He chose twelve witnesses to labor with Him in face of this growing antagonism.

These aspects of the apostolic call both differ from that which appears in Mark, while all three, each being itself perfect in its setting, combine to present a flawless portrait of our ever adorable Savior and Lord in His choice of those who should eventually occupy positions of honor and dignity in His kingdom. Sympathy for the ignorant and love for the erring wrought in the heart of the Master, as Matthew shows; grace also wrought in associating fishermen and others with Himself as the “Faithful and True Witness” in testimony against a hostile world, as Luke shows. But Mark is careful to display the holy and heavenly calling of the apostolate instituted by the Lord. He makes it clear that these chosen ones had no connection with the grateful crowds on the one hand, nor with the witnessing demons on the other.

We are told that Jesus left both of these companies and went up into the mountainous region. It was a place of separation from the world of confusion, the powers of evil, and the passions of sin, below. In the presence-chamber of the Most High, the thrice-holy Servant passed the night-watches in communion with His Father. This act of His was, as it were, a foreshadowing of what He said later, in that marvelous prayer before His crucifixion, “For their sakes I sanctify myself that they also might be sanctified through the truth” (John 17:19). Even then it was true, though more fully so later, that the called ones were not of the world, even as He was not of the world.

But if this is the correct view of the passage in Mark, the Spirit being jealous for the honor of Christ shows by this connection that the ministry of the Servant of Jehovah was thus freed of all apparent association with either time-serving beneficiaries or the spiritual agents of Satan. He, on the contrary, silenced the demons, and, exercising His sovereign right, selected from His disciples “whom He Himself would.”

THE PURPOSE OF THE CALL

The object for which these twelve persons were selected from among the mass of the disciples or followers of the Lord is here stated to be threefold. They were (1) to be with the Lord, (2) to be sent forth to preach, and (3) to have authority to expel demons. These chosen ones, as Luke tells us, are “named apostles” by the Lord Himself (Luke 6:13); and it is well to remember that this term was applied to them from the first, so that the apostolate, so far as the twelve are concerned, originated before the founding of the church.

The first of their qualifications is of special interest since it is mentioned by Mark alone—they were to be “with Him.” The phrase constitutes one of those inconspicuous points in the differentiation of this Gospel from the others that offer to the believing heart such indisputable evidence that a predominating purpose characterizes the portraiture of the Lord Jesus in each of the four. Here we have the calling of those destined to carry on the service and testimony of the gospel in the whole world after His departure. Do we not therefore see the exquisite propriety that the Evangelist who describes the perfect Servant of Jehovah should show us that His under-servants received their training in the company of the Master Himself. Who so competent to instruct them, by example and precept, what was acceptable and glorifying service to God, as He whose “ears were digged,” as the Psalmist said (Psa. 40:6)? They, after their service in the day of suffering, should serve in the day of glory, as the Lord told them at a later period. “Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations; and I appoint unto you a kingdom, even as my Father appointed unto me, that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom; and ye shall sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Luke 22:28, 29). Those who were with David's Son in the cave of Adullam should be with David's Lord in mount Zion.

We may thus consider that this phrase covers the spiritual education which Christ's servants received under the personal tuition of the Incomparable Servant, who in His service served even His own servants. They were admitted to a degree of favor and intimacy which was accorded to none beside. In such a hallowed associate-ship what daily lessons were ever before them for their learning of untiring zeal, exhaustless patience, purest devotion, absolute and unqualified obedience to God and profoundest sympathy for man!

But more than this, being “with Him” they heard His words, and received the truth. Seeing Him, they saw the Father also. Beholding Him, they beheld His glory, as of the Only-begotten of the Father. So that the apostles became qualified to testify, as eye-witnesses, of the revelation of the Father made by the Son. One of them, subsequently, writing to the whole family of God, referred to the fullness of this intimacy as that which constituted the credentials of his apostleship. “What was from [the] beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we looked on, and our hands handled, concerning the Word of life (and the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and report to you the eternal life, the which was with the Father and was manifested to us); that which we have seen and heard we report to you” (1 John 1:1-3, N.T.). The apostles therefore had the honorable distinction of being not only the servants of the Lord, but His friends (John 15:14, 15).

In the second place, the apostles were called that they might be sent forth to preach. At the commencement of His public ministry the Lord presented Himself, preaching the gospel of God —that the kingdom was at hand. It now was proved to be necessary that this testimony should be taken up by others and spread in all directions, and the Lord chose the twelve that He might commission them to go throughout the country as the accredited heralds of His kingdom. The term “apostle” signifies one who is sent, and the first item of the service assigned to them was to announce that the Redeemer was come to Zion, and that the prophetic kingdom was therefore at the doors.

Thirdly, the apostles were to receive authority to cast out demons. In Matthew and Luke the power to cure diseases is coupled with that over unclean spirits. And copyists with an ignorant zeal to make the Gospels all alike, appear to have added the phrase here unwarrantably, for it is now agreed that the best witnesses omit it in Mark.

And the context supplies what will be found to be quite an adequate explanation of the omission here by Mark of any reference to the curative powers conferred upon the apostles. The purpose of this section, as has been suggested already, is to show the dissociation of the kingdom of the Lord and the kingdom of Satan. One of the special forms of temptation in the wilderness was that the Lord should obtain the dominion of the world by acknowledging the rule of Satan (Luke 4:6-8). Now we read that evil spirits submitted to His power and rendered public testimony to His divine person. The Lord knew what His enemies would say, and what indeed they did say of Him, soon afterward—that He had Beelzebub, and that His mighty works were done by evil agency.

Hence the Lord, anticipating this calumny, chose the twelve apostle to be His ambassadors, and gave them also authority over evil demons. So that wherever the Lord and His apostles encountered the spiritual powers of darkness, there was the reverse of co-operation; the unclean spirits were cast out and not suffered to speak. Mark had shown the angels ministering to Jesus (1:13), but he makes it clear that evil spirits, the servants of the great enemy, were in no way associated with Him.

The apostolic power over diseases is therefore not mentioned in this connection, in order that greater prominence might be given to their power over demons, We can see the utmost propriety in this omission, especially when we consider that the chapter goes on to narrate that the charge of complicity with Satan was actually brought against the Lord by the scribes which came down from Jerusalem.

THE TWELVE AND THEIR NAMES

The Lord chose and appointed the twelve to be His apostles. The term itself, though used in connection with the call by Matthew and Luke, is not given by Mark, who only uses it once throughout his Gospel (6:30). Their number has an obvious allusion to the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28); and the sphere of their service was confined to the earthly people of God. Their charge from the Lord was, “Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not; but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 10:5, 6). After the Lord's resurrection the commission was made universal in its scope: “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). And at Pentecost the apostles being together with others of the followers of the Lord, the Spirit descended upon them (Acts 2), and they were incorporated in the church, that new building of God which groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord (Eph. 2:21, 22).

Paul, called after Pentecost, was pre-eminently the apostle of the church in the sense that the revelation of the mystery of its heavenly calling was communicated to him. Barnabas is also alluded to as an apostle in company with Paul (Acts 14:14). But the original call of the twelve Jewish apostles as recorded in the Gospels is clearly in connection with the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom to Israel.

This band of apostles is frequently alluded to in Scripture as “the twelve,” but this mode of reference is used most of all by Mark. The following is a list of the passages—Matt. 26:20; Mark 3:14; 6:7; 9:35; 10:32; 11:11; 14:17; Luke 6:13; 8:1; 9:12; 18:31; John 6:67, 70; Acts 6:2 Cor. 15:5. Thomas is called “one of the twelve” (John 20:24); and so is Judas (Matt. 26:14, 17; Mark 14:10, 20, 43; Luke 22:3, 17;

John 6:70, 71). After the defection of Judas, they are called “the eleven” (Matt. 28:16; Mark 16:14; Luke 24:9, 33; Acts 1:26); Matthias being subsequently chosen by lot after prayer to fill the vacancy (Acts 1:26; 2:14).

The names of the twelve apostles are enumerated in each of the Synoptic Gospels, and also in the Acts, and these names were also seen in vision inscribed upon the foundations of the wall of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:14). They occupied a special place of honor and privilege in the confession of the name of Jesus in the days of His presentation as Messiah to Israel, and in the coming day of glory a special award is accorded to them in manifestation before Israel and the nations in that holy city which is to come down from God. Paul undoubtedly will have his distinguished place in that heavenly kingdom, but the twelve, unlike Paul, moved along, in believing wonder, with the Lord in His daily progress through this world of woe. Hence, their names are written, not only in heaven (a matter in itself of greater cause for their rejoicing than power over evil spirits, Luke 10:20), but also in the foundations of the wall of that figurative city which will be a medium for the light of the glory of God and the Lamb throughout the millennial earth.

The various names of the apostles, with one or two exceptions, are easy of identification. A few brief remarks upon each are appended, following the order found in Mark.

Simon Peter. The name of this apostle is always placed first in the various lists of the twelve, and also when two or three or more are mentioned by name. Simon or Simeon (Symeon, Acts 15:14; 2 Peter 1:1) was the son of Jona or Jonas (John 1:42; 21:15-17). Jonas, which is equivalent to John, is the Greek form of Jonah. And Bar-jona, or Bar-Jonah, means son of John (Matt. 16:17).

Simon received a new name from the Lord, signifying a stone or a rock. This name in the Aramaic, that is, the language usually spoken by the Lord, was Kephas, or, Cephas (John 1:42 Cor. 1:12; Gal. 2:9), and in the Greek, Peter (Petros, Matt. 16:17). Peter, or Simon Peter, occurs most frequently by far in the New Testament. Besides in those references, made historically before his call and at his naming, Simon is used alone in the following passages—

(a) By the Lord (Matt. 17:25; Mark 14:37; Luke 22:31; John 21:15-17).

(b) By the other apostles (Luke 24:34).

(c) By James (Acts 15:14).

(2) James. This was one of the sons of Zebedee the fisherman, the New Testament form of Zabdi (Josh. 7:1, 17, 18; 1 Chron. 8:19). The word James is an English form of the Hebrew and Greek name Jacob. He is the only apostle whose death is mentioned in the New Testament, being executed in Jerusalem by Herod Agrippa I. (Acts 12:1, 2).

From a comparison of Matt. 27:56 with Mark 15:40, it would appear that the name of the mother of James and John was Salome.

(3) John. The brother of James was also chosen to be an apostle, and the two sons of Zebedee were surnamed by the Lord Boanerges, which means, Sons of thunder.8 Though others of the apostles appear to have had several names, Peter, James and John are the only ones who, we are told, received surnames from the Lord.

There seems no doubt that John alludes to himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 13:23; 19:26; 21:20) in the Gospel which he wrote. He also wrote three Epistles, as well as the Apocalypse, the latter during his exile in the island of Patmos (Rev. 1:9).

John is associated with Peter in their visit to the tomb of Jesus (John 20:1-10), in the healing of the lame man and the subsequent testimony (Acts 3:1, 4; 4:14, 19), and in their journey to Samaria after the preaching of Philip (Acts 8:14); while Peter's inquiry of the Lord concerning John, “And what shall this man do?” (John 21:21) spews the affection existing between the two men.

The name John in Hebrew is Johanan, “the gift of Jehovah.”

(4) Andrew. In Matthew and Luke, Andrew immediately follows Simon Peter in the list of names. They were brothers, and natives of Bethsaida, like Philip (John 1:44). Andrew was a disciple of John the Baptist, whom he left to follow Jesus, afterward communicating to his own brother the joyful intelligence that the Messiah was found. This preceded the call by the Lord (Mark 1:16).

Little is said of Andrew. His name is, however, mentioned alone twice by John (6:8; 12:22). The four, Peter, Andrew, James and John are named as being together with the Lord in the house at Capernaum (Mark 1:29) and on the mount of Olives (Mark 13:3).

(5) Philip. This apostle was also of Bethsaida, a fact stated twice in John's Gospel (1:44; 12:21). He was one of the early disciples of the Lord, being called by Him, as it says, Jesus “findeth Philip and saith unto him, Follow me” (John 1:43). The Lord “proved” Philip before the feeding of the multitude (John 6:5-7). Some Greeks came to him, and said, “Sir, we would see Jesus” (John 12:21). He said to the Lord,

“Show us the Father, and it sufficeth us” (John 14:8). All these historical items are communicated in the Fourth Gospel only.

The name itself means “lover of horses.”

(6) Bartholomew. This was the apostle's patronymic, that is, his family name, or surname; and it occurs in all four lists. Nathanael was, most probably, his personal name, signifying the “gift of God.” He confessed the Lord before His public ministry as Son of God and King of Israel (John 1:49). Bartholomew is not mentioned by John, who, however, includes Nathanael of Cana when naming others of the apostles after the resurrection (John 21:2). Of him the Lord said, “Behold, an Israelite indeed in whom there is no guile” (John 1:47).

(7) Matthew. The identity of Matthew and Levi the publican seems to rest upon sufficient evidence, and reference has previously been made in these articles to this point.9 He was the writer of the First Gospel, but no further record of him is found in the Scriptures. Mark alone gives the name of his father, Alphaeus (2:14), a different person, it is presumed, from the one mentioned in connection with James, since the two apostles are not associated like James and John of Zebedee.

(8) Thomas. The name Thomas, like that of Didymus, which is used three times by John, means “a twin.” Nothing is said of him after his call and appointment except by John. When the Lord spoke of going to Bethany, Thomas said to the other disciples, “Let us also go with him, that

we may die with him" (John 11:16). When the Lord was instructing the apostles as to His immediate departure and their knowledge of the way, Thomas broke in with, "Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?" (John 14:5). His incredulity at the tidings of the resurrection has passed into a proverb (John 20:24-31).

(9) James. In each of the four lists, Peter heads the first four names, Philip the second four, and James of Alphteus the third four.

James is a name of frequent occurrence among the Jews, and, on this account, the name is not easy of identification, apart from some distinguishing epithet. In the New Testament we read of (1) James of Zebedee, (2) James of Alphaeus, (3) James the Lord's brother, and (4) James the Less. The first is clear, but scholars are divided in their opinions as to the number of persons referred to by the following terms, whether three, two or one. A few words must suffice here upon what has been the subject of much controversy.

James [the son] of Alphaeus only occurs in each of the various lists of the apostles. But it has been supposed that Alphaeus is the Greek name for the Hebrew Cleophas (Clopas, John 19:25), whose wife stood by the cross with the other Marys, and is called the mother of James (Luke 24:10). In any case, that James of Alphaeus was an apostle is fully established.

James the Lord's brother is so called by the apostle Paul in his Epistle to the Galatians. He states that on his visit to Jerusalem, "other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother" (Gal. 1:19). This person appears to be distinguished in this way from the other James who is mentioned in the succeeding chapter without any qualifying phrase (Gal. 2:9, 12) [?]. Such a form of reference implies that the latter was too well-known in Galatia to require any special term of distinction. The latter may therefore be assumed to be the James who came into prominence in Jerusalem after the martyrdom of the son of Zebedee (Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18), and to be identical [?] with James of Alphaeus, one of the twelve. He wrote the inspired Epistle to the twelve tribes (James 1:1), and is sometimes known as James the Just.

James the Lord's brother is mentioned with others (Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3); and in the account of the meeting in the upper room at Jerusalem before Pentecost, the brethren of Jesus are said to have been there, but they are mentioned separately from the apostles (Acts 1:14). In favor of the hypothesis that he wrote the Epistle of James it may be noted that like Jude he does not claim to be an apostle, but neither does John in any of his three Epistles. This argument therefore is not a weighty one.

James the less, or little, occurs but once (Mark 15:40), and is named as the son of Mary, one of the Galilaean women who were last at the cross and first at the tomb. She was the wife of Alphaeus, so that this is the James already mentioned, the epithet being applied to him probably because of his stature.

(10) Thaddaeus. From Matthew we learn that Lebbaeus was surnamed Thaddaeus (Matt. 10:3), while Luke, in his Gospel and in the Acts, gives a further name of this apostle, viz., Judas [the son or brother] of James. A question of his is recorded by John, who distinguishes him from the traitor of the same name: "Judas (not Iscariot) saith unto him, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?" (John 14:22). There is no further reference to him by name in the New Testament.

Whether Judas the apostle was the writer of the Epistle bearing this name is a matter upon which difference of judgment exists. The writer introduces himself, not as an apostle (see also verse 17), but as "Judas, a servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James," this James being the Lord's brother. It is certain that of the Lord's brothers there were two so-named, since they both are mentioned by Matthew and Mark (Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3), and we know that the brethren of the Lord were at the apostolic prayer-meeting in Jerusalem (Acts 1:11), including James and Judas, if not Joses and Simon. There is no great difficulty therefore in supposing that Judas the Lord's brother wrote the Epistle known by that name.

If the contrary opinion is held—that the writer was an apostle—it is necessary to translate the idiomatic expression in Luke 6:16 and in Acts 1:13 as in the Authorized Version, "Jude [the brother] of James" to agree with Jude 1, instead of "Jude [the son] of James," as in the Revised Version. And yet in a previous case the same idiom is rendered, "James [the son] of Alpheus," so that the identification calls for patient discrimination rather than hasty dogmatism.

(11) Simon. He is distinguished from Simon Peter by Matthew and Mark as the Cananean, and by Luke as the Zealot. The first term is the Hebrew (not meaning an inhabitant of Canaan), and the second the Greek name for a Jewish sect holding violent religious and political views, inimical to the Romans. Nothing else is recorded concerning this apostle specially.

(12) Judas Iscariot. This name is always placed last of all in the lists of the apostles. With one or two exceptions each reference to him is accompanied by a phrase alluding to his betrayal of Jesus. He is said to have been [the son] of Simon (John 6:71; 12:4; 13:2, 26). He was not of Galilaean origin, like the majority of the apostles, but of Kerioth, a town in the land of Judah (Josh. 15:25), this being implied by "Iscariot."

[W. J. H.]

Studies in Mark, Mark: 3:1-6: (20) A Merciful Deed on the Sabbath

14.-A Merciful Deed on the Sabbath

"And he entered again into the synagogue; and there was a man there which had his hand withered.1 And they watched him whether he would heal him on the sabbath day; that they might accuse him. And he saith unto the man that had his hand withered,2 Stand forth.3 And he saith unto them, Is it lawful on the sabbath day to do good, or to do harm?4 to save a5 life, or to kill? But they held their peace6 And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved7 at the hardening of their heart, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thy hand. And he stretched it forth; and his hand was restored. And the Pharisees went8 out, and straightway with the Herodians took counsel9 against him, how they might destroy him" (3:1 -6, R. V.).

In the cornfields the lowly Servant of Jehovah, by the vindication of His followers from the groundless charge made against them by the Pharisees, declared that He had supreme authority over the sabbath. The record of this declaration by the Son of man is immediately succeeded, in all three of the Synoptical Gospels, by the account of the miraculous restoration, on another sabbath, of the withered hand of

the man in the synagogue. Whether the latter event followed the former in immediate chronological sequence cannot be definitely ascertained from the sacred history, and this point may therefore be regarded as one of no importance in the scheme of the Gospels.

It is, however, of the deepest interest to observe that the two incidents are brought together by three of the Evangelists, and thus constitute an epoch in the Galilaean ministry of our Lord. At this juncture the truth of the gospel broke away from Judaism. For herein it is shown how the teaching and practice of Jesus came into direct collision with the teaching and practice of the Jews in regard of one of the most salient of the outward features of their religion—the observance of the sabbath. In this particular, as in others, the Jews had rendered the law of God inoperative by their traditions. The Lord, by exposing this departure from the spirit of their ancient oracles, and the evil tendencies of their beliefs, aroused their hostility and censure. The two incidents may be regarded from this point of view as forming a double witness (1) to the apostasy of the Jews in their manner of observing the sabbath—that characteristic ordinance committed to the chosen people—and (2) to the wise and faithful testimony to the truth delivered by Jehovah's Servant in the face of Pharisaic gainsaying and rancor. And while both occurrences show the persistent zeal exercised by the Lord's enemies to prove Him a sabbath-breaker, they also show how able the Lord was to confound their schemes and to discern the evil motives concealed beneath the cloak of piety.

THE WITHERED HAND RESTORED

The Lord went into a synagogue on the sabbath. It is not clear whether this was or was not the synagogue at Capernaum where He had already performed miracles. But when the Pharisees and scribes who were assembled there saw amongst the congregation a man whose hand (the right, as Luke the physician, tells us) was shrunken and useless they suspected that the Master might heal the afflicted man. Thoroughly opposed to Him as they were, their unspoken thoughts by this conjecture paid tribute to the unfailing compassion of Jesus for whatever weakness and suffering crossed His pathway. But it is patent that the fact of His being good and doing good, which they inwardly acknowledged, caused them to hate Him and to seek to destroy Him. Imbued with this sinister desire they eyed the Lord narrowly, hoping that out of His active beneficence which they anticipated they might concoct some charge which would bring Him under the jurisdiction of the law.

Jesus knew their machinations (Luke 6:8), but was not to be diverted out of His course of “doing good.” He bade the afflicted man to rise and stand out in the midst in sight of the whole company. Then the Lord, desirous of awakening the dormant consciences of the Pharisees and scribes to a sense of their own guilty motives, asked them, “Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath or to do harm? to save life or to kill?” (Mark, Luke).10 To this piercing question, which exposed the hidden sophistries of their minds, they had no reply, and were dumb before Him. They had reasoned within themselves that, since the commandment of God forbade all work on the sabbath, Jesus, by healing the withered hand, would be working, and therefore breaking the sabbath. But the Lord's words put the matter on a different plane altogether. The question was not, as they supposed, one between activity and passivity; it was between doing good and doing harm, between saving a life and destroying a life by refraining from saving it. The law of God was given for the repression of evil, not for the repression of good. “There is none good save one, that is, God,” and it is inconceivable that He, “the Goodness of goodness,” would promulgate a law which would prevent the doing of good. Indeed to refrain from doing good when opportunity is offered is to display unlikeness to God. “Whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him” (1 John 3:17)?

Thus then did the Lord, by the presentation of the truth, seek, first of all, to heal the diseased minds of His enemies in the synagogue, but was hindered by their unbelief. The entrance of His words would have illuminated their dark hearts; but as the Prophet of Jehovah surveyed the congregation, His omniscient eyes marked not only the frowning brow and furtive glance but the hardened hearts and minds refusing to accept the truth. The zeal for God which “consumed” the Righteous Servant drew forth a momentary flash of that “wrath of the Lamb” from which the potentates of this world shall vainly seek to be sheltered in a future day (Rev. 6:15-17). But the Lord was not there to judge. Hence He regarded their desperate condition with sorrow and grief. “He looked round11 about on them with anger, being grieved at the hardening of their heart.” Then addressing the disabled man, He bade him stretch out his hand. With implicit trust in the words of the prophet of Nazareth the man essayed to do so, and found the limb restored to its natural strength and suppleness.

Such a result could not be gainsaid. The miracle was performed in a public place in the presence of a company of witnesses, consisting not of ignorant and credulous peasants only, if at all, but also of educated Pharisees and scribes who were only too anxious to deny the cure altogether, if possible, or at any rate to raise objections to its genuine character. They did not, however, attempt to deny the miracle, but leaving the synagogue they sought their rivals, the Herodians, and laying aside their mutual animosities, the two parties conferred together that they might find the most expeditious method of destroying Jesus.

PROMINENCE GIVEN TO SABBATH-SERVICE

In the brief outline of the life and ministry of our Lord which we possess in the Gospels, it is striking to observe what a large proportion, comparatively speaking, of His recorded service was performed upon the sabbath. There are, altogether, about twenty-six cases of healing specifically mentioned in the Gospels, and of these, seven are stated to have been executed on the sabbath day. These seven cases are—

1. The demoniac at Capernaum (Mark 1:21).

2. Simon's wife's mother (Mark 1:29).

3. The man with a withered hand (Mark 3:1-5).

4. The bowed woman (Luke 13:14).

5. The man with dropsy (Luke 14:1-6).

6. The impotent man at the pool (John 5:9).

7. The beggar blind from birth (John 9:14).

Other instances are referred to in general terms as happening on the seventh day. It may also be observed that the Lord commenced His public ministry at Nazareth on the sabbath; and that He was in the sepulcher during the whole of the sabbath after His crucifixion—that “high day,” as it was called. Attention has already been drawn to the fact that the incident in the cornfields occurred on the sabbath.

Much of this service was rendered in synagogues where it was customary for the law and the prophets to be read in the hearing of those assembled. The acts of mercy therefore, in addition to the direct benefit which they conferred upon those immediately concerned, formed instructive examples of the blessing for man which would characterize the coming kingdom even then preached by the Servant of Jehovah. This blessing was not to be effected without the energy of divine love. And divine love had charged itself to remove the presence of sin and its fruits; nor could it rest until this was accomplished for the whole creation. As the Lord said on another occasion, “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work” (John 5:17). The instance here of the healing of the withered arm was a sample of the “powers of the world to come,” and was but a single instance of what shall eventually be effected for the whole earth.

Looked at truly, the presence of this sufferer in the synagogue was undeniable evidence that the sabbath could not be rightly kept. For at the beginning of the world's history, when Jehovah rested on the seventh day from His works and blessed it and hallowed it, the earth was unblemished, and declared the glory of God. In an Eden unsullied by man's disobedience Jehovah could, in that primeval sabbath, commune with Adam. The entrance of sin destroyed these conditions, its presence in the world being incompatible with the rest of God.12

At Sinai the people of Israel were enjoined to “Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy.” There were to be no sinful desires, no sinful actions, no sinful associations. They were to regard the claims of Jehovah upon them and observe the day to Him, distinguishing it from the six days by abstaining from all manner of work, i.e., all labor usually undertaken for personal gain or gratification or comfort.

Where was this sanctity in the Galilaean synagogue? It is true there was a cessation of manual labor in the town. The fishing-boats rode idly at anchor or were drawn up on the strand, the fields and vineyards were deserted, the bazaars were silent, and a decorous company assembled for prayer and reading of the Scriptures. This man saw, and judged what a pious observance of the sabbath was there.

But Jesus saw more and differently. He saw a man there doing no manner of work truly, for his right hand was robbed of its cunning. If this affliction was not a direct infliction from God, as in the case of the renegade king and of the false shepherd of Israel (1 Kings. 13:4; Zech. 11:17), it was certainly the result of sin, whatever the secondary causes may have been. The human hand, by its flexibility and manifold utility, differentiates the physical organization of man from the ape-like animals which superficially resemble him. Its uselessness in this case demonstrated the cruel effects of sin upon mankind.

But the Savior saw even more. He looked beneath the cloak of formal piety and hypocrisy, and discerned a fountain of corruption. Evil thoughts and desires were in the assembly. Those who considered that to heal a man on the sabbath was to violate sanctity had no scruples about holding a council on that day for the destruction of Jesus. The Cain-thirst for innocent blood was there. The professed sabbath-keepers were hating their Messiah without a cause, and had already murdered Him—in their hearts. Was this remembering, the sabbath day to keep it holy? All this and more the Lord saw, as He looked round on them with anger, being grieved at the hardening of their hearts. He surveyed them in the spirit that at His final entry into Jerusalem wept over the guilty city.

Similarly, we read of divine grief in the Old Testament when in antediluvian days “the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart” (Gen. 6:5, 6). Again He said of the Israelites in the wilderness, “Forty years long was I grieved with this generation, and said, It is a people that do err in their heart, and they have not known my ways” (Psa. 95:10). A SOLEMN LESSON There is in this incident, beside other instruction, a solemn lesson for all time as to the utter futility of the mere outward observance of a divine ordinance. The same truth is expressed many times elsewhere and in many ways. But it is here associated with the keeping of the sabbath and not with the offering of sacrifice or the repetition of prayers, and it may be well to state the principle which seems to be involved. Here, on the part of the Pharisees, was a great display of zeal, ostensibly for the honor of Jehovah's sabbath. They appeared to be desirous above all things that its holiness should be preserved inviolate, so much so that they regarded the plucking of a few ears of corn and the healing of a withered hand as infractions of God's law. But what was the truth? They were all the while furiously angry without cause, hating their Messiah and persecuting the benefactor of their fellows. It is evident that their position was one of gross deceit, though while they might deceive other men and even themselves, they could not deceive God. And this was the true nature of Pharisaism, as the Gospels abundantly testify. It is well, however, to remember that this hypocrisy arose from the natural tendencies of the human heart, and for this reason all religious persons are liable to fall into the same unreality in their devotional exercises. And what at first may be no more than an occasional lapse, becomes eventually a settled habit. We are therefore to regard the exposure here made of the inward evil of these religious professors as a serious warning for the present day.

It should be comparatively easy to discern that the exercise of public Christian worship and the celebration of the Lord's Supper are liable to the danger of unreality—a punctilious performance of these rites being accompanied by a complete absence of spiritual intention. And it is commonly and rightly understood that this failure to present to God “worship in spirit and in truth” is especially to be feared when that worship is connected with an ornate ceremonialism and a prescribed liturgy. The aesthetic ritual may proceed most agreeably to the cultivated taste, but what if the soul of the worshipper be out of harmony with its God?

Most admit the possibility and even the prevalence in Christendom of this spiritual pretension. But is it not too often forgotten that the danger equally exists, however simple the external forms of worship may be? In our Lord's day it was found in the synagogue as much as in the temple. Nowadays hollow formalism frequents both the fretted aisles of venerable cathedrals and the whitewashed rooms of our obscure by-ways. Reality may be as seriously lacking in the simple singing of a “common meter” hymn as in the classical rendering of an anthem accompanied by trained choral and instrumental harmonies. The delusion lies in the false assumption that the negation of all outward ceremonies provides a certain safeguard against unspiritual worship and prayer. The truth is that the presence or the absence of an appointed ritual will not exclude from the worshippers thoughts which are evil and hostile to the Savior, though it is likely enough that these thoughts may assume the disguise of religious zeal for the readier deception of the unwatchful, and of such as, like those in the synagogue, have not learned the real nature of their own sinful hearts.

HEART-HARDNESS

What are we to understand by the phrase used here— “the hardening of their heart"? Does it imply that the hearts of the audience in the synagogue were naturally incapable of appreciating the cogent and irrefragable evidence afforded by the works of Jesus to the divine nature of His person and mission? or does it imply that they, knowing otherwise, resolutely refused to recognize the value of this evidence? In other words, is the allusion to their inborn or to their willful obdurateness of heart?

The word —translated “hardening” or “hardness” signifies a state of callousness, and, considered in connection with the other instances of its use in the New Testament, seems to specify the deplorable state of insensibility of the Jews to the words and works of the kingdom which were placed before them by their Messiah—a condition of indifference which became intensified by their neglect of the testimony to the gospel.

Looking at the other occurrences of the word and its cognate forms, we find that it is applied to the Jews, to the Gentiles, and to the disciples of our Lord to indicate their want of receptivity of the truth. In the Epistle to the Romans, the apostle uses it in reference to the rejection of the gospel by the mass of the Jews. “That which Israel seeketh for, that he obtained not; but the election obtained it, and the rest were hardened.” “A hardening in part had befallen Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in” (Rom. 11:7, 25). Again, in another epistle, the apostle, speaking of the same subject, says, “Their minds were hardened” (2 Cor. 3:14).13

The same term is used to express the natural irresponsiveness of the Gentiles also to what is of God: “Being darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardening of their heart” (Eph. 4:18).

The word is not found in the Synoptical Gospels except in Mark. He uses it here, and also in reference to the disciples: “They understood not concerning the loaves, but their heart was hardened” (Mark 6:52). And again, he reports the words of Jesus to the dull apostles, “Why reason ye, because ye have no bread? Do ye not yet perceive, neither understand? Have ye your heart hardened” (Mark 8:17)?

In the above instances the activity of the will in opposition to the truth is not necessarily implied. The term appears rather to point to that prevailing state of moral stupidity among the Jews which failed to perceive what was evidently of God.

When the apostle in the Hebrews is referring to the willful obstinacy of the Israelites in the wilderness he uses a different word: “Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness” (Heb. 3:8, 15; 4:7). And without presuming to dogmatize as to its finer shades of meaning it is suggested that the word 14 and its derivatives is employed to denote that definite resistance on man's part which deliberately blocks up the heart to exclude the light of God—as the Lord said, “Ye will not come unto me that ye may have life” (John 5:40).

It must be added that the former word, , occurs in one other connection not vet mentioned. John uses it in his Gospel with reference to the solemn judicial process which is exercised by God upon those who fill up their measure of guilt in repeated refusal of divine testimony. The Evangelist, speaking of those who had not believed on Jesus although they had witnessed so many miracles by Him, wrote, “For this cause they could not believe, for that Isaiah said again, He hath blinded their eyes and hardened their heart; lest they should see with their eyes and perceive with their heart, and should turn, and I should heal them” (John 12:39, 40; citation from Isa. 6:9, 10). This judicial sentence was not pronounced upon the nation until the divine patience was exhausted with those who stumbled at the stumbling-stone, ignoring the Messiah sent to them (Acts 13:27).

[W. J. H.]

Studies in Mark, Mark: 2:23-28: (19) The Servant of Jehovah the Lord of the Sabbath

13. -The Servant of Jehovah, The Lord of the Sabbath (2:23-28 continued)

Second-First Sabbath

The parallel account in the Gospel of Luke of the Lord's walk with His disciples through the cornfields contains a chronological note which does not occur in either Matthew or Mark. There we read, “Now it came to pass on the second-first sabbath that he was going through the cornfields” (Luke 6:1). The occasion is in this sentence specified by the use of a very unusual term, “the second-first sabbath.”

The word (for in the Greek it is but a single word) is so infrequent and so difficult of exact definition, that in many ancient MSS. it is unwarrantably omitted. For this insufficient reason the Revisers have also omitted the word, briefly indicating this omission by a note in the margin that “Many ancient authorities insert second-first.” “Now the witnesses which omit the word are few, though high, and the difficulty of understanding a word nowhere else occurrent, and in itself hard to explain without an exact knowledge of Jewish scripture and usage, accounts readily for the tampering hand of copyists prone to cut knots instead of untying them.... Nobody would or could create a needless difficulty by inserting this [word in sixteen uncial MSS.]; but we can easily account for a few omitting what was hard in their eyes, as it is to most readers still."1

What then is to be understood by this difficult epithet, “second-first”? There have been many explanations, mostly far-fetched, the discussion of which is beyond the purpose and scope of the present article. That interpretation is prima facie most to be commended which is founded on the scripture itself.

Now there is an express injunction in the law of Moses forbidding the Israelites at harvest-time to partake of the fresh corn until the ceremony of the wave-sheaf was passed. This occurs amongst the very particular and explicit regulations regarding the feasts of Jehovah (Lev. 23:9-14). The children of Israel were enjoined to bring a sheaf of the first-fruits of their harvest to the priest that he might wave it before Jehovah. This was to be done during the feast of unleavened bread, or of the passover, as it was also called, “on the morrow after the sabbath.” This sabbath occurring after the slaying of the paschal lamb was considered of especial sanctity, and was regarded by the Jews as a great or high day (John 19:31). It was emphatically the first sabbath, not necessarily in point of time, but in point of importance. The following day, the wave-sheaf was offered to Jehovah, and the succeeding sabbath would be the “second-first.”

On the great sabbath no godly Jew would have partaken of ears of corn, because of the legal prohibition which stated, “Ye shall eat neither bread nor parched corn, nor fresh ears, until this selfsame day, until ye have brought the oblation of your God: it is a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings” (Lev. 23:14). On the second-first sabbath the wave-sheaf would have been offered, and the injunction just quoted would therefore not be applicable to the action of the disciples, they being ceremonially free to partake of the newly-ripened corn.

SABBATH MADE FOR MAN

The Evangelist proceeds to show that the Lord justified His followers on another ground—by the enunciation of a weighty truth concerning the sabbath which the Pharisees had nullified by their tradition. The distinction of this utterance from the Lord's historical allusion to the Old Testament is marked in the narrative by the phrase, “And he said unto them.” For He proceeded to introduce to them a new phase of the subject, illuminating it by the truth of God, as it could emanate from Himself only. In their ignorant zeal, under a thin veneer of piety, they had made the sabbath a yoke of bondage grievous to be borne. The Lord pronounced authoritatively, “The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath.” The object of the institution of the septenary season of rest was not the punishment of man, but his blessing.

Was not this so at the beginning? When the works of creation were complete and the earth was in a glorious state of perfection and beauty fresh from the hands of its Maker, “on the seventh day God finished his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and hallowed it; because that in it he rested from all his work which God had created and made” (Gen. 2:2, 3). In that rest our first parents were to participate, but sin entered into the world, and thorns and thistles, and wearisome labor and death. Still, as to original divine purpose, the sabbath was made for man who appeared on the sixth day. And if the people of Israel were to do no manner of work on the sabbath, a merciful and gracious Jehovah provided a double portion of manna on the sixth day. And when the sanctity of the seventh day was enforced by the attendant terrors of Sinai, this was due to the choice of the proud and self-confident people themselves, who placed themselves under the law and its restrictions (Ex. 19:8). The vexatious deprivations associated with the sabbath were therefore derived from man and not from God. In its original nature it was not mere prohibition, but positive blessing.

The Lord declared that the sabbath was made not for Israel only, but for man. It was true that the sabbath was a special sign that Israel was the nation of Jehovah; but it was also true that it existed before Israel's day, though the responsibility for the observance of the sanctity of the seventh day was placed upon them. Thus Jehovah said to them through Ezekiel, “Moreover also I gave them my sabbaths to be a sign between me and them” (Ezek. 20:12). And the Levites in their worship said, “And [thou] madest known unto them thy holy sabbath, and commandedst them commandments and statutes and a law, by the hand of Moses thy servant” (Neh. 9:14). At Sinai therefore Israel received what had existed as the sabbath of Jehovah from the beginning and what in its original scope embraced all mankind.

“Pharisees might turn the sabbath into an engine for torturing man, but in God's mind the sabbath came in most mercifully. There were the days of labor which God Himself had known something of in figure, for there was a time when He had wrought and made the earth; and God Himself was pleased to rest on the sabbath, and to sanctify it. Then sin came in, and God could no longer own it, and His word is silent. We read of the sabbath no more until God takes up His people in delivering mercy, and gives them manna from heaven. Then the sabbath day becomes a marked thing, and rest follows, the type of Jesus sent down from above. It disappears from the beginning of the first book of scripture, and reappears in the second. God makes rest once more. He was giving to man in grace when He brought Israel out of Egypt. Of this the sabbath was the appropriate sign.” Law came in by-the-bye, imposing its observance with penalties for disobedience, but from the beginning it was not so.

THE LORD OF THE SABBATH

“The Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath.” In these words, to the confusion of the unbelieving Pharisees, the Servant of Jehovah asserted His claim to an absolute authority over the sabbath. In virtue of His own rights He was competent to decide what might or what might not be done on the sabbath, for He was Lord of the sabbath.

This was an important revelation of the dignity of His person, and we find the saying recorded in each of the Synoptic Gospels in connection with the incident before us. But here it is especially instructive to observe that the Servant of Jehovah, so perfect in His dependence, so untiring in His energy, so exquisite in His sympathy, and so tender in His compassion, quietly and unostentatiously, using the simplest form of speech, claimed an unqualified authority which no man ever possessed previously. For, let it be remembered, this Lordship implied more than the Adamic supremacy over the lower creation. This was Lordship over a divine institution which Adam never had. The Son of man, who had power on earth to forgive sins, had power on earth to regulate the sabbath also, for, even as Peter said to Cornelius, “He is Lord of all.”

The ideal sabbath is yet to come. So the apostle in the Epistle to the Hebrews, after showing that the rest of God did not come about in Old Testament times, declares, “There remaineth therefore a sabbath-rest for the people of God” (Heb. 4:9). Of this sabbatism the Son of man is Lord, as He is the true Joshua to lead His own into that rest, and to maintain them in it. At that day both the heavens and the earth will participate in the sabbath of Jehovah, whose glory shall fill the whole earth throughout the millennial day. This period to which the prophets witness will be the true sabbath when the second Adam, the Son of man, will rule, and both the heavenly and the earthly departments of His kingdom will enjoy this rest.

SON OF MAN

The Lord advanced this claim of Lordship of the sabbath not as the Son of David, nor as the Seed of Abraham, nor as Immanuel, but as the Son of man. “The Son of man is Lord of the sabbath also.”

This title of Christ is remarkable for more reasons than one. In the New Testament it is found almost exclusively in the Gospels. The exceptions are two passages where the Lord is seen in vision and thus named as the future Judge of men (Rev. 1:13; 14:14) in accordance with other scriptures (Dan. 7:13; John 5:27); and a quotation from the Psalms which is used in Hebrews, “What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him?” (Heb. 2:6; Psa. 8:4). Stephen, when arraigned before the Jewish council, also uses it (Acts 7:56). In the Gospels it does not occur in the narrative itself, nor in any utterances made by others either to the Lord or about Him, but is strictly confined to His own sayings. And it is by far the most frequent term applied by the Lord to Himself. Thus in Mark's Gospel “Son” is recorded once (13:32); “Lord” twice (5:19; 11:3); “Christ” once (9:41); “Master” (teacher) once (14:14); “Lord of the sabbath” once (2:28); “King of the Jews” once (15:2); “Sower” twice (4:3, 14); “Master (lord) of the house” once (13:35); “Bridegroom” three times (2:19, 20). But “Son of man” occurs fifteen times, which is more than all the others added together. A similar proportion is found in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, while in John “Son” used alone is more prevalent than “Son of man.”

We may now inquire what is the significance of this title assumed by the Lord. This can only be learned by a careful study of the passages in which the title occurs. And with the intention of providing assistance in such a study the various references in the Synoptic Gospels are collated under headings which indicate their general tenor and form a basis for further research by such readers as are so disposed.

The Lord refers to Himself as the Son of man when

1. Foretelling His betrayal, sufferings and death—Matt. 17:12, 22; 20:18, 28; 26:2, 24, 45; Mark 8:31; 9:12, 31; 10:33, 45; 14:21, 41; Luke 9:22, 44; 18:31; 22:22, 48; 24:7.

2. Foretelling His coming glory and kingdom —Matt. 10:23; 13:41; 16:27, 28; 28 xxiv. 27, 30, 37, 39, 44; xxv.

31; xxvi. 64; Mark 8:38; 13:26; 14:62; Luke 9:26; 12:40; 17:22, 24, 26, 30; 18:8; 21:27.

3. Foretelling His resurrection—Matt. 12:40; 17:9; Mark 9:9; Luke 11:30.

4. Foretelling His session on high—Luke 22:69.

5. Declaring Himself the homeless One—Matt. 8:20; Luke 9:58.

6. Declaring Himself the Forgiver of sins—Matt. 9:6; Mark 2:10; Luke 5:24.

7. Declaring Himself Lord of the sabbath—Matt. 12:8; Mark 2:28; Luke 6:5.

8. Declaring Himself the Savior—[Matt. 11]—Luke 9:56; 19:10.

9. Declaring Himself the Sower—Matt. 13:37.

10. Referring to men's opinion of Him—Matt. 11:19; 12:32; 16:13; Luke 7:34; 12:10.

11. Referring to the confession of His name—Luke 6:22; 12:8.

In the Gospel by John it is recorded that the Lord used the term when speaking of—

1. His death—3:14; 8:28; 12:34.

2. His glorification—i. 51; 12:23; 13:31.

3. His ascension—6:62.

4. His authority to judge—5:27.

5. His personal glory—3:13.

6. Himself as an object of faith—6:27, 53; [9:35].

A consideration of the whole of these references is at this time impracticable; but a cursory glance is sufficient to instruct us that this title is one taken by the Lord in view of the fact that the kingdom of God which He proclaimed was not accepted by the people of Israel. On the contrary, He Himself was met with personal hatred, and in view of the culmination of this hatred in His crucifixion under a coalition of Jews and Gentiles, He adopted the designation of Son of man—a title of wider limits than Son of David. Thus, when Peter, speaking for the other apostles, confessed Him as the Christ, the Lord “charged them that they should tell no man of him. And he began to teach them that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he spake the saying openly” (Mark 8:27-32). And as may be seen from the above classification, a great proportion of the passages in the Gospels containing this term allude to His approaching death. The greater part of the remainder refer to His resurrection, ascension, glorification, and to the future manifestation of His kingdom in judgment and glory, which. will be not only national but universal in its scope. But all the passages coincide to point out this title, though of wider significance than “Messiah,” as that assumed by the Lord in consequence of His rejection by the chosen nation to which He expressly came.

The use of this phrase in the Old Testament corroborates this interpretation of its significance. Passing over the general prophetic sense of the term in Job 25:6; Psa. 8:4; 80:17; Dan. 7:13; it is applied by Jehovah to two of His prophets, viz., Daniel and Ezekiel (Dan. 8:17; Ezek. 2:1, etc.). Now both of these men were raised up as witnesses during the period when the nation, on account of its apostasy from the worship of Jehovah, was under a foreign yoke. Sovereignty was transferred from Israel to the Gentiles, and it is remarkable that these two contemporary servants of God who prophesied outside the land of Israel during the captivity are the only ones who are so designated. So that the Lord, in describing Himself as the Son of man, adopted a title hitherto borne only by prophets in exile. It was even then a title of reproach, inasmuch as it indicated that the nation of Israel, like Esau, renounced the privileges of its birthright. But what was the departure in the day of Daniel and Ezekiel to the departure in the day of the Gospel? Was it not an incomparable privilege that the Messiah should offer Himself to the Jews, insignificant as they were nationally at that period, and enslaved moreover to the Romans? But the people deliberately refused Him,2 whereupon the Lord instructed His followers to proclaim Him no longer in that character (Matt. 16:13-28; Mark 8:30; Luke 9:21), but to know Him as the Son of man who was to pass through the depths of suffering to the heights of glory in the kingdom beyond. This was a difficulty to His disciples then even as it is still; only faith can adequately sustain him who seeks to walk in the pathway of the despised and suffering Son of man.

The Second Man, the Lord from heaven, was in a world different in nature from that in which the First man, Adam, was placed. He was in a world into which sin had entered, and in which it “reigned unto death.” And in this world, when it demonstrated its implacable hostility to all that is divine by refusing to receive Him or to recognize Him, He took the title of Son of man. This title implied that the Servant of Jehovah was in the world outside Eden, the same world into which Cain and Abel, Seth and Enosh were born, begotten in the likeness and image of fallen Adam. But Jesus was “without sin,” Son of man truly, but not son of a man. He was “born of a woman,” but the “Holy Thing” born was the Son of God.

“He was to be the Son of man—a title the Lord Jesus loves to give Himself—a title of great importance to us. It appears to me that the Son of man is, according to the word, the Heir of all that the counsels of God destined for man as his portion in glory, all that God would bestow on man according to those counsels (see Dan. 7:13, 14; Psa. 8:4-6; 80:17; Prov. 8:30, 31). But in order to be the Heir of all that God destined for man, He must be a man. The Son of man was truly of the race of man—precious and comforting truth! born of a woman, really and truly a man, and partaking of flesh and blood, made like unto His brethren.

“In this character He was to suffer, and be rejected, that He might inherit all things in a wholly new estate, raised and glorified. He was to die and rise again, the inheritance being defiled, and man being in rebellion—His co-heirs as guilty as the rest.”

[W. J. H.]

Studies in Mark, Mark: 2:23-28: (18) Servant of Jehovah the Lord of the Sabbath

13.-The Servant of Jehovah the Lord of the Sabbath

“And it came to pass, that he was going on the sabbath day through the cornfields; and his disciples began, as they went,1 to pluck the ears of corn. And the Pharisees said unto him, Behold, why do they on the sabbath day that which is not lawful? And he said unto them, Did ye never read what David did, when he had need, and was an hungered, he, and they that were with him? How he entered into the house of God when Abiathar was high priest, and did eat the shewbread, which it is not lawful to eat save for the priests, and gave also2 to them that were with him? And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for3 man, and not man for4 the sabbath: so that the Son of man is lord even5 of the sabbath” (2:23-28, R.V.).

The Servant of Jehovah is shown by the Evangelist in a variety of circumstances, carrying out in them all the will of God with absolute and unvarying perfection, so that in every recorded word and deed we have for our admiration and humble emulation a living exemplification of divine truth.

We have seen Him at the feast spread by the love of Matthew the publican, having accepted the invitation with that humility which was the wonder of the Pharisees and is the ambition of the believer. But as He thus “goes along with the lowly” we see the Guest become the Host. He will be debtor to none, and in that motley assemblage of self-righteous and self-abased men He dispenses the hospitality of heaven, making them free of truths of the kingdom which the prophets and kings, the Abrahams and Davids of old, had longed in vain to know.

We now see Him a wanderer, and His followers staying their hunger with a few grains of corn, plucked by the wayside. They who had no occasion to fast because the Bridegroom was with them were compelled to fast because the Bridegroom was a rejected one. The Pharisees raised objections to this act of the disciples, as if the law of God were infringed thereby, but the Lord exposed their sophistry by means of the Old Testament scriptures, and accepting His title as the rejected Servant, He asserted the authority of the Son of man as the Lord of the Sabbath.

JESUS IN THE CORNFIELDS

The Lord and those who were with Him were walking in the cornfields on the Sabbath day. We learn from the parable of the Sower that a public way or path often lay through the cornfields, on which indeed some seeds were apt to fall in sowing-time (Mark 4:4). The disciples, as they passed along, began to pluck some of the ears of corn, and, after rubbing them in their hands, to eat the early ripened grain. This act was not regarded as a violation of the law of private property. On the contrary, it was expressly permitted under the Mosaic economy: “When thou comest into thy neighbor's standing corn, then thou mayest pluck the ears with thine hand; but thou shalt not move a sickle unto thy neighbor's standing corn” (Deut. 23:25). Accordingly, in this case we do not find that any protest was raised by the husbandman himself, but the envious and jealous eyes of the Pharisees were upon the little band, and directly they began (Matt. 12:1, 2) to pluck the corn in their hunger, the hostile critics in their indecent haste to find some occasion to condemn the Lord, said to Him, “Behold, why do they on the Sabbath day that which is not lawful?”

The Lord Himself had not participated in the act of the disciples, but He defended them against their accusers. Precious proof of His faithful guardian love for those whom the Father had given Him out of the world! If He is for His own, who can be against them? The time was to come when the little flock would be left alone, and in that future evil day they must gird themselves with the girdle of truth and wield the sword of the Spirit. Now the Master, whose hands had been taught to fight in the wilderness (Psa. 144:1), used the two-edged sword of scripture to overcome these adversaries who sought to fasten upon His followers the stigma of law-breakers.

The reply of Jesus, as recorded by Mark, consists of two distinct portions, each of which is introduced by the words, “And he said unto them.” (1) He appealed to written scripture in support of what was done: “Did ye never read what David did?” etc. (2) He vindicated the act of the disciples on the ground of the origin of the Sabbath, and of His own authority as Lord of the Sabbath. To this two-fold testimony the Pharisees, so far as we learn, returned no reply. We can well believe that, in a greater degree than in the case of the proto-martyr Stephen, “they were not able to withstand the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spake” (Acts 6:10).

In the Gospel by Luke, the same two points raised by the Lord are given, but in Matthew two other points are added, so that His testimony there is shown to have a fourfold character. But this we can now do no more than mention. The Lord there is stated to have cited, in addition to that given by Mark and Luke—(1) the example of the priests serving on the Sabbath day in the temple, executing their duties in the offering of sacrifices and the like, not contrary to, but in accordance with the law, and (2) the declaration of Jehovah through Hosea of His desire for the exercise of His own mercy rather than the reception from man of the sacrifice required by law (Matt. 12:5-7; Hos. 6:6). But of all these things the Pharisee in his religious pride was ignorant, or he would not have condemned the guiltless disciples. This instance afforded a practical illustration of the truth previously declared by the Lord that the old wine-skins of the law could not contain the new wine of the kingdom.

DAVID AND ABIATHAR

Let us consider now this reference—the only one made by the Lord to the history of His ancestor according to the flesh, the great king of Israel—(1) regarding the incident itself, and (2) inquiring what is its application to the event in the cornfields.

David, chosen of God and anointed of Samuel to be king over Israel, was in flight from Saul, who sought to kill him. It was a day when the appointments of Jehovah for His worship and praise in Israel were sadly “out of course.” The ark was at Kirjath-jearim, while the tabernacle was at Nob (1 Sam. 7:2; 2 Sam. 6:2), where the priests were also; and thither David came, a fugitive from the wrath of the king, and famished with hunger. He arrived on the Sabbath day when the priests had changed the twelve loaves of shewbread ("the bread of the face,” or “of the presence") which according to divine instruction were placed on the golden table in the holy place every Sabbath (Ex. 25:30; Lev. 24:5-9). The ritual was therefore proceeding, though there was no ark within the holy of holies—an indication of the manner in which the nation had departed from the center and core of worship as laid down in the beginning of its history. David asked the priest for some of the stale loaves for himself and his companions. This was a bold request, for this hallowed bread, unleavened, anointed with pure frankincense, one of the most holy fire offerings to Jehovah, was eaten in the holy place by the priests only (Lev. 24:7-9). But the priest recognized in the hungry David fleeing from Saul the anointed of Jehovah, and he gave him shewbread, in spite of the evil eyes of Doeg the Edomite, a creature of Saul's, which were upon him (1 Sam. 21:7), and by whose hand the fearful vengeance of the king was speedily wreaked upon Nob and its priestly inhabitants.

It was to the written account of this incident in the life of David that our Lord referred by way of scriptural support of what the disciples had done on the Sabbath. “Did ye never read what David did?” The parallel is clear. The glory of God had departed from the temple, and the Pharisees were despising and rejecting their Messiah, even as David was hunted into exile by the cruel and unrighteous rage of Saul. In that day the letter of the ancient ordinances had to yield to the necessities of him who was the anointed king after God's heart. Of what value then were these petty cavils of the Pharisees who sought to impose grievous burdens contrary to the spirit of the law, and refused to acknowledge either the King or His kingdom? Their objections recoiled to their own condemnation, for were they not to blame because the Lord from heaven was wandering on the Sabbath, with His followers, hungry and homeless? “In the presence of the evil that despises God's beloved and faithful witnesses in the earth, the outward ordinances of the Lord lose their application for the time being. The sanctity of ritual disappears before the rejection of the Lord and His people.” “Granted that the shewbread was only for the priests, yet for them to keep their consecrated bread and let the anointed king starve would be strange homage to God and the king. And now the Son of David, the Lord of David, was there, and more rejected, more despised, than David himself.”

ABIATHAR OR AHIMELECH?

In a divine revelation there must be of necessity difficulties to a finite mind. And in an inspired history extending over many centuries and consisting of events selected and grouped for moral and spiritual instruction, there must indeed be difficulties many of which arise from the omission of connecting links which, though unessential to the divine aim, would nevertheless, if supplied, at once remove the perplexity. An instance of such a difficulty, which is indeed common in all history, occurs in this section of Mark. The Lord's words, as recorded in this Gospel, are, “Did ye never read what David did... how he entered the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest.” In the book of Samuel, David is said to have come to Ahimelech the priest (1 Sam. 21:1), who gave him the bread, and was subsequently massacred with his family by order of Saul (1 Sam. 22:11-19), one of his sons named Abiathar escaping to David, and afterward becoming high priest.

So that apparently the same man is called Ahimelech in one place and Abiathar in another. This constitutes the “difficulty,” and if we were in possession of the whole of the details it would no longer he a difficulty to our intelligence, as it is now none to our faith. We dare not suppose that our Lord was ignorant of the name of the priest at Nob, nor that Mark, who alone of the Evangelists supplies the name, was permitted by the inspiring Spirit to record the words of his Master erroneously. But as the Lord definitely challenged the Pharisees, who were so punctilious as to the letter of scripture, on their reading ("Did ye never read?") we may examine the Old Testament for help. The Lord's words, as we have seen, imply that the truth on this point could have been ascertained by reading.

Now it will be observed from the Historical Books that (1) the same person frequently possessed more than one name, and (2) that the same name frequently recurs in the pedigree of families. It is not therefore an improbable explanation that the priest who succored David bore the joint names of Ahimelech and Abiathar, and that his son, who escaped the massacre at Nob, also bore the same double names. Indeed, the responsible priest at Nob is “called by no less than three names—Ahiah (1 Sam. 14:3, 18), Ahimelech (1 Sam. 21:1-6; 22:9-23); and, as in St. Mark, Abiathar (1 Chron. 18:16; 24:6, 31). The Septuagint gives also the form Abimelech. Moreover, the son of this Ahimelech or Abiathar, who was afterward David's joint High Priest6 with Zadok, was himself also called by both names, viz., Abiathar (1 Sam. 22:20-23; 2 Sam. 15:24-29; 1 Kings 2:26, 27), and Ahimelech (2 Sam. 8:17; 1 Chron. 24:6, 31), or Abimelech (1 Chron. 18:16). Now it has often been remarked that there occur in the Old Testament many instances of double names,7 as Reuel, Jethro, and Hobab; Esau and Edom; Benjamin and Benoni; Gideon and Jerubbaal; Solomon and Jedidiah; Uzziah and Azariah; Zedekiah and Matthaniah (see Patrit. de Evang. L. iii.; Diss. ix. c. 3); but it has scarcely been noticed that the priests especially appear to have borne double names, and that father and son were frequently called by the same names. Yet both these facts are of the utmost value for the passage before us. The following are illustrations—As to the first: In 1 Mac. 2:1-5 is a list of five priests, sons of Mattathias, all with double names. The priestly pedigree of Josephus, from the public records, furnishes several other examples (Jos. Vit. §§ 1, 2). As to the second: It was proposed to call John the Baptist Zechariah ' after the name of his father '; and his father was a priest (Luke 1:5, 59). In Josephus's pedigree, Matthias, one of his priestly ancestors, had a son also called Matthias; whose grandson again was likewise named Matthias, and his son also Matthias (9.). Also, upon the deposition of Joseph Cabi, the High Priesthood was conferred on the son of the famous High Priest Ananus, “who was himself also called Ananus” (Jos. Ant. xx. 9.1). Thus, then, we not only have Old Testament evidence to the fact that the High Priest who gave David the hallowed bread bore the name of Abiathar as well as that of Ahimelech, and his son likewise; but also independent evidence that this possession of double and the same names by father and son in the families of the priests was not an unusual occurrence. With such evidence the alleged historical error of Mark completely vanishes. “8

This explanation seems preferable to that which supposes that the phrase in Mark is elliptical and means “in the days of Abiathar who afterward became high priest.” Abiathar, it is further assumed in this hypothesis, influenced his father to befriend David, and as he alone escaped, this may have been the case.

Seeing that the senior priest at Nob was called Ahimelech and Abiathar, a pertinent inquiry arises why the Lord refers to him as Abiathar instead of Ahimelech, the latter being the name by which he is described in the narrative relating to the shewbread incident.

In connection with this inquiry, it should be remembered that Ahimelech was of the house of Eli, and that house was doomed to extermination by the judgment of God, because of the wickedness at Shiloh (1 Sam. 2:30-33; 3:12-14). In accordance with this judgment, Eli's descendants were all slain at Nob, but with one exception. For God was not unmindful of the mercy of Ahimelech shown to His anointed, and He did not then make a full end of the line of Ithamar, and blot out the posterity of Eli from the earth. Abiathar was spared to be the representative of the junior house of Aaron throughout the reign of David, being subsequently deposed by Solomon in fulfillment of the word of Jehovah spoken concerning the house of Eli in Shiloh (1 Kings 2:27). Abiathar therefore (to use the more frequent name by which he is called who was the companion of David in his exile) preserved the second name of his father Ahimelech throughout the glorious reign of David when the rest of the family were cut off.

In the warning of judgment delivered to Eli by the man of God, he said, “It shall come to pass that every one that is left in thine house shall come and how down to him [Jehovah's anointed] for a piece of silver and a loaf of bread, and shall say, Put me, I pray thee, into one of the priests' offices, that I may eat a morsel of bread” (1 Sam. 2:36). But it came about that Jehovah's anointed begged bread of the descendant of Eli, and as he was not denied, the mercy of God was displayed in the midst of the judgments that fell upon the ungodly house, and a scion of that house held the priestly office while David was upon the throne.

The Lord therefore, in alluding to the act of kindness shown to David by Ahimelech, alludes also to its recognition and reward by Jehovah in a manner familiar to students of God's word by selecting the least obvious of his names, but that name by which his reward is marked in Holy Writ, viz., in the mercy and distinction conferred upon his son Abiathar. The principle of moral and spiritual significance conveyed by the use of the one or the other of double names may be traced elsewhere in scripture. Compare, for example, the use of Jacob and of Israel in the prophecies, and of Simon and of Peter in the Gospels.

It is believed therefore that underlying this alleged historical difficulty there is a truth of great beauty which is seen upon patient inquiry. In addition to the assertion that the Son of David may do what David did, there is the quotation of an example of God's grace shining out in a dark chapter in the annals of the priesthood. We cannot think there was no bread in Nob except the show-bread. But all closed their hearts to David except one, and he helped and honored the true king of Israel when all else despised him. And Jehovah, true to His word spoken to the head of that priestly house, “Them that honor me I will honor,” rewarded his kindness as is recorded. The Lord would have them know that the principle was equally true in their day. If the Pharisees received God's anointed, already rejected by the spirit of the nation, their reward should be great in heaven. The stone of stumbling would assuredly fall in crushing judgment upon the guilty people, but the followers of the Lord in “His temptations” should “sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

[W. J. H.]

Studies in Mark, Mark: 2:18-22: (17) Fasting and Feasting

12.-Fasting and Feasting

“And John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting: and they come and say unto him, Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but thy disciples fast not? And Jesus said unto them, Can the sons of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? as long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken1 away from them, and then will they fast in that day. No man seweth a piece of undressed2 cloth on an old garment: else that which should fill it up3 taketh from it, the new from the old, and a worse rent is made. And no man putteth new wine into old wine-skins: else the wine will burst the skins, and the wine perisheth, and the skins; but they put new wine4 into fresh wine-skins” (2:18-22, R.V.).

(Note: “is poured out,” J.N.D. “is lost,” W.K.)

There seems no sufficient ground to doubt that this question was put to the Lord in the house of Levi, nor that it arose while the feast was still in progress. The previous question related to the relative respectability of the assembly in the house of the tax-gatherer, where Jesus attended as the invited and honored guest. The present question referred to the purpose for which the company was assembled. It was as if they had inquired with some display of zealous piety, Is this a time for eating and drinking and feasting? feebly imitating the indignant question Elisha put to Gehazi, “Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and olive-yards and vineyards, and sheep and oxen, and men-servants and maid-servants?” But unlike Elisha, the zeal of the questioners was without knowledge. The wisdom, however, of the Prophet whom God had raised up “like unto Moses” made the manifested ignorance of this inquiry the occasion for instruction to all.

The questioners in this case embraced John the Baptist's disciples and the Pharisees. John himself was at this time in prison (Mark 1:14), but his followers remained as a distinct body during this and some part, at any rate, of the Lord's ministry (Matt. 11:2; 14:12; John 3:25), and even subsequently (Acts 19:1-4). They were taught by John to pray and to make supplications (Luke 5:33; 11:1), and as their master came eating no bread nor drinking wine (Luke 7:33), so they used often to fast, imitating his austerities. In this they were in unison with the Pharisees, for was it not the proud boast of one of them that he fasted twice in the week (Luke 18:12)? They were on this occasion accompanied therefore by the Pharisees, though, as Matthew tells us, they were the actual spokesmen. “Then come to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not” (Matt. 9:11)?

THE OCCASION OF THE QUESTION

We are not informed in the Gospels why this question was laid before the Lord. But it can hardly be supposed that on the part of the Pharisees there was a sincere desire for instruction. The publicans were entering the kingdom of God (Matt. 21:31), but they were not desirous of learning its principles. They were probably hoping that some word of His might form a basis of attack. On the other hand it is easy to conceive that the disciples of the Baptist might have been presenting to the Lord what was really an insuperable spiritual difficulty to them, founded upon the striking contrast between John and Jesus, which their imperfect knowledge could not reconcile. John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine; the Son of man came eating and drinking. Who was right?

The disciples of John had every confidence in their master. Though he wrought no miracles, they regarded him, and rightly so, as the prophet of the Highest, the forerunner of the Messiah. They were profoundly convinced of the justice of his stern denunciations of the evils prevailing in every social class at that time, though now, in the strange providence of God that voice of testimony was silent in the prison of the oppressor. They believed that the ax was laid at the root of the tree, and everything was ready for the baptism of the fire of Jehovah's judgment (Matt. 3:11, 12). They repented; and was not fasting fruit worthy of repentance? John fasted, and should not the disciples be as their master?

But more than this they were not without the support of scriptural example and precept for the association of fasting with the introduction of the kingdom of Messiah. Truly this support existed more in their own fancies than in reality, but such is often the case in the history of spiritual difficulties. They would remember the long fast of Moses on the occasion of the giving of the law, and of Elijah, in whose spirit John had come, in the days of the restoration of the law. When Zechariah prophesied of the fountain to be opened for sin and uncleanness, and of the deliverance of Jerusalem from the oppression of the Gentiles, did he not prophesy that in that day there should be a great mourning in Jerusalem? The whole land should mourn, every family apart (Zech. 12:9-13:1). Joel also, in view of the imminence of the day of Jehovah, calls the people to fasting and to prayer: “Sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the old men and all the inhabitants of the land unto the house of the LORD your God, and cry unto the LORD” (Joel 1:14; 2:15).

These and other scriptures in connection with the introduction of the kingdom, which they believed to be at hand, might well cause them to wonder when they saw a feast not a fast proclaimed, and sanctioned by the presence of Jesus Himself, while sinners were not cut off in judgment but made welcome at this feast which was proceeding at the very time of one of their own fasts. What was the explanation? They sought instruction of the great Prophet of wisdom. “Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but thy disciples fast not?”

THE TERMS OF THE ANSWER

The solution of their difficulty was simple, and in like manner all our difficulties vanish as the light of God shines upon them. They had fallen into the common error of thinking of the coming kingdom and of forgetting that the King was already present with them. They were absorbed with the adjustment of the Bridegroom's affairs, and overlooking the Bridegroom Himself. They were full of the sense of their own guilt as sinners, and ignorant of the presence of the Savior of sinners. There is a time to fast and a time to feast. The question really was which of these was seasonable, and this the Lord settles in His own inimitable way, revealing the truth concerning Himself in simple and homely figures such as all might understand.

He was among them as One to serve them all in love, not in the majesty of His might to condemn; with the branch of olive, not with the rod of iron; as the Bridegroom, not as the Judge. “Can,” said He, “the sons of the bride-chamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? as long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. But the days will come when the bridegroom shall have been taken away from them, and then will they fast in that day.”

It was clearly incongruous for there to be, from whatever motive, fasting in the presence of a bridegroom. The nuptial season is, by common consent, one associated with joy, from the days of Adam and Eve in Eden. And the disciples of John had to learn that the Lord Jesus was presenting Himself to the daughter of Zion in the character of her Bridegroom, come to betroth Himself to her “in righteousness and in judgment, and in loving-kindness and in mercies,” according to the spirit of the prophecies of Hosea. God had raised up a Horn of salvation for His people; was it therefore a day for a man to afflict his soul, to bow his head like a bulrush, to cover himself with sackcloth and ashes? Was not the “Magnificat” of Mary (Luke 1:46-55) more suitable to their lips than the Lamentations of Jeremiah, since the Servant of Jehovah was in their midst—He who had come to give a garland for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness (Isa. 61:3)?

There is reason to think that these men had heard this figure of the Bridegroom applied to the Messiah on a previous occasion. They spoke to John with reference to the numbers of persons whom they saw coming to Jesus. John showed them that he was aware that this was, and must he, the case, saying also in explanation, “He that hath the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice; this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:29, 30). The Baptist compared himself to the friend of the Bridegroom, showing that he was conscious that Jesus was present in that character though he himself was His friend, rather than of the bride. For like Moses upon Pisgah, he discerned the promised kingdom and its glories near at hand, yet not for him. Like aged Simeon he would depart, having seen the King in His beauty.

The Lord now confirmed the application of this prophetic figure by John, their master, to Himself, as if to awaken a sense of allegiance to Him as the Bridegroom of Israel. Had not John pointed to Him, saying to them, “Behold the Lamb of God"? But they had not responded. Had he not spoken of Him as the Bridegroom? But still they fasted and prayed and held aloof from Him to whom John witnessed. The Lord did not definitely call them to follow Him as He called Peter and Andrew, James and John, and Levi the publican, for they lacked that appreciation of Himself which would have impelled them to instant obedience. But He set before them that truth concerning Himself which, when received by faith, would inevitably draw them unto Him.

AN OCCASION FOR FASTING TO COME

While the disciples of the Lord had at that time adequate reasons for rejoicing, inasmuch as the Hope of Israel was with them, the days would darken again before the millennial dawn. The Bridegroom would be taken away; then they would have reason to fast. Thus did the Lord, early in His ministry, intimate to His own, in veiled but significant language, that He must be removed from their midst, and, in consequence, a sorrow should fill their hearts which would be turned into joy only at His second coming (see John 16:17-22).

The coming days, characterized by the absence of the Bridegroom, are strictly those which immediately precede His public appearing for the blessing of Israel and the nations generally. Those will be days of unparalleled tribulation for the Jews, of such an intensely violent nature that if they were protracted none could be saved (Matt. 24:21, 22). Then the faithful ones might well fast.

So the Lord instructs them subsequently in more definite terms (Mark 13), but here imparts so much of the truth as was needful to meet the difficulty raised. The Lord was with them, and in this they were authorized to rejoice, as they would be constrained to do by the affections of their hearts towards Him.

The Lord did not condemn fasting as a practice. He instructed His disciples that it should be undertaken in secret, as before God, rather than before men (Matt. 6:16-18). It was to be united with prayer for the effectual expulsion of unclean spirits in certain cases (Mark 9:29). There was a season of prayer and fasting in the early church when Paul and Barnabas went forth on their first missionary tour (Acts 13:3). Nothing in scripture appears to warrant the present general abandonment of the practice by Christians, though indeed there is a sense in which we may say the Lord is still with us (Matt. 28:20). Self-denial in the spirit of Nazariteship, of which food-fasting is but a single phase, should, however, be practiced by the believer habitually and not only on special occasions.

Fasting appears to be expressive of an occupation of the spiritual nature with heavenly subjects to such an intense degree that the instinctive cravings of the physical nature for food and relaxation are disregarded or unheeded for the time. In its purest form therefore fasting is involuntary. It is surely needless to say that the perfunctory or the Pharisaic fast is valueless before God.

THE OLD AND NEW CONTRASTED

The Lord, in taking up the question of the apparent incongruity between His disciples and John's, used it as an occasion for general instruction as to the contrast in principle between the dispensation that was passing away and that which was about to come. That was old; this was new. The two differed in nature and character—both externally and internally. This essential contrast the Lord placed before them in the simple and homely metaphors of the cloth and the wine, with the absence of affinity between new and old in both cases. “No man seweth a piece of undressed [unmilled] cloth on an old garment: else that which should fill it up taketh from it, the new from the old, and a worse rent is made. And no man putteth new wine into old wine-skins: else the wine will burst the skins, and the wine perisheth, and the skins; but new wine must be put into fresh wine-skins.”

In the first case a worn-out and torn garment is rendered still more unserviceable by a patch of new cloth—the newness itself causing a further breach. In like manner, unless new wine is put into fresh unused skins (or leather bottles) the skins burst5 and both the wine and the skins are lost.

The joys of the promised kingdom are associated in the prophets with the introduction of what is absolutely new and created of God, not with the rehabilitation of the old things. Thus we read in Isaiah, “Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former things shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice forever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying” (Isa. 65:17-19). Nothing can be newer than a created thing. And the principle is true in Christianity, even as it will be in the coming millennial day. “If any man is in Christ, there is a new creation; the old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor. 5:17).

The dispensational truths underlying the emblems of the cloth and the wine are fully revealed in subsequent parts of the New Testament. That outward righteousness which is of the law is replaced by that which is of faith. And the joys of the “vine of the earth” give way to those of the “True Vine,” who bestows the inward power and comfort of the Holy Ghost, a source of joy of which no one can rob us. Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews particularly deal with these contrasts.

“It is not possible to attach the spiritual power of Christianity to the carnal ceremonies which human nature loves, because it can make of them a religion without a new life, and without the conscience being touched. The unconverted man, if he wishes, may thus do as much good as the converted man. No, the new wine must be kept in new bottles: it is important for us to remember it. The dispensation was changed, a new order was coming in, and all was altered; the nature of the things was different—they could not exist at the same time; fleshly ceremonies and the power of the Holy Ghost could never go together. Think of it, Christians! Christianity has tried to embellish itself with these ceremonies, and often even under pagan forms; and what has it become? It has adapted itself to the world of which these forms were the rudiments, and has become really pagan, and its true spirituality can hardly be found at all.”

[W. J. H.]

Studies in Mark, Mark: 2:13-17: (16) Publicans Enter the Kingdom

11.-Publicans Enter the Kingdom

“And he went forth again by the sea side; and all the multitude resorted unto him, and he taught them. And as he passed by he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the place of toll, and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him.

“And it came to pass that he was sitting at meat in his house, and many publicans and sinners sat down with Jesus and his disciples: for there were many, and they followed him. And the scribes of the Pharisees when they saw that he was eating with the sinners and the publicans, said unto his disciples, He eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners. And when Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, they that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners1 (2:13-17, R.V.).

The Evangelist as directed by the inspiring Spirit proceeds to set forth the character of the ministry of Jesus the Servant-prophet. He had been announcing the imminence of the kingdom of God (1:14-15). He had by many incontestable proofs shown that the healing mercies of Jehovah were in their midst in His own person (1:16-39). But the people had heedless ears and callous hearts and the striking cases of the cleansed leper and the restored paralytic awakened the religious wisdom of the day. only to prefer a malicious charge of blasphemy against Him as the Forgiver of sins (1:40-2:12).

When the benign grace of God is met by the churlish resistance of man it seeks to extend its limits. The Savior came bringing grace and truth to the favored nation, but since the scribes and Pharisees would not have His boon, He would show that the nature of this grace was such that it embraced not only the despised Galilean, but 'the still more despised publican. Mark shows this development in the Lord's ministry by the account of the call of Levi, and by the subsequent feast at which many tax-collectors and sinners were present as welcome guests.

(“came,” J.N.D.; “kept coming,” J.N.D., note.)

(“passing by,” J.N.D.)

(“tax-office,” J.N.D.)

(“lay at table,” J.N.D.; W.K.)

(“tax-gatherers,” J.N.D.; W.K,)

(“and Pharisees,” J.N.D.

(““Why is it,” J.N.D.; “How is it,” W.K.)

(“strong,” J.N.D.; W.K.)

(“ill,” J.N.D.; W.K.)

(“have not come,” J.N.D.; W.K.)

THE CALL OF THE TAX-COLLECTOR

Jesus left Capernaum and passed on to the shores of the Sea of Galilee where He was teaching the crowds that flocked to Him. Here was the Government custom-house, where various tolls and dues were collected either for Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee, or for the Romans. The persons responsible for the collection of these taxes were, in many, if not in all, instances, Jews. On this account, as well as because of the natural repugnance of most men to pay taxes at all, the “publicans” were regarded by their country-men as an odious and hateful class. In the performance of their duties they had ample opportunities for oppression and extortion, to their own personal enrichment (Luke 3:13). Such abuses naturally aggravated the hatred generally felt towards them. All, however, were not equally oppressive, and Zacchaeus evidently was an exception to the general rule, for he seems to have been of just and generous habits (Luke 19:8).

As Jesus passed along he saw Levi, the son of Alphaeus, sitting at the place of toll. Addressing him, the Master said, Follow Me. And in instant response Levi arose and followed Him.

As in the case of Simon and Andrew (1:16-18), there was probably on the part of Levi some previous knowledge of the Lord and His teaching. They, as John 1 shows, had made a confession of Him some time before they were called to go after Him. Levi no doubt had heard His preaching and witnessed His miracles in Capernaum. For aught we know to the contrary he may have been one of those publicans who “justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John,” and thus confessedly was one of those waiting for the Redeemer of Israel (Luke 3:12; 7:29). But his difficulty would be whether he who was considered to be no better than a Gentile2 might dare to appropriate the blessings of the promised kingdom. Like his fellow who could not lift up so much as his eyes in the temple (Luke 18:13), this man could not lift up his eyes to Him who was greater than the temple.

But the Searcher of hearts was passing by. He who knew the vain thoughts of the scribes and Pharisees knew also the timid desires of the publican. He who saw Nathanael under the fig-tree, had seen Levi at the toll-booth. And the Lord of love summoned him who was already a disciple in heart to be His follower in the open light of day. At once he arose and left all, as Luke tells us, reclaimed thus from the service of the Roman to that of King Immanuel, who in this manner collected His dues by the Sea of Galilee.

LEVI AND MATTHEW

Some have found a difficulty in determining whether Levi the publican and Matthew the apostle were the same person. There is, however, no sufficient reason to doubt their identity. In the lists of the apostles given in the Synoptic Gospels, Matthew is named in each of them. And Mark and Luke, in narrating the call of the publican, both give him the name of Levi. The obvious inference from these passages is that, like other of the apostles, the man had two names, Matthew being his most usual, if not his only, designation after his call to the discipleship of Jesus.

In the first Gospel, Matthew, writing of the same eventful call, ascribes it to a man named Matthew (Matt. 9:9), thus indicating his own origin with the utmost candor and humility, and by the avoidance of the name Levi preventing any possible confusion as to his identity. It is granted that a crooked worldly policy animated by motives of short-sighted prudence might cause an author to conceal such a fact about himself; but he who was inspired to include the names of Tamar and Bathsheba in the genealogy of the Messiah (Matt. 1) would be preserved from the petty meanness of concealing the fact that one of the Lord's apostles was a tax-collector. “Whom do we hear to blazon the shame of Matthew but his own mouth? Matthew the Evangelist tells us of Matthew the publican. His fellows call him Levi, as unwilling to lay their finger upon the spot of his unpleasing profession; himself will not smother nor blanch it a whit, but publishes it to all the world in a thankful recognition of the mercy that called him, as liking well that his baseness should serve for a fit foil to set off the glorious luster of His grace by whom he was elected. What matters it how vile we are, O God, so Thy glory may arise in our abasement?” The truth is that Matthew bore two names; so “Thomas is called Didymus by John only; and Thaddeus (or Lebbeus as in Matthew and Mark) is called Judas by Luke and John.” But while the identity of Matthew and Levi may be considered as well established, it is the merest conjecture to regard Alphaeus, the father of Levi, as identical with the father of James (Matt. 10:4), and with Cleophas (John 19:25). THE FEAST IN MATTHEW'S HOUSE Soon after the call of the fishermen Jesus went to the house of Simon and Andrew (i. 29). He is now shown as the guest of Levi the publican. “And Levi made him a great feast in his house; and there was a great multitude of publicans and of others that were sitting at meat with them” (Luke 5:29). The King is not the host here, for He has not yet taken possession of His own. Solomon in the day of his power made a feast to all his servants (1 Kings 3:15), but He who was a greater than Solomon had no place to lay His head. He who in a coming day will make in mount Zion for “all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined” (Isa. 25:6), was well content to be entertained by the tax-gatherer. And what a company were seen at the banquet that day! The Son of man had power on earth to forgive sins; hence sinners were welcome to Him who came to cleanse them from their sins. Levi the publican could testify to the grace that called him to be a follower of Jesus; hence, other publicans felt this to be a sufficient ground for believing that if they also came He would in no wise cast them out. We find therefore that a goodly company responded to the invitation of Levi, and came to eat and drink with Him. “O happy publicans and sinners who found out their Savior! O merciful Savior that disdained not publicans and sinners!” They found Him to be indeed the “Friend of publicans and sinners,” “a Friend sticking closer than a brother,” and it is good to read that at the close of the feast

“many followed Him,” sinners as they were, fitted and made meet to follow the Sinless One into His kingdom.

MURMURS AT THE FEAST

The unbelieving and sinful generation that murmured of old in the wilderness at the heavenly manna murmured now in the presence of the Bread of God come down from heaven to fill with good things those who were hungry and thirsty after righteousness. The Pharisaic scribes said to the disciples, “How is it he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners?”

It will be observed how the gradual development of evil opposition to the Lord is presented to us. In the previous incident we are shown the mental comment, the inward suspicion, the evil surmise of the Pharisees; and also how the Lord graciously corrected this, rebuking them before all that others might fear. Now we see that the sinful thought of foolishness became the spoken back-biting word of these men unrestrained and unabashed in the presence of Him who had laid bare the thought and intents of their hearts. The word of the Pharisees, however, was spoken not to the Lord Himself, but to the disciples, reminding us of the wily serpent in Eden who directed his assaults upon Adam through Eve, the weaker vessel. They, avoiding Jesus Himself, sought to bring the Master into discredit with His followers by their question, “How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners?” It was a whisper in their ears to turn away their hearts, even as Absalom sought to turn away the hearts of the people from David.

But the Lord was watchful over His own. It was not yet the time to put words of wisdom into their mouths to speak for Him as His witnesses. (Matt. 10:19). But He answered for them, confuting the sophistry of the scribes. “They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.” It was in this manner that the two-edged sword of truth proceeded out of His mouth for their moral judgment. For why was it they failed to receive their Messiah? Because in their own estimation they did not need such a one as He. Why complain then that those who did feel their need of such a Savior came to Him and were made welcome? What sort of a physician is he who refuses to minister to any but the hale and the hearty?

The Lord then definitely announced that He was come not to call the righteous (i.e. those who were righteous in their own eyes; indeed otherwise there is none righteous, no, not one), but sinners. These who responded should be washed, sanctified, justified, and made inheritors of the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-11), but those who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others, except they repented, would most assuredly perish in their sins.

In Matthew it is stated that the Lord vindicated His reception of the moral outcasts by a quotation from the prophet Hosea: “Go ye,” He said, “and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice” (Matt. 9:13; Hos. 6:6). It was the promise of God that when man was in a resourceless case, He would exercise His prerogative of mercy. The Lord accordingly was in the midst of Israel not to receive sacrifice but to show mercy. For it is suggested that this is the significance of the passage, rather than a rebuke to formalism and religious ceremonialism which some see in it.

According to the latter interpretation the sentence is a declaration that God desires not the sacrifices of the law but the merciful deeds of man to his fellow-creatures. But while this statement is true in itself, and indeed expressed in other portions of Scripture, the words of the prophet as used here by the Lord show that in receiving publicans and sinners He was performing the divine function of displaying mercy, which was in accordance with the will of God, rather than the offering of sacrifice by those whose hearts were far from God, like the Pharisees. It was for the remission, not for the judgment of sins, that the Servant of Jehovah, the “dayspring from on high,” had visited His people; and His mission emanated from the tender mercy [the heart of mercy] of God Himself (Luke 1:78). While it abides true that judgment shall overtake every evil work, it was shown in the house of Levi the tax-gatherer how the mercy of God gloried against judgment.

[W. J. H.]

Studies in Mark, Mark: 2:1-12: (15) Publicans Enter the Kingdom

10.-Out of Weakness Made Strong (continued)

Forgiveness of Sins

It is remarkable that the Lord in His ministry in only one other recorded instance deals with the question of the forgiveness or remission of sins. To the penitent woman, in Simon the Pharisee's house, He said definitely, “Thy sins are forgiven” (Luke 7:48). There were thus two witnesses to His power on earth to forgive sins according to the prophecy of Zacharias (Luke 1:77). This blessed work was hindered by the obduracy and impenitence of the people. But after His crucifixion and the shedding of the blood of the new covenant for the remission of sins, He is presented anew in this character. Peter testified concerning this: “Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior for to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:31). And this grace is not for Israel alone, but for all that believe. This Paul declared in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch: “Through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by him all that believe are justified from all things” (Acts 13:38, 39).

Such was the wider and fuller tide of blessing for man which was ensured by the death of Christ. But here was a sample of this function performed by the Person deputed to forgive, the blood-basis of the act having not yet been laid. The cleansing of the leprosy and the healing of the paralytic, coupled with the forgiveness of sins, were indisputable evidence that the Servant-Prophet of Jehovah was present in Galilee exercising divine prerogatives in His own right. Was not the Psalm familiar to their ears, “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits; who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases"1 (Psa. 103:2, 3)? There was now an exemplification of this mercy before their eyes which could not be dissociated from Jesus of Nazareth as the One who was acting. In point of fact, Israel did not know nor consider, but this Servant of God patiently accumulated evidences of His mission which would leave the nation without excuse.

Are the Lord's words to be regarded as a benevolent wish on His part that the sick man's sins may eventually be forgiven? Not so; but rather as a positive declaration that they were then and thereby forgiven ("Thy sins are forgiven"); and the Lord intended that the sufferer should understand His words in this unequivocal sense. At any rate, the scribes understood the words in this sense, and they, in consequence,

brought the charge of blasphemy against Him: “Why doth this man thus speak? he blasphemeth? Who can forgive sins but one, even God?” It is evident they regarded the words as a positive expression of fact, and not a hope for future pardon, such as any one might compassionately utter on behalf of another.

It may be asserted that the disease of this man's body was an infliction upon him in consequence of some particular sins of which he had been guilty. God sent such temporal judgments in His government of the people of Israel, as the scripture testifies in many parts. For instance, at the repeated murmuring of the nation in the wilderness Jehovah smote them with a plague2 (Num. 11:32, 33; Psa. 78:31). In New Testament times it was so also in the assembly at Corinth, where many were in sickness and some even slept, because of their transgression (1 Cor. 11:30; see also James 5:14-16). The Lord recognized afflictions of this judicial character in the case of the impotent man of Bethesda, to whom He said after His cure, “Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee” (John 5:14).

If it be so, that the Lord's declaration of forgiveness had reference only to that portion of the man's sins for which his paralysis was a temporal chastisement under the hand of God, and not to the sum total of his guilt as a sinner, the principle still holds good. It is equally the exclusive prerogative of God to release a man from the temporal, as it is from the eternal, consequence of his sins. Sin is an offense against God, and therefore He only can remit it. By divine mercy the sins of Saul of Tarsus, the chief of sinners, were forgiven; by that same mercy alone, the thorn in the flesh could be removed from Paul the apostle (1 Tim. 1:15; 2 Cor. 12:7).

True were the words of the scribes, “Who can forgive sins but one, even God"; but false was their assumption that He who had just spoken was not God. He was God “manifest in the flesh,” as He proved so often before their eyes. But all human reasoning founded upon disbelief in the person of Christ must not only he false but evil. He alone is the Truth, and He is also the Life, and the Way to the Father.

SPEAKING BLASPHEMY

Blasphemy in Holy Scripture, while sometimes used for evil speech against man, has reference also to evil speaking against or about God. The mental charge of blasphemy made against our Lord on this occasion was due to the assumption of the scribes that He usurped one of the attributes of Godhead by pronouncing absolution of sins. His claim to be the Son of God was so regarded by the Jews; as the Lord said to them, “Say ye of him whom the Father hath sanctified and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest, because I said, I am the Son of God?” (John 10:33, 36). At the trial Caiaphas said to Jesus, “I adjure thee by the living God that thou tell us whether thou he the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said; nevertheless I say unto you, Henceforth ye shall see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power and coming on the clouds of heaven. Then the high priest rent his garments, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? Behold, now ye have heard the blasphemy. What think ye? They answered and said, He is worthy of death” (Matt. 26:63-66; Mark 14:64, New Tr.).

While these references illustrate the use of the term by the Jews, the Lord Himself applies it to the disparagement of God the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:31; Mark 3:28, 29; Luke 12:10). The term is also used for the calumniation of men, and of Jesus on the cross (Luke 22:65; 23:39), and is translated variously as “evil speaking,” “railing,” “being defamed,” etc. Its seriousness as a sin is correlated to the dignity of the person slandered or blasphemed—a distinction fully recognized by human laws.

SON OF MAN

It is to be noted that in this connection we have the first recorded use of this title of our Lord in this Gospel and also in Luke—the power of the Son of man to forgive sins. In Matthew it first occurs in the sentence, “The Son of man hath not where to lay his head” (Matt. 8:20). The title is frequently applied by the blessed Lord to Himself, but is never applied to Him by others, nor by the Evangelists themselves. Stephen testified, however, that he saw the “Son of man standing on the right hand of God” (Acts 7:56). And in the Apocalyptic visions John saw the Son of man in His capacity as Judge (Rev. 1:13; 14:14). It does not occur at all in the Epistles, except once in a quotation from the Psalms (Heb. 2:6).

This title, “Son of man,” by its terms suggests a wider sphere than is suggested by “Son of David” and “Son of Abraham.” It implies universal headship, as Heb. 2 shows, and was adopted by the Lord in view of His rejection by the Jews as the Messiah. Son of a man He was not, but Son of man He was, and when on earth He could say, “The Son of man which is in heaven” (John 3:13 Cor. 15:47). In Daniel His universal dominion is prophesied of under this title: “I saw in the night visions, and behold, one like unto the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom that all the peoples, nations and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed” (Dan. 7:13, 14). As Son of man He has power to execute judgment on sins as well as to forgive them (John 5:27).

In the prophetic communications to Ezekiel, the title, “Son of man,” is frequently employed by Jehovah when addressing the prophet. It is also used once in addressing Daniel (Dan. 8:7), but they never apply it to themselves. Both Ezekiel and Daniel were prophets of the exile, and ministered away from Judah, which was under the power of the Gentiles. The Lord too, as the despised Servant-Prophet, ministering in “Galilee of the Gentiles,” assumed this title, proving His authority to forgive sins, not as Jehovah of Psa. 103, or as the Messiah of Israel, but as the Son of man. [W. J. H.]

(To be continued)

Studies in Mark, Mark: 2:1-12: (14) Out of Weakness Made Strong

10.-Out of Weakness Made Strong

“And when he entered1 again into Capernaum after some days, it was noised2 that he was in the house3. And many were gathered4 together, so that there was no longer room for them, no, not even about the door; and he spake5 the word unto them. And they come, bringing unto him a man sick of the palsy, borne of four. And when they could not come nigh unto him for the crowd, they uncovered the roof where he was; and when they had broken it up6, they let down the bed7 whereon the sick of the palsy lay. And Jesus seeing their faith saith

unto the sick of the palsy, Son8, thy sins are forgiven.

“But there were certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts, Why doth this man thus speak? he blasphemeth: who can forgive sins but one, even God?

“And straightway Jesus, perceiving9 in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, saith unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts? Whether10 is easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins are forgiven; or to say, Arise and take up thy bed and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power11 on earth to forgive sins (he saith to the sick of the palsy), I say unto thee, Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house. And he arose, and straightway took up the bed, and went forth12 before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion13“ (Mark 2:1-12, R.V.).

Here we have the account of another of the numerous “mighty works” of our Lord performed in that particularly favored town, Capernaum. This town, whose name signifies the city of comfort or consolation, seems to have been the chosen center from which the Lord proceeded upon His various itineraries. It is called by Matthew “His own city” (Matt. 9:1), and it was there, presumably because it was His place of residence, that the tax-collectors exacted tribute from Him (Matt. 17:24).

After some days of retirement in desert places, following upon the cleansing of the leper, Jesus came to town again and entered the house privately—possibly the house of Simon and Andrew. His arrival was quickly reported, and the news traveled rapidly throughout the town and district, so that He was soon sought out by the crowds in Capernaum, as He had been in the desert places.

The Lord continued His work of teaching, as the Sower sowing the good seed of the word of the kingdom, and as the righteous Servant of Jehovah instructing the masses in righteousness (Isa. 53:11, New Tr.). Besides the simple unlettered peasantry of Galilee His audience, on a certain day at any rate, included Pharisees and teachers of the law who had come out of every town in Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem (Luke 5:17; Mark 3:22). Were these emissaries of the priests to whom the cleansed leper presented himself, and charged by them to make official inquiries concerning Jesus and His work? We indeed are not told so, but we are told (1) that this healed man was sent as a witness to the leaders of the people, and (2) that immediately afterward hostility to the Servant of God had begun to work in their hearts.

Eagerness to see and hear something novel brought together then, as always, a great concourse of persons, whose interest was intensified not only by the fame of Jesus and His miracles, but also by the visit of the nation's great ones from the metropolis and from the large towns of the provinces. Every means of access to the Master who sat indoors teaching was in consequence filled by excited crowds straining to hear a word or to catch a glimpse of what was being done.

There must necessarily have been disappointment for many that day, and it would seem that one of the least likely in Capernaum to receive benefit on this occasion from the great Healer was the paralyzed man, whose infirmity confined him to his bed. This man had an earnest desire in his heart to seek the face of Jesus, whom he believed could relieve him, as He had done many others. His faith was shared especially by four devoted friends14, who carried him upon his bed to the house where Jesus was. These were accompanied by others, as Mark's narrative shows— “they came, bringing a paralytic, borne of four.” At the house further advance seemed impossible, for the courtyard and every avenue of approach was blocked by interested persons who showed no disposition to make room for the sick man and his bearers. But what so dauntless as earnest and purposeful faith such as this! They, the sufferer agreeing to endure the pain to himself which the scheme involved, ascended by an outside flight of stairs to the flat roof of the house (cp. Matt. 24:17), where they proceeded to remove the tiling or the thin stone roofing (not at all a difficult task, and its repair an easy matter), and to lower the paralytic upon his bed, through the opening thus made, in to the presence of the Master.

The act was a bold and beautiful strategem of faith, arising not from a spirit of bravado, but from real confidence in the grace and power of Him whose presence they sought, coupled with a sense of the needed mercy. The faith was that of the five, for the action was concerted. And this the Lord saw, and approved what might have seemed to most brusque and ill-timed. It was indeed an offering to the Lord, even as the Jews will be in a future day when they are brought to Jehovah out of all the nations “upon horses and in chariots, and in litters, and upon mules, and upon swift beasts” to the holy mountain Jerusalem for blessing in their land (Isa. 66:20).

In this instance the Lord did not wait for the suppliant to frame his petition, nor did He say, as to the blind man, “What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?” He gave him the boon and more, going down to deep-seated needs the man, so far as we know, had never realized. Addressing the sick of the palsy in tender and affectionate terms, Jesus said, “Son15, thy sins are forgiven.”

The critical portion of the audience, seeing no visible effect following these words, drew adverse conclusions immediately, and in their hearts set down the Lord as a blasphemer— “Why doth this man thus speak? he blasphemeth. Who can forgive sins but God only?”

But Jesus was present not only as the One to pardon iniquities and heal diseases (Psa. 103:3), but also as the One who searches the hearts, tries the reins and knows the inmost thoughts (Psa. 94:11; Jer. 17:10). He who saw the faith of the five men perceived the reasonings of the scribe's in His own omniscient spirit (cp. John 2:24; 6:61), and not by a power temporarily imparted to Him, as might have been the case with a prophet. None but God could penetrate the secret workings of man's spirit, as Solomon confessed in his prayer (1 Kings 8:39 Chron. 28:9; 2 Chron. 6:30; Ezek. 11:5), and the Lord gave the Pharisees the proof of the nature of His person by answering their thoughts. Who else could “hear them thinking"?

The Lord thereupon addressed those who were inwardly caviling at His words in terms which shed the light of God upon their hearts, revealing their secret thoughts: “Why reason ye these things in your hearts? Whether is easier to gay to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins are forgiven; or to say, Arise and take up thy bed and walk?” The crucial point was not the actual words uttered, but what result was consequent upon their utterance. And the Lord proceeded to give them a visible assurance that His word was living and powerful, as He had just shown it to be “sharper than a two-edged sword.” He demonstrated its power over physical infirmity, that by analogy its power to dispense pardon to the guilty might be known. The Master then continued, “But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins (he saith to the sick of the palsy), I say unto thee, Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house.”

The effect of these words addressed in His own authority ("I say unto thee"), and not speaking as a delegate, was instantaneous upon the paralytic man. His useless limbs were strengthened, so that he arose immediately; and so hale was he that he was able, as incontestable evidence of his thorough restoration, to take up the pallet or mattress upon which he had been brought to Jesus and to carry it away in

presence of them all. What previously was a proof of his weakness, became thus a witness to his strength.

The miracle too was an undeniable testimony to the claims of the One then in Capernaum. The company was deeply impressed by the sight. They were all amazed and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion. Israel by-and-by will see and believe on the evidence of sight. But the Lord said, “Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed” (John 20:29), and this applies to the Christian to-day (1 Peter 1:8). [W. J. H.]

(To be continued)

Studies in Mark, Mark: 1:40-45: (13) The Leper Touched and Cleansed

9.-The Leper Touched and Cleansed

“And there cometh to him a leper, beseeching him, [and kneeling down to him], and saying unto him, If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And being moved with compassion, he stretched forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou made clean. And straightway the leprosy departed from him, and he was made clean. And he strictly charged him, and straightway sent him out; and saith unto him, See thou say nothing to any man; but go thy way, show thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing the things which Moses commanded,1 for a testimony unto them. But he went out2, and began to publish 3 it much, and to spread abroad the matter, insomuch that Jesus could no more openly enter into a city4, but was without in desert places; and they came to him from every quarter5“ (i. 40-45, R.V.).

We now approach what may be regarded as a new section in the general scheme of Mark's Gospel. And in this section the incident of the healed paralytic which immediately follows, is coupled with that of the cleansed leper. The change in subject here will be the more readily seen after a brief review of the preceding portions of this first chapter. It has been observed (1) how this Gospel opens by stating circumstantially the credentials of Jesus Christ, the Servant of Jehovah (vers. 1-13); going on to record (2) His public announcement of the good news that God's kingdom was at hand (vers. 14, 15); (3) His association of others with Him in His ministry (vers. 16-21); (4) His zealous and active beneficence in Capernaum, and indeed throughout Galilee, among those possessed of evil spirits, and those diseased in body (vers. 22-39). And the last-named account of this service of the Lord on the Sabbath and the first of the week is stated in such terms that it forms a tableau of the coming millennial day with its deliverance from temporal ills, which is connected in the prophecies with the personal presence of Jehovah's Servant, and which will be preceded by the casting of Satan into the abyss where he will be bound for a thousand years (Rev. 20).

Now the Evangelist passes on to illustrate how the Lord was present to relieve a deeper and more serious human need than any yet mentioned. His Galilaean ministry was in the preceding narrative shown to comprise the healing of the sick and the deliverance of those oppressed by the devil. But besides this the nation was legally and morally defiled, and moreover sin had wrought such inherent weakness in the people that, unable to come of themselves, they needed to be brought to the feet of the divine Healer. Two typical cases—the leper and paralytic—are therefore selected for the exemplification of the perfect suitability of the Servant of the Lord to remedy the existing state of physical and spiritual evil among men, the physical being used as a type of the spiritual according to the frequent custom in the Gospels, and in this way illustrating by concrete example the word of the kingdom which Jesus preached.

Before proceeding to consider the solemn significance of the former of these two incidents, it may be well to note that in the third gospel also, the same combination occurs. The healing of the leper and then of the palsied man are there given previous to the account of the call of Levi (Luke 5:12-26). In Matthew, however, the historical order, which is evidently that found in Mark and Luke, is not followed, but the events are set in that connection which most vividly portrays the Kingship of Jesus. There the healing of the leper is placed after that manifesto of the new order of things in the coming kingdom, commonly known as the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 8:1-4), although in point of time the miracle was wrought previously, as Luke shows. And this miracle is followed in Matthew by the healing of the centurion's servant, and of Peter's wife's mother, the stilling of the tempest and the casting out of the demons which then entered the herd of swine. All these events are named before the cure of the palsied man (Matt. 9:1-8), and are followed by the call of the tax-gatherer.

Without now considering the significance of this chronological displacement of details, it is sufficient to note that Matthew gives a fuller and more varied array of witnesses to the character of Messiah's coming kingdom than was needful in Mark. Here we have only two witnesses cited, whose joint testimony, however, is as valid as that of a more numerous company.

THE CURE OF THE LEPER

The Evangelist describes the cure of the leper in graphic terms, as is characteristic of him. We are called to behold the afflicted outcast coming to Jesus, not standing “afar off” like the leprous ten (Luke 17:12), but in his eagerness approaching Him of whose great power in the kingdom of pain he had heard. With mute entreaties the poor sufferer, “full of leprosy,” as Luke tells us he was, beseeches the Master to exercise His pity and His power. In the intensity of his emotion he threw himself upon his knees6 before the Lord in that attitude which is so significant at once of reverence and dependence. Then the kneeling suppliant framed his petition in the brief words which are recorded without variation by the Synoptists, save that Matthew and Luke add the term of address, “Lord.” He does not say, as the fervor of his actions might lead us to expect he would have said, “Have mercy on me,” or, “Heal me; cleanse me"; but he expresses his conviction that in the person of Jesus of Nazareth there is a resident power adequate to meet even such a desperate case as this “if thou wilt, thou canst cleanse me.”

The leper's prayer has been criticized, it being alleged that it lacks faith because there is no expressed appeal to the love and mercy of the Lord. We desire, in passing, to record an emphatic protest against human criticism of the leper's prayer or of the prayers of any. Prayer is the transmission of the inner cravings of the spiritual nature of man (whether articulate or not) to his God. Who shall intermeddle in this? Who has a right to censure what is meant for the divine ear? If I am an auditor, I may, if needs he, abstain from adding my “Amen” to the petition. This is permitted me, but further I dare not go. Am I competent to examine the naked heart of him who prays, and to unravel his secret motives? The Lord does this still, as He did of old when He openly condemned the prayer of the hypocritical Pharisee for its insincerity.

But the Lord does not condemn this defiled pleader. On the contrary, the appeal instantly calls forth the exercise of those potentialities of the healing mercy abounding in Him, though there was more than the mere act of miraculous power. He was moved with compassion; His whole nature, rising above all that was loathsome and repellent, physically and ceremonially, in the leper, was stirred with intense sympathy for the sufferer. Here we see the tender mercy of God (Luke 1:78) exhibited in Jesus, That we may be encouraged to seek and find true consolation in His compassions towards us, which fail not.

As king Ahasuerus extended the golden scepter of mercy to his beautiful queen Esther, so the Lord stretched out the hand of mercy and touched the unlovely leper, contracting no defilement as another would have done (Lev. 13:46; Num. 5:2). Then He sent forth His word and healed him: “I will, be thou made clean."7

WHAT DOES LEPROSY ILLUSTRATE?

Leprosy was a common disease in Israel, and was brought with them, it has been said, from the bondage of Egypt. Apart from its seriousness as a disease of the body, the law of Moses imposed upon it additional seriousness by the ceremonies of that economy. Other infirmities and diseases receive brief mention only, but the instructions having reference to leprosy occupy a considerable section in the priests' guide book (Lev. 13; 14).

The priest, acting as the representative of Jehovah in the midst of His people, examined the symptoms of a suspected case, and decided accordingly whether the patient was a leper or not; and if so, condemned him to dwell alone in the place of uncleanness without the camp. The priest only was empowered to decide whether the plague of leprosy was healed in a given case, while a series of ceremonies was prescribed before the healed man could be again acknowledged as one of the congregation of worshippers of Jehovah.

It is easy to gather from this exceptional prominence assigned to it that leprosy is figurative of sin, and especially of sin in that aspect of it which causes the sinner to be excluded from the presence of God and from the privileges of relationship with Him. This intimate connection between the moral and physical in this disease is illustrated by the case of Uzziah, king of Judah, who in a spirit of profane bravado usurped the priest's office and went into the temple of Jehovah to burn incense on the golden altar. He was opposed by the priests in his sacrilegious act, and he was smitten of God with leprosy to mark his uncleanness of heart and unfitness for the divine presence. “Then Uzziah was wroth; and he had a censer in his hand to burn incense; and while he was wroth with the priests, the leprosy broke forth in his forehead before the priests in the house of Jehovah beside the altar of incense. And Azariah the chief priest, and all the priests, looked upon him, and, behold, he was leprous in his forehead, and they thrust him out quickly from thence; yea, himself hasted also to go out, because Jehovah had smitten him. And Uzziah the king was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a separate house, being a leper; for he was cut off from the house of Jehovah” (2 Chron. 26:16-21). At his death he was buried in a field adjoining the burial-place of kings. The uncleanness of the king's heart was indicated by the leprous signs which arose in his body and demonstrated the justice of his exclusion from priestly ministrations, though he was the anointed king of Israel. His very effort to force himself into the presence of the All-pure brought to view his latent uncleanness.

Leprosy then is emblematical of man's natural defilement, individually and nationally. And by the cleansing of the Galilaean leper the Servant of Jehovah showed that He had come to purify the sinner from his sins, as He would Israel also, if the nation would take up the language of penitence, and say, “We are all become as one that is unclean, and all our righteousnesses are as a polluted garment” (Isa. 64:6, R.V.). Then would Jehovah's prophetic promise to His people be fulfilled, “I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against me; and I will pardon all their iniquities, whereby they have sinned; and whereby they have transgressed against me” (Jer. 33:8). This will be fulfilled in a day to come, but if Israel had known, even then a fountain was opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness (Zech. 13:1).

LEGAL CEREMONY TO BE OBSERVED

It was the function of a priest to pronounce a leprous man unclean, and it was also his function to pronounce a man clean when he was cured. The law was inoperative to heal, and only took cognizance of the fact of a man being healed or not. The work of ceremonial restoration only commenced when the cure of the plague had been effected by other means. This is expressly stipulated in the book of Leviticus “And Jehovah spake unto Moses, saying, This shall be the law of the leper in the day of his cleansing: he shall be brought unto the priest, and the priest shall go forth out of the camp, and the priest shall look, and behold, if the plague of leprosy be healed in the leper” (Lev. 14:1-3).

Clearly, the legal provision only contemplated one in whom divine mercy and power had wrought a cure. The leper whom Jesus cleansed was such a one. And the Lord bade him to observe the rites of the law in this respect. He was to show himself to the priest “for a testimony,” that the genuine nature of this unusual case of recovery might be attested by the recognized authority in such matters. The priest who declared him unclean was the person most qualified to decide whether he was now really clean or not. To him was he therefore sent by the Lord, who never set aside the law.

But there was more involved in this than the release of the cleansed leper from his sanitary and religious restrictions. The man was a living witness to the fact that God who of old cleansed a hated Syrian had now cleansed a despised Galilean, and this He had done by His Servant, greater than Elisha, but equally ignored by the ruling power. The appointed sacrifices and offerings were to be made, so that Jehovah's name might be glorified in the obedience thus rendered to His word by the leper in a day of its neglect and dishonor. For this Servant sought not His own glory, but His who sent Him, being obedient Himself, and impressing on others obedience to constitutional authority.

THE SILENCE ENJOINED

There has been much conjecture as to the reasons for the silence imposed upon the man by Jesus: “See thou say nothing to any man.” But from the narrative it will be seen that the leper's mission to the priests was made to appear by the Lord to be one demanding immediate execution. After the healing Jesus at once sent him off, strictly charging him to say nothing to any one, but to show himself to the priest, who would then have before him indubitable evidence of the reality of this cure. This injunction the man disregarded, and as soon as he left the Lord began to spread the news in the immediate locality, so that Jesus could no longer go into town, but remained in desert places where persons visited Him.

“See thou say nothing to any man” may be compared with the Lord's direction to the seventy, “Salute no man on the way” (Luke 10:4). In matters of urgency it was necessary to avoid these tedious and elaborate salutations. Elisha gave similar instructions to Gehazi (2 Kings 4:29). The verb () used of the Lord's sending him on the errand, while literally meaning “to drive forth,” certainly implies urgency and speed. The man was directed to discharge his obligations to the Levitical priesthood before abandoning himself to the selfish joy of announcing his cure to his excitable friends and neighbors. Divine claims were paramount.

But the healed leper disregarded both the word of His Healer and the express commandments of the law. And there have been those who have sought to justify the act of disobedience, as if grace such as the leper had received absolved the recipient from the responsibility of obedience. On the contrary, “to obey is better than sacrifice,” and He, who told the delivered Gergesene to go home and tell his friends what the Lord had done (Mark 5:19), had wise reasons for what He said to the leper. Silence is a grace equally with speech when in accordance with the will of the Lord.

[W. J. H.]

Studies in Mark, Mark: 1:32-39: (12) Evening and Morning at Capernaum

8.-Evening and Morning (First Day) at Capernaum

“And at even, when the sun did set, they brought1 unto him all that were sick,2 and them that were possessed with devils.3 And all the city was gathered together at the door. And he healed many that were sick with divers diseases, and cast out many devils; and he suffered not the devils4 to speak, because they knew5 him.

“And in the morning, a great while before day,6 he rose up and departed into a desert place, and there prayed.7 And Simon and they that8 were with him followed after him; and they found him and say unto him, All are seeking thee. And he saith unto them, Let us go elsewhere into the next towns, that I may preach there also; for to this end came I forth. And he went into their synagogues throughout all Galilee, preaching and casting out devils9“ (i. 32-39).

The Jewish Sabbath was passed, and the first of the week began. The Mosaic day of rest was not such for the Servant of Jehovah. A captive of Satan was in the synagogue, and the Son of God was manifested that He might destroy the works of the devil. Weakness and pain, the effects of the presence of sin in the world, were present in the house of Simon Peter, and the Anointed One had come “to set at liberty them that are bruised.” Hence it was a day of service for Jesus, who cast out the demon and healed the mother-in-law of Simon. And the necessity for such service proved unmistakably the utter inadequacy of the law to relieve and bless the sinful and suffering Jew.

But after Sabbath a new era dawned, a forecast of the kingdom come in power. Not now isolated cases were blessed, but all the sick and suffering of Capernaum flocked to the great Physician, who healed them all—every one. Those who had in weariness and painfulness passed many a sleepless night were freed of their infirmities to enjoy a rest Jewish ordinances could never give. It was truly the beginning of a new week for them. And it was also a happy augury of that millennial day for Israel when the glorious Sun of righteousness, even then present with healing in His wings, should arise and chase away all darkness, disease and death.

Studies in Mark, Mark: 1:21-31: (11) Demoniac in the Synagogue

7.-A Sabbath at Capernaum (continued)

The Demoniac in the Synagogue

How soon the Evangelist shows that the ministry of the Servant-Prophet elucidated the true moral condition of things in Israel! The Light shone into the darkness, and there in the synagogue revealed the hypocritical scribes in the pulpit, and an unclean spirit in the congregation. Such ministry could never be popular, especially when its novelty was passed, because “men loved darkness rather than the light, for their works were evil. For every one that doeth ill hateth the light and cometh not to the light, lest his works should be reproved” (John 3:19, 20).

But if fallen man refused to own the light of life, the powers of darkness did not remain silent and irresponsive in the presence of the Majesty of heaven in human guise. He who was possessed by the unclean spirit acknowledged Jesus the Nazarene as the Holy One of God. It was a confession, no doubt, of apprehension and dread, for the demons “believe and shudder,” but the declaration was real and true nevertheless, as indeed all such must be in the presence of Him who is the Truth. The unclean spirit hitherto concealed behind the personality of the man revealed himself by this public utterance, “What have we [the man and I] to do with thee, Jesus the Nazarene?” The spirit of lying spoke truth, for “what fellowship has light with darkness,” but not the whole truth, for Jesus came to deliver man from the authority of darkness (Col. 1:13). The demon continued, “Art thou come to destroy us [the man and me]?” Yea and nay, foul spirit. “To this end was the Son of God manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8). But as for the man, “the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them” (Luke 9:56). Then, without equivocation or ambiguity, the unclean and unholy spirit bore testimony to the Holy and the Just One: “I [not now the man] know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God.”

What a commotion such an outcry would create in the synagogue. The audience had not ceased to wonder at the gracious words of instruction from the new Teacher. They were now startled by the passionate outburst from the man with a demon. The two speakers afforded contrast of the widest possible nature. There was the Man, “anointed with the Holy Ghost and with power” (.), “full of the Holy Spirit.” There was also a man possessed by an unclean spirit, a power of evil. It was necessary that this existing contrast should be emphasized before all, and that it should be made clear to all that there was no association whatsoever between the Servant of Jehovah and the spirit of darkness.

The Lord therefore, acting in His own authority, did what even Michael the archangel forbore to do when he durst not bring a railing accusation against the devil, but said, The Lord rebuke thee (Jude 9). Jesus rebuked him, quelling his riotous speech with a word, as with a

similar word He did the howling winds, the tossing waves, and the raging, burning fever. Exercising His authority further than mere repression, He commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man.

The demon obeyed, speaking no more, only uttering inarticulate cries as he departed, his exit being attended by a paroxysm of physical pain to the possessed man (Cf. Mark 9:26). “What the devil cannot keep as his own, he will, if he can, destroy; even as Pharaoh never treated the children of Israel so ill as when they were just escaping from his grasp. Something similar is evermore taking place; and Satan tempts, plagues and buffets none so fiercely as those who are in the act of being delivered from his tyranny forever.”

Thus then did the Lord deliver the captive of Satan, and demonstrate that in His service He held no alliance with the evil one. The Servant of Jehovah who vanquished the prince of this world in the solitudes of the wilderness, unmasked him when, in the crowded synagogue, he came in the guise of one of the fallen sons of men, acknowledging Him as the Holy One of God. In the power of the Spirit of God, Jesus, the true Nazarite, maintained His service in the unsullied purity of heavenly light. He who opened the mouths of dumb sinners to speak forth His praise closed the mouths of demons, forbidding them to say that they knew Him. And in this manner the Lord removed all occasion for stumbling as to His service, and anticipated that malicious spirit in the scribes and Pharisees which caused them to bring against Him the baseless and evil charge that He cast out demons by Beelzebub, the prince of demons.

Here, however, in the synagogue at Capernaum, the utmost amazement prevailed. Those present had felt the authority of His word within them; they now saw that authority exemplified in the person of another, a remarkable deliverance wrought at the simple word of Jesus. They questioned among themselves for an explanation, unready as yet to see a sufficient explanation in the Person of Jesus before them. They can but own, however, that this is a new kind of teacher and a different sort of teaching altogether from any to which they have been accustomed. For the word of Jesus evidently is of paramount authority even in the kingdom of Satan. The report of this incident, as it might well do, spread with rapidity throughout the Galilaean district.

SIMON'S WIFE'S MOTHER HEALED

Following directly upon the service of the Lord in the synagogue we are called to witness His service in the home. His activities and perfections which glorified God in the public synagogue are shown to have been equally in exercise in the privacy of the domestic circle.

Immediately He passed from the synagogue where such excitement had been awakened to partake of the hospitalities of the house of Simon and Andrew. James and John are invited also. They knew the commandment, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy"; but could it be kept more holy than in the presence and company of Jesus?

Coming into the house, a shadow lay upon it. Simon's wife's mother was there, sick of a great fever, as Luke the physician states. With simple directness and with growing confidence in the love and sympathy and power of their Master they unite to tell Him of their trouble. They had seen His power in the physical world—over the fish of the sea. They had seen His power in the realm of darkness—over the unclean demon. But could He—would He—consider a private sorrow, a domestic affliction? The compassionate Lord dissipated once for all any uncertainty on this score. He had come to heal the diseases of Israel, and He vouchsafed a ready answer to their request.

Jesus came to the bedside. He stood over the patient and rebuked the fever. Taking her by the hand He raised her. The fever left her, and she immediately arose, the recovery being instantaneous and complete, so that she was able to wait upon them.

The touch of Jesus is significant, indicating His personal contact with sorrowing humanity. He did not touch the demoniacs, but He touched the leper, the eyes of the blind, the tongue of the dumb, and the ear of Malchus. He also touched the bier of the dead, and the terrified disciples on the mount of Transfiguration. The hand of Omnipotence was laid upon the infirmities of man. He proved Himself a God near at hand, and not afar off. The principle is true now to faith, but will have a direct application when Messiah visits His enfeebled people, raising them up by His strong right hand.

The restored woman used her newly-given strength in serving the One who had bestowed it and those with Him. This is an example for all time. What have we that we have not received? Let all therefore be rendered to Him who is the Giver.

[W. J. H.]

Studies in Mark, Mark: 1:21-31: (10) A Sabbath in Capernaum

7.-A Sabbath at Capernaum

“And they go into Capernaum; and straightway on the Sabbath day he entered into the synagogue and taught.1 And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught2 them as having authority, and not as the scribes. And straightway3 there was in their synagogue a man with4 an unclean spirit; and he cried out, saying, 5What have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth?6 Art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who that; art, the Holy One of God. And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace,7 and come out of him. And the unclean spirit tearing him and crying with a loud voice came out of him. And they were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What is this? a new teaching! With authority he commandeth even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.8

“And the report of him went out straightway everywhere into all the region of Galilee. 9

“And straightway when they were come out10 of the synagogue they came into the house of Simon and Andrew with James and John. Now Simon's wife's mother lay sick of11 a fever; and straightway they tell him of her: and he came12 and took her by the hand and raised her up; and the fever left her, and she ministered unto them” (1:21-31, R.V.).

(Many of these renderings by W.K. are taken from Vol: II. of the Believer's Monthly Magazine.)

The Servant of Jehovah proceeds with His ministry of the kingdom of God. Only He is not now alone in it. We read previously that “Jesus came into Galilee"; we now read “they go into Capernaum.” He would necessarily direct all the service and provide and arrange all matters as the

Master. It was their part to be ear-witnesses of His gracious words and eye-witnesses of His miracles and signs, and some of them of His majesty also. But they, we may be sure, found their joy and their strength. not in visions of the future, but in the simple satisfaction that arose from being in the company and under the direction of a loved One. Is it not so even now? Does not the renewed heart crave for a sense of the Lord's presence? And did not the Lord Himself answer that craving by His promise before His departure, “Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world” (Matt. 28:20). And, if this assurance be said to have a special collective application, the wish of Paul for Timothy is undoubtedly individual, “The Lord [Jesus Christ] be with thy spirit” (2 Tim. 4:22). May we then, individually and collectively, walk with Him!

The Lord was pleased to select Capernaum as His abode in Galilee, making from thence His circuits through the numerous towns and villages—of that populous district. Capernaum was from this circumstance highly favored as a place.—Matthew, alluding to the Lord's residence there, speaks of it as “His own city” (9:1). In the words often quoted from Chrysostom, “Bethlehem bore Him, Nazareth nurtured Him, Capernaum had Him continuously as inhabitant.”

The Lord Himself referred to this mark of outward privilege and its abuse in words of solemn and tremendous import, “And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be brought down to hell [hades]; for if the mighty works which have been done in thee had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day” (Matt. 11:23). Capernaum repented not at the preaching of Jesus, and while its unbelieving inhabitants must answer for themselves individually in a day of judgment yet to come, this, the Lord's own city in Galilee, has been so completely overthrown that its site cannot with certainty be identified.

In the Lord's service on this Sabbath day in Capernaum, as recorded by Mark, He is shown (1) teaching in the synagogue, (2) expelling a demon, and (3) healing Simon's wife's mother.

JEHOVAH'S SERVANT TEACHING WITH AUTHORITY

Jesus straightway went into the synagogue, probably that one built by the Roman centurion (Luke 7:1, 5), and began teaching. We are not: told here the matter of His discourse. Matthew, in, what is commonly known as the Sermon on the mount, has summarized in the words of our Lord the moral principles which should characterize the coming kingdom of heaven. Mark simply states that He who had preached the fulfillment of ancient promise and the gospel of God now commenced to expound the truth, so that those who were hungering and thirsting after righteousness might be filled. Many prophets and kings had desired to hear the things taught in Capernaum that day, but had not heard them. And many in the synagogue, the Simeons and the Annas, had waited for that day, and now they received with joy the welcome news of grace, saying in their hearts, “Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us; this is the Lord; we have waited for him; we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation” (Isa. 25:9; cf. Luke 2:29).

But the Evangelist points out for our admiration and instruction that the teaching of the lowly Servant in the synagogue was “with authority”, and also that this character was so evident in His words as to fill the audience with astonishment. His words carried with them the weight of divine credentials, giving them a distinction altogether superior to those of unauthorized teachers, so that not only the common people, but a learned rabbi was constrained to say to Him, “We know thou art a teacher come from God.”

We may pause here to inquire more closely and particularly as to the exact meaning of this phrase used with regard to the Lord's teaching at Capernaum. “He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as the scribes"; and again, “With authority he commandeth even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.” What was it for Him to speak with authority? Does this mean that when He spoke His words were followed by an immediate and irresistible effect in the conviction of the minds and hearts of the auditors, or in compelling the obedience of the unclean demon present? Or does it mean that when He spoke it was evident to His hearers that He had an adequate commission as the Servant of Jehovah to declare the good tidings that He did? The latter, assuredly, is the meaning most in consonance with the scheme of this Gospel, and also with the general usage of the original word () rightly translated “authority.”

This word (.) implies the possession of the right or title to act, and not only the capacity or competency to do so, the latter being expressed by the word often translated “power” (). Moses might be said to have had zeal and competency when he first set about redressing his people's wrongs in Egypt; but when his authority was challenged, “Who made thee a prince and a judge over us?” he fled ignominiously. Later, however, Jehovah said to him, “Come now and I will send thee unto Pharaoh that thou mayest bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.” He then went as a divinely accredited emissary. It is so that Jesus is presented in Mark. He had an indisputable right to speak.

It is not implied that His word in any sense lacked power. On the contrary, in Luke we have, in connection with this very incident, both words13 used; “with authority () and power () he commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out” (Luke 4:36). As a Servant, He was heaven's Plenipotentiary in the fullest sense of the word. He had the amplest title to speak, and His word was also effective, according to Isaiah's prophecy, “So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it” (Isa. 55:11).

The time soon came when men in resentment questioned this authority of the Lord. Did they not ask, “By what authority doest thou these things?” and, “Who gave thee this authority to do these things?” (Mark 11:27-33). But this question was the outcome of the stubborn will of man rebelling against the manifest authority of God; and Jesus vouchsafed no answer.

Here in Galilee were simple souls, thirsting for the word of life, desirous of having the great problems of an active conscience toward God settled with authority. They perceived with amazement such authority in the manner of the Lord's teaching, even before that authority was demonstrated in their midst by the expulsion of a demon. It must be observed that this character was recognized although His word was not prefaced by the phrase so frequent in the prophecies which were read in their hearing every Sabbath, “Thus saith Jehovah.” Indeed, a false prophet might use such a formula, but here was One who spake in His own name and yet in the name of Jehovah of Israel and the God of all the earth also. He said, “Verily, verily, I say unto you"; “Ye have heard that it was said to them of old time... but I say unto you,” giving them thus, by virtue of His own right, the word of Him that sent Him. Can we wonder that it was said, “I perceive that thou art a prophet"; and again, “We have heard ourselves, and know, that this is indeed the Savior of the world” (John 4:19, 42)? While even the officers sent to arrest Him excused their failure to execute their task by the statement, “Never man so spake.”

The teaching of Jesus is placed in contrast with that of the scribes in so far as the former possessed an authority of which the latter was utterly destitute. “He taught them as having authority, and not as the scribes.” It is unnecessary to refer to the erudite speculations of

professors of our day, at home or abroad, as to the theology of the scribes, in order to realize the force of this inspired contrast. We have all we need in this Gospel itself. The Lord Himself has characterized the scribes and their doctrine, and they therefore stand uncloaked in the presence of the Light of the world (Mark 7:1-13; 12:38-40). Besides, the question here considered is not the one raised later, viz., what the scribes taught, but how they taught. The unlettered peasants, hearing the Faithful and True Witness, confessed how different His teaching is from that of the false witnesses. They heard the voice of the Good Shepherd, whose own the sheep were, and it had a ring of authority never heard in the voice of the hireling who cared for the fleece rather than the flock.

The truth was that, though the scribes sat on Moses' seat, they neglected the commandments of God, and expounded and enforced the precepts of men. Hence their words were bereft of all authority in matters appertaining to the responsibility of man to God, and this lack was evident to the natural conscience. But now One spake upon whose words sinful men might rest with assurance, as He said, “We speak that we do know, and bear witness of that we have seen.” “His word does not consist of arguments which evidence the uncertainty of man, but comes with the authority of One who knows the truth which He proclaims—authority which in fact was that of God who can communicate truth.” It is no wonder then that the audience in the synagogue was filled with amazement, as they listened to the authoritative words of Jesus of Nazareth. Let us hope that many received His words in faith, and, believing, had life in His name.

(To be continued)

[W. J. H.

Studies in Mark, Mark: 1:16-20: (9) The Call of the Four Fishermen

Now, what is the object of this narrative as given us by the first two Evangelists? Does not this lie on the surface? In each case we have (1) Jesus Himself beginning His public preaching of the kingdom, (2) His call of others to follow Him, (3) His activity. in preaching in the Galilean synagogues, and performing deeds of mercy. Clearly, then, we have set before us the beginning of Messiah's ministry in which He immediately associates others with Himself in His public service. The objective fact of the call of the four from their temporal duties is mentioned, but no more than this, because no more was necessary. The possible significance of such a brief reference has already been stated.

In Luke, however, we have a great deal more than the bare fact of certain disciples renouncing their possessions to follow the Messiah. We are called to witness, in the case of one of them as a sample of the others, how the Lord, using temporal circumstances in His own gracious and inimitable manner as the media, wrought within the man, teaching him something of His own nature and something of his own evil heart. We are shown, in fact, the moral preparation of Simon for the step of renunciation. Thus, while in Matthew and Mark we have what is objective, in Luke we have the subjective side. The difference therefore of the standpoints is radical, and must lead to what we actually find in the narratives—divergences, though not discrepancies.

Another salient feature of the narrative in Luke is that the event is displaced from its strict chronological position. Such a displacement is for moral reasons, and is not of infrequent occurrence in this Gospel. The call which in Matthew and Mark is in immediate sequence to the Lord's initial public testimony, is in Luke made to follow, not precede, the cure of the demoniac in the synagogue of Capernaum, and the healing of Peter's wife's mother. The truth is that Luke gives us not only the general fact of the beginning of the Lord's preaching (as in chap. iv. 14, 15), but taking up the single case of His word in the synagogue at Nazareth, gives us to see how grace was poured into and from His lips, delighting many sad hearts, but alas! arousing many evil ones also. He goes on to show that same grace not only speaking, but working for man's blessing, grouping a number of His merciful acts, that the Savior's wonderful grace may be the more impressively set out as the Stronger than Satan and the Deliverer of men from those disabilities sin and Satan have introduced. Luke 4 is therefore an example of the topical style which may be said to prevail in this Gospel rather than the chronological.

“And now we have, in the beginning of the fifth chapter, a fact taken entirely out of its historical place. It is the call of the earlier apostles, more particularly of Simon, who is singled out, just as we have seen one blind man, or one demoniac brought into relief, even though there might he more. So the son of Jonas is the great object of the Lord's grace here, although others were called at the same time. There were companions of his leaving all for Christ; but we have his case, not theirs, dealt with in detail. Now from elsewhere we know that this call of Peter preceded the Lord's entrance into Simon's house, and the healing of Simon's wife's mother (Mark 1). We also know that John's Gospel has preserved for us the first occasion when Simon ever saw the Lord Jesus, as Mark's Gospel shows when it was that Simon was called away from his ship and occupation. Luke had given us the Lord's grace with and towards men, from the synagogue at Nazareth down to His preaching everywhere in Galilee, casting out devils, and healing diseases by the way. This is essentially a display in Him of the power of God by the word, and this over Satan and all the afflictions of men. A complete picture of all this is given first, and in order to leave it unbroken, the particulars of Simon's call are left out of its time. But as the way of the Lord on that occasion was of the deepest value as well as of interest to be given, it was reserved for this place. This illustrates the method of classifying facts morally, instead of merely recording them as they came to pass, which is characteristic of Luke."1

Sufficient has now been adduced to indicate that what seems at first so divergent in Luke is in perfect consonance with the character of that Gospel, which ever shows us the Lord of grace, though encountering and even arousing the evil of man, abounding over it with His compassionate love. It may not be necessary, therefore, to go on to show in detail the wealth of moral teaching and instruction contained in this section, profitable as this would be.

It may, however, still be asked, Are the particulars given in Luke altogether reconcileable with those named by the first two Evangelists? It has already been stated that this is not a question of vital importance, and by being led to consider it as such the believer is apt to be diverted from the profitable study of the Gospels. However, for the sake of any who find a difficulty here an attempt will be made to give the details recorded in the three Gospels in their strict chronological sequence.

The four fishermen had spent a long night of fruitless toil upon the Galilaean lake. In the morning Jesus came along the shore, where the boats were drawn up and men and women were at their work. He spake to them the word of God (Luke 5:1). So sweet was the heavenly message

that they longed to hear more. It was so contrasted with that voice from Sinai which filled men with terrors, and they pressed upon Him in their eagerness to listen. Now the two fishing-boats were drawn up on the strand and were empty, their crews having left them to wash (Luke 5:2) the trawl-nets which had been used overnight in the deep waters, preparatory to another night's quest. Simon and Andrew presumably had the smaller boat; Zebedee, the hired servants, as well as James and John, being apparently in the other. They had, therefore, finished the washing2 of their large nets, and with characteristic energy were now wading in the water near the shore, endeavoring with a hand or casting-net3 to supply something of the deficiency of the past night's work. This Matthew (iv. 18) and Mark (i. 16) tell us. They would be within ear-shot of Jesus, and can we doubt that they would draw nearer to hear Him the better?

Jesus then selecting the smaller and more convenient boat for His purpose, bade Simon put it off from the shore. He finishes His discourse; then, knowing the natural anxiety of the breadwinners, He said, “Launch [in the singular, being addressed to Simon as captain of the boat] out into the deep, and let down [this is in the plural, showing that others were present in the boat] the trawl-nets for a draft.” Simon let down a single net,4 which was filled to bursting with fish. The partners in the other boat are beckoned to come to their assistance, and both boats are filled with the spoil. Simon, convicted of his own lack of confidence and of the Lord's omniscient power and grace, falls before Him in (confession. The Lord assures him, saying, “Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men.” This, however, was not the call to follow Him.

The boats then came to land. Will not He who cared for the fragments of the multiplied loaves and fishes care that this harvest of the sea be duly garnered? This being done, He says to Simon and Andrew, “Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men” (Matt. and Mark). And going farther along the shore, the sons of Zebedee are seen in their boat mending the nets damaged by the great catch, and He calls them also.

It is by no means affirmed that the order of (events here indicated is absolutely accurate:) but it is affirmed that such an order is neither impossible nor inconceivable, and that it also shows that the statements of the three Evangelists are, as thus regarded, consistent with one another.

Returning now to Mark after this digression, we may observe how the Lord in this call, humble Servant of Jehovah as He was, asserts His sovereign claim. In a peremptory imperative He bade them, Come. The command awoke within them the divine instinct of obedience. This word of authority forever adjusted their mutual relationship as servants to the Master. Later on, in a critical moment, Simon Peter said, “Lord, if it be thou; hid me come to thee upon the waters.” He had learned the absolute rights of the Lord over Him from that memorable day when he forsook all to follow Him.

We may here see the distinction between the earlier lessons of “Andrew and Peter, and what they now learned. Andrew and Peter had found Him to be the Lamb of God, the Messiah of Israel (John 1:36-42). Their hearts burned within them as they listened to His discourses of love and goodness and truth. But now He had come down to them in the midst of their daily toil. He said to Simon, “Give me the use of your fishing-boat as a pulpit,” sitting in it with more majesty than Solomon upon his ivory throne; and then at a word filling it with leaping fish in payment of their scant service. Now He had come nearer still to them in the humdrum of their lives, and they heard Him say to them, Come after Me. The authority of the voice was irresistible, and they obeyed like the fish of the lake, which, hearing the call of their Creator, swarmed along the trackless paths of the deep to do Him homage where He sat in the old fishing-boat.

These fishermen recognized the voice of the King of Israel. They so thoroughly believed His gospel of the coming kingdom that they were ready to admit the absolute rights of the King over them. He of His own wisdom had sought them out, made the selection between them and others, and instructed them to follow Him, conscious of what in His own power He could make them. The anointed king may be obscured in the cave of Adullam; these men obey Him as implicitly as if He were wielding the scepter on the throne of Zion.

Their ready response, however, is the result of previous workings within them. John shows us how they learned His personal glories as Savior. A second lesson was to know Him as Lord. For this they were prepared, as we have seen, by the word He preached and the miracle He wrought. And consequently when His call was given they obeyed with promptness.

Such is the order usually adopted by the Spirit in the induction of a believer into the place of service. For the believer confesses Jesus who died for his sins and lives as his Lord. He is bought with a price to live no longer for self, but to Him who died and lives for him. There are necessarily but few called to a place of renunciation such as that taken by the apostles, but there are no concerns of any believer over which the Lord has not His unqualified rights. Do we all yield Him His own?

(Continued)

[w. J. H.]

Studies in Mark, Mark: 1:16-20: (8) The Call of the Four Fishermen

“And passing1 along by the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting2 a net in the sea; for they were fishers. And Jesus said unto3 them, Come ye4 after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men. And straightway they left the nets5, and followed him.

“And going on a little further, he saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also6 were in the boat mending the nets.7 And straightway he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went 8 after him” (1:16-20, R.V.).

The Evangelist has in the immediately preceding verses shown the Servant of Jehovah commencing His ministry of the coming kingdom of God. He thereupon shows that this Servant, in the execution of His momentous mission, was pleased to associate with Himself some of the godly and believing ones of Galilee. Not that there was need on His part for such, or for any associates. Feeble and fallible man does, as a prudential, and even necessitous, measure, seek to counterbalance his own inherent defects by the strength of “big battalions,” or by the wisdom of a multitude of counselors. But this Servant was without limitations (save those that were self-imposed), and competent to carry out all that was given Him to do; and yet we are invited by the Evangelist to remark that directly He stepped forth into the path of public service,

He called some fishermen to follow Him in that pathway. It is a circumstance which surely we cannot consider without advantage, since every detail in that divine biography is the exemplification here upon earth of a heavenly principle, for our wonder and instruction, as well as for our humble imitation.

The details of this historical incident, fraught with such far-reaching consequences to the disciples personally and to multitudes of millions through them, are of the scantiest, though, having regard to its important nature, we might have expected an exuberance. By the call of Jesus these men were elevated out of that nameless obscurity in which Galilean peasantry were wont to live and die. This call involved, not indeed that their names are written in the Lamb's book of life, though this be true (but not truer of them than of every redeemed one), but that their names are recorded in the inspired and imperishable archives of the church on earth, of which church they, with other apostles and prophets, formed the foundation, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone (Eph. 2:19, 20).

Possessing, as we do, the light of subsequent history upon this event, we can consider the high destiny of these humble men. Founders of world—empires there have been; great as the world counts greatness. But where are Egypt, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, and their founders? The names of Simon and Andrew, of James and John, however, are hewn in the rock—foundations of that church against which the very gates of hades shall not prevail. Nay, when earth-kingdoms shall all have perished, and Messiah reigns gloriously, then shall these righteous ones shine forth in the kingdom of their Father. When the holy city Jerusalem descends from heaven to be the seat of government of the kingdom of heaven, manifested in all the glories of fulfilled prophecies, earth shall read the Galilean names again. In the dazzling vision of the prophet of Patmos, where all is glory and perfection and brilliance,' amid the blazonry of heaven itself, brought down for terrestrial view, we can see twelve names only (Rev. 21:14), and they include these four, once scored, as proof of ownership, on a couple of fishing cobles on the Galilean lake. This is a marvelous record, and where shall we match it?

But if we consider for a moment longer we shall see what an excellent example this affords of that heavenly perspective in which events are set in Holy Writ. Man writes in earthly perspective, that is, human events and persons to him loom large in the foreground, but as he turns from the temporal to the spiritual and to the eternal, these dwindle in importance until they reach a vanishing point. Man magnifies present things in all their uncertainty with a light borrowed from the historical experiences of the doubtful past; consequently the eternity of the future is minimized, and if not altogether ignored by him is lightly regarded and reduced to a point of undefined position and without importance.

In Scripture we have a corrective of this false vision. Man is invited to look through heavenly lenses and to behold what a change divine perspective makes, and how entirely the relative importance of things is thereby reversed. As we look tie see that the angle of vision is increased with distance. Present things become petty, future things are magnificent. God starts with a feeble and sinful worm, and leads us on to behold His infinite and inscrutable grace covering his sin, and advancing the sinner to heirship with God and joint-heirship with Christ. We may also see a momentary suffering expanding into an eternal weight of glory. When we, through pressure of circumstances, are about to exclaim like a peevish saint of old, “All these things are against me,” another examination of the case through this heavenly medium reveals to us that all these things “work together for good.”

It would be easy to pursue this line of thought further to practical profit, but it is necessary to return to the simple narration of the call of the fishermen. Having in view the heights of peculiar eminence and distinction to which these men were to be raised in the future, a human historian would have invested their call with such legendary tales and mythical marvels as the Eastern mind is quick to imagine and skilful to invent. Circumstances of their early lives would be shown to constitute premonitory signs of their future destiny. And the reason for the adoption of such a mode of narration is that the historian would be, like others of his class, seeking to discover the cause of the future greatness of his subject in the subject himself and in his lineage or his early environment.

In Scripture we have a contrasted method, and are shown that the cause of an ultimate position of extensive influence and grandeur in a servant of God is to be sought above rather than below. For God makes choice of human instruments not on the earthly principle of the unique and inherent fitness of the instrument itself, but rather because He sees there material that He can make fit for His purpose.9 Clearly, therefore, the circumstances under which the actual call was made are of minor importance in a divine record. And in this instance we are certain all the future history of these men was before the inspiring Spirit, for He wrote Rev. 21 as well as Mark 1; yet the narrative is entirely divested of anything approaching earthly glamor. We just have the Lord walking by the sea; the fishermen at their work; His call, holding out to them no alluring prospects; their immediate response. Such simplicity was a deathblow to the pride of the Jew, who would have loved to have seen their lineage traced back to some ancient and honorable family in Israel, as well as to that of the Gentile who would have wished to see that they had been trained in the philosophy of the schools, or in the arts of war and legislation. Had they such qualification's there might have been ostensible cause for glorying in them; poor and simple as they were, we can only glory in the Lord (1 Cor. 1:26-31).

It may be useful in this connection to make some remarks on the relation of the narrative as given by Mark with those appearing in the other Gospels. In John we have what unquestionably is antecedent and even preparatory to the call as recorded by the Synoptists. But to the significance of this it may be necessary to recur at a later stage of these remarks.

Matthew and Mark use almost identical terms in their respective accounts. There are differences in some phrases, however,10 all of which we may well believe have their significance and their suitability to the scheme of the Gospel in which they occur. But we leave these points in order to refer at once to Luke 5:1-11, where a narrative is given which contains at first sight such points of diversity from Matthew and Mark that sober men have without adequate reason declared that it relates to a different event, and that it is subsequent in point of time.

In Luke we read that the Lord saw two boats by the shore of the lake. He entered one belonging to Simon, and desired that he would push off a little that He might address the people who were crowding to the water's edge in order to hear Him. After the discourse He directed Simon to push out into deep water and let down the fishing-nets. Simon obeyed, though dubiously; but an astonishing haul of fish was the result, so much so that his net burst, and he had to seek the help of his partners in the other boat. Peter was conscience-stricken in the presence of this Gracious Power, who, however, assured him that in the future he should catch men. When the boats returned to land, the occupants followed the Lord.

This account, it is stated, presents points of absolute disagreement with Matthew and Mark. The latter make no reference to the preaching of Jesus nor to a miraculous catch of fish. They, unlike Luke, mention Andrew as the companion of Simon Peter, and that Zebedee and the servants were with James and John, who are said to be mending, not washing, their nets. They also record, while Luke does not, that Jesus definitely called the fishermen to follow Him, and that He addressed a separate call to each of the pairs.

On consideration of these points of diversity it must be admitted that in no instance are they such as to render the narratives incompatible one with another. Luke does not contradict Matthew and Mark, nor do they him. It must further be admitted that in no one of the accounts, nor in all of them taken together, have we the whole of the details of the incident. This is unnecessary, and would indeed be impossible (John 21:25). Details not essential to the purpose of the Gospel are omitted. And while these omissions may sometimes prevent us from piecing together the four narratives into one “harmonious” whole, we are not, in consequence, the losers. On the contrary, the Gospels, as we have them, present the truth exactly as it was intended by the Divine Author that they should. It is only shallow-minded man who regards it as a defect in inspiration that one Evangelist does not supply the historical omissions of his predecessor. He would have arranged them so, because they would then form a series of Sunday school exercises to fit the four one with another like parts of a dissected map. What a poor idea of inspiration is in the minds of many!11

It is, indeed, believed to be absolutely unnecessary to reconstruct any historical incident in the Gospels, to enable us to understand what each record was meant to convey. It is ours to seek in all humility to understand it in the form it has been given us.

[W. J. H.]

(To be continued)

Studies in Mark, Mark: 1:14-15: (7) Jehovah's Servant Preaching

V.-Jehovah's Servant Preaching

(3) The subject of the Lord's preaching is here stated to be “the gospel of God.” “Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God,” for it was the day of the fulfillment of ancient promise and prophecy now announced by Him in whom they were all fulfilled. This, therefore, was the beginning of the gospel, the true “Proto-evangelium,” the source of that river of grace which, deepening and widening in its onward course, should eventually carry its blessing to the uttermost part of the earth (Mark 16:15).

Isaiah's prophecy refers to this day of good tidings in more places than one. After foretelling the preparatory testimonies John the Baptist should render, he continues, “O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion, get thee up into the high mountain; O thou that tellest good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God! Behold, the Lord God will come as a mighty one, and his arm shall rule for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompence before him. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd, he shall gather the lambs in his arm, and carry them in his bosom, [and] shall gently lead those that give suck” (Isaiah 40:9-11, R.V.). This prophecy, it is true, includes the coming of the King of Israel in power for deliverance and blessing and the establishment of the kingdom in glory. But, nevertheless, Jehovah Jesus was there, bringing to Zion in His own person the good tidings of His presence, which He began to announce in Galilee of the Gentiles.

Would Zion receive these good tidings and believe Messiah's report? Alas! the ears of the people were stopped and their hearts hardened, and they would not hear and believe. Not until a yet later day will they say, “Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.” Then will the people with ecstatic joy break out in the language of the same prophet, “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace, that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth! The voice of thy watchmen! they lift up the voice, together do they sing; for they shall see, eye to eye, when the LORD returneth to Zion” (Isaiah 52:7, 8, R.V.).

But whether Israel would hear or whether they would not hear, it was equally the part of the Servant of Jehovah to go forward in the work committed to Him. Jehovah had anointed Him to preach good tidings to the poor (Isaiah 61:1). He accordingly commences this ministry in the most despised town of the most despised region in the land of Israel (Luke 4:18).

The phrase used here, “the gospel of God,” is striking in its comprehensiveness; for “the kingdom of” is an unwarranted addition, foisted into the text from Matthew 4:23 at some period subsequent to the apostolic day by misguided harmonists, zealous to introduce uniformity where the divine Author had ordered variety. “The gospel of God” implies the heavenly origin of the gospel. It was God's gospel, emanating from Him, and, in consequence, possessing a paramount authority. This Servant of Jehovah, Son of God as He was, brought no independent message of His own devising. The gospel He preached was the gospel of God. And we cannot fail to observe the beautiful propriety of this phrase, peculiar as it is to this Gospel, which, before we are permitted to hear a word of the preaching of Jesus, the Servant-Prophet, points us upward to heaven and to God as its source.

And what is here stated by the inspired Evangelist was stated more explicitly and emphatically by the Lord Himself. “My teaching is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man willeth to do his will, he shall know of the teaching whether it be of God, or [whether] I speak from myself.” “I spake not from myself, but the Father which sent me, he hath given me a commandment what I should say, and what I should speak.” “The word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's who sent me” (John 7:16, 17; 12:49; 14:24, R.V.).

It is noticeable that while the phrase—the gospel of God—only occurs once in the Gospels, it is of more frequent occurrence in the Epistles.

The great apostle to the nations, in his Epistle to the Romans, speaks of himself as separated unto the gospel of God, and also of ministering it to the Gentiles (Romans 1:1; 15:16). Twice he speaks of preaching the gospel of God to those at Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 2:2, 8, 9); while the apostle of the circumcision uses it in a solemn warning which he utters to unbelievers— “For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God; and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God” (1 Peter 4:17)?

Thus Paul and Peter united in the service of spreading the heavenly evangel; but it is a fruitful theme for meditation that God's gospel was first proclaimed by Him who was both its Essence and Fullness. Well might the apostle exclaim, “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him” (Hebrews 2:3)?

(4) We now come to the declarations of the Lord as they are summarized in this Gospel. They contained a twofold announcement, and a twofold exhortation. The Servant-Prophet announced (a) that the time was fulfilled, and (b) that the kingdom of God was at hand; while He

called upon men (a) to repent, and (b) to believe the gospel.

By the fulfillment of the time () it may be supposed that the Lord made reference to the fact of His own public appearance in Galilee as the Servant-Prophet at a moment which was predetermined by Jehovah who sent Him. We find a similar expression used by the Lord elsewhere, implying how perfectly His life was regulated from above, and in no sense the outcome of unforeseen circumstances. When the brethren of the Lord urged Him to go up to Jerusalem at the feast of tabernacles, His reply was, “My time () is not yet come, but your time is alway ready.... Go ye up unto the feast; I go not up yet unto this feast, because my time is not yet fulfilled” (John 7:6, 8). At the last paschal feast, the Lord sent this message to the man in Jerusalem, “The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the passover at thy house with my disciples” (Matthew 26:18). Speaking also of the second coming of the Son of man, He says to His disciples, “Ye know not when the time () is” (Mark 13:33), warning them also of those who would raise a false alarm of the approach of that day, saying, “The time () is at hand” (Luke 21:8). To everything, therefore, in the life of the incarnate Son there was an appointed time. Of this He, as the obedient Man, was conscious; and it was an exemplification of the perfection of His service for God, not only to know this for the joy of His own heart, but to declare it publicly, as in this instance, in the hearing of those who were naturally the sons of disobedience.

The theme of His announcement was that the kingdom of God was nigh. This constituted His glad tidings. Clearly this gospel was not that of the Acts and of the Epistles; only that Jehovah the Savior was there, even then, in His fullness for empty and needy sinners. But until His death and resurrection, neither the utter depravity of man was proved, nor was the incomparable love of God towards guilty sinners manifested. Here, however, it is declared that “the kingdom of God was nigh.” This was a word of hope and gladness, uttered to this saddened and sin-stricken world. And what a disordered spectacle the world then afforded to those that “feared Jehovah and thought upon His name"! The chosen people were divided and scattered, and the returned remnant of the Jews under the heel of the Roman oppressor. The Gentiles were “without God, and without hope in the world"; while the whole creation was groaning and travailing together in pain.

At such a juncture the inspiriting cry is raised: “The kingdom of God is at hand.” This kingdom is not to consist of a fallen man ruling fallen men. When the blind lead the blind the ditch must be their destination. Such, in fact, is the history of man's kingdoms, as the Old Testament fully shows. Now God's kingdom is to appear, originating with God, governed by God, maintained by God. The sphere of influence of this kingdom is not confined to Israel, but to extend to all nations, to the uttermost parts of the earth; and not over man only, the head of creation, but all suffering creation shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption. Such beneficent and assured effects the word of God recites elsewhere, though these effects are not realized even yet.

Here the King appears. How near, therefore, must God's kingdom be, when God's King was among them! Only a short while and Jesus would present Himself to the daughter of Zion as her King. He would go up to Jerusalem in fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy, “Tell ye the daughter of Zion, Behold thy King cometh unto thee, meek and sitting upon an ass, and a colt, the foal of an ass.” Alas! that the King should hear Himself denied by the sages of Jerusalem, who sat in Moses' seat— “We have no king but Caesar!” “Away with this Man! Crucify him!” He was indeed crucified, and this of necessity changed the aspect of the kingdom for the time. But while this is so, “the kingdom of God” is yet to be established upon the earth, and all rule and all authority and power shall be eventually abolished according to His infallible word (see 1 Corinthians 15:24).

But were the hearers prepared for the gospel? For the due enjoyment of the blessing of God's kingdom, whether in its moral or material form, an inward change is essential. Hence the Lord calls upon men to repent. He was not here to subjugate men by the exercise of irresistible force. He came to “call sinners to repentance.” In this the Lord reiterated the exhortation of His forerunner; for John the Baptist called upon men to repent. And those who received his testimony were baptized in Jordan, confessing their sins. It was no less necessary that men should repent and accept the gracious witness concerning the coming kingdom, trusting simply to the word of Him who brought the good tidings.

[W. J. H.]

(Continued from page 360)

(To be continued)

Studies in Mark, Mark: 1:14-15: (6) Jehovah's Servant Preaching

V.-Jehovah's Servant Preaching

“Now after that John was delivered up,1 Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel2 of3 God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand4: repent ye, and believe in5 the gospel6“ (1:14, 15, R.V.).

At the appointed moment, the anointed Servant of Jehovah commenced His public service by announcing the good news that God's promised kingdom was imminent. And who shall ever know with what ineffable joy the obedient Son whose ears had been “digged” for service (Psalm 40:6, margin) performed in this as in all else the will of Him who sent Him? We are, however, permitted to know some of the intimacies of the Father and the incarnate Son, wherein this mutual satisfaction is expressed. We are, for instance, made privy to the Father's declaration from heaven, “Thou art my dearly-beloved Son, in whom is my delight.” This personal complacency was fully reciprocated by Jehovah's Servant, who, entering into the world, says, “Lo, I am come; in the roll it is written of me: I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart. I have published [preached] righteousness in the great congregation; lo, I will not refrain my lips, O Lord, thou knowest. I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation; 1 have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth from the great congregation” (Psalm 40:7-10).

And this delight thus expressed in regard of the service of preaching in the great assemblies of Israel was maintained even when His obedience led Him to lay down His life (John 10:17; Hebrews 10:5-7), thereby fulfilling to the uttermost, as He had previously made known, God's will.7 We have a notable example of His joy in the path of service on that memorable occasion when the obdurate unbelief of Capernaum, the center of His Galilean ministry, was brought before Him. We read, “In that hour Jesus rejoiced [exulted] in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto

babes; even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight" (Luke 10:21). Such a spirit in the moment of apparent failure was the perfection of service, and how contrasted it was with that of the preacher to the Ninevites, seeking first to escape from the path of duty, and then angry that the repentant citizens believing his message were spared. Jesus, who rejoiced in presence of the unbelief of Capernaum, rejoiced also over one sinner who repented.8 For He was the good Shepherd seeking the lost sheep of the house of Israel. "And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and his neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost" (Luke 15:5, 6). Blessed Savior, in any service of ours, feeble and unworthy as it must ever be, may a like joy possess us and bring us in our measure with like equanimity through victory or what seems defeat!

It is proposed to group some fragmentary thoughts relating to this passage under one of the following heads—(1) The signal for the preaching to begin; (2) the scene of the preaching; (3) the subject of the preaching; (4) the declarations of the Preacher.

(1) The signal for the commencement of Christ's preaching. There is "a time to keep silence and a time to speak" —a precept never exemplified so perfectly as by the Lord of all. The time for Jesus to come forth into the way of public service was indicated by the imprisonment of John the Forerunner and Baptist." Now when he heard that John was delivered up, he withdrew into Galilee; and leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum" (Matthew 4:12, 13, R.V.). There had previously been blessed ministry by the Lord to individuals in Judaea and Samaria, as the early chapters of the Gospel of John show (chap. 3:24). But this ministry was the manifestation of His personal grace and glory which is above all the limitations of the times and dispensations which mark the ordered government of the world, and such manifestations form the special subject of the Fourth Gospel. Mark, however, like the other Synoptists, sets before us the beginning of His official service in introducing the promised kingdom, and this initial act synchronized with the removal of John, who was a witness to Jesus as the Christ, from the sphere of public testimony.

John had preached of Jesus as the One who was about to come, and after baptizing Him in Jordan, had testified to Him as being then present in Israel. This work of the prophet of the Most High, the messenger of Jehovah, the herald of the Messiah, was now accomplished. And what distinguished service was his! His was the unique distinction of being the first to own the coming Savior and King (Luke 1:41), and this by divine prompting of altogether a special nature, while his was the first voice to call the sinful sons of men to "behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). The Lord said of him, "Among them that are born of women there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist" (Matthew 11:11). So powerfully did his work and testimony, though unaccompanied by miraculous sign, work in the hearts of men, that many seemed to be prepared to accept John himself as the Messiah (Luke 3:15), in spite of his utter repudiation of any such claim, and his clear testimony to Jesus: "He must increase, and I must decrease."

While men were thus ready to be misled as to the personality of the Christ, we may be sure that Satan, failing to destroy the royal Seed in the massacre of Bethlehem's babes (Revelation 12:1-5), and foiled in his temptations of Jesus in the wilderness, would welcome such an opportunity to set up a rival to Jesus, Israel's promised King and Savior. He who would use Simon Peter, the honored witness to Jesus as the Son of the living God as a stumbling-block in His way to the cross (Matthew 16:23), would seek to use the Baptist as a counter attraction when Jesus should offer Himself to the people as the sent One of God. If Satan had such a malevolent intention, it was frustrated by the shutting up of John in prison.

The prophets of old had their contemporaries. The voice of Jehovah came to Israel through Micah the Morasthite as well as through the more brilliant son of Amoz of his day; while subsequently God spake simultaneously through Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. But He who had spoken in days past in many measures and in many manners to the fathers by His prophets was about to speak to them by a Son, the only-begotten. No prophet, not even an angel, can for a moment be compared with God's spokesman in His unapproachable dignity as the Son. And John, the last of the prophets, though himself more than a prophet, was withdrawn by God from the scene of public testimony, that the Son might stand alone, an Object supremely worthy and sufficient to engross the hearts of all mankind. How could God have a servant contemporary with His Son? As He has no peer, so this Servant needs no coadjutor. Even Moses and Elias must vanish directly Simon Peter seeks to class them with Jesus; so that he and his astonished companions may see "no one save Jesus only," teaching them and all men that the Son is incomparable.

John then, having borne faithful witness to the truth, was removed to make way for Him who is the Faithful and True Witness. When the Light of the world shines forth, no place is found for the burning and shining lamp (John 5:35, R.V.), welcome as it was in the dawning. He was not, however, like his prototype Elijah, carried up to heaven by a whirlwind. He was carried to a prison and to death under the power of a dissolute Idumean king. He had preached that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. But it was not for him to know in his own experience the beneficent sway of the scepter of righteousness. For him the earthly throne was one of iniquity, and its sword was the sword of cruelty and revenge. Truly his eyes saw the King of Israel in the beauty of His grace, but notwithstanding, his headless corpse was soon to lie martyred in the kingdom of "this world." This was a fitting prelude to the coming tragedy when "the kings of the earth set themselves in array, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against his anointed" (Acts 4:25-27).

(2) The scene of the preaching. The Lord began His service of preaching in Galilee, not in Judea. Bethlehem, the birthplace of Messiah, had its favors according to the prophet— "Thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, which art little to be among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall One come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting" (Micah 5:2, R.V.). But there is no record of any visit by the Lord to Bethlehem during His ministry. Galilee, the despised region in the north of the land, was privileged to have more than any other place His gracious and marvelous service by word and sign. This, too, was in accordance with the prophecy of olden time, as the Evangelist Matthew shows: "He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the borders of Zebulun and Naphtali; that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying, The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, toward the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; the people which sat in darkness saw a great light, and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death, to them did light spring up" (Matthew 4:13-17, R.V.).

This prophetic promise (Isaiah 9:1, 2) was one of comfort for the faithful remnant in a day when Gentile powers should oppress the land and Messiah should be a "stone of stumbling and a rock of offense to both the houses of Israel." It was promised that in such circumstances a bright and glorious light should shine forth in the most obscure and despised part of the land. And so it came about, for into Galilee Jesus came preaching the kingdom of God; and this was a reason with the Pharisees of Jerusalem for despising Him. Ignoring Jonah, who was of the land of Zebulun, they said, "Search and see; for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet" (John 7:52).

Galilee “seems to have been originally confined to a little ‘circuit ' of country round Kedesh-Naphtali, in which were situated the twenty towns given by Solomon to Hiram, king of Tire, as payment for his work in conveying timber from Lebanon to Jerusalem (Joshua 20:7; 1 Kings 9:11). They were then, or subsequently, occupied by strangers, and for this reason Isaiah gives to the district the name ‘Galilee of the Gentiles ' (Isaiah 9:1). It is probable that the strangers increased in number, and became during the captivity the great body of the inhabitants; extending themselves over the surrounding country, they gave to their new territories the old name, until at length Galilee became one of the largest provinces of Palestine.”

“It was outside the regular allotment of Israel, in that part of it which is yet to belong to Israel, which certain of the tribes had taken possession of, though, strictly speaking, it was beyond the proper limits of the promised land. The Lord goes through Galilee of the Gentiles; and in all that He fulfilled the prophecy [of Isaiah]. The Jews ought surely to have known it.”

“It is shown afterward in this prophecy that (while the Gentile affliction upon the nation would he heavier than ever, and the Roman oppression far exceed the Chaldean of old), the Messiah would be there, despised and rejected of men, nay, of the Jews, and that at this very time, when thus set at naught by the people that ought to have known His glory, great light would spring up in the most despised place, in Galilee of the nations, among the poorest of the Jews, where Gentiles were mixed up with them—people who could not even speak their own tongue properly.9 There should this bright and heavenly light spring up; there the Messiah would be owned and received.”

It was therefore appointed of God that in the tetrarchy of Herod Antipas, who had shut up John the Baptist in prison, the Lord Himself should begin to teach and to preach. And this He accordingly did.

[W. J. H.]

Studies in Mark, Mark: 1:12-13: (5) Wild Beasts and the Angels

IV.-The Wild Beasts And The Angels

“And straightway the Spirit driveth him forth1 into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days tempted of Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered unto him” (1:12, 13, n.v.).

The real nature of the sin-stricken world into which the Servant of Jehovah had entered to do in public the will of Him that sent Him is thus briefly indicated by the Evangelist. And emphasis is given to his concise statement by the dark contrast in which it stands with the verses that precede. There we read of the effulgent glory emanating from the rent heavens upon the lowly Jesus come forth from Nazareth of Galilee, of the dove-like Spirit of God anointing and sealing the Servant of Jehovah, and of the Father's voice declaring His complacency in the Baptized One, His beloved Son. Here we read of Him hurried by the Spirit into the wilderness, tempted there of Satan forty days, and with the wild beasts. From the scene of heavenly light Jesus passed immediately to encounter the power of darkness, for this He had come to do. As yet the heavens could open thus upon but One Man here below, though this transient gleam afforded an earnest of the coming day of glory for the whole earth, when the service of Jesus, which was then beginning, should be fully accomplished.

It is thus impressed upon us by the brief reference in the verses before us that Jesus was anointed to serve, not as angels do in the purity of heaven, but in a world of sin, where all creation is groaning together and travailing in pain because of present evil (Romans 8:22). The wilderness was there; the wild beasts were there; Satan was there. The whole world was in subjection to that wicked one, that arch-rebel against God and archenemy of man (1 John 5:19). But the Son of God was manifested that He might destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8).

It is to be noted that in each of the three Synoptical Gospels the temptation in the wilderness is recorded immediately after the baptism and the anointing. For forty days Jesus the Christ, the Savior of men, was alone in the wilds with Satan, who is Apollyon2, the destroyer of men. He who had entered the strong man's house to spoil his goods must first bind the strong man (Matthew 12:29). Accordingly Jesus, marked out of old as the Seed of the woman who should bruise the serpent's head, met the ancient adversary of man alone in the solitudes of the wilderness. Soon He would effectually annul the power of Satan, but now He withstands his subtleties, and is victorious.

In the preceding, and the succeeding, Gospels the three final efforts of the enemy at the close of the forty days' temptations are narrated in detail, Matthew placing the three in strict chronological sequence, while Luke reverses the second and third for moral reasons, consonant with the purpose of that Gospel. Mark, however, states simply, “He was in the wilderness forty days tempted of Satan.” He records the fact of the temptation, but states nothing regarding its nature, nor the manner in which the obedient and dependent Man overcame the wiles of the wicked one. It was sufficient here to let it be known that at the outset the Servant of Jehovah, apart from human view or aid or interference, joined issue with the enemy of God and man. The struggle was upon the question of His own personal allegiance to the One who had sent Him. But this character of the temptation is not mentioned here, nor even His victory and Satan's departure at the close. Two figures loom upon the sombre canvas—the elect Servant and Satan, with the wilderness and wild beasts in the background, while ministering angels shed light upon a scene otherwise of darkness.

Any further remarks that may occur on this passage may, for convenience' sake, be grouped under one of the following heads:-(l) The energy of the Spirit. (2) The temptation by Satan. (3) The company of the wild beasts. (4) The ministry of the angels.

(1) “Immediately the Spirit driveth him forth into the wilderness.” The phrase is one expressive of intense energy and instant action. The Father had bestowed the Holy Spirit upon Him “without measure,” and Jesus, in the plenitude of that Spirit,3 took the pathway which led into the wilderness. In that He was driven forth, it is proved how perfectly and fully He was possessed of the Spirit; in that this was done immediately, it is proved how swift was the Lord's response to Him by whom He had been anointed for service. There are two marks of perfection in service complete, unrestricted obedience, and also ready, unhesitating obedience. They both characterize the Lord at the beginning of His service; they are not less conspicuous at its close.

But such a quality as obedience is not appreciated in a world where all naturally are the sons of disobedience. Submission in the eyes of men is only weakness, a lack of fiber and force. Yet with what moral magnificence was the obedience of Christ invested as He, the dearly loved Son of the Father, is pleased to yield Himself up in the fullest degree to be led of the Spirit into the wilderness, as later to Calvary. It is a fruitful and practical subject for our meditation, since we are sanctified unto the obedience of Christ, and exhorted to be filled with the Spirit. And what is inculcated by precept and doctrine in the Epistles is enforced by illustration and example in the divine biography of the Gospels, where the moral glory and beauty of the subjection of Christ shine forth at every step. The life itself was for the glory of God; the record of that life is for the comfort and joy and emulation of His people.

But this driving forth of Jesus recalls, by way of sad contrast, the history of Eden and the expulsion of our first parents. Of them we read, after the fall, “Jehovah God sent him [Adam] forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden cherubim, and the flame of a sword which turned every way to keep the way of the tree of life” (Genesis 3:23, 24). This ejection was the penalty of Adam's disobedience; the passage from Jordan to the wilderness was the obedient act of Him who was the incomparable Servant of God, because He was His Son.

(2) The way of service for John the Baptist brought him into the wilderness to cry to guilty Israel to repent, because the kingdom of heaven was at hand. The way of Jesus, the Servant of Jehovah, led Him into the wilderness to be tempted of Satan forty days. Misguided men have sought the wilderness to evade the power of evil. Jesus sought it with the express intention of meeting the evil one. He alone was perfect within, and while He Himself was led up to meet the tempter, He taught His disciples to pray, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil [or, the evil one]” (Matthew 6:13). And when a self-confident apostle of His was about to venture into the midst of the temptations of the foe He made supplication for him. “Simon, Simon,” He said, “behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not” (Luke 22:31, 32).

Man always underrates the power and subtlety of Satan, but the Lord, who fully knew, and also measured by experience the strength of the “strong man,” went forth to meet him and to endure from him every form of temptation4 (Luke 4:13, R.V.). Though “in the likeness of sinful flesh” He was “without sin,” and “knew no sin.” The temptations, therefore, came to the Lord exclusively from without, as was also the case with unfallen Adam, though true of none on earth besides.

It was made known at the beginning that the manifestation of the Son of God would be for the destruction of the works of the devil (1 John 3:8). Jehovah said to the serpent in Eden, “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Genesis 3:15). In the Gospels we are shown historically that this was so. We find that when Jesus was born, Satan, using Herod as his tool, attempted to destroy Him (Matthew 2:16; Revelation 12:4, 5). Satan also sought, through Simon Peter, to stumble the Lord in the way to the cross (Matthew 16:23). For His betrayal Satan himself, not a demon or unclean spirit, took possession of Judas Iscariot (Luke 22:3; John 13:27). “This is your hour,” said the Lord to the chief priests, “and the power of darkness” (Luke 22:53). And though Satan seemed for a moment to triumph in the death of the Lord, thereby bruising His heel, by that same act his own head was bruised, according to the saying of old. For the power of Satan was annulled not by incarnation, but by death, as the Scripture declares. He became flesh “that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Hebrews 2:14).

It is clear, from these scriptural references, that the Servant-Prophet whom Mark delineates would have in His service to meet the devil, the adversary of man, and especially the foe of Him who had come to be the deliverer of man, and to heal those who “were oppressed of the devil.” Accordingly the Evangelist records that immediately upon His baptism Jesus encountered the prince of this world, being subjected to his temptations for forty days in the wilderness. It was not consonant with the special object of his Gospel to specify in detail the three final assaults of the evil one. It sufficed to state the fact of the encounter, while the personality of the tempter is emphasized here by the use of the name, Satan, rather than the more general term, “the devil” (), as in Matthew and Luke.

(3) “He was with the wild beasts.” While Mark omits many details of the Lord's temptation which are found in Matthew and Luke, this circumstance is peculiar to the account by the Second Evangelist. Its mention here is the more noteworthy because of the succinctness of the whole paragraph. The theorists on the subject of the origin of the Gospels find it difficult to invent a plausible theory to fit this awkward phrase on the assumption that the Gospel of Mark is an abridgment or precis of those of Matthew and Luke. Besides this phrase, there are miracles, a parable, and some incidents also, peculiar to this Gospel, and to account for the presence of these it is imagined by others that all the Evangelists compiled their accounts from an “original” or “primitive” Gospel, or that Mark's Gospel was the earliest; for when it is a question of the imagination, “historic” or otherwise, you cannot expect general agreement among the various theories advanced.

To illustrate how these various hypotheses leave one still groping in the dark, I quote from a writer of much acumen, whose remarks are based on extensive research into the subject in hand. He says: “I believe, therefore, that the compiler of the Second Gospel could not but have been acquainted with the tradition [of the temptation] recorded by Matthew and Luke, of which I look on Mark 1:13 as an abridgment. Yet the mention of wild beasts leads me to thinks that in the case of the opening, as well as of the concluding verses the abridgment was made by one who wrote so early as to be in independent possession of traditions.''5

Without here discussing this theory of abridgment, it may be pointed out that Dr. Salmon admits that the presence of this phrase requires a special explanation. He suggests feebly that Mark acquired it from some independent source. How does such a supposition help us? To regard the phrase as one supplied by Mark, either from memory or from some special source of information, and that it was added here just because it is not mentioned in the other Gospels, is virtually to rob the Holy Record of all aim and purpose, and to suggest that the Evangelist was most inefficient even as a compiler! Besides, if he added the circumstance of the wild beasts, because it is not recorded elsewhere, why does he mention along with it the ministry of the angels, which occurs also in Matthew 4:11?

The truth is that in this account, as we have it, the Evangelist wrote as “moved by the Holy Spirit,” and it is to be feared that this fact is overlooked in discussions as to “Petrine tradition” and “double” or “triple tradition.” The question of the origin of a given phrase in the narrative is altogether a subordinate and unimportant detail, when the Holy Spirit has been pleased to weave it into the fabric of the Gospel. It is possible that we may be slow to perceive its exact bearing in the scheme of the Evangelist. It is, in any case, becoming on our part to seek to learn this by patient inquiry, and by diligent waiting upon the Spirit for His illumination.

Jesus ''with the wild beasts” is a graphic touch of the inspired penman to indicate the fallen world which was the sphere of service for Jehovah's Servant. Adam was created to rule for God over the terrestrial works of His hand. All beasts of the field were subject to him, not in

fear and dread as afterward was the case (Genesis 9:2). They were brought to him in the garden of Eden, and by him named (Genesis 2:19, 20). In the wilderness of Judaea, however, they were wild, needing to be tamed by the power of man, and formed in themselves so many witnesses of the desolateness of a sinful earth, utterly devoid as the whole scene was of any of those alleviating circumstances known as human comforts.

Man, by his departure from the knowledge of God, has brought himself morally to the level of the beasts that perish (Psalm 73:22; 2 Peter 2:12); and, in prophetic imagery, a wild beast is employed as the symbol of worldly power and kingdom. This is so notably in references to Gentile rule, for when dominion was taken from Israel and placed into the hands of the kings of the earth, none of them ruled in the fear of God. Nebuchadnezzar, as an example and warning to others, who, like him should, in the vanity of their hearts, forget God, was driven from men to dwell with the beasts of the field, until his understanding returned and he blessed the Most High (Daniel 4).

In Daniel's vision of the four great world-empires he saw them as wild beasts (Daniel 7), and John beheld the revived Roman Empire of a future day under the figure of a beast (Revelation 13); for, like wild creatures, none of these kingdoms carry out the will of God except under His direct coercion. The wild beast is one that has shaken off the yoke and bondage of man. It is not, therefore, a stretch of imagination to see in the picture of Jesus among the wild beasts a shadow of the perfectly obedient Servant of Jehovah come into a world of fallen men, who owned no authority higher than the strongest or the most cunning among themselves.

(4) “The angels ministered unto Him.” Here we have a lovely contrast with the dark desolations of earth, amid which the Son of man is displayed to us in the wilderness. The ministering spirits of heaven attend upon Jesus in the scene of His temptation. Though surrounded by the darkness of this world, the light of the glory above is seen still to shine upon Him. Jesus had come as the Servant of Jehovah to serve the lowliest and the wickedest of men, but the highest celestial being would find it a joy to seek Him out in His solitude to do Him homage, and to serve the One who was learning what need was, though He possessed all things.

In His subsequent pathway, others gathered round Him to wait on Him, though He Himself was among His own as One who served. The twelve were His chosen body-guard, but He did not treat them as servants knowing not what their Lord did. Martha of Bethany served Him in the house of Simon the leper. Galilean women ministered to Him of their substance. He Himself asked a woman of Samaria to supply Him with a drink of water. But was it not fitting that the first to serve the Servant of Jehovah in His public service should be those august servitors whose functions lie in heavenly courts? Indeed, it was but in accord with an ancient prophecy that when the First-begotten was brought into the world all the angels of God should worship, as well as serve, Him (Deuteronomy 32:43, LXX.; Psalm 97:7; Hebrews 1:6).

On this occasion the heavenly service was rendered in private, unseen of man. But in the coming day of glory, when the Anointed appears in His majesty, every eye shall see Him and His angelic retinue too (Matthew 25:31; 2 Thessalonians 1:7). This future attendance will be public, and unmistakeable even by unbelief. But while the service in the wilderness seems to have been personal and unwitnessed, angelic homage to Himself was announced by the Lord in the earliest days of His ministry as a form of testimony which His own should receive in the days of His flesh, the ampler witness awaiting the millennial day. To Nathanael He said, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, [Henceforth] ye shall see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man” (John 1:51).

[W. J. H.]

(To be continued)

Mark 1:12. —To translate here by “driveth,” appears to go beyond the due requirement of the context which in all cases is the true arbiter of its force. Suitably rendered for the most part by “cast out,” there are instances nevertheless, in our A. and R..V. where our translators have justifiably presented a more congenial rendering. Take the following—Matthew 9:38 “send forth,” Mark 1:43 “sent away” (or, “out,” R.V.), John 10:4 “putteth forth” “hath put,” R.V.), Revelation 11:2 “leave out” (or, “without,” R.V.). In this very chapter (ver. 43) did our Lord ("moved with compassion,” 41) immediately after “drive” away (!) the cleansed leper? Why then “driveth” in verse 12?

Studies in Mark, Mark: 1:9-11: (4) Baptism of Jesus and the Witness From Heaven

III.-The Baptism Of Jesus And The Witness From Heaven (continued)

We now come to the testimony rendered to Jesus from heaven in the hour of His baptism. This witness was of a double character, viz. (1) the visible descent of the Spirit upon Him, and (2) the audible voice out of the heavens acknowledging Him. And in this character the witness was to be considered as valid and adequate from a legal Standpoint, since, as the Lord reminded the Jews on a subsequent occasion, it was a written axiom of their law that the testimony of two persons is true (John 8:17). Here then the Father and the Spirit attest the Son.1 Can such witness be exceeded? The Spirit witnessed to the unblemished and impeccable humanity of Jesus, and anointed Him for service. The Father acknowledged the Man, Christ Jesus, to be His dearly-loved Son. Thus we see in this context the Evangelist establishing on divine testimony the titles given to Jesus in the opening sentence of the Gospel, viz. (1) Christ (the “Anointed”), and (2) the Son of God (1:1).

Considering then first of all the outpouring of the Spirit upon Jesus, we may remark how it witnessed (1) to His holy humanity, and (2) to His anointing for service. In lowly grace He submitted to the baptism of repentance, but with no need for repentance. He publicly joined those who had confessed their sins, having no sins Himself to confess. Will unbelieving and carnal hearts think otherwise of Him, misconstruing the act of grace? To check such a hateful imputation, immediately as He emerged from the water the heavens were rent asunder, and the Father, jealous for the glory of the Son, gave the Holy Spirit to abide upon Him. Of all others baptized, though sins were confessed, their consciences were still unpurged from dead works and sinful stains, and must remain so until He came who had power on earth to forgive sins. But Jesus was the Anti-type of the meal-offering of fine flour mingled, and anointed, with oil, apart from the cleansing and atoning blood, and was thus in contrast with the Aaronic priests who received the anointing oil subsequent to an application of the blood. Here was a holy temple in which God the Holy Spirit could and would dwell. He was the Second man, the Lord from heaven, and on Him alone in this polluted earth the dove-like Spirit found a resting-place, as God the Father's seal (John 6:27), altogether apart from atonement.

But the descent of the Spirit had an official as well as a personal significance. The formal induction of kings, priests, and prophets into office was by anointing with oil, and prophecy as well as type indicated that the promised One would be so distinguished. Indeed He was expected in that character. Accordingly, when Andrew heard the testimony of the Baptist that the Holy Spirit had descended upon Jesus, he communicated the good news straightway to Simon, his brother, saying, “We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ2“ (John 1:32, 41). The Samaritans had a similar hope, hence the woman said of Jesus, “Come, see a man who told me all things that ever I did; is not this the Christ?” (John 4:29).

The “Anointed” was the burden of the oracle of prophecy. Hannah looked forward to the day when the horn of Jehovah's anointed would be exalted (1 Samuel 2:10). The royal Psalmist foresaw a dark day when the rulers of Israel and Gentile kings would enter into an unholy alliance against Jehovah and His Anointed (Psalm 2:2; Acts 4:25-27). Daniel predicted the date of the coming of Messiah the Prince, and its result (Daniel 9:25, 26). According to another Psalm, God would anoint Him “with the oil of gladness above His fellows” (Psalm 45:7; Hebrews 1:9). As the “Rod out of the stem of Jesse,” it was predicted that “the Spirit of Jehovah shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of Jehovah” (Isaiah 11:1, 2). It was also stated specifically that Jehovah's Servant should receive the Spirit. In words fulfilled at the Jordan, Jehovah said, “Behold, my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my Spirit upon him” (Isaiah 42:1; Matthew 12:18). The dove-like form symbolized the meekness, lowliness, and absence of self-assertion, which were the particular characteristics in which the energy of the Spirit would manifest itself in Jesus.

And all this came about. God “anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power” (Acts 10:38). And the Lord made allusion to the unimpeachable credentials furnished by this unction, when He announced at Nazareth the fulfillment of another prophecy concerning Himself “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek [poor],” etc. (Isaiah 61:1; Luke 4:18).

The Servant of Jehovah therefore entered upon His ministry in the full consciousness that everything was in due order according to the scriptures. This is indicated here, so far as the anointing is concerned, by a statement peculiar to this Gospel. Jesus Himself is said to have seen the Spirit given: “Coming up out of the water, he [Jesus] saw the heavens rent asunder, and the Spirit as a dove descending upon him.” John the Baptist also saw (though we know of none besides), as we find in John 1:32, 34, and Matthew 3:16, no witness being named in Luke 3:22. John bare record of what he saw, and others believed because of his testimony.

But let us pass on to consider the testimony of the heavenly voice out of the opened heavens, succeeding and silencing the voice crying in the wilderness. The heavens were not opened to disclose an object there, as in the case of Stephen. On the contrary, heaven had found an object upon earth—the sinless and obedient Jesus. To Him came the voice, not of an angelic choir as to the shepherds on the plains of Bethlehem, but of the Father Himself, saving, “Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I am well pleased.” As Man He was hereby assured of the divine complacency in Himself, and thus He commenced His ministry as the Servant of Jehovah in the full personal consciousness of His own Sonship. “Though he was Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered” (Hebrews 5:8), and He continued to abide in the sense of His Sonship throughout (John 10:33). He said to the Pharisees, “I know whence I come, and whither I go,” and, again, speaking of His Father He said, “I know him, for I am from him, and he sent me” (John 8:14; 7:29). So that the whole of His multifarious service was ennobled and enriched by His divine nature as Son of God, which gave it a character absolutely unique.

The voice from heaven was, in Old Testament times, familiar as a vehicle of direct communication from Jehovah. That voice was known in Eden, and is there associated with the presence of the Lord God Himself (Genesis 3:8). Moses reminded the Israelites of the manner in which Jehovah promulgated His law; “the LORD spake unto you,” he says, “out of the midst of the fire; ye heard the voice of words, but saw no form; only ye heard a voice” (Deuteronomy 4:12, R.V.). The glory and majesty of this voice is the subject of Psalm 29. It came to Elijah and Isaiah as servants of Jehovah (1 Kings 19:9-18; Isaiah 6:8). Now it is heard saluting the newly-baptized Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of God.

It will be observed, that as it is here stated that Jesus saw the descent of the Spirit, so it is also stated, as in Luke, that the voice was addressed to Him. On the mount of transfiguration, the voice which then came forth from the cloud, the “excellent glory” (2 Peter 1:17), spoke of Him to the auditors— “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” It is so also in the account in Matthew of His baptism (3:17). But in Mark and Luke the words recorded are, “Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I am well pleased.”

This personal address was in accordance with Messianic prediction in the Second Psalm: “I will declare the decree; Jehovah hath said unto me, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee” (ver. 7). Paul, in his discourse at Antioch, applied the passage to the “raising up"3 of Jesus (Acts 13:33), as he did again in his Epistle to the Hebrews in two connections (1:5; 5:5). The divine Sonship is therefore predicated of Him at His birth in time (Luke 1:32, 35), throughout His service, and also in resurrection.

But in Mark an addendum is made to the declaration, “Thou art my Son.” He is also styled” the dearly-loved"; “in thee,” says the voice, “I have found my delight.” God had found His good pleasure () in man, according to the angels' song (Luke 2:14, R.V.). And who shall measure this ineffable joy between the Father and the Son, from which the Spirit was not excluded? No wonder we read, “The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand” (John 3:35; 5:20).

The words of another, by way of brief summary, may well conclude our meditations on this passage. “Though truly God, He was man; though a Son, He became a servant, and was now about to enter on His ministry. He receives the Spirit as well as the recognition of His Son-ship. He had justified God's sentence on, and call to, Israel—yea, He had in grace joined the souls who had bowed to it in the waters of Jordan; but this could not be without the answer of the Father for His heart's joy in the path He was about to tread. The one was the fulfillment of every kind of righteousness, and not legal only (this in grace, for there was no necessity of evil in His case); the other was His recognition thereon by the Father in the nearest personal relationship, over which His submission to baptism might have cast a cloud to carnal eyes. “4

[W. J. H.]

(To be continued)

Studies in Mark, Mark: 1:9-11: (3) Baptism of Jesus and the Witness From Heaven

III.-The Baptism Of Jesus And The Witness From Heaven

“And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan And straightway coming1 up out of the water, he saw the heavens rent asunder,2 and the Spirit as a dove descending upon him; and there came a voice out of the heavens, Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I am well pleased3“ (1: 9-11, R.V.).

All three of the Synoptical Gospels record the baptism of Jesus in Jordan, and also the heavenly testimony which accompanied it. The Fourth Gospel refers only to the descent of the Spirit which attested His divine Sonship, this being the main theme of this Evangelist, rather than the Lord's coming in accordance with prophecy, as is so carefully shown in the first three Gospels.

The testimony of John the Baptist to the Lord is divided chronologically into two distinct sections by the baptism of Jesus; the first being his announcement that the Messiah was about to come, as Paul said—John “first preached before his coming the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel” (Acts 13:24); and the second being his declaration that the promised One had now come— “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me, for he was before me.” “I saw and bare record that this was the Son of God” (John 1:29, 30, 34). The first part of this testimony is recorded exclusively by Matthew, Mark and Luke; the second part by John only.

It is evident therefore that the event of Christ's baptism coincided with the conclusion of prophetic (that is, predictive) testimony to Him. And it will be remembered that the prophecy of John was singular in respect of the entire absence of any accompanying miraculous voucher. Moses' rod becoming a serpent, the long drought at the word of Elijah, the brackish springs at Jericho purified by Elisha, Nebuchadnezzar's forgotten dream recalled and interpreted by Daniel, are all instances of signs given to show that the men so acting were servants of the most high God. But John's testimony lacked support of this nature, and was attested by its immediate fulfillment and verification. Thus it was said, “John indeed did no sign, but all things whatsoever John spake of this man were true” (John 10:41). Those who heard his prophecy also saw its accomplishment.

John was divinely instructed to look for the specific fulfillment of his own prediction. He said, “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance; but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear; he shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.”

“I knew him not; but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptiseth with the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 3:11; John 1:33). This descent of the Spirit was therefore the appointed sign to John that the promised One was come, and that He was moreover the Son of God, for none beside could baptize with the Holy Spirit. As soon as John the Baptist had witnessed this sign from heaven he was thereby qualified to commence the second part of his ministry. This he did, pointing so definitely and effectively to the Lamb of God in their midst that his own disciples left him for his Master (John 1:35-37).

But John based this testimony upon what he himself saw at the Jordan Apart from this, speaking officially no doubt, he says, “I knew him not.” He does not hereby deny any previous acquaintance with Jesus, but he does deny that his declaration that Jesus was the Jehovah, whose way he was sent to prepare, was grounded upon any deductions he himself had drawn, or upon any estimate of His personality he himself had formed.4 It rested upon a heavenly revelation he had personally received, just as Saul's preaching of Christ as the Son of God (Acts 9:20) was founded upon the heavenly voice and vision that came to him on the road to Damascus. In neither case was the testimony humanly derived; and this the Baptist implied, when he said, “I knew him not.”

But while the divine seal was set upon John's ministry at the baptism of Jesus, it must not be supposed that his preaching was previously without effect upon men. The fiery words of the Baptist penetrated the consciences of many, so that they not only repented, but reasoned in their hearts concerning John himself, whether haply he were not the Christ (Luke 3:15); while all the people held him to be a prophet (Matthew 21:26). Can one number the publicans and sinners who were baptized of John in Jordan, confessing their sins, and were afterward received by the Lord, so that they said, “This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them5"? These were they who “justified” God, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him (Luke 7:29, 30). Though he came unto them in the way of righteousness, they believed him not, but said, “He hath a demon” (Matthew 21:32). And as the leaders of the people rejected the prophet of righteousness, and refused to own that his baptism was “from heaven” (Matthew 21:25), so they rejected a greater than he—Him by whom grace and truth had come (John 1:17).

It is well to see, however, that scripture shows that a great moral work of preparation was wrought by John's preaching, and in consequence a company gathered around him, who exhibited deeds “worthy of repentance,” mainly in their confession of sins and submission to baptism. The plowing had been done; it was time for the Sower to come forth to sow. A little flock of straying sheep had been collected in the sheepfold. Accordingly the Shepherd of the sheep appeared at the door of the sheep-fold, and to him the porter opened (John 10).6

This formal act was not undertaken, however, without remonstrance on the part of the Baptist, when Jesus “came from Nazareth of Galilee” to be baptized of him in Jordan “I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? exclaimed the astonished prophet, seeking in his ignorant impulse to oppose the divine will by his notions of human propriety. But whatever John might think, the way of Jehovah lay through Jordan Jehovah-Jesus was looking towards those who were poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembled at His word through His messenger (Isaiah 66:2). The way of righteousness was that by which John had come to the people (Matthew 21:32). And the Lord meant by a public and unmistakable act to own that way, and, graciously answering the one who sought to hinder Him, said, “Suffer it now; for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15). This was indeed a gracious reply, and in it the Lord at once maintained His authority and illustrated His grace. There was the gentle insistence that His will must be done, while at the same time with peculiar grace He yoked John with Himself in that submission which godly service ever involves. “It becometh us"7 are His words, for He was now stepping forth into the public eye, as the Servant of Jehovah, and this initial act was proper both to the baptizer and to the Baptized.8

[W. J. H.]

(To be continued)

Studies in Mark, Mark: 1:2-3: (2) Quotations From the Old Testament

II.-The Quotations From The Old Testament (1:2, 3)

“Even as it is written in Isaiah the prophet,1 Behold, I send my messenger before thy face who shall prepare thy way.2 The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make ye ready3 the way of the Lord, make his paths straight” (1:2, 3, R.V.).

In the abrupt manner characteristic of this Gospel a citation from the ancient prophecies is placed as a preface without any such introductory phrase as is used, for instance, by Matthew: “Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet,” etc.; and again, speaking of John the Baptist, “This is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice,” etc. (Matthew 1:22; 3). Luke also, like Matthew, places the historical fulfillment before the prediction itself. He records that John came preaching the baptism of repentance, “As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, The voice,” etc. (Luke 3:3, 4). Mark, in contra-distinction from these two, first quotes the written prophecy and then relates the historical fact of John's preaching and baptism. Why is this inversion of the usual order which we find in John's Gospel (19:24, 28, 36), as well as in the two Synoptists? Believing as we do in the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures, we believe this reversed order is designedly so arranged. Before, however, seeking to discover the purpose of this arrangement, another noteworthy circumstance must be mentioned which can hardly escape the diligent student of this Gospel. The quotation is singular in this respect, viz., that it is the only reference made by Mark, in the course of his narrative, to the Old Testament as prophecy, or authority. The other Evangelists, especially Matthew and Luke, make more frequent reference. Mark's first word almost is the recital of an inspired utterance, but it is the only instance. Many examples occur in which this Evangelist gives the words of our Lord Himself containing His quotation of the scriptures (see chaps. 4:12; 10:6, 7, 8, 19; 12:1, 10, 19, 26, 29, 31, 36, et al.), while he also in the course of the narrative makes more or less evident allusion to Old Testament phrases (see 1:44; 2:26; 4:29, 32; 6:34; 11:9, 19; 15:24, 29, 36; 16:19); but in the latter instances the fact that the phrases occur elsewhere is not mentioned.4

Here, however, the quotation is made by Mark himself, and is introduced impressively by the statement, “As it is written in Isaiah the prophet,” showing (1) that it is a written record, not an oral tradition, and (2) that it is an ancient prediction by a prophet of God. Then the terms of the prophecy having been recited, its historical fulfillment in the preaching of John the Baptist is duly stated.

Let us now consider why this Old Testament scripture is brought before us here, and why it is placed before, rather than after, the notice of the event to which it is shown to relate.

And the first general consideration is that this passage, so strikingly emphatic by its singularity, establishes before the history begins an unmistakable connection between this “gospel of Jesus Christ” and the burden of ancient prediction concerning the coming One. It is true that here in Mark “there is no blowing of trumpets to usher in the King in due style and title” as in Matthew. Neither have we the fullness of detail concerning the birth and early days of the Son of man amid circumstances of lowly Jewish piety such as are given by Luke. In John, human genealogy would obviously he out of place in the Gospel that treats of Him as the Word who was God, as it would equally be, for contrasted reasons, in Mark's Gospel, where He is portrayed as the Servant. As another has said, “Mark is devoted to the details of His service, especially His service in the gospel, accompanied by suited power and signs.... Hence as the Lord was the perfect Servant, so the perfect account of it says nothing here of a genealogy; for who would ask the pedigree of a servant?”

But if the genealogy of a servant is not an essential preface to an account of his labors, is it not fitting that his credentials should be stated? Here was the One from God, even “as he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets which have been since the world began” (Luke 1:70). God, “having raised up his Servant Jesus, sent him to bless” the people in accordance with the testimony of the prophets of Israel (Acts 3:26, R.V.). Jehovah's guarantee that Jesus was the promised Servant should have ensured His acceptance by the people who were the chosen guardians of the prophetic oracles. And the gravamen of Peter's charges against the Jews for their guilt in delivering up and denying in the presence of Pilate God's Servant Jesus was that they did so in face of the united testimony of the prophets, who had, moreover, testified of this particular guilt of theirs (Acts 3:13, 18, 21-26). Here, in Mark, a couple of pregnant sentences are sufficient to indicate that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Jehovah's Servant, is the One whose coming had been long foretold, and these should he ample to awaken our adoring contemplation of Jesus Christ come in flesh.

But, in the second place, as we consider the position of this citation in relation to its context, are we not entitled to ask whether it may not be connected with the antecedent verse as well as with the subsequent one? The words of the prophecy quoted have certainly a general reference to One whose advent was imminent as well as to one who was to herald that advent. His coming One is referred to in the first verse, “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God"; and His forerunner is introduced in vers. 3-8. In this view the Gospel opens not only with the assertion of the deity of the Servant by the Evangelist himself (ver. 1), but with the confirmatory prophetic testimony that He was Jehovah (vers. 2, 3).

Let us now examine this passage more closely, and in our further consideration notice—

The phrase, “as it is written;”

The phrase, “in Isaiah the prophet” (substituted by the Revisers for “in the prophets");

The quotation (ver. 2) from Malachi;

The quotation (ver. 3) from Isaiah.

(1) The phrase, “as it is written” (Rev. Text), is that occurring frequently in the N.T. as an introduction to scriptural quotations, and it is found about fourteen times in the Epistle to the Romans alone. The general sense in which it is used seems to be that the written words cited have a direct bearing upon the person or event named in the context. The historical event is thus authoritatively declared to be in accordance with what had been prophesied of old, while it is not thereby necessarily implied that the prophecy has received its complete fulfillment. It may, or

it may not, have done so, but this is to be determined apart from grounds afforded by the words “as it is written.”

On examination of the various occurrences of this phrase, it will be found that this is not the only instance in which it precedes a composite quotation. In Romans 9:33, Isaiah 8:14 is combined with Isaiah 28:16; in Romans 11:8-10 we find Isaiah 29:10, Deuteronomy 29:4, Psalm 69:22, 23; and in Romans 3:10-18 several passages are united. Here in Mark, Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3 are conjoined.

(2) “In Isaiah the prophet” is the accepted reading in place of “in the prophets.” It may be mentioned that this is the only case in which the name of a prophet is given after the phrase “as it is written.” In Luke 2:23 we have, “As it is written in the law of the Lord,” and in Acts 7:42; “As it is written in the book of the prophets"; but in all other places no personal reference is made.

The amended reading obviously creates a difficulty, as the passage is cited partly from Malachi and partly from Isaiah. Scriptural difficulties, however, only call for patient waiting upon God for light, which when given reveals the hidden beauty and subtle perfections of Holy Writ. To regard the words as a blunder on the part of the Evangelist is unthinkable. In the words of another, “Even on human ground it is absurd to suppose that the writer did not know that the first words quoted were from Mal. 3:1, and, if inspiration he allowed, the only question is as to the principle of thus merging a secondary in a primary quotation. Compare the somewhat different use of Jeremiah (from that of Isaiah 40:3) in Matthew 27:9, 10. There is purpose in both, which cursory readers have not seen, and so they have been as quick to impute a slip as the later copyists were to eliminate it. But it is as irreverent as unwise and evil to obscure or deny the truth even in such points as these, because the modes of scripture application differ from those of ordinary men, and we may not at a first glance be able to appreciate or clear up the profound wisdom of inspiration.”

The author goes on to say: “Kilster's conjecture that the reading was originally 'in the prophet' seems a mere effort to get rid of what he did not understand, which really, like such attempts generally, leaves the chief point where it was.” Dr. William Lee's suggested explanation is also inadequate. He assumes that Malachi's prophecy is no more than a quotation from Isaiah. He says, “Malachi is merely the auctor secundarius; and the Evangelist points out that this is the case by ascribing both commentary and text to Isaiah, whom he thus represents as the auctor primarius, the commentary being placed first, as it serves to elucidate the text."5 Whether Malachi only echoes Isaiah's prediction, as here stated, we will now proceed to inquire.

(3) The quotation from Malachi. “Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, who shall prepare thy way.” (The words, “before thee,” are here omitted, though they are quoted in Matthew 11:10 and Luke 7:27.)

Now there are two very striking features prominent in this prophecy—(1) the personality of Jehovah's messenger, who is honored and dignified by being such; and (2) the personality of the coming One who is declared to be Jehovah Himself. In regard to the first of these points, it will be remembered that the passage from Malachi occurs in Matthew and Luke, not in connection with John's preaching, as is Isaiah's prophecy (Matthew 3:3, Luke 3:4), but with John himself. When the Baptist's testimony was past and he was in prison, and to outward appearance he and his work had failed, the Lord said definitely,

“This is he of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face who shall prepare thy way before thee. Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist” (Matthew 11:10, 11; Luke 7:27, 28). He was the “prophet of the Highest,” and indeed much more than a prophet—the immediate forerunner of the Lord, going before His face to prepare His way. But it is well to see that while he abased himself in accordance with the prophecy of Isaiah (John 1:23), the Lord exalted him in accordance with the prophecy of Malachi.

In the second place we have here Jehovah speaking, and Jehovah sending— “Behold, I send my messenger.” And as it is Jehovah sending, so it is Jehovah who is coming. In Malachi the language is precise as to this, “Behold, I send my messenger before my face.” The pronoun in Mark is changed from the first person to the second— “before thy face” —because of the incarnation. He who sends had taken the place of the sent One, but the Sender and the Sent are one. “I and my Father are one.” Thus He who is before us in this Gospel as Jehovah's Servant is the One who sends the greatest of all servants beside Himself. Elsewhere we read John was a “man sent from God,” while the Servant-Son was God.

It is further to be observed that the prophecy of Malachi is in particular connection with the day of Jehovah. The One predicted is the coming Judge, for the prophet continues, “Behold, he cometh, saith Jehovah of hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? For he is like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap; and he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver.” This looks forward to a day of judgment yet future; but the same Person who is then to come as supreme Arbiter came to John to be baptized of him in Jordan.

(4) The quotation from Isaiah. “The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make ye ready the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.” A scrutiny of this passage in comparison with the previous verse makes it plain that there are such differences as forbid the thought that the later prophecy is a repetition of the earlier.

In the first place, while Malachi foretells the messenger who was to usher in the promised One, Isaiah prophesies of the message which should be proclaimed in anticipation of Messiah's advent by a nameless and obscure “voice” crying in the wilderness. In Malachi the messenger prepares the way; in Isaiah the voice calls upon the audience to make ready the way. The later prophet looks on to coming judgment, the earlier to coming salvation— “all flesh shall see the salvation of God” (Luke 3:6). Each prophet has therefore a distinct point of view; and Dr. Lee's theory of one being an echo of the other is not tenable. Neither can Malachi he regarded as amplifying the prophecy of Isaiah, though it is clear from the coupling of the two passages by Mark that there is a connection, but surely not that of commentary and text, as has been alleged. Such an explanation is confessedly a weak one, since it states that the Evangelist names Isaiah because the quotation from Malachi which is prefixed “only serves to elucidate the text.”

But is not the true connection between the two passages to be traced in the manner and measure of the fulfillment of the prophecies in question What was the preparation made for the coming Jesus Christ? John preached the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Those who confessed their guilt were those who were most truly ready for the coming of Him who had power on earth to forgive sins. This moral preparedness therefore as the result of the strenuous call to repentance by the voice crying in the wilderness is the burden of Isaiah's prophecy. And this prediction was actually fulfilled before the coming of the Lord. And because it was accomplished, a specific reference is made to Isaiah by this Evangelist, as also in a similar connection by Matthew and Luke. But Malachi's prophecy, on the other hand, only

received a partial accomplishment. John was the messenger to prepare Jehovah's way, but not yet as the Judge of Israel. And the very omission of the prophet's name to this prophecy, making it appear to be an interpolation, becomes significant of some special sense in which it is quoted. And this sense is, it is submitted, that of its partial accomplishment in John the Baptist, somewhat in the same way that Malachi's other prophecy (4:5) concerning the coming of Elijah the prophet received an anticipatory fulfillment in the same person (Matthew 11:11; 17:11, 12) so far as relates to the inward effects of his testimony for God. The application of the two prophecies quoted by Mark to the Baptist is also seen in the words of the angel to Zacharias, “He shall go before his face in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient [to walk] in the wisdom of the just; to make ready for the Lord a people prepared [for him]” (Luke 1:17, R.V.). In the last clause we have the words of both Malachi and Isaiah, as given by Mark. John was to prepare the way; the people were to prepare their hearts; even as those holy men of old foresaw and spake accordingly, being moved by the Holy Spirit. To sum up: the moral preparation which was the result of John's preaching being the subject of the Evangelist's history, the prophetic reference is accordingly made, by name, to Isaiah who prophesied of this rather than of the future day of judgment which will be heralded by a messenger of Jehovah even as the present day of salvation. And from this point of view, the deliberate and evident exclusion of Malachi's name, although his words are quoted, becomes as strikingly emphatic as the Lord's abrupt closing of the roll of Isaiah's prophecies in the synagogue at Nazareth. Most, if not all, of His hearers must have known that He had suddenly ceased in the middle of a sentence. He would thus impress upon them that He had not come to introduce “the day of vengeance of our God” (Isaiah 61:1, 2; Luke 4:16-21). Similarly the omission of Malachi's name here is eloquent of the truth that “the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God,” is in accordance with the prophecies of mercy rather than with the prophecies of retribution.

[W. J. H.]

(Continued from page 268)

(To be continued)

Studies in Mark, Mark: 1:1: (1) The Gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God

I.— “The Gospel Of Jesus Christ, The Son Of God” (1:1)

It is both interesting and instructive to observe what guards are set in holy Scripture to prevent our misapprehension of its main object. For while all divine communications are didactic and disciplinary (2 Timothy 3:16, 17) in a general. sense, their supreme characteristic, in the New Testament at any rate, is that they constitute the revelation of the Father and the Son, and on this account such precautions are rendered the more necessary. In that sacred monologue to which we are graciously made privy in the Fourth Gospel, the eternal Son, speaking to the holy Father concerning His followers, said, “I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me, and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me” (John 17:8). How shall we not then prize such utterances, given by the Father to Jesus, given by the Son to us, that we might know both the Sender and the Sent One! But then we are in danger of missing the lofty nature of these communications.

Do we on all occasions realize the personality of the Author, speaking Himself and of Himself to us as we read the Bible? This, however, is the aim of our spiritual education—that we should, above the din of controversy and the bustle of the marts, hear habitually the voice of Him who saw us “under the fig-tree.” We shall find an abundance of smooth stones in the stream, with which our Goliaths may be smitten down. But we cannot slake the thirst of our spirits with pebbles. We need to drink “of the brook in the way,” of the water of the well in Bethlehem. Truly, the power of God can make such stones bread; but we are not entitled to expect that Christian vigor will be maintained by perpetual miracle, and in order to live we need “every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God,” as our Lord Himself said.

And the construction of the phrase just quoted is highly significant. This vivifying power of the word of God is here intimately associated with its reception direct from “the mouth of God.” It was the breath of the Almighty that infused the spirit of life into Adam's inanimate clay at the beginning. Through grace we have been created afresh in Christ Jesus, and it is the theopneustic scriptures which sustain the new man. And their special value in this respect lies in the fact that in them we receive a personal communication from Him who is the Life.

Men labor zealously, but fruitlessly, to invent a definition of the inspiration of the Scriptures which shall be alike agreeable to the “honest doubter” and to the simple believer. But light and darkness may be as readily reconciled as doubt and faith. And after all, the definition of a fact is of negligible importance in comparison with the fact itself. And while few are qualified to judge of the adequacy or otherwise of a proposed definition of inspiration, it is within the power of the humblest saint to hold to the invincible authority and the incorruptible truth of God inherent in the Scriptures, both being qualities which are inseparable from a communication made by God to man.

The foregoing remarks have been necessarily somewhat abstract in character. It is proposed, therefore, to illustrate their general drift by examples from the Bible itself—one from the Old Testament and one from the New.

Abraham was a man who understood what it was to receive personal communications from God. One such instance in his career of faith is recorded in Genesis 15, and this will suffice to indicate the principle involved. Abram had arrived at a critical epoch in his history. For nearly ten years he had now been wandering as a pilgrim and a stranger in a land definitely promised to his seed, he himself to become the channel of blessing to all the families of the earth. After all those years of patience, these promises still seemed but a mirage of the desert. Abram was a childless man of eighty-five, the apparent heir to his possessions being Dammesek Eliezer.

It is at this juncture that the word of Jehovah comes to Abram in a vision, “Fear not, Abram; I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward.” But this reassurance only awakens a fretful plaint from the man of deferred hopes as though he had failed to judge Him faithful who had promised. And how is this flickering flame of faith rekindled? It is significant to note that again we read, “The word of Jehovah came unto him [but not in a vision this time], saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir.” This, however, was not an impersonal word, but such a communication as brought Abram into personal intercourse with Jehovah Himself; for it is added immediately, “And HE brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them; and HE said unto him, So shall thy seed be.”

This was a confirmation in amplified terms, though not yet with the oath given on mount Moriah (Genesis 22:16-18; Hebrews 6:13-18), of the initial promise to Abram, whose faith and hope now needed “encouragement.” How it would revive and strengthen his faith to hear the voice of Him who had promised, and to be assured that though long years had passed He had not forgotten! Moreover, to accomplish this result the more thoroughly, the Lord Himself conveyed this reassurance to His patient but not perfect servant. Accordingly we gather that the desired end was attained. The faith of Abram, impressed by the authority and faithfulness of Him who was speaking, laid hold of the living God, so that we find it written, “He believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.” And here we have the cardinal principle, which must ever underlie the life of the just, as the New Testament fully shows, wrought in the heart of this ancient saint by the word as it proceeded out of the mouth of God.

In Mary of Bethany we have a New Testament instance of one whose inner life received sustenance and nourishment by personal communications from the lips of the Lord Himself. On a memorable occasion she sat at His feet, and heard His word (Luke 10:39), selecting this attitude of her own free choice, impelled thereto no doubt by some sense within her of the real personality of the lowly Prophet of Nazareth. She received His words at first hand, choosing in this “the good part"; and they were not received in vain. Living, as we thus see her, by every word proceeding out of the mouth of God's Spokesman, she learned what most seemed to have missed, that the way of the Lord to the hill of glory lay through the valley of death. Six days before the Passover Mary came to the house of Simon the leper to anoint His body beforehand for the burial. Neither did she undertake the vain errand of seeking that body at Joseph's tomb on the first of the following week. She knew He was not there, but risen as He had told her and many besides. But was not her superior intelligence due in great part, if not entirely, to the fact that her teaching was viva, voce, while she, realizing in some degree who the august Person her teacher was, received His instruction in all faith and reverence?

Only in like manner can the maximum value be obtained from the Scriptures to-day. Those alone who humbly and prayerfully seek Him who is the Author and Subject of the Bible will hear His voice. To seek Him apart from the word is to be cheated by the vain imaginings of our deceitful nature. To read the word apart from Him is to expose ourselves to a similar cheat. He who is the Truth is to be found only in the word which is truth.

These reflections have been awakened by the phrase standing at the commencement of Mark's Gospel— “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” Its abruptness has occasioned much divergent opinion as to its exact meaning, though in this particular it accords perfectly with the terse and staccato style of Mark. The simplest and most acceptable view seems to be to regard it as forming the inspired title to the whole book that follows.

For what is the object of an inscription to a given volume? Is it not to prepare the reader for what is to be found therein? And this divine title to the Second Gospel is preparatory, informing the reader of its sacred contents, that with reverence and godly fear he may receive the words of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It is easy to forget that it was Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who came forth from Nazareth in Galilee, who ate with publicans and sinners, who was accused by the scribes of blasphemy and of casting out demons by Beelzebub, who was mocked, scourged, and crucified. But can any believer doubt the deeper significance these facts assume to us as we read them in the remembrance of the eternal Godhead of the holy Sufferer, and even more so when in the communion of the Holy Spirit we receive them as it were from His very lips?

Jesus Christ is presented in this Gospel as the Servant of Jehovah, who, according to the ancient prophecies, was to come into the world. How fitting before we read an account of His ways in lowly service that we should be reminded of His Deity, lest we should in heart detract from His glory! He who emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, learning obedience by the things He suffered, was Jesus Christ, the Son of God (Philippians 2:6-9; Hebrews 5:8).

But adequate testimony to His Sonship is recorded in other parts of this Gospel. There is a double witness from on high. At the baptism in Jordan a voice out of the heavens declared, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (1:11), a testimony repeated from the “excellent glory” on the Mount of Transfiguration (9:7). There was also a double witness from beneath. Unclean spirits fell down before Him, saying, “Thou art the Son of God” (3:11). So also Legion says, “What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God? I adjure thee by God that thou torment me not” (5:7).

We may also refer to His own recorded witness before the high priest. When the latter asked Him, “Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?” and received the reply, “I am,” he understood the nature of the claim thus made.."The high priest rent his clothes, and saith, What need we any further witnesses? Ye have heard the blasphemy; what think ye? And they all condemned him to be worthy of death” (14:61-64).

The remarkable expression of the Roman centurion at the crucifixion is also given in this Gospel. “When the centurion which stood over against him saw that he so cried out and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God” (15:39). There has been some discussion as to the exact sense in which the soldier used these words, and whether he is to be regarded as a confessor of Christ like Simon Peter (Matthew 16:16). But it is sufficient to see that he rebutted the charge of the Jews who said to Pilate, “We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God” (John 19:7). After witnessing the portentous signs of His death, the centurion was constrained, impartially if not unwillingly, to declare, “Truly this man was the Son of God.”

Thus we see that in this Gospel which portrays the Servant of Jehovah in His ways of perfect obedience, His eternal Sonship is jealously guarded, and that this character is given Him from its opening sentence. Incidentally, we also gather that there is cogent internal evidence for the retention here of the phrase, “the Son of God,” which some critical editors of the text have rejected on insufficient external grounds.

[W. J. H.

(To be continued)

clickbible.org