

ARTICLE III.

THE PERIOD OF DOUBT AMONG THE FRIENDS
OF JESUS: A STUDY IN THE LIFE OF JESUS.

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It is necessary first to sketch briefly Jesus' method of procedure in announcing his Messiahship, for only so do we see how the period of doubt was occasioned.

According to Matthew a voice from heaven at the baptism, applying to Jesus the Messianic title, Son of God, identified Jesus to John the Baptist as Messiah. According to the first chapter of John's Gospel, the Baptist introduced at least two, and probably more, of his disciples to Jesus as Messiah. There is evidence that the Baptist limited this explicit designation of Jesus as Messiah to an inner circle of his disciples, speaking of him to the main body simply as a very great personage from whom mighty works were to be expected. The evidence of this is the fact, that later, when John the Baptist and Jesus were working near each other in northern Judæa or southern Samaria, the Baptist's disciples came to him in a spirit of grieved loyalty, complaining that he who had been with them beyond Jordan, to whom their Rabbi had borne testimony, was now drawing all men to himself.¹ They would not have resented the growing popularity of Jesus, if the Baptist had previously distinctly introduced him to them as the Messiah. They would surely have joined the company of Jesus, as did those to whom the Baptist did speak of Jesus' Messiahship. Another indication that John spoke publicly of Jesus only as of a great personage is seen

¹John iii. 25, 26.

in the later attitude toward Jesus of the people east of the Jordan. Late in his ministry, when he was generally thought to be a Messianic aspirant, he went back to this region east of the Jordan where he had first received testimony from John. On the occasion of this visit, the people seem to have regarded him, not as one who had been designated by John as the Messiah, but as one from whom mighty works had been predicted. "John," they said, "did no sign: but all the things whatsoever John spake of this man were true."¹ They then proceeded to believe in Jesus, presumably as Messiah, accepting the surmise that had now become current regarding him.

It is to be observed that these two different, though wholly consistent, designations of Jesus are attributed to the Baptist, not the one in the Synoptic Gospels and the other in John's Gospel, but both in John's Gospel. The explanation of the phenomenon is to be sought in Jesus himself. The Synoptic Gospels teach very distinctly that Jesus was opposed to any general announcement of his Messiahship. He hushed the confessions of the affrighted demoniacs, who recognized him.² When he sent his disciples out to preach, they made no mention of his Messiahship, but simply reiterated the Baptist's demand for repentance in preparation for the coming kingdom.³ Far on in the ministry, when Peter said unto him, "Thou art the Christ," "he charged them that they should tell no man of him."⁴ It was to be the sacred secret of the inner circle. We must surely think of Jesus and the Baptist as having had, in the early days of the ministry, considerable conference with each other; and, since Jesus was so strongly opposed to any public announcement of Messiahship, his wishes must have shaped the Baptist's course. The same stringent prohibition that he put upon all others who might be tempted to proclaim his Messiahship, he put also

¹ John x. 40, 41. ² Mark i. 34. ³ Mark vi. 12, 13. ⁴ Mark viii. 29, 30.

upon the Baptist. The Baptist, therefore, retained the great body of his disciples, and continued his work after the public appearance of Jesus, only making vigorous protest against the surmise, which his disciples' devotion to him was constantly prone to make, that he was himself the Christ. "Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but, that I am sent before him."¹ This attitude of extreme deference on the part of the Baptist to Jesus, together with the fact that a few of his most intimate disciples had attached themselves to Jesus, may well have suggested to the rest that John regarded Jesus as a possible Messiah. To produce so suggestive a situation would have been quite in harmony with Jesus' general policy, as will be shown later.

This general reticence of Jesus, the Baptist, and the disciples, upon the subject of Jesus' Messiahship, explains the fact that, according both to the Synoptic Gospels and John's Gospel, the public at large, late in the ministry of Jesus, was in doubt as to whether he really regarded himself as the Messiah. At a time generally thought to be as late as six months before his death, Jesus questioned his disciples as to current popular opinion about himself. They replied, that there was great diversity of opinion, some supposing him to be a reincarnation of John the Baptist, now dead; others supposing him to be Elijah, or Jeremiah, or some other of the old prophets.² Of course, if Jesus had announced himself as Messiah, this diversity of views would have been impossible. There could have been but two opinions. He would have been regarded either as the Messiah or as an impostor, for certainly Elijah would not *pretend* to be the Messiah.

This same state of uncertainty at a late stage of the ministry is pictured also in John's Gospel. According to John x. 24, the Jerusalem Jews gathered about Jesus one

¹ John iii. 28.

² Mark viii. 27, 28.

winter day, in the temple area, and tried to extort from him a definite assertion on the subject. "How long dost thou hold us in suspense? If thou art the Christ, tell us plainly." Jesus replied, that he had told them, though evidently not by any such formal declaration as we are now discussing, but by the character of his works, a way of which more will be said further on. It is, furthermore, a familiar fact that at his final trial the prosecutors were unable to secure adequate evidence that he had ever distinctly asserted his Messiahship, and the case against him would have broken down, had he not himself made the requisite confession on the spot.¹ There is evidence, then, both in the Synoptic Gospels and in John's Gospel, that Jesus repressed all *public* announcement of his Messiahship.

It seems probable, also, that even in his intercourse with the inner circle of his own disciples, his assertions of Messiahship were neither explicit nor frequent. The first chapter of John's Gospel puts it beyond question that his first disciples, who were afterward members of the apostolic band, gathered about him with the conviction that he was the Messiah. Jesus seemed to encourage this conviction, not by a distinct statement, but by one of his characteristic suggestively obscure sayings, "Because I said unto thee, I saw thee underneath the fig-tree, believest thou? Thou shalt see greater things than these. . . . Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye shall see the heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man."² (It is assumed in all this discussion that the expression "Son of man" was not a current Messianic title, and that its use, therefore, was not an evident assertion of Messiahship.) They knew that he was reported in Sychar to have said to a village woman, that he was the Messiah,³ and they may have known later of the distinct declaration of Messiahship made to the blind Jerusalem beggar that had been excom-

¹ Mark xiv. 55-63.

² John i. 50, 51.

³ John iv. 25, 26.

municated from the synagogue.¹ In general, however, in his intercourse with his disciples, he seems to have manifested a reticence about discussing his Messiahship that must often have perplexed them.

In connection with this mysterious avoidance of any distinct assertion of Messiahship, Jesus kept doing many things calculated to suggest that he thought himself to be the Messiah. He assumed authority to forgive sins²; he assumed authority to abrogate the Sabbath law³; he spoke of himself as one greater than the temple⁴; above all, he asserted for himself an intimate and unique relation to God, by calling God in some special sense his Father.⁵ Not all of these assumptions were currently recognized features of Messiahship. Indeed some of them would probably have seemed to the Jews, with their low conception of Messiahship, assumptions that no Messiah would have ventured to make. This may have been particularly true of Jesus' statements regarding his unique filial relation to God. While the title "Son of God" was a regularly recognized Messianic title, the Jews seem to have given it no such richness of meaning as Jesus expressed when discussing his filial relation to God. Therefore it may well have been that some of the discourses in John's Gospel referring to his filial relation to God in a way that is to us, and was to him, a clear implication of Messiahship, seemed to them such blasphemy as no Messiah would have uttered. In addition to these suggestive statements about himself, Jesus gave impressive exhibitions of power that were suggestive of Messiahship; although, taken by themselves, they were such as God might empower a prophet to make.⁶

In general, it may be said that Jesus did a great deal in public to produce the surmise that he was the Messiah, sometimes, especially among the Jerusalem leaders, accord-

¹ John ix. 35-37. ² Mark ii. 5. ³ Mark ii. 28. ⁴ Matt. xii. 6.

⁵ John v. 17, 18. ⁶ Cf. John iii. 2.

ing to John's Gospel, going to the very verge of explicit assertion; but that he scrupulously refrained from any decisive, formal, public avowal of Messiahship. The two unequivocal avowals mentioned in John's Gospel were both privately made to individuals when not even his disciples were present. He behaved in such a way as to draw the attention of the nation to himself, and yet he held the nation at arm's length, leaving it uncertain whether he really considered himself to be the Messiah. This strange method of procedure, so well calculated to arouse eager expectation, and yet for many months failing to gratify it, afforded the ground for what I have called the *period of doubt*. We have now to consider the different individuals or classes that doubted, discuss more particularly the ground of their doubt, and the measures taken by Jesus to remove it.

THE DOUBT OF JOHN THE BAPTIST.

The first to be seriously troubled by this long-deferred announcement of Messiahship was, strangely enough, the Baptist himself. He that had been first to recognize, was first to doubt. Upon closer scrutiny, however, the Baptist's doubt does not appear so strange. Among the minor considerations that explain his doubt are these. He was the first of the circle of the friends of Jesus to suffer disaster, because of his connection with Jesus. He had gone fearlessly on with a vigorous popular campaign of preparation for the Messiah's kingdom, preaching reform impartially to high and low, and, in consequence, was now imprisoned in a fortress among the barren crags of Moab. He had been used to the wild, free, dervish life of the wilderness, and found his spirit growing moody in the unwonted and intolerable confinement of the prison. Furthermore, such inactive solitude, after the exhilaration of a period of great popularity, preaching to vast crowds upon subjects that profoundly moved him, produced a painful

reaction. Like his great prototype, Elijah, who after the excitement of Carmel wanted to die, he, too, may have been greatly depressed in spirit. His depression was not helped by the apparent indifference of Jesus, who organized no such movement for his release as a Messiah might have been expected to originate.

But there must have been certain more fundamental doubts that kept coming into his mind, and that he had not the health and strength to put away. The first of these was Jesus' strange failure to begin the work of judgment. The most prominent feature in John's pungent preaching had been the prediction of judgment. He had thrilled his audiences with most vivid and homely illustrations of the nearness of the Messianic Judge. The Messiah, whose advent was now so imminent, was like a farmer making a tour of inspection in his orchard, laying his axe down for a moment at the root of the tree, while deciding by a final examination of its branches, whether to spare it or cut it down.¹ He was like the farmer, whose foot was already upon the edge of the threshing-floor, and whose uplifted hand held the winnowing-fan ready to begin the separation of wheat from chaff, to garner the one and burn the other.² John's heart had been hot with indignation against the great sins of his age,—the religious hypocrisy and hard-hearted love of money that he saw upon his occasional visits to Jerusalem, and brooded over when he returned to his wilderness home. The Messiah would come in stern and awful wrath to smite the rotten structure of this social system. But the months passed wearily on, and Jesus gave no sign of a disposition to judge any one. He went genially and sociably about among the people, attending their weddings and dinner parties. His enemies, the Pharisees, were contemptuously referring to him as a man overfond of good food and fine wines,—“a gluttonous man and a winebib-

¹ Matt. iii. 10.

² Matt. iii. 12.

ber."¹ How could a Messiah go sociably about attending weddings and dinner parties in the face of these awful evils of society that cried out to heaven for judgment! Jesus was perhaps even reported in the Machaerus prison to have said that he came not to judge the world! He was apparently proving deficient in what had been a fundamental feature of the Baptist's conception of Messiahship.

Another essential feature of the Baptist's conception of Messiahship had been the Messiah's baptism with the Holy Spirit. 'My baptism,' John kept saying, 'is only a water baptism. His will be a Holy Spirit baptism.'² But the months passed by, and Jesus baptized no one with the Spirit.

Furthermore the Baptist's faith must have been sorely tried by a certain apparent aimlessness in the life of Jesus. Jesus failed to take any decided steps toward the organization of a kingdom. Although he gave startling exhibitions of power in the healing of disease, he seemed unequal to the main emergency, with no adequate conception of what it devolved upon a Messiah to do. A strange apparent hesitation had always characterized Jesus, and must have been sorely perplexing to a man of John's positive temperament. At the very beginning, when Jesus met John in the Jordan valley, he had manifested an inexplicable unreadiness to embrace an opportunity. The crowds gathered by John were eagerly expecting the Messiah, and were ready to be organized into a kingdom. Everything seemed ready for the hand of a strong, forceful Messianic leader, but Jesus, instead of seizing the opportunity, strangely disappeared, and was not seen again for some six weeks. He was reported to have gone away alone into the wilderness. The great festivals of the nation, when devout Jews came up to Jerusalem from all over the Roman Empire, were choice opportunities for a Messiah to influence his

¹ Matt. xi. 19.

² Cf. Matt. iii. 11.

people, but Jesus seemed sometimes to shrink from these occasions. It was this trait that made his own family lose patience with him. "Now the feast of the Jews, the feast of tabernacles, was at hand. His brethren therefore said unto him, Depart hence, and go into Judæa, that thy disciples also may behold thy works which thou doest. For no man doeth anything in secret, and himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou doest these things, manifest thyself to the world."¹ He went about country, village, and city healing sick people, visiting poor people, and gratifying fond mothers, doubtless much to the annoyance of his disciples, by giving their little children his blessing.

And so it happened that two men of serious mien clambered down the steeps of Moab, crossed the Jordan, and suddenly confronted Jesus one day as he taught the people in the market, with the abrupt query: "John the Baptist hath sent us unto thee, saying, Art thou he that cometh, or look we for another?"² Jesus' reply to the earnest question was characteristic. He bade the messengers watch him, while, for a busy hour, "he cured many of diseases and plagues and evil spirits; and on many that were blind he bestowed sight."³ Then he sent a message to John, devoid, as usual, of any direct assertion of Messiahship. It was a description of what he was doing, in language suggestive of the Baptist's favorite prophet, the prophet in whom he had found the language that best expressed his sense of vocation, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness."⁴ Isaiah had prophesied, as John had perhaps failed duly to notice, that a part of the glory of the Messianic age would consist in such healing of physical ailments as Jesus was then performing. "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb

¹ John vii. 2-5. ² Luke vii. 20. ³ Luke vii. 21. ⁴ John i. 23.

shall sing."¹ "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the poor [meek]."² "Go your way and tell John," said Jesus, "what things ye have seen and heard; the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good tidings preached to them."³ That is, John was to see that, although Jesus seemed in some particulars so un-Messiah-like, these actions were really the beginning of that banishment of physical ailment, of death, and of disregard of the poor, which Isaiah had prophesied as part of the glorious Messianic reign. The reference to prophecy was reënforced by a kindly personal exhortation to John to put away his doubts,—“and blessed is he, whosoever shall find none occasion of stumbling in me.”⁴ It was an assurance that Jesus knew what he was about, and an appeal to John simply to trust him.

When John had listened eagerly and thoughtfully to the report of his messengers, he doubtless turned again to the well-thumbed parchment roll of his favorite prophet, and read the portions suggested to him by Jesus' reply. Perhaps he saw a secret significance in the words that prefaced one of the passages, "Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God; he will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened."⁵ He trusted once more in the reliability of the sign of the descending dove, which he had learned in the wilderness to expect, and which he had seen at Jesus' baptism.⁶

THE DOUBT OF THE GALILEANS.

We have next to consider the situation of a large class of the common people. As has already been said, Jesus'

¹ Isa. xxxv. 5, 6. ² Isa. lxi. 1. ³ Luke vii. 22.

⁴ Luke vii. 23. ⁵ Isa. xxxv. 4, 5. ⁶ John i. 32-34.

conduct was such as to attract the attention of the nation to himself as a personage of great distinction. Candid men like Nicodemus admitted that he must be a teacher from God, because of the mighty works he did, but there was no agreement as to who he was. As time went on there were many to suggest that perhaps he was the Messiah. This last opinion nearly came to an open expression among the common people in Galilee. His fame as a prophet was so great that the sight of him, starting across the head of the Lake of Galilee in a boat with his disciples, was sufficient to set the crowds hurrying around the head of the lake on foot; so that, when he reached his destination, there was awaiting him upon the shore a crowd of ten or fifteen thousand people,—“five thousand men, beside women and children.”¹ As the day drew near its close, some provision had to be made for feeding them, and this need Jesus met by miraculously increasing the five loaves and two fishes that happened to be at hand. When the crowds became aware of the miracle that was being performed, they went wild.

There is one note that is never absent from the world's composite voice. Sometimes it is the pitiful wail of children, and sometimes the hoarse voice of desperate men. It is the age-long cry of the hungry for bread. For them, he who can make bread cheap may be king. Men's conceptions of the coming kingdom doubtless varied, then as now, with their various ideals. It was to each man the time when that which he most ardently hoped for would be attained. Just as to the Pharisee the kingdom of God was a state in which every man in his daily life would be a punctilious law-keeper, so to these people on the lake shore it was a state in which the bitter struggle for the common necessities of life would cease, when bread would be plenty and cheap. They had emphasized such passages

¹ Matt. xiv. 13-21.

in the prophets as described prodigious fertility, even the deserts blossoming out in luxuriant vegetation, "The desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly."¹

This action of Jesus, making bread to abound for the poor, seemed to them the sure beginning of Messianic plenty, and a sure indication of Jesus' Messiahship. These free-spirited, daring Galileans began to gather here and there in groups. Word was passed rapidly about among them that they would seize Jesus by force, carry him back to Capernaum, throw off allegiance to Herod and Tiberius, and make Jesus Messianic Emperor. Then they would sweep through the country in triumphant procession to the approaching passover in Jerusalem, carrying everything before them. But when the leaders of the crowd looked for Jesus, he was gone! He had slipped quietly up the mountain side.

The next day they found him in Capernaum. At once, with the simple directness of perfect insight, he proceeded to describe them to themselves. He told them that their interest in him was chiefly due, not to their desire for the higher phases of life to be realized in the Messianic kingdom, not even to their desire to see miraculous exhibitions of power like that of the previous day, but simply to their desire for easier physical conditions, for cheap bread. "Ye seek me, not because ye saw signs, but because ye ate of the loaves, and were filled."² The people tried to tempt him into a repetition of the miracle of the preceding day by slyly hinting, that, as Moses had given daily free manna in the wilderness, so he might cause a daily multiplication of free loaves. When this hint did not suffice, they plainly requested him to begin the plenty of the Messianic reign,—“Lord, evermore give us this bread.”³ Jesus then proceeded to deliver a charac-

¹ Isa. xxxv. 1, 2.

² John vi. 26.

³ John vi. 31-34.

teristic address, presenting to them the spiritual character of his Messianic ideal in a form that we now recognize as profoundly suggestive to the spiritually minded, but so weirdly enigmatical and unpractical in the judgment of the multitude as to alienate effectively the element that had desired to crown him Messianic king. He seemed to them to be talking in a senseless way about some cannibalistic eating of his flesh and blood.¹ This alienated not simply the people that, the day before, would have forced upon him the rôle of a political Messiah, but others who had been inclined to the theory of his Messiahship and even called "disciples." "Many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him."² His failure to utilize the opportunity for a declaration of Messiahship or to take a conciliatory attitude toward the crowd, argued in their minds a fatal lack of the practical political force and sagacity requisite for the establishment and administration of a great world-empire. Moreover, this obscure, sentimental style of speech convinced them that, although he did possess certain strange, miraculous powers, he was a visionary, half-daft dreamer. This we know to have been the view held at one time by his own family. They are on record as having thought him "beside himself," and in need of their care.³ Jesus himself, when in Nazareth, significantly confessed that a prophet was not without honor, except "in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own *house*."⁴

THE DOUBT OF THE TWELVE.

This doubt among the people and outer circle of his own disciples, Jesus was not able at the time to overcome. He let them go, and turned his attention to holding his immediate friends, the twelve men of his choice and those connected with them. There was sore need that he should

¹ John vi. 51-53. ² John vi. 66. ³ Mark iii. 20, 21. ⁴ Mark vi. 4.

concentrate attention upon them, for it was a critical time in the history of their connection with him. It is natural to suppose that the considerations that had tended to produce doubt in the minds of John the Baptist, the outer circle of Galilean disciples, and the Galilean common people, must have been to some extent operative in the minds of the Twelve. They must have felt very painfully Jesus' failure month after month to make formal proclamation of his Messiahship, and to proceed to do the things they had expected soon to see him do, when they first attached themselves to him. They doubtless were concerned about his failure to utilize the readiness of the Galileans for a popular movement in his favor, and the unpractical, enigmatical character of the address in the Capernaum synagogue must have been a trial to them.

It remains now to cite the evidence of their doubt, and to show how Jesus overcame it.

The first distinct hint of their danger is found in the solemn warning with which Jesus surprised them as they were sailing away from the Galilean shore after an ominously short interview with some of the principal Galilean Pharisees: "Take heed," said he impressively, "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the leaven of Herod."¹ The disciples at first failed to see the force of the remark. They noticed that they had neglected to replenish their store of provisions with a fresh supply of bread, and dully interpreted Jesus' remark as a playful rebuke of their carelessness,—“ You seem to be afraid of the leavened loaves that are to be bought in the Galilean domain of Herod and the Pharisees!” The real meaning of Jesus' remark is to be sought in the interview with the Pharisees that had just occurred.² In that interview the Pharisees had hypocritically desired a sign from heaven, as if ready to accept evidence of his Messiahship, while really plotting for his ar-

¹ Mark viii. 15.

² Mark viii. 11-13.

rest and execution. In another context¹ Jesus is represented as saying distinctly, that the leaven of the Pharisees is hypocrisy. The fact that Herod is mentioned with the Pharisees indicates that he, too, was in some way leagued with the Pharisees against Jesus, although manifesting no open opposition to him. The Pharisees and Herodians had at an earlier period been in collusion.² In Luke xiii. 31, 32, when certain Pharisees warned Jesus to get out of Galilee because Herod was going to kill him, Jesus is said to have called him a "fox," which seems to imply that Jesus regarded him as sly and hypocritical.

The Twelve, then, at this period were in danger of a kind of hypocrisy in appearing to have more confidence in Jesus than they really felt. The doubts that John the Baptist so frankly confessed to Jesus, they felt, but feared to express. It may be that the apostate spirit in Judas was beginning to develop. Such a state of mind was entirely distasteful to the transparent honesty of Jesus. He, therefore, not long after, took measures to bring out into open statement their real feeling with reference to him. The account of his attempt is given in close connection with this warning against hypocrisy. In the vicinity of Cæsarea Philippi he asked them one day an unusual question. After inquiring what the current opinion regarding himself was, he turned directly upon them with the searching question, "Who do you think that I am?" "If you have doubts, out with them," he seemed to say. Peter answered that they believed him to be the Christ.³ It is hardly probable that all of them could have given this reply as promptly and sincerely as did Peter. The confession was exceedingly gratifying to Jesus, and drew from him the appreciative exclamation, "Blessed art thou, Simon, son of John." The source of Peter's conviction could not be sought in the conflicting

¹ Luke xii. 1.² Mark iii. 6.³ Mark viii. 29.

opinions current among the people, and, as we have seen, Jesus himself had in all probability refrained from any explicit assertion of Messiahship even in the inner circle of his disciples. The peculiar conduct that had recently alienated so large a part of his following was a distinct obstacle to such confidence as Peter here expressed. It was an evidence of spiritual enlightenment that Peter, under such circumstances, should still persist in the conviction that had led him at the first to attach himself to Jesus, and Jesus seemed to recognize this in saying to him, "Blessed art thou, Simon, Bar-Jonah: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven."¹

After encouraging them by the virtual avowal of Messiahship implied in his reply to Peter, Jesus proceeded to subject their confidence in the theory of his Messiahship to a severe strain. He told them that the hatred of the Scribes and Pharisees would succeed in accomplishing his death. The death of the Messiah was a thought entirely foreign both to learned Jewish theology and to the popular conception of Messiahship. "We have heard out of the law that the Christ abideth forever," the multitude said to Jesus when, at a later period, in Jerusalem, he predicted his death.² The Twelve themselves do not seem to have taken Jesus' predictions of death and resurrection after three days literally. Had they done so, they would not have given up in despair when he did die, and would not have regarded the first report of a resurrection as "idle talk."³ They probably regarded this prediction as one of the many enigmatical utterances of Jesus that they could not understand. Perhaps they thought it likely that he was figuratively describing some sort of temporary disappearance to be followed by a triumphant re-appearance; for, at the time of his famous discourse upon the destruction of Jerusalem, they seem to have made up their minds

¹ Matt. xvi. 17.

² John xii. 34.

³ Luke xxiv. 11.

that he was to disappear for a time, and simply asked him what would be the sign of his parousia.¹ That they did not in that question have in mind a death and resurrection is evident from the fact, just noted, that the actual death seemed to them the end of all their hope. It is true that the words of protest ascribed to Peter in Matthew's Gospel indicate that, when Peter for the first time heard Jesus' prediction, he was inclined to take it literally, and regarded it as the expression of a gloomy and somewhat despondent frame of mind, which he sought to remove by saying, "Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall never be unto thee."²

According to Mark's Gospel, which often throws light upon the words of Jesus by preserving the significant circumstances of their historical setting, the disciples were disturbed because Jesus made this prediction in the presence of the people in his *public* teaching. This seemed to them a serious blunder, the repetition of which Peter vigorously sought to prevent. "He spake the saying openly. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him."³ The danger was that the multitude would think Jesus meant what he said, and he thus be entirely discredited in their eyes; for no one could be expected to follow a Messiah who anticipated death. To Peter's thought this was another instance of an unwise use of figurative language, like that which in the Capernaum address had already cost him so large a part of his following.

Jesus, however, would not retract, nor abate the force of his statement. Neither would he avoid publicity, but "called unto him the multitude with his disciples," and told them that not simply did he anticipate death himself, but that no one could keep a place in his following who was not ready to die with him. "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."⁴ This recklessly impolitic statement pro-

¹ Matt. xxiv. 3. ² Matt. xvi. 22. ³ Mark viii. 32. ⁴ Mark viii. 33, 34.

duced consternation among the disciples, and introduced them into a period of doubt that constituted the most critical stage in the history of their connection with Jesus. It lasted, according to the statement of all three Synoptic Gospels, for one week.¹ During this week of suspense they doubtless debated long and seriously among themselves the pros and cons of Jesus' Messiahship. Should they cut loose from him as so many among the people had done? Back of this unpractical, disappointing conduct was there in his personality the real force and sagacity requisite for the founding and administering of a great Jewish world-empire? Would he ever take a decisive forward step? On the other hand, how could a Messiah do works more wonderful than those done by him? Had there not been manifested in his life attractive personal qualities that would make it hard to leave him?

It seems probable that, as the week drew near its close, Jesus, watching his disciples closely, saw how evenly the issue hung in the balance, and proceeded to turn the scale by employing a unique measure for the recovery of their confidence. It is a significant fact that in all three Synoptic Gospels this measure is dated with reference to Jesus' disturbing statements about his death and the possible death of some of his disciples. Matthew and Mark introduce their account of the measure with the expression "after six days," and Luke, employing a different method of reckoning, begins his narrative with the statement, "It came to pass about eight days after these sayings." Jesus invited the three leading spirits of the apostolic company to spend a night with him on the mountain. There, in their presence, he came down from the plane of spiritual demonstration, and, as a concession to their need, condescended to make for them an impressive physical demonstration of Messianic glory. "He was transfigured before

¹ Matt. xvii. 1; Mark ix. 2; Luke ix. 28.

them; and his garments became glistening, exceeding white; so as no fuller on earth can whiten them. And there appeared unto him Elijah with Moses: and they were talking with Jesus." The three disciples became sore afraid; for "there came a cloud overshadowing them: and there came a voice out of the cloud," applying to Jesus the Messianic title, and bidding them have confidence in him, "This is my beloved Son: hear ye him."

Evidently this unique demonstration thoroughly convinced the three men, for Jesus felt it necessary to pledge them to secrecy, qualifying his injunction this time by giving them permission to reveal their experience after he had risen from the dead.¹ They obeyed his injunction, but were greatly puzzled as to what the rising again from the dead meant. The other nine apostles, therefore, probably did not know what had happened on the mountain, but they did know that their three companions were now perfectly certain that Jesus was the Messiah, and the confidence of these three influenced the rest. Thenceforth they all counted confidently upon the speedy establishment of the kingdom, and straightway proceeded to apportion among themselves in imagination the offices of the new state.² The ambitious mother of James and John sought to get the advantage of Peter by trying to pledge Jesus beforehand to give her sons the two highest offices in the new state.³

There is no opportunity in this discussion to consider in detail the reasons for Jesus' strange method of procedure in the announcement of his Messiahship. It is sufficient to say, in general, that his purpose was to replace the popular conception of Messiahship, and of the kingdom of God, by the larger, truer one that lay in his own mind. In order to do this, it was necessary to attract the attention of the nation to himself as a prophet of God, or as a

¹ Mark ix. 9.

² Mark ix. 33, 34.

³ Matt. xx. 20, 21.

possible Messiah, and then to keep it in a period of prolonged suspense which he might utilize to illustrate by life and teaching his own conception of the kingdom of God and Messiahship. Neither is there opportunity in the present discussion to consider what the details of this conception were, what the expression "kingdom of God" meant to Jesus, and what he conceived to be the chief business of a Messiah. As we look back upon the period, we see that his conception was definite and profound. He had seen the vision of redeemed humanity that he who sees forgets nevermore, the details of which are being slowly wrought out, and the ultimate realization of which will amply compensate for all the suffering of the centuries. Two things were dominant in his vision—love and life. Hate and death had disappeared from among men. The age-long cursing and sobbing of humanity had died away forever. He saw the Federation of the men of the Loving Heart extending its high civilization among all nations and into the endless ages.

The reason he seemed to his contemporaries to have no plan was because his plan was so vast and so simple that they could not see its outlines. In the midst of the impatience of his friends and the sneering hatred of his enemies, he stood with the calm patience of a soul that had come out of eternity, silently and steadily maturing a plan, not for the quick realization of a single generation, but for the ages. His confidence in the ultimate feasibility of his own conception was so perfect that it did not disturb him to go with it directly athwart the conceptions of a majority of his countrymen, and even to disappoint the expectations of his best friends.