

## *The Sure Mercies of David*

**F.F. Bruce**

[p.3]

All Christian interpretation of Holy Scripture is founded on the belief that the Old Testament and the New are related the one to the other in terms of promise and fulfilment, and that the promise and fulfilment meet together in Christ. The purpose of this lecture is to survey one of the many strands which go to make up this pattern of promise and fulfilment—the strand whose special character is well summed up in the phrase “the sure mercies of David”.

### **1. *The Promise***

These words—“the sure mercies of David”—appear twice in the Authorized Version of the English Bible: in Isa. 55. 3 and in Acts 13. 34. The New Testament occurrence is a conscious quotation from the Old Testament occurrence, and is intended to show the fulfilment of the promise to which the Old Testament occurrence belongs. The Revised Version of Acts 13. 34 renders the Greek text more accurately, “the holy and sure blessings of David”; for the Greek text here reproduces the Septuagint reading (*ta hosia Daueid to pista*). The Septuagint reading presupposes a Hebrew text with the word *chased* (“holy”) instead of *chesed* (“mercy”) which we find in the received Hebrew text of Isa. 55. 3. The difference is not serious. The Hebrew word *chesed* of our received text denotes “covenant mercy”, “loving kindness,” “steadfast love”—the attitude which God takes towards those to whom He has pledged Himself in solemn covenant (and which He expects them to show to Him and to one another).

[p.4]

The word *chased* presupposed by the Septuagint reading is a cognate adjective describing persons or objects involved in such a covenant relationship.

“I will make an everlasting covenant with you,” says God, “even the sure mercies of David”—the steadfast, reliable covenant mercies which were promised to David. The group of prophetic oracles to which this promise belongs (Isa. 40-55) opens with the words of comfort which foretell the end of Jerusalem’s desolation and the return of her deported citizens from exile in Babylonia to their own city and land. This restoration is to be the redemptive act of Israel’s God; and to accomplish it He has raised up Cyrus, founder of the Persian Empire. As Cyrus marches from victory to victory, he does not realize that his triumphant progress is directed by a God whom he does not know, the only real God, by contrast with whom all the gods of the nations are nonentities. Yet, in spite of Cyrus’s ignorance, Jehovah, Israel’s God, has anointed him and held his right hand, in order to bring him to a position of world dominion in which he may perform Jehovah’s pleasure and restore the Jewish exiles to their homeland. The purpose and effect of this will be that all nations shall know that Jehovah is God alone. The good tidings thus proclaimed to Zion will find an echo throughout the whole world; they involve, in fact, good tidings for all mankind.

But how can the rise of a heathen conqueror, how indeed can the return of a few thousand displaced Jews, have such world-wide religious implications? Because by these movements, whatever their intrinsic importance may be, the stage is set for something more important

still—for the introduction of a figure who puts Cyrus in the shade, the Servant of Jehovah whose direct mission it is to spread the knowledge of the true God to the ends

[p.5]

of the earth. Cyrus has served Jehovah unconsciously; here is one who will serve Him willingly and intelligently. Cyrus has served the divine purpose by the temporary and limited methods of military conquest and imperial power; here is one who will serve it in a far different way—not by making a noise in the world but in obscurity and by patient obedience; not by the imposition of his will on others but by uncomplaining endurance of unjust judgment, contempt, suffering and death. Such a fate is the reward meted out to him by others for his obedience to God, but it is more than that: it is the crowning act of his obedience; it is the very means by which he fulfils the purpose of God in a more abiding fashion than Cyrus could ever achieve, and in consequence brings blessing and liberation to multitudes.

Who is this Servant? Occasionally in these chapters the nation of Israel appears to be addressed as the servant of Jehovah, as in Isa. 49. 3:

And he said unto me, Thou art my servant;  
Israel, in whom I will be glorified.

But Israel has not been an obedient servant; the task of carrying the knowledge of God to the other nations is therefore entrusted to one who in his own person realizes the ideal Israel and brings blessing to Israel and the other nations alike.

It is too light a 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 end of the earth.

(Isa. 49. 6.)

The Servant to whom such special attention is drawn is closely associated with the nation of Israel and yet

[p.6]

distinguished from the nation; indeed, the sin of the nation is one of the causes of his suffering.

It is no accident that the character and work of this Servant are portrayed against the background of promised restoration from exile. And it is no accident that against this same background God assures His people that, despite the diminished state of their fortunes, He has not forgotten the promises which He made in earlier days to their great king, David. He reaffirms these promises; He will surely fulfil them. Even an ordinary promise of God is Certain of fulfilment, but the promises made to David are more than ordinary promises. They were given in a form which David himself describes as “an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure” (2 Sam. 23. 5). They were communicated by the mouth of the prophet Nathan (2 Sam. 7. 10-16):

I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in their own place, and be moved no more... Moreover the LORD telleth thee that the LORD will make thee an house. When thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever... And thine house and thy kingdom shall be made sure for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever.

These promises are echoed time and again in later parts of the Old Testament, not least in the Book of Psalms. They are recalled, for example, at the beginning of Ps. 89, in a day when the fortunes of David's house were at a low ebb, as "the mercies of the LORD" which are "for ever", and they are amplified thus in verses 20-37:

I have found David my servant;  
With my holy oil have I anointed him:

[p.7]

With whom my hand shall be established;  
Mine arm also shall strengthen him...  
I also will make him my firstborn,  
The highest of the kings of the earth.  
My mercy will I keep for him for evermore,  
And my covenant shall stand fast with him.  
His seed also will I make to endure for ever,  
And his throne as the days of heaven...  
My covenant will I not break,  
Nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips.  
Once have I sworn by my holiness;  
I will not lie unto David;  
His seed shall endure for ever,  
And his throne as the sun before me.  
It shall be established for ever as the moon,  
And as the faithful witness in the sky.

In these and other Psalms (compare Ps. 132. 11 ff.) it is emphasized that Jehovah's oath to David is inviolable; His mercies are eternal; His covenant is sure.

## ***2. David and his Successors***

David was not only the founder of a great dynasty. Rising to power in a day of disaster for Israel, he enabled the united tribes to throw off the yoke of their oppressors, the Philistines and others. He occupied the fortress of Jerusalem, seat of the ancient royalty of Melchizedek, priest of God Most High; and made it not only the capital of his kingdom but also the central sanctuary of the nation by enshrining the ark of the covenant there. At the enshrinement of the ark he exercised priestly functions, and as he had the gift of prophecy as well, he was one of the few figures in Israel's history in whom the three offices of prophet, priest and king concurred. He led his people to victory against the surrounding nations and built up an empire stretching, by direct or indirect

[p.8]

control, from the frontier of Egypt to the upper Euphrates. When he bequeathed this empire to his son Solomon, it might have appeared that the glories promised by God to David and his house had reached their peak.

But as Solomon's reign advanced, the lustre began to fade. One subject-nation after another regained its independence, and on Solomon's death the kingdom of Israel itself split into two parts; and the southern monarchy, which remained with the house of David, was the smaller and poorer of the two. Worse was to follow. A time came, about two hundred years after Solomon's death, when the northern monarchy was incorporated in the Assyrian Empire, and even the house of David was threatened with extinction. But in these years of darkness the Covenant mercies promised to David were confirmed afresh. Even in the northern kingdom a prophet declared that, after a long captivity, the children of Israel would return and seek Jehovah their God and David their king: their enjoyment of Jehovah's "goodness in the latter days" would be conjoined with the renewal of their allegiance to the line of David (Hosea 3. 4 f.). In the southern kingdom Isaiah announced that greater glories awaited the house of David than any it had known thus far, under a great king of that line—Immanuel, the Virgin's Son (Isa. 7. 14), the Prince of the Four Names (Isa. 9. 6 f.), on whom the Spirit of Jehovah would rest in unprecedented fulness (Isa. 11. 1 ff.), whose everlasting kingdom would be marked by righteousness and peace (Isa. 32.1 ff.). The fulfilment of all this was assured by "the zeal of Jehovah of hosts"—His loving care for His people and for the honour of His own pledged word. And Isaiah's contemporary Micah looks to David's town of Bethlehem for the promised deliverer and ruler of Israel, the man whose advent establishes peace, the shepherd-

[p.9]

king who will be "great unto the ends of the earth" (Micah 5. 2 ff.).

The events of the immediate future, however, showed no sign of the fulfilment of these hopes. The recession of Assyrian power gave Judah and Jerusalem a respite of a century or so, but the day came when the southern monarchy, too, was abolished, and Zedekiah, the last king of David's line, was carried into exile. The fragment of Israelite territory which had remained to David's dynasty became a minor province of the Babylonian Empire. Where now were "the sure mercies of David"?

Even now, when the gloom was thickest, a gleam of promise shone. Jeremiah assured his people that in place of the unworthy rulers who occupied David's throne in the closing days of the monarchy (Jer. 13. 13; 22. 2; 29. 16), God would raise up a righteous scion of the royal house, a second and greater David (Jer. 30. 9); "and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and execute judgment and justice in the land. In his days Judah shall be saved and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, The LORD is our righteousness" (Jer. 23. 5 f.; compare 33. 15 ff.). Zedekiah—*Tzidqi-yahuhad* proved untrue to the meaning of his name, "Jehovah's righteousness"; but another would rise who would rightly bear the name *Yahweh-tzickenu*. To those who feared that the promises of God had been proved ineffective, His reply was: "If ye can break my covenant of the day, and my covenant of the night, so that there should not be day and night in their season; then may also my covenant be broken with David my servant, that he should not have a son to reign upon his throne" (Jer. 33. 20 f.; compare verses 25 f.).

Similarly Jeremiah's younger contemporary Ezekiel, contemplating the downfall of the perjured Zedekiah,

[p.10]

sees that the crown of David will remain without a wearer for long, but not for ever: in due course one who is worthy to wear it will come and receive it. “I will overturn, overturn, overturn it: this also shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him” (Ezek. 21. 27). These words echo a promise which was ancient even in Ezekiel’s day, the words spoken of Judah in the Blessing of Jacob (Gen. 49. 10):

The sceptre shall not depart from Judah,  
Nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet,  
Till he come whose it is;  
And unto him shall the obedience of the peoples be.

This rendering, “Till he come whose it is,” quoted from the margin of the Revised Version, gives a probable interpretation to the phrase which the Authorized Version translates “until Shiloh come”—a translation which leaves an important word untranslated. It might have been thought at one time that the establishment of the Davidic monarchy exhausted the terms of the promise in Judah’s blessing; again, with the fall of that monarchy it might have been thought that the promise had been annulled. But Ezekiel declares that the prophecy neither found its ultimate fulfilment in the rise of David’s house nor met its final frustration in the ruin of that house. Another David (compare Ezek. 34. 23 f.; 37. 24 f.) is yet to come, the one to whom the sovereignty belongs by right, and in him all the promises made to Judah’s tribe and David’s house will be perfectly satisfied.

### ***3. After the Exile***

When at last the edict came which authorized the return of the exiles and the rebuilding of the temple at Jerusalem, it was natural that a restoration of David’s dynasty should be looked for at the same time. And

[p.11]

indeed, the restored community was administered at first by governors of the house of David, appointed by the Persian authorities. It may be that some pinned their hopes to Sheshbazzar or Zerubbabel as the restorer of David’s dominion. But neither of these was the second David of whom Jeremiah and Ezekiel spoke. To be sure, Zerubbabel is hailed as “The Branch” in Zech. 6. 12, although it did not fall to him to fulfil Jeremiah’s prophecy in which the coming deliverer receives that title. But the fact that after the return from captivity a prince of the house of David was governor of Judah showed at least that the promise of a “righteous Branch” to be raised up for David (Jer. 23. 5; 33. 15), had not been forgotten; Zerubbabel’s temporary elevation was a token that the Messiah of David’s line would indeed come—and it is, incidentally, a matter of interest that both the New Testament genealogies of our Lord include Zerubbabel among His ancestors (Matt. 1. 12 f.; Luke 3. 27).

I have used the expression “the Messiah of David’s line”. The word Messiah (Hebrew *mashiach*) is a verbal adjective with passive force from the Hebrew verb *mashach* (“anoint”); the Messiah is thus the “Anointed One”—not merely with reference to a past act of anointing but to the sacred character and power which he possesses in consequence of that act. The corresponding Greek word is the verbal adjective of *chrío* (“I anoint”)—*christos*, whence the

English form “Christ”. But in the Old Testament the title Messiah is not applied distinctively to the coming deliverer of David’s line as it is in later Jewish and Christian literature. When the term “Messiah” occurs in the Old Testament, it is normally defined by some qualifying addition, such as “the Messiah of Jehovah” or “my Messiah”. “This,” as Geerhardus Vos points out, “is of some importance because it

[p.12]

shows that the name had not yet been petrified into a conventional designation, but was a phrase the force of whose original conception was still being felt” (*The Self-Disclosure of Jesus*, p. 105). Nor was it only of kings that the term was used; the high priest, for example, is called the Messiah-Priest by virtue of his anointing (Lev. 4. 3, 5, 16; 6. 22). A prophet might also be anointed for his sacred service (compare 1, Kings 19. 16), but not so regularly as the king and the priest; so the term “Messiah” is not applied in the Old Testament to a prophet as such. In Zech. 4. 14 Prince Zerubbabel and his high-priestly colleague Joshua are described as “anointed ones”; but here the term used is not “Messiah” but the idiomatic expression “sons of oil”.

After Zerubbabel, the descendants of David pass into obscurity. Throughout the centuries of Persian and Graeco-Macedonian supremacy, and in the brief spell of national independence under the Hasmoneans, the hope of Israel was conceived in various ways: for many the expectation of a deliverer from David’s line gave way to the expectation of one from the tribe of Levi, whether a Hasmonean or a member of the family of Zadok which had been superseded by the Hasmoneans. (The Zadokite expectation has in recent years been illumined by the literature found in the Qumran ravine, near the Dead Sea; this literature appears to have come from a community which remained true to the old high-priestly family of Zadok and considered Israel’s hope to be bound up with the fortunes of that house.)

The end of the Hasmonean period of independence, however, and the advent of Roman domination in 63 B.C., saw a revival of the ancient hope that deliverance would come from the house of David. From the early days of the Roman occupation of Judaea we have a

[p.13]

collection of hymns oddly known as the Psalms of Solomon, in which this revived hope finds clear expression. Here, for example, are some verses (23 f., 32-36) of the seventeenth psalm in this collection:

See, Lord; raise up for them their king, the son of David,  
In a time which thou knowest, O God,  
That he may reign over Israel thy servant;  
And gird him with strength to dash in pieces the unjust  
rulers...  
He will possess the nations, to serve him under his yoke,  
And he will glorify the Lord with the praise of all the  
earth;  
He will cleanse Jerusalem in holiness, as it was from the  
beginning,  
That the nations may come from the ends of the earth  
to see his glory,  
Bearing gifts for her sons that were utterly weakened,

And to see the glory of the Lord wherewith God has  
glorified her;  
A righteous king, one taught by God, is he who rules  
over them,  
And there will be no unrighteousness among them all  
his days,  
For all will be holy, and their king is the Lord Messiah.

The closing phrase of this quotation—"the Lord Messiah" or "the Anointed Lord" (Greek *christos* identical with the title used in the angelic annunciation to the shepherds in the nativity story of Luke 2. 11: "there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is *Christ the Lord*". To be sure, it has been suggested that in both places the original text had "the Lord's Anointed" (Greek *christos kyriou*, as in Luke 2. 26); but this is no more than a conjecture.

The whole atmosphere of Luke's first two chapters, indeed, reminds us of the *Psalms of Solomon*; the pious people portrayed in these chapters (Zacharias and

[p.14]

Elizabeth, Joseph and Mary, Simeon and Anna) apparently belonged to a group not unlike the group from which that psalter comes. And the canticles of these chapters in large measure celebrate the fulfilment of the aspirations voiced in that psalter. The note of fulfilment of the Davidic promises is sounded, for example, in Gabriel's annunciation to Mary about her Son (Luke I. 32 f.):

He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most  
High:  
And the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his  
father David:  
And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever;  
And of his kingdom there shall be no end.

We hear the same note in Zacharias's hymn of praise (Luke 1. 68-70):

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel;  
For he hath visited and wrought redemption for his people,  
And hath raised up a horn of salvation for us  
In the house of his servant David  
(As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets  
which have been since the world began.)

The whole outlook and emphasis of these Canticles are quite different from anything that Luke could have been expected to invent; they come from a circle where the hope of Israel was looked for in the form of a prince of the house of David, and where it was believed that this hope was on the point of fulfilment.

But even in these canticles there is an indication that this Davidic prince will be at the same time the predicted Servant of Jehovah. The aged Simeon was told that before his death he would see the Lord's Messiah, but when at last he sees the infant Christ, his praise is voiced in language drawn from the Servant Song of Isa. 49. 1-6:

[p.15]

Mine eyes have seen thy salvation,  
Which thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples;  
A light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
And the glory of thy people Israel (Luke 2. 30-32).

#### **4. *The Apostolic Witness***

In the early preaching of the apostles, the statement that Jesus was a descendant of David appears to have been a constant feature. Paul, summing up the theme of the gospel in Rom. 1. 3, says that He “was born of the seed of David according to the flesh”. The genealogies of Matt. 1 and Luke 3 trace His ancestry by divergent routes, but the routes converge not only (as we have seen) in Zerubbabel, but also (and more pointedly) in David. Nor does the Fourth Evangelist contradict this. He does indeed report a dispute in the temple court where some of the people assembled argue that Jesus cannot be the Messiah because He is a Galilaean, whereas the prophetic writings say that the Messiah will Come “of the seed of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was” (John 7. 41 f.). But to infer from this that John is denying the Davidic descent of Jesus, or His birth in Bethlehem, is to miss a subtle instance of Johannine irony.

The early Christian speeches outlined in the Acts of the Apostles bear the same testimony. Peter on the day of Pentecost quotes part of Ps. 16 and points out that it cannot refer to David in person (Acts 2. 29-32):

Brethren, I may say unto you freely of the patriarch David, that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us unto this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins he would set one upon his throne; he foreseeing this spake of the resurrection of the Christ, that neither was he left in Hades, nor did his flesh see

[p.16]

corruption. This Jesus did God raise up, whereof we all are witnesses.

So, too, Paul in the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch reviews the history of Israel from the Exodus to the reign of David, and then passes straight from David to Christ: “Of this man’s seed bath God according to promise brought unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus” (Acts 13. 23). And James the Just at the Council of Jerusalem sees the restoration of David’s fallen tent, foretold in Amos 9. 11, fulfilled in the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus and in the reconstitution of His followers as a new community embracing believing Gentiles as well as believing Jews (Acts 15. 16-18). For, just as God’s promise to build a house for David was fully realized not in Solomon but in Christ, so the prediction that David’s son would build a house for God was consummated not in Solomon’s temple but in the new temple of Christ’s body in which His people “are builded together for a habitation of God in the Spirit” (Eph. 2. 22).

Again, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, Jesus is viewed as the One to whom Jehovah in Ps. 110 says not only “Sit thou at my right hand” (verse 1) but also “Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek” (verse 4). David, by his conquest of Jerusalem, became heir to

Melchizedek's royal priesthood, but it is in the ascension and heavenly session of Jesus Christ that the fulness of this heritage is realized.

### ***5. Our Lord's Testimony***

But what of our Lord Himself? Did He regard Himself as the promised seed of David?

When He received baptism at the hands of John, He was (as we all remember) addressed by a heavenly voice which said: "Thou art my Son, my Beloved; in thee I

[p.17]

am well pleased" (Mark 1. 11). It has often been pointed out that these words acclaim Him as the Messiah-King in terms of Ps. 2. 7, but at the same time show that His Messiahship was to be fulfilled in terms of the obedient and suffering Servant of Jehovah, introduced in Isa. 42. 1. The Spirit of God came upon Him at the same moment, equipping Him for His messianic ministry. We recall that the Spirit is said to rest in unlimited measure not only on the promised "shoot out of the stock of Jesse" of Isa. 11. 1 ff., but also on the faithful and humble Servant of Isa. 42. 1 ff. Both these prophecies began to be fulfilled in one Person, Jesus of Nazareth, at the moment when "God anointed him with the Holy Ghost and with power" (Acts 10. 38). The Servant of Jehovah, in fact, is explicitly said to be anointed for his task, if the opening words of Isa. 61 refer to the same person as do the earlier Servant Songs in the book (as I have no doubt they do). When, therefore, Jesus read these words in the synagogue at Nazareth and applied them to Himself—"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he anointed me..." (Luke 4. 18)—He proclaimed Himself as the Servant-Messiah. He showed how He understood His baptism and its attendant circumstances, and how He interpreted His messianic office.

The temptation in the wilderness suggested to Him that He should fulfil His Messiahship along the lines of traditional and popular expectation and not in terms of the suffering Servant. He refused such suggestions then, as later on He refused to be turned aside by the disappointment of His friends or by their well-meaning endeavours to make Him take some thought for His own safety. The anger of His audience at Nazareth was roused by His announcement that He accepted His Messiahship in no such restrictive national sense as they had hoped. When

[p.18]

the crowds whom He had fed with loaves and fishes wished to make Him king, because they thought they had found in Him one who would accomplish their dearest aspirations, He positively discouraged them with hard sayings as He spoke of the necessity of His death. No wonder that so many of His followers at that time turned back and "walked no more with him" (John 6. 66). And when Peter, almost in the same breath as his confession of Jesus as Messiah, tried to dissuade Him from the thought of suffering and death, he received the same rebuke as the tempter in the wilderness: "Get thee behind me, Satan" (Mark 8. 33). For in essence this was the same old temptation—the temptation to achieve His Messiahship by some other way than the way of the cross. Time and again He found it necessary to impress on His disciples that His Messiahship was a Servant-Messiahship, and that their only hope of attaining greatness and glory in His kingdom lay in their following Him, since the Son of Man had come not to receive service from others but to be a servant Himself, "and to give his life a

ransom for many” (Mark 10. 45). Even after His death and resurrection they came but slowly to believe all that the prophets had spoken—that the Messiah must first suffer, and then, and thus, enter into the promised glory (Luke 24. 25 f.).

But, while this was the way in which our Lord accepted and fulfilled His Messiahship, and while He rarely used the title Messiah of Himself, He did not refuse it when it was given Him. He accepted it from Peter at Caesarea Philippi, but warned Peter and the other apostles not to tell anyone that He was the Messiah. The popular associations of the title would cause misunderstanding and undesirable trouble if He publicly claimed it. But when He stood before the Sanhedrin, and other attempts

[p.19]

to procure His conviction had failed, He gave a direct answer to the high priest’s question whether or not He was the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One. “I am,” He replied; “and you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Almighty, and coming with the clouds of heaven” (Mark 14. 62). On that claim He was adjudged guilty of blasphemy and worthy of death.

Did He, however, claim to be in a real sense a descendant of David? He did not repudiate the title “son of David” when it was given Him by the Syrophœnician woman (Matt. 15. 22), or by Bartimæus (Mark 10. 47 f.), and He refused to rebuke the crowds who hailed Him thus when He entered Jerusalem as the meek Saviour-King of Zech. 9. 9. He knew, of course, that there were more important things than the establishment of His physical or even legal descent from David. But it should not be too hastily inferred from His language about Ps. 110. 1 that He disclaimed such descent. “How say the scribes that the Christ is the son of David? ...David himself calleth him Lord; and whence is he his son?” (Mark 12. 35-37). He is not disclaiming Davidic descent, but drawing their attention to the fact that the Messiah was much more than David’s son; he was David’s Lord as well. This was a much more important feature of Messiah’s person and dignity, and one which they tended to overlook

There is implicit in these words of our Lord a claim to divine dignity, as also (I believe) in His words to the high priest, already quoted. The claim to be Messiah would not be blasphemy in itself, if it constituted a claim to be no more than the son of David. But Jesus went on to speak of Himself in language drawn from the judgment scene of Dan. 7. 13, where “one like unto a son of man” comes with the clouds of heaven to receive universal and

[p.20]

everlasting dominion from the Ancient of Days. His judges took this to mean that He claimed much more than Davidic sonship—that He claimed, in effect, to be the peer of the Most High. This was blasphemy indeed, in their eyes.

Jesus would not be the kind of Messiah that many of His people wanted Him to be, and they would not have the only kind of Messiah that He was prepared to be. The Sanhedrin refused to believe that He was the Lord’s Anointed, and they sentenced Him to death. Were they right or wrong in their refusal? The apostolic preaching gave an emphatic answer to the question. God had indeed sent Him, and God raised Him up from the dead. But by so doing God did not simply reverse the verdict of an earthly court. He brought His ancient purpose and promise to fulfilment. Jesus of Nazareth, crucified by men, has been highly exalted by God. Great

David's greater Son reigns, more gloriously than great David himself ever did, as Prophet and Priest and King; but He bears this triple dignity as the Servant of Jehovah who was faithful unto death.

## **6. The Fulfilment**

Let us turn now to the New Testament quotation of the words which form the title of this lecture. Paul, in the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch, asserts that Jesus' conquest of death (a greater conquest than David ever achieved) was God's fulfilment of the promises made to David.

And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he hath spoken on this wise, I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David. Because he saith also in another psalm, Thou wilt not give thy Holy One to see corruption (Acts 13. 34 f.).

[p.21]

("Another psalm," he says, because he has just quoted Ps. 2. 7, "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee," of God's raising up Jesus to be Israel's Messiah. And now he quotes Ps. 16. 10, as Peter had done on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem, as a prophecy of Christ's resurrection.)

But the blessings promised to David were not for him and his house alone, nor even for the people of Israel alone. Who are the people with whom God, in Isa. 55. 3, undertakes to "make an everlasting covenant... even the sure mercies of David"? They are, surely, all who hear the call to the thirsty to come and drink, all who turn from things which cannot satisfy to receive God's own gift of life. He through whom the sure mercies of David are to be bestowed is not a deliverer for one nation only: "Behold," says God, "I have given him for a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander to the peoples" (Isa. 55. 4). Nor can this witness and leader and commander to the peoples be other than the obedient Servant of the preceding chapters who comes to be a light to the nations and to bear the sin of many.

But Jesus of Nazareth, anointed with the Holy Spirit and power, unjustly condemned by men, but highly exalted by God, is the One who, as a matter of history and experience, has done this very thing. Far greater numbers than ever submitted to David's rule, from every nation under heaven, acknowledge Him as Leader and Commander, Prince and Saviour, Redeemer from sin and death, and Light of the world. So to us to-day, as to the synagogue-audience in Pisidian Antioch, comes the assurance that by Him we too may receive and enjoy the sure mercies of David.

Be it known unto you therefore, brethren, that through this man is proclaimed unto you remission of sins: and

[p.22]

by him everyone that believeth is justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.... For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying,

I have set thee for a light of the Gentiles,

That thou shouldest be for salvation unto the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 13. 38 f., 47).

Never were more splendid and lavish promises made than those in which the perpetual sovereignty of David's house was covenanted to David himself. Never did promises seem more completely disappointed of all hope of fulfilment than the promises made to David. And never were promises more gloriously fulfilled than those very promises, as they have been fulfilled in our Lord Jesus Christ. True, we do not as yet see all things put under Him. But His suffering and triumph are to us the pledge of His eternal kingdom.

All the age-old features of the Messiah have been absorbed in the person and achievement of the suffering Servant. In the apocalyptic vision where John sees the celebration of the triumph of Jesus, the Conqueror's arrival is heralded in terms drawn from the ancient "messianic" language of Old Testament expectation. He is the "Lion of the tribe of Judah"; he is the "Root of David". But when John sees the conquering Hero enter, he sees One who has been led as a lamb to the slaughter, as was written concerning the suffering Servant. It is the "Lamb as it had been slain" that has conquered; it is the suffering Servant who is Lord of history (Rev. 5. 5 ff.). He has fought and won the decisive battle, and has thus ensured the advent of the day when every knee will bow in His name and every tongue confess Him as Lord—when the kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His

[p.23]

Anointed; and He shall reign for ever and ever. The mercies covenanted to David are made doubly sure—by the faithful word of God and by the redemptive work of Christ. And because the Son of David triumphed through suffering, the royal words of the seventy-second psalm are true of Him in a sense beyond the psalmist's own understanding:

He shall have dominion also from sea to sea,  
And from the River unto the ends of the earth...

His name shall endure for ever;  
His name shall be continued as long as the sun:  
And men shall be blessed in him;  
All nations shall call him happy.  
Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel,  
Who only doeth wondrous things:  
And blessed be his glorious name for ever;  
And let the whole earth be filled with his glory.  
Amen, and Amen.