

**THE CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE, THE  
FEEDING OF THE FIVE THOUSAND,  
AND THE WALKING ON THE SEA**

## CHAPTER VIII

THE CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE, THE FEED-  
ING OF THE FIVE THOUSAND, AND THE  
WALKING ON THE SEA

THERE are five events, other than those we have already considered, which are recorded both by the Synoptists and St. John. These we must now proceed to examine. They are the cleansing of the temple, the feeding of the five thousand, the walking on the sea, the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and the Last Supper. We shall consider the first three of these in the present chapter.

Each of the three Synoptists records how Jesus, after His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, went to the temple and cast out

them that bought and sold there, protesting against its sacred precincts being turned into a den of robbers. These three accounts are in reality one; the first and third Evangelists have doubtless here borrowed from Mark. St. Luke's account is the shortest; that in Mark, which is copied almost verbatim in Matthew, is the longest. In both Mark and Matthew it is said that Jesus entered into the temple and cast out them that sold and bought there, and overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold doves, and Mark adds that He would not suffer that any man should carry a vessel through the temple.

St. John, however, says nothing about this cleansing of the temple after the triumphal entry, but he records a similar occurrence as taking place at an early stage in the ministry when Jesus went up to Jerusalem for the passover. We will quote his account: "And the passover of

the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And he found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: and he made a scourge of cords, and cast all out of the temple, both the sheep and the oxen; and he poured out the changers' money and overthrew their tables; and to them that sold the doves he said, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house a house of merchandise. His disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house shall eat me up."

Further in both cases the Evangelists represent that Jesus was challenged by the authorities for His action. In the Synoptic account the question is put to Him: "By what authority doest thou these things? or who gave thee this authority?" To these questions Jesus gave no direct reply, but put to His questioners a counter question, "The baptism of John, was it from heaven or from men?" and promised an answer to

## 190 THE CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE

their question in return for their answer to His. They found themselves in a dilemma, and could not answer, and so received no answer to the question they had put.

In St. John also Jesus is challenged by the Jews and the question asked Him is: "What sign showest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things?" And Jesus answered: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Evangelist then goes on to record the answer of the Jews: "Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou raise it up in three days?" He then adds: "But he spake of the temple of his body. When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he spake this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said."

Now before we pass on to compare and contrast these accounts, and to decide whether both the Synoptic and Johannine accounts are to be considered historical or,

## THE CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE 191

if not, to which of the two the preference is to be given, let us notice a significant feature in the account of the Fourth Gospel, namely the reference to the disciples. "His disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house shall eat me up." And again: "When he was risen from the dead his disciples remembered that he spake this." These statements are at once explicable and justified if the Evangelist was himself a disciple. None but disciples themselves could appropriately say that they remembered, unless indeed he had the information from them, or unless there were something in their conduct which showed it (see for example Matt. xxvi. 75, Luke xxiv. 8). If then our Evangelist be not himself a disciple, he here makes himself appear so to be, and that in a most subtle way.

It must be allowed, I think, that there is nothing at all in the account of the cleansing of the temple in the Fourth Gospel which is *a priori* historically improbable. The

## 192 THE CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE

only exception that can be taken to it is that it too closely resembles the Synoptic account to be considered as the record of a separate historical event. But it is important to notice that a very casual statement in Mark respecting the false witness brought against Jesus at His trial before the high priest shows that some such words as those attributed to Jesus in the Fourth Gospel on this occasion must have been uttered by Him. St. John puts into the mouth of Jesus the words, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." In Mark it is said that at the trial there stood up certain and bare false witness against Him, saying, We heard Him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands. This witness was false because it distorted the words which Jesus had spoken. He had not said "I will destroy this temple," but "Destroy ye this temple, and in three days I will

raise it up." Exception has been taken to the explanation given by the Fourth Evangelist that Jesus spoke these words of the temple of His body. But we may in passing remark that the statement of the false witnesses in Mark respecting a temple made without hands shows that Jesus used the word temple in a metaphorical sense, and why therefore may He not have intended His body? And I think that it must be admitted that if Jesus did ever speak these words—as even Mark gives us reason to think that He did—the occasion of their utterance in the Fourth Gospel is peculiarly appropriate. And we may remark in conclusion on this point that the account in Mark of the false witness at the trial points to the words not having been recently spoken. It is an argument in favour of them having been uttered at an early stage of the ministry, as in our Gospel they are said to have been.

Again, the account of the cleansing of

the temple in the Fourth Gospel is minute and circumstantial. The oxen and the sheep are not mentioned in the Synoptists, but only here. The scourge of cords is peculiar to this Gospel, and the manner of dealing with the various articles of commerce is very exact. The oxen and sheep are driven out; the changers' money is poured out, and their tables overthrown; and the doves are got rid of by a command to those that sold them to take them away. Contrast with this exactness of statement the account in Mark: "He began to cast out them that sold and them that bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold the doves." Apart from prejudices against the Fourth Gospel on other grounds, would not its account of the cleansing of the temple deserve to be preferred to the Synoptic account, supposing that a choice had to be made between the two?

## THE CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE 195

But here is just the question which we must face, namely, whether a choice has to be made, or the incident was repeated in actual fact. And we may ask, Why should there not have been a second occurrence? If it were the case, as the Fourth Gospel states, that Jesus protested against the profanation of the temple at the beginning of His ministry, why, if He found the same profanation going on at a later stage, may He not have repeated His protest? It is true that the Fourth Gospel says nothing about such a repetition. But then neither does it say anything about a good many other incidents that took place at Jerusalem after the triumphal entry. What it says rather supplements the Synoptists than repeats what they had already written.

Further, the difference between the challenge put to Jesus on the two occasions and His answer to it militates against the theory that we have to do with only

one event and not two. Supposing that the Synoptists and the Fourth Evangelist recorded the cleansing of the temple as taking place *at the same time* but with a difference of detail in regard to it, then I allow that it would be a remark of a very weak case to explain the differences of detail by duplicating the event. But this is not the case with which we have to deal here. There is a difference of detail, and the occasion is also different. Therefore the two events may well be distinct. Both may have taken place.

The position has been taken up by some scholars that the event only occurred once and that the Fourth Gospel has given it its right place in point of time, the Synoptists only finding it necessary to place it where they do because they have given no record of any previous visit of Jesus to Jerusalem during His ministry. This position I find myself unable to adopt. I should be disposed to adopt it if I were persuaded

that a choice had to be made between the two, but I am of opinion that the repetition of the occurrence is the simplest and the most natural explanation of the contents of the documents. I certainly find myself unable to believe that the story as given by the Fourth Evangelist is an embellishment of that of the Synoptists. If it were, we should have to pronounce it an extraordinarily clever one, because of the superior picturesqueness of its details. This is more easily explained by the supposition that the writer was an eye-witness of the things which he relates.

We now come to the story of the feeding of the five thousand. They are probably not far wrong who consider that the interest of the Fourth Evangelist in regard to this lies not so much in the miracle itself as in the discourse which he places after it. The miracle forms the text of a sermon.

## 198 FEEDING OF THE FIVE THOUSAND

At this point, then, I hope I may be pardoned if I state the opinion that if the discourse in Capernaum on the Bread of Life had been found in our Gospel following upon the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand, and *if that miracle had had no place in the Synoptists*, there would have been critics who would have said that the miracle never took place at all, just as they tell us that the raising of Lazarus is a pure invention of the Evangelist, a story to illustrate the text, I am the Resurrection and the Life. But as the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand is recorded by the Synoptists, they are unable to take up this position, but they tell us that the discourse is an invention. Well, we are not now concerned with the discourse, though we shall have something to say about it later on. It finds no place in the Synoptists, and at present we are concerned with such things as are related both by them and the

Fourth Evangelist. It is the miracle with which we have to do. We must ask whether the account given of it in our Gospel is such as to justify the belief that he who records it was a disciple and an eyewitness of what he relates; for this he was, on the theory of the Johannine authorship of the Gospel.

Substantially, the account of the miracle is the same as that given by the Synoptists. Nobody could doubt for a moment that the Evangelist is recording the same event as that which they relate. But a very cursory reading of our Evangelist's account, and comparison of it with the Synoptic account, show us that it is marked by greater particularity, so that either the Evangelist is writing from personal experience, or he had knowledge of details beyond those known to the Synoptists, or he embellished the Synoptic narrative with details for some purpose or other. We must first examine the account and see what these details are.

## 200 FEEDING OF THE FIVE THOUSAND

According to our Evangelist the feeding of the multitude was first suggested by Jesus Himself. The Synoptic account represents the disciples as coming to Jesus and asking Him to send the multitudes away that they might buy something to eat. But Jesus replied, Give ye them to eat. And they answered, 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. Then He made the people sit down, and distribution was made of the loaves and the fishes, so that the whole multitude was satisfied. At the conclusion of the meal twelve basketfuls of the fragments were taken up. This is in substance the Synoptic account.

In the Fourth Gospel it was Jesus who first broached the subject of food for the multitude. "Seeing that a great company cometh unto Him, He saith to Philip,

## FEEDING OF THE FIVE THOUSAND 201

Whence are we to buy bread, that these may eat?" Why was the question addressed to Philip in particular? Was it that he was an inhabitant of the nearest town? We cannot tell. But we cannot but be struck by the fuller detail of our Evangelist beyond that of the Synoptists, who mention no disciples by name. The narrative goes on to say that Jesus only asked this question to prove Philip, for He Himself knew what He would do. Exception has been taken to this statement as exhibiting the tendency of the Evangelist to emphasise the foreknowledge of Jesus. But the question is whether the subsequent conduct and action of Jesus justify the statement. And most people would allow that they do. The statement of the Evangelist is of course not a statement of fact cognised by the senses. It is a justifiable conclusion based on the facts of the case.

Then comes Philip's answer: "Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient

## 202 FEEDING OF THE FIVE THOUSAND

for them that every one may take a little." This has to be compared with the question of the disciples, in the Synoptic narrative, whether they should go and buy two hundred pennyworth of bread. There is no real discrepancy between the two accounts. For if Jesus had, as our Evangelist represents, asked the question, Whence are we to buy bread that these may eat? the subsequent statement of Philip that two hundred pennyworth of bread would not suffice might well be converted into a kind of surprised question such as we find in the Synoptists: Shall we go and buy two hundred pennyworth of bread and give them to eat?

It is not improbable, as the Synoptists state, that Jesus at this point asked the disciples how many loaves they had, nor is it improbable that the answer came, as according to our Evangelist it must have done, from Andrew: There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves and two fishes;

## FEEDING OF THE FIVE THOUSAND 203

but, he asks, what are they among so many? Here again we have a particularity of statement in the mention of Andrew by name, which it is difficult to account for unless things really happened as here stated. One who was present would know and might well remember these details. If, however, the details are merely invented to make it appear that the writer was an eye-witness of the event, does it not seem strange that he nowhere asserts his own presence on the occasion? It can be inferred but it is never obtruded.

There are two other points in the account given by our Evangelist which indicate first-hand evidence. The one is the statement made by him that there was much grass in the place, and the other is the command of Jesus to gather up the broken pieces remaining over that nothing might be lost. The Synoptic account does indeed tell of the gathering up of the fragments, but it says nothing of this act proceeding

from a command of the Master. The probability seems to me to be in favour of such an order having been given.

The miracle of the feeding of the five thousand is followed in our Gospel, as in the first two, by an account of the walking upon the water. This forms a natural transition to the great discourse on the Bread of Life delivered in the synagogue at Capernaum. We may suppose, then, that it was on this account that St. John gave it a place in his narrative.

There are certain points of difference in regard to this incident between the Synoptists and St. John which must now be touched on. We observe first of all that St. John alone has something to say of the effect upon the people of the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand. He tells us that they said: "This is of a truth the prophet that cometh into the world." He then goes on to say that Jesus perceived

that they were about to come and take Him by force and to make Him a king, and that for this reason He withdrew again into the mountain Himself alone. Then, apparently in the absence of the Master, when the evening came, the disciples went down to the sea and entered into a boat, and were going over the sea to Capernaum. The Evangelist adds that it had become dark and Jesus had not yet come to them.

But according to the Synoptic account it was Jesus Himself who had constrained (*ἠνάγκασεν*) the disciples to enter into the boat and to go before Him to the other side—to Bethsaida according to Mark—while He sent the multitude away. Then, after He had taken leave of the multitude, He went into the mountain to pray. St. John, however, represents some, at any rate, of the multitude as being the next morning still in the same spot where the miracle had taken place (vi. 22).

Now as regards the effect produced upon

the multitude by the miracle of the feeding, there seems to be nothing improbable in this as it is described by our Evangelist. It was indeed a stupendous miracle that they had witnessed, and the conclusion to which they came seems perfectly natural under the circumstances. Moreover it would be difficult to see what motive the Evangelist could have had in making this statement unless what he says did really take place. It is true that the intention to seize Jesus to make Him king is only said to have been perceived by Jesus, and no outward signs of the intention are mentioned. But we need not assume that the Evangelist had nothing to go upon in making this statement. Moreover the haste shown and the compulsion exercised by Jesus, according to the Synoptists, in sending away the disciples, things which are unexplained in the Synoptic narrative, may perhaps be accounted for if the story of this event in the Fourth Gospel is

historical. For it might well be that Jesus desired to remove His disciples at once from the dangerous enthusiasm of the crowd, against which they might have been powerless to stand. There is certainly, then, no disagreement with the Synoptists on the part of our Evangelist when he describes the effect produced by the miracle upon the crowd. He is merely recording what they are silent about.

There does, however, appear to be a disagreement in regard to the other two points, namely, the sending away of the multitude and the departure of the disciples. But as to the first of these two it must be observed that our Evangelist really is silent on the matter, and it must not be supposed that what he says of the crowd the next morning in verse 22 implies that all the five thousand were still there. He speaks of ὁ ὄχλος ὁ ἑστηκὼς πέραν τῆς θαλάσσης. The presence of the article before the participle seems to make it impossible to understand that by ὁ ὄχλος

is meant the whole multitude of the day before. And indeed the following verses show that there were only so many as could cross the lake in the boats which came over to the place from Tiberias, and which were driven in possibly by the storm during the night. Some dispersal of the crowd the day before was well-nigh imperative in order to frustrate their purpose, and it is not difficult to fit in the statement of the Synoptists, that Jesus sent the multitude away, with the narrative of the Fourth Gospel, though this does not mention the fact explicitly.

The more difficult point is the departure of the disciples; but perhaps we may get help from the mention of Bethsaida in Mark. Matthew omits the words *πρὸς Βηθσαιδάν*, possibly because the writer found it difficult to interpret them, Bethsaida being situated at the north end of the lake and not close to its banks. Indeed some have thought that the words in Mark

imply that there was a second place called Bethsaida on the western shore of the lake, but this is mere hypothesis and has nothing to support it. Mark says that Jesus immediately compelled His disciples to enter into the boat and to go before to the other side (*προάγειν εἰς τὸ πέραν*)—to Bethsaida (*πρὸς Βηθσαιδάν*), so our English translation runs. What is meant by these words? Did Jesus send His disciples across to the western shore of the lake? The words *πρὸς Βηθσαιδάν* seem to exclude this, though the expression *εἰς τὸ πέραν* at first suggests it. May it not then be that Jesus told His disciples to go across to a point on the shore of the lake in the direction of Bethsaida, or over against Bethsaida, it being understood that He would follow them on foot? This interpretation would give a perfectly natural meaning to the words *πρὸς Βηθσαιδάν*. And if the interpretation be correct, then the narrative of St. John will fit in quite well with it. For the

disciples would wait at this spot for Jesus; and only when it had grown dark, and Jesus had not yet come, did they start to cross to the western shore of the lake, to Capernaum as St. John says.

Further, I am of opinion that not only is this interpretation of the words *πρὸς Βηθσαιδάν* a possible one, but it is necessary. If Bethsaida had been the goal, the fact would have been expressed by the use of the preposition *εἰς*, not by *πρὸς*. To a place is always in the New Testament rendered by *εἰς*. The only apparent exception to this that I can find is St. Luke xxiv. 50, where we have *ἕως πρὸς Βηθανίαν*, which is translated in the Authorised Version "as far as to Bethany." But this is probably incorrect; and we note that the Revisers have rendered it "until they were over against Bethany."

It does not seem to me, then, that there is anything in the account of this incident in the Fourth Gospel which is out of agreement with the Synoptic account.

Indeed the purpose of the multitude to declare Jesus king, which our Evangelist alone mentions, seems to throw light on what Mark and Matthew tell us. For it helps us to understand the desire of Jesus to separate His disciples from the dangerous enthusiasm of the crowd and His conduct in dispersing the multitude, before He rejoined the disciples. According to the Johannine account the disciples did not start to cross to the western shore of the lake until it had become dark and Jesus had not yet rejoined them. Their goal was Capernaum (*ἤρχοντο πέραν τῆς θαλάσσης εἰς Καφαρναούμ*). The Evangelist gives a graphic though very brief description of the difficulty encountered in the crossing when he says that the sea was rising by reason of a great wind that blew. He tells us that they had rowed some twenty or thirty furlongs when they beheld Jesus walking on the sea, and drawing nigh unto the boat and they were afraid.

When they were assured that it was Jesus they were ready to receive Him into the boat; and straightway, he concludes, the boat was at the land whither they were going. He does not state that they landed at Capernaum itself, though his language implies that they were somewhere near it, but this they might be if it was the land of Gennesaret, as Mark calls it. And there would be plenty of time for the incidents recorded in Mark vi. 54, 55 to happen before those of the multitude who came over from the eastern shore arrived in Capernaum later in the day (St. John vi. 24).

It is true that the Evangelist says nothing of Peter's attempt to walk on the sea to Jesus, an incident recorded only in Matthew. Of course if this incident really took place and the Evangelist did not know of it, he could not have been an eyewitness. But we cannot draw any conclusion from his silence on the point.

Exception has been taken to the statement made in our Evangelist's account that the boat was *immediately* at the land whither they were going, whereas it would appear that the disciples were well out in the middle of the lake when Jesus came to them. Mark, followed by Matthew, says that the wind ceased, and implies a continuation of the voyage. But if the last part of the voyage was smooth and quickly over, we need not be hypercritical in judging of the manner in which our Evangelist expresses the fact. The verb he uses is *γίνομαι*, the same word which he employs two verses before when he speaks of Jesus drawing near to the boat (*ἔγγυς τοῦ πλοίου γινόμενον*). It is true that it is the aorist *ἐγένετο* which occurs in the verse we are considering, yet still the verb itself denotes a process and not merely a state. They were not at once at the land, but they quickly got to it.

Returning once again to the narrative of

Mark, we may point out how improbable it is that "the other side" to which Jesus at once compelled His disciples to go was the western shore of the lake. For the Evangelist distinctly says that the disciples were to go *before*, while Jesus sent the multitude away. The clear implication is that He would follow them, and on foot, for there is no suggestion that there was any other boat there than the one. The place to which they were directed to go was then not very far distant, as indeed it would not be if Bethsaida here means Bethsaida Julias to the north of the lake, not far from which town the miracle of the feeding had taken place.

Further, it seems clear that the incident of the walking on the water could not have taken place in this neighbourhood, for Mark speaks of it as happening in the fourth watch of the night. The disciples must then have been on the lake for a considerable time and have advanced some way. It is highly improbable that they were still near to the place from which they had started.