

**THE MINISTRY OF JESUS ACCORDING  
TO THE FOURTH EVANGELIST**

## CHAPTER XI

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THE story of the ministry of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel differs from that in the Synoptists chiefly in these two respects: (1) Whereas from the Synoptic narratives it might appear that Jesus gathered no disciples about Him until after the imprisonment of the Baptist, the Fourth Evangelist states clearly that Jesus made disciples and entered upon an active ministry when John was not yet cast into prison. (2) Whereas the Synoptists make Galilee and the north the scene of the ministry of Jesus until near the time of

His visit to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast at which He was crucified, the Fourth Evangelist represents Jesus as visiting Jerusalem repeatedly, there being five Feasts, including the fatal Passover, which, according to him, gave Jesus occasion to go to the holy city.

Now, as regards the first of these two differences, it must be carefully noticed that the Synoptic narratives, though they do not mention a period of ministry prior to the imprisonment of the Baptist, yet do not exclude the possibility of such. For it is important to observe that the Fourth Evangelist does not locate this earlier ministry of Jesus in Galilee. It is true that he takes Jesus to Galilee after He has gathered to Himself certain of the Baptist's disciples (i. 35-51), and that he records the miracle wrought at the marriage feast in Cana, and also a sojourn of not many days in Capernaum. But we must be careful to notice that there is no *public* activity in

Galilee at this time. The occasion of the marriage feast was a private one, and only His mother, and brethren and disciples are mentioned in connexion with the stay in Capernaum.

From Capernaum our Evangelist takes Jesus to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover (ii. 13 ff.), and after this Jesus and His disciples came into "the land of Judæa." Here He tarried with them and they—presumably with His authority (comp. iii. 22 with iv. 2)—baptized. At this time, the Evangelist says expressly, John was still baptizing, for he was not yet cast into prison. This statement reads like a deliberate correction of a possible misunderstanding that might arise from the Synoptic narrative, respecting the time when the public teaching of Jesus began.

Now it is a matter of some importance that we should notice how both Mark and Matthew imply that, before the public Galilean ministry of Jesus began, He was

elsewhere than in Galilee, though they do not say where. Mark has: "After that John was delivered up, Jesus came (*ηλθεν*) into Galilee, preaching the Gospel of God, etc." (St. Mark i. 14), and Matthew speaks of a *withdrawal* into Galilee: "When he heard that John was delivered up, he withdrew (*ἀνεχώρησεν*) into Galilee." The wording in Matthew might suggest that it was in consequence of the imprisonment of the Baptist that Jesus withdrew to Galilee. St. Mark, however, mentions the imprisonment only as a point of time, and does not say that it was the reason why Jesus came into Galilee. So then even though the author of 'Matthew' may have intended his words "When he heard that John was delivered up, etc." to give the explanation why Jesus retired to Galilee, we need not regard the statement as authoritative, for he may only have drawn an incorrect conclusion from St. Mark, who is his authority here.

But the Fourth Evangelist gives as the

reason why Jesus departed into Galilee that He "knew that the Pharisees had heard that He was making and baptizing more disciples than John" (iv. 1). These words leave it undetermined whether the writer means that the move was made while John was still baptizing. "Baptizing more disciples than John" might mean baptizing more disciples than John *had* done, and not *was* doing. The reason of the withdrawal of Jesus to Galilee may then be given correctly in the Fourth Gospel, and the time of it, which is left undetermined here, may well be, as St. Mark says, after John was delivered up. Only a too keen scent for discrepancies between the Fourth Gospel and the Synoptists will detect one here.

But then we are confronted with the objection that St. Mark, followed by the author of 'Matthew,' places the call of Andrew and Simon Peter, to be disciples of Jesus, after the Galilean ministry had

begun, whereas the writer of the Fourth Gospel brings them into discipleship some time before, representing them, as we have seen, as having been previously followers of the Baptist. This seems at first sight a serious objection, particularly as St. Mark was the 'interpreter' of Peter and is reputed to be the reporter of that Apostle's teaching. But I think that it is possible to make too much of the influence of St. Peter upon St. Mark's Gospel. It must not be so exaggerated as to make the Apostle almost the author of that Gospel. And we have already pointed out in the second chapter how insufficient the account given by St. Mark of the call of Peter and Andrew by the sea of Galilee is to explain their readiness to obey. We must surely prefer here the fuller narrative of St. Luke who had some other source of information on this point than St. Mark's Gospel. It may justly be argued that the story of the miraculous draught of fishes as given

by St. Luke (v. 1-11) is the natural prelude to the promise of Jesus: "From henceforth thou shalt catch men." The very fragmentary account, then, given by St. Mark, who depicts Jesus walking by the sea of Galilee and calling Andrew and Peter to follow Him, and He would make them fishers of men, needs to be supplemented as in St. Luke's Gospel it is. But there is no reason for regarding this supplement as in any way artificial and the invention of the writer. It has all the appearance of historical truth. Nor, as I have already pointed out, does St. Luke's account suggest that when this incident took place Simon Peter was still a stranger to Jesus. On the contrary, it is more probable than not that Peter already knew Jesus and so had learnt to place confidence in Him, as he shows himself ready to do when he says: "Master, we toiled all the night, and took nothing: but at thy word I will let down the net."

It does not then seem to me reasonable

to consider the Fourth Gospel incredible in so far as it brings Simon Peter and Andrew into a position of discipleship with Jesus at a time earlier than the public Galilean ministry. It is a remarkable fact that if we exclude the account given in the Fourth Gospel of the passing of disciples from the Baptist to Jesus then we have no record anywhere of any such thing. It is surely unlikely that he who made it his work to prepare the way for the Christ should not have passed on some of his disciples to follow Jesus.

And before we go on further, it may be pointed out that we have evidence from another source that the ministry of Jesus does not (even in the view of one of the Synoptic Evangelists) date from the imprisonment of the Baptist, but rather goes back to the time when John was still baptizing. I refer to the reported words of St. Peter in Acts i. 21 f., where we read: "Of the men therefore which have companied with us

all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and went out among us, *beginning from the baptism of John*, unto the day that he was received up from us, of these must one become a witness with us of his resurrection." The words here italicised seem to me an indirect but not an uninteresting confirmation of what is reported in the Fourth Gospel respecting the time at which Jesus began to gather disciples about Himself.

But, an objector will say, granting that Jesus may have made disciples prior to His public Galilean ministry, there is a serious difficulty in the way of the acceptance of the account of this in the Fourth Gospel. For the recognition and confession of Jesus by His disciples, as the Messiah at this early stage is, in view of the Synoptic narratives, an anachronism. This recognition, it is said, only came later. Moreover, in the Synoptists Jesus is represented as unready to declare Himself

to be the Messiah, whereas in the Fourth Gospel the Messianic claim is in the foreground everywhere.

I have already pointed out in the second chapter that the recognition of the first disciples of Jesus as the Christ is more a hope than an assured faith, and that the discipline of their training under Jesus was necessary in order that it might pass from the one to the other. Even in the Fourth Gospel itself the faith of the disciples is shown to be of gradual growth (ii. 11, vi. 68 f.). At first it was the belief of hope, and this, as they gained experience, developed into the faith that comes of knowledge.

In reference to the general objection that in the Fourth Gospel Jesus puts Himself forward from the first as the Messiah it may be said that this is an objection which is easily overrated. As we shall see when we come to consider the visits of Jesus to Jerusalem, He did not

declare Himself as the Christ to the Jews sufficiently clearly for them. And so late as the last visit but one we find them challenging Him to assert Himself: "How long dost thou hold us in suspense? If thou art the Christ tell us plainly."

It seems to me as clear as anything well can be, if once we accept the Synoptic story of the Baptism of Jesus, that He was fully conscious of His Messiahship before He began His ministry. And when He came forward to gather disciples to Himself, He must have meant to present Himself to them as the Messiah, to make them 'believe in Him.' That the conception which the people had of the Messiah was a wrong one, and one that Jesus could not entertain, is apparent enough. And as wrong notions manifested themselves, caution was needed—even the Fourth Gospel shows this to have been the case (ii. 24, vi. 15)—and injunctions to silence such as we find in the Synoptists may

have become necessary. As Professor Stanton\* well observes, Jesus "set before Himself a twofold object—to implant in the hearts of men faith in Himself as the Christ, and at the same time to change their conception of the Christ, to prevent His countrymen receiving Him merely as the Christ of their expectation."

It must be borne in mind that the time when Jesus came forward was one of expectation. People were looking for the Messiah, and the preaching of the Baptist must have quickened the hope of the coming of the Christ. Some of the Baptist's disciples then were ready to follow one to whom their master had pointed them. With this little band of disciples Jesus went to Galilee, but not, as we have seen, to come forward there publicly as a Teacher. At the marriage feast in Cana of Galilee He turns the water into

\* *The Gospels as Historical Documents*, part ii. p. 196.

wine. It is interesting, I think, to note one particular in our Evangelist's account of this event. I refer to the hesitation, which Jesus shows, to exercise His power. When His mother tells Him that the supply of wine has failed, He answers her, almost reprovingly: "Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come." Shall He, or shall He not, relieve their want? He cannot unless the right moment has come for the manifestation of His power. Now the Fourth Evangelist tells us nothing of the story of the Temptation of Jesus, as we have it in the Synoptists, but we observe here a striking agreement between him and them. The author of *Ecce Homo* was right, I think, in making the Temptation of Jesus a matter having to do with the way in which He should exercise His miraculous powers. He had refused in the wilderness to turn stones into bread for the satisfaction of His bodily wants. And it seems

to me that He hesitates, for the moment, as to whether He shall use His power at the marriage-feast. He must first be assured that His hour has come, and that the occasion is a right one for so doing. There is at first sight an apparent contradiction between the gentle rebuke addressed to His mother and His subsequent readiness to take the course He did. But deliberation was needed. He would not be dictated to, save from above. There was only hesitation until the Divine will was clear. Then an immediate response was made.

The miracle then was wrought, and the Evangelist records that in consequence of it, His disciples (of whom we believe he was himself one, and so qualified to speak on the point) believed on Him. They who had joined themselves to Jesus, because of the testimony of the Baptist to Him, were now finding that their allegiance was deserved.

After this event at Cana, whether immediately or not we cannot say, for the connecting link *μετὰ τοῦτο* does not determine this, Jesus went with His mother and brethren and disciples to Capernaum, for what purpose we are not told, but there is no hint of any public teaching on this occasion. Thence He went up to Jerusalem for the Passover (ii. 13), His disciples accompanying Him (ii. 22). It was on this occasion that, for the first time, He protested against the profanation of the temple. The account of this we have already considered in an earlier chapter, and we have seen that there is good reason to regard it as historical. The action of Jesus aroused the resentment of ‘the Jews’ and we see here the beginning of their hostility towards Him, which thus dates from a very early stage of His public life. For this is His first appearance in Jerusalem since this began. But all were not hostile. “When He was at Jerusalem

at the passover, during the feast, many believed on his name, beholding his signs which he did." The Evangelist does not tell us what signs these were. The cleansing of the temple may well have been one of them. But though many were ready 'to believe on His name'—which means probably that they were ready to welcome Him as Messiah—"Jesus did not trust Himself unto them." We may read into this statement of the Evangelist the fact that there were false conceptions of Messiahship in the minds of the people in Jerusalem, and these Jesus detected from the first.

It was during the time in Jerusalem that the visit of Nicodemus to Jesus by night occurred (iii. 1-21). There is nothing incredible or at all improbable in this visit, nor do I see any reason to doubt that the *purport* of the conversation, which, indeed, the Evangelist may himself have heard, is correctly reported. I say deliberately 'purport,' for, as has often been pointed out,

the style of the writer himself marks even the words of Jesus which He records. Indeed it is not always easy to decide where Jesus ceases to speak, and the reflections of the Evangelist on His words begin. Thus verses 16–21 of this chapter may well be the writer's own comment, rather than words of Jesus.

“After these things”—these events at Jerusalem—Jesus sojourned with His disciples in the land of Judæa (iii. 22) and baptized, while John was still baptizing. And “there arose a questioning on the part of John's disciples with a Jew about purifying” (iii. 25). They come to John and tell him of the activity and growing popularity of Jesus. This gives the Evangelist the opportunity to record the further testimony of his former master the Baptist: “Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth

him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy, therefore, is fulfilled. He must increase, I must decrease." There seems no sufficient reason for the invention of this incident and we may well believe that it really did occur. The concluding words of this chapter (iii. 31-36) are no argument against it, for they need not be understood as part of the Baptist's answer. Rather do they read like a reflection of the writer.

We now come to the withdrawal of Jesus from Judaea into Galilee. We have already considered the reason which our Evangelist gives for this. The journey to Galilee was made through Samaria, and the chief incident in it is the conversation with the woman of Samaria at Jacob's well. The story of this is told circumstantially and with remarkable detail, and I should find it difficult to believe that it can be invention and not fact. It was in accordance with our Lord's method to use passing circum-

stances to teach important truths, and in this case He engages the woman in conversation arising out of her employment at the time. The story is, however, open to the objection that Jesus plainly declares Himself to this woman to be the Christ. It must, however, be noticed that He does not so declare Himself until the woman has spoken of the expectation of Messiah among her own people.

We have now reached the time when the public ministry of Jesus in Galilee begins. "The Galileans received him, having seen all the things that he did in Jerusalem at the feast: for they also went unto the feast." So writes our Evangelist. He does not narrate the details of the work of Jesus in Galilee at this time except the single miracle of the healing of the nobleman's son at Capernaum. We cannot decide why he is so reticent about the work in Galilee, nor why he singles out this particular miracle as worthy of narration. It seems to have

been impressed upon his mind that on each of the two occasions when Jesus had come into Galilee He had wrought a sign at or from Cana (iv. 54). But after all why should the Evangelist have told again the story of the Galilean ministry? It had already been written at some length and there was no need to repeat what the Synoptists had already written. It is true that he does later on repeat the story of the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand, and that of the walking upon the sea, but these he introduces, I believe, only because they led up to the discourse in the synagogue at Capernaum. This seems to be the Evangelist's centre of interest in that section of his Gospel.

We are all familiar with the view that the Fourth Evangelist wrote to supplement the Synoptists, and, though this would be an insufficient explanation to give of his purpose in penning his Gospel, we may well believe that there is an element of truth

in it. The interest of the Evangelist turns on the belief and the unbelief which the presence and person of Christ called forth. The rejection of Jesus by the Jews, though given in the Synoptic narratives, is inadequately explained. The steps by which the crucifixion ultimately came about are not shown. The Fourth Evangelist is careful to trace the hostility of the Jews from its first beginnings to its culmination in the crucifixion. His Gospel is a historic commentary on his own words: "He came unto his own (*εἰς τὰ ἰδία*) and his own (*οἱ ἰδίοι*) received him not." Not that his Gospel gives only a dark picture of unbelief. There were those who believed, and of them he writes: "As many as received him to them gave he the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on his name."

As we have already said, there were five festal occasions when Jesus visited Jerusalem. The first of these has already come before us. It was a Passover, the first since

He had begun to make disciples. The chief incident of it was the cleansing of the temple. The next occasion was after the public Galilean ministry had begun. The feast is an unnamed one (v. 1). It has been conjectured to be (1) Pentecost, (2) Purim, (3) the Feast of Trumpets. Certainty is impossible in the matter. Our Evangelist tells how Jesus on this occasion offended the Jews by healing an impotent man on the Sabbath day. They ‘persecuted’ Jesus —by reproaches we may suppose. The answer Jesus gave them was: “My Father worketh even until now and I work.” They were offended at this saying and now sought to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath but also made Himself equal with God.

Now it has been objected that the manner in which Jesus speaks to the Jews in Jerusalem does not accord with the style of His teaching, as the Synoptists represent it. Indeed, I have heard it said that Jesus’

manner of address in the Fourth Gospel is irritating and not worthy of Him. The saying put into the mouth of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel, "My Father worketh until now, and I work" is contrasted with His words on a similar occasion: "The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath." And we are told that it is highly improbable that Jesus would have spoken to the Jews in Jerusalem about His Father, as in the Fourth Gospel He does. It is said that the argumentative tone of the Gospel reflects the thoughts of a later time, and cannot be reconciled with the Synoptic teaching. It seems not simple enough, but is altogether too theological.

This complaint is made against the long discourse of Jesus which follows immediately upon the incident we have been considering. But I do not think that we have any right to judge *a priori* how Jesus would speak in Jerusalem. Even the Synoptists, when they take Him to Jerusalem for the last Passover,

put into His mouth very stern and uncompromising words. And I see no reason why from the first Jesus should not have adopted towards the religious teachers in Jerusalem the attitude which the Fourth Evangelist sets Him forth as exhibiting. It is not fair to compare the manner of teaching given by Jesus to the simple folk in Galilee with His manner of speaking in Jerusalem where the conditions were so entirely different. A breach with the authorities there was inevitable from the first. Jesus comes to offer Himself to them for their acceptance and He does not conceal His claims, which run counter to all the prejudices and selfish ambitions of Scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees.

It is not necessary to suppose that the Fourth Evangelist gives us the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus. But we may not unreasonably think that he sets forth the purport of the Master's appeal and claims. It is to be noticed that he does not represent Jesus as coming to Jerusalem and giving out

with no uncertain voice: I am the Christ: It would seem that Jesus never so styled Himself in Jerusalem until He was challenged at His trial before the high priest, and then He only did so in answer to the high priest's question. To have proclaimed Himself as the Christ in the face of the mistaken ideas as to the nature of the Messianic office would have been mischievous. But Jesus did come forward acting with authority, as in the case of the cleansing of the temple, and claimed to speak authoritatively in the name of God, whom He calls publicly His Father. He asserts too that His miracles are signs of His divine mission. From the first He claims the allegiance of Jerusalem for Himself, though He knows what the claim is to cost Him.

The discourse then given in v. 19-47, and completed in vii. 15-24, this latter passage having seemingly become displaced from its proper context,\* marks a crisis in the life of

\* See *Hibbert Journal* for April, 1909 : *On two dislocations in St. John's Gospel.*

Jesus. He sees that the attitude of the rulers in Jerusalem towards Him is irreconcilable. Henceforth, Galilee is His hope, and the scene of His labours. Apparently He did not attend the next Passover Feast, but He waited until the Feast of Tabernacles was well advanced and then came forward and preached boldly in the temple courts, inviting attention to Himself. He does not now address Himself to the rulers but to the people generally: "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." There is much speculation among the people as to whether He is the Christ, and many were ready to believe on Him. The Pharisees are alarmed by the readiness shown to accept Him as the Christ and they send the temple officers to take Him. These, however, are unable to obey the order, so impressed are they by the manner of Jesus' teaching—"Never man spake like this man." Jesus continues to teach, directing men boldly to Himself as the light of

the world (viii. 12). The Pharisees resent the testimony He bears to Himself, and an altercation ensues, which ends in an attempt to stone Him, because He had spoken blasphemy in claiming to be one with God (viii. 58). But He escaped. Then follows the story of the healing of the man born blind, which is told with remarkable vividness and detail, that it is difficult to believe it can be an invention of the writer. The questioning by the Pharisees of the man himself and his parents, and their attempts to intimidate by threats of excommunication are clearly and logically brought out. The man receives his sentence of excommunication and Jesus offers Himself to him as the object of his personal faith (ix. 35-38). Jesus still speaks boldly to the people and asserts Himself as the true leader and shepherd of Israel in opposition to the hirelings who but seek their own (x. 1-18). Many think Him mad and possessed, but

some reason more soberly: "These are not the sayings of one possessed with a devil. Can a devil open the eyes of the blind?"

All this happened at the Feast of Tabernacles. The Evangelist does not tell us what happened meanwhile, but he passes at once to the Feast of Dedication, some two months later. "It was winter," he says, "and Jesus was walking in the temple in Solomon's porch." The Jews seek to draw from Him a direct claim to be the Messiah: "If thou art the Christ, tell us plainly." But Jesus refers them to the works He has done, and reproves their unbelief. Again He repeats His oneness with the Father, and they again try to stone Him (x. 22-39).

This is the last time that Jesus comes to Jerusalem until He offers Himself as Jerusalem's King of peace (xii. 12-16). He retires now beyond the Jordan to the place where John had at the first baptized. Here

many came to Him; and they said: "John indeed did no sign: but all things whatsoever John spake of this man were true." And many believed on Him there.

Next follows the story of the raising of Lazarus, the objections to which we will consider later. This miracle, persuading, as it did, so many to believe on Jesus, finally decided the Pharisees to put Him to death. Their opportunity came when Jesus presented Himself publicly before the Feast of the Passover.

Now, whatever objections may be made to the account in the Fourth Gospel of the visits of Jesus to Jerusalem on the ground that they do not fit into the Synoptic frame of events, and that the teaching in Jerusalem does not accord with that in Galilee, we have a right to demand that critics should concede that at any rate our Evangelist gives a picture consistent in itself, and that the progress of events is not unnatural. In other words, the

events do 'march.' There is no halting. We can see opposition developing ; and the final issue flows naturally out of the beginning. The unbelief and hostility of the Jews and their final rejection and crucifixion of Jesus stand out clearly and consistently. But something more will have to be said in our next and concluding chapter in answer to objections which are made to the Fourth Gospel on the ground of its inconsistency with the other three.