

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

STUDIES IN THE "INNER LIFE" OF JESUS.

VIII.

THE JUDGMENT OF RELIGIOUS RULERS AND TEACHERS.

1. JESUS began the fulfilment of His vocation by testing the preparedness of His environment. As the greatest preparedness might be looked for in the disciples of the Baptist, His forerunner and herald, He first called some of them to be His companions. In His own kindred He did not find the needed readiness, and He had to sever Himself from His own family that He might do His work. *Jerusalem*, with its glorious but tragic history, with its sacred memories, hallowed associations, and religious influences, drew Him. Here stood the sanctuary of His people's faith, here was the heart of the national life, here was a stage large and lofty enough for the Messiah of the race to take His place and fill His part, here were in greatest volume two of the channels in which the piety and the devotion of the age flowed. Far from Jerusalem, estranged from its worship and separated from its life, the *Essenes* sought to nourish and to cherish the higher life of unworldliness and godliness; but with them Jesus seems to have had no contact, over them He exercised, and from them He received no influence. In Jerusalem, however, as the leading priests of the Temple, the *Sadducees* combined official piety and personal secularity, the administration of the national worship and the advancement of their individual interests, using godliness as a means of gain. As they were conservative in doctrine and practice, so were they tenacious of their position and privileges. Their successful rivals for popularity in the city were the *Pharisees*, for whom the law, with a multitude of traditional explanations and extensions, was Israel's highest good as well as heaviest burden, and who found in the synagogue a sphere of prominence and

influence denied them in the Temple. These two parties of rulers and teachers of the people needed to be tested by Jesus, that He might discover how far they would be hostile or favourable to His work. In His treatment of both classes we find the two features of His conduct, already noted in a previous Study. He showed both courage and wisdom; in running a risk He made a test. He ventured on the disclosure of His secret only so far as to make full discovery for Himself of what He might hope for, or must fear from those whose position and authority marked them out as either His most helpful friends or His most hurtful foes. The two incidents recorded in John's Gospel, *the Cleansing of the Temple* (ii. 13-22) and *the Talk with Nicodemus* (iii. 1-12), have this common interest, that in both Jesus stands with the sifting fan in His hand.

2. The record of the cleansing of the Temple in John's Gospel raises a critical problem, which, as it seems not incapable of solution by the psychological method of the study of the "Inner Life" of Jesus, may here be properly and fitly dealt with. In the Synoptic Gospels we have also a brief record of a similar act, but placed at the close of the ministry. At first sight it seems highly improbable that there were two cleansings. The act repeated would not have the same significance as when only once performed. Varying traditions might be sufficient to explain the difference in details of the narratives. John betrays no consciousness of a subsequent, or the Synoptists of an antecedent cleansing; each record represents the act as solitary. We seem to be shut up to choosing between the Synoptic and the Johannine narratives. Arguments for each side can be brought forward. It is unlikely that Jesus would so soon make so plain a claim to be the Messiah, and so quickly make enemies of the Jewish rulers—thus urge the advocates of the Synoptic record. The defenders of the Johannine reply: The act need not be regarded as

an open claim of the Messiahship, as any pious Jew might be righteously indignant at such unhallowing of the Temple, and might let his indignation burst forth in such an act; and even the story of the Judæan ministry at the close of Jesus' life, as told in the Synoptists, presupposes an earlier ministry, in which Jesus had already come into conflict with the ecclesiastical authorities. But it seems to the writer that when we examine the records more closely in the light of the consciousness of Jesus, the improbability of two cleansings is not so great as at first sight appears. It has already been suggested that the cleansing of the Temple at the beginning of the ministry was prompted by the intense enthusiasm with which Jesus entered on His vocation. It was indeed a sign of the zeal for God which was eating Him up. It is not, however, to be judged as a reckless foolish outburst. His intense emotion was so guided and ruled by His wisdom that the very act which relieved His pent-up feelings was also a means of laying bare to Him the secrets of the hearts of the Jewish rulers. It was not intended as a plain declaration of Messiahship, but as a stirring call for religious reform, addressed to those who were most directly responsible for the religious condition of the people. The cleansing of the Temple at the close of the ministry, as recorded by the Synoptists, on the other hand, had evidently a Messianic significance. Jesus had welcomed Messianic honours from the people. His entering Jerusalem on an ass was one token of the kind of Messiahship He was willing to accept, a humble and gracious sovereignty. His cleansing of the Temple was another; His reign would be in righteousness and holiness. The second demonstration was addressed to the people rather than to the rulers, although the repetition of the act would be intended to recall to and enforce on their attention the solemn warning by which the act on the first occasion had been justified.

3. This utterance of Jesus, "Destroy this temple, and

in three days I will raise it up" (John ii. 19), as throwing fuller and clearer light on the thoughts and feelings of Jesus at this time, claims closer study. But we are at once brought face to face with a difficulty. The Evangelist himself offers us an explanation of the saying. Must we accept this interpretation as infallible and authoritative, or dare we exercise our own judgment on its suitability? It is evident that many of Jesus' sayings during His earthly life were either not understood, or even misunderstood by His disciples. The Evangelist himself here confesses that the saying was not understood till after the Resurrection. But we may ask, Were the Apostles so changed, even by the gift of the Spirit, as to become at once infallible interpreters of the mind of Christ? No such claim is made for them in the New Testament. Both in respect of their eager anticipation of the second coming of Christ and their tardy recognition of the place of the Gentiles in the Church, they showed themselves to be fallible men needing to be taught. If Peter's exegesis of the 16th Psalm in his discourse after Pentecost (Acts ii. 29-31), however appropriate for the occasion, was not accurate historically, may not John's interpretation of this saying of Jesus, however inevitable it might appear to him to be, yet be inapplicable to the historical situation and fail to express exactly the intention of Jesus in speaking? Such a suggestion is sometimes met with the taunt, that the person making it thus claims to be better and wiser than the Apostles. But the unworthy sneer can easily be robbed of its sting. On the one hand it may be pointed out that the minds of the Apostles were so preoccupied by the marvel of the Resurrection that they were prone to see the whole past of Jesus' life in its light, and, therefore, to find references to, and anticipations of the event in all sayings of Jesus about the meaning of which there was some doubt, but in which such an allusion might possibly be discovered.

Standing further away from the event we are free of this absorption of thought. On the other hand it may be claimed that we can now see the life of Jesus, in the light which the history of Christianity during all these centuries throws upon it, as the Apostles could not. There is much in the teaching of Jesus to which Christian history alone can afford the illuminative commentary. Confessing humbly and sincerely his inferiority to a Peter or a John, the modern interpreter may believe that he has this advantage over them, that they belonged to the first, he to the twentieth Christian century; and the history of these centuries should not count for naught in fitting men to understand the mind of Jesus, which is not for one age, but for all time.

4. Having justified his doubt regarding the Evangelist's interpretation, the writer may now frankly state that it seems to him inappropriate. Had the words been spoken towards the close of the ministry, when in His speech Jesus distinctly anticipated death from the enmity of the ecclesiastical authorities, and emphatically declared His assurance that God would raise Him from the dead, this explanation would have been more probable. As Jesus did not speak of His death and rising again to His followers till after the turning-point of the Galilean ministry, such an allusion at this time contradicts what the Gospel narratives suggest regarding alike His own experience and His method of dealing with others. Such a reference too would have no meaning whatever for those to whom the words were addressed, and it is difficult to discover in it any immediate application to the actual situation. The challenge, "If you kill Me, I shall rise again," would be no answer to the question regarding His right to do this deed. Besides, it may be noted that Jesus does not elsewhere speak of His body as the temple of God, and that He does not claim to raise Himself from the dead, but is assured that the

Father will raise Him. Both phrases suggest later phases of Christian thought. On these grounds it seems to the writer impossible to accept this explanation of the saying.

5. A better explanation is not far to seek; it is suggested by the context. The words are addressed to the ecclesiastical authorities in Jerusalem, who claimed to be the guardians of the religious life of the people, and who challenged the right of any man, not belonging to their privileged and consecrated caste, to interfere in any way with the control of the religious affairs of the nation. Jesus had so interfered, and was required to prove His authority to do so. Could He have declared His authority more effectively than by condemning their incapacity, and asserting His own competence? He could not do this in unequivocal language without prematurely and precipitately bringing to a close His controversy with the rulers. It was needful for Him to exercise some reserve in expression. Hence the enigmatical form of the answer, the meaning of which now seems plain to us, and may be rendered in this paraphrase. Go on doing as you now are, and you will prove, not the defenders, but the destroyers of the national religion, of which this building is the sanctuary. But even should you succeed in bringing ruin on the Jewish faith, I, whose right to work this reform you challenge, am able to bring about a spiritual restoration in a very short time. In this answer Jesus did not appeal to some future event, but to His own present consciousness of a vocation which He was confident He was able to fulfil in spite of all the opposition the Jewish rulers might offer. Two points in this statement especially claim notice: (1) His condemnation of the Jewish priesthood, and (2) His confidence in His vocation.

6. Where no compromise of principle was involved, Jesus conformed to the religious and moral standards of

the age and the people, but He transcended both in His personal faith and life. Although He went up to the temple at the feasts, His aim was not so much to offer worship as to teach the multitudes that resorted thither, for His communion with God did not seek, and could not have found an unimpeded channel in the Temple ritual. Yet He valued the worship in the sanctuary at Jerusalem as an expression of the religious life of the nation, in which there was much formalism, but through which even spirituality might be exercised. The court of the Gentiles, where those who were outside of the covenant might nevertheless approach the God of the covenant in devotion, divorced from ritual forms, seems to have been especially dear to Him as a token of the breadth of the heavenly Father's love; we can understand, therefore, His indignation at finding that the ecclesiastical authorities paid more regard to ritual observances than to devotional feelings in allowing the traffic in the requisites for ritual worship to disturb the hallowed calm of the place of devotion, and that they dared to show their contempt for the Gentiles by using their court as a market-place. Their action revealed not only their formalism and secularity, but also their exclusiveness and arrogance. For the sake of gain they polluted the sanctuary of which they were the guardians. This conduct was the external symptom of a deep-rooted and wide-spread internal disease, which, if not arrested in its course, must end in death. The formalism and traditionalism, the arrogance and exclusiveness, the avarice and ambition of the priests were destructive of the religious life of the nation. Their irritation at Jesus' interference showed their insensibility to appeal, their incapacity for reform, and so justified the unqualified severity of the censure which Jesus pronounced upon them.

7. Although Jesus thus condemned the recognized religious leaders, yet He did not despair of religion in the

nation. Devotion might be associated with the Temple, but was not dependent upon it. Piety would not always need priests, and altars, and sacrifices. The change had already begun, as the synagogue had drawn to itself some of the interests and aspirations which would otherwise have clung to the Temple. The synagogue did form the transition from the Jewish Temple to the Christian Church; and its simpler worship was an anticipation of, and preparation for the spiritual service, detached from ritual observances, which is characteristic of the Christian religion. That Jesus looked forward to such a change is not so surprising as that He expected the change to come soon and suddenly, for it would have seemed much more likely at the time that the change would come gradually. Jesus knew, however, that God had pronounced the sentence of the old order, and that He had summoned the forces of the new. He was conscious that in His own person there was the power to give to the people a new religious life in place of the old which the priesthood was destroying. He was confident that this mission would not end in failure, but would be crowned with success. If we think of the history which the Temple represented, the ideas that it symbolized, the religion expressed by it, if we recall the wisdom of the founder and lawgiver of the people, the moral purity and intellectual sanity and spiritual sublimity of the prophets—although that splendid past was obscured by this mean present—and then fix our gaze on this Carpenter of Nazareth, this Galilean peasant without any learning of the schools and any support of the sects, who calmly anticipates the destruction of such a sanctuary of such a nation, and confidently asserts His ability to give the world what should compensate for its loss, we marvel at His audacity until we remember that history has fulfilled His prophecy, and that He has raised a better and more enduring temple in the Church which is His body.

8. If the priests showed that they would be a hindrance and not a help in the movement to a more spiritual worship and a more ethical service of God, their rivals, the Pharisees, might at first sight appear to offer better promise of sympathy and support. The Pharisees were not altogether indifferent to goodness and godliness, and not quite subdued by selfishness and worldliness. There were empty professors and vain pretenders among them, but there were also serious and earnest men. It is evident that as a class they closely and eagerly watched the beginning of the ministry of Jesus in Jerusalem; at first it may be with mere curiosity, but afterwards it would seem with growing interest. By His miracles some at least were convinced that He was a prophet with a Divine commission, and, like popular religious leaders in all ages, they were ready to patronize Him, and even seek an alliance with Him, with the aim and in the hope of making His efforts subserve their purposes, and turning His success to their own credit and advantage. Nicodemus, more favourably impressed than most of the others, came to Jesus, not only to satisfy his own desire for fuller knowledge, but even to secure information which might guide his party in its decision for or against the new movement. He is usually regarded as an anxious inquirer, whose timidity and caution prevented his approaching Jesus by day, and led him to pay his visit in the secrecy and the silence of night. But the narrative, closely studied, does not bear out this impression of him. Jesus does not welcome him as graciously, or treat him as generously as we may be sure He would have done had he come truly as one distressed by darkness and desirous of light. He addresses him not as an individual inquirer, but as the representative of a class. Nicodemus greets Jesus with a patronizing tone, which at once evokes a stinging rebuke. Instead of a growing faith he displays an increasing incredulity. Instead of allowing himself to be guided into truth by the wisdom of Jesus, he seeks to

show the folly of His words. He is dismissed curtly as one who, conceited and confident about his own wisdom and discernment, has nevertheless shown himself quite incapable of understanding even elementary spiritual truth. There is, in the writer's judgment, little doubt that the talk of Jesus with Nicodemus ends with verse 10, or less probably with verse 12, and what remains consists of the Evangelist's reflections on the conversation. It is generally admitted that these reflections begin at verse 16; but it seems extremely improbable that to so undiscerning and unsympathetic a listener Jesus would have communicated any of the heavenly things mentioned in verses 13 to 15. Verses 11 to 12 may with less improbability be regarded as still belonging to the report of the conversation, but a decision of the question cannot here be confidently offered.

9. If Nicodemus may be treated as representing the Pharisaic party, then the demand for a new birth, a birth from above, a birth of water and the spirit, made by Jesus, indicates His judgment on the Pharisaic party. Only by a thorough change could any member of that party be made capable of appreciating and appropriating the spiritual good which he had been sent and fitted by God to impart to men. If we consider what the distinctive features of Pharisaism were, we shall approve Jesus' judgment. God was conceived as Lawgiver, Ruler, Judge. His relation to man was confined to the promulgation of a moral code and a ritual system, the enforcement of their provisions the reward of obedience or observance and the punishment of disobedience or disregard. Man, on the other hand, was the recipient of law, the subject of rule, and the blessed or the accursed by God's judgment. It was his interest to know and to do his duty, that he might escape penalty and secure reward. Duty was not conceived as an inward personal disposition, but as a comprehensive and complex code of observances and restrictions, not only difficult to

fulfil, but even perplexing to discover ; and yet for obedience there was offered the great reward of participation in the glorious Messianic kingdom. The Pharisees not only made this reward their aim, but they held it as their hope, because they themselves believed, and the popular judgment endorsed their claim, that they had fulfilled the legal condition, so that a share in the kingdom of the Messiah would be theirs not by God's favour, but by their own merits. The Baptist, it is true, had protested against, but had not to any extent disturbed this complacency. As herald of the kingdom he had demanded from all repentance and baptism as its sign if they desired to enter the kingdom, and had promised the gift of the Spirit as one of its blessings. Although some of the Pharisees, seeking to win popular favour by appearing to share the people's enthusiasm for the Baptist had sought baptism at his hands, yet he detected and denounced their insincerity. As a party it was impossible for the Pharisees to accept and approve the Baptist's ministry. Jesus sends Nicodemus as representing the party back to the Baptist ; only by the way of John could they approach Him. Before they could understand or judge whether His teaching was true, and of God, before they could join in the movement of moral reform and religious revival which He was carrying on, they must be prepared to acknowledge their sin and guilt, to turn from their evil ways and false thoughts, to recognize their insufficiency and impotence ; they must be willing to accept as God's free gift the pardon of their old sinful life, and the power of the new holy life, by which alone they could apprehend and appropriate the kingdom. It is evident how thoroughly opposed to Pharisaic assurance and expectation such a demand was. In making it so uncompromisingly Jesus showed how absolutely hostile to, and irreconcilable with His moral and spiritual ideal Pharisaism appeared to be. For Him God was the Father, who seeks and saves His lost children, who cannot win anything by merit, and need not

seek to do so, as their Father is no hard taskmaster. For Him man's need and helplessness appeared the strongest plea for God's full and free grace.

10. The form in which the demand is made claims closer attention. It reveals to us the significance and value for Jesus in His vocation of His experience in baptism. He Himself had fulfilled the condition which He laid down for others. In so far as it was possible for one so sinless and so spiritual as He was, He had been born anew of water and of the spirit. He had, as has already been shown, entered sympathetically and vicariously into the experience of repentance, of which baptism was the symbol. He had been endowed to fit Him fully for His work with the power of the Holy Spirit. He was in this initial experience, as He was to be in subsequent experiences, the firstborn among many brethren. In some measure all who desired to share the life in God which He Himself lived, and had come to impart to men, must pass through the same experience as He had. Paul was afterwards to teach that the saved sinner must identify Himself with the Saviour's experience of the Cross endured, as well as the Grave conquered. It should not be overlooked that the servant had the Master's warrant for this teaching, which for many has seemed too individually Pauline to be acknowledged universally Christian. Jesus too required of His disciples a vital union with Himself, not only an appropriation of the blessings secured by His experience, but a reproduction in them of that experience as the condition of their enjoyment of these blessings. If it were made clear beyond all doubt or question that the faith in God's grace which saves is a baptism with Jesus in repentance and regeneration, a death to sin, and a rising again to holiness with Him, evangelical theology would be delivered altogether from the danger, from which it has not always escaped, of failing to be intensely and vigorously ethical. This principle, that the experience of

Jesus is typical, is capable of varied and extensive application, and the result of a courageous and faithful application of it, would be that on the one hand the life of Jesus would gain in human interest; and the life of the Christian, on the other hand, in Divine significance. It was by this spiritual reproduction of Himself that Jesus intended to raise up that spiritual temple to God, which would replace the material Temple, the worship of which the priests were destroying by their formalism and secularity. If the one incident teaches us the sublime confidence which Jesus cherished regarding His ability to fulfil this vocation, the other shows us the no less sublime humility of His method of fulfilment. He knew that He could lead men up to the heights where God dwelleth; but He was willing that He might so lead them to tread every step of the path which runs in the depths of man's sin and misery, darkness and death. He was alike confident of exaltation, and prepared for humiliation.

ALFRED E. GARVIE.

ON THE MEANING AND SCOPE OF JEREMIAH
VII. 22, 23.

BUT, lastly, the most important of the phrases relevant to this point is דַּעַת אֱלֹהִים מְעֻלֹת (Hos. vi. 6b). In the paraphrase of this clause the מן is retained by the Targum.

עֲבָרֵי אִוְרֵיתָא דִּי מִמְּסַקֵּי¹ עֲלוֹן ("the fulfillers of the Law of Jahveh are better than the bringers of sacrifice"), and also by the Peschitta (ܘܚܘܿܢ). This מן is also rendered by the sign of the comparative in LXX. (καὶ ἐπιγινώσκων θεοῦ ἢ

¹ So pointed according to Levy's *Targumwörterbuch*, but the supra-linear punctuation shows ך with a Shevâ (Merx, *Chrestomathia targumica*, s.v. עלא; and Dalman, *Grammatik des Christlich-Palästinischen Aramäisch*, 1894, p. 57). The pronunciation of ך (Gen. iii. 8, etc.), which is marked by ך׃ in the editio Sabineta of the Targum of Onkelos (ed. Aug. Berliner) and with the sign of Pathach under ך in Kautzsch, *Mittheilung über eine alte Handschrift des Targum Onkelos* (1893, p. xi., and Exod. iii. 2), is not, so far as I see, discussed by Winer, Levy, Merx (*Chrestomathia*, p. 2, ך׃), or Dalman.