

*THE LIFE OF CHRIST ACCORDING TO ST. MARK.*VII. THE HEALER, I. 29-34.¹

WE now learn that two of the disciples, Simon and Andrew, had a house in Capernaum, and that Jesus returned thither with James and John after the scene in the synagogue. Simon, it seems, was married, and his mother-in-law helped his wife to keep house. Jesus may have been a visitor there before, and have found a sympathy which He missed in His own home; but on this Sabbath the mother-in-law lay restless with fever, distressed that she could not entertain her friend. She heard her kinsfolk come home from the synagogue, and perhaps noticed some unusual excitement. Then they came to her room, and Jesus entered, and they followed Him. His very presence was always a healing balm and a refreshing cordial, but now as she looked up she saw a new light in His eyes, and wondered at an unwonted air of power, force, and authority. He came to her and took her hand, and she felt stronger, and moved as if to sit up; He raised her, and the fever passed away, and she was herself again. Forthwith she went to take her share in preparing the evening meal.

But the excitements of the day were not yet over, for there were other demoniacs in Capernaum besides the one who had been healed in the synagogue; and others besides Peter's wife's mother were ill. Loving care for these sufferers would be reinforced by the universal appetite for the marvellous; for a while, however, both were checked by the law of the Sabbath. But when the sun set a crowd gathered round Simon's house, bringing all the sick and all the demoniacs in the town; and the rest of the inhabitants came to look on. Such, at any rate, was the impression

¹ These studies do not profess to be an adequate historical or doctrinal account of Christ, but are an attempt to describe the impressions which the Gospel of St. Mark would make upon a reader who had no other source of information as to Christ and Christian theology.

made upon Jesus and His friends when their quiet evening was broken in upon by the cries of the eager throng. Jesus came forth to meet these new demands; the sun had set, and the brief twilight soon faded into darkness, relieved perhaps by the uncertain illumination of torches, or the cold, weird light of the moon. Again Jesus proved Himself master of disease and demoniac possession—"many" were healed—not all, some went away disappointed. Perhaps they had not faith, or Jesus' powers failed Him as time went on; and some may have despaired of getting their turn that night. "To-morrow," they may have said to each other as they turned homeward, "to-morrow we will come again, and our turn will come"; or "To-morrow the Prophet will have recruited His energy and will be able to heal our friends."

This time Jesus gave an added proof of His power over the demons. The demoniac in the synagogue had saluted Him as "the Holy One of God"—a dangerous title in a country which swarmed with fanatics looking for a Messiah to lead them against the Romans and their henchmen the Herods. Perhaps, too, at this stage of his career, the reader might suppose, Jesus shrank from the suggestion that He was the Messiah as from a blasphemy. Now, therefore, He silenced the demoniacs lest they should again suggest that He was the Messiah.

VIII. THE PREACHING IN GALILEE, I. 35-39.

The events just narrated involved a crisis in the spiritual life of Jesus almost as important as the Baptism or the Temptation; He had discovered His powers of healing, and perhaps also their limitation. What was their meaning in relation to His mission? The question was not easy to answer. For, on the one hand, the professional exorcist and wonder-worker was well known and little respected, and a reputation for miraculous powers might embarrass Jesus.

John the Baptist wrought no miracles ; but, on the other hand, these mighty works relieved suffering and attracted hearers. After the Baptism He had sought solitude in the wilderness, and now He again needed to consider His life in undisturbed fellowship with God. Therefore early next day, before dawn, while His friends were still sleeping, He left the town, and found some lonely place, and gave Himself up to prayer.

But when His friends rose in the morning, and before they thought of disturbing Him, the bearers of sick folk began to beset the house. There would be some who had come the night before, but had missed their chance, and others who had not heard of Jesus till it was too late, so that they put off coming till the morning. Perhaps it was the arrival of a would-be patient that sent the disciples to look for Jesus. Simon went eagerly to call his Master to fresh marvellous works, and lo ! the Master was not there. Simon looked for him hurriedly in the house, and then had to meet the applicants with a blank face, and tell them that he could not find Jesus. Then the crowd dispersed through the town to look for Him, but to no purpose.

At last the disciples hunted Him down in His retreat. "Every one is looking for you," they cried, overjoyed at having found Him, eager to take Him back at once to Capernaum, that He might work more miracles, and continue His triumphant career. But their high spirits received a severe check ; Jesus would not go back to Capernaum.

"Let us go elsewhere," He replied, "to the neighbouring villages, that I may preach there also, for My mission is to preach."

Through His communing with God He had learnt that His mission was not to work miracles, but to declare the Kingdom of God ; that He was first and foremost a Healer of souls. There was danger lest the beginning He had made at Capernaum should be marred by His reputation as

a wonder-worker ; therefore, without hesitation, He sacrificed His newly won popularity, and quenched the enthusiasm of His followers. Whether the crestfallen disciples consented to accompany Him we do not know, we hear nothing more of them till after Jesus returned to Capernaum ; but the Master Himself wandered from one Galilean synagogue to another, delivering His message, confronted again and again by demoniacs, from whom He drove out the demons ; but there were no other healings—with one exception.

IX. THE LEPER, I. 40-45.

The narrative of St. Mark suggests by its silence that at this period Jesus refused to heal the sick ; but the importunity of one suppliant overcame His reluctance ; a leper begged for cleansing.

“ If Thou wilt, Thou canst cleanse me.” The leper had heard that Jesus refused to heal, but he believed that it was the will and not the power that was lacking ; hence the words, “ If Thou wilt.” The suggestion that He was unwilling to relieve suffering touched Jesus to the quick, and overbore for the moment the interests of the Kingdom, and the social and religious decorum of the times. Jesus put out His hand, and *touched* the leper, and the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed. But this impulsive act of generosity seems to have been followed by something like a revulsion of feeling ; the cleansing of this leper would encourage others to resort to Him, so that He would again be hindered in His work. Jesus tried in vain to guard against such consequences by sending the man away at once with strict orders to tell no one. Let him leave Galilee, and go away to the Temple at Jerusalem, and there fulfil the ritual observances appointed for the cleansing of a leper. But even the authority which had silenced demons could not keep the man quiet ; he told the story everywhere, and the people supposed that Jesus was now willing to heal

anybody and everybody. Had He not *touchèd* a leper? When He tried to go into a town He found Himself hemmed in by a crowd too eager for healing of sick bodies to care for any ministry to sinful souls, so that He was compelled to imitate John and become a voice in the wilderness; and there the people flocked to Him as they had done to John; but the crowds were thinking more of wondrous works than of repentance and forgiveness.

X. THE PARALYTIC, II. 1-12.

After some time Jesus ventured back again to Capernaum, and again probably made His home in Simon's house, and the people crowded in, and He preached to them. He had succeeded at last in making them understand that they must accept Him as a Teacher, and not chiefly as a Healer and Wonder-worker; He still wrought cures from time to time, but on the whole He succeeded in protecting His ministry from endless importunity. That he could do so without losing His hold on the people is a most convincing proof of the unique force of His personality. The following incident illustrates the changed conditions.

Instead of a crowd of sick folk a single paralytic found access to Jesus only through the persistence of His friends. In the present state of our information we cannot understand all the details, but the main facts are clear. Jesus sat teaching in a large room from which He could be seen and heard from outside; a crowd had gathered round the house, and the room was full except for a space in front of the Teacher. Four men carrying a paralytic, in default of the ordinary means of access, managed somehow to let down their burden through the roof, and thus place him before Jesus. Such persistence showed implicit confidence both in the power and in the goodwill of Jesus; and the audience wondered what response He would make, whether He would rebuke the intrusion, or utter some word of power, and heal the sufferer.

“Son,” He said, “thy sins be forgiven thee.” To a modern audience, and probably to many of those then present, these words would sound like an evasion of the demand for a miracle. The carnal mind would think that an offer of forgiveness to such a sufferer was mere mockery; but Jesus placed in the forefront that which was most important to Him, and also doubtless to the sufferer; His inspired insight had discerned that the paralytic craved healing for his soul as well as for his body.

But the gathering included critical theologians, for Jesus’ doings had attracted the notice of the Jewish clergy; and there were scribes present to whom His words were blasphemy. In professing to forgive sins, He was usurping a prerogative of God Himself. Jesus read their thoughts, and answered them by word and deed; and in this answer He dealt with other thoughts, too, which have not been recorded.

“Why reason ye thus in your hearts? Is it easier to say to the paralytic, Thy sins be forgiven thee, or to say, Arise, take up thy rug and walk?”

“That,” said many of His hearers to themselves, “is the very question we were asking ourselves.”

But Jesus continued, with a change of tone, which again roused the expectations of His hearers,

“But that ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins.”

Then He turned to the paralytic—

“I bid thee arise, take up thy rug, and go home.”

A shock of new life throbbled through the half dead body of the paralytic, and he rose up before them all, took up his rug, and went out; and they were all astonished and glorified God.

We do not know why Jesus called Himself the Son of Man; the phrase sounds like a contrast to the demoniac’s “Holy One of God.” But this assumption of a distinct

title shows that Jesus had been meditating on His position. What was He? How was He to answer questions as to Himself and His mission? He chose a title which, whatever else it might mean, marked Him off from all other teachers, and claimed for Him a special position of His own. Moreover this incident lays renewed emphasis on the fact that the work of Jesus centred in forgiveness—atonement. It also marks a new development, Jesus recognizes His powers of healing as an assurance of His divine mission, and a public credential of His authority.

XI. THE TAX-GATHERER, II. 13-17.

During this second visit to Capernaum there was another calling of a disciple sufficiently remarkable to be described in some detail, because the new disciple was neither religious¹ nor respectable, and because this was the very reason why Jesus called him. Up to a certain point the circumstances remind us of the call of the first four disciples. Jesus was again walking by the lake; again He saw a man busy with his regular work, and bade the man follow Him, and the command was promptly obeyed. This disciple too was of the lower middle class, a tax-gatherer or revenue officer in charge of a local branch of the customs. Such men are usually obnoxious on account of their profession, and in Palestine they served the unpopular Herods; many of the class made their office an opportunity for cruel extortion. Their work, too, brought them into close contact with men and things of all sorts, so that they could not observe the laws as to ceremonial cleanness; and yet Jesus invited one of these men to become His disciple, follower, and friend. The new disciple's name is given as Levi ben Alphaeus.

Levi did not separate himself from his own class when he became a disciple. We hear next of a great gathering

¹ In the current sense of the term.

at a meal, perhaps in Levi's house, perhaps in that of Jesus, at which many of His disciples were present, and also many tax-gatherers and "sinners"; and Jesus actually ate with these who were unclean. The piety of orthodox Jews was far more astounded than we should be if we saw a revival preacher taking a pipe and pot of beer at a public house in amicable conversation with the regular customers. The scribes of the Pharisees gasped out their indignant surprise, "He is eating with tax-gatherers and sinners!" Jesus heard, and replied that He did so of set purpose, "The healthy do not need a physician, but those who are sick: I did not come to call the righteous but sinners."

This is the clue to the calling of Levi; he was made a disciple, not in spite of, but because of, his disreputable social and religious standing—amongst other reasons. Jesus had associated Himself with sinners in seeking baptism from John; He had taken up John's message of repentance and forgiveness; and He had made forgiveness the prelude to His greatest work of healing. His mission was to sinners, therefore He had amongst His disciples a tax-gatherer, one of the lapsed masses of His time, who could help Him to approach them, and so gain their confidence.

For these "sinners" were not exclusively, or even chiefly, criminal or immoral, but rather corresponded to our lapsed masses, many of whom live in suburban villas. They were Jews who were not "good" Jews, in a stronger sense than that in which many Englishmen are not "good Churchmen." They were careless alike of the ritual and of the moral demands of the Law, and thus seemed both to themselves and to others shut out from any religious life. Moreover as the religion of Israel was an essential feature of patriotism, they were further degraded by being shut out from the highest ideals and aspirations of the national life. Such twofold exclusion implied loss of self-respect, and of moral stimulus, so that these sinners would share

the lax morality of those who have lapsed from the control of patriotic and religious public opinion.

But Jesus setting about the work of founding the Kingdom of God, appealed specially to this class. We read that, even before He called Levi, His growing influence was shown by the many disciples who followed Him, and these already included "sinners," a class conscious of the unfavourable judgement of public opinion, and half inclined to believe that the condemnation was just, might be ready to listen to a message of repentance and forgiveness.

XII. THE BRIDEGROOM, II. 18-20.

Jesus further outraged Jewish orthodoxy by neglecting the religious exercise of fasting, even while it was being observed by the disciples of His old master—John. His reason for this neglect throws a flood of light upon His thoughts at this time concerning Himself and His work.

"Why," said He, "should His disciples fast while the *Bridegroom* was with them?"

He called His message the Good News; He rejoiced in His power to heal body and soul, so that He could think of Himself as the Bridegroom, the happy occasion of gladness to all about Him; His disciples were the Bridegroom's friends, who shared His joy. Fasting is not a usual feature of wedding celebrations. In time, indeed, the marriage feast would end, the Bridegroom and His friends would separate, and life would fall back into everyday routine, in which fasting might find a place; but these were the great days of the inauguration of a new dispensation. The promise of the Kingdom seemed near and bright; the spirit thereof was abroad upon the earth, and in God's own time would take to itself such a body, such outward form, as He willed; and Jesus, God's beloved Son, Son of Man, Good Physician, Bridegroom, was to be the great agent of its coming.

XIII. NEW WINE, II. 21-28.

This incident as to fasting is another illustration of the attitude of Jesus towards the popular religion. He had already healed on the Sabbath; had touched a leper; had professed to forgive sins; had called a tax-gatherer to be a disciple; and had eaten with sinners. Now He neglected fasting; in the sequel we shall see that He persistently broke the Sabbath.¹ In His overflowing confidence and energy He did not hesitate to affront the popular religious leaders at every turn. This policy is formulated in the sayings about the new patch, and the new wine-skins, and is further illustrated by the incident of the plucking of the ears of corn on the Sabbath. "The old garment," said Jesus, "could not be mended with a patch of new cloth, and the new wine could not be put into old bottles; it would burst them." The traditions of the scribes could not be the laws of the kingdom, and the Spirit which descended upon Jesus at His Baptism was too mighty to be confined within the narrow limits of Pharisaic Judaism. Jesus made it clear with the utmost frankness that He could not be either a follower or an ally of the scribes. The prominent feature of their religion was a multiplicity of ceremonial observances; the essentials of the faith of the Kingdom were to do justice, and love mercy, and walk humbly with God. Jesus did not try to combine the two; the free spiritual life must be substituted for the bondage of tradition.

The incident of the plucking of the ears of corn gave Jesus an opportunity of stating His views of the Sabbath. He and His disciples were taking a walk through the corn-fields on the Sabbath, and the disciples began to pluck the ears of corn. Some Pharisees who were present regarded this as a breach of the Sabbath, and remonstrated with Jesus. He replied by citing a case from the Old Testament

¹ According to the views of the Pharisees.

to show that ritual ordinances were not absolutely binding, but might be set aside in the interests of humanity. According to the law, only priests might eat the shewbread, but when David and his companions needed food, the High Priest gave them the shewbread ; so, too, the laws of the Sabbath need not be observed in all their strictness when men were hungry and needed food. "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath " ; and the Son of Man was Lord of the Sabbath. Jesus, therefore, was quite prepared to set His authority against that of the scribes as to the way in which the Sabbath should be kept.

In this connexion we must refer to a previous incident. When Jesus cleansed the leper, He sent him to Jerusalem to fulfil the legal ritual. But we must remember that the Jerusalem priests belonged for the most part to the Sadducees, the conservative party of aristocratic ecclesiastical officials, who were opposed to the Pharisees. The position of Jesus resembled that of many great religious leaders. He found revealed religion corrupted ; the Pharisees, the most active and fervent religious party, held a corrupt form of the true faith with intolerant fanaticism, and claimed that the corruption was the only true form of the religion of Israel, or, to use a modern term, the only true orthodoxy. Jesus repudiated much of the popular Pharisaism, yet His teaching really represented the ancient faith of Israel. The true successor of the Old Testament was not the system of the Pharisees which elaborated the literal phrasing of its formulæ and ordinances ; but the message of Jesus which made the Old Testament a stepping stone to larger truths and a higher life. Like many other teachers in a similar position, Jesus desired to remain within the ancient religious organization, and to obtain the recognition of its official heads. We may use one or two modern illustrations, on the understanding that the application is to be strictly limited to the one point, the

desire of a religious leader to be loyal to the officials and organizations of his Church, although he is at variance with the form of it which is popularly regarded as orthodox. From one point of view the position of Jesus might be compared to that of John Wesley; and from another to that of an opponent of popular ritualism appealing to the Anglican bishops.

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POST-EXILIC JUDAISM.¹

PERHAPS the truest thing to say of this volume is the most pleasant, namely that it meets the high expectations excited by its subject and its author. Written with exceptional scholarship, it outstrips all other works in the same field, and for years to come it will form an indispensable handbook to the study of post-exilic Judaism, or indeed of that Judaism which, during the three centuries subsequent to the Maccabean age, constitutes the background of early Christianity. Bousset's method is to present the religious life of this epoch in successive sections. He assumes the historical outline, which has been so frequently and sufficiently surveyed by others. But the method of strictly historical treatment is set aside, partly because the available materials are insufficient for the purpose of fixing definite stages in the development, partly because he considers that a certain unity of spirit and aim underlies and to some degree dominates the varied phenomena and divergent phases of the religion.

The introductory section (pp. 6-52) upon the sources and literature has been compiled with extraordinary competence and care. Bousset, among other conclusions of interest,

¹ *Die Religion des Judentums im neutestamentlichen Zeitalter*, by Wilhelm Bousset: Berlin, Reuther und Reichard, 1903.