

*THE LIFE OF CHRIST ACCORDING TO  
ST. MARK.<sup>1</sup>*

XXXIII. THE JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM, X. 32-52.

(a) 32-34, *Renewed Prophecy of Death and Resurrection.* Ever since Peter's Confession Jesus had been preparing for His visit to Jerusalem, and had been moving towards Judaea, first through Galilee, and then through the lands east of the Jordan. The secrecy of His movements in Galilee had secured Him from an arrest which would have thwarted His plans; and His renewed public ministry east of the Jordan and perhaps in the border districts of Judaea had recalled Him to men's minds and raised expectations as to the possibilities involved in His entry into the Holy City; now He began a direct and avowed journey thither.

In these last days Jesus was often preoccupied with His coming sacrifice of Himself; He faced this grim prospect alone, for the Apostles' lack of understanding cut Him off from their sympathy. Now as He entered on the final stage of His journey, He went on before the disciples, oblivious of them, wrapped in His own thoughts; and they followed wondering. He bore Himself in the same exalted fashion as when He came down from His interview with Moses and Elijah; the ecstasy of prophetic inspiration was upon Him, as if once more He held converse with supernatural beings; and the disciples followed, silent, awestruck, and afraid.

After a while He roused Himself, and turned to the Apostles, entered into conversation with them, and spoke afresh of His coming death and resurrection; with

<sup>1</sup> These studies do not profess to be an adequate historical and doctrinal account of Christ, but are an attempt to set forth the impression which St. Mark's account of our Lord would make on a reader whose only source of information was the Second Gospel, and who knew nothing of Christian dogmatics.

what effect St. Mark does not tell us, but the sequel shows that His words made but slight impression on them, for the next subject dealt with is

(b) 35-45. *The Ambition of the Sons of Zebedee.* The previous rebuke of Jesus<sup>1</sup> had failed to quench the spirit of jealous rivalry amongst His followers; and His renewed popularity had made them more deaf than ever to His gloomy prognostications of coming doom; rather the glory of the Kingdom seemed close at hand; doubtless Jesus would now inaugurate it at Jerusalem. Dazzled by this prospect, the sons of Zebedee came in eager excitement to ask for the chief places in the kingdom.

"Teacher," said they, "if only you would do for us whatsoever we ask."

These two sons of Zebedee, John and James, were two of the three Apostles whom Jesus trusted most implicitly and with whom He was most closely intimate. They had been with Him when others were excluded—at the house of Jairus and at the Transfiguration. "Surely," they thought, "He loves us well enough to grant us special favours." We need not suppose that after their experience of Jesus they expected Him to make promises blindfold. They spoke somewhat rhetorically, but what they meant, and what He understood them to mean, was, "Teacher, we are going to ask you a very great favour." He replied by inquiring what they sought for.

"Grant," said they, "that we may sit, one on your right hand, and one on your left hand in your glory—when you come to your kingdom."

The request showed great lack of understanding and sympathy towards Jesus, and also a measure of disloyalty towards their comrades. Yet Jesus met them with His usual patient kindness; He sought to avoid the necessity

<sup>1</sup> Unless indeed ix. 33-37 and this passage are both reminiscences of the same event.

for direct rebuke by a hint of His coming Passion. Surely they must have understood something of His many warnings; if He turned their thoughts to the experiences which awaited Him, they might remember His words and have some sense of the stress and burden of His soul; they might be ashamed of their selfish ambition and forbear to press their request.

“You know not what you ask,” said Jesus. “Can you drink of the cup that I drink of, or be baptized with the baptism wherewith I am being baptized?”

But this veiled appeal was in vain; the brothers were in no mood to take hints; what they understood by the words of Jesus, or whether they understood anything by them, we cannot tell; but they were confident that they could fulfil any conditions attached to the distinction they sought, and they replied,—

“We can.”

He had spoken to them in a parable, and they had not understood; He did not try to explain, but continued in the same strain,—

“The cup that I drink, you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the baptism wherewith I am being baptized; to sit on My right and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.”

Perhaps the obtuseness and self-seeking of the Apostles made Jesus distrust His judgment in calling them; He did not doubt their loyalty and affection; they would be true to Him to the end and share His fortunes; but He could not tell what would be their place in establishing the kingdom and in determining its character, laws, and principles; these things were in the hands of God.

When the other Apostles heard of the attempt of the sons of Zebedee to steal a march upon them, they were naturally indignant, and probably expressed their feelings in no measured words. Perhaps they complained to Jesus; at

any rate this new dispute came to His ears, and He called them to Him. Now He dropped figurative language and spoke plainly. The Apostles had thought of the Kingdom of God after the carnal, worldly fashion of the popular Messianic ideas ; it was to be a kingdom with a magnificent court of splendid officials, a kingdom in which, as in other kingdoms, men might honourably compete for the highest posts, the greatest honours, emoluments, and authority. Jesus now told them that the principles of His Kingdom were quite different ; there the first and chief would not be the man who was most successful in exacting service, obedience, and deference from his fellows, but the man who rendered service to all.

“You know,” said He, “that those who are counted rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it is not so amongst you. Whosoever would be great amongst you, shall be your servant, and whosoever would be first amongst you, shall be slave of all.”

The Kingdom was as the King ; He was not supreme because He had trampled down all rivals, but because

“The Son of Man came not to have servants, but to be a servant, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

The verses dealt with in this section are of the greatest importance ; they are the most formal statement by Jesus that He was not a Messiah according to popular ideas ; it is also an explicit description of the character of the kingdom. The simple principle laid down here is comprehensive and far-reaching ; it involves a fundamental and essential feature of the teaching of Jesus, illustrated and confirmed, as He Himself states, in His Passion, the crowning act of His ministry.

In His concluding words Jesus made yet another attempt to win the sympathy of His followers for Himself in His impending trial.

(c) 46-52. *The Healing of the Blind Bartimæus.* In the course of His journey to Jerusalem Jesus crossed the Jordan and came to Jericho, where He spent the night. In the morning He started again accompanied by His disciples and a great crowd. The latter need not have actually belonged to His following; just then the roads were thronged with pilgrims to Jerusalem for the Passover.

On the outskirts of the town a blind beggar, the son of Timæus, sat by the wayside. The Passover pilgrimage might well be harvest-time for such; the many travellers would doubtless be generous; they were in a festive mood, and under the influence of a religion which laid much stress on almsgiving. But a greater hope was stirring in the heart of the son of Timæus; he had been told that Jesus of Nazareth was in Jericho and would leave that morning; he had heard of His mighty works and how He had opened the eyes of the blind. Now he waited eagerly for Jesus to pass by, and as he heard the noise made by one company after another, he asked again and again if Jesus of Nazareth were amongst them. At last he was told that Jesus was there, and then the confused noise of the moving throng was pierced by shrill cries, "Son of David! Jesus! Pity me!" The crowd were startled and scandalized. "Son of David" was only Messiah in other words; and hitherto such titles had only been publicly given to Jesus by demoniacs. Any Pharisees in the crowd would sneer at the notion of a Nazarene Messiah whose herald was a blind beggar. Nor would His own followers be gratified at the outcry; Peter, for instance, chafing at the reticence imposed upon him, eager to proclaim his Master's true dignity, would be indignant at being so unworthily anticipated. Many voices were raised bidding the man be silent, but opposition only provoked him to reiterate more loudly than ever, "Son of David! Jesus! Pity me!" Perhaps his cries now first reached the ears of the Master,

or Jesus may have hesitated, as in the cases of the miracle after the Transfiguration and the daughter of the Syro-phœnician woman.

“Son of David!” The title could not be a mere piece of flattery, part of a mendicant’s stock-in-trade. The blind man would understand little of the meaning of the phrase for theology or for Israel or for the human race. For him the Messiah was the Healer who opened the eyes of the blind.

“Son of David! Jesus! Pity me!” The words were strangely in tune with the thoughts and purposes of Jesus; He was on His way to declare Himself the Messiah, and perhaps already the crowd caught the suggestion of a new departure from the bearing and manner of Jesus and His disciples. Every step was bringing Him nearer to Jerusalem, committing Him more deeply, making retreat more impossible. There is no sign of wavering, but doubts and misgivings must have crowded on His mind. The ringing cries, “Son of David! Jesus! Pity me!” may have seemed words of Divine encouragement and admonition almost as much as the voices from heaven at the Baptism and the Transfiguration. “Son of David” might be the promise and omen of widespread recognition of the Messiahship. The importunate and reiterated “Pity me!” would remind Him that the misery and sin of mankind called Him to Jerusalem and to the Cross.

“Son of David!” This public salutation placed Him in a dilemma; He had silenced the demoniacs who greeted Him with Messianic titles; if now He allowed Himself to be called “Son of David” without rebuke or disclaimer, He virtually declared Himself Messiah and anticipated a step He probably intended to take when He was actually entering Jerusalem. On the other hand, He could hardly disclaim the title now, and accept it a few hours later. Providence, He must have felt, had again taken times and

seasons out of His hand, and He acquiesced in its decision. Without making any protest He stopped and bade them call the son of Timæus to Him.

Forthwith officious voices cried out to the blind man, "Take courage! Arise! He calls you!" He threw off his cloak and sprang up. Then, perhaps led by friendly hands, perhaps guided only by the wonderful instinct of the blind, he came to where Jesus stood waiting for him, and heard the Master ask him, "What would you have me do?"

"Rabboni," he answered, using a title of honour only found here,<sup>1</sup> "that I may receive my sight."

"Go your way," answered Jesus; "your faith has saved you."

At once the blind man's sight returned to him, and he joined the company that followed Jesus to Jerusalem.

It was the last of Jesus' mighty works of healing, wrought in response to unquestioning and persistent faith; wrought without effort or delay, in the full tide of spiritual force in which He moved onward to His death.

W. H. BENNETT.

## THE ETHICAL TEACHING OF ST. PAUL.

### (2) SOME GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS.

IN seeking to obtain a general conception of St. Paul's ethical teaching as a whole it is of the first importance to keep always in mind the occasional and non-systematic character of the writings in which it is contained. The Epistles are not treatises, doctrinal or moral, but *epistles*, that is to say letters, written for the most part under the stress of some urgent need, and revealing in every page the traces of their origin. This does not by any means rob them of their character as authoritative expositions of the mind of Christ, nor reduce them to the level of mere private

<sup>1</sup> I.e. in St. Mark.