

DODS MARCUS

THE EXPOSITOR'S BIBLE:
THE GOSPEL OF ST
JOHN, VOL. II

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Marcus Dods

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I. THE ANOINTING OF JESUS

“Jesus therefore six days before the Passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus raised from the dead. So they made Him a supper there: and Martha served; but Lazarus was one of them that sat at meat with Him. Mary therefore took a pound of ointment of spikenard, very precious, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. But Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples, which should betray Him, saith, Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? Now this he said, not because he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and having the bag took away what was put therein. Jesus therefore said, Suffer her to keep it against the day of My burying. For the poor ye have always with you; but Me ye have not always. The common people therefore of the Jews learned that He was there: and they came, not for Jesus’ sake only, but that they might see Lazarus also, whom He had raised from the dead. But the chief priests took counsel that they might put Lazarus also to death; because that by

reason of him many of the Jews went away, and believed on Jesus." – John xii. 1–11.

This twelfth chapter is the watershed of the Gospel. The self-manifestation of Jesus to the world is now ended; and from this point onwards to the close we have to do with the results of that manifestation. He hides Himself from the unbelieving, and allows their unbelief full scope; while He makes further disclosures to the faithful few. The whole Gospel is a systematic and wonderfully artistic exhibition of the manner in which the deeds, words, and claims of Jesus produced, – on the one hand, a growing belief and enthusiasm; on the other, a steadily hardening unbelief and hostility. In this chapter the culmination of these processes is carefully illustrated by three incidents. In the first of these incidents evidence is given that there was an intimate circle of friends in whose love Jesus was embalmed, and His work and memory insured against decay; while the very deed which had riveted the faith and affection of this intimate circle is shown to have brought the antagonism of His enemies to a head. In the second incident the writer shows that on the whole popular mind Jesus had made a profound impression, and that the instincts of the Jewish people acknowledged Him as King. In the third incident the influence He was destined to have and was already to some extent exerting beyond the bounds of Judaism is illustrated by the request of the Greeks that they might see Jesus.

In this first incident, then, is disclosed a devotedness of faith which cannot be surpassed, an attachment which is absolute;

but here also we see that the hostility of avowed enemies has penetrated even the inner circle of the personal followers of Jesus, and that one of the chosen Twelve has so little faith or love that he can see no beauty and find no pleasure in any tribute paid to his Master. In this hour there meet a ripeness of love which suddenly reveals the permanent place which Jesus has won for Himself in the hearts of men, and a maturity of alienation which forebodes that His end cannot be far distant. In this beautiful incident, therefore, we turn a page in the gospel and come suddenly into the presence of Christ's death. To this death He Himself freely alludes, because He sees that things are now ripe for it, that nothing short of His death will satisfy His enemies, while no further manifestation can give Him a more abiding place in the love of His friends. The chill, damp odour of the tomb first strikes upon the sense, mingling with and absorbed in the perfume of Mary's ointment. If Jesus dies, He cannot be forgotten. He is embalmed in the love of such disciples.

On His way to Jerusalem for the last time Jesus reached Bethany "six days before the Passover" – that is to say, in all probability¹ on the Friday evening previous to His death. It was natural that He should wish to spend His last Sabbath in the congenial and strengthening society of a family whose welcome and whose affection He could rely upon. In the little

¹ It is uncertain whether the "six days" are inclusive or exclusive of the day of arrival and of the first day of the Feast. It is also uncertain on what day of the week the Crucifixion happened.

town of Bethany He had become popular, and since the raising of Lazarus He was regarded with marked veneration. Accordingly they made Him a feast, which, as Mark informs us, was given in the house of Simon the leper. Any gathering of His friends in Bethany must have been incomplete without Lazarus and his sisters. Each is present, and each contributes an appropriate addition to the feast. Martha serves; Lazarus, mute as he is throughout the whole story, bears witness by his presence as a living guest to the worthiness of Jesus; while Mary makes the day memorable by a characteristic action. Coming in, apparently after the guests had reclined at table, she broke an alabaster of very costly spikenard² and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair.

This token of affection took the company by surprise. Lazarus and his sisters may have been in sufficiently good circumstances to admit of their making a substantial acknowledgment of their indebtedness to Jesus; and although this alabaster of ointment had cost as much as would keep a labouring man's family for a year, this could not seem an excessive return to make for service so valuable as Jesus had rendered. It was the manner of the acknowledgment which took the company by surprise. Jesus was a poor man, and His very appearance may have suggested that there were other things He needed more urgently than such a

² In *The Classical Review* for July 1890 Mr. Bennett suggests that the difficult word πιστικῆς should be written πιστακῆς, and that it refers to the *Pistacia terebinthus*, which grows in Cyprus and Judæa, and yields a very fragrant and very costly unguent.

gift as this. Had the family provided a home for Him or given Him the price of this ointment, no one would have uttered a remark. But this was the kind of demonstration reserved for princes or persons of great distinction; and when paid to One so conspicuously humble in His dress and habits, there seemed to the uninstructed eye something incongruous and bordering on the grotesque. When the fragrance of the ointment disclosed its value, there was therefore an instantaneous exclamation of surprise, and at any rate in one instance of blunt disapproval. Judas, instinctively putting a money value on this display of affection, roundly and with coarse indelicacy declared it had better have been sold and given to the poor.

Jesus viewed the act with very different feelings. The rulers were determining to put Him out of the way, as not only worthless but dangerous; the very man who objected to this present expenditure was making up his mind to sell Him for a small part of the sum; the people were scrutinising His conduct, criticising Him; – in the midst of all this hatred, suspicion, treachery, coldness, and hesitation comes this woman and puts aside all this would-be wisdom and caution, and for herself pronounces that no tribute is rich enough to pay to Him. It is the rarity of such action, not the rarity of the nard, that strikes Jesus. This, He says, is a noble deed she has done, far rarer, far more difficult to produce, far more penetrating, and lasting in its fragrance than the richest perfume that man has compounded. Mary has the experience that all those have who

for Christ's sake expose themselves to the misunderstanding and abuse of vulgar and unsympathetic minds; she receives from Himself more explicit assurance that her offering has given pleasure to Him and is gratefully accepted. We may sometimes find ourselves obliged to do what we perfectly well know will be misunderstood and censured; we may be compelled to adopt a line of conduct which seems to convict us of heedlessness and of the neglect of duties we owe to others; we may be driven to action which lays us open to the charge of being romantic and extravagant; but of one thing we may be perfectly sure – that however our motives are mis-read and condemned by those who first make their voices heard, He for whose sake we do these things will not disparage our action nor misunderstand our motives. The way to a fuller intimacy with Christ often lies through passages in life we must traverse alone.

But we are probably more likely to misunderstand than to be misunderstood. We are so limited in our sympathies, so scantily furnished with knowledge, and have so slack a hold upon great principles, that for the most part we can understand only those who are like ourselves. When a woman comes in with her effusiveness, we are put out and irritated; when a man whose mind is wholly uneducated utters his feelings by shouting hymns and dancing on the street, we think him a semi-lunatic; when a member of our family spends an hour or two a day in devotional exercises, we condemn it as waste of time which might be better spent on practical charities or household duties.

Most liable of all to this vice of misjudging the actions of others, and indeed of misapprehending generally wherein the real value of life consists, are those who, like Judas, measure all things by a utilitarian, if not a money, standard. Actions which have no immediate results are pronounced by such persons to be mere sentiment and waste, while in fact they redeem human nature and make life seem worth living. The charge of the Light Brigade at Balaclava served none of the immediate purposes of the battle, and was indeed a blunder and waste from that point of view; yet are not our annals enriched by it as they have been by few victories? On the Parthenon there were figures placed with their backs hard against the wall of the pediment; these backs were never seen and were not intended to be seen, but yet were carved with the same care as was spent upon the front of the figures. Was that care waste? There are thousands of persons in our own society who think it essential to teach their children arithmetic, but pernicious to instil into their minds a love of poetry or art. They judge of education by the test, Will it pay? can this attainment be turned into money? The other question, Will it enrich the nature of the child and of the man? is not asked. They proceed as if they believed that the man is made for business, not business for the man; and thus it comes to pass that everywhere among us men are found sacrificed to business, stunted in their moral development, shut off from the deeper things of life. The pursuits which such persons condemn are the very things which lift life out of the low level of commonplace buying and selling,

and invite us to remember that man liveth not by bread alone, but by high thoughts, by noble sacrifice, by devoted love and all that love dictates, by the powers of the unseen, mightier by far than all that we see.

In the face, then, of so much that runs counter to such demonstrations as Mary's and condemns them as extravagance, it is important to note the principles upon which our Lord proceeds in His justification of her action.

First, He says, this is an occasional, exceptional tribute. "The poor always ye have with you, but me ye have not always." Charity to the poor you may continue from day to day all your life long: whatever you spend on me is spent once for all. You need not think the poor defrauded by this expenditure. Within a few days I shall be beyond all such tokens of regard, and the poor will still claim your sympathy. This principle solves for us some social and domestic problems. Of many expenses common in society, and especially of expenses connected with scenes such as this festive gathering at Bethany, the question always arises, Is this expenditure justifiable? When present at an entertainment costing as much and doing as little material good as the spikenard whose perfume had died before the guests separated, we cannot but ask, Is not this, after all, mere waste? had it not been better to have given the value to the poor? The hunger-bitten faces, the poverty-stricken outcasts, we have seen during the day are suggested to us by the superabundance now before us. The effort to spend most where least is needed suggests to us, as to these

guests at Bethany, gaunt, pinched, sickly faces, bare rooms, cold grates, feeble, dull-eyed children – in a word, starving families who might be kept for weeks together on what is here spent in a few minutes; and the question is inevitable, Is this right? Can it be right to spend a man's ransom on a mere good smell, while at the end of the street a widow is pining with hunger? Our Lord replies that so long as one is day by day considering the poor and relieving their necessities, he need not grudge an occasional outlay to manifest his regard for his friends. The poor of Bethany would probably appeal to Mary much more hopefully than to Judas, and they would appeal all the more successfully because her heart had been allowed to utter itself thus to Jesus. There is, of course, an expenditure for display under the guise of friendship. Such expenditure finds no justification here or anywhere else. But those who in a practical way acknowledge the perpetual presence of the poor are justified in the occasional outlay demanded by friendship.

2. But our Lord's defence of Mary is of wider range. "Let her alone," He says, "against the day of my burying hath she kept this." It was not only occasional, exceptional tribute she had paid Him; it was solitary, never to be repeated. Against my burial she has kept this unguent; for me ye have not always. Would you blame Mary for spending this, were I lying in my tomb? Would you call it too costly a tribute, were it the last? Well, it is the last.³ Such is our Lord's justification of her action. Was Mary

³ So Stier.

herself conscious that this was a parting tribute? It is possible that her love and womanly instinct had revealed to her the nearness of that death of which Jesus Himself so often spoke, but which the disciples refused to think of. She may have felt that this was the last time she would have an opportunity of expressing her devotion. Drawn to Him with unutterable tenderness, with admiration, gratitude, anxiety mingling in her heart, she hastens to spend upon Him her costliest. Passing away from *her* world she knows He is; buried so far as she was concerned she knew Him to be if He was to keep the Passover at Jerusalem in the midst of His enemies. Had the others felt with her, none could have grudged her the last consolation of this utterance of her love, or have grudged Him the consolation of receiving it. For this made Him strong to die, this among other motives – the knowledge that His love and sacrifice were not in vain, that He had won human hearts, and that in their affection He would survive. This is His true embalming. This it is that forbids that His flesh see corruption, that His earthly manifestation die out and be forgotten. To die before He had attached to Himself friends as passionate in their devotion as Mary would have been premature. The recollection of His work might have been lost. But when He had won men like John and women like Mary, He could die assured that His name would never be lost from earth. The breaking of the alabaster box, the pouring out of Mary's soul in adoration of her Lord – this was the signal that all was ripe for His departure, this the proof that His manifestation had done

its work. The love of His own had come to maturity and burst thus into flower. Jesus therefore recognises in this act His true embalming.

And it is probably from this point of view that we may most readily see the appropriateness of that singular commendation and promise which our Lord, according to the other gospels, added: "Verily I say unto you, wherever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken for a memorial of her."

At first sight the encomium might seem as extravagant as the action. Was there, a Judas might ask, anything deserving of immortality in the sacrifice of a few pounds? But no such measurements are admissible here. The encomium was deserved because the act was the irrepressible utterance of all-absorbing love – of a love so full, so rich, so rare that even the ordinary disciples of Christ were at first not in perfect sympathy with it. The absolute devotedness of her love found a fit symbol in the alabaster box or vase which she had to break that the ointment might flow out. It was not a bottle out of which she might take the stopper and let a carefully measured quantity dribble out, reserving the rest for other and perhaps very different uses – fit symbol of our love to Christ; but it was a hermetically sealed casket or flask, out of which, if she let one drop fall, the whole must go. It had to be broken; it had to be devoted to one sole use. It could not be in part reserved or in part diverted to other uses. Where you have such love as this, have you not the highest

thing humanity can produce? Where is it now to be had on earth, where are we to look for this all-devoting, unreserving love, which gathers up all its possessions and pours them out at Christ's feet, saying, "Take all, would it were more"?

The encomium, therefore, was deserved and appropriate. In her love the Lord would ever live: so long as she existed the remembrance of Him could not die. No death could touch her heart with his chilly hand and freeze the warmth of her devotion. Christ was immortal in her, and she was therefore immortal in Him. Her love was a bond that could not be broken, the truest spiritual union. In embalming Him, therefore, she unconsciously embalmed herself. Her love was the amber in which He was to be preserved, and she became inviolable as He. Her love was the marble on which His name and worth were engraven, on which His image was deeply sculptured, and they were to live and last together. Christ "prolongs His days" in the love of His people. In every generation there arise those who will not let His remembrance die out, and who to their own necessities call out the living energy of Christ. In so doing they unwittingly make themselves undying as He; their love of Him is the little spark of immortality in their soul. It is that which indissolubly and by the only genuine spiritual affinity links them to what is eternal. To all who thus love Him Christ cannot but say, "Because I live, ye shall live also."

Another point in our Lord's defence of Mary's conduct, though it is not explicitly asserted, plainly is, that tributes of

affection paid directly to Himself are of value to Him. Judas might with some plausibility have quoted against our Lord His own teaching that an act of kindness done to the poor was kindness to Him. It might be said that, on our Lord's own showing, what He desires is, not homage paid to Himself personally, but loving and merciful conduct. And certainly any homage paid to Himself which is not accompanied by such conduct is of no value at all. But as love to Him is the spring and regulator of all right conduct, it is necessary that we should cultivate this love; and because He delights in our well-being and in ourselves, and does not look upon us merely as so much material in which He may exhibit His healing powers, He necessarily rejoices in every expression of true devotedness that is paid to Him by any of us.

And on our side wherever there is true and ardent love it must crave direct expression. "If ye love me," says our Lord, "keep my commandments"; and obedience certainly is the normal test and exhibition of love. But there is that in our nature which refuses to be satisfied with obedience, which craves fellowship with what we love, which carries us out of ourselves and compels us to express our feeling directly. And that soul is not fully developed whose pent-up gratitude, cherished admiration, and warm affection do not from time to time break away from all ordinary modes of expressing devotion and choose some such direct method as Mary chose, or some such straightforward utterance as Peter's: "Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou

knowest that I love Thee.”

It may, indeed, occur to us, as we read of Mary's tribute to her Lord, that the very words in which He justified her action forbid our supposing that any so grateful tribute can be paid Him by us. “Me ye have not always” may seem to warn us against expecting that so direct and satisfying an intercourse can be maintained now, when we no longer have Him. And no doubt this is one of the standing difficulties of Christian experience. We can love those who live with us, whose eye we can meet, whose voice we know, whose expression of face we can read. We feel it easy to fix our affections on one and another of those who are alive contemporaneously with ourselves. But with Christ it is different: we miss those sensible impressions made upon us by the living bodily presence; we find it difficult to retain in the mind a settled idea of the feeling He has towards us. It is an effort to accomplish by faith what sight without any effort effectually accomplishes. We do not *see* that He loves us; the looks and tones that chiefly reveal human love are absent; we are not from hour to hour confronted, whether we will or no, with one evidence or other of love. Were the life of a Christian nowadays no more difficult than it was to Mary, were it brightened with Christ's presence as a household friend, were the whole sum and substance of it merely a giving way to the love He kindled by palpable favours and measurable friendship, then surely the Christian life would be a very simple, very easy, very happy course.

But the connection between ourselves and Christ is not of

the body that passes, but of the spirit which endures. It is spiritual, and such a connection may be seriously perverted by the interference of sense and of bodily sensations. To measure the love of Christ by His expression of face and by His tone of voice is legitimate, but it is not the truest measurement: to be drawn to Him by the accidental kindnesses our present difficulties must provoke is to be drawn by something short of perfect spiritual affinity. And, on the whole, it is well that our spirit should be allowed to choose its eternal friendship and alliance by what is specially and exclusively its own, so that its choice cannot be mistaken, as the choice sometimes is when there is a mixture of physical and spiritual attractiveness. So much are we guided in youth and in the whole of our life by what is material, so freely do we allow our tastes to be determined and our character to be formed by our connection with what is material, that the whole man gets blunted in his *spiritual* perceptions and incapable of appreciating what is not seen. And the great part of our education in this life is to lift the spirit to its true place and to its appropriate company, to teach it to measure its gains apart from material prosperity, and to train it to love with ardour what cannot be seen.

Besides, it cannot be doubted that this incident itself very plainly teaches that Christ came into this world to win our love and to turn all duty into a personal acting towards Him; to make the *whole* of life like those parts of it which are now its bright exceptional holiday times; to make all of it a pleasure by making all of it and not merely parts of it the utterance of love. Even

a little love in our life is the sunshine that quickens and warms and brightens the whole. There seems at length to be a reason and a satisfaction in life when love animates us. It is easy to act well to those whom we really love, and Christ has come for the express purpose of bringing our whole life within this charmed circle. He has come not to bring constraint and gloom into our lives, but to let us out into the full liberty and joy of the life that God Himself lives and judges to be the only life worthy of His bestowal upon us.

II. THE ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM

“On the morrow a great multitude that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took the branches of the palm trees, and went forth to meet Him, and cried out, Hosanna: Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel. And Jesus, having found a young ass, sat thereon; as it is written, Fear not, daughter of Zion: behold, thy King cometh, sitting on an ass’s colt. These things understood not His disciples at the first: but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of Him, and that they had done these things unto Him. The multitude therefore that was with Him when He called Lazarus out of the tomb, and raised him from the dead, bare witness. For this cause also the multitude went and met Him, for that they heard that He had done this sign. The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, Behold, how ye prevail nothing: lo, the world is gone after Him.” – John xii. 12–19.

If our Lord arrived in Bethany on Friday evening and spent the Sabbath with His friends there, “the next day” of ver. 12 is Sunday; and in the Church year this day is known as Palm Sunday, from the incident here related. It was also the day, four days before the Passover, on which the Jews were enjoined by the law to choose their paschal lamb. Some consciousness of this may have guided our Lord’s action. Certainly He means

finally to offer Himself to the people as the Messiah. Often as He had evaded them before, and often as He had forbidden His disciples to proclaim Him, He is now conscious that His hour has come, and by entering Jerusalem as King of peace He definitely proclaims Himself the promised Messiah. As plainly as the crowning of a new monarch and the flourish of trumpets and the kissing of his hand by the great officers of state proclaim him king, so unmistakably does our Lord by riding into Jerusalem on an ass and by accepting the hosannas of the people proclaim Himself the King promised to men through the Jews, as the King of peace who was to win men to His rule by love and sway them by a Divine Spirit.

The scene must have been one not easily forgotten. The Mount of Olives runs north and south parallel to the east wall of Jerusalem, and separated from it by a gully, through which flows the brook Kidron. The Mount is crossed by three paths. One of these is a steep footpath, which runs direct over the crest of the hill; the second runs round its northern shoulder; while the third crosses the southern slope. It was by this last route the pilgrim caravans were accustomed to enter the city. On the occasion of our Lord's entry the road was probably thronged with visitors making their way to the great annual feast. No fewer than three million persons are said to have been sometimes packed together in Jerusalem at the Passover; and all of them being on holiday, were ready for any kind of excitement. The idea of a festal procession was quite to their mind. And no sooner did the

disciples appear with Jesus riding in their midst than the vast streams of people caught the infection of loyal enthusiasm, tore down branches of the palms and olives which were found in abundance by the roadside, and either waved them in the air or strewed them in the line of march. Others unwrapped their loose cloaks from their shoulders and spread them along the rough path to form a carpet as He approached – a custom which is still, it seems, observed in the East in royal processions, and which has indeed sometimes been imported into our own country on great occasions. Thus with every demonstration of loyalty, with ceaseless shoutings that were heard across the valley in the streets of Jerusalem itself, and waving the palm branches, they moved towards the city.

Those who have entered the city from Bethany by this road tell us that there are two striking points in it. The first is when at a turn of the broad and well-defined mountain track the southern portion of the city comes for an instant into view. This part of the city was called “the city of David,” and the suggestion is not without probability that it may have been at this point the multitude burst out in words that linked Jesus with David. “Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed is the King that cometh in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the kingdom of our father David. Hosanna, peace and glory in the highest.” This became the watchword of the day, so that even the boys who had come out of the city to see the procession were heard afterwards, as they loitered in the streets, still shouting the same refrain.

After this the road again dips, and the glimpse of the city is lost behind the intervening ridge of Olivet; but shortly a rugged ascent is climbed and a ledge of bare rock is reached, and in an instant the whole city bursts into view. The prospect from this point must have been one of the grandest of its kind in the world, the fine natural position of Jerusalem not only showing to advantage, but the long line of city wall embracing, like the setting of a jewel, the marvellous structures of Herod, the polished marble and the gilded pinnacles glittering in the morning sun and dazzling the eye. It was in all probability at this point that our Lord was overcome with regret when He considered the sad fate of the beautiful city, and when in place of the smiling palaces and apparently impregnable walls His imagination filled His eye with smoke-blackened ruins, with pavements slippery with blood, with walls breached at all points and choked with rotting corpses.

Our Lord's choice of the ass was significant. The ass was commonly used for riding, and the well-cared-for ass of the rich man was a very fine animal, much larger and stronger than the little breed with which we are familiar. Its coat, too, is as glossy as a well-kept horse's – "shiny black, or satiny white, or sleek mouse colour." It was not chosen by our Lord at this time that He might show His humility, for it would have been still humbler to walk like His disciples. So far from being a token of humility, He chose a colt which apparently had never borne another rider. He rather meant by claiming the ass and by

riding into Jerusalem upon it to assert His royalty; but He did not choose a horse, because that animal would have suggested royalty of quite another kind from His – royalty which was maintained by war and outward force; for the horse and the chariot had always been among the Hebrews symbolic of warlike force. The disciples themselves, strangely enough, did not see the significance of this action, although, when they had time to reflect upon it, they remembered that Zechariah had said: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: He is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass. And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off: and He shall speak peace unto the heathen.”

When John says, “these things understood not His disciples at the first,” he cannot mean that they did not understand that Jesus by this act claimed to be the Messiah, because even the mob perceived the significance of this entry into Jerusalem and hailed Him “Son of David.” What they did not understand, probably, was why He chose this mode of identifying Himself with the Messiah. At any rate, their perplexity brings out very clearly that the conception was not suggested to Jesus. He was not induced by the disciples nor led on by the people to make a demonstration which He Himself scarcely approved or had not intended to make. On the contrary, from His first recorded act that morning He had taken command of the situation. Whatever was done was

done with deliberation, at His own instance and as His own act.⁴

This then in the first place; it was His own deliberate act. He put Himself forward, knowing that He would receive the hosannas of the people, and intending that He should receive them. All His backwardness is gone; all shyness of becoming a public spectacle is gone. For this also is to be noted – that no place or occasion could have been more public than the Passover at Jerusalem. Whatever it was He meant to indicate by His action, it was to the largest possible public He meant to indicate it. No longer in the retirement of a Galilean village, nor in a fisherman's cottage, nor in dubious or ambiguous terms, but in the full blaze of the utmost publicity that could possibly be given to His proclamation, and in language that could not be forgotten or misinterpreted, He now declared Himself. He knew He must attract the attention of the authorities, and His entrance was a direct challenge to them.

What was it then that with such deliberation and such publicity He meant to proclaim? What was it that in these last critical hours of His life, when He knew He should have few more opportunities of speaking to the people, He sought to impress upon them? What was it that, when free from the solicitations of men and the pressure of circumstances, He sought to declare? It was that He was the Messiah. There might be those in the crowd who did not understand what was meant. There might be

⁴ This is more distinctly brought out in the Synoptic Gospels than in St. John: cp. Mark xi. 1–10.

persons who did not know Him, or who were incompetent judges of character, and supposed He was a mere enthusiast carried away by dwelling too much on some one aspect of Old Testament prophecy. In every generation there are good men who become almost crazed upon some one topic, and sacrifice everything to the promotion of one favourite hope. But however He might be misjudged, there can be no question of His own idea of the significance of His action. He claims to be the Messiah.

Such a claim is the most stupendous that could be made. To be the Messiah is to be God's Viceroy and Representative on earth, able to represent God adequately to men, and to bring about that perfect condition which is named "the kingdom of God." The Messiah must be conscious of ability perfectly to accomplish the will of God with man, and to bring men into absolute harmony with God. This is claimed by Jesus. He stands in His sober senses and claims to be that universal Sovereign, that true King of men, whom the Jews had been encouraged to expect, and who when He came would reign over Gentiles as well as Jews. By this demonstration, to which His previous career had been naturally leading up, He claims to take command of earth, of this world in all its generations, not in the easier sense of laying down upon paper a political constitution fit for all races, but in the sense of being able to deliver mankind from the source of all their misery and to lift men to a true superiority. He has gone about on earth, not secluding Himself from the woes and ways of men, not delicately isolating Himself, but exposing Himself freely to

the touch of the malignities, the vulgarities, the ignorance and wickedness of all; and He now claims to rule all this, and implies that earth can present no complication of distress or iniquity which he cannot by the Divine forces within Him transform into health and purity and hope.

This then is His deliberate claim. He quietly but distinctly proclaims that He fulfils all God's promise and purpose among men; is that promised King who was to rectify all things, to unite men to Himself, and to lead them on to their true destiny; to be practically God upon earth, accessible to men and identified with all human interests. Many have tested His claim and have proved its validity. By true allegiance to Him many have found that they have gained the mastery over the world. They have entered into peace, have felt eternal verities underneath their feet, and have attained a connection with God such as must be everlasting. They are filled with a new spirit towards men and see all things with purged eyes. Not abruptly and unintelligibly, by leaps and bounds, but gradually and in harmony with the nature of things, His kingdom is extending. Already His Spirit has done much: in time His Spirit will everywhere prevail. It is by Him and on the lines which He has laid down that humanity is advancing to its goal.

This was the claim He made; and this claim was enthusiastically admitted by the popular instinct.⁵ The populace was not merely humouring in holiday mood a whimsical person

⁵ According to the reading of the scene by St. John, the people needed no prompting.

for their own diversion. Many of them knew Lazarus and knew Jesus, and taking the matter seriously gave the tone to the rest. The people indeed did not, any more than the disciples, understand how different the kingdom of their expectation was from the kingdom Jesus meant to found. But while they entirely misapprehended the purpose for which He was sent, they believed that He was sent by God: His credentials were absolutely satisfactory, His work incomprehensible. But as yet they still thought He must be of the same mind as themselves regarding the work of the Messiah. To His claim, therefore, the response given by the people was loud and demonstrative. It was indeed a very brief reign they accorded to their King, but their prompt acknowledgment of Him was the instinctive and irrepressible expression of what they really felt to be His due. A popular demonstration is notoriously untrustworthy, always running to extremes, necessarily uttering itself with a loudness far in excess of individual conviction, and gathering to itself the loose and floating mass of people who have no convictions of their own, and are thankful to any one who leads them and gives them a cue, and helps them to feel that they have after all a place in the community. Who has not stood by as an onlooker at a public demonstration and smiled at the noise and glare that a mass of people will produce when their feelings are ever so little stirred, and marked how even against their own individual sentiments they are carried away by the mere tide of the day's circumstances, and for the mere sake of making a demonstration? This crowd

which followed our Lord with shoutings very speedily repented and changed their shouts into a far blinder shriek of rage against Him who had been the occasion of their folly. And it must indeed have been a humbling experience for our Lord to have Himself ushered into Jerusalem by a crowd through whose hosannas He already heard the mutter of their curses. Such is the homage He has to content Himself with – such is the homage a perfect life has won.

For He knew what was in man; and while His disciples might be deceived by this popular response to His claim, He Himself was fully aware how little it could be built upon. Save in His own heart, there is no premonition of death. More than ever in His life before does His sky seem bright without a cloud. He Himself is in His early prime with life before Him; His followers are hopeful, the multitude jubilant; but through all this gay enthusiasm He sees the scowling hate of the priests and scribes; the shouting of the multitude does not drown in His ear the mutterings of a Judas and of the Sanhedrim. He knew that the throne He was now hailed to was the cross, that His coronation was the reception on His own brows of all the thorns and stings and burdens that man's sin had brought into the world. He did not fancy that the redemption of the world to God was an easy matter which could be accomplished by an afternoon's enthusiasm. He kept steadily before His mind the actual condition of the men who were by His spiritual influence to become the willing and devoted subjects of God's kingdom. He measured with accuracy

the forces against Him, and understood that His warfare was not with the legions of Rome, against whom this Jewish patriotism and indomitable courage and easily roused enthusiasm might tell, but with principalities and powers a thousandfold stronger, with the demons of hatred and jealousy, of lust and worldliness, of carnality and selfishness. Never for a moment did He forget His true mission and sell His spiritual throne, hard-earned as it was to be, for popular applause and the glories of the hour. Knowing that only by the utmost of human goodness and self-sacrifice, and by the utmost of trial and endurance, could any true and lasting rule of men be gained, He chose this path and the throne it led to. With the most comprehensive view of the kingdom He was to found, and with a spirit of profound seriousness strangely contrasting in its composed and self-possessed insight with the blind tumult around Him, He claimed the crown of the Messiah. His suffering was not formal and nominal, it was not a mere pageant; equally real was the claim He now made and which brought Him to that suffering.

III. *THE CORN OF WHEAT*

“Now there were certain Greeks among those that went up to worship at the feast: these therefore came to Philip, which was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and asked him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus. Philip cometh and telleth Andrew: Andrew cometh, and Philip, and they tell Jesus. And Jesus answereth them, saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth by itself alone; but if it die, it beareth much fruit. He that loveth his life loseth it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.” – John xii. 20–26.

St. John now introduces a third incident to show that all is ripe for the death of Jesus. Already he has shown us that in the inmost circle of His friends He has now won for Himself a permanent place, a love which ensures that His memory will be had in everlasting remembrance. Next, he has lifted into prominence the scene in which the outer circle of the Jewish people were constrained, in an hour when their honest enthusiasm and instincts carried them away, to acknowledge Him as the Messiah who had come to fulfil all God’s will upon earth. He now goes on to tell us how this agitation at the centre was found rippling in ever-widening circles till it broke with a gentle whisper on the shores of the isles of the Gentiles. This is the

significance which St. John sees in the request of the Greeks that they might be introduced to Jesus.

These Greeks were “of those that came up to worship at the feast.” They were proselytes, Greeks by birth, Jews by religion. They suggest the importance for Christianity of the leavening process which Judaism was accomplishing throughout the world. They may not have come from any remoter country than Galilee, but from traditions and customs separate as the poles from the Jewish customs and thoughts. From their heathen surroundings they came to Jerusalem, possibly for the first time, with wondering anticipations of the blessedness of those who dwelt in God’s house, and feeling their thirst for the living God burning within them as their eyes lighted on the pinnacles of the Temple, and as at last their feet stood within its precincts. But up through all these desires grew one that overshadowed them, and, through all the petitions which a year or many years of sin and difficulty had made familiar to their lips, this petition made its way: “Sir, we would see Jesus.”

This petition they address to Philip, not only because he had a Greek name, and therefore presumably belonged to a family in which Greek was spoken and Greek connections cultivated, but because, as St. John reminds us, he was “of Bethsaida of Galilee,” and might be expected to understand and speak Greek, if, indeed, he was not already known to these strangers in Jerusalem. And by their request they obviously did not mean that Philip should set them in a place of vantage from which they might have a

good view of Jesus as He passed by, for this they could well have accomplished without Philip's friendly intervention. But they wished to question and make Him out, to see for themselves whether there were in Jesus what even in Judaism they felt to be lacking – whether He at last might not satisfy the longings of their Divinely awakened spirits. Possibly they may even have wished to ascertain His purposes regarding the outlying nations, how the Messianic reign was to affect them. Possibly they may even have thought of offering Him an asylum where He might find shelter from the hostility of His own people.

Evidently Philip considered that this request was critical. The Apostles had been charged not to enter into any Gentile city, and they might naturally suppose that Jesus would be reluctant to be interviewed by Greeks. But before dismissing the request, he lays it before Andrew his friend, who also bore a Greek name; and after deliberation the two make bold, if not to urge the request, at least to inform Jesus that it had been made. At once in this modestly urged petition He hears the whole Gentile world uttering its weary, long-disappointed sigh, "We would see." This is no mere Greek inquisitiveness; it is the craving of thoughtful men recognising their need of a Redeemer. To the eye of Jesus, therefore, this meeting opens a prospect which for the moment overcomes Him with the brightness of its glory. In this little knot of strangers He sees the firstfruits of the immeasurable harvest which was henceforth to be continuously reaped among the Gentiles. No more do we hear the heart-broken cry, "O

Jerusalem, Jerusalem!" no longer the reproachful "Ye will not come to Me, that ye might have life," but the glad consummation of His utmost hope utters itself in the words, "The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified."

But while promise was thus given of the glorification of the Messiah by His reception among all men, the path which led to this was never absent from the mind of our Lord. Second to the inspiring thought of His recognition by the Gentile world came the thought of the painful means by which alone He could be truly glorified. He checks, therefore, the shout of exultation which He sees rising to the lips of His disciples with the sobering reflection: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." As if He said, Do not fancy that I have nothing to do but to accept the sceptre which these men offer, to seat Myself on the world's throne. The world's throne is the Cross. These men will not know My power until I die. The manifestation of Divine presence in My life, has been distinct enough to win them to inquiry; they will be for ever won to Me by the Divine presence revealed in My death. Like the corn of wheat, I must die if I would be abundantly fruitful. It is through death My whole living power can be disengaged and can accomplish all possibilities.

Two points are here suggested: (I.) That the life, the living force that was in Christ, reached its proper value and influence through His death; and (II.) that the proper value of Christ's life is that it propagates similar lives.

I. The life of Christ acquired its proper value and received its fit development through His death. This truth He sets before us in the illuminating figure of the corn of wheat. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone." There are three uses to which wheat may be put: it may be stored for sale, it may be ground and eaten, it may be sown. For our Lord's purposes these three uses may be considered as only two. Wheat may be eaten, or it may be sown. With a pickle of wheat or a grain of oats you may do one of two things: you may eat it and enjoy a momentary gratification and benefit; or you may put it in the ground, burying it out of sight and suffering it to pass through uncomely processes, and it will reappear multiplied a hundredfold, and so on in everlasting series. Year by year men sacrifice their choicest sample of grain, and are content to bury it in the earth instead of exposing it in the market, because they understand that except it die it abideth alone, but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit. The proper life of the grain is terminated when it is used for immediate gratification: it receives its fullest development and accomplishes its richest end when it is cast into the ground, buried out of sight, and apparently lost.

As with the grain, so is it with each human life. One of two things you can do with your life; both you cannot do, and no third thing is possible. You may consume your life for your own present gratification and profit, to satisfy your present cravings and tastes and to secure the largest amount of immediate enjoyment to yourself – you may eat your life; or you may be

content to put aside present enjoyment and profits of a selfish kind and devote your life to the uses of God and men. In the one case you make an end of your life, you consume it as it goes; no good results, no enlarging influence, no deepening of character, no fuller life, follows from such an expenditure of life – spent on yourself and on the present, it terminates with yourself and with the present. But in the other case you find you have entered into a more abundant life; by living for others your interests are widened, your desire for life increased, the results and ends of life enriched. “He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.” It is a law we cannot evade. He that consumes his life now, spending it on himself – he who cannot bear to let his life out of his own hand, but cherishes and pampers it and gathers all good around it, and will have the fullest present enjoyment out of it, – this man is losing his life; it comes to an end as certainly as the seed that is eaten. But he who devotes his life to other uses than his own gratification, who does not so prize self that everything must minister to its comfort and advancement, but who can truly yield himself to God and put himself at God’s disposal for the general good, – this man, though he may often seem to lose his life, and often does lose it so far as present advantage goes, keeps it to life everlasting.

The law of the seed is the law of human life. Use your life for present and selfish gratification and to satisfy your present cravings, and you lose it for ever. Renounce self, yield yourself

to God, spend your life for the common good, irrespective of recognition or the lack of it, personal pleasure or the absence of it, and although your life may thus seem to be lost, it is finding its best and highest development and passes into life eternal. Your life is a seed now, not a developed plant, and it can become a developed plant only by your taking heart to cast it from you and sow it in the fertile soil of other men's needs. This will seem, indeed, to disintegrate it and fritter it away, and leave it a contemptible, obscure, forgotten thing; but it does, in fact, set free the vital forces that are in it, and give it its fit career and maturity.

Looking at the thing itself, apart from figure, it is apparent that "he that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal." The man who most freely uses his life for others, keeping least to himself and living solely for the common interests of mankind, has the most enduring influence. He sets in motion forces which propagate fresh results eternally. And not only so. He who freely sows his life has it eternally, not only in so far as he has set in motion an endless series of beneficent influences, but inasmuch as he himself enters into life eternal. An immortality of influence is one thing and a very great thing; but an immortality of personal life is another, and this also is promised by our Lord when He says (ver. 26), "Where I am, there shall also My servant be."

This, then, being the law of human life, Christ, being man, must not only enounce but observe it. He speaks of Himself

even more directly than of us when He says, "He that loveth his life shall lose it." His disciples thought they had never seen such promise in His life as at this hour: seedtime seemed to them to be past, and the harvest at hand. Their Master seemed to be fairly launched on the tide that was to carry Him to the highest pinnacle of human glory. And so He was, but not, as they thought, by simply yielding Himself to be set as King and to receive adoration from Jew and Gentile. He saw with different eyes, and that it was a different exaltation which would win for Him lasting sovereignty: "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me." He knew the law which governed the development of human life. He knew that a total and absolute surrender of self to the uses and needs of others was the one path to permanent life, and that in His case this absolute surrender involved death.

A comparison of the good done by the life of Christ with that done by His death shows how truly He judged when He declared that it was by His death He should effectually gather all men to Him. His death, like the dissolution of the seed, seemed to terminate His work, but really was its germination. So long as He lived, it was but His single strength that was used; He abode alone. There was great virtue in His life – great power for the healing, the instruction, the elevation, of mankind. In His brief public career He suggested much to the influential men of His time, set all men who knew Him a-thinking, aided many to reform their lives, and removed a large amount of distress and disease. He communicated to the world a mass of new truth, so

that those who have lived after Him have stood at quite a different level of knowledge from that of those who lived before Him. And yet how little of the proper results of Christ's influence, how little understanding of Christianity, do you find even in His nearest friends until He died. By the visible appearance and the external benefits and the false expectations His greatness created, the minds of men were detained from penetrating to the spirit and mind of Christ. It was expedient for them that He should go away, for until He went they depended on His visible power, and His spirit could not be wholly received by them. They were looking at the husk of the seed, and its life could not reach them. They were looking for help from Him instead of themselves becoming like Him.

And therefore He chose at an early age to cease from all that was marvellous and beneficent in His life among men. He might, as these Greeks suggested, have visited other lands and have continued His healing and teaching there. He might have done more in His own time than He did, and His time might have been indefinitely prolonged; but He chose to cease from all this and voluntarily gave Himself to die, judging that thereby He could do much more good than by His life. He was straitened till this was accomplished; He felt as a man imprisoned and whose powers are held in check. It was winter and not spring-time with Him. There was a change to pass upon Him which should disengage the vital forces that were in Him and cause their full power to be felt – a change which should thaw the springs of life in Him

and let them flow forth to all. To use His own figure, He was as a seed unsown so long as He lived, valuable only in His own proper person; but by dying His life obtained the value of seed sown, propagating its kind in everlasting increase.

II. The second point suggested is, that the proper value of Christ's life consists in this – that it propagates similar lives. As seed produces grain of its own kind, so Christ produces men like Christ. He ceasing to do good in this world as a living man, a multitude of others by this very cessation are raised in His likeness. By His death we receive both inclination and ability to become with Him sons of God. “The love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge that if one died for all, then all died; and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him that died for them.” By His death He has effected an entrance for this law of self-surrender into human life, has exhibited it in a perfect form, and has won others to live as He lived. So that, using the figure He used, we may say that the company of Christians now on earth are Christ in a new form, His body indeed. “That which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body which shall be, but bare grain: but God giveth it a body as it hath pleased Him, and to every seed his own body.” Christ having been sown, lives now in His people. They are the body in which He dwells. And this will be seen. For standing and looking at a head of barley waving on its stalk, no amount of telling would persuade you that that had sprung from a seed of wheat; and looking at any life which is

characterised by selfish ambition and eagerness for advancement and little regard for the wants of other men, no persuasion can make it credible that that life springs from the self-sacrificing life of Christ.

What Christ here shows us, then, is that the principle which regulates the development of seed regulates the growth, continuance, and fruitfulness of human life; that whatever is of the nature of seed gets to its full life only through death; that our Lord, knowing this law, submitted to it, or rather by His native love was attracted to the life and death which revealed this law to Him. He gave His life away for the good of men, and therefore prolongs His days and sees His seed eternally. There is not one way for Him and another for us. The same law applies to all. It is not peculiar to Christ. The work He did was peculiar to Him, as each individual has his own place and work; but the principle on which all right lives are led is one and the same universally. What Christ did He did because He was living a human life on right principles. We need not die on the cross as He did, but we must as truly yield ourselves as living sacrifices to the interests of men. If we have not done so, we have yet to go back to the very beginning of all lasting life and progress; and we are but deceiving ourselves by attainments and successes which are not only hollow, but are slowly cramping and killing all that is in us. Whoever will choose the same destiny as Christ must take the same road to it that He took. He took the one right way for men to go, and said, "If any man follow Me, where I am there will he

be also.” If we do not follow Him, we really walk in darkness and know not whither we go. We cannot live for selfish purposes and then enjoy the common happiness and glory of the race. Self-seeking is self-destroying.

And it is needful to remark that this self-renunciation must be real. The law of sacrifice is the law not for a year or two in order to gain some higher selfish good – which is not self-sacrifice, but deeper self-seeking; it is the law of all human life, not a short test of our fidelity to Christ, but the only law on which life can ever proceed. It is not a barter of self I make, giving it up for a little that I may have an enriched self to eternity; but it is a real foregoing and abandonment of self for ever, a change of desire and nature, so that instead of finding my joy in what concerns myself only I find my joy in what is serviceable to others.

Thus only can we enter into permanent happiness. Goodness and happiness are one – one in the long-run, if not one in every step of the way. We are not asked to live for others without any heart to do so. We are not asked to choose as our eternal life what will be a constant pain and can only be reluctantly done. The very heathen would not offer in sacrifice the animal that struggled as it was led to the altar. All sacrifice must be willingly made; it must be the sacrifice which is prompted by love. God and this world demand our best work, and only what we do with pleasure can be our best work. Sacrifice of self and labour for others are not like Christ’s sacrifice and labour unless they spring from love. Forced, reluctant, constrained sacrifice or service –

service which is no joy to ourselves through the love we bear to those for whom we do it – is not the service that is required of us. Service into which we can throw our whole strength, because we are convinced it will be of use to others, and because we long to see them enjoying it – this is the service required. Love, in short, is the solution of all. Find your happiness in the happiness of many rather than in the happiness of one, and life becomes simple and inspiring.

Nor are we to suppose that this is an impracticable, high-pitched counsel of perfection with which plain men need not trouble themselves. *Every* human life is under this law. There is no path to goodness or to happiness save this one. Nature herself teaches us as much. When a man is truly attracted by another, and when genuine affection possesses his heart, his whole being is enlarged, and he finds it his best pleasure to serve that person. The father who sees his children enjoying the fruit of his toil feels himself a far richer man than if he were spending all on himself. But this family affection, this domestic solution of the problem of happy self-sacrifice, is intended to encourage and show us the way to a wider extension of our love, and thereby of our use and happiness. The more love we have, the happier we are. Self-sacrifice looks miserable, and we shrink from it as from death and destitution, because we look at it in separation from the love it springs from. Self-sacrifice without love *is* death; we abandon our own life and do not find it again in any other. It is a seed ground under the heel, not a seed lightly thrown into prepared

soil. It is in love that goodness and happiness have their common root. And it is this love which is required of us and promised to us. So that as often as we shudder at the dissolution of our own personal interests, the scattering of our own selfish hopes and plans, the surrender of our life to the service of others, we are to remember that this, which looks so very like death, and which often throws around our prospects the chilling atmosphere of the tomb, is not really the termination, but the beginning of the true and eternal life of the spirit. Let us keep our heart in the fellowship of the sacrifice of Christ, let us feel our way into the meanings and uses of that sacrifice, and learn its reality, its utility, its grace, and at length it will lay hold of our whole nature, and we shall find that it impels us to regard other men with interest and to find our true joy and life in serving them.

IV. THE ATTRACTIVE FORCE OF THE CROSS

“Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save Me from this hour. But for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify Thy name. There came therefore a voice out of heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again. The multitude therefore, that stood by, and heard it, said that it had thundered: others said, An angel hath spoken to Him. Jesus answered and said, This voice hath not come for My sake, but for your sakes. Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Myself. But this He said, signifying by what manner of death He should die. The multitude therefore answered Him, We have heard out of the law that the Christ abideth for ever: and how sayest thou, The Son of man must be lifted up? who is this Son of man? Jesus therefore said unto them, Yet a little while is the light among you. Walk while ye have the light, that darkness overtake you not: and he that walketh in the darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. While ye have the light, believe on the light, that ye may become sons of light.” – John xii. 27–36.

The presence of the Greeks had stirred in the soul of Jesus conflicting emotions. Glory by humiliation, life through death, the secured happiness of mankind through His own anguish

and abandonment, – well might the prospect disturb Him. So masterly is His self-command, so steadfast and constant His habitual temper, that one almost inevitably underrates the severity of the conflict. The occasional withdrawal of the veil permits us reverently to observe some symptoms of the turmoil within – symptoms which it is probably best to speak of in His own words: “Now is My soul troubled; and what shall I say? Shall I say, ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? But for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify Thy name.” This Evangelist does not describe the agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. It was needless after this indication of the same conflict. Here is the same shrinking from a public and shameful death conquered by His resolution to deliver men from a still darker and more shameful death. Here is the same foretaste of the bitterness of the cup as it now actually touches His lips, the same clear reckoning of all it meant to drain that cup to the dregs, together with the deliberate assent to all that the will of the Father might require Him to endure.

In response to this act of submission, expressed in the words, “Father, glorify Thy name,” there came a voice from heaven, saying, “I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.” The meaning of this assurance was, that as in all the past manifestation of Christ the Father had become better known to men, so in all that was now impending, however painful and disturbed, however filled with human passions and to all appearance the mere result of them, the Father would still be

glorified. Some thought the voice was thunder; others seemed almost to catch articulate sounds, and said, "An angel spake to Him." But Jesus explained that it was not "to Him" the voice was specially addressed, but rather for the sake of those who stood by. And it was indeed of immense importance that the disciples should understand that the events which were about to happen were overruled by God that He might be glorified in Christ. It is easy for us to see that nothing so glorifies the Father's name as these hours of suffering; but how hard for the onlookers to believe that this sudden transformation of the Messianic throne into the criminal's cross was no defeat of God's purpose, but its final fulfilment. He leads them, therefore, to consider that in His judgment the whole world is judged, and to perceive in His arrest and trial and condemnation not merely the misguided and wanton outrage of a few men in power, but the critical hour of the world's history.

This world has commonly presented itself to thoughtful minds as a battle-field in which the powers of good and evil wage ceaseless war. In the words He now utters the Lord declares Himself to be standing at the very crisis of the battle, and with the deepest assurance He announces that the opposing power is broken and that victory remains with Him. "Now is the prince of this world cast out; and I will draw all men unto Me." The prince of this world, that which actually rules and leads men in opposition to God, was judged, condemned, and overthrown in the death of Christ. By His meek acceptance of God's will in

the face of all that could make it difficult and dreadful to accept it, He won for the race deliverance from the thralldom of sin. At length a human life had been lived without submission at any point to the prince of this world. As man and in the name of all men Jesus resisted the last and most violent assault that could be made upon His faith in God and fellowship with Him, and so perfected His obedience and overcame the prince of this world, – overcame him not in one act alone – many had done that – but in a completed human life, in a life which had been freely exposed to the complete array of temptations that can be directed against men in this world.

In order more clearly to apprehend the promise of victory contained in our Lord's words, we may consider (I.) the object He had in view – to “draw all men” to Him; and (II.) the condition of His attaining this object – namely, His death.

I. The object of Christ was to draw all men to Him. The opposition in which He here sets Himself to the prince of this world shows us that by “drawing” He means attracting *as a king attracts*, to His name, His claims, His standard, His person. Our life consists in our pursuance of one object or another, and our devotion is continually competed for. When two claimants contest a kingdom, the country is divided between them, part cleaving to the one and part to the other. The individual determines to which side he shall cleave, – by his prejudices or by his justice, as it may be; by his knowledge of the comparative capacity of the claimants, or by his ignorant

predilection. He is taken in by sounding titles, or he penetrates through all bombast and promises and douceurs to the real merit or demerit of the man himself. One person will judge by the personal manners of the respective claimants; another by their published manifesto, and professed object and style of rule, another by their known character and probable conduct. And while men thus range themselves on this side or on that, they really pass judgment on themselves, betraying as they do what it is that chiefly draws them, and taking their places on the side of good or evil. It is thus that we all judge ourselves by following this or that claimant to our faith, regard, and devotion, to ourself and our life. What we spend ourselves on, what we aim at and pursue, what we make our object, that judges us and that rules us and that determines our destiny.

Christ came into the world to be our King, to lead us to worthy achievements. He came that we might have a worthy object of choice and of the devotion of our life. He serves the same purpose as a king: He embodies in His own person, and thereby makes visible and attractive, the will of God and the cause of righteousness. Persons who could only with great difficulty apprehend His objects and plans can appreciate His person and trust Him. Persons to whom there would seem little attraction in a cause or in an undefined "progress of humanity" can kindle with enthusiasm towards Him personally, and unconsciously promote His cause and the cause of humanity. And therefore, while some are attracted by His person, others by the legitimacy of His

claims, others by His programme of government, others by His benefactions, we must beware of denying loyalty to any of these. Expressions of love to His person may be lacking in the man who yet most intelligently enters into Christ's views for the race, and sacrifices his means and his life to forward these views. Those who gather to His standard are various in temperament, are drawn by various attractions, and must be various in their forms of showing allegiance. And this, which is the strength of His camp, can only become its weakness when men begin to think there is no way but their own; and that allegiance which is strenuous in labour but not fluent in devout expression, or loyalty which shouts and throws its cap in the air but lacks intelligence, is displeasing to the King. The King, who has great ends in view, will not inquire what it is precisely which forms the bond between Him and His subjects so long as they truly sympathise with Him and second His efforts. The one question is, Is He their actual leader?

Of the kingdom of Christ, though a full description cannot be given, one or two of the essential characteristics may be mentioned.

1. It is a *kingdom*, a community of men under one head. When Christ proposed to attract men to Himself, it was for the good of the race He did so. It could achieve its destiny only if He led it, only if it yielded itself to His mind and ways. And those who are attracted to Him, and see reason to believe that the hope of the world lies in the universal adoption of His mind and ways,

are formed into one solid body or community. They labour for the same ends, are governed by the same laws, and whether they know one another or not they have the most real sympathy and live for one cause. Being drawn to Christ, we enter into abiding fellowship with all the good who have laboured or are labouring in the cause of humanity. We take our places in the everlasting kingdom, in the community of those who shall see and take part in the great future of mankind and the growing enlargement of its destiny. We are hereby entered among the living, and are joined to that body of mankind which is to go on and which holds the future – not to an extinct party which may have memories, but has no hopes. In sin, in selfishness, in worldliness, individualism reigns, and all profound or abiding unity is impossible. Sinners have common interests only for a time, only as a temporary guise of selfish interests. Every man out of Christ is really an isolated individual. But passing into Christ's kingdom we are no longer isolated, abandoned wretches stranded by the stream of time, but members of the undying commonwealth of men in which our life, our work, our rights, our future, our association with all good, are assured.

2. It is a *universal* kingdom. "I will draw *all* men unto Me." The one rational hope of forming men into one kingdom shines through these words. The idea of a universal monarchy has visited the great minds of our race. They have cherished their various dreams of a time when all men should live under one law and possibly speak one language, and have interests so truly

in common that war should be impossible. But an effectual instrument for accomplishing this grand design has ever been wanting. Christ turns this grandest dream of humanity into a rational hope. He appeals to what is universally present in human nature. There is that in Him which every man needs, – a door to the Father; a visible image of the unseen God; a gracious, wise, and holy Friend. He does not appeal exclusively to one generation, to educated or to uneducated, to Orientals or to Europeans alone, but to man, to that which we have in common with the lowest and the highest, the most primitive and most highly developed of the species. The attractive influence He exerts upon men is not conditioned by their historical insight, by their ability to sift evidence, by this or that which distinguishes man from man, but by their innate consciousness that some higher power than themselves exists, by their ability, if not to recognise goodness when they see it, at least to recognise love when it is spent upon them.

But while our Lord affirms that there is that in Him which all men can recognise and learn to love and serve, He does not say that His kingdom will therefore be quickly formed. He does not say that this greatest work of God will take a shorter time than the common works of God which prolong one day of our hasty methods into a thousand years of solidly growing purpose. If it has taken a million ages for the rocks to knit and form for us a standing-ground and dwelling-place, we must not expect that this kingdom, which is to be the one enduring result of this

world's history, and which can be built up only of thoroughly convinced men and of generations slowly weeded of traditional prejudices and customs, can be completed in a few years. No doubt interests are at stake in human destiny and losses are made by human waste which had no place in the physical creation of the world; still, God's methods are, as we judge, slow, and we must not think that He who "works hitherto" is doing nothing because the swift processes of jugglery or the hasty methods of human workmanship find no place in the extension of Christ's kingdom. This kingdom has a firm hold of the world and must grow. If there is one thing certain about the future of the world, it is that righteousness and truth will prevail. The world is bound to come to the feet of Christ.

3. Christ's kingdom being universal, it is also and necessarily *inward*. What is common to all men lies deepest in each. Christ was conscious that He held the key to human nature. He knew what was in man. With the penetrating insight of absolute purity He had gone about among men, freely mixing with rich and with poor, with the sick and the healthy, with the religious and the irreligious. He was as much at home with the condemned criminal as with the blameless Pharisee; saw through Pilate and Caiaphas alike; knew all that the keenest dramatist could tell Him of the meannesses, the depravities, the cruelties, the blind passions, the obstructed goodness, of men; but knew also that He could sway all that was in man and exhibit that to men which should cause the sinner to abhor his sin and seek the face of

God. This He would do by a simple moral process, without violent demonstration or disturbance or assertion of authority. He would “draw” men. It is by inward conviction, not by outward compulsion, men are to become His subjects. It is by the free and rational working of the human mind that Jesus builds up His kingdom. His hope lies in a fuller and fuller light, in a clearer and clearer recognition of facts. Attachment to Christ must be the act of the soul’s self; everything, therefore, which strengthens the will or enlightens the mind or enlarges the man brings him nearer to the kingdom of Christ, and makes it more likely he will yield to His drawing.

And because Christ’s rule is inward it is therefore of universal application. The inmost choice of the man being governed by Christ, and his character being thus touched at its inmost spring, all his conduct will be governed by Christ and be a carrying out of the will of Christ. It is not the frame of society Christ seeks to alter, but the spirit of it. It is not the occupations and institutions of human life which the subject of Christ finds to be incompatible with Christ’s rule, so much as the aim and principles on which they are conducted. The kingdom of Christ claims all human life as its own, and the spirit of Christ finds nothing that is essentially human alien from it. If the statesman is a Christian, it will be seen in his policy; if the poet is a Christian, his song will betray it; if a thinker be a Christian, his readers soon find it out. Christianity does not mean religious services, churches, creeds, Bibles, books, equipment of any kind; it means

the Spirit of Christ. It is the most portable and flexible of all religions, and therefore the most pervasive and dominant in the life of its adherent. It needs but the Spirit of God and the spirit of man, and Christ mediating between them.

II. Such being Christ's object, what is the condition of His attaining it? "*I, if I be lifted up*, will draw all men unto Me." The elevation requisite for becoming a visible object to men of all generations was the elevation of the Cross. His death would accomplish what His life could not accomplish. The words betray a distinct consciousness that there was in His death a more potent spell, a more certain and real influence for good among men than in His teaching or in His miracles or in His purity of life.

What is it, then, in the death of Christ which so far surpasses His life in its power of attraction? The life was equally unselfish and devoted; it was more prolonged; it was more directly useful, – why, then, would it have been comparatively ineffective without the death? It may, in the first place, be answered, Because His death presents in a dramatic and compact form that very devotedness which is diffused through every part of His life. Between the life and the death there is the same difference as between sheet lightning and forked lightning, between the diffused heat of the sun and the same heat focussed upon a point through a lens. It discloses what was actually but latently there. The life and the death of Christ are one and mutually explain each other. From the life we learn that no motive can have prompted Christ to die but the one motive which ruled Him always – the

desire to do all God willed in men's behalf. We cannot interpret the death as anything else than a consistent part of a deliberate work undertaken for men's good. It was not an accident; it was not an external necessity: it was, as the whole life was, a willing acceptance of the uttermost that was required to set men on a higher level and unite them to God. But as the life throws this light upon the death of Christ, how that light is gathered up and thrown abroad in world-wide reflection from the death of Christ! For here His self-sacrifice shines completed and perfect; here it is exhibited in that tragic and supreme form which in all cases arrests attention and commands respect. Even when a man of wasted life sacrifices himself at last, and in one heroic act saves another by his death, his past life is forgotten or seems to be redeemed by his death, and at all events we own the beauty and the pathos of the deed. A martyr to the faith may have been but a poor creature, narrow, harsh and overbearing, vain and vulgar in spirit; but all the past is blotted out, and our attention is arrested on the blazing pile or the bloody scaffold. So the death of Christ, though but a part of the self-sacrificing life, yet stands by itself as the culmination and seal of that life; it catches the eye and strikes the mind, and conveys at one view the main impression made by the whole life and character of Him who gave Himself upon the cross.

But Christ is no mere hero or teacher sealing his truth with his blood; nor is it enough to say that His death renders, in a conspicuous form, the perfect self-sacrifice with which He

devoted Himself to our good. It is conceivable that in a long-past age some other man should have lived and died for his fellows, and yet we at once recognise that, though the history of such a person came into our hands, we should not be so affected and drawn by it as to choose him as our king and rest upon him the hope of uniting us to one another and to God. Wherein, then, lies the difference? The difference lies in this – that Christ was the representative of God. This He Himself uniformly claimed to be. He knew He was unique, different from all others; but He advanced no claim to esteem that did not pass to the Father who sent Him. Always he explained His powers as being the proper equipment of God's representative, "The words that I speak unto you, I speak not of Myself." His whole life was the message of God to man, the Word made flesh. His death was but the last syllable of this great utterance – the utterance of God's love for man, the final evidence that nothing is grudged us by God. Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. His death draws us because there is in it more than human heroism and self-sacrifice. It draws us because in it the very heart of God is laid bare to us. It softens, it breaks us down, by the irresistible tenderness it discloses in the mighty and ever-blessed God. Every man feels it has a message for him, because in it the God and Father of us all speaks to us.

It is this which is special to the death of Christ, and which separates it from all other deaths and heroic sacrifices. It has a universal bearing – a bearing upon every man, because it is a

Divine act, the act of that One who is the God and Father of all men. In the same century as our Lord many men died in a manner which strongly excites our admiration. Nothing could well be more noble, nothing more pathetic, than the fearless and loving spirit in which Roman after Roman met his death. But beyond respectful admiration these heroic deeds win from us no further sentiment. They are the deeds of men who have no connection with us. The well-worn words, "What's Hecuba *to me* or I to Hecuba?" rise to our lips when we try to fancy any deep connection. But the death of Christ concerns all men without exception, because it is the greatest declarative act of the God of all men. It is the manifesto all men are concerned to read. It is the act of One with whom all men are already connected in the closest way. And the result of our contemplation of it is, not that we admire, but that we are drawn, are attracted, into new relations with Him whom that death reveals. This death moves and draws us as no other can, because here we get to the very heart of that which most deeply concerns us. Here we learn what our God is and where we stand eternally. He who is nearest us of all, and in whom our life is bound up, reveals Himself; and seeing Him here full of ungrudging and most reliable love, of tenderest and utterly self-sacrificing devotedness to us, we cannot but give way to this central attraction, and with all other willing creatures be drawn into fullest intimacy and firmest relations to the God of all.

The death of Christ, then, draws men chiefly because God

here shows men His sympathy, His love, His trustworthiness. What the sun is in the solar system, Christ's death is in the moral world. The sun by its physical attraction binds the several planets together and holds them within range of its light and heat. God, the central intelligence and original moral Being, draws to Himself and holds within reach of His life-giving radiance all who are susceptible of moral influences; and He does so through the death of Christ. This is His supreme revelation. Here, if we may say so with reverence, God is seen at His best – not that at any time or in any action He is different, but here He is *seen* to be the God of love He ever is. Nothing is better than self-sacrifice: that is the highest point a moral nature can touch. And God, by the sacrifice which is rendered visible on the cross, gives to the moral world a real, actual, immovable centre, round which moral natures will more and more gather, and which will hold them together in self-effacing unity.

To complete the idea of the attractiveness of the Cross, it must further be kept in view that this particular form of the manifestation of the Divine love was adapted to the needs of those to whom it was made. To sinners the love of God manifested itself in providing a sacrifice for sin. The death on the cross was not an irrelevant display, but was an act required for the removal of the most insuperable obstacles that lay in man's path. The sinner, believing that in the death of Christ his sins are atoned for, conceives hope in God and claims the Divine compassion in his own behalf. To the penitent the Cross

is attractive as an open door to the prisoner, or the harbour-heads to the storm-tossed ship.

Let us not suppose, then, that we are not welcome to Christ. He desires to draw us to Himself and to form a connection with us. He understands our hesitations, our doubts of our own capacity for any steady and enthusiastic loyalty; but He knows also the power of truth and love, the power of His own person and of His own death to draw and fix the hesitating and wavering soul. And we shall find that as we strive to serve Christ in our daily life it is still His death that holds and draws us. It is His death which gives us compunction in our times of frivolity, or selfishness, or carnality, or rebellion, or unbelief. It is there Christ appears in His own most touching attitude and with His own most irresistible appeal. We cannot further wound One already so wounded in His desire to win us from evil. To strike One already thus nailed to the tree in helplessness and anguish, is more than the hardest heart can do. Our sin, our infidelity, our unmoved contemplation of His love, our blind indifference to His purpose – these things wound Him more than the spear and the scourge. To rid us of these things was His purpose in dying, and to see that His work is in vain and His sufferings unregarded and unfruitful is the deepest injury of all. It is not to the mere sentiment of pity He appeals: rather He says, “Weep not for Me; weep for yourselves.” It is to our power to recognise perfect goodness and to appreciate perfect love. He appeals to our power to see below the surface of things, and through the

outer shell of this world's life to the Spirit of good that is at the root of all and that manifests itself in Him. Here is the true stay of the human soul: "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden"; "I am come a light into the world: walk in the light."

V. RESULTS OF CHRIST'S MANIFESTATION

“But though He had done so many signs before them, yet they believed not on Him: that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? For this cause they could not believe, for that Isaiah said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and He hardened their heart; lest they should see with their eyes, and perceive with their heart, and should turn, and I should heal them. These things said Isaiah, because he saw His glory; and he spake of Him. Nevertheless even of the rulers many believed on Him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess it, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: for they loved the glory of men more than the glory of God. And Jesus cried and said, He that believeth on Me, believeth not on Me, but on Him that sent Me. And he that beholdeth Me beholdeth Him that sent Me. I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on Me may not abide in the darkness. And if any man hear My sayings, and keep them not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth Me, and receiveth not My sayings, hath One that judgeth him: the word that I spake, the same shall judge him in the last day. For I spake not from Myself; but the Father which sent Me, He hath given

Me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that His commandment is life eternal: the things therefore which I speak, even as the Father hath said unto Me, so I speak.” – John xii. 37–50.

In this Gospel the death of Christ is viewed as the first step in His glorification. When He speaks of being “lifted up,” there is a double reference in the expression, a local and an ethical reference.⁶ He is lifted up on the cross, but lifted up on it as His true throne and as the necessary step towards His supremacy at God’s right hand. It was, John tells us, with direct reference to the cross that Jesus now used the words: “I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me.” The Jews, who heard the words, perceived that, whatever else was contained in them, intimation of His removal from earth was given. But, according to the current Messianic expectation, the Christ “abideth for ever,” or at any rate for four hundred or a thousand years. How then could this Person, who announced His immediate departure, be the Christ? The Old Testament gave them ground for supposing that the Messianic reign would be lasting; but had they listened to our Lord’s teaching they would have learned that this reign was spiritual, and not in the form of an earthly kingdom with a visible sovereign.

Accordingly, although they had recognised Jesus as the Messiah, they are again stumbled by this fresh declaration of His. They begin to fancy that perhaps after all by calling Himself “the

⁶ See iii. 14.

Son of man” He has not meant exactly what they mean by the Messiah. From the form of their question it would seem that Jesus had used the designation “the Son of man” in intimating His departure; for they say, “How sayest thou, The Son of man must be lifted up?” Up to this time, therefore, they had taken it for granted that by calling Himself the Son of man He claimed to be the Christ, but now they begin to doubt whether there may not be two persons signified by those titles.

Jesus furnishes them with no direct solution of their difficulty. He never betrays any interest in these external identifications. The time for discussing the relation of the Son of man to the Messiah is past. His manifestation is closed. Enough light has been given. Conscience has been appealed to and discussion is no longer admissible. “Ye have light: walk in the light.” The way to come to a settlement of all their doubts and hesitations is to follow Him. There is still time for that. “Yet a little while is the light among you.” But the time is short; there is none to waste on idle questionings, none to spend on sophisticating conscience – time only for deciding as conscience bids.

By thus believing in the light they will themselves become “children of light.” The “children of light” are those who live in it as their element, – as “the children of this world” are those who wholly belong to this world and find in it what is congenial; as “the son of perdition” is he who is identified with perdition. The children of light have accepted the revelation that is in Christ, and live in the “day” that the Lord has made. Christ contains

the truth for them – the truth which penetrates to their inmost thought and illuminates the darkest problems of life. In Christ they have seen that which determines their relation to God; and that being determined, all else that is of prime importance finds a settlement. To know God and ourselves; to know God's nature and purpose, and our own capabilities and relation to God, – these constitute the light we need for living by; and this light Christ gives. It was in a dim, uncertain twilight, with feebly shining lanterns, the wisest and best of men sought to make out the nature of God and His purposes regarding man; but in Christ God has made noonday around us.

They, therefore, that stood, or that stand, in His presence, and yet recognise no light, must be asleep, or must turn away from an excess of light that is disagreeable or inconvenient. If we are not the fuller of life and joy the more truth we know, if we shrink from admitting the consciousness of a present and holy God, and do not feel it to be the very sunshine of life in which alone we thrive, we must be spiritually asleep or spiritually dead. And this cry of Christ is but another form of the cry that His Church has prolonged: "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light."

The "little while" of their enjoyment of the light was short indeed, for no sooner had He made an end of these sayings than He "departed, and did hide Himself from them." He probably found retirement from the feverish, inconstant, questioning crowd with His friends in Bethany. At any rate this removal of

the light, while it meant darkness to those who had not received Him and who did not keep His words, could bring no darkness to His own, who had received Him and the light in Him. Perhaps the best comment on this is the memorable passage from *Comus*:

“Virtue could see to do what virtue would
By her own radiant light, though sun and moon
Were in the great sea sunk.
He that has light within his own clear breast
May sit i’ the centre and enjoy bright day;
But he that hides a dark soul and foul thoughts
Benighted walks under the midday sun,
Himself is his own dungeon.”

And now the writer of this Gospel, before entering upon the closing scenes, pauses and presents a summary of the results of all that has been hitherto related. First, he accounts for the unbelief of the Jews. It could not fail to strike his readers as remarkable that, “though He had done so many miracles before the people, yet they believed not in Him.” In this John sees nothing inexplicable, however sad and significant it may be. At first sight it is an astounding fact that the very people who had been prepared to recognise and receive the Messiah should not have believed in Him. Might not this to some minds be convincing evidence that Jesus was not the Messiah? If the same God who sent Him forth had for centuries specially prepared a people to recognise and receive Him when He came, was it

possible that this people should repudiate Him? Was it likely that such a result should be produced or should be allowed? But John turns the point of this argument by showing that a precisely similar phenomenon had often appeared in the history of Israel. The old prophets had the very same complaint to make. "Who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?" The people had habitually, as a people with individual exceptions, refused to listen to God's voice or to acknowledge His presence in prophet and providence.

Besides, might it not very well be that the blindness and callousness of the Jews in rejecting Jesus was the inevitable issue of a long process of hardening? If, in former periods of their history, they had proved themselves unworthy of God's training and irresponsive to it, what else could be expected than that they should reject the Messiah when He came? This hardening and blinding process was the inevitable, natural result of their past conduct. But what nature does, God does; and therefore the Evangelist says "they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart." The organ for perceiving spiritual truth was blinded, and their susceptibility to religious and moral impressions had become callous and hardened and impervious.

And while this was no doubt true of the people as a whole, still there were not a few individuals who eagerly responded to this last message from God. In the most unlikely quarters,

and in circumstances calculated to counteract the influence of spiritual forces, some were convinced. "Even among the chief rulers many believed on Him." This belief, however, did not tell upon the mass, because, through fear of excommunication, those who were convinced dared not utter their conviction. "They loved the praise of men more than the praise of God." They allowed their relations to men to determine their relation to God. Men were more real to them than God. The praise of men came home to their hearts with a sensible relish that the praise of God could not rival. They reaped what they had sown; they had sought the esteem of men, and now they were unable to find their strength in God's approval. The glory which consisted in following the lowly and outcast Jesus, the glory of fellowship with God, was quite eclipsed by the glory of living in the eye of the people as wise and estimable persons.

In the last paragraph of the chapter John gives a summary of the claims and message of Jesus. He has told us (ver. 36) that Jesus had departed from public view and had hidden Himself, and he mentions no return to publicity. It is therefore probable that in these remaining verses, and before he turns to a somewhat different aspect of Christ's ministry, he gives in rapid and brief retrospect the sum of what Jesus had advanced as His claim. He introduces this paragraph, indeed, with the words, "Jesus cried and said"; but as neither time nor place is mentioned, it is quite likely that no special time or place is supposed; and in point of fact each detail adduced in these verses can be paralleled from

some previously recorded utterance of Jesus.

First, then, as everywhere in the Gospel, so here, He claims to be the representative of God in so close and perfect a manner that "he that believeth on Me, believeth not on Me, but on Him that sent Me. And he that seeth Me, seeth Him that sent Me." No belief terminates in Christ Himself: to believe in Him is to believe in God, because all that He is and does proceeds from God and leads to God. The whole purpose of Christ's manifestation was to reveal God. He did not wish to arrest thought upon Himself, but through Himself to guide thought to Him whom He revealed. He was sustained by the Father, and all He said and did was of the Father's inspiration. Whoever, therefore, "saw" or understood Him "saw" the Father; and whoever believed in Him believed in the Father.

Second, as regards men, He is "come a light into the world." Naturally there is in the world no sufficient light. Men feel that they are in darkness. They feel the darkness all the more appalling and depressing the more developed their own human nature is. "More light" has been the cry from the beginning. What are we? where are we? whence are we? whither are we going? what is there above and beyond this world? These questions are echoed back from an unanswering void, until Christ comes and gives the answer. Since He came men have felt that they did not any longer walk in darkness. They see where they are going, and they see why they should go.

And if it be asked, as among the Jews it certainly must have

been asked, why, if Jesus is the Messiah, does He not punish men for rejecting Him? the answer is, "I came not to judge the world, but to save the world." Judgment, indeed, necessarily results from His coming. Men are divided by His coming. "The words that I have spoken, the same shall judge men in the last day." The offer of God, the offer of righteousness, is that which judges men. Why are they still dead, when life has been offered? This is the condemnation. "The commandment of the Father is life everlasting." This is the sum of the message of God to men in Christ; this is "the commandment" which the Father has given Me; this is Christ's commission: to bring God in the fulness of His grace and love and life-giving power within men's reach. It is to give life eternal to men that God has come to them in Christ. To refuse that life is their condemnation.

VI. THE FOOT-WASHING

“Now before the feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end. And during supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray Him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He came forth from God, and goeth unto God, riseth from supper, and layeth aside His garments; and He took a towel, and girded Himself. Then He poureth water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded. So He cometh to Simon Peter. He saith unto Him, Lord, dost Thou wash my feet? Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt understand hereafter. Peter saith unto Him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me. Simon Peter saith unto Him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. Jesus saith to him, He that is bathed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all. For He knew him that should betray Him; therefore said He, Ye are not all clean. So when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments, and sat down again, He said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call Me, Master, and, Lord: and ye say well; for so I am.

If I then, the Lord and the Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye also should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, A servant is not greater than his lord; neither one that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, blessed are ye if ye do them." – John xiii. 1–17.

St. John, having finished his account of the public manifestation of Jesus, proceeds now to narrate the closing scenes, in which the disclosures He made to "His own" form a chief part. That the transition may be observed, attention is drawn to it. At earlier stages of our Lord's ministry He has given as His reason for refraining from proposed lines of action that His hour was not come: now He "knew that His hour was come, that He should depart out of this world unto the Father." This indeed was the last evening of His life. Within twenty-four hours He was to be in the tomb. Yet according to this writer it was not the paschal supper which our Lord now partook of with His disciples; it was "before the feast of the Passover." Jesus being Himself the Paschal Lamb was sacrificed on the day on which the Passover was eaten, and in this and the following chapters we have an account of the preceding evening.

In order to account for what follows, the precise time is defined in the words "supper being served"⁷ or "supper-time having arrived"; not, as in the Authorised Version, "supper being

⁷ Compare Mark vi. 2, γενομένου σαββάτου; and the Latin "posita mensa."

ended,” which plainly was not the case;⁸ nor, as in the Revised Version, “during supper.” The difficulty about washing the feet could not have arisen after or during supper, but only as the guests entered and reclined at table. In Palestine, as in other countries of the same latitude, shoes were not universally worn, and were not worn at all within doors; and where some protection to the foot was worn, it was commonly a mere sandal, a sole tied on with a thong. The upper part of the foot was thus left exposed, and necessarily became heated and dirty with the fine and scorching dust of the roads. Much discomfort was thus produced, and the first duty of a host was to provide for its removal. A slave was ordered to remove the sandals and wash the feet.⁹ And in order that this might be done, the guest either sat on the couch appointed for him at table, or reclined with his feet protruding beyond the end of it, that the slave, coming round with the pitcher and basin,¹⁰ might pour cool water gently over them. So necessary to comfort was this attention that our Lord reproached the Pharisee who had invited Him to dinner with a breach of courtesy because he had omitted it.

On ordinary occasions it is probable that the disciples would perform this humble office by turns, where there was no slave to discharge it for all. But this evening, when they gathered for the last supper, all took their places at the table with a studied

⁸ See ver. 2.

⁹ ὑπολύετε, παῖδες, καὶ ἀπονίζετε.

¹⁰ The “tûsht” and “ibrîek” of modern Palestine.

ignorance of the necessity, a feigned unconsciousness that any such attention was required. As a matter of course, the pitcher of cool water, the basin, and the towel had been set as part of the requisite furnishing of the supper chamber; but no one among the disciples betrayed the slightest consciousness that he understood that any such custom existed. Why was this? Because, as Luke tells us (xxii. 24), "there had arisen among them a contention, which of them is accounted to be the greatest." Beginning, perhaps, by discussing the prospects of their Master's kingdom, they had passed on to compare the importance of this or that faculty for forwarding the interests of the kingdom, and had ended by easily recognised personal allusions and even the direct pitting of man against man. The assumption of superiority on the part of the sons of Zebedee and others was called in question, and it suddenly appeared how this assumption had galled the rest and rankled in their minds. That such a discussion should arise may be disappointing, but it was natural. All men are jealous of their reputation, and crave that credit be given them for their natural talent, their acquired skill, their professional standing, their influence, or at any rate for their humility.

Heated, then, and angry and full of resentment these men hustle into the supper-room and seat themselves like so many sulky schoolboys. They streamed into the room and doggedly took their places; and then came a pause. For any one to wash the feet of the rest was to declare himself the servant of all; and that was precisely what each one was resolved he, for his part,

would not do. No one of them had humour enough to see the absurdity of the situation. No one of them was sensitive enough to be ashamed of showing such a temper in Christ's presence. There they sat, looking at the table, looking at the ceiling, arranging their dress, each resolved upon this – that he would not be the man to own himself servant of all.

But this unhealthy heat quite unfits them to listen to what their Lord has to say to them that last evening. Occupied as they are, not with anxiety about Him nor with absorbing desire for the prosperity of His kingdom, but with selfish ambitions that separate them alike from Him and from one another, how can they receive what He has to say? But how is He to bring them into a state of mind in which they can listen wholly and devotedly to Him? How is He to quench their heated passions and stir within them humility and love? “He riseth from the supper-table, and laid aside His garments, and took a towel, and girded Himself. After that He poureth water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded.” Each separate action is a fresh astonishment and a deeper shame to the bewildered and conscience-stricken disciples. “Who is not able to picture the scene, – the faces of John and James and Peter; the intense silence, in which each movement of Jesus was painfully audible; the furtive watching of Him, as He rose, to see what He would do; the sudden pang of self-reproach as they perceived what it meant; the bitter humiliation and the burning shame?”

But not only is the time noted, in order that we may perceive the relevancy of the foot-washing, but the Evangelist steps aside from his usual custom and describes the mood of Jesus that we may more deeply penetrate into the significance of the action. Around this scene in the supper-chamber St. John sets lights which permit us to see its various beauty and grace. And first of all he would have us notice what seems chiefly to have struck himself as from time to time he reflected on this last evening – that Jesus, even in these last hours, was wholly possessed and governed by love. Although He knew “that His hour had come, that He should depart out of this world unto the Father, yet having loved His own which were in the world He loved them unto the end.” Already the deep darkness of the coming night was touching the spirit of Jesus with its shadow. Already the pain of the betrayal, the lonely desolation of desertion by His friends, the defenceless exposure to fierce, unjust, ruthless men, the untried misery of death and dissolution, the critical trial of His cause and of all the labour of His life, these and many anxieties that cannot be imagined, were pouring in upon His spirit, wave upon wave. If ever man might have been excused for absorption in His own affairs Jesus was then that man. On the edge of what He knew to be the critical passage in the world’s history, what had He to do attending to the comfort and adjusting the silly differences of a few unworthy men? With the weight of a world on His arm, was He to have His hands free for such a trifling attention as this? With His whole soul pressed with the heaviest burden ever laid

on man, was it to be expected He should turn aside at such a call?

But His love made it seem no turning aside at all. His love had made Him wholly theirs, and though standing on the brink of death He was disengaged to do them the slightest service. His love was love, devoted, enduring, constant. He had loved them, and He loved them still. It was their condition which had brought Him into the world, and His love for them was that which would carry Him through all that was before Him. The very fact that they showed themselves still so jealous and childish, so unfit to cope with the world, drew out His affection towards them. He was departing from the world and they were remaining in it, exposed to all its opposition and destined to bear the brunt of hostility directed against Him – how then can He but pity and strengthen them? Nothing is more touching on a death-bed than to see the sufferer hiding and making light of his own pain, and turning the attention of those around him away from him to themselves, and making arrangements, not for his own relief, but for the future comfort of others. This which has often dimmed with tears the eyes of the bystanders struck John when he saw his Master ministering to the wants of His disciples, although He knew that His own hour had come.

Another side-light which serves to bring out the full significance of this action is Jesus' consciousness of His own dignity. "Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He came forth from God, and goeth unto God," riseth from supper, and took a towel and girded Himself.

It was not in forgetfulness of His Divine origin, but in full consciousness of it, He discharged this menial function. As He had divested Himself of the “form of God” at the first, stripping Himself of the outward glory attendant on recognised Divinity, and had taken upon Him the form of a servant, so now He “laid aside His garments and girded Himself,” assuming the guise of a household slave. For a fisherman to pour water over a fisherman’s feet was no great condescension; but that He, in whose hands are all human affairs and whose nearest relation is the Father, should thus condescend is of unparalleled significance. It is this kind of action that is suitable to One whose consciousness is Divine. Not only does the dignity of Jesus vastly augment the beauty of the action, but it sheds new light on the Divine character.

Still another circumstance which seemed to John to accentuate the grace of the foot-washing was this – that Judas was among the guests, and that “the devil had now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray him.” The idea had at last formed itself in Judas’ mind that the best use he could make of Jesus was to sell Him to His enemies. His hopes of gain in the Messianic kingdom were finally blighted, but he might still make something out of Jesus and save himself from all implication in a movement frowned upon by the authorities. He clearly apprehended that all hopes of a temporal kingdom were gone. He had probably not strength of mind enough to say candidly that he had joined the company of disciples on a false understanding, and meant now quietly to return to his trading at

Kerioth. If he could break up the whole movement, he would be justified in his dissatisfaction, and would also be held to be a useful servant of the nation. So he turns traitor. And John does not whitewash him, but plainly brands him as a traitor. Now, much may be forgiven a man; but treachery – what is to be done with it; with the man who uses the knowledge only a friend can have, to betray you to your enemies? Suppose Jesus had unmasked him to Peter and the rest, would he ever have left that room alive? Instead of unmasking him, Jesus makes no difference between him and the others, kneels by his couch, takes his feet in His hands, washes and gently dries them. However difficult it is to understand why Jesus chose Judas at the first, there can be no question that throughout His acquaintance with him He had done all that was possible to win him. The kind of treatment Judas had received throughout may be inferred from the treatment he received now. Jesus knew him to be a man of a low type and impenitent; He knew him to be at that very time out of harmony with the little company, false, plotting, meaning to save himself by bringing ruin on the rest. Yet Jesus will not denounce him to the others. His sole weapon is love. Conquests which He cannot achieve with this He will not achieve at all. In the person of Judas the utmost of malignity the world can show is present to Him, and He meets it with kindness. Well may Astié exclaim: “Jesus at the feet of the traitor – what a picture! what lessons for us!”

Shame and astonishment shut the mouths of the disciples,

and not a sound broke the stillness of the room but the tinkle and splash of the water in the basin as Jesus went from couch to couch. But the silence was broken when He came to Peter. The deep reverence which the disciples had contracted for Jesus betrays itself in Peter's inability to suffer Him to touch his feet. Peter could not endure that the places of master and servant should thus be reversed. He feels that shrinking and revulsion which we feel when a delicate person or one much above us in station proceeds to do some service from which we ourselves would shrink as beneath us. That Peter should have drawn up his feet, started up on the couch, and exclaimed, "Lord, do you actually propose to wash my feet!" is to his credit, and just what we should have expected of a man who never lacked generous impulses. Our Lord therefore assures him that his scruples will be removed, and that what he could not understand would be shortly explained to him. He treats Peter's scruples very much as He treated the Baptist's when John hesitated about baptizing Him. Let Me, says Jesus, do it now, and I will explain My reason when I have finished the washing of you all. But this does not satisfy Peter. Out he comes with one of his blunt and hasty speeches: "Lord, Thou shalt never wash my feet!" He knew better than Jesus, that is to say, what should be done. Jesus was mistaken in supposing that any explanation could be given of it. Hasty, self-confident, knowing better than anybody else, Peter once again ran himself into grave fault. The first requirement in a disciple is entire self-surrender. The others had meekly allowed Jesus to

wash their feet, cut to the heart with shame as they were, and scarcely able to let their feet lie in His hands; but Peter must show himself of a different mind. His first refusal was readily forgiven as a generous impulse; the second is an obstinate, proud, self-righteous utterance, and was forthwith met by the swift rebuke of Jesus: "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me."

Superficially, these words might have been understood as intimating to Peter that, if he wished to partake of the feast prepared, he must allow Jesus to wash his feet. Unless he was prepared to leave the room and reckon himself an outcast from that company, he must submit to the feet-washing which his friends and fellow-guests had submitted to. There was that in the tone of our Lord which awakened Peter to see how great and painful a rupture this would be. He almost hears in the words a sentence of expulsion pronounced on himself; and as rapidly as he had withdrawn from the touch of Christ, so rapidly does he now run to the opposite extreme and offer his whole body to be washed – "not my feet only, but my hands and my head." If this washing means that we are Thy friends and partners, let me be all washed, for every bit of me is Thine. Here again Peter was swayed by blind impulse, and here again he erred. If he could only have been quiet! If he could only have held his tongue! If only he could have allowed his Lord to manage without his interference and suggestion at every point! But this was precisely what Peter had as yet not learned to do. In after-years he was to learn meekness; he was to learn to submit while

others bound him and carried him whither they would; but as yet that was impossible to him. His Lord's plan is never good enough for him; Jesus is never exactly right. What He proposes must always be eked out by Peter's superior wisdom. What gusts of shame must have stormed through Peter's soul when he looked back on this scene! Yet it concerns us rather to admire than to condemn Peter's fervour. How welcome to our Lord as He passed from the cold and treacherous heart of Judas must this burst of enthusiastic devotion have been! "Lord, if washing be any symbol of my being Thine, wash hands and head as well as feet."

Jesus throws a new light upon His action in His reply: "He that is washed, needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all." The words would have more readily disclosed Christ's meaning had they been literally rendered: He that has bathed needeth not save to wash his feet. The daily use of the bath rendered it needless to wash more than the feet, which were soiled with walking from the bath to the supper-chamber. But that Christ had in view as He washed the disciples' feet something more than the mere bodily cleansing and comfort is plain from His remark that they were not all clean. All had enjoyed the feet-washing, but all were not clean. The feet of Judas were as clean as the feet of John or Peter, but his heart was foul. And what Christ intended when He girt Himself with the towel and took up the pitcher was not merely to wash the soil from their feet, but to wash from their hearts

the hard and proud feelings which were so uncongenial to that night of communion and so threatening to His cause. Far more needful to their happiness at the feast than the comfort of cool and clean feet was their restored affection and esteem for one another, and that humility that takes the lowest place. Jesus could very well have eaten with men who were unwashed; but He could not eat with men hating one another, glaring fiercely across the table, declining to answer or to pass what they were asked for, showing in every way malice and bitterness of spirit. He knew that at bottom they were good men; He knew that with one exception they loved Him and one another; He knew that as a whole they were clean, and that this vicious temper in which they at present entered the room was but the soil contracted for the hour. But none the less must it be washed off. *And He did effectually wash it off by washing their feet.* For was there a man among them who, when he saw his Lord and Master stooping at his couch-foot, would not most gladly have changed places with Him? Was there one of them who was not softened and broken down by the action of the Lord? Is it not certain that shame must have cast out pride from every heart; that the feet would be very little thought of, but that the change of feeling would be marked and obvious? From a group of angry, proud, insolent, implacable, resentful men, they were in five minutes changed into a company of humbled, meek, loving disciples of the Lord, each thinking hardly of himself and esteeming others better. They were effectually cleansed from the stain they had

contracted, and could enter on the enjoyment of the Last Supper with pure conscience, with restored and increased affection for one another, and with deepened adoration for the marvellous wisdom and all-accomplishing grace of their Master.

Jesus, then, does not mistake present defilement for habitual impurity, nor partial stain for total uncleanness. He knows whom He has chosen. He understands the difference between deep-seated alienation of spirit and the passing mood which for the hour disturbs friendship. He discriminates between Judas and Peter: between the man who has not been in the bath, and the man whose feet are soiled in walking from it; between him who is at heart unmoved and unimpressed by His love, and him who has for a space fallen from the consciousness of it. He does not suppose that because we have sinned this morning we have no real root of grace in us. He knows the heart we bear Him; and if just at present unworthy feelings prevail, He does not misunderstand as men may, and straightway dismiss us from His company. He recognises that our feet need washing, that our present stain must be removed, but not on this account does He think we need to be all washed and have never been right in heart towards Him.

These present stains, then, Christ seeks to remove, that our fellowship with Him may be unembarrassed; and that our heart, restored to humility and tenderness, may be in a state to receive the blessing He would bestow. It is not enough to be once forgiven, to begin the day "clean every whit." No sooner do we

take a step in the life of the day than our footfall raises a little puff of dust which does not settle without sullyng us. Our temper is ruffled, and words fall from our lips that injure and exasperate. In one way or other stain attaches to our conscience, and we are moved away from cordial and open fellowship with Christ. All this happens to those who are at heart as truly Christ's friends as those first disciples. But we must have these stains washed away even as they had. Humbly we must own them, and humbly accept their forgiveness and rejoice in their removal. As these men had with shame to lay their feet in Christ's hands, so must we. As His hands had to come in contact with the soiled feet of the disciples, so has His moral nature to come in contact with the sins from which He cleanses us. His heart is purer than were His hands, and He shrinks more from contact with moral than with physical pollution; and yet without ceasing we bring Him into contact with such pollution. When we consider what those stains actually are from which we must ask Christ to wash us, we feel tempted to exclaim with Peter, "Lord, Thou shalt never wash my feet!" As these men must have shivered with shame through all their nature, so do we when we see Christ stoop before us to wash away once again the defilement we have contracted; when we lay our feet soiled with the miry and dusty ways of life in His sacred hands; when we see the uncomplaining, unrepachable grace with which He performs for us this lowly and painful office. But only thus are we prepared for communion with Him and with one another. Only by admitting that we need cleansing, and by

humbly allowing Him to cleanse us, are we brought into true fellowship with Him. With the humble and contrite spirit which has thrown down all barriers of pride and freely admits His love and rejoices in His holiness does He abide. Whoso sits down at Christ's table must sit down clean; he may not have come clean, even as those first guests were not clean, but he must allow Christ to cleanse him, must honestly suffer Christ to remove from his heart, from his desire and purpose, all that He counts defiling.

But our Lord was not content to let His action speak for itself; He expressly explains (vv. 12–17) the meaning of what He had now done. He meant that they should learn to wash one another's feet, to be humble and ready to be of service to one another even when to serve seemed to compromise their dignity.¹¹ No disciple of Christ need go far to find feet that need washing, feet that are stained or bleeding with the hard ways that have been trodden. To recover men from the difficulties into which sin or misfortune has brought them – to wipe off some of the soil from men's lives – to make them purer, sweeter, readier to listen to Christ, even unostentatiously to do the small services which each hour calls for – is to follow Him who girt Himself with the slave's apron. As often as we thus condescend we become like Christ. By putting Himself in the servant's place, our Lord has consecrated all service. The disciple who next washed the feet

¹¹ For the formal Foot-washing by the Lord High Almoner, the Pope, or other officials, see Augustine's *Letters* LV.; Herzog art. *Fusswaschung*; Smith's *Dict. of Christian Antiq.* art. *Maundy Thursday*.

of the rest would feel that he was representing Christ, and would suggest to the minds of the others the action of their Lord; and as often as we lay aside the conventional dignity in which we are clad, and gird ourselves to do what others despise, we feel that we are doing what Christ would do, and are truly representing Him.

VII. *JUDAS*

“I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen: but that the Scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth My bread lifted up his heel against Me. From henceforth I tell you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am He. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth Me; and he that receiveth Me receiveth Him that sent Me. When Jesus had thus said, He was troubled in the spirit, and testified, and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray Me. The disciples looked one on another, doubting of whom He spake. There was at the table reclining in Jesus’ bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved. Simon Peter therefore beckoneth to him, and saith unto him, Tell us who it is of whom He speaketh. He leaning back, as he was, on Jesus’ breast saith unto Him, Lord, who is it? Jesus therefore answereth, He it is, for whom I shall dip the sop, and give it to him. So when He had dipped the sop, He taketh and giveth it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. And after the sop, then entered Satan into him. Jesus therefore saith unto him, That thou doest, do quickly. Now no man at the table knew for what intent He spake this unto him. For some thought, because Judas had the bag, that Jesus said unto him, Buy what things we have need of for the feast; or, that he should give something to the poor. He then having received the sop went out straightway: and it was night.” —

When Jesus had washed the disciples' feet, apparently in dead silence save for the interruption of Peter, He resumed those parts of His dress He had laid aside, and reclined at the table already spread for the supper. As the meal began, and while He was explaining the meaning of His act and the lesson He desired them to draw from it, John, who lay next Him at table, saw that His face did not wear the expression of festal joy, nor even of untroubled composure, but was clouded with deep concern and grief. The reason of this was immediately apparent: already, while washing Peter's feet, He had awakened the attention and excited the consciences of the disciples by hinting that on some one of them at least, if not on more, uncleansed guilt still lay, even though all partook in the symbolic washing. And now in His explanation of the foot-washing He repeats this limitation and warning, and also points at the precise nature of the guilt, though not yet singling out the guilty person. "I speak not of you all; I know whom I have chosen; I have not been deceived: but it was necessary that this part of God's purpose be fulfilled, and that this Scripture, 'He that eateth bread with Me, hath lifted up his heel against Me,' receive accomplishment in Me."

It was impossible that Jesus should undisturbedly eat out of the same dish with the man whom He knew to have already sold Him to the priests; it were unfair to the other disciples and a violence to His own feelings to allow such a man any longer to remain in their company. But our Lord does not name the traitor

and denounce him; he singles him out and sends him from the table on his hateful mission by a process that left every man at the table unaware on what errand he was despatched. In this process there were three steps. First of all, our Lord indicated that among the disciples there was a traitor. With dismay these true-hearted men hear the firmly pronounced statement “one of *you* shall betray Me” (ver. 21). All of them, as another Evangelist informs us, were exceeding sorrowful, and looked on one another in bewilderment; and unable to detect the conscious look of guilt in the face of any of their companions, or to recall any circumstance which might fix even suspicion on any of them, each, conscious of the deep, unfathomed capacity for evil in his own heart, can but frankly ask of the Master, “Lord, is it I?” It is a question that at once proves their consciousness of actual innocence and possible guilt. It was a kindness in the Lord to give these genuine men, who were so shortly to go through trial for His sake, an opportunity of discovering how much they loved Him and how closely knit their hearts had really become to Him. This question of theirs expressed the deep pain and shame that the very thought of the possibility of their being false to Him gave them. They must at all hazards be cleared of this charge. And from this shock of the very idea of being untrue their hearts recoiled towards Him with an enthusiastic tenderness that made this moment possibly as moving a passage as any that occurred that eventful night But there was one of them that did not join in the question “Lord, is it I?” – else must not our Lord have broken

silence? The Twelve are still left in doubt, none noticing in the eagerness of questioning who has not asked, each only glad to know he himself is not charged.

The second step in the process is recorded in the 26th chapter of Matthew, where we read that, when the disciples asked "Lord, is it I?" Jesus answered, "He that dippeth his hand with Me in the dish, the same shall betray Me." It was a large company, and there were necessarily several dishes on the table, so that probably there were three others using the same dish as our Lord: John we know was next Him; Peter was near enough to John to make signs and whisper to him; Judas was also close to Jesus, a position which he either always occupied as treasurer and purveyor of the company, or into which he thrust himself this evening with the purpose of more effectually screening himself from suspicion. The circle of suspicion is thus narrowed to the one or two who were not only so intimate as to be eating at the same table, but as to be dipping in the same dish.

The third step in the process of discovery went on almost simultaneously with this. The impatient Peter, who had himself so often unwittingly given offence to his Master, is resolved to find out definitely who is pointed at, and yet dare not say to Christ "Who is it?" He beckons therefore to John to ask Jesus privately, as he lay next to Jesus. John leans a little back towards Jesus and puts in a whisper the definite question "Who is it?" and Jesus in the ear of the beloved disciple whispers the reply, "He it is to whom I shall give a sop when I have dipped it." And

when He had dipped the sop, He gave it to Judas Iscariot. This reveals to John, but to no one else, who the traitor was, for the giving of the sop was no more at that table than the handing of a plate or the offer of any article of food is at any table. John alone knew the significance of it. But Judas had already taken alarm at the narrowing of the circle of suspicion, and had possibly for the moment ceased dipping in the same dish with Jesus, lest he should be identified with the traitor. Jesus therefore dips for him and offers him the sop which he will not himself take, and the look that accompanies the act, as well as the act itself, shows Judas that his treachery is discovered. He therefore mechanically takes up in a somewhat colder form the question of the rest, and says, "Master, is it I?" His fear subdues his voice to a whisper, heard only by John and the Lord; and the answer, "Thou hast said. That thou doest, do quickly," is equally unobserved by the rest. Judas need fear no violence at their hands; John alone knows the meaning of his abrupt rising and hurrying from the room, and John sees that Jesus wishes him to go unobserved. The rest, therefore, thought only that Judas was going out to make some final purchases that had been forgotten, or to care for the poor in this season of festivity. But John saw differently. "The traitor," he says, "went immediately out; and it was night." As his ill-omened, stealthy figure glided from the chamber, the sudden night of the Eastern twilightless sunset had fallen on the company; sadness, silence, and gloom fell upon John's spirit; the hour of darkness had at length fallen in the very midst of this quiet feast.

This sin of Judas presents us with one of the most perplexed problems of life and character that the strange circumstances of this world have ever produced. Let us first of all look at the connection of this betrayal with the life of Christ, and then consider the phase of character exhibited in Judas. In connection with the life of Christ the difficulty is to understand why the death of Christ was to be brought about in this particular way of treachery among His own followers. It may be said that it came to pass "that Scripture might be fulfilled," that this special prediction in the 41st Psalm might be fulfilled. But why was such a prediction made? It was of course the event which determined the prediction, not the prediction which determined the event. Was it, then, an accident that Jesus should be handed over to the authorities in this particular way? Or was there any significance in it, that justifies its being made so prominent in the narrative? Certainly if our Lord was to be brought into contact with the most painful form of sin, He must have experience of treachery. He had known the sorrow that death brings to the survivors; He had known the pain and disappointment of being resisted by stupid, obstinate, bad-hearted men; but if He was to know the utmost of misery which man can inflict upon man, He must be brought into contact with one who could accept His love, eat His bread, press His hand with assurance of fidelity, and then sell Him.

When we endeavour to set before our minds a clear idea of the character of Judas, and to understand how such a character could be developed, we have to acknowledge that we could desire

a few more facts in order to certify us of what we can now only conjecture. Obviously we must start from the idea that with extraordinary capacity for wickedness Judas had also more than ordinary leanings to what was good. He was an Apostle, and had, we must suppose, been called to that office by Christ under the impression that he possessed gifts which would make him very serviceable to the Christian community. He was himself so impressed with Christ as to follow Him: making those pecuniary sacrifices of which Peter boastfully spoke, and which must have been specially sore to Judas. It is possible, indeed, that he may have followed Jesus as a speculation, hoping to receive wealth and honour in the new kingdom; but this motive mingled with the attachment to Christ's person which all the Apostles had, and mingles in a different form with the discipleship of all Christians. With this motive, therefore, there probably mingled in the mind of Judas a desire to be with One who could shield him from evil influences; he judged that with Jesus he would find continual aid against his weaker nature. Possibly he wished by one bold abandonment of the world to get rid for ever of his covetousness. That Judas was trusted by the other Apostles is manifest from the fact that to him they committed their common fund, – not to John, whose dreamy and abstracted nature ill fitted him for minute practical affairs; not to Peter, whose impulsive nature might often have landed the little company in difficulties; not even to Matthew, accustomed as he was to accounts; but to Judas, who had the economical habits, the aptitude for finance,

the love of bargaining, which regularly go hand in hand with the love of money. This practical faculty for finance and for affairs generally might, if rightly guided, have become a most serviceable element in the Apostolate, and might have enabled Judas more successfully than any other of the Apostles to mediate between the Church and the world. That Judas in all other respects conducted himself circumspectly is proved by the fact that, though other Apostles incurred the displeasure of Christ and were rebuked by Him, Judas committed no glaring fault till this last week. Even to the end he was unsuspected by his fellow-Apostles; and to the end he had an active conscience. His last act, were it not so awful, would inspire us with something like respect for him: he is overwhelmed with remorse and shame; his sense of guilt is stronger even than the love of money that had hitherto been his strongest passion: he judges himself fairly, sees what he has become, and goes to his own place; recognises as not every man does recognise what is his fit habitation, and goes to it.

But this man, with his good impulses, his resolute will, his enlightened conscience, his favouring circumstances, his frequent feelings of affection towards Christ and desire to serve Him, committed a crime so unparalleled in wickedness that men practically make very little attempt to estimate it or measure it with sins of their own. Commonly we think of it as a special, exceptional wickedness – not so much the natural product of a heart like our own and what may be reproduced by ourselves, as the work of Satan using a man as his scarcely responsible tool to

effect a purpose which needs never again to be effected.

If we ask what precisely it was in the crime of Judas that makes us so abhor it, manifestly its most hateful ingredient was its treachery. "It was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it; but it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance." Cæsar defended himself till the dagger of a friend pierced him; then in indignant grief he covered his head with his mantle and accepted his fate. You can forgive the open blow of a declared enemy against whom you are on your guard; but the man that lives with you on terms of the greatest intimacy for years, so that he learns your ways and habits, the state of your affairs and your past history – the man whom you so confide in and like that you communicate to him freely much that you keep hidden from others, and who, while still professing friendship, uses the information he has gained to blacken your character and ruin your peace, to injure your family or damage your business, – this man, you know, has much to repent of. So one can forgive the Pharisees who knew not what they did, and were throughout the declared opponents of Christ; but Judas attached himself to Christ, knew that His life was one of unmixed benevolence, was conscious that Christ would have given up anything to serve him, felt moved and proud from time to time by the fact that Christ loved him, and yet at the last used all these privileges of friendship against his Friend.

And Judas did not scruple to use this power that only the love of Jesus could have given him, to betray Him to men whom

he knew to be unscrupulous and resolved to destroy Him. The garden where the Lord prayed for His enemies was not sacred to Judas; the cheek that a seraph would blush to kiss, and to salute which was the beginning of joy eternal to the devout disciple, was mere common clay to this man into whom Satan had entered. The crime of Judas is invested with a horror altogether its own by the fact that this Person whom he betrayed was the Son of God and the Saviour of the world, the Best-beloved of God and every man's Friend. The greatest blessing that God had ever given to earth Judas was forward to reject: not altogether unaware of the majesty of Christ, Judas presumed to use Him in a little money-making scheme of his own.

The best use that Judas could think of putting Jesus to, the best use he could make of *Him* whom all angels worship, was to sell Him for £5.¹² He could get nothing more out of Christ than that. After three years' acquaintanceship and observation of the various ways in which Christ could bless people, this was all he could get from Him. And there are still such men: men for whom there is nothing in Christ; men who can find nothing in Him that they sincerely care for; men who, though calling themselves His followers, would, if truth were told, be better content and feel they had more substantial profit if they could turn Him into money.

So difficult is it to comprehend how any man who had lived as the friend of Jesus could find it in his heart to betray Him,

¹² More exactly, £3 10 8, the legal value of a slave.

should resist the touching expressions of love that were shown him, and brave the awful warning uttered at the supper-table – so difficult is it to suppose that any man, however infatuated, would so deliberately sell his soul for £5, that a theory has been started to explain the crime by mitigating its guilt. It has been supposed that when he delivered up his Master into the hands of the chief priests he expected that our Lord would save Himself by a miracle. He knew that Jesus meant to proclaim a kingdom; he had been waiting for three years now, eagerly expecting that this proclamation and its accompanying gains would arrive. Yet he feared the opportunity was once more passing: Jesus had been brought into the city in triumph, but seemed indisposed to make use of this popular excitement for any temporal advantage. Judas was weary of this inactivity: might he not himself bring matters to a crisis by giving Jesus into the hands of His enemies, and thus forcing Him to reveal His real power and assert by miracle His kingship? In corroboration of this theory, it is said that it is certain that Judas did not expect Jesus to be condemned; for when he saw that he was condemned he repented of his act.

This seems a shallow view to take of Judas' remorse, and a feeble ground on which to build such a theory. A crime seems one thing before, another after, its commission. The murderer expects and wishes to kill his victim, but how often is he seized with an agony of remorse as soon as the blow is struck? Before we sin, it is the gain we see; after we sin, the guilt. It is impossible to construe the act of Judas into a mistaken act of friendship

or impatience; the terms in which he is spoken of in Scripture forbid this idea; and one cannot suppose that a keen-sighted man like Judas could expect that, even supposing he did force our Lord to proclaim Himself, his own share in the business would be rewarded. He could not suppose this after the terrible denunciation and explicit statement that still rang in his ears when he hanged himself: "The Son of man goeth as it is written of Him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born."

We must then abide by the more commonplace view of this crime. The only mitigating circumstance that can be admitted is, that possibly among the many perplexed thoughts entertained by Judas he may have supposed that Jesus would be acquitted, or would at least not be punished with death. Still, this being admitted, the fact remains that he cared so little for the love of Christ, and regarded so little the good He was doing, and had so little common honour in him, that he sold his Master to His deadly enemies. And this monstrous wickedness is to be accounted for mainly by his love of money. Naturally covetous, he fed his evil disposition during those years he carried the bag for the disciples: while the rest are taken up with more spiritual matters, he gives more of his thought than is needful to the matter of collecting as much as possible; he counts it his special province to protect himself and the others against all "the probable emergencies and changes of life." This he does, regardless of the frequent admonitions he hears from the Lord

addressed to others; and as he finds excuses for his own avarice in the face of these admonitions, and hardens himself against the better impulses that are stirred within him by the words and presence of Christ, his covetousness roots itself deeper and deeper in his soul. Add to this, that now he was a disappointed man: the other disciples, finding that the kingdom of Christ was to be spiritual, were pure and high-minded enough to see that their disappointment was their great gain. The love of Christ had transformed them, and to be like Him was enough for them; but Judas still clung to the idea of earthly grandeur and wealth, and finding Christ was not to give him these he was soured and embittered. He saw that now, since that scene at Bethany the week before, his covetousness and earthliness would be resisted and would also betray him. He felt that he could no longer endure this poverty-stricken life, and had some rage at himself and at Christ that he had been inveigled into it by what he might be pleased to say to himself were false pretences. His self-restraint, he felt, was breaking down; his covetousness was getting the better of him; he felt that he must break with Christ and His followers; but in doing so he would at once win what he had lost during these years of poverty, and also revenge himself on those who had kept him poor, and finally would justify his own conduct in deserting this society by exploding it and causing it to cease from among men.

The sin of Judas, then, first of all teaches us the great power and danger of the love of money. The mere thirty pieces of

silver would not have been enough to tempt Judas to commit so dastardly and black a crime; but he was now an embittered and desperate man, and he had become so by allowing money to be all in all to him for these last years of his life. For the danger of this passion consists very much in this – that it infallibly eats out of the soul every generous emotion and high aim: it is the failing of a sordid nature – a little, mean, earthly nature – a failing which, like all others, may be extirpated through God's grace, but which is notoriously difficult to extirpate, and which notoriously is accompanied by or produces other features of character which are among the most repulsive one meets. The love of money is also dangerous, because it can be so easily gratified; all that we do in the world day by day is in the case of most of us connected with money, so that we have continual and not only occasional opportunity of sinning if we be inclined to the sin. Other passions are appealed to only now and again, but our employments touch this passion at all points. It leaves no long intervals, as other passions do, for repentance and amendment; but steadily, constantly, little by little, increases in force. Judas had his fingers in the bag all day; it was under his pillow and he dreamt upon it all night; and it was this that accelerated his ruin. And by this constant appeal it is sure to succeed at one time or other, if we be open to it. Judas could not suppose that his quiet self-aggrandisement by pilfering little coins from the bag could ever bring him to commit such a crime against his Lord: so may every covetous person fancy that his sin is one that is his own

business, and will not damage his religious profession and ruin his soul as some wild lust or reckless infidelity would do. But Judas and those who sin with him in making continually little gains to which they have no right are wrong in supposing their sin is less dangerous; and for this reason – that covetousness is more a sin of the *will* than sins of the flesh or of a passionate nature; there is more choice in it; it is more the sin of the whole man unresisting; and therefore it, above all others, is called idolatry – it, above all others, proves that the man is in his heart choosing the world and not God. Therefore it is that even our Lord Himself spoke almost despairingly, certainly quite differently, of covetous men in comparison with other sinners.

Disappointment in Christ is not an unknown thing among ourselves. Men still profess to be Christians who are so only in the degree in which Judas was. They expect *some* good from Christ, but not all. They attach themselves to Christ in a loose, conventional way, expecting that, though they are Christians, they need not lose anything by their Christianity, nor make any great efforts or sacrifices. They retain command of their own life, and are prepared to go with Christ only so far as they find it agreeable or inviting. The eye of an observer may not be able to distinguish them from Christ's true followers; but the distinction is present and is radical. They are seeking to use Christ, and are not willing to be used by Him. They are not wholly and heartily His, but merely seek to derive some influences from Him. The result is that they one day find that, through all their religious

profession and apparent Christian life, their characteristic sin has actually been gaining strength. And finding this, they turn upon Christ with disappointment and rage in their hearts, because they become aware that they have lost both this world and the next – have lost many pleasures and gains they might have enjoyed, and yet have gained no spiritual attainment. They find that the reward of double-mindedness is the most absolute perdition, that both Christ and the world, to be made anything of, require the whole man, and that he who tries to get the good of both gets the good of neither. And when a man awakes to see that this is the result of his Christian profession, there is no deadliness of hatred to which the bitter disappointment of his soul will not carry him. He has himself been a dupe, and he calls Christ an impostor. He knows himself to be damned, and he says there is no salvation in Christ.

But to this disastrous issue *any* cherished sin may also in its own way lead; for the more comprehensive lesson which this sin of Judas brings with it is the rapidity of sin's growth and the enormous proportions it attains when the sinner is sinning against light, when he is in circumstances conducive to holiness and still sins. To discover the wickedest of men, to see the utmost of human guilt, we must look, not among the heathen, but among those who know God; not among the profligate, dissolute, abandoned classes of society, but among the Apostles. The good that was in Judas led him to join Christ, and kept him associated with Christ for some years; but the devil of covetousness that was cast out for a while returned and brought with him seven

devils worse than himself. There was everything in his position to win him to unworldliness: the men he lived with cared not one whit for comforts or anything that money could buy; but instead of catching their spirit he took advantage of their carelessness. He was in a public position, liable to detection; but this, instead of making him honest perforce, made him only the more crafty and studiously hypocritical. The solemn warnings of Christ, so far from intimidating him, only made him more skilful in evading all good influence, and made the road to hell easier. The position he enjoyed, and by which he might have been for ever enrolled among the foremost of mankind, one of the twelve foundations of the eternal city, he so skilfully misused that the greatest sinner feels glad that he has yet not been left to commit the sin of Judas. Had Judas not followed Christ he could never have attained the pinnacle of infamy on which he now for ever stands. In all probability he would have passed his days as a small trader with false weights in the little town of Kerioth, or, at the worst, might have developed into an extortionous publican, and have passed into oblivion with the thousands of unjust men who have died and been at last forced to let go the money that should long ago have belonged to others. Or had Judas followed Christ truly, then there lay before him the noblest of all lives, the most blessed of destinies. But he followed Christ and yet took his sin with him: and thence his ruin.

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