

II. Jesus Christ.

We believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, Who for us men and our salvation became man and dwelt among us.

We believe that He lived a perfect human life, wholly devoted to the will of God and the service of man.

We believe that in Him God comes face to face with men; so that they learn that God loves them, seeks their good, bears their sorrows and their sin, and claims their exclusive faith and perfect obedience.

We believe that in Jesus Christ God acted to save man, taking, at measureless cost, man's sin upon Himself; that the Cross reveals at once God's abhorrence of sin and His saving love in its height and depth and power; and that the Cross is for all time the effectual means of reconciling the world unto God.

We believe that Jesus was raised victorious over death and declared to be the Son of God with power; and that He is alive for evermore, our Saviour and our Lord.

So we acknowledge Jesus Christ as the Son of God Incarnate, the Saviour of the world.

CHAPTER II. JESUS CHRIST

A. JESUS THE CHRIST

Who Became Man and Dwelt among Us.

The New Testament opens with four Gospels. Of these admittedly Mark is the earliest. It gives the impression of a breathless story. Incident follows incident in a style marked by the vivid present, "and" chasing "and" in the manner of the eager hurrying narrator who has barely finished one thrilling scene before he is off on the trail of another and plunging after that with undiminished ardour. From the voice of John crying in the wilderness "Prepare" and "Repent," forward through clash after clash between the hero and the religious dogmatist, we are borne swiftly on from Galilee to Cæsarea Philippi, from Gethsemane to the Judgment Hall and along the sorrowful way to Calvary. We pause only when we come to the amazing story of the open tomb and the women standing by awestruck. It is a record of startling happenings, of a human figure who appears in a real world, speaking in such vivid accents and performing such deeds of power that dazzled onlookers are both thrilled and alarmed. It is an unmistakable incursion into history of one who was a phenomenon, an enigma.

When we read through St. Matthew's Gospel, we find the story set in a fuller context. The life of Jesus is seen as an emergence in the history of the Jewish people, the fulfilment at last of many prophecies, the proclamation of a new law of revolutionary demand; and as the narrative gains momentum towards its later scenes, the clouds of foreboding and imminent judgment gather overhead, and the central figure appears as the Man of Destiny in His national history, the culmination of the long process of the ages, and the judge of mankind. The challenge throughout is that of a King to whom the wisest must come to offer homage, a royal proclamation of a new law that revolutionizes all values and sets men over against the standard of the Kingdom of Heaven, and woe be unto those who have not ears to hear. The Son of Man has come in judgment.

The Gospel of Luke has this same story to set within the

framework of world history. But it is the coming of a Graciousness, an act of Redemption for which angels in heaven and shepherds on earth and sainted seers at the Temple door are waiting. It is a proclamation of deliverance for the poor, the opening of eyes for the blind, and release for all mankind, sinner and Samaritan sharing with Pharisee and Jew. It is the message of a God who goes out after the lost, who has forgiveness even for His enemies, paradise even for the penitent thief. And yet it echoes a sad woe over a Jerusalem that knows not the time of its visitation; a warning that, except we repent, we shall all likewise perish; an urgent appeal for importunity in prayer. Thus it is Graciousness that must not be rejected, a sword of division that cannot be evaded. And that life of Jesus is not a finished story, but a prelude: it issues into a waiting Church that is to be filled with power from on high. Jesus has come into the history of men, and He is to remain in history, in His Church and in the life of His people, their hearts burning within them when He meets them on the way.

Thus the Gospels portray a figure of history, rooted in one generation, yet fulfilling the hopes of past ages, and reaching forth with power to bless all mankind.

But within the historical framework there is obviously another and a dominant interest. Always this Jesus is constraining men to decision for or against Him. As soon as He issues into a public ministry there is conflict around His name, conflict in His own country of Galilee, conflict in His own city of Nazareth, conflict of the deepest in the central city of Jerusalem. This man provokes strongest emotions; ignorant Gadarenes would drive Him out of their coasts because He has uncanny powers; natural enemies—like the court party of Herod and the conservatively pious—combine their forces to thwart Him. His own mother felt a sword pierce through her heart as she watched His perilous career, and sought to draw Him from His course. The sick of every sort come flocking to Him, and even the outcast publicans betray a strange interest in His passing by. But those Galileans who have been closest to Him in His ministry come to hail Him as the Anointed One of God; even a Syro-Phœnician woman comes worshipping; a Roman judge can find no fault in Him; and an honest Roman soldier, confronting Him under the torture of a criminal's cross, pronounces Him truly a Son of God. Evidently this is a

man who cannot be ignored: He utters a doctrine at which people are astonished, and exercises powers that startle the cleverest observers. He passes on amid blessing and cursing; He is set for the falling and rising of many in and beyond Israel.

Thus this man of human story has constrained men to set Him on a place apart. The historical figure has become a Saviour of men. Here is a power that transcends the earthly scene: He must be seen in the heavenlies. To the records of His life story must be added an estimate of another kind. His Church has ever treasured a Fourth Gospel, the spiritual Gospel in which from the opening page to the close it is the living Word of God which confronts men. This is frankly written "that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might find life through his name."

A Perfect Human Life, Wholly Devoted. Luke 4: 16-22; Matt. 11: 25-30; Luke 12: 49-50.

By what power did Jesus thus impress His name indelibly upon the history and conscience of mankind? Simply by living the life of a human being, growing up to man's estate in the simple home of a carpenter, sharing the intimacies of the family life with sisters and brothers, and then at the call of God passing out into a ministry among His fellows of teaching and healing and witnessing. He did not attempt to cater to men's greed and to dazzle them by miracle or mass hysteria. He relied immeasurably on simple personal contacts: by voice, hand, and eye He made appeal; the quiet word, the healing touch, the searching look won Him victories. With utter frankness and sincerity He set men face to face with God and with their true selves, leaving the men they were gazing ashamedly across the chasm at the men they might be. He never sought to arrest attention by adopting the garb of a desert ascetic. His authority from the beginning rested on His own penetrating mind and blameless character with an ever-haunting sense of a Something beyond and with Him; truth on His lips flashed clean and clear in accents which there was no mistaking; and there was a flawless harmony between His own life and His commanding precepts. The daily sights and scenes of everyday life supplied all He needed to point His lessons: He made humanity learn ever from its own nobler heights, from the widow's indefatigable persistence for her share of justice, from

the father's heart that could not but receive back with joy the undeserving prodigal.

Living thus completely on the open levels of village society without concealment or privacy, thrust up against prying eyes and listening ears, He lived out a life on which even His enemies failed to fix any clinging slander. Nor was this a mere negative flawlessness, a blank white sheet of an existence: it was a vivid swift-moving career of positive action, of unceasing self-giving for His fellow-men, especially for the ailing and the discouraged, with bold and challenging words and contacts for the sinner and the outcast. Throughout the months of the ministry there was an unrelenting interest in the needs and hopes of each individual soul who made approach to Him, an eager willingness to expend virtue without counting the cost. There was in all His activity a big-mindedness and tender-heartedness that made His days a triumphal progress of the delivering Spirit of the Lord that the prophet had dreamed of—the opening of sightless eyes, the releasing of imprisoned souls, and the gladdening of weary hearts. Plainly this Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.

The compelling urge, moreover, came from no fevered eagerness for popularity or personal glory. Always His coming and going were under constraint from on high. At the moment of His baptism He heard the direct call, and in every crisis He found His way to the Father's presence, on the mountain top or in the garden, on the dusty highway and even on the cruel Cross. Necessity was laid upon Him, and how was He straitened till it be accomplished. He had a baptism to be baptized with, a cup He must needs drink, a greater will before which He bowed in obedience and agony. We can observe between the lines of the story how other forces beat upon Him in vain. A whole cityful of people would gather at His door eager to encourage Him towards popularity, to persuade Him to accept the grateful homage of the masses as the wonderful physician. After the Feeding of the Five Thousand the awestruck crowds would fain have carried Him away to be their king and leader of a long-delayed *revolution* for a people's freedom (John 6: 15); and behind the enslaved Jews were other nations aplenty ready to follow a bold lead for the overthrow of Rome and the setting up of a new empire of larger liberty. His closest friends sought to divert Him

from any premature encounter with the hate and death in Jerusalem. He became so detached from them in His out-soaring thoughts that He walked before them as one apart, while they followed behind a prey to fears and alarms (Mark 10: 32). He saw there was treachery among His followers; but He would not save Himself by any drastic purge of traitors. He found a Roman judge so impressed by His innocence as almost to hold the door open for His escape, and He would not. No voice would He hear but the voice of God; no road would He follow but the will of His Father. Surely this was a perfect life wholly devoted to the will of God and the service of man.

The Son of the Father. Matt. 16: 13-28; Matt. 12: 6; Luke 11: 31-32.

Who then was this phenomenon of history, Jesus of Nazareth? We all know from the thousand fallibilities and limitations of each passing day that we are but men, poor creatures of need and shame who live only by the great God's pity and tenderness. But this Jesus wheeled round upon His intimates one day and startled them with the question: "Whom do men say that I am?" Here then was one man who was a problem to Himself: as Denney puts it: "The question, it might almost be said, is more significant than the answers. Jesus is not only conscious that He is a problem to men, He assumes that He ought to be. It is not right that people should be indifferent to Him. . . ."

They had left the Galilean crowds and excitement behind them, and for days they had travelled northwards towards the lofty ranges of Lebanon and the majestic snow-clad peaks of Hermon. It was a region for pause and reflection, for there was much in that landscape to stir thought and imagination. Yonder lay the sources of the mighty and historic Jordan: "The place is a very sanctuary of waters, and from time immemorial men have drawn near it to worship."² From the boulders and debris of a high cliff, dank and red, wells forth, as if from hidden sources, the thirty-feet-broad tumultuous stream. In the cliff is a dark grotto above which are carved Greek shrines recalling that fittingly here was worshipped the great nature-god *Pan* whose name still lingers in the modern Banias. Here too by command of Herod the

¹ James Denney, *Jesus and the Gospel*, p. 323.

² G. A. Smith, *Historical Geography of the Holy Land*, p. 474.

Great another and more ambitious shrine had been raised, a temple in white marble with the bust of great *Cæsar* Augustus. Thus, where beside the mysterious grotto deep called unto deep, across the heights of Hermon, men had been constrained for long ages to offer homage. Was this the highest height to which the soul could rise—the worship of the seductive and mysterious power manifest in the productivity of nature as represented by *Pan*, or the pomp of power based on the sword as centred in a mortal man, great *Cæsar*? Nature-worship and Führer-worship still claim allegiance. But Jesus had come upon the scene, bringing with Him a majesty of another sort, the glory of the God of love. Already men had begun to link Him with the Spirit of the Most High; for He recalled to the people who saw Him in action those men in whom the divine Word had burned and glowed, Elijah of the passionate zeal and consuming one-ideaed devotion, and Jeremiah, the prophet of exquisite tenderness combined with the strange aloofness of the Suffering Servant of God.

“Whom say ye that I am?”, asked Jesus of His Galilean friends, those men who had been so close to Him that nothing of His human action could be hid from their searching gaze. Yet these men, near enough to read each and every flaw, were still prepared to put upon Him the highest title in their vocabulary: “Thou art the Christ.” It was an amazing acknowledgment of one who walked before them as a common man; for it meant they reckoned Him worthy to be given the supreme commission God had to offer—to be the one chosen to bring in the dream of the long ages, the resplendent new order for mankind. There was that in Jesus evidently which compelled His intimates to set Him closer to the mind and counsel of Almighty God than any other man, saint or prophet or king.

Jesus must have confessed to Himself that this estimate from without only corroborated the conviction that had sprung up within His own soul. As a growing boy in the Temple He had spoken of the High and Lofty One intimately as “My Father.” At the baptism, threshold of His life’s work, He had heard the voice claiming Him as son: “This day have I begotten thee.” In His parables as He expounded the ways of God with mankind He pictured Him as a Father among His sons. When He lifted up His petitions, He addressed Him naturally and unaffectedly as Father. The one title He constantly bestowed

upon Himself was Son of Man. That, according to the vision of Daniel 7, meant that, when it pleased God to end the reign of worldly powers with their bestial and savage policies, it was to this Son of Man that He would commit the new everlasting Kingdom to be established by His own divine power, a Kingdom humane and spiritual as the earthly powers had been brutal and despotic. That Kingdom, Jesus declared, had come, and He Himself must be the one chosen to introduce it. He had hinted at the glory of that new epoch as something grander than the wise Solomon had embodied (Luke 11: 31). And, still more significantly, He had asserted that something greater than the *Temple* was there (Matt. 12: 6): which meant that with Him, Jesus, and the new society He brought, the Presence of the Living God was confronting men with a life-giving power that even the storied Holy House on Mount Zion had never known. Because He knew He brought the Presence with Him He had startled the paralytic into health by telling him his sins were forgiven; and the radiance of that Presence convinced even the woman of the city that she too could win free from her gilded chains into a larger liberty—a delirious surprise to which only falling tears could testify (Luke 7: 38). This surely was a remarkable consciousness that Jesus possessed that in Him, and through the new society He inaugurated, all the glories that the wisest seers had glimpsed, all the health and spiritual healing that had centred in the ancestral fane, now were immediately and directly available for mankind. In a unique and absolute way He was the Son of the Father.

At the heart of this disclosure was a blameless beauty of soul. Men saw an outer glory; God knew the inner secret, the unstained loveliness of the holy heart. “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” He wore a white radiance, a winsome serenity, the living symbol of the flawless sacrifice.* When the Baptist saw among the penitents this man coming to a rite of cleansing, instinctively he drew back: this was highest, holiest manhood by whom, not to whom, the sacred water should be ministered. The eager, blustering, self-confident Peter was suddenly aware that his beloved and familiar friend stood on another level of being: “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” This man embodied the moral standard He preached.

* On the sinlessness of Jesus consult A. Martin, *The Finality of Jesus for Faith*, ch. iv.

"Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?" (Matt. 18: 21). Peter was normally never at a loss for an answer, but he was speechless when he heard the reply, "Until seventy times seven!" He might have put that saying away as an impractical word for a real world. But he revised that opinion when he heard these whispered words reported from the shadow of the Cross: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23: 34). To be in this man's company was to know that there could be no half-hearted allegiance. He carried an atmosphere of values with Him to which one had to *surrender* the heart. A man had to turn his back on the alluring world *absolutely* before he could answer the straight query, "Lovest thou *me*?" (John 21: 15ff.). It was hard for one who knew his own evil heart to answer boldly "Yes." There must have been a haunting sense of glory on His face before the rich and the clever came running and kneeling to one who was the village carpenter. The rich young ruler, with that sensitive fineness of soul that drew the Master's love, felt the heavenward pull so strong that he went away exceeding sorrowful; it was a hard choice: this man or an unsatisfied heart all life long.

For ah! the Master is so fair,
His smile so sweet to banished men,
That they who meet it unaware
Can never rest on Earth again.

Nathanael was an Israelite indeed in whom was no guile. Something lies unexplained in John's story (1: 45ff.), but evidently there was in Jesus an appeal to this rare spirit that threw him into complete homage. Under the fig-tree he had given himself to the study of the law, seeking to find God there. Probably he had been deeply stirred by the Baptist. But now he had found a King of Israel, a spiritual Saul among the people. Nay more, One in whose presence the dividing screen fell away and heaven became open for continual intercourse with the sons of earth. Mary of Bethany had rare vision. She knew the better part which was not to be taken away from her. She could not declare in words of sober prose how this friend sanctified the supper table. She could only make a broken alabaster box declare her will to yield her all. This man was not a mere echo of the divine voice: He was the authentic Word, uttering the Divine Holiness.

In Him God Comes Face to Face With Man. John 1: 1-18;
Phil. 2: 1-11; Col. 1: 14-17; Heb. 1: 2-3.

That claim and consciousness of Jesus made a landmark in religious history. Scripture and all Christian experience corroborate His estimate of Himself. More and more men have become convinced that it is impossible to disengage the ministry of Jesus from the activity of God: it was God who was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. What was the uniqueness in His presence that made the unclean spirit give voice: "Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? . . . I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God" (Mk. 1: 24)? "Follow me," Jesus had but to say; and, though He had just stepped from the carpenter's shop, authority rang in His voice and His word was accepted as a command to be obeyed. "Ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old . . . but I say unto you . . ." and before the astonished ears of tradition-revering and devout Israelites the law of Moses was cast into the shadow, and the utterance of this contemporary human shone out as transcending the ten words spoken amid the thunders of Sinai. Only a voice acclaimed as *God's* could set aside the law of God. Pharisee and Scribe, honoured for piety and knowledge of the sacred lore of the Rabbis, were overawed into gaping silence before His penetrating pronouncements. "Never man spake like this man." "He spake with authority and not as the Scribes." To a Hebrew the one authority to be obeyed was the voice from heaven: that voice reached men's souls in the accents of the Man of Nazareth. The remote God about whom the Scribes debated and the prophets used to speak had come near and faced men.

That truth found classic expression in the Fourth Gospel. The Word became flesh: that self-disclosure that God had granted in passing manifestations had now blazed forth in a life that awakened men to a new consciousness of the Graciousness and Reality of the Creator and Redeemer of men. If from the void had issued in times past notes and intimations that broke and died away leaving a haunting sense of an unfinished harmony beyond, now at last there had poured forth upon human ears a voice that set all men's hearts a-singing. "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his

Son" (Heb. 1: 1). Men looked upon a human face, but recognized in the light of it that they were gazing at last upon the unveiled glory of God. As there was a time, reflected the Apostle Paul, when upon the darkness and chaos of the unfinished universe the voice said, "Let there be light," and there was light, giving colour and outline and character to the shape of things, so upon the confusion and sorrow of earth, in the dark night of sin and death, there had flashed forth a radiance from the Son of Man: it was the *likeness of God* that thus appeared above the maze and the tangle of humanity, the enlightening vision of the Eternal One Himself, majestic and gracious (2 Cor. 4: 6). It was *God* who came right into the homes and hearts of men in the preacher of Nazareth. It was not just that truth was spoken from a prophet's mouth: it was a creative Personality touching individuals to a new splendour of living. The prejudiced human of the first century with a Jewish tradition of exclusive self-righteousness would not have done the things this man did. He stepped right out of all the conventions, walked right in among the social outcasts, and sat down to eat with publicans and sinners. He went unmasked across forbidden thresholds; and, confronting a quivering publican at his own hearth, He awakened his sleeping soul and discovered a son of Abraham: with the power of His presence salvation came to this house. Sensing at once His *pity* and His *purity*, the sinner who under a life of shame had long concealed a heartache broke through her reserve, and in a swift and startling act of love and penitence began a new course of life. The Baptist had by his words reached men's souls and sought to confirm his message in a rite; but here was One whose touch was immediate and direct: He brought gospel and regeneration at one and the same time.

He Seeks Their Good, Matt. 5: 45; Mark 2: 14-17; Luke 7: 36-50; Luke 19: 1-9.

Conventional religion drew back in horror before this upsetting of ancient values. The divine had been set down as holy and unapproachable; but here was a blameless Son of God who sought out and made friends with sinners. This was a signal departure from the precedents in the religions of mankind whereby sinful man must stand afar off from the All-Holy One and approach

only after he had purified himself by rites and penitence or by priestly intervention.* *Here was God in a new guise seeking out and standing beside the sinner in his sin.* Instinctively the publican in the parable stood afar off, beating his breast and crying, "God be merciful to me a sinner." "This man," said the typical Pharisee in a famous scene (Luke 7: 39), "if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner": proximity between a true Son of God and the sinner was unthinkable. "Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness . . ." (Ps. 15: 1f.). The practices of primitive religion might be summed up as ways of attaining purification, in order to come near to God. Higher religions that have freed themselves from ritual ideas of uncleanness still are concerned deeply with the need for spiritual cleansing as the only way to have community with the deity. To the Muslim when a man tells a lie the foulness of its odour drives his guardian angels a mile away; none shall touch the *Qur'an* except the purified. The Greek was much concerned with *katharsis* (purification): for communion with the god or participation in the mysteries purity was essential. The Orphic sects imposed a stringent code of abstinence on all who sought happiness in the next world. Thus *universally* the sinner must not dare to seek the divine *till he has performed the stated ritual*. But Jesus began His public life standing among the penitents under John's baptism, and with His last breath He opened the gates of Paradise to a penitent thief. In the hour of her public shame He stood with the woman taken in adultery over against her accusers. This concern for the seeking out of the sinner was so complete a revolution in religious thought that it can only be described as God breaking through to make a new revelation of His nature.

Naturally here Judaism took sharp issue with Jesus. This, the Rabbis held, was dethroning the righteousness of God. That God should send rain upon the just and the unjust alike was unrighteous: it was to put sinners upon the same level as saints in the sight of God, and that surely was impiety offensive to a Holy God. But this was God as Jesus knew Him. Love was His own nature, as was righteousness. What the sinner has to expect

* Cf. Karl Holl, *The Distinctive Elements of Christianity*, translated by E. P. Dickie.

is not offended dignity that averts its face till the sinner does penance, but a heart grieved, so grieved as to initiate a means to awaken and recall and redeem the erring one. This is the Christian Gospel that is a religious revolution. God is revealed in Jesus as concerned less with the punishment than with the cure of sin. Right at the opening of His ministry forgiveness is the word He must speak. The divine nature does not wait for penitence, but goes out to meet the sinner in his sin with a love so warm that the frozen heart melts in tears. The sinners and the outcasts in consequence were storming the Kingdom, while the righteous Pharisees strove in vain to attain the goal of a perfectly kept Sabbath in Israel. He who waits for perfect conditions before he puts his hand to the plough never reaps a harvest in the natural world, and God does not insist on our perfection before He calls us into His company in the spiritual sphere. The greater our need, the readier He is to come to our aid.

Will anyone suggest that in thus making approach to the sinner God in Jesus undermined morality? Was Peter less troubled about sin because Jesus made him His friend? Did not Zaccheus surrender his ill-gotten gains when Jesus stepped into his life? Did not Matthew leave the lucrative trade altogether when the word of Jesus gripped him? When the Magdalene was received with a gracious pardon instead of a stinging rebuke, did she go back to her old trade light-heartedly? Did the woman taken in adultery fail to feel the sting of her wrongdoing when He challenged her accusers? Did the rich young ruler live comfortably with his great possessions when Jesus left a command in his soul? Can anyone read the record of the life of Jesus and not feel the constraint of His blameless purity? Has any mind ever met a sterner challenge than the Sermon on the Mount? No, the strange power of this gentle Son of Man was to set man before the judgment seat of absolute love. Beside the austerity of His demand there is the pressing obligation His love casts upon us. Beside the purity that condemns our sinfulness there is the constraint of His generosity upon us. We are twice-judged.

In the attitude of Jesus toward the capital city of Jerusalem we see as in a mirror the mind of God toward us men and our contentment in our settled ways. Almost any other place would

have offered Him a kindlier reception, but it was there at the last that He would go. "He set his face to go to Jerusalem." "How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" (Matt. 23: 37). But because the clouds of doom were gathering over the obdurate city as the revolutionary party whetted their knives for a foolish clash with all-powerful Rome, it was all the more incumbent upon love that it must declare itself. As He looked down upon the city He burst into tears, so intimately did He take to Himself the burden of the city's sins and her sorrows past and yet to come. He rode in defencelessly that He might make clear His will to her peace and welfare. Right within the ancient sanctuary He proclaimed the nearness of the grander spiritual temple of His person and society, but their only answer was to demand His authority. Yet authority He had, and He claimed it. With all His patience and His love He insisted that they must give Him alone their trust and loyalty or perish. "If thou hadst known in this thy day the things which belong unto thy peace!" (Luke 19: 42). In the Divine name He brought this last offer, but they discerned not the time when God Himself was visiting them. Truth was hid from their eyes, and the doom of desolation must come. God was long-suffering, but He must have exclusive faith and obedience.

B. THE NECESSITY OF THE CROSS

At Measureless Cost. Matt. 16: 21-23; John 12: 1-9; 20-23.

When Peter reached the grand climax of belief and hailed Jesus as Messiah, He straightway began to lift a corner of the veil for them: "He began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again" (Mark 8: 31). Again and again He returned to the theme (9: 31; 10: 33ff.). Indeed it became His one concern and preoccupation.

Nothing can be more clear than this, that Jesus saw before Him in the capital city a commission from God from which there was no escape. Every Gospel portrays Jesus reaching forward toward this crisis. Once He had been hailed as Messiah, there

was only one direction He could take—toward that place where the national life surged and the people's hopes centred. No more does He confront great crowds or linger much in casual encounter: He stays by the Twelve and seeks to make more secure the links of loyalty and hope that bind them to Him. And the kernel of His conversation was this theme of suffering to come. At first the rebound of the most loyal like Peter was sharp: such a fate could not befall such a chosen one. But Jesus rebuked the dream of a grander road, and persisted. When they talked of places of honour, He pushed them up against the stern demand of endurance and sacrifice: there is a cup to be drunk and a baptism to be baptized with. What a chasm of spirit divided him from the Twelve! What was first in His thought was last in theirs. This is reflected in the unvarnished but vivid picture: "They were in the way going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus was going before them: and they were amazed; and as they followed, they were afraid" (Mark 10: 32). This is a glimpse of a leader resolved and absorbed, pushing ahead as He had never pushed before, and followed with a reluctance and an apprehension and misgiving such as had never before emerged. It is here that Luke reveals the face set resolutely, and here, too, the stern words to a would-be disciple: "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (9: 51-62). To this period also belong the words: "I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" (12: 50).

The words in which Jesus justifies His line of action are introduced by a Greek word (*dei*) that implies that this dread journey was *divinely* appointed. God's will was behind this decision (Mark 8: 31). He had begun to pay the bitter cost when He broke away from His home and took a course that seemed the mark of madness to His nearest and dearest. What more bitter anguish could be thrust on a loving son than to know that a sword was even now piercing His mother's heart, and what would it be when she saw Him on a criminal cross? To one who held John Baptist to be one of the greatest born of woman it was cruel to take a line that made John feel deserted by his likeliest disciple, adding thus disappointment and distress to the hard lot of the prophet in prison (Matt. 11). When close friends like John and James appeared before Him brimful of eager expecta-

tion of coming glory, it was hard to dash in their faces the chill reality of a gruelling baptism and a bitter cup (Mark 10: 35). How difficult it must have been to struggle daily with the uncomprehending roseate hopes of these simple souls who followed Him, and to know that in the end He must leave them victims to a grim awakening and the clutch of pitiless forces! He betrayed a mind often preoccupied with the costliness of sacrifice. What fascinated His interest in Mary's extravagant gift of precious ointment was that she parted thus with what she dearly loved—as so must He; for He enjoyed human life and all its myriad contacts and interests (Mark 14: 3). So too the widow's mites that she willingly flung into the treasury were hard to come by and were her *all*: it was throwing away her bread (12: 41). He spoke the parable about the king who must needs count the cost before he went on an expedition (Luke 14: 31), and He did not conceal from Himself that some could enter into life only at the cost of being halt and maimed (Mark 9: 43).

When the Greeks were waiting for an audience and His mind was thrilled by the prospect of the harvest to be gathered, He knew full well that first the corn of wheat must fall into the earth and die (John 12: 24). Gethsemane was a costly ordeal, but He had been paying in drops of blood all the way—in the cruel disappointment of men's unresponsiveness, in the stinging taunts that ungenerous folk cast at Him, in the malignant opposition with which the officials and the religious countered Him, in the hypocrisy that remained impenetrable to pleading or exposure, in the awful responsibility that saw a nation blindly heading for disaster and failed to stab it awake, in the crushing weight of heedless sin and indifference in the people who alone had the vision of the true God. Upon that uniquely sensitive heart the fearful burden daily rested, and there was no human friend who even dimly understood or dumbly tried to help. Thus we see as in a mirror how the divine bears the sin of man—at measureless cost. Foxes had holes, birds of the air had nests, but the Son of Man had not where to lay His head.

God's Abhorrence of Sin and His Saving Love. Hosea 11; Is. 53; Matt. 26: 20-24; Luke 22: 37.

In these days of ruthless totalitarian war the heinousness of sin has come home to us. The pitilessness and the blatant savagery

of it have struck deep into even our insensitive souls. When men are seized by stealth in the privacy of their homes, dragged forth and lined up in barrack squares to be shot in dozens, without trial or even accusation, simply because they dared to think differently from others; when engines of death are hurled down upon crowded tenements, and mothers and children are thrown from sleep into the awful agonies of pain and death; when in the darkness without warning helpless souls are capsized in mid ocean and left to the pitiless waters while the perpetrators look on and laugh; then indeed we awake to the ugliness of sin. And when these horrors come to those we ourselves love and cherish, to the innocent we have ourselves fondled, our wrath becomes a terrible thing. Ordinarily we avert our eyes from sin or seek to chase it from our minds because our own hearts accuse us of like transgressions. But how must sin appear to the All-Seeing God and the all-sensitive heart of love? Set down the story of a year's life in a crowded city block in peace time where poverty and drink and lust hold sway, unroof in imagination one single row of houses for one single night and look in upon the crime and hopelessness and misery, and the heart is too full for words, the eyes too hard for tears. The imagination refuses to picture the ills we could daily know. Enough that we face those we must share, and hide our thought about the rest.

But the Creator of all human souls cannot be indifferent to the world He has made; He cannot single out the loveliness and pass unheeded the fevers and the woes. Sin that we comprehend only in the mass He knows in the single tragedies of each tenement of clay. It was characteristic of Jesus that He dealt lovingly and patiently with individual after individual. The personal concern of the Father was mirrored in the personal ministries of the Son. He lived in Galilee, remote to all appearances from the great world's throbbing life; but the heaving seas of worldwide humanity laid at His feet evidence aplenty of the sorrows of the untraversed oceans.

His first ministry was that of forgiveness. But forgiveness, glorious and life-giving as it is to the redeemed soul, is but a drop that falls on a single blade of grass. Behind the Magdalene's sin was a whole context of transgression, a history of wilfulness and lust and careless parenthood, it may be, a story of disappointment

and momentary abandon that cruel and gross minds had turned to gain without pity. Behind the ill-gotten gains of a Zaccheus lay his disloyalty to national ideals, and behind that again the crushing yoke of Rome that brought the doubtful gifts of bread and games to the imperial city as it brought penury and frustration to the subject peoples, a system that drowned many in the debauchery of excessive wealth and power in and around the palace as it defrauded multitudes of a just price for the crops they grew and of that greater harvest of the soul and spirit that belongs to free men and women. Behind the betrayal of a Judas, a disappointed Zealot, lay the malignity of a Caiaphas and his fellow-lovers of office and power, and beyond them lay centuries of privilege by which the service of God had been corrupted and debased. The redeeming acts of Jesus to individual souls were but candle lights that revealed the limitless darkness beyond.

How then could the Almighty contrive to send to earth's remotest bounds and into its depths some awareness of His abhorrence of the ravages of sin? A beacon must be lit in the land that would throw its light far and wide, and that beacon must have a strange singularity about its fires that men would look up and take thought. What stark and challenging deed could be lifted up before men's eyes that would at once declare the exceeding sinfulness of sin and at the same time reveal the power that alone could bring health and healing to its victims and martyrs? If sin was to confront mankind in all its hideous reality, then love likewise in all its heroic winsomeness must flaunt its glory in the skies. So there came to be that incredible tragedy of the ages, the Crucifixion on Calvary.

Premonitions of that grand act of history had come to a lone singer in Israel when he burst into poetry in the songs of the Suffering Servant (Is. 42: 1-4; 49: 1-6; 50: 4-9; 52: 13 to 53: 12). There he had pictured an Israel pure and innocent, suffering incalculably under the murderous cruelty of stronger surrounding powers, yet bearing herself with such lofty allegiance to a higher will that gradually it began to smite with shame the minds of her oppressors. Surely there fell upon them as they watched a wonder that one should suffer so inexplicably and unprotestingly. And as they marvelled, the flash of insight lit up their dull understanding and they knew that it was a divine mystery they beheld—the innocent was suffering for their sins, the chastisement of their

peace fell upon the tortured one. Such a premonition must reach the stage of reality.

The Son of Man must needs suffer, Jesus had striven to teach. It needs blood, sweat, and tears to lay upon the conscience of men the terrible toll of heedlessness. Men excused Rome her despotism because she was just; then let her representative in Jerusalem face the angry and scheming priests with all their power to stir bloodshed and rebellion, and show if justice could dwell in the heart of a despot, if power would forego its alliance with policy and cunning and let the innocent go free. If she with all power at her command laid hands on innocence, then her subservience to sin was proven and exposed. Let the corrupt and worldly priests be faced with the choice of losing their prestige or doing to death the Man of Nazareth, and the crisis would show how they hugged their sin—lust of power and greed. Let the people even, with all their professed admiration for the Galilean and their willingness to follow Him, be faced with the choice of a Barabbas and bloody vengeance or the pale Galilean who talked of meekness and peace, and see if sin did not win the mastery. And that choice of sin by rulers, priests, and people would be exposed for all time as upon the cruel cross was hoisted the innocent victim, the purity that no slander could tarnish, the blamelessness that no cruelty could provoke to strike back. Strange that it should need the bitterness of death to release the truth. Some flowers must be crushed to give out their fragrance; the great divide must be crossed before the view on the other side can be unveiled. The Son of Man could not stop short of death if the dark hideousness of the world's sin was to stand out clear.

With the exposure of sin must be revealed the grace that redeems, else the spectacle of his own misdoing would have been too terrible even for sinful man. It was one thing just to *talk* about meekness on the Mount in Galilee, but it was quite another to see it *lived out* in the agony of a courtroom and the long stretch of travel under a heavy cross along the sorrowful way while soldiers scoffed and enemies grunted satisfaction. Such meekness impressed even a proud Roman. It might be airy rhetoric to talk of surrendering an offending eye or a limb; but there was a saving salt in the sacrifice when one calmly gave up life itself rather than betray a principle. It was just a startling

paradox to be exhorted to love your enemies and to pray for them that despitefully use you, but it gave men furiously to think of love as no mere sentiment when it enabled a man in the agony of death and torture to pray for those who had actually raised the cruel cross and driven the nails into His hands. It was no surprising thing that Pilate after a superficial examination and without calling many witnesses should say that he found no fault in this man; but it was matter for pondering when a blunt soldier who had looked on many executions gazed with a strange awe at this quivering figure on the Cross, marked His words and demeanour, and exclaimed, "Truly this was a righteous man." Thus the sordid tragedy of a criminal's death could be viewed as no mere exhibition of the evil heart in man, but as the exaltation of that spiritual quality whereby the evil could be met and overcome. If there are depths unplumbed in the wickedness of man, there are also heights unscaled in the spirit that God gives to those who look in faith to Him.

But this demonstration of the eternal love, to be on the grand scale, must be made by a divine protagonist. There must be no unreal shadow figures on the screen. God Himself must enter the human stage and prove beyond contradiction that it was His will to wrestle with sin and it was His power that would overthrow the evil. No common ties must bind the Son of Man to the Father in heaven. God must be in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. And yet man must feel that this warfare was not a remote conflict in the heavens, but a combat where the conditions and the weapons were human. The Son of God must be a son of man, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, so that when in the shock of battle He met the dread enemy, it would be by no supernatural wizardry that the mortal blow was given and victory won, but by means that were spiritual, by qualities that had their parallel and counterpart in the life of a common man. So Calvary became the ordeal of the Son of Man and at the same time the victory of God.

The Effectual Means, Heb. 2: 17-18; Heb. 4: 15-16.

The method chosen for the grand hope of reconciliation for the whole world was a strange one: a simple carpenter turned preacher in remote Palestine and among a subject people, an

inconspicuous beginning and the prelude to a drab ending—a criminal's cross of shame on a bare eminence outside a city wall. But has it proved an effectual means? Principal Alexander Martin has affirmed: "It is matter of experience that morally distracted souls do thus find the readjustment with Reality which they crave. They do, in plain spiritual fact, pass into 'the Holiest of all'—to the very heart of Existence where alone a spiritual nature can rest—through the rent veil of this Man's flesh. . . . Nothing is surer to Christian faith than that we are 'made nigh by the blood of Christ.'"^a

C. THE RESURRECTION

Victorious Over Death. Mark 15; Matt. 28; Luke 24; John 20-21; 1 Cor. 15.

When the sun went down on the bleak tragedy of Calvary, hope might very well have died in Israel. The purest life ever lived in its long history had ended on a criminal's cross, and it seemed as if it but remained to cast the earthly frame to rest ingloriously in a common felon's grave. Loving hands might intervene and place the body reverently in a new tomb, but that was only a seemly act of farewell. Pious women hurrying with spices to pay the last dues were but adding the touch of beauty and love to relieve the grimness of the inevitable end. The birds on the bough might fittingly have tuned their notes into a sad requiem.

From the human side nothing more was expected from Jesus of Nazareth. His story had passed into history, and even His closest associates had no eyes for marvel to spring forth. A resuscitation in any shape or form was entirely unexpected. All the records testify to the Resurrection as a complete surprise: it was not a mere hallucination that grew out of notions earlier cherished in circles from which the disciples came. The disciples out on the lake were surprised (John 21: 7); on the way to Emmaus it was of a lost leader they spoke when lo! He was in their company an unsuspected fellow-traveller (Luke 24: 21); it was an obstinately unbelieving Thomas whom his Lord confronted (John 20: 25); it was to women who had gone to pay the last

^a *The Finality of Jesus for Faith*, p. 174f.

offices to the dead that there opened up the vision of the empty tomb (Mark 16: 1); and it was to Paul an enemy and an unbeliever that the Risen Lord spake startlingly on the Damascus Road (Acts 9: 4). The event indeed was so far out of their expectation that the women at the tomb were left afraid (Mark 16: 8), the disciples were changed from disheartened and fleeing men to bold preachers of a living Lord (Acts 4: 13), and Paul always spoke of having been "apprehended," laid hold on, arrested and turned round in his thoughts and life purposes by a Power and Presence that confronted him suddenly (Phil. 3: 12). It was as if an unseen world of reality had invaded this common earth, and men of flesh and blood, earth bound and earth centred, had their mind opened to a Divine Presence that recognized no barriers.

It was the faith of the singer of the Suffering Servant songs that the only end to long travail was glorious triumph:

Behold, my servant shall achieve,
He shall be exalted, lifted up and very high . . .
Many the nations that shall wonder,
Kings shall shut their mouths in awe:
What they were never told shall they see,
What they had never heard shall they ponder. . . .
From the travail of his soul he shall see light
And rest satisfied with the knowledge of his vindication
(Is. 52: 13ff.).

So had Job reached the conviction: "I know that my Vindicator liveth" (19: 25).

So it had fallen out in the actuality of living history: Jesus Christ was risen from the dead. The God of love had declared His righteousness; the God of righteousness had certified His love by raising from the dead the sinless Son of Man.

It is a vain study to turn to the written records and place under a microscope divergences in the Gospel testimonies. This is a field of experience where redemption counts and not mere records. As James Denney has put it, "It ought to be apparent that, so far as the fact of the resurrection of Jesus is concerned, the narratives of the evangelists are quite the least important part of the evidence . . . It is not this or that in the New Testament . . . which is the primary evidence for the resurrection; it is the New Testament itself. The life that throbs in it from beginning

to end, the life that always fills us again with wonder as it beats upon us from its pages, is the life which the Risen Saviour has quickened in Christian souls. The evidence for the resurrection of Jesus is the existence of the Church in that extraordinary spiritual vitality which confronts us in the New Testament.”

With a strange premonition the Psalmist, from his close grasp on the God of his faith, had exclaimed: “Thou wilt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption” (16: 10). That was a verse on which early Christian thought seized (Acts 2: 25ff.). What was involved in this life was not just a span of ordinary existence. Here was a life proved blameless in the sight of men, a life in which the moral qualities were gathered in all their purity and power: it was a thrusting through and a flourishing on the common earth of that peace and joy, that love and pity, that faith and tenderness, which man’s eyes looked for as sign and symbol of the heavenly reality. If that the noblest Son of Man could know no happier issue than to be rudely haled from a Gethsemane, shuffled through a travesty of justice along the Via Dolorosa to a criminal’s cross and a transgressor’s grave, then the divine honour was for ever besmirched and His righteousness denied. If the heavens remained brass over Calvary, faith and hope in the mercy of God was stifled in every sensitive soul. So even Jesus was deluded, and for all His living grasp on a Father’s hand He too was cast into ignominy and devouring death! Surely it was proven that the divine arm was shortened that it could not save.

Jesus through His ministry had been the incarnation of human yearnings as of the divine mind. He had confidently declared the forgiveness of sins—unveiling, and by His deeds and attitudes making vivid and real, the outreaching love of the Father. He had brought to the common earth the qualities of mind and soul and spirit that awakened the sensitive to the inrush of a new order: the Kingdom of God had arrived among men. *Could that be all a vain dream?* He had persuaded His listeners that God set human values above rigid laws, willing rather that His healing should make a Sabbath in the soul than to hold to a harsh formalism without (Mark 2: 27-28). He had opened invitingly the gates of prayer, assuring the most defenceless of humans that their importunity won vindication from the pitiful and righteous

* *Jesus and the Gospel*, pp. 111-112.

God (Luke 18: 1-8). He had penetrated behind the forms and falsities of legalistic rules, and set men face to face with the deadliness of evil desire and murderous thought (Matt. 5: 21). *What if the Almighty One refused to honour that revelation of His name and nature?* All that discerning minds had come to see in the words Love, Righteousness, Holiness, Peace, Meekness, Joy, Forgiveness—all that was inextricably associated with Jesus of Nazareth. For these realities He had lived and died. If the Almighty honoured and vindicated that sacrifice, then these realities were approved of God and shone as stars in man’s heaven. If the tragedy of Calvary aroused no action in the God of all Justice, then He did not care.

But God did care, and the power of the Resurrected One descended upon living men with a transforming touch past all denial. It was not just that Peter saw a vision or Paul heard a voice on the Damascus Road. These men were quickened by a new spiritual dynamic: the stumbling, fumbling, denying Peter became a leader radiating confidence and conviction, and Paul outstripped all his contemporaries in zeal and insight and moral grandeur. A company of disillusioned, disheartened followers gathered out of nowhere to testify after Pentecost to a transfiguring faith and a consuming love that set a Church in motion, a Church that has gone on spreading its roots throughout the lands of earth and still defies the death that falls on earthly societies. Whence has come that driving force, that persistent energy of renewal, that inherent quality that sustains the saint and heals the sinner of every class and kind?

The Church knows only one explanation: Jesus Christ is risen—not that He was raised up merely in the long past to walk the earth for a season, a phantom spirit coming through closed doors, haunting the shore line of the old familiar fishing-ground, disappearing from the grasp of would-be worshippers in the garden where He had been laid. The Church does not rest on the bare memories of a re-animated body that came and after forty days passed from human vision. The Church knows her Lord as one who was exalted to another order of being, one who was declared to be the Son of God with power. The gift of the Holy Spirit, the renewing vitality that still animates the saints of today as it has glorified the faithful of all the generations—that is the evidence that He lives at the right hand of God.