

# **The Teaching of CHRIST**

By

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## **INTRODUCTION**

### **THE CLAIM OF CHRIST AS TO THE VALUE OF HIS TEACHING**

**"Never man spake like this man"** (John 7:46)

THE declaration with which this introductory study is prefaced was made by impartial, and probably, indifferent men, after listening to some of the things that JESUS said.

Earlier in the chapter we find this statement:

**"The Pharisees heard that the people murmured such things concerning him; and the Pharisees and the chief priests sent officers to take him"** (John 7:32).

The outcome was -

**"Then came the officers to the chief priests and Pharisees; and they said unto them, Why have ye not brought him? The officers answered, Never man spake like this man"** (John 7:45, 46).

I make use of these words of the officers, whatever they intended by them, as a declaration of my conviction that the words of CHRIST were not the words of a merely human teacher.

My purpose in this series of meditations is to consider His teaching on some of the great themes of supreme interest to men, and I propose to do that in the simplest way possible.

Let it be understood that we start on the assumption that the New Testament view of the Person of CHRIST is to be accepted as true. I am not proposing a study of the words of JESUS, in order to lead to CHRIST. I rather desire to lead those who have already found CHRIST to a study of His words.

In this, our first meditation, I propose to examine the claims which CHRIST made as to His own teaching. I take up the writings of other men, all of them valuable in greater or less degree - and it is always interesting to notice a man's estimate of the value of the things he says himself - and this I have observed; that the greatest human teachers have always been reticent as to the

ultimate authority of their teaching. They have always admitted that there is room for interpretation, for question, for further investigation. That note is entirely absent from the teaching of CHRIST. There is no apology. He never said, 'It is natural therefore to suppose'; 'It may probably be'; or 'Consult the authorities.'

Scattered through the Gospels there are many statements which He made concerning His teaching, some incidental, others outstanding, special, and definite; and it is impossible and unnecessary for our present purpose, to deal with the whole of these.

I propose to refer to the principal statements which I have described as outstanding, special, and definite; and in doing so we shall find two words employed - in reference to His teaching which it may be well for us at once to consider.

JESUS sometimes spoke of "**My words**," sometimes of "**My sayings**," of "**these words of Mine**," "**these sayings of Mine**." We must, however, lay no emphasis at all upon this distinction, because our translators have not maintained the distinction between the Greek words to which I refer.

Those who read the New Testament in the Greek will be careful to distinguish between the words *logos*, and *rhema*; for such distinction may make all the difference in the interpretation of a particular passage. While, in considering His claims as to the value of His teaching, we need not tarry very long with such examination, yet it is important that we recognize the distinction.

John's Gospel opens with statements characterized by awe-inspiring sublimity, and we are conscious of our inability to finally express their meaning. The suggestion of the opening statement is too mysterious, too high and too glorious for man's reaching, too profound for his fathoming. "**In the beginning was the word**" (John 1:1).

In that declaration, however, John employed the particular word to which we must first give our attention. It is the word *logos*, translated here "**Word**." The root from which the word is derived means *to lay side by side*; therefore *to collect*, and *to set in order*. Consequently it suggests words so set together and framed as to express thought; and therefore it refers to the thought itself, orderly and sequential, which is put together and expressed.

Whenever we come to the word *logos*, therefore, we must remember its two values.

- The first is that of a method of expression; and
- The second is that of the truth which is expressed.

That is the word which most often occurs as we examine what our Lord had to say about His own teaching.

The word *rhema* simply means articulate speech, something beyond a mere sound; a sound which is a method of expression, or a sound conveying a meaning. I do not intend to suggest that when JESUS spoke of His own sayings, and described them by the word *rhema* that He meant they were unimportant, for no saying of His could in any sense be unimportant.

In this study I shall indicate the distinction between *logos* and *rhema* by translating the former, *word* or *words*; and the latter, *sayings*.

I propose, then, first a collocation of passages which reveal to us our Lord's estimate of the value of His own teaching. Having read these passages, we shall make a deduction of values, as preliminary to our future, and larger study.

Having first referred to the passages as they occur in the four Gospel stories, I shall then group them, so far as is possible, in the order in which they were spoken by the Lord. Finally, I shall attempt to make the deductions from them which are necessary to our subsequent studies.

In Matthew there are two principal statements of our Lord concerning His own teaching:

**"Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it"** (Matthew 7:24-27)

**"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away"** (Matthew 24:35).

The first statement concluded the Manifesto on the Mount. The final word was spoken in the midst of the Manifesto of the ultimate movements of His Kingdom, the prophecy on Olivet.

In the Gospel of Mark we find two principal declarations:

**"Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels"** (Mark 8:38).

**"Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away"** (Mark 13:31).

In the Gospel of Luke we find the record of four great central claims of JESUS concerning His teaching:

**"Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like: He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great"** (Luke 6:47-49).

**"For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels"** (Luke 9:26).

**"Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away"** (Luke 21:33).

**"And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things"** (Luke 24:44-48).

In the Gospel of John we have three great central words:

**"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life"** (John 5:24).

There are two other statements in the course of the controversy that followed, which I desire to link with this first declaration:

**"The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life"** (John 6:63).

**"Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death"** (John 8:51).

Note in each case the repetition of the thought of life. The second of the great central words of this Gospel reads thus:

**"And if any man hear my words, and believe 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 words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day"** (John 12:47-48).

Speaking in the upper room, and under the shadow of the Cross, to His Father, our Lord said:

**"For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me"** (John 17:8).

I at once confess that it seems to my own heart that the mere reading of these passages brings us into an atmosphere in which we are conscious of the august sublimity of CHRIST's conception of the value of His own teaching. My own conviction is that there is not a single one of these passages that we can believe to be true if we deny the Deity of our Lord. And if the statement be

questioned, then take any of these claims, and put them into the lips of any other teacher, and it must at once be seen how entirely and absolutely they are out of place. They are words which claim a full and final authority for the One Who uttered them.

Now let me group them in chronological order. I do not set very much value upon this, but it is at least interesting to see, as far as possible, how His disciples heard His progressive claim as to His own teaching.

I think the first in order is that recorded in the fifth chapter of John, in which He declared that His word believed, leads to the Father, and constitutes the medium of age-abiding life.

Next in order came the word at the close of the great Manifesto in which He so clearly and deliberately claimed that His words constitute the foundation upon which men must build, unless in the stress of storm their building is to be destroyed; or, in other words, that His teaching is the foundation of character.

Next in order came the words that Mark records, and Luke also, in which our Lord declared that His words constitute the test of the inspiration of life, and therefore the test of nobility for to-day and forever. Whosoever is, here and now, "**ashamed of me and of my words . . . the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.**"

The man who is to-day ashamed of the teaching of the Lord, does not accept His ideal, turns his life away from the revelation of character and nobility contained within His words; makes certain the inexorable result that, in the day of glory, when the ideals of CHRIST are vindicated, CHRIST will be ashamed of him. Why? Because that man has turned his back upon the true ideals of nobility, and has devoted himself to that which is base and low and mean. CHRIST thus claimed that His words constitute the true inspiration of life, which makes for nobility of character.

Next in order came the declaration recorded by John, that His word is to be the Divine standard of judgment; that by the word which He has spoken men are to be judged in that ultimate day, to which He so often made reference.

Then we come to that supreme declaration recorded by Matthew, Mark, and Luke, "**Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away.**"

My memory goes back nine-and-thirty years to a morning when I received one of the earliest and profoundest impressions of my life. It was created by that poet-preacher, Thomas Jones. I was a boy in Walter's Road Church in Swansea, and I remember the occasion as though it were but yesterday.

He gave out the text, "**Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away,**" and then in his own inimitable way he began, leaning on his pulpit, "And who is this young man that says this? Is not this the carpenter?" Then he led us on, and I saw the Lord that morning, and I have never forgotten from that day to this the tremendous importance of this statement.

That impression comes back through the years to me now, with the accumulated testimony of any measure of attention I have been able to give to the teaching of CHRIST, and I believe the tremendous declaration that His word is the central and final authority. **"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away."**

Next in order we have His word in the intercessory prayer, spoken, not to men, but to His Father, in which He said, **" Father, I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me,"** which was His claim that the things He had spoken, which at first often appear to be so fragmentary and broken and scattered, but in which very brokenness and scattering there is a great system, constitute the complete testimony of GOD to men.

And last in order comes that word spoken after His resurrection, in exposition of redemption, in which He declared, **" These are the words which I spake unto you . . . concerning me".**

Everything in the Old Testament Scriptures, the law, the prophets, the psalms, all the teaching foretelling death and resurrection; the promise of repentance and remission of sins, He claimed as finding fulfillment in Himself, and as constituting the sum total of His teaching.

In conclusion let us make a declaration of values.

First, *our Lord distinctly claimed that His teaching was Divine in its authority;* and He made that claim in words which are most remarkable:

**"For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak"** (John 12:49-50).

That was His own estimate. He declared that what He said was from GOD; that what He said was clearly spoken to men; and therefore that what He said should become the basis of judgment. This is a very supreme claim, a claim made by no other teacher with the same definiteness.

There is no apology here; there is no appeal to men to consider; there is no suggestion that if men will hear Him, they may thereafter form their own conclusion. He stands in the midst of humanity, and says that His teaching is Divine in its authority. That is true, or it is not true. We shall assume it as true as we go forward.

If, however, any are not able to assume that it is true, then there is a test; a test permitted, a test given by JESUS.

**"If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself"** (John 7:17).

Now, that is the full passage. We constantly quote that verse partially, as though CHRIST had said, If a man shall do His will, he shall know. We have no right to stop there - we must hear CHRIST through. That may be true in certain senses, but CHRIST declared that he that wills to

do His will shall know of the teaching *whether it be of GOD*.

Thus CHRIST said that the only way in which we can test His teaching is by obeying it; not by our own intellectual cleverness can we ever test the truth of His teaching; not by any philosophy or wit or wisdom of our own; but if we will do what He says, in doing, we shall come to certainty as to whether or not the thing spoken was speech from GOD.

That test is in itself, if possible, a more supreme claim still. It is CHRIST's perpetual challenge to the race. He claims that His teaching is from GOD. He uttered that challenge in the days of His flesh; and He publishes it anew at this very hour, in the midst of all our complex life, and to all men.

The test of the Divinity of His teaching is obedience to it.

I will make this affirmation, which may be challenged, but I will make it and leave it: No man ever tried and tested CHRIST's teaching in that way, and decided that it was untrue. Or to put it into positive form: Every man who has obeyed the teaching of CHRIST has at last been compelled to say, This word that He spake to my soul was the Word of GOD. His first claim, then, was that His teaching is Divine in its authority.

The second claim that our Lord made for His own teaching was that, *being Divine in authority, it was in order to human government*. Again, passages we have already quoted must be repeated. Take that first word at the close of the Manifesto; "**these sayings of Mine**," are rock foundations for character; and in preparation for character, for conduct; and in preparation for conduct, for conception. That is a claim that if a man will make the words of JESUS the master-conceptions of his life, square his conduct with these conceptions; then his character will be strong enough to stand the stress and strain of all the storms that ever blow from earth or hell.

A man, did I say? Yes, CHRIST always begins with the individual; but He does not end with the individual. Nevertheless He does not deal with society to the neglect of the individual, and He never suggests the folly of incorporating in the new and ultimate society men who are other than men of perfected character.

He always begins there; but He is challenging the statesmen of to-day with the same words:- Build on My words and you build well and forever. Build, however fairly and beautifully, with apparent refinement, upon anything else; then when the storm comes, all will be swept away. That is His own conception of the value of His teaching.

He claimed more than that. Not is the foundation of character found in these words of His, they constitute the very medium of life, for if a man hear His word, it is the word which reveals the Father; and the man receiving it will believe the Father; and so the word will become the medium through which he will receive life. It not only affords the vision of the truth; it supplies the virtue that makes possible the victory.

He claimed also that for human government His words are the test of inspiration. What are our inspirations to-day?

What are we dreaming about? What are the ideals formed in our hearts, which we are answering? Let us bring them into the light of CHRIST's teaching. Are we ashamed? If we follow that unworthy inspiration, there will come a day of great glory and revelation, when He will be ashamed of us.

These are supreme claims! The most monstrous fraud the world has ever known was this JESUS; or ultimate, supreme, final, He was very GOD, as well as very man.

In the third place *He claimed that His teaching was for the proclamation of redemption*: It is not without significance, with which we cannot now tarry, but to which we shall come again in the course of our studies, that the word He spoke beyond the Cross, and beyond the grave about His words, was that in which He declared that all the Old Testament Scriptures were of value, as they led up to Him; and that the central facts of all His ministry and His revelation were those of His death and of His resurrection; that the deepest and profoundest passion of His heart, and the highest joy of His soul was that He came into human history to preach the evangel of repentance and remission of sins. He claimed that His words are the words which proclaim redemption for men and women who are lost.

*The last claim is that His teaching is final*. Heaven and earth pass, but the words abide. Nor do they abide only; they are complete; as He said to His Father: "**I have given them Thy word.**"

That is what the writer of the letter to the Hebrews meant when he said, "**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, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds**" (Hebrews 1:1-2).

In that speech everything was said that man needs to hear.

These are superlative claims. We start the present series of meditations, accepting them as true. From this point we shall go forward, desiring to hear what He has to say.

It seems as though, out of that overshadowing glory of this mount of worship, I again hear the voice that spoke to Peter, James, and John, on the holy mount long ago; and this is what it says: "**This is My Son . . . hear ye Him**" (Luke 9:35).

We started with the confession of impartial and indifferent men, "**Never man spake like this man.**" We close with the declaration of GOD, "This is My Son . . . hear ye Him."

~ end of Introduction ~

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