

The Life of JESUS CHRIST

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Chapter 5

THE YEAR OF PUBLIC FAVOR

Paragraphs 66-83. GALILEE, THE SCENE OF THIS YEAR'S WORK.

- 67,68. Its Size and Population, the Sea of Galilee.
- 69. Return of JESUS from the South.
- 70. Visit to Nazareth.
- 71. Removal of His Home to Capernaum.
- 72. Manner of His Life;
- 73. His Popularity.

Paragraphs 74-115. THE MEANS HE EMPLOYED.

- 76-83. Miracles. Different Kinds of them.
- 78-83. Reasons. why He wrought them.
- 84-104. Preaching.
- 86-89. The form of His Preaching.
- 90-95. The Qualities of the Preacher.
- 91. Authority.
- 92. Boldness.
- 93. Power.
- 94. Graciousness.
- 95. Human Breadth.
- 96-102. The matter of His Teaching.
- 97-100. The Kingdom of GOD.
- 101. Himself.
- 102. Important Themes which He only slightly touched.
- 103-104. His Audiences.
- 105-113. The Apostolate.
- 105-108. Call and Training of the Twelve.

Paragraphs 109-114. His Human Character.

109. Purposefulness.

110. Faith.

111. Originality.

112. Love to Men.

113. Love to GOD.

114. Sinlessness.

115. The Deity of CHRIST. [54]

66. After the year spent in the south, JESUS shifted the sphere of His activity to the north of the country. In Galilee He would be able to address Himself to minds that were unsophisticated with the prejudices and supercilious pride of Judea, where the sacerdotal and learned classes had their headquarters; and He might hope that, if His doctrine and influence took a deep hold of one part of the country, even though it was remote from the center of authority, He might return to the south backed with an irresistible national acknowledgment, and carry by storm even the citadel of prejudice itself.

67. **Galilee** - The area of His activity for the next eighteen months was very limited. Even the whole of Palestine was a very limited country. Its length was a hundred miles less than that of Scotland, and its breadth considerably less than the average breadth of Scotland. It is important to remember this, because it renders intelligible the rapidity with which the movement of JESUS spread over the land, and all parts of the country flocked to His ministry; and it is interesting to remember it as an illustration of the fact, that the nations which have contributed most to the civilization of the world have, during the period of their true greatness, been confined to very small territories. Rome was but a single city, and Greece a very small country.

68. Galilee was the most northerly of the four provinces [55] into which Palestine was divided. It was sixty miles long by thirty broad; that is to say, it was less than some of our Scottish counties. It was about the size of Aberdeenshire. It consisted for the most part of an elevated plateau, whose surface was varied by irregular mountain masses. Near its eastern boundary it suddenly dropped down into a great gulf, through which flowed the Jordan, and in the midst of which, at a depth of five hundred feet below the Mediterranean, lay the lovely, harp-shaped Sea of Galilee. The whole province was very fertile, and its surface thickly covered with large villages and towns. The population was perhaps as dense as that of Lancashire or the West Riding of Yorkshire. But the center of activity was the basin of the lake, a sheet of water thirteen miles long by six broad. Above its eastern shore, round which ran a fringe of green a quarter of a mile broad, there towered high, bare hills, cloven with the channels of torrents. On the western side, the mountains were gently sloped and their sides richly cultivated, bearing splendid crops of every description; while at their feet the shore was verdant with luxuriant groves of olives, oranges, figs, and every product of an almost tropical climate. At the northern end of the lake the space between the water and the mountains was broadened by the delta of the river, and watered with many streams from the hills, so that it was a perfect paradise of fertility and beauty. It was called the Plain of Gennesareth, and even at this day, when the whole basin of the lake is little better than a torrid solitude, is still covered with magnificent corn-fields, wherever the hand of cultivation touches it; and, where idleness leaves it untended, is overspread with thick jungles of

thorn and oleander. In our Lord's time, it contained the chief cities on the lake, such as Capernaum, Bethsaida and Chorazin. But the whole shore was studded with towns and villages, and formed a perfect beehive of swarming human life. The means of existence were abundant in the crops and [56] fruits of every description which the fields yielded so richly; and the waters of the lake teemed with fish, affording employment to thousands of fishermen. Besides, the great highways from Egypt to Damascus, and from Phoenicia to the Euphrates, passed here, and made this a vast center of traffic. Thousands of boats for fishing, transport and pleasure moved to and fro on the surface of the lake, so that the whole region was a focus of energy and prosperity.

69. The report of the miracles which JESUS had wrought at Jerusalem, eight months before, had been brought home to Galilee by the pilgrims who had been south at the feast, and doubtless also the news of His preaching and baptism in Judaea had created talk and excitement before He arrived. Accordingly, the Galileans were in some measure prepared to receive Him when He returned to their midst.

70. One of the first places He visited was Nazareth, the home of His childhood and youth. He appeared there one Sabbath in the synagogue, and, being now known as a preacher, was invited to read the Scriptures and address the congregation. He read a passage in Isaiah, in which a glowing description is given of the coming and work of the Messiah; "**The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because He has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.**" As He commented on this text, picturing the features of the Messianic time - the emancipation of the slave, the enriching of the poor, the healing of the diseased - their curiosity at hearing for the first time a young preacher who had been brought up among themselves passed into spell-bound wonder, and they burst into the applause which used to be allowed in the Jewish synagogues. But soon the reaction came. [57] They began to whisper:

- Was not this the carpenter who had worked among them?
- Had not His father and mother been their neighbors?
- Were not His sisters married in the town?

Their envy was excited. And, when He proceeded to tell them that the prophecy which He had read was fulfilled in Himself, they broke out into angry scorn. They demanded of Him a sign, such as it was reported He had given in Jerusalem; and when He informed them that He could do no miracle among the unbelieving, they rushed on Him in a storm of jealousy and wrath, and hurrying Him out of the synagogue to a crag behind the town, would, if He had not miraculously taken Himself away from them, have flung Him over, and crowned their proverbial wickedness with a deed which would have robbed Jerusalem of her bad eminence of being the murderess of the Messiah.

71. From that day Nazareth was His home no more. Once again, indeed, in His yearning love for his old neighbors, He visited it, but with no better result. Henceforward He made His home in Capernaum, on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee. This town has completely vanished out of existence; its very site cannot now be identified with any certainty. This may be one reason why it is not connected in the Christian mind with the life of JESUS in the same prominent way as Bethlehem, where He was born, Nazareth, where He was brought up, or

Jerusalem, where He died. But we ought to fix it in our memories side by side with these, for it was His home for eighteen of the most important months of His life. It is called His own city, and He was asked for tribute in it as a citizen of the place. It was thoroughly well adapted to be the center of His labors in Galilee, for it was the focus of the busy life in the basin of the lake, and was conveniently situated for excursions to all parts of the province. Whatever happened there was quickly heard of in all the regions round about. [58]

72. In Capernaum, then, He began His Galilean work; and for many months the method of His life was, to be frequently there as in His headquarters, and from this center to make tours in all directions, visiting the towns and villages of Galilee. Sometimes His journey would be inland, away to the west. At other times it would be a tour of the villages on the lake, or a visit to the country on its eastern side. He had a boat that waited on Him, to convey Him wherever He might wish to go. He would come back to Capernaum, perhaps only for a day, perhaps for a week or two at a time.

73. In a few weeks the whole province was ringing with His name; He was the subject of conversation in every boat on the lake and every house in the whole region; men's minds were stirred with the profoundest excitement, and everyone desired to see Him. Crowds began to gather about Him. They grew larger and larger. They multiplied to thousands and tens of thousands. They followed Him wherever He went. The news spread far and wide beyond Galilee, and brought hosts from Jerusalem, Judea and Perea, and even from Idumea in the far south, and Tyre and Sidon in the far north. Sometimes He could not stay in any town, because the crowds blocked up the streets and trade one on another. He had to take them out to the fields and deserts. The country was stirred from end to end, and Galilee was all on fire with excitement about Him.

74. How was it that He produced so great and widespread a movement? It was not by declaring Himself the Messiah. That would indeed have caused to pass through every Jewish breast the deepest thrill which it could experience. But although JESUS now and then, as at Nazareth, revealed Himself, in general He rather concealed His true character. No doubt the reason of this was, that among the excitable crowds of rude Galilee, with their grossly materialistic hopes, the declaration would have [59] excited a revolutionary rising against the Roman government, which would have withdrawn men's minds from His true aims and brought down on His head the Roman sword, just as in Judea it would have precipitated a murderous attack on His life by the Jewish authorities. To avert either kind of interruption, He kept the full revelation of Himself in reserve, endeavoring to prepare the public mind to receive it in its true inward and spiritual meaning, when the right moment for divulging it should come, and in the meantime leaving it to be inferred from His character and work who He was.

75. The two great means which JESUS used in His work, and which created such attention and enthusiasm, were His Miracles and His Preaching.

76. **The Miracle-Worker** - Perhaps His miracles excited the widest attention. We are told how the news of the first one which He wrought in Capernaum spread like wildfire through the town, and brought crowds about the house where He was; and whenever He performed a new one of extraordinary character, the excitement grew intense and the rumor of it spread on every hand. When, for instance, He first cured leprosy, the most malignant form of bodily disease in

Palestine, the amazement of the people knew no bounds. It was the same when He first overcame a case of possession; and when he raised to life the widow's son at Nain, there ensued a sort of stupor of fear followed by delighted wonder and the talk of thousands of tongues. All Galilee was for a time in motion with the crowding of the diseased of every description who could walk or totter to be near Him, and with companies of anxious friends carrying on beds and couches those who could not come themselves. The streets of the villages and towns were lined with the victims of disease as His benignant figure passed by. Sometimes He had so many to attend to that he could not find time even to eat; and at one [60] period He was so absorbed in His benevolent labors, and so carried along with the holy excitement which they caused, that His relatives, with indecorous rashness, endeavored to interfere, saying to each other that He was beside Himself.

77. The miracles of JESUS, taken altogether, were of two classes - those wrought on man, and those wrought in the sphere of external nature, such as the turning of water into wine, stilling the tempest, and multiplying the loaves. The former were by far the more numerous. They consisted chiefly of cures of disease less or more malignant, such as lameness, blindness, deafness, palsy, leprosy, and so forth. He appears to have varied very much His mode of acting, for reasons which we can scarcely explain. Sometimes He used means, such as a touch, or the laying of moistened clay on the part, or ordering the patient to wash in water. At other times He healed without any means, and occasionally even at a distance. Besides these bodily cures, He dealt with the diseases of the mind. These seem to have been peculiarly prevalent in Palestine at the time, and to have excited the utmost terror. They were believed to be accompanied by the entrance of demons into the poor imbecile or raving victims, and this idea was only too true. The man whom JESUS cured among the tombs in the country of the Gadarenes was a frightful example of this class of disease; and the picture of him sitting at the feet of JESUS clothed and in his right mind, shows what an effect His kind, soothing and authoritative presence had on minds so distracted. But the most extraordinary of the miracles of Jesus upon man were the instances in which He raised the dead to life. They were not frequent, but naturally produced an overwhelming impression whenever they occurred. The miracles of the other class - those on external nature - were of the same inexplicable description. Some of His cures of mental disease, if standing by themselves, might be accounted for [61] by the influence of a powerful nature on a troubled mind; and in the same way some of His bodily cures might be accounted for by His influencing the body through the mind. But such a miracle as walking on the tempestuous sea is utterly beyond the reach of natural explanation.

78. Why did JESUS employ this means of working? Several answers may be given to this question.

79. First, He wrought miracles because His Father gave Him these signs as proofs that He had sent Him. Many of the Old Testament prophets had received the same authentication of their mission, and although John, who revived the prophetic function, worked no miracles, as the Gospels inform us with the most simple veracity, it was to be expected that He who was a far greater prophet than the greatest who went before Him, should show even greater signs than any of them of His divine mission. It was a stupendous claim which He made on the faith of men when He announced Himself as the Messiah, and it would have been unreasonable to expect it to be conceded by a nation accustomed to miracles as the signs of a divine mission, if He had wrought none.

80. Secondly, the miracles of CHRIST were the natural outflow of the divine fulness which dwelt in Him. GOD was in Him, and His human nature was endowed with the HOLY GHOST without measure. It was natural, when such a Being was in the world, that mighty works should manifest themselves in Him. He was Himself the great miracle, of which His particular miracles were merely sparks or emanations. He was the great interruption of the order of nature, or rather a new element which had entered into the order of nature to enrich and ennoble it, and His miracles entered with Him, not to disturb, but to repair its harmony. Therefore all His miracles bore the stamp of His character. They were not mere exhibitions of power, but also of holiness, wisdom and love. The Jews often sought from Him mere gigantesque prodigies, to gratify [62] their mania for marvels. But He always refused them, working only such miracles as were helps to faith. He demanded faith in all those whom He cured, and never responded either to curiosity or unbelieving challenges to exhibit marvels. This distinguishes His miracles from those fabled of ancient wonder-workers and medieval saints. They were marked by unvarying sobriety and benevolence, because they were expressions of His character as a whole.

81. Thirdly, His miracles were symbols of His spiritual and saving work. It is only necessary to consider them for a moment to see that they were, as a whole, triumphs over the misery of the world. Mankind is the prey of a thousand evils, and even the frame of external nature bears the mark of some past catastrophe: "**The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain.**" This huge mass of physical evil in the lot of mankind is the effect of sin. Not that every disease and misfortune can be traced to special sin, although some of them can. The consequences of past sin are distributed in detail over the whole race. But yet the misery of the world is the shadow of its sin. Material and moral evil, being thus intimately related, mutually illustrate each other.

- When He healed bodily blindness, it was a type of the healing of the inner eye;
- when He raised the dead, He meant to suggest that He was the Resurrection and the Life in the spiritual world as well;
- when He cleansed the leper, His triumph spoke of another over the leprosy of sin;
- when He multiplied the loaves, He followed the miracle with a discourse on the bread of life;
- when He stilled the storm, it was an assurance that He could speak peace to the troubled conscience.

82. Thus His miracles were a natural and essential part of His Messianic work. They were an excellent means of making Him known to the nation. They bound those whom He cured to Him with strong ties of gratitude, and [63] without doubt, in many cases, the faith in Him as a miracle-worker led on to a higher faith. So it was in the case of His devoted follower Mary Magdalene, out of whom He cast seven devils.

83. To Himself this work must have brought both great pain and great joy. To His tender and exquisitely sympathetic heart, that never grew callous in the least degree, it must often have been harrowing to mingle with so much disease, and see the awful effects of sin. But He was in the right place; it suited His great love to be where help was needed. And what a joy it must have been to Him to distribute blessings on every hand and erase the traces of sin; to see health returning beneath His touch; to meet the joyous and grateful glances of the opening eyes; to hear the blessings of mothers and sisters, as He restored their loved ones to their arms; and to see the light of love and welcome in the faces of the poor, as He entered their towns and villages. He drank deeply of the well at which He would have His followers to be ever drinking - the bliss of

doing good.

84. **The Teacher** - The other great instrument with which JESUS did His work was His teaching. It was by far the more important of the two. His miracles were only the bell tolled to bring the people to hear His words. They impressed those who might not yet be susceptible to the subtler influence, and brought them within its range.

85. The miracles probably made most noise, but His preaching also spread His fame far and wide. There is no power whose attraction is more unfailing than that of the eloquent word. Barbarians, listening to their bards and story-tellers, Greeks, listening to the restrained passion of their orators, and matter-of-fact nations like the Roman, have alike acknowledged its power to be irresistible. The Jews prized it above almost every other attraction, and among the figures of their mighty dead revered none [64] more highly than the prophets - those eloquent utterers of the truth, whom Heaven had sent them from age to age. Though the Baptist did no miracles, multitudes flocked to Him, because in his accents they recognized the thunder of this power, which for so many generations no Jewish ear had listened to. Jesus also was recognized as a prophet, and accordingly, His preaching created widespread excitement. **"He spake in their synagogues, being glorified of all."** His words were heard with wonder and amazement. Sometimes the multitude on the beach of the lake so pressed upon Him to hear, that He had to enter into a ship and address them from the deck, as they spread themselves out in a semicircle on the ascending shore. His enemies themselves bore witness that **"never man spake like this man;"** and meager as are the remains of His preaching which we possess, they are amply sufficient to make us echo the sentiment and understand the impression which He produced. All His words together which have been preserved to us would not occupy more space in print than half-a-dozen ordinary sermons; yet it is not too much to say, that they are the most precious literary heritage of the human race. His words, like His miracles, were expressions of Himself, and everyone of them has in it something of the grandeur of His character.

86. The form of the preaching of JESUS was essentially Jewish. *The Oriental mind does not work in the same way as the mind of the West.* Our thinking and speaking, when at their best, are fluent, expansive, closely reasoned. The kind of discourse which we admire is one which takes up an important subject, divides it out into different branches, treats it fully under each of the heads, closely articulates part to part, and closes with a moving appeal to the feelings, so as to sway the will to some practical result. *The Oriental mind, on the contrary, loves to brood long on a single point, to turn it round and round, to [65] gather up all the truth about it in a focus, and pour it forth in a few pointed and memorable words.* It is concise, epigrammatic, oracular. A Western speaker's discourse is a systematic structure, or like a chain in which link is firmly knit to link; an Oriental's is like the sky at night, full of innumerable burning points shining forth from a dark background.

87. Such was the form of the teaching of JESUS. It consisted of numerous sayings, everyone of which contained the greatest possible amount of truth in the smallest possible compass, and was expressed in language so concise and pointed as to stick in the memory like an arrow. Read them, and you will find that everyone of them, as you ponder it, sucks the mind in and in like a whirlpool, till it is lost in the depths. You will find, too, that there are very few of them which you do not know by heart. They have found their way into the memory of Christendom as no other words have done. Even before the meaning has been apprehended, the perfect, proverb-like

expression lodges itself fast in the mind.

88. But there was another characteristic of the form of JESUS' teaching. *It was full of figures of speech.* He thought in images. He had ever been a loving and accurate observer of nature around Him - of the colors of the flowers, the ways of the birds, the growth of the trees, the vicissitudes of the seasons - and an equally keen observer of the ways of men in all parts of life - in religion, in business, in the home. The result was that He could neither think nor speak without His thought running into the mould of some natural image. His preaching was alive with such references, and therefore full of color, movement and changing forms. There were no abstract statements in it; they were all changed into pictures. Thus, in His sayings, we can still see the aspects of the country and the life of the time as in a panorama - the lilies, whose gorgeous beauty His eyes feasted on, waving [66] in the fields; the sheep following the shepherd; the broad and narrow city gates; the virgins with their lamps awaiting in the darkness the bridal procession; the Pharisee with his broad phylacteries and the publican with bent head at prayer together in the temple; the rich man seated in his palace at a feast, and the beggar lying at his gate with the dogs licking his sores; and a hundred other pictures that lay bare the inner and minute life of the time, over which history in general sweeps heedlessly with majestic stride.

89. But the most characteristic form of speech He made use of was the parable. It was a combination of the two qualities already mentioned-concise, memorable expression, and a figurative style. It used an incident, taken from common life and rounded into a gem-like picture, to set forth some corresponding truth in the higher and spiritual region. It was a favorite Jewish mode of putting truth, but JESUS imparted to it by far the richest and most perfect development. About one-third of all His sayings which have been preserved to us consists of parables. This shows how they stuck in the memory. In the same way the hearers of the sermons of any preacher will probably, after a few years, remember the illustrations they have contained far better than anything else in them. How these parables have remained in the memory of all generations since! The Prodigal Son, the Sower, the Ten Virgins, the Good Samaritan, - these and many others are pictures hung up in millions of minds. What passages in the greatest masters of expression - in Homer, in Virgil, in Dante, in Shakespeare - have secured for themselves so universal a hold on men, or been felt to be so fadelessly fresh and true? He never went far for His illustrations. As a master of painting will make you, with a morsel of chalk or a burnt stick, a face at which you must laugh, or weep, or wonder, so JESUS took the commonest objects and incidents around Him - the sewing of a piece of cloth on [67] an old garment, the bursting of an old bottle, the children playing in the market-place at weddings and funerals, or the tumbling of a hut in a storm - to change them into perfect pictures, and to make them the vehicles for conveying to the world immortal truth. No wonder the crowds followed Him! Even the simplest could delight in such pictures and carry away as a life-long possession the expression at least of His ideas, though it might require the thought of centuries to pierce their crystalline depths. There never was speaking so simple yet so profound, so pictorial yet so absolutely true.

90. Such were the qualities of His style. The qualities of the Preacher Himself have been preserved to us in the criticisms of His hearers, and are manifest in the remains of His addresses which the Gospels contain.

91. The most prominent of them seems to have been Authority: "The people were astonished at His doctrine, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes." The first

thing His hearers were struck with was the contrast between His words and the preaching which they were wont to hear from the scribes in the synagogues. These were the exponents of the deadest and driest system of theology that has ever passed in any age for religion. Instead of expounding the Scriptures, which were in their hands, and would have lent living power to their words, they retailed the opinions of commentators, and were afraid to advance any statement, unless it was backed by the authority of some master. Instead of dwelling on the great themes of justice and mercy, love and GOD, they tortured the sacred text into a ceremonial manual, and preached on the proper breadth of phylacteries, the proper postures for prayer, the proper length of fasts, the distance which might be walked on the Sabbath, and so forth; for in these things the religion of the time consisted. In order to see anything in modern times at all like the preaching [68] which then prevailed, we must go back to the Reformation period, when, as the historian of Knox tells us, the harangues delivered by the monks were empty, ridiculous, and wretched in the extreme. "Legendary tales concerning the founder of some religious order, the miracles he performed, his combats with the devil, his watchings, fastings, flagellations; the virtues of holy water, chrism, crossing, and exorcism; the horrors of purgatory, and the numbers released from it by the intercessions of some powerful saint - these, with low jests, table-talk, and fireside scandal, formed the favorite topics of the preachers, and were served up to the people instead of the pure, salutary, and sublime doctrines of the Bible." Perhaps the contrast which the Scottish people three and a half centuries ago felt between such harangues and the noble words of Wishart and Knox, may convey to our mind as good an idea as can be got of the effect of the preaching of JESUS on His contemporaries. He knew nothing of the authority of masters and schools of interpretation, but spoke as One whose own eyes had gazed on the objects of the eternal world.

- He needed none to tell Him of GOD or of man, for He knew both perfectly.
- He was possessed with the sense of a mission, which drove Him on and imparted earnestness to every word and gesture.
- He knew Himself sent from GOD, and the words He spoke to be not His own, but GOD's.
- He did not hesitate to tell those who neglected His words that, in the judgment, they would be condemned by the Ninevites and the Queen of Sheba, who had listened to Jonah and Solomon, for they were hearing One greater than any prophet or king of the olden time.
- He warned them that on their acceptance or rejection of the message He bore would depend their future weal or woe.

This was the tone of earnestness, of majesty; and authority that smote His hearers with awe.

92. Another quality which the people remarked in Him was **Boldness**: "**Lo, He speaketh boldly.**" This appeared [69] the more wonderful because He was an unlettered man, who had not passed through the schools of Jerusalem or received the imprimatur of any earthly authority. But this quality came from the same source as His authoritativeness. Timidity usually springs from self-consciousness. The teacher who is afraid of his audience, and respects the persons of the learned and the great, is thinking of himself and of what will be said of his performance. But he who feels himself driven on by a divine mission forgets himself. All audiences are alike to him, be they gentle or simple; he is thinking only of the message he has to deliver. JESUS was ever looking the spiritual and eternal realities in the face; the spell of their greatness held Him, and all human distinctions disappeared in their presence; men of every class were only men to Him. He was borne along on the torrent of His mission, and what might happen to Himself could not

make Him stop to question or quail. He discovered His boldness chiefly in attacking the abuses and ideals of the time. It would be a complete mistake to think of Him as all mildness and meekness. There is scarcely any element more conspicuous in His words than a strain of fierce indignation. It was an age of shams above almost any that have ever been. They occupied all high places. They paraded themselves in social life, occupied the chairs of learning, and above all debased every part of religion. Hypocrisy had become so universal that it had ceased even to doubt itself. The ideals of the people were utterly mean and mistaken. One can feel throbbing through His words, from first to last, an indignation against all this, which had begun with His earliest observation in Nazareth and ripened with His increasing knowledge of the times. The things which were highly esteemed among men, He broadly asserted, were abomination in the sight of GOD. There never was in the history of speech a polemic so scathing, so annihilating, as His against the figures to which the reverence of the multitude [70] had been paid before His withering words fell on them - the scribe, the Pharisee, the priest, and the Levite.

93. A third quality which His hearers remarked was Power. "**His word was with power.**" This was the result of that unction of the Holy One, without which even the most solemn truths fall on the ear without effect. He was filled with the Spirit without measure. Therefore the truth possessed Him. It burned and swelled in His own bosom, and He spoke it forth from heart to heart. He had the Spirit not only in such degree as to fill Himself, but so as to be able to impart it to others. It overflowed with His words and seized the souls of His hearers, filling with enthusiasm the mind and the heart.

94. A fourth quality which was observed in His preaching, and was surely a very prominent one, was Graciousness: "**They wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth.**" In spite of His tone of authority and His fearless and scathing attacks on the times, there was diffused over all He said a glow of grace and love. Here especially His character spoke. How could He who was the incarnation of love help letting the glow and warmth of the heavenly fire that dwelt in Him spread over His words? The scribes of the time were hard, proud, and loveless. They flattered the rich and honored the learned, but of the great mass of their hearers they said, "**This people, which knoweth not the law, is cursed.**" But to JESUS every soul was infinitely precious. It mattered not under what humble dress or social deformity the pearl was hidden; it mattered not even beneath what rubbish and filth of sin it was buried; He never missed it for a moment. - Therefore He spoke to His hearers of every grade with the same respect. Surely it was the divine love Itself, uttering itself from the innermost recess of the divine being, that spoke in the parables of the fifteenth of Luke.

95. Such were some of the qualities of the Preacher. [71] And one more may be mentioned, which may be said to embrace all the rest, and is perhaps the highest quality of public speech. He addressed men as men, not as members of any class or possessors of any peculiar culture. The differences which divide men, such as wealth, rank: and education, are on the surface. The elements in which they are all alike - the broad sense of the understanding, the great passions of the heart, the primary instincts of the conscience - are profound. Not that these are the same in all men. In some they are deeper, in others shallower; but in all they are far deeper than aught else. He who addresses them appeals to the deepest thing in his hearers. He will be equally intelligible to all. Every hearer will receive his own portion from him; the small and shallow mind will get as much as it can take, and the largest and deepest will get its fill at the same feast. This is why the words of JESUS are perennial in their freshness. They are for all generations, and equally for

all. They appeal to the deepest elements in human nature to-day in England or China as much as they did in Palestine when they were spoken.

96. When we come to inquire what the matter of JESUS' preaching consisted of, we perhaps naturally expect to find Him expounding the system of doctrine which we are ourselves acquainted with, in the forms, say, of the Catechism or the Confession of Faith. But what we find is very different. He did not make use of any system of doctrine. We can scarcely doubt, indeed, that all the numerous and varied ideas of His preaching, as well as those which He never expressed, co-existed in His mind as one world of rounded truth. But they did not so co-exist in His teaching. He did not use theological phraseology, speaking of the Trinity, of predestination, of effectual calling, although the ideas which these terms cover underlay His words, and it is the undoubted task of science to bring them forth. [72] But He spoke in the language of life, and concentrated His preaching on a few burning points, that touched the heart, the conscience, and the time.

97. The central idea and the commonest phrase of His preaching was "**the kingdom of God.**" It will be remembered how many of His parables begin with "**The kingdom of Heaven is like**" so and so. He said, "**I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also,**" thereby characterizing the matter of His preaching; and in the same way He is said to have sent forth the apostles "**to preach the kingdom of God.**" He did not invent the phrase. It was a historical one handed down from the past, and was common in the mouths of His contemporaries. The Baptist had made large use of it, the burden of his message being, "**The kingdom of God is at hand.**"

98. What did it signify? It meant the new era, which the prophets had predicted and the saints had looked for. JESUS announced that it had come, and that He had brought it. The time of waiting was fulfilled. Many prophets and righteous men, He told His contemporaries, had desired to see the things which they saw, but had not seen them. He declared that so great were the privileges and glories of the new time, that the least partaker of them was greater than the Baptist, though he had been the greatest representative of the old time.

99. All this was no more than His contemporaries would have expected to hear, if they had recognized that the kingdom of GOD was really come. But they looked round, and asked where the new era was which JESUS said He had brought. Here He and they were at complete variance.

- They emphasized the first part of the phrase, "**the kingdom,**" He the second, "**of God.**"
- They expected the new era to appear in magnificent material forms - in a kingdom of which GOD indeed was to be the ruler, but which was to show itself in worldly splendor, in force of arms, in a [73] universal empire. JESUS saw the new era in an empire of GOD over the loving heart and the obedient will.
- They looked for it outside. He said, "**It is within you.**"
- They looked for a period of external glory and happiness. He placed the glory and blessedness of the new time in character.

So He began His Sermon on the Mount, that great manifesto of the new era, with a series of "**Blesseds.**" But the blessedness was. entirely that of character. And it was a character totally different from that which was then looked up to as imparting glory and happiness to its possessor

- that of the proud Pharisee, the wealthy Sadducee, or the learned scribe. Blessed, said He, are the poor in spirit, they that mourn, the meek, they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake.

100. The main drift of His preaching was to set forth this conception of the kingdom of GOD, the character of its members, their blessedness in the love and communion of their Father in Heaven, and their prospects in the glory of the future world. He exhibited the contrast between it and the formal religion of the time, with its lack of spirituality and its substitution of ceremonial observances for character. He invited all classes into the kingdom - the rich by showing, as in the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus, the vanity and danger of seeking their blessedness in wealth; and the poor by penetrating them with the sense of their dignity, persuading them with the most overflowing affection and winning words that the only true wealth was in character, and assuring them that, if they sought first the kingdom of GOD, their heavenly Father, who fed the ravens and clothed the lilies, would not suffer them to want.

101. But the center and soul of His preaching was Himself. He contained within Himself the new era. He not only announced it, but created it. The new character [74] which made men subjects of the kingdom and sharers of its privileges was to be got from Him alone. Therefore the practical issue of every address of CHRIST was the command to come to Him, to learn of Him, to follow Him. "**Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden,**" woo the key-note, the deepest and final word of all His discourses.

102. It is impossible to read the discourses of JESUS without remarking that, wonderful as they are, yet some of the most characteristic doctrines of Christianity, as it is set forth in the Epistles of Paul and now cherished in the minds of the most devoted and enlightened Christians, hold a very inconsiderable place in them. Especially is this the case in regard to the great doctrines of the gospel as to how a sinner is reconciled to GOD, and how, in a pardoned soul, the character is gradually produced which makes it like CHRIST and pleasing to the Father. The lack of reference to such doctrines may, indeed, be much exaggerated, the fact being that there is not one prominent doctrine of the great apostle the germs of which are not to be found in the teaching of CHRIST Himself. Yet the contrast ill marked enough to have given some color for denying that the distinctive doctrines of Paul are genuine elements of Christianity. But the true explanation of the phenomenon is very different. JESUS was not a mere teacher. His character was greater than His words, and so was His work. The chief part of that work was to atone for the sins of the world by His death on the cross. But His nearest followers never would believe that He was to die, and, until His death happened, it was impossible to explain its far-reaching significance. Paul's most distinctive doctrines are merely expositions of the meaning of two great facts - the death of CHRIST and the mission of the Spirit by the glorified Redeemer. *It is obvious that these facts could not be fully explained in the words of JESUS Himself, when they had not yet taken place; but [75] to suppress the inspired explanation of them would be to extinguish the light of the gospel and rob CHRIST of His crowning glory.*

103. The audience of Jesus varied exceedingly both in size and character on different occasions. Very frequently it was the great multitude. He addressed them everywhere - on the mountain, on the sea-shore, on the highway, in the synagogues, in the temple courts. But He was quite willing to speak with a single individual, however humble. He seized every opportunity of doing so. Al-

though He was worn-out with fatigue, He talked to the woman at the well; He received Nicodemus alone; He taught Mary in her home. There are said to be nineteen such private interviews mentioned in the Gospels. They leave to His followers a memorable example. This is perhaps the most effective of all forms of instruction, as it is certainly the best test of earnestness. A man who preaches to thousands with enthusiasm may be a mere orator, but the man who seeks the opportunity of speaking closely of the welfare of their souls to individuals must have a real fire from Heaven burning in his heart.

104. Often His audience consisted of the circle of His disciples. His preaching divided His hearers. He has Himself, in such parables as the Sower, the Tares and the Wheat, the Wedding Feast, and so forth, described with unequalled vividness its effects on different classes. Some it utterly repelled; others heard it with wonder, without being touched in the heart; others were affected for a time, but soon returned to their old interests. It is terrible to think how few there were, even when the Son of GOD was preaching, who heard unto salvation. Those who did so gradually formed round Him a body of disciples. They followed Him about, hearing all His discourses, and often He spoke to them alone. Such were the five hundred to whom He appeared in Galilee after His resurrection. [76] Some of them were women, such as Mary Magdalene, Susanna, and Joanna the wife of Herod's steward, who, being wealthy, gladly supplied His few simple wants. To these disciples He gave a more thorough instruction than to the crowd. He explained to them in private whatever was obscure in His public teaching. More than once He made the strange statement that He spake in parables to the multitudes in order that, though hearing, they might not understand. This could only mean, that those who had no real interest in the truth were sent away with the mere beautiful shell, but that the obscurity was intended to provoke to further inquiry, as a veil half-drawn over a beautiful race intensifies the desire to see it; and to those who had a spiritual craving for more He gladly communicated the hidden secret. These, when the nation as a whole declared itself unworthy or being the medium of the Messiah's world-wide influence, became the nucleus of that spiritual society, elevated above all local limitations and distinctions of rank and nationality, in which the spirit and doctrine of CHRIST were to be spread and perpetuated in the world.

105. **The Apostolate** - Perhaps the formation of the Apostolate ought to be placed side by side with miracles and preaching as a third means by which He did His work. The men who became the twelve apostles were at first only ordinary disciples like many others. This, at least, was the position of such of them as were already His followers during the first year of His ministry. At the opening of His Galilean activity, their attachment to Him entered on a second stage: He called them to give up their ordinary employments and be with Him constantly. And probably not many weeks afterwards, He promoted them to the third and final stage of nearness to Himself, by ordaining them to be apostles.

106. It was when His work grew so extensive and pressing [77] that it was quite impossible for Him to overtake it all, that He multiplied Himself, so to speak, by appointing them His assistants. He commissioned them to teach the simpler elements of His doctrine, and conferred on them miraculous powers similar to His own. In this way many towns were evangelized which He had not time to visit, and many persons cured who could not have been brought into contact with Himself. But, as future events proved, His alms in their appointment were much more far-reaching. His work was for all time and for the whole world. It could not be accomplished in a single lifetime. He foresaw this, and made provision for it by the early choice of agents who

might take up His plans after He was gone, and in whom He might still extend His influence over mankind. He Himself wrote nothing. It may be thought that writing would have been the best way of perpetuating His influence and giving the world a perfect image of Himself; and we can not help imagining with a glow of strong desire what a volume penned by His hand would have been. But for wise reasons He abstained from this kind of work and resolved to live after death in the lives of chosen men.

107. It is surprising to see what sort of persons He selected for so grand a destiny. They did not belong to the influential and learned classes. No doubt the heads and leaders of the nation ought to have been the organs of their Messiah, but they proved themselves totally unworthy of the great vocation. He was able to do without them; He needed not the influence of carnal power and wisdom. Ever went to work with the elements of character that are not bound to any station of life or grade of culture, He did not scruple to commit His cause to twelve simple men, destitute of learning and belonging to the common people. He made the selection after a night spent in prayer, and doubtless after many days of deliberation. The event showed with what insight into character He [78] had acted. They turned out to be instruments thoroughly fitted for the great design; two at least, John and Peter, were men of supreme gifts; and, though one turned out a traitor, and the choice of him will probably, after all explanations, ever remain a very partially explained mystery, yet the selection of agents who were at first so unlikely, but in the end proved so successful, will always be one of the chief monuments of the incomparable originality of JESUS.

108. It would, however, be a very inadequate account of His relation to the Twelve merely to point out the insight with which He discerned in them the germs of fitness for their grand future. They became very great men, and in the founding of the Christian Church achieved a work of immeasurable importance. They may be said, in a sense they little dreamed of, to sit on thrones ruling the modern world. They stand like a row of noble pillars towering far across the flats of time. But the sunlight that shines on them, and makes them visible, comes entirely from Him. He gave them all their greatness; and theirs is one of the most striking evidences of His. What must He have been whose influence imparted to them such magnitude of character, and made them fit for so gigantic a task! At first they were rude and carnal in the extreme. What hope was there that they would ever be able to appreciate the designs of a mind like His, to inherit His work, to possess in any degree a spirit so exquisite, and transmit to future generations a faithful image of His character? But He educated them with the most affectionate patience, bearing with their vulgar hopes and their clumsy misunderstandings of His meaning. Never forgetting for a moment the part they were to play in the future, He made their training His most constant work. They were much more constantly in His company than even the general body of His disciples, seeing all He did in public and hearing all He said. They were often His only audience, [79] and then He unveiled to them His glories and mysteries of His doctrine, sowing in their minds the seeds of truth, which time and experience were by and by to fructify. But the most important part of their training was one which was perhaps at the time little noticed, though it was producing splendid results - the silent and constant influence of His character on theirs. He drew them to Himself and stamped His own image on them. It was this which made them the men they became. For this, more than all else, the generations of those who love Him look back to them with envy. We admire and adore at a distance the qualities of His character; but what must 'it have been to see them in the unity of life, and for years to feel their moulding pressure! Can we recall with any fulness the features of this character, whose glory they beheld and under whose power they lived?

109. **The Human Character of JESUS** - Perhaps the most obvious feature which they would remark in Him was Purposefulness. This certainly is the ground-tone which sounds in all His sayings which have been preserved to us, and the pulse which we feel beating in all His recorded actions. He was possessed with a purpose which guided and drove Him on. Most lives aim at nothing in particular, but drift along, under the influence of varying moods and instincts or on the currents of society, and achieve nothing. But JESUS evidently had a definite object before Him which absorbed His thoughts and drew out His energies. He would often give as a reason for not doing something, "**Mine hour is not yet come,**" as if His design absorbed every moment, and every hour had its own allotted part of the task. This imparted an earnestness and rapidity of execution to His life which most lives altogether lack. It saved Him, too, from that dispersion of energy on details, and carefulness about little things, on which those who obey no definite call throw [80] themselves away, and made His life, various as were its activities, an unbroken unity.

110. Very closely connected with this quality was another prominent one, which may be called Faith, and by which is meant His astonishing confidence in the accomplishment of His purpose, and apparent disregard both of means and opposition. If it be considered in the most general way how vast His aim was - to reform His nation and begin an everlasting and world-wide religious movement - if the opposition which He encountered, and foresaw His cause would have to meet at every stage of its progress, be considered; and if it be remembered what, as a man, He was - an unlettered Galilean peasant - His quiet and unwavering confidence in His success will appear only less remarkable than His success itself. After reading the Gospels through, one asks in wonder what He did to produce so mighty an impression on the world. He constructed no elaborate machinery to ensure the effect. He did not lay hold of the centers of influence - learning, wealth, government, etc. It is true He instituted the Church. But He left no detailed explanations of its nature or rules for its constitution. This was the simplicity of faith, which does not contrive and prepare, but simply goes onward and does the work. It was the quality which He said could remove mountains, and which He chiefly desiderated in His followers. This was the foolishness of the gospel, of which Paul boasted, as it was going forth, in the recklessness of power, but with laughable meagerness of equipment, to overcome the Greek and Roman world.

111. A third prominent feature of His character was Originality. Most lives are easily explained. They are mere products of circumstances, and copies of thousands like them which surround or have preceded them. The habits and customs of the country to which we belong, the fashion and tastes of our generation, the traditions of our education, the prejudices of our class, the opinions of our [81] school or sect - these form us. We do work determined for us by a fortuitous concurrence of circumstances; our convictions are fixed on us by authority from without, instead of waxing naturally from within; our opinions are blown to us in fragments on every wind. But what circumstances made the Man CHRIST JESUS? There never was an age more dry and barren than that in which He was born. He was like a tall, fresh palm springing out of a desert. What was there in the petty life of Nazareth to produce so gigantic a character? How could the notoriously wicked village send forth such, breathing purity? It may have been that a scribe taught Him the vocables and grammar of knowledge, but His doctrine was a complete contradiction of all that the scribes taught. The fashions of the sects never laid hold of His free spirit. How clearly, amidst the sounds which filled the ears of His time, He heard the neglected voice of truth, which was quite different from them! How clearly, behind all the pretentious and accepted forms of piety, He saw the lovely and neglected figure of real godliness! He cannot be

explained by anything which was in the world and might have produced Him.

- He grew from within.
- He directed His eyes straight on the facts of nature and life and believed what He saw, instead of allowing His vision to be tutored by what others had said they saw.
- He was equally loyal to the truth in His words.
- He went forth and spoke out without hesitation what He believed, though it shook to their foundations the institutions, the creeds, and customs of His country, and loosened the opinions of the populace in a hundred points in which they had been educated.

It may, indeed, be said that, though the Jewish nation of His own time was an utterly dry ground, out of which no green and great thing could be expected to grow, He reverted to the earlier history of His nation and nourished His mind on the ideas of Moses and the prophets. There is some truth in this. But affectionate and constant as was His [82] familiarity with them, He handled them with a free and fearless hand. He redeemed them from themselves and exhibited in perfection the ideas which they taught only in germ. What a contrast between the covenant GOD of Israel and the Father in Heaven whom He revealed; between the temple, with its priests and bloody sacrifices, and the worship in spirit and in truth; between the national and ceremonial morality of the Law and the morality of the conscience and the heart! Even in comparison with the figures of Moses, Elijah and Isaiah, He towers aloft in lonely originality.

112. A fourth and very glorious feature of His character was Love to Men. It has been already said that He was possessed with an overmastering purpose. But beneath a great life-purpose there must be a great passion, which shapes and sustains it. Love to men was the passion which directed and inspired Him. How it sprang up and grew in the seclusion of Nazareth, and on what materials it fed we have not been informed with any detail. We only know that, when He appeared in public, it was a master-passion, which completely swallowed up self-love, filled Him with boundless pity for human misery, and enabled Him to go forward without once looking back in the undertaking to which He devoted Himself. We know only in general that it drew its support from the conception He had of the infinite value of the human soul. It overleapt all the limits which other men have to put to their benevolence. Differences of class and nationality usually cool men's interest in each other; in nearly all countries it has been considered a virtue to hate enemies; and it is generally agreed to loathe and avoid those who have outraged the laws of respectability. But He paid no heed to these conventions; the overpowering sense of the preciousness which He perceived in enemy, foreigner, and outcast alike, forbidding Him. This marvellous love shaped the purpose of His life. It gave Him the most tender and [83] intense sympathy with every form of pain and misery. It was His deepest reason for adopting the calling of a healer. Wherever help was most needed, thither His merciful heart drew Him. But it was especially to save the soul that His love impelled Him. He knew this was the real jewel, which everything should be done to rescue, and that its miseries and perils were the most dangerous of all. There has sometimes been love to others without this vital aim. But His love was directed by wisdom to the truest weal of those He loved. He knew He was doing His very best for them when He was saving them from their sins.

113. But the crowning attribute of His human character was Love to GOD. It is the supreme honor and attainment of man to be one with GOD in feeling, thought and purpose. JESUS had this in perfection. To us it is very difficult to realize GOD. The mass of men scarcely think about Him at all; and even the godliest confess that it costs them severe effort to discipline their minds

into the habit of constantly realizing Him. When we do think of Him, it is with a painful sense of a disharmony between what is in us and what is in Him. We cannot remain, even for a few minutes, in His presence without the sense, in greater or less degree, that His thoughts are not our thoughts, nor His ways our ways. With JESUS it was not so.

- He realized GOD always.
- He never spent an hour,
- He never did an action, without direct reference to Him.

GOD was about Him like the atmosphere He breathed or the sunlight in which He walked.

- His thoughts were GOD's thoughts;
- His desires were never in the least different from GOD's;
- His purpose, He was perfectly sure, was GOD's purpose for Him.

How did He attain this absolute harmony with GOD? To a large extent it must be attributed to the perfect harmony or His nature within itself, yet in some measure.

He got it by the same means by which we laboriously seek it:

- by the study of GOD's thoughts and purposes in His Word, which, from His childhood, was [84] His constant delight;
- by cultivating all His life long the habit of prayer, for which He found time even when He had not time to eat; and
- by patiently resisting temptations to entertain thoughts and purposes of His own different from GOD's.

This it was which gave Him such faith and fearlessness in His work: He knew that the call to do it had come from GOD, and that He was immortal till it was done. This was what made Him, with all His self-consciousness and originality, the pattern of meekness and submission; for He was for ever bringing every thought and wish into obedience to His Father's will. This was the secret of the peace and majestic calmness which imparted such a grandeur to His demeanor in the most trying hours of life. He knew that the worst that could happen to Him was His Father's will for Him; and this was enough. He had ever at hand a retreat of perfect rest, silence and sunshine, into which He could retire from the clamor and confusion around Him. This was the great secret He bequeathed to His followers, when He said to them at parting, "**Peace I leave with you; My peace I give unto you.**"

114. The Sinlessness of JESUS has been often dwelt on as the crowning attribute of His character. The Scriptures, which so frankly record the errors of their very greatest heroes, such as Abraham and Moses, have no sins of His to record. There is no more prominent characteristic of the saints of antiquity than their penitence: the more supremely saintly they were, the more abundant and bitter were their tears and lamentations over their sinfulness. But although it is acknowledged by all that JESUS was the supreme religious figure of history, He never exhibited this characteristic of saintliness: He confessed no sin. Must it not have been because He had no sin to confess? Yet the idea of sinlessness is too negative to express the perfection of His character. He was sinless; but He was so because He was absolutely full of love. Sin [85] against God is merely the expression of lack of love to GOD, and sin against man of lack of love to man.

A being quite full of love to both GOD and man cannot possibly sin against either. This fulness of love to His Father and His fellow-men, ruling every expression of His being, constituted the perfection. of His character.

115. To the impression produced on them by their long-continued contact with their Master the Twelve owed all they became. We cannot trace with any fulness at what time they began to realize the central truth or the Christianity they were afterwards to publish to the world - that behind the tenderness and majesty of this human character there was in Him something still more august - or by what stages their impressions ripened to the full conviction that in Him perfect manhood was in union with perfect Deity. This was the goal of all the revelations of Himself which He made to them. But the breakdown of their faith at His death shows how immature up till that time must have been their convictions in regard to His personality, however worthily they were able, in certain happy hours, to express their faith in Him. It was the experience of the Resurrection and Ascension which gave to the fluid impressions, which had long been accumulating in their minds, the touch by which they were made to crystallize into the immovable conviction, that in Him with whom it had been vouchsafed to them to associate so intimately, "**God was manifest in the flesh.**" [86] [Page 87 left blank]

~ end of chapter 5 ~
