

The Teaching of CHRIST

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PART III

THE TEACHING OF CHRIST CONCERNING THE KINGDOM OF GOD

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE CRISIS

“When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?” (Matthew 16:13).

“And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16)

“For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works” (Matthew 16:27).

“Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28).

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

“Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32).

“Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately” (Luke 12:35-36).

“For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10).

“And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Luke 22:29-30).

WHEN dealing with some of the phases of the Kingdom as indicated in the references of JESUS, we noted as the final fact that the Kingdom is to be established on the earth by processes, culminating in a crisis.

With the processes we have dealt;

- The Cross as fundamental;
- The Church as instrumental; and
- The conflict as experiential.

Coming now to the crisis to which our Lord referred, we have immediately to recognize how large a place the subject occupied in the teaching of JESUS. He said far more concerning His advent than He did concerning either His Cross or His Church.

We will, therefore, first survey the field; secondly, examine the first explicit declaration; and finally, attempt to summarize the facts revealed.

In surveying the teaching of JESUS on this subject, we shall confine ourselves to those words of the Lord in which He distinctly dealt with the second advent in its bearing on the Kingdom; omitting all references to that advent which had other reasons and other applications. In referring to this subject He had two methods, which we may describe as parabolic, and specific; and we shall group His sayings in that way.

The parables of the Kingdom may be divided into two groups, those delivered in set discourse, recorded in the thirteenth chapter of Matthew; and those incidentally spoken upon other occasions, and almost exclusively to His disciples, even if in the hearing of the crowd.

In the thirteenth chapter of Matthew we have seven parables dealing directly with the Kingdom of Heaven, those of the sower, the dandelion, the mustard-seed, the leaven, the treasure, the pearl, and the drag-net; and a final one setting forth the responsibility of those who have this teaching, that of the householder.

In so far as these parables deal with the processes of the Kingdom, they reveal a conflict; the continued opposition of two persistent activities, antagonistic to each other; or else they reveal some selective activity which finds treasure in the earth and takes it out therefrom, but still leaves the Kingdom unestablished.

Or, to put the matter into slightly different form, in these parables of the thirteenth chapter, we have teaching concerning the Kingdom, but nothing final; no description of its ultimate conditions, no description of the prevailing glories; only a description of certain processes through which the Kingdom passes, only pictures covering a certain period of time, and revealing the movement towards a Kingdom. That period is one of conflict, of antagonism, or, as I have already said, of the operation of two opposing activities.

In two of these parables a definite crisis is referred to; that of the dandelion, and that of the drag-net.

In each of them our Lord referred to "the consummation of the age," not the end of all the ages, but the consummation of one particular age, the age which He was then describing in His parables. He declared, moreover, in each of these two parables that the consummation of the age would be brought about by some definite interposition of His own. Neither in the parable of the dandel, nor that of the drag-net did He make any definite reference to His personal advent, but He did declare that He would take hold of the reins of authority, and sending His angels into the midst of human affairs, would separate between the evil and the good, casting out of the Kingdom all the things of evil, and bringing to final fruition and glory the things of goodness which have resulted from the operation of His servants through the processes.

Thus in these two parables, the truth is clearly revealed, that the final victory over evil is to be won by a definite crisis under His own guidance, His own authority, and His own administration.

Glancing next at those which were incidentally spoken, we find three definitely dealing with the relation of His advent to the Kingdom.

The first is that of the waiting servants, recorded by Luke. The crisis for which these servants were bidden to wait was that of the return of their lord and master. This parable is closely linked to that gracious word of JESUS, **"Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom"** (Luke 12:32).

Having said that, He told His disciples how they might come into possession of that which it was their Father's good pleasure to give them. They were to sell what they had, and invest their wealth as members of His Kingdom in such a way as to bring the Kingdom. He Finally illuminated that instruction by the parable beginning:

"Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord" (Matthew 12:35).

The next is the parable of the laborers in the vineyard, recorded by Matthew 20:1-16. Notice the crisis of eventide, when the master comes, and the servants appear before him to receive the rewards of toil.

The last is the parable of the marriage feast, also recorded by Matthew (22:1-14). The particular value of this in our present study is that of the crisis created when the King Himself appears, and the man without the wedding garment is sent forth into the darkness outside the Kingdom.

Thus in all the parabolic teaching a crisis was referred to; and it is quite clear that, in the mind of the Lord, the crisis would be created by His own return.

All this, however, was not merely referred to in parabolic teaching; it was definitely stated. At Caesarea Philippi He for the first time explicitly declared that He would come again. Each of the evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, place that declaration for the first time in that particular relation. After the confession of Peter, after the avowed purpose of building the Church, after the declared necessity for the way of the Cross, He said, **"For the Son of man shall come in the**

glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works” (Matthew 16:27).

Quite clearly, according to that declaration of our Lord, His own personal advent is to constitute the crisis by which the Kingdom will be established.

In the Olivet prophecies (Matthew 23, 24) the same truth was clearly declared. The culmination of the conflict would be when He, the Son of Man, should come; the responsibility of stewards during the period of His absence was always to be fulfilled in the light of His return; and when, looking through the centuries, He foretold the hour of national reconstruction, He associated it with His own coming, declaring that He would return, and before Him the nations should be gathered together, and that under His supervision the great work should go forward.

Finally, under the shadow of the Cross, in His last discourse with His own disciples, He said unto them, **“And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel”** (Luke 22:29-30).

Now this is to sweep over the whole ground of His teaching, not to interpret it in detail, but to lay emphasis upon the fact that He confidently affirmed, and persistently declared, that He Himself would actually and personally return, and that by that return the crisis would arrive in which the processes of this period would find fulfillment and the Kingdom of GOD would be established.

But now, in order to a little more careful consideration we concentrate upon what has been already described as the first explicit declaration: **“For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works”** (Matthew 16:27).

It requires a very great deal of the wisdom which is of this world to escape from the simple meaning of that declaration of JESUS. If, in order to hear these words, we can get away from this particular age, and stand among those disciples at Caesarea Philippi, and listen with them, hearing the words as they heard them, from the standpoint of their consciousness, we shall be far nearer to their meaning than in any other way.

Let us first observe the title which our Lord employed in this statement, **“The Son of Man.”** What did that mean to the men who heard it? The connection of the ancient writings is quite evident. In the Old Testament it rarely occurs, and, indeed, it may be said that it is only found specifically and definitely in one particular prophecy, that of Daniel, and it appears there, only to pass out of sight almost immediately.

“I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed” (Daniel 7:13-14).

Daniel asked for an explanation of his vision, and in the course of that explanation, these are the words dealing with this particular part of it:

"But the judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and to destroy it unto the end. And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him" (Daniel 7:26-27).

Now if, at this distance of time, I should affirm that when JESUS made use of the title "**Son of Man**" for Himself, He did so intending to assume the title as it appeared in Daniel, it would be a supposition to which some objection might very properly be taken. But when we consider that this particular word in Daniel had produced the profoundest effect upon the Jewish theologians, and that the teachers of the time were constantly employing it in reference to Messiah; then we shall see that it was impossible for any new teacher to employ it, without giving those who heard Him do so the impression that He was using it in that sense.

Extracts from two Jewish writers will show the effect that had been produced upon them by the prophecy of Daniel.

The book of Enoch was certainly pre-Christian; - it is not quite easy to date it, but we cover all the ground of suggestion by declaring it was written somewhere in the century preceding the coming of CHRIST, somewhere between 94 and 4 B. C.

In that book are these words:

"And there; saw One who had a Head of Days, and His head was white like wool, and with Him was another being whose countenance had the appearance like one of the holy angels. And I asked the angel who went with me and showed me all the hidden things, concerning that Son of Man, who he was, and whence he was, and why he went with the Head of Days? And he answered and said unto me, This is the Son of Man who hath righteousness, with whom dwelleth righteousness, and who reveals all the treasures of that which is hidden, because the Lord of Spirits hath chosen him, and his lot before the Lord of Spirits hath surpassed everything in uprightness forever. And this Son of Man whom thou hast seen will arouse the kings and the mighty ones from their couches, and the strong from their thrones, and will loosen the reins of the strong, and grind to powder the teeth of the sinners. And He will put down the kings from their thrones and kingdoms, because they do not extol and praise Him, nor thankfully acknowledge whence the kingdom was bestowed upon them" (Enoch xlii. 1-5).

Or again, in the same book of Enoch:

"And he sat on the throne of his glory and the sum of judgment was committed unto Him, the Son of Man, and he caused the sinners, and those who had led the world astray to pass away and be destroyed from off the face of the earth" (Enoch xlix. 27).

These quotations illustrate the common thought of the time in which JESUS exercised His

ministry. The title used by Daniel had taken hold of the hearts of the subsequent teachers, and everywhere there was expectation of some apocalypse, unveiling, out-shining, manifestation, connected with the coming of the Messiah who was referred to as the Son of Man.

In the Apocrypha, in the second book of Esdras, a book written undoubtedly within the first century of the Christian era, about 81 A. D., the same ideas are found. Esdras tells of a dream in which he saw coming *"Up from the midst of the sea as it were the likeness of a man; and I beheld, and lo, that man flew with the clouds of Heaven; and when he turned his countenance to look, all things trembled that were seen under him . . . After this, I beheld, and lo, there was gathered together a multitude of men, out of number, from the four winds of Heaven, to make war against the man that had come out of the sea"* (Esdras xiii. 2, 3, 5).

When Esdras seeks the interpretation of the dream, he is told:

"Whereas thou sawest a man coming up from the midst of the sea, the same is he whom the Most High hath kept a great season, which by his own self shall deliver his creatures: and he shall order them that are left behind . . . Behold, the days come when the Most High will begin to deliver them that are upon the earth . . . and it shall be when these things shall come to pass, and the signs shall happen that; showed thee before, then shall my Son be revealed, whom thou sawest as a man ascending . . . And this my Son shall rebuke the nations which are come for their wickedness . . . And He shall destroy them without labour by the law, which is likened unto fire" (Esdras xiii. 25, 26, 29, 32, 37, 38).

All this is of importance in that it shows that our Lord used the title Son of Man, knowing that the men who heard understood it as referring to the Messiah. In the subsequent interpretation of the Master's meaning we find a return to the very views that had characterized the most illuminated teachers in the days before the Lord came Again, CHRIST used that title for Himself, not once or twice, but constantly; indeed, it was His favorite title for Himself.

In declaring the purpose of His mission, He said, **"For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost"** (Luke 19:10).

When He described the method of His mission He said, **"The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many"** (Matthew 20:28).

And now when referring to the completion of His work He said: **"For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father"** (Matthew 16:27).

Now examining His use of the title on this special occasion in the light of the whole story, everything began with His own question, **"Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?"** And when the answer came from one illuminated soul, **"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God"** (Matthew 16:13, 16).

He accepted the confession, and proceeded to make a declaration concerning His Church, His Cross, and the fact that He was coming again; and announced that by the way of His coming again, the Kingdom whose foundation must be laid in the mystery of His Cross, and whose

processes must be carried forward by the conflict of His Church, should be established in the world.

He declared that He Himself would come again, in the glory of His Father, and bringing with Him, for the administration of the affairs of His Kingdom on this earth the angels of His presence. The avowed purpose of His coming is that of the actual, immediate, visible assumption of authority; and consequent discrimination in the affairs of the world. In that coming again, there will be fulfilled the prophecy of His immediate forerunner, John the Baptist, **"Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire"** (Matthew 3:12).

That prophecy our Lord referred to in His own parabolic utterances, as He claimed that at the consummation of the age He would come for the fulfillment of that ministry, the purging of the floor, the gathering of the wheat into the garner, and the burning of chaff in unquenchable fire.

These were great figures of speech, all too narrowly interpreted oftentimes, for wheat in that figure of speech is infinitely more than individual men, and chaff may not refer to men at all; or it may, as men have given themselves over to the things of chaff. It is a picture of the Lord Himself coming at the end of the age, and bringing with Him the angels in order to aid Him in His actual ministry in this world; of His coming to destroy all things evil, and establish all things in themselves good; the winnowing of the threshing floor of the world, so that the chaff is separated from the wheat, and gathered for burning, and the wheat harvested into the treasure-house of the King.

It is a picture of a final activity of judgment, in which He will separate, not between man and man alone, but between affairs and affairs, things and things, methods and methods; destroying by His own immediate presence and government all the things that are unworthy, and conserving and establishing all that accords with the will of GOD.

In this teaching of JESUS there are many details omitted, many questions that we should like to ask are unanswered; but enough is revealed to give us courage of heart. To summarize what seem therefore to be the chief matters in this teaching.

First our Lord taught with great distinctness that the processes towards the Kingdom will culminate in a crisis; that the crisis will be created by His own coming again; that it will be as distinct, as definite as was His first coming, and no more wonderful and no more unbelievable; that the activities of His personal coming will be those of judgment. Judgment means far more than punishment. Judgment is separation, restoration, administration, government. We talk of the day of judgment as if it were a day of four and twenty hours. The day of grace has lasted two millenniums. How long may GOD's day of judgment last? It is quite certain by Biblical prophecy it will last a thousand years, for all the millennium is the day of judgment; and there are hints and gleams in these prophetic writings of a period beyond the millennium.

In the book of Revelation the story of the millennium is dismissed in a few verses; beyond the brief picture of the millennium it is declared that there will be the recrudescence of evil, for during the millennium it is but held in check, and never eliminated. But beyond, it is eradicated,

and the glorious Kingdom of the Son is that in which the tabernacle of GOD shall be with men, and He shall dwell with them.

All this must be brought to pass by His advent and His judgment of the world; that is, His direct, immediate, positive government of it. He will not come merely to reign over a people who have been subjugated to His sway by the preaching of the Gospel and missionary effort. He will come to reign over all peoples, some of whom will be antagonistic to Him at His advent; and therefore there will be a preliminary process necessary, the winnowing of the floor, the gathering out of things that offend, the casting of them out, in order to the establishment of the Kingdom. But the issue of His second coming will be the subjugation of all things to Himself.

He teaches moreover that the responsibilities of His Church in this period are those of sharing His Cross, and maintaining His conflict; and He carefully warned His disciples, in words that we need most solemnly to ponder, that the judgment is postponed until He come. Darnel and wheat must grow together until He separate them. The net must swing to the tides, and enclose all manner of fishes, until He separate them. So our business is not that of uprooting darnel, but of planting wheat. Our business is not to set up thrones of judgment before which we summon men; but to carry on the conflict with which we dealt in our previous study, the conflict of the resistance of non-resistance :-the perpetual march of victory which is the constant march of defeat. It is the way of the Cross that leads to the crowning.

These certainly are the teachings of CHRIST according to the records. Those who are wiser than He must be left to their own problems, and to their own vain conceits. Only let those who are wiser than these words of JESUS consider lest, in zeal for some false conception of GOD, they may wrong themselves, and the Kingdom of GOD.

An article appeared recently in the *British Weekly*, which is well worthy of very careful attention on the part of Christian people (June 20th, 1912). It has applications beyond this connection, but the title of it immediately arrested my attention, "Irreligious solicitude for GOD."

The writer of the article shows that Hilary first used that phrase "irreligious solicitude for GOD," and that he used it in reference to those thinkers who shrank from accepting the full mystery of the Incarnation, because it seemed to be a kind of dishonor to GOD. In that very mood some truly fine souls object to the doctrine of the actual second advent of CHRIST. Such an objection is "irreligious solicitude for GOD."

Let the objection be answered in the words of Mr. Grist. He says,

"A favorite expedient adopted by many is to assume that the apocalypse of JESUS is purely pictorial, and then proceed to 'spiritualize' this teaching by excluding every statement that does not accord with the saying '**The Kingdom of God is within you**' . . . This prevalent mode of exegesis springs in part from a false delicacy or so-called spirituality, which resents every embodiment of ideas, and decries the material side of life in order to exalt the ideal. A world less gross than the one GOD has created would be needed to satisfy this superior order of minds" (*Historic CHRIST in the Faith of To-day*," p. 427).

The man who objects to the Incarnation because it dishonors GOD, objects to that through which he gained the conception of GOD that now makes him object to the idea of Incarnation. It was only through the Incarnation that the high and exalted ideals of GOD which men have to-day were made possible.

If GOD did see fit to tabernacle in human flesh, then I worship, though I cannot understand it. The stoop is too infinite for my comprehension, but I dare not question it. And I will not be guilty of such an irreligious solicitude for GOD as to refuse to believe the apocalyptic word of JESUS, for by other words He so revealed GOD to me that I am compelled to believe Him when He affirms that He will come again, in order to establish the Kingdom.

To those who believe the teachings of CHRIST, they bring rest and strength, amid all the conflict of to-day.

We realize that all is now as He said it should be; the devil is surely sowing darnel; and so we are confident that all will be according to His word. It was in connection with these very prophecies that He said, **"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away."**

Believing that to be true, we are content in the hour of conflict, in the bearing of the Cross; for upon all the conflict there flashes the glory of the advent, and we are able to sing with mighty old Luther,

"We wait beneath the furnace blast
The pangs of transformation,
Not painlessly doth GOD recast,
And mould anew the Nation
Where wrongs expire;
Nor spares the hand
That from the land
Uproots the ancient evil.

"Then let the selfish lips be dumb,
And hushed the breath of sighing,
Before the joy of peace must come
The pains of purifying.
GOD give us grace
Each in his place
To bear his lot;
And, murmuring not,
Endure, and wait the labour."

~ end of chapter 18 ~

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