

APOSTLESHIP

G. W. North

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The selection, training and making of
apostles

G.W. North

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The text

This edition is based on the texts of Mr North's books which first appeared on the website of Lanark Christian Fellowship many years ago.

We have exercised as much care as possible in the conversion into this format, but if you are aware of any errors, could you please let us know.

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PART I — THE TWELVE APOSTLES

Chapter 1 — THE HIGH CALLING OF GOD

A Bondslave of Jesus Christ

In the third chapter of his letter to the Philippians Paul wrote that the single aim of his life while on this earth was to attain unto the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. It is a wonderful ambition, simple and comprehensive, the statement of a true apostle. To attain unto this he had let everything else go; it was the only thing that mattered to him, overriding everything else in his life. Other things had come and gone; marks had been reached, goals achieved, purposes fulfilled; these all lay behind him now, many of them forgotten — they had long since lost their attraction; he had

passed beyond them. He had gained benefit from all, but they were not his final goal, so he had left them, freeing himself to reach out for all the things yet lying ahead. A final mark was set for him. He knew it, and, disentangled and unencumbered, he pressed towards it running strongly for the prize he so much coveted.

Much has been spoken and written about and around this passage, its wording, its message, its sentiments, and much more its noble ideals. Over and over again throughout the centuries saints and scholars have considered the passage and have passed on their benefits, until at this point in time there can scarcely be anything fresh left to say about it: no attempt will be made to do so here. The purpose for the reference to this scripture is to draw attention to this apostle's narrow view of life, and to show

with what great application he pursued what he knew to be his predestiny. The calling and office of apostleship in the body of Jesus Christ is generally considered to be the highest of all the many callings therein. It is therefore hoped that it may be considered to be a permissible liberty to lift this masterpiece of expression out of its original setting and use it as an acceptable introduction to the whole subject of apostleship.

When Paul wrote in this vein to the Philippians he was not writing about his own calling to apostleship; both he and they knew that he was already an apostle. If there was any church in Asia Minor which knew Paul's calling and office it was the Philippians. For them everything began when a group of women started to meet together to pray, and pray until their prayer

was answered; it was. God sent them Paul. He was their apostle by God's choice; neither in his mind nor in theirs was this in doubt or dispute; they were the fruit and proof of his apostleship. It is clear from scripture that at no time in his life did Paul ever reach out after apostleship as an end in itself, or as a prize to be won. He realized that the office is one of gift, not of reward. He never sought to be an apostle of Jesus Christ; he always thought he was unworthy of the position, and it is not even clear in scripture at what point he first assumed the title or was recognized as such.

To the Corinthians he firmly asserts and repeats that he was an apostle by the will of God, but this was only because he had to do so. To their shame he had to defend his calling to them because it was God's calling and they were questioning it. To his mind

there was no possibility that he or anyone else could be or should be called an apostle. In an illuminative phrase to the Romans he says he was a slave of Jesus Christ, called an apostle. What a commentary on his attitude towards the 'top' calling. He might have written 'only a slave', for that is what he means. By the will of God and his own will also, he was a bonds slave. To him that was the greatest of all privileges. That he was also called an apostle of Jesus Christ was a matter of his Master's choice; his choice was slavery. In his estimation apostleship is an appointment to a position of hard work among fellow-slaves. To him it was obvious that apostles cannot be selected by men from among themselves; he saw that to attempt that is an act of rebellion as preposterous as the belief that apostles are self-chosen. Anyone who is convinced that

his own virtues and abilities commend him to God, or who requires recognition by Him or the Church on these grounds, is self-deceived. The true apostle is as much surprised by God's choice of him as are his companions; he is always convinced that he is not fit to be an apostle.

The Great Apostle

Such a one was Paul; we learn this and much more than this from a letter he once wrote to his son in the faith, Timothy. It is very clear in this scripture that apostleship is first of all a heavenly calling; it did not originate from earth. Apostleship among men is an adaptation of and a projection from the being of God, particularly of the person of Jesus Christ. Long before God ever chose a man to be an apostle on earth He elected the Christ to the office. The Lord Jesus assumed the title and fulfilled the heavenly

calling on earth when He came into this world; herein then lies the greatness and awful responsibility of the office. Men never addressed Him by that name or acknowledged the office, and He did not require it of them. He was not the first human being on earth to be designated apostle. The title, if title it be, was bestowed by Him first upon the twelve chosen disciples. Furthermore, although the office holds obvious associations with the event, the calling did not originate at Jordan, nor was the title bestowed upon Him when He was anointed there. The calling and office and title had earlier and higher origins than that; the Lord held the office of Apostle in heaven.

It is the writer to the Hebrews who declares the Lord to be an apostle; no one else does, and the epistle is not concerned with

Christ's earthly life but His heavenly ministry. The title is used in conjunction with another of His heavenly offices — High Priest; the two offices are thus shown to be associated with each other — 'the Apostle and High Priest of our profession'; both positions are eternal and heavenly. In connection with this we should note that, in anticipation of His incarnation, it was written of Him that His goings forth were from eternity. This scripture about the coming of the Messiah was quoted to Herod by the scribes following the birth of Jesus — He came forth unto God from Bethlehem, as the prophet said. He had also come forth from heaven to the people, but they did not recognize that, or believe that He came to earth because He was sent by His Father. His nativity was not His first visit to earth from heaven, nor was it His first mission for God on earth. From

eternity He had been habitually going forth on mission at His Father's behest, though never before by incarnation. He was the Apostle and in this sense the Servant of the Trinity as Isaiah makes plain. Bearing this in mind, it may well be that Paul's words to the Philippians, already quoted, did refer to apostleship, heavenly apostleship, that is the apostleship in heaven. If this is indeed so, then Paul's statement holds a whole new world of meaning; divine possibility opens up to faith most invitingly, and a course is set before every one of us as it was before Paul. But, although the prospect is most intriguing, we will not pursue it; those who reach the mark at last shall find out what mystery lies beyond the words.

The connection between Paul's statement of intent and the expectation he entertained and our present subject is the phrase 'high

calling of God'. The apostle said this high calling is in Christ, and it is clear that he only discovered it when he found himself in Him, not until then. It was not the only thing he found in Christ, as the epistle shows, but it was something of which Paul became gradually aware from the very moment of his regeneration onwards. He did not fully recognize it immediately, but he was not left long without knowledge of the reason for his call. Within only a few days of his first encounter with Christ on the Damascus road, God sent to him Ananias His servant, who informed Paul of the life work for which he had been apprehended, and, in view of this, ministered to him the Holy Spirit. Listening to the man, Paul could not but be convinced that God had specially chosen him, for Ananias plainly told him so; it must therefore have been obvious to him from

the very beginning that he had been called in order to be sent; when or exactly where he was not told; he knew why though. He already knew that among the churches of Christ there were men called apostles; Pharisee that he was, he had regarded them as cursed of God and therefore His enemies, and for months past he had been seeking to destroy them. He might have thought that, had he wished to do so, he could have used the title 'apostle' about himself, and except he hated the word and all it stood for, he might well have done so, for he was truly a sent man.

The leaders of Judaism had chosen him and sent him to quash the so-called 'sect of the Nazarenes', which of late had sprung up so quickly and was flourishing so vigorously around the name of Jesus. But he detested the title with all its connotations; he had no

ambitions along that line at all, none whatsoever. Yet, to his astonishment, within days of his unintentional and unexpected meeting with Christ, this man's calling and election by God was being outlined to him in words and in a manner which could have left him in no doubt as to God's intentions for his life. It was also made very clear to him what the relationship between himself and Christ was to be, for Ananias spoke to him in the language, if not the tones, of command. There was no mistaking that Jesus Christ, in whose name Ananias came, regarded Himself as being Paul's Lord, and Paul as being His slave. This was entirely in harmony with all Paul had realized of Christ from the very first; the Lord had laid hold of him with such power and force that he knew he was in the grip of a mighty potentate. Paul never once raised an argument about that, he

knew that the one who had stopped him dead in the road was a lord, though who He was he did not know — Paul knew what He was, but not who He was. This lord was the Lord, and from the moment Jesus identified Himself to him he began to accept orders from Him; 'Arise, go into Damascus, there it shall be told thee what thou must do' was the first of many. Crisis point was reached with Paul at that moment; either he would do as he was told and, in so doing, acknowledge that Jesus Christ was Lord and that he was His slave, or he would not; he made his choice. Paul rose to his feet and did exactly what he had been ordered to do; his will was broken, he submitted to the Lord and yielded himself to Him, a slave for ever.

Lord and Saviour

To many it may come as a very real surprise to know that the word Saviour occurs very

infrequently in the New Testament. By comparison with the use of the word 'Lord' its occurrence is minimal. It is the same in the Old Testament also; the references to the title 'Lord' there are so many that, by comparison, the word 'saviour' is almost non-existent. To the understanding heart that should speak volumes and need no comment! Paul was a polite, reverent and deferential slave of his Lord, Christ, and he sought nothing higher on this earth. To him Jesus was not Saviour and Lord but Lord and Saviour; to his heart and mind that was the only true and correct order of revelation and address. Not for him the pseudo hail-fellow-well-met attitude of the twentieth century permissive society; it would be as offensive to him as it surely is in the ears of God. The over-familiarity of our days is insulting to His Majesty, and must be rejected by the

churches as being part of the rebelliousness of a Godless age; it is contemptuous. It was no surprise to the Ephesians, or to anyone who knew the great apostle, to read that he was the prisoner of the Lord; he was; they all knew it. Similarly, when the Corinthians read Paul's statement that necessity was laid upon him, everyone would have agreed and testified to the truth of what the man said; Paul was a man entirely owned by another — possessed, and voluntarily so. If his slavery had been against his will, he said, a dispensation of the gospel would have been granted him, and if that had been so it would have meant that he had been granted licence from God to sin by disobedience. But God does not grant licence to sin; He does not grant dispensations and indulgences; hierarchies may do so, but these are never churches, nor are their officials men of God.

That this great God of ours forgives and forgives and forgives again and again and again must never be mistaken or construed to meant that He indulges sin; He does not. This acknowledgement of Christ's Lordship and man's slavery was as much a virtue of Ananias as of Paul. When he was sent of God to minister to Paul, his mission was as that of a slave. His response to Christ was exactly the same as Paul's had been — 'Lord'; 'here I am Lord,' he said; everyone in the church had the same understanding; each knew in himself that he was a slave. 'Go,' the Lord said, and Ananias went; when he arrived in the street called Straight and found Paul he said, 'Brother Saul'. Ananias welcomed him to the house of slaves with the words that he had been chosen by the Lord and was going to be sent on a mission from Him, and he delivered the message in tones of

authority in the language of command. Ananias did not speak of office or title, he promised him nothing but suffering, but if ever a man was being called to fill the office and bear the title 'apostle' it was Saul of Tarsus.

Unlike anyone else before him, from the very beginning and from the very Highest of all, without being specially designated as such, Paul was a called apostle. In several of the epistles he wrote to various churches, he certified and authenticated his right to do so with the words, 'Paul, an apostle'.

Misguidedly the words 'to be' have been added by the translators thus: 'Paul, called (to be) an apostle': it is a great pity. These words have been inserted in an attempt to make fluent reading for time-bound readers, but they obscure more truth than they reveal, for they give an interpretation of

scripture. To a certain extent they do help by pointing out the translators' understanding of the reason why the Lord called him, namely in order that he should be an apostle. The degree of truth in this suggestion is sufficient to commend it to the reader's mind on two counts: (1) a man cannot be anything before the Lord calls him; (2) that is exactly what happened. But the point being made is that it is the Lord who called Paul an apostle; this is the point so often missed. In the mind of God Paul was always an apostle: he did not have to become one in order to bear the title, nor did he have to earn it, he was always an apostle. Before he was recognized as an apostle and given the title by men, Paul was an apostle of Christ; the callings and elections of God are eternal. This marvellous fact is as true of the humblest member and

office of the church as it is of an apostle, but what a high calling apostleship is; it is the highest of all callings to which a man may be elected.

Many aspire to apostleship in these days, but there are few that rightly bear the title and fit and fulfil the calling in reality. The title is based upon a concept and bestowed with purpose by the sovereign will of God; other than that it is a false assumption.

Because of His foreknowledge, and certainly by His grace, the title is sometimes bestowed by Him upon men who, among their contemporaries, appear to deserve it, but it cannot be earned; when given to a man it must be understood by all to be but a further grace of God to him. Born of a relationship, it is an award to a degree of devotion foreknown by the Lord, and not as a reward for the demonstration of that

devotion. Paul said that God enabled him for that for which He counted him faithful. God gave Paul His trust, putting him into the ministry; apostleship is a mark of an addiction to Christ excelling all others. The concept is slavery, love's freewill addiction to Christ; the title is as much God's estimate of a man as it is of His choice of him. In His mind an apostle is the slave of slaves.

Apostleship is not a concept of majesty or of rule, but of work, hard, unceasing labour involving suffering and loss. Two sentences, the one modern and the other ancient, joined together, express it in choicest words — 'burning with love's pure devotion (I) we will live and die for thee', and 'I laboured more abundantly than they all'. Surely, these statements are worthy of Christ, although He never made them; they are true of Him who is the greatest apostle of all — they

must also be as true of every man who allows himself to be called an apostle by men. Paul once wrote of himself and the apostolic band of which he was a member, 'we as workers together with Christ': the apostle considered himself to be a worker; he did not think of himself as an apostle who worked but as a worker called an apostle, a very different thing. He said of himself that he was not fit to be called an apostle, and to himself would only allow that he was the least of all the apostles; he was always so aware of how terribly he had persecuted both Jesus and His Church, and was thoroughly ashamed of it. His later labours for Christ and His Church were by way of being a repayment for the damage he had done and for the insults and blasphemies he had heaped upon the Lord and His people. Throughout his entire ministerial life he

considered himself to be in debt to the whole world of men. To his Lord he regarded himself to be in debt for eternity, consequently he laboured more abundantly than all the others.

When writing to the Corinthians he gives a brief account of some of his journeys and labours and trials — they were very spectacular and formidable — but he considered this to be nothing more than foolish boasting. He found no pleasure in this, and only indulged it upon the assumption that, since they suffered fools gladly they would bear with him also, but he regretted that they had forced him into doing it. He wrote in full knowledge of the fact that the work he did was no proof of his office or of his fitness for it. Not all the works he listed put together were regarded by him as the greatest factor in an apostle's

calling, neither were they advanced with this in mind; he only put these forward to those who would persist in making that kind of comparison between apostles. His testimony must have staggered his critics, but he did not flatter himself by it, he was only sorry that a church he had established should require it of him. Long before he wrote his letter he realized and proved that works can be made to prove anything. Steeped in Jewish history as he was, he had always been aware of the fact that, when God came to Jacob and changed his name to Israel, He had put everything to do with God and man in true perspective — 'As a prince hast thou power with God and with men'. The Lord put the man's priorities right — power with God first, power with men second; if a man gets the order right and keeps his heart right he will find that these two work together in

perfect balance as one. Having power with God for men's needs he will, by reason of that, at some time have power with men for God's purposes.

Our Great High Priest

In this thing God showed Himself the example of all He desires and expects of men. Before He attempted to show that He had power with men He worked with power in God — that is within Himself — and the power worked in Him mightily unto the creation of the universe and the manifestation of man. As a result of, and in keeping with this, Jesus was born on earth — the Apostle of God. God worked within Himself unto this end long before He began, or even could begin, to work within or upon man to His ends with him. This method and demonstration by God is the pattern for all men, especially for apostles. By the power

that works in him an apostle must first have power with God before he can expect to have power with men. The Lord Jesus was set forth on earth as the example of this and we are commanded to consider Him as such. It seems that the writer to the Hebrews is setting out a logical order of truth and guiding our thinking along God's common sense lines, made apparent by the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension of Christ. Having completed the work of redemption for which He came, He has returned to heaven and is now appearing at the throne of God interceding for us; having become an apostle He is now a high priest. From the point of view of men that is the true order, but from God's point of view it is not.

Long, long before He became a man in order to have power with men, in a new way with

a new purpose the Lord had power with God in heaven, and when in the fulness of time He appeared upon earth He followed the same pattern. Ages before He was born a man and became a human apostle the Lord stayed in obscurity, out of public gaze, and had power with God, ministering Himself to His Father as He had ever done. The apostleship, which began with His incarnation, was the logical outcome of this eternal priesthood; He offered no outpoured blood then — just Himself. His ultimate sacrifice on earth, the flesh and blood man He was, was the result of it; that was all He offered — but that was ALL. All apostleship among men to this day is only bestowed upon man from this position; it is the only apostleship there is, and it will only function within the Church upon these conditions. No one on this earth can be, or will be,

regenerated and converted, into the image of God except it be from this ministry; a man must have power with God before he can have this ability and authority from God. God will not bestow this most miraculous of all power and function upon any man unless this truth be recognized and adopted without reservation or diminution into his thinking and practice. Priesthood, though classified with apostleship, is both in order of thought and degree of power and importance, greater than apostleship, and must precede it in order of ordination and ministry. God will not send out an unsacrificing man with an uncaring heart; He cannot because such a person would misrepresent Him; God has no care for mere form and banal ordinance. When the Lord was here on earth among men He did not choose apostles from among them because

they were great men; His own ministry at that time was conducted among men on a different basis and for a different purpose from that which was revealed and upon which He worked after Pentecost. As a man His purposes were with Israel after the flesh; these were primarily Messianic and carried out upon the basis of God's promises to His people Israel concerning an earthly kingdom. Following Israel's rejection of Him under the Old Covenant, He brought in the new and everlasting covenant under the terms of which He brought His own Church into being. Everything to do with this was and is administered from heaven upon the basis of God's promise to the Son, which was fulfilled at Pentecost almost immediately after He returned to heaven. A new age then began, in which the glorified Lord elected and called apostles in a manner different

altogether from the procedure He followed when on earth. This can be demonstrated in many ways, but sufficient has been shown for the present, so leaving this aspect of apostleship until later we will turn to the Gospels and take up our subject in these writings.

Chapter 2 — THE REASON FOR THE CALL

The Persistent Call

It may be correct to assume that the men the Lord chose to be His apostles during His earthly life were men above the average; surely they must have been or they would never have stayed with Him. From the moment men started to follow Jesus, whatever the motive was that moved them to do so, they must have realized that discipleship to Him would not be easy. A few days' acquaintance with Him must have made them realize that they may have been committing themselves to something they could live to regret; many questions about His aims and intentions must frequently have filled their minds. It could not have been long however before they discovered that they were attaching themselves to a

man who was heading for disaster. Not only so, but they soon began to realize that He was fast becoming the most-loved and most-hated figure in the land. Wherever He went there was extraordinary blessing, but there was also unimagined trouble. He was always clashing with the religious authorities; it seemed inevitable that arguments would develop about everything He did or said. He was popular enough with the masses, but whatever He said or did seemed to be challenged by their elders and religious leaders; the simplest of remarks were questioned and His most beneficent intentions were constantly regarded as suspect.

It was of no use to try and hide the fact, either from themselves or from others, that He was a most controversial figure. Although He said many wonderful things about God,

He did also say things and make claims about Himself that were most provocative; often they themselves did not understand His meanings, yet somehow they could not doubt Him or abandon His call. There was something about Him that held them; His was not a passing attraction, it gripped them, He seemed to hold them in His hand; His call was insistent, there was no denying that He meant to have them. His pursuit of Peter, James and John was remarkably persistent; it was quite apparent to those three, if not to all, that He was not prepared to let them go. Following their first call this famous trio often went back to their fishing, but He pursued them to the fishing grounds and finally convinced them that they must follow Him. It was evident to them and to all that He really did want them, and it was also clear that He was going to be their Lord or

nothing; loyalty to Him was the first requirement.

The Man Above All

One of the most engaging attractions about Christ to them was His humanness; He endeared Himself to their hearts because He was so natural. They soon discovered that His favourite name for Himself was Son of Man; that was how He thought about Himself. He was certainly that; He never aspired to anything higher and when He said it of Himself it seemed to mean much to Him, as though in His heart it meant a lot more than they knew. Having been familiarized with the writings of the prophets since childhood, they were aware that the prophet Ezekiel had been called 'son of man'. At the time the prophet was recording God's words to him in a vision. Ezekiel had never called himself by that

name as though he was making any great claim for himself, but no one doubted that he was a great man and a prophet of the Lord. Daniel, another great prophet and a man greatly loved by God, also used the name of himself; but again he was not making the claims himself, but was only recording what he was called by Gabriel. Neither of those men were making proud boasts or great claims but were simply recording facts; even so, neither of them said he was the Son of Man. Jesus did though, and when men heard Jesus say He was the Son of Man they knew what He was meaning: He was matter-of-factly claiming the divine title. Everyone who heard Him must have known what Jesus was doing and where such claims would ultimately lead. In all respects Jesus made plain to them that His claims, as well as He Himself, must be

faced. Such tactics could only lead to one end, it seemed He was deliberately heading for a clash with the authorities; everyone knew it was bound to occur.

Perhaps it was either to challenge Him on this ground or to forewarn Him, that Nicodemus, the nation's foremost teacher, came to Jesus one night in Jerusalem.

According to him it was freely acknowledged among the teaching fraternity that Jesus was a teacher and that He was undoubtedly sent from God. Those men had been watching Him closely for some time; the miracles He did seemed to prove their conclusions and they were prepared to admit it. But how about this title He was using of Himself? Did He really think He was the Son of Man? It was an astonishing claim, a different matter altogether, and they had very grave doubts about Him, hence the interview by the top

man. Jesus knew the position from which Nicodemus was speaking and who he was and the company he represented and why he came; more than that, He loved him. Therefore, taking charge of the conversation, He directed Nicodemus' thoughts towards the truth which he and all men needed to know. He was not prepared at that time to answer endless questions about genealogies and the implications of His works and claims and statements; He knew that would only gender strife, and He did not want strife with Nicodemus. Instead He deliberately made an answer to him which, if taken the wrong way, could be made to mean that He regarded him as being totally incapable of asking Him questions, because he was not even alive. Poor Nicodemus — he was completely nonplussed. Instead of asking Jesus about Himself and who and what He

was, he was forced to ask questions about himself; he was entirely outmanoeuvred and completely baffled. The answers he received and the information he was given filled him with amazement and incredulity. He left that room that night certain of at least one thing: Jesus thought he needed to be born from above.

Something else equally important was clear to him: this man, who they thought was a teacher sent from God, firmly believed that He Himself was born of God. Although he had so obviously been put under examination by Jesus, he had also, to the best of his ability, examined Jesus, and he realized that whoever Jesus was He was certainly a force to be reckoned with. He was indeed! When He called Himself the Son of Man He meant He was more than just a prophet raised up unto the people as were

Ezekiel or Daniel, or even Moses or Abraham. He was meaning more than that, much more, more than at the time He was prepared to say, for no man had been His father. Ezekiel had been a special prophet in that he was also a priest, but he was nevertheless a mere man, for a man had been his father. God addressed him as 'son of man', but He was careful to give Ezekiel a vision of One who he knew was greater altogether than himself. Ezekiel was granted a vision of the likeness of a throne of fire with 'the likeness of ... a man above upon it', he said; he also saw the appearance of a bow and heard a voice calling him, 'son of man', and saying, 'I send thee'. Ezekiel was conscious of the fact that he had seen the likeness of the throne and the glory of the Lord, who in times past had appeared on earth among men in the likeness of the

appearance of a man. The prophet-priest was overwhelmed; he had seen a vision of God, and to him God appeared to bear the likeness of a man. What was he seeing? What did it mean? Was this the likeness of the original Man, the uncreated pattern-Man upon whom Adam, the original man of earth, was created and from whom he had received his spirit? Ezekiel knew he was not seeing Him, that was not possible, but he knew he was seeing a likeness, and said so. It was as though he was beholding a mysterious reflection of God in some heavenly mirror, and He appeared to be a man! This was something new.

The Lord God, the Creator of heaven and earth and men, appeared unto Ezekiel in the likeness of a man and spoke to him. 'Son of man', He said, 'stand upon thy feet and I will speak unto thee', and at the same time the

spirit entered into him and Ezekiel became a prophet. Six or seven hundred years later another man, in full view of that same throne, recorded that an angelic man said unto him, 'The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy'. Ezekiel did not know that name, but he saw the likeness of a Man and heard Him calling him son of man. Without knowing it he was listening to the testimony of Jesus; to him it seemed like the testimony of the man-like God who was speaking to him from the fiery throne of glory. What he did know was that the spirit of prophecy and of that testimony entered him, and from that moment he became what he was called: in a new way he was now a son of man sent from God, a prophet of the Lord and a representative of the Most High. More than being a son of a man he was a son of that Man, the One who had called him from

the throne and spoken to him and whose spirit had entered him. His human name had not been mentioned, instead he had been given a descriptive title, far more related to his humanity than the name his father had given him when he was born. Because of this wonderful new relationship with the Man on the throne he knew that he was related to all mankind, and from that moment he knew he was on a mission from God. He was sent; he was an apostle of that Man on the throne, who is the great Apostle of God.

To the Jews who came to listen to Jesus on earth the title, 'son of man', was sacred and divine, it held all those great historic meanings full of spiritual import and promise. Did He know what His claims meant? Did this man realize all He was saying? They all knew what He had recently

done in the temple; it was a public scandal and, in their eyes, sacrilegious; He seemed to have come suddenly from nowhere and burst upon the public scene, creating havoc everywhere. In the temple He had even gone so far as to challenge the priests and the Levites and all the elders present, in fact everybody within sound of His voice, to 'destroy this temple', and, as if to add absurdity to indignity, had boasted that if they did so he would raise it again in three days. Such things had never been heard of before. Whatever was He doing and saying? Did He realize that there was a direct link between His actions and words and what Ezekiel had prophesied? Ezekiel had actually spoken of the destruction of the temple and of its rebuilding, and had included plans for its reconstruction in his book. Did this Jesus fully realize what it meant to claim to be the

Son of Man and to say such things? Did He understand what His claims meant to them? Was He a cruel, heartless charlatan, a blasphemer and a deceiver, or was He genuine? In his day Ezekiel had been a tremendous man; his impact on his contemporaries was profound and unforgettable, they truly accepted him as a son of man sent from God. His prophecies were so true and weighty and full of prophetic hope that they were still influencing the nation to that day; if what Jesus said was true, the prophecy was about to be fulfilled. If that were indeed so, then Jesus was plainly the Son of Man and the Son of God too; He was the Messiah. But raise the temple in three days! That could not possibly be; even Ezekiel had not suggested that.

Ezekiel had never claimed to be the Son of Man, nor did he ever say he had power on earth to forgive sins, or that he was Lord of the sabbath; but this man did. Further than that, as time went on and His ministry progressed, one day, without the slightest reticence or hesitation, Jesus actually claimed to be the Lord who made the sabbath day for Adam. He was not claiming just to be a man, or even a distant son of the man for whom the sabbath was made; He was categorically stating that He pre-existed Adam, the father of the whole race. More than that, although He did not say so, He was claiming to be the one who fashioned time. There really could be no doubting Jesus' purpose in making such claims, He was saying He was the Lord God. Whether or not they thought it, the likeness of the appearance of the man on the throne was

now manifest in flesh before them. However else and in whatever other forms He may appear on the throne, this one thing is sure, in accordance with Ezekiel's vision of the reflected likeness in the heavens of a Man, God had become Man on earth.

The Background of the Call

The implications of this insistent and repeated claim that He was Lord of the sabbath proved to be the main reason for the first moves towards Jesus' ultimate murder. The intention to destroy Him had for some time lain smouldering in the hearts of the fanatical Pharisees, who went and took counsel with the equally fanatical Herodians, that together they should work out a plan to have Him murdered. This fatal decision was taken one day in a synagogue and there is no doubt that the Lord deliberately provoked it. It was the sabbath and the place was packed

with worshippers; His presence assured that, and in the congregation there was a man with a withered hand. Knowing that the Lord's compassionate heart would almost certainly go out to the man, His enemies gathered around watching and waiting. Understanding this, and quite undeterred by it, the Lord went straight to the point and said to the crippled man, 'Stand forth': everyone present knew the challenge had been accepted. Addressing Himself to everybody present, including His enemies, He said, 'Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days or to do evil? To save life or to kill?' No-one spoke; there was no answer but the one He demonstrated: He healed him. The Son of Man acted upon a law which preceded Moses' law and was one of the reasons why Moses' law was given, a heavenly law as eternal as God, namely the

law of doing good every day and through all eternity. To do good is God's habit; from this all creation proceeded: at the conclusion of each day's activity in the first week of world history God pronounced His satisfaction with His handiwork in these terms, 'It is good'. It was therefore natural for Christ to do good and, in the synagogue that day, the Lord coupled with this law another one like it and closely connected with it, namely the law of salvation. 'Is it lawful... to save life...?' He said, meaning by implication that any and every day, including the sabbath, was the right day for healing, and He healed the man to underline that fact. The Pharisees, filled with anger though they were, could not deny what He said, and kept quiet; they had no alternative. They dared not raise any objection, either to the truth or to the miracle, or they would have lost their

reputation in the community. They had thought they had Him trapped but were caught in their own snare and publicly humiliated; filled with hate they took steps to do away with Him. The Lord, fully aware of this, also made some decisions; the future must be safeguarded, so He proceeded to take steps to ensure that His work would continue in the earth after He left.

Besides this awareness of the intentions of the Pharisees, the Lord had other reasons also for making His new moves; all things were working together for good. Vast multitudes were thronging Him every day, all to listen, some to touch or be touched by Him. Even gentiles were coming to hear Him; the very unmanageability of the crowds was creating problems. His heart was filled with compassion for them, their need was so great and He wanted to do them good, but

except He did some kind of self-exalting sensational miracle He just had to retreat from them. At times the crush was so great that there would be no place to stand, and at one time He just had to ask His disciples for a boat so that He could distance Himself from the people a little. Not that He wanted to get away from them; on the contrary He wanted to remain within their sight and hearing, but how to do that without being trodden underfoot by them, was a real problem. Under those circumstances it was humanly impossible to be in direct touch with everybody and it grieved Him. They were not to be blamed for their eagerness, if the positions had been reversed He would have done the same as they.

Sitting there in the boat, with the needs of men and women staring Him in the face, it was obvious that something more must be

done about it than at present. He needed assistance. The time had come for the men He had called to discipleship to be put to work; they must learn that He expected them to do more than follow Him, they must help Him also. His plan would be to select a band of men from among His followers, train them, and send them out to the people in their own homes in their own cities and towns and villages throughout the whole land. The effect of this would be to increase and broaden the scope of the ministry; instead of one voice proclaiming the gospel in the land there would be thirteen. It would greatly help the people also, for they would not then need to travel long distances to Him, but would have their needs met by others than Himself; such a thing could result in nothing but good.

There was also another reason for this determination. Among those attracted to Him and His ministry were a lot of devil-possessed people; these were as welcome as anyone else, the blessings were for all, but there was more to it than that. Through these people satan was attempting to destroy His ministry, and Jesus knew it. Having failed in his earlier attempts to destroy Him, the devil was trying new tactics. Having failed to defeat Him by direct confrontation in the wilderness, satan's new move was to try and discredit His works and ruin His ministry by attempting to praise and patronize Him. The Lord saw through it of course and was far too wise to accept it; He would not allow it in His presence. Insincere praise is worse than criticism; genuine praise is a ministry, whether to God or to man, but flattery is deception; whoever receives it will

bring about his own destruction. The praise of devils is damning, both to themselves and to those they praise; better an open sword-thrust than devilish flattery. Whenever He met it the Lord dealt with it summarily; His method was always to silence the person the devil was using.

Following this, the Lord made His first major move towards the fulfilment of His purposes (and what a lesson we all should learn from this): He ascended a mountain and spent a whole night alone in prayer to God. It was a momentous occasion; the decisions He had to make that night would affect all time and eternity. The new programme of God for men was about to be set in motion on the earth, preparations for the founding of the Kingdom of God in the hearts of men were in the making. The Lord would not move without His Father's mind though, so He

sought seclusion to wait on God. We do not know all that took place during that time of solitary communion, we can only judge by what followed on from it. In the beginning, when He was about to commence His public ministry, Jesus was shown all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them in a moment of time from the top of an exceedingly high mountain. Satan had taken Him there to represent to Him both the extent and the exaltation of his kingdom, and to impress Him that he really was reigning over all other kingdoms of this world. The devil had carried Him to the heights hoping that, with one dazzling display and a flashing temptation full of lying promise, he would sweep Christ off His feet and bring His mission to nought. Full of pride, satan spoke to Jesus as a king to an heir apparent; his was the kingdom of

kingdoms — all the kingdoms of the world he boasted. The devil seemed to have such great possessions and power, but it was of no avail, He who boasted no earthly kingdom did not want the devil's. Christ already had a kingdom of His own, but it was not of this world. What a great fool Lucifer again proved himself to be that day; men who are deceived by him are poor dupes, but Jesus was not one of them.

So it was that many months later, as the morning dawned, the Lord sat alone on the mountain as on the throne of His kingdom. With calm confidence He looked out over His native land, and prepared to launch His counter attack on the devil. Whether He had been entirely alone with God all night or whether His disciples had also spent the night there, hidden in some place close at hand yet some distance removed from Him,

is difficult to tell. Whether near or far, to Him they were in another world, a kingdom foreign to God, and He left them there while He spent that night of prayer alone. Had they been watching all night for Him though, waiting upon His good pleasure? Had they been witnesses of His patient waiting, and did they hear the distant sound of His voice and try to make out His words as He lay before God, shadowed from the moon in some dark cleft of the rock? Obviously they were somewhere near at hand, near enough to hear His voice when He called to them in the morning: they were staunch men, ready to respond to His needs or requirements at all times. Although He had excluded them from His personal devotions and private prayers, He had not dismissed them from following Him, so they stayed as close to

Him as possible, entering Into as much as they could.

Called to be With Him

Loyalty and devotion are precious virtues and in the morning they earned their reward, for in the dawning of the new day they heard Him calling to them. Quick to respond, senses all alert, they hurried to answer Him, wondering what He wanted. With no preamble, without any explanation, He began to call out names, selecting individuals from among them, perhaps pointing them out with His finger; something new was happening. One, two, three, four, five — on He went, everyone but He wondering what it was about and when it would stop; no one knew, and except to call out the name of the person He wanted He said nothing. It would have been less mystifying to them if, before starting to call,

He had explained to them what was in His mind, but this He had not done, so they just stood silently by while those He named moved over to Him forming themselves into a little band, increasing in number as the call continued. Not much longer though, He reached twelve and stopped; evidently the chosen number was complete. What would be the next move? Everyone stood around, wondering what it was all about, the little group forming a kind of inner core of the larger company of disciples. All awaited His further word but none was forthcoming. If He explained His purpose to them it is not recorded; He simply called and they obeyed. The Gospel-writers who record the incident tell us the Lord's reasons for doing this, but do not say whether or not He disclosed these to them at that time. It may not have been wise to have done so just then, but He

was the best judge of that; the principal thing about the occasion is that the famous apostolic band was formed that morning as they obeyed His call. He called them apostles; but whether or not He put the title to each name as He called it, thus — Apostle Peter, Apostle James, Apostle John — we do not know.

Whatever the rest of His faithful disciples thought of His actions and choice, they did not say; they did not offer an opinion, and He did not seek it; His word was sovereign. For the most part those men were a good, loyal crowd, and they accepted what He did, but they were also very human and must have felt some kind of reactions to what was happening. The twelve were not the only men who had stayed within earshot of Him all through that night. Why did He select them and pass over all the others? Were

those twelve men so very special? Was there something wrong with the rest of them; if not, why was He being so selective? Was He showing favouritism? It is never easy to be selective among human beings, if only because someone is bound to get hurt if he is so pointedly left out. Unless self-esteem is very low, jealousy is often unavoidably created when sovereign choices are made. To be passed over without explanation hurts pride and causes misunderstandings; at such times motives are bound to be questioned and misinterpretations will always be made; almost invariably such things as happened that morning cause trouble and unhappiness to someone. But if these troubles existed among the disciples they are not referred to — it could be that only murmurs of assent and signs of approval were expressed. Perhaps they all knew that election is not

division and ought never to be thought of as promotion; the twelve were not called because they were superior beings, they were not treated as such by the Lord, neither were they regarded as such by their fellows.

Of one thing we may be very sure, even though he may have known little or nothing about what his calling entailed, each one of those apostles was thrilled that the Lord had chosen him. At that time, for the most part, the Lord was a very popular figure and the prospect was very thrilling; to be with Him was an honour and a pleasure. Perhaps if they, as He, could have seen prison and judgement and a cross ahead they might not have been so keen; threats and persecutions are hard things to live with; mercifully they were hidden from their eyes. The Lord was very wise, and His timing was perfect; He

knew also who He had called and who would follow Him without demanding explanations; to Him that is a virtue. He wanted their implicit trust, for He had no intention of revealing His plans for the twelve at that time, He loved them too much for that. The purposes He had in mind for them were very great, so great in fact that, for the time being, He just had to keep them secret. Beyond what He may have expressed of His desire for them to be with Him then, the Lord's purposes for them included greater things in the not too distant future as well. He was going to give them power to heal sicknesses and cast out devils and send them forth into the land to preach the gospel to the nation.

His choices that morning were made with a twofold plan in mind: (1) it was the first step towards the initiation of an immediate

strategic campaign against satan; (2) it was also a move towards the fulfilment of His as yet unannounced intention to build His Church. He did not inform anybody of these things then; it was enough for the twelve that they should know He wished them to be with Him. Naturally they were thrilled, it was what they wanted, and to discover that He wanted it as much as they did filled them with joy. Jesus was as human as they were; He longed for human companionship and to have real friends who believed in Him and wanted Him for Himself. He yearned to be wanted as a person and not just followed as a religious leader or a great benefactor. Besides, to be what He wanted them to be, they themselves must want Him more than anything or anyone; religious convictions and staunch loyalties are poor substitutes for love. He did not want comrades in arms,

nor yet just champions of a cause; He could have had ten thousand angels for that if He but spoke the word; He wanted men, fellow human beings; He had become a man for that. He knew that He must not overburden them at that time though; it would have been a terrible mistake to have done so. They were quite unable to meet the demands of the situations into which He wished to send them; they needed training. The Lord's work was not easy. If men were to understand who He was and learn of His kingdom, His will must be done on earth, but the twelve were neither prepared personally nor equipped sufficiently for the task. When He chose His men they were unregenerate; He had no option about this, He just had to make the most of what was available. Presumably they were zealots and the best that could be had, but they were

men born of the flesh, not one of them had received the Spirit of God. By contrast He was a man of the Spirit; He was born of the Spirit, filled with the Spirit, anointed with the Spirit; He was the Spirit manifest in flesh, but they were none of these things.

Doubtless they aspired unto the spirit they saw in Him, but while He was yet with them that could not be; the Holy Spirit would not come to them until He left the earth.

Nevertheless, while He was on the earth He needed to make the kingdom of heaven manifest to His generation, where it was and in what it consisted, and what the kingdom of God was like, and He had very little time in which to do it. The task was gigantic, and the days were short and men were in the dark; the whole land must be flooded with light and the power of God as quickly as possible; but to have sent out men neither

spiritually equipped nor mentally prepared for such a task would have been to court disaster, and in the sight of God it would have been criminal folly. Although potentially they were apostles, they were far from what they should have been; they were His sheep moreover, and He could not possibly throw them to the wolves. To have endowed them with gifts and endued them with power would have been a simple enough thing for Him to do, but it would not have been loving; He had more regard for them than that; their souls were worth infinitely more to Him than their service.

That is why His first intention in the call was 'that they should be with Him'; His call was to Himself, not to a work, even though it was His work. Work must wait, pressing and great though it was, and the needs dire and many; work was only of secondary

importance, their relationship with Him and their own personal needs were of far greater importance. Whether or not they were aware of it, their own needs were as great as those of the people to whom He wished to send them; their state was little better than anyone else's; it would be a great mistake and utterly wrong to send them out in their present condition. His first concern for them was not equipage or gifts or power, or to exhort them to dedicate themselves to the task; all that could wait. Gifts could be bestowed and power could be imparted to them in a moment when the time was right, and dedication to the work would develop as they engaged in it. His concern when He called them was with their relationship to Him; first and foremost He wanted them to be with Him; before they could work among

men they must learn to live with Him and with each other.

The Lord's most important business with those men was to establish, as nearly as possible, the same position between Himself and them as existed between Himself and His Father; He knew He could not do that yet. Work-wise a somewhat similar position had to be established, He had been sent from His Father on His apostolic calling, and He wanted that same thing for His apostles. He could not give them His heritage, or an entirely identical privilege, but He wanted to send them out as from His own bosom; for above all they were in need of this as well as of more intensive instruction. There was something else also which concerned Him: when He came from His Father's bosom it was as a lamb for the slaughter, and He knew that unless He sent out His apostles in

the same manner all would be in vain. He was also aware that keeping them with Him — virtually commandeering them — would brand them in men's eyes and they would become natural victims of every devouring spirit in the land — which is exactly how it worked out.

When He did finally send them forth they were indeed as sheep among wolves, sacrificed by Him unto the needs of the world; but He did not tell them these things at first, they were not ready for it. They must stay with Him and learn of Him; only by this could they be prepared for what lay ahead for them. If they stayed with Him and succeeded in learning of Him He would feel justified in sending them out when the time came. Their ministry would be to preach and exercise power in His name, and only in the intimacy of a closer relationship with Him

could they learn to do that. They must learn of Him from Himself personally, their knowledge must not be second-hand, hearsay and supposition would not do; each one must acquire everything directly from Him by close observation of Him under all situations and conditions. How much they would learn! He was as fearless as He was gentle, as noble as He was brave, as loving as He was just; He had no weaknesses whatever, His life would stand the closest scrutiny; the nearer they came to Him the more wonderful He would become to them. He knew they would be amazed at most things and baffled by much that He did; but His love, He knew, would more than compensate for everything. They would find His grace more than sufficient for all the mystery and astonishment and all the hardships and fears, all the shame of their

calling, would be touched by His glory; they would discover good and evil, but they would be taught the truth and necessity of it all by Him. When He finally sent them out to stand on their own among men and devils, the knowledge they had gained of Him and His ways would be all the assurance and authority they needed. He could not impart knowledge of Himself in the same way as He could bestow power upon them; that must be learned by each one individually before He sent them. His greatest concern was that the ignorant and the sick and the devil-possessed should be loved as He loved them; they must be handled aright and in the same way as He Himself would do it; souls must not be submitted to uncouth experimentation by men who had not properly learned of Him.

Even so the apostles' spiritual education would never be completed until they were exposed to unresolvable situations without Him being there. O how much they would learn on their own when they would have nothing more humanly tangible and recognizable of His presence with them than His name. Some things, such as baptism in water and personal recruitment of one disciple by another, He had allowed from the beginning; indeed from the commencement of His ministry it had been His policy to hand over all water baptism to His disciples under His personal supervision, but preaching and healing and deliverance He was not prepared to hand over to untrained and ignorant men. At some stage power had to pass into the hands of men or the kingdom of heaven, (which both John the Baptist and He Himself had announced as being at

hand), could never reach all the people of the land. Hence His new move; the period of training must commence; the kingdom must be publicized everywhere and come within everybody's reach.

Whosoever shall do the Will of God.

As soon as this new move of the Lord came to people's notice it immediately met with opposition. He knew it would, it was bound to be misunderstood. It upset His friends, it upset His enemies and it upset His family (to say nothing of what the rest of His disciples thought and said); that He upset the devil goes without saying, He wanted to do that. He did not wish to upset His friends and dear ones though; that caused Him sorrow, but not second thoughts; it just had to happen. He never let the possibility of being misunderstood or maligned deter Him: this was part of the price He had to pay and His

apostles had to consider it well, they too had, a price to pay. He did not expect anybody to understand Him much, not even His own family; they were concerned about Him, understandably enough; to them He seemed to be going too far altogether. In the beginning it had all been very thrilling, He was a wonder boy; those who had known Him throughout His life from infancy must have anticipated that at some time unusual things would be bound to happen to Him; they could not possibly have expected what did happen though. While He was a carpenter at Nazareth, apart from being the best carpenter there was, His life followed fairly predictable lines. But who could have foretold the events which took place at Jordan or foreseen the way things went from there on? What, for instance, was the explanation of His sudden departure from

home for some unknown spot in the wilderness? What happened to Him there? That was a turning point; from then on everything suddenly changed; to His family it was embarrassing and disconcerting. How could they justify His conduct to people in the village? It was most uncomfortable and unexplainable. How could an explanation be given to the neighbours about the men who kept turning up in the village and hanging about around His home? Then there was the incident in the synagogue; what He did there was good — it was surely right to cast out devils — but the claims He made! He nearly got Himself murdered over them; He was certain to run into trouble if He continued to say that kind of thing. The miracle at Cana of Galilee was terrific of course; they could all bask in the reflected glory of that, Mary especially; it was a welcome relief from the

tension and uncertainty of some of His other activities. But that was all ruined when He went up to Jerusalem; He created unimaginable, almost unforgivable, disturbances in the temple. He was so unpredictable, He knew very well that His behaviour would cause untold troubles, the temple was the Jews' most sacred shrine. Whatever was He thinking of? There seemed to be no restraining Him, yet where it would all end if He went on unchecked who could imagine? His friends felt they must do something about it.

The reports which came to their ears of His latest doings sounded rather alarming; He had spent all night in prayer on a mountain top with His disciples, and had decided that twelve of them should be with Him all the time. Whatever for? Had He formed a bodyguard? Was He going to do something

desperate? Was He going to try and establish a kingdom and take over the government? Was He about to Stage a coup? What was in His mind? They were afraid for Him. Nationalism was good perhaps, but there had been others who had tried these things before and had perished. His friends were really concerned for Him; He had gone far enough, if not too far already, so they consulted together with His family, and decided they must act at once; the decision taken, they set out to try and restrain Him. They had no difficulty in finding Him; He was in some person's house and His chosen band was with Him. Thousands of people, it seemed, were hanging around the place hoping to see Him. They were so many that there was no time to eat and scarcely room to breathe; there was great excitement everywhere too, the

pressure was tremendous, it was not natural. Everything the Nazarenes saw and heard made them more concerned; it was worse than they had thought, and they were more anxious for Him than ever; they pressed through the crowd until they reached Him. When at last they succeeded in getting through to Him, they were filled with dismay, and wondered if it had been worth the effort. What they found filled them with disappointment; their pleadings had no effect on Him at all, He was obviously beside Himself. The change that had come over Him was extraordinary; He was in the grip of something, He was like a man possessed. During the night something beyond natural explanation had undoubtedly happened to Him. They realized that they could do nothing; in their hearts they knew He was already beyond

their powers of persuasion. They just had to leave Him.

They did right of course. Nothing seemed to touch Him; it never occurred to any of them that He was the epitome of the servant of the Lord spoken of by Isaiah: He was blind and deaf. They were blind and deaf to the fact that He refused to see and hear any of the signs and warnings they saw and heard, although they were plain enough for everybody to see and hear. Some scribes had come down from Jerusalem to investigate the position; these were knowing men and it was their pronounced opinion that He was possessed of a very powerful spirit named Beelzebub the prince of devils. That was why He could cast the devils out, they said Of course, that was the obvious reason; the scribes knew; if they didn't then who did? Jesus' friends were more worried

than ever, but not so He; when the scribes' verdict came to His ears, as it was intended to, His response was to call them to Him and tell them a couple of simple stories. His purpose was transparently obvious. By those stories He showed the people exactly what He thought of the scribes and how ridiculously wrong they were. More seriously for them, they were perversely wrong. They felt so secure in their office, and believed that they were serving God and the people; but Jesus showed them that, in reality, they were serving satan; worse still, without knowing it, they were actually his slaves, held, imprisoned and in bonds in his house. The stories, so simply told and readily understandable, were thinly veiled descriptions of those scribes' own deadly condition. At the same time, so like Him, He was graciously telling them, and all who

were listening to Him, that He had come to spoil satan's house and goods and that therefore there was hope for them; but they were not impressed. What they did not know then was that He had actually met satan earlier and had conquered and bound him in the privacy of the wilderness. Having done that, He found no difficulty in delivering human beings from lesser devils which had made their homes in them: the greater victory being achieved, the lesser skirmishes posed no problems to Him. Deliverance was no trouble to Him at all.

This was all very wonderful in the ears and eyes of all His well-wishers. Men and women who had benefitted from His ministry stood in and around that house that day thrilling to His words, and, despite their apprehensions, could not but join with His disciples and apostles and rejoice together with the

people. They were still not without some degree of reserve though, especially when they heard His next solemn words: 'He that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness but is in danger of eternal damnation'. It was a greatly daring thing to say and obviously dangerous; everyone knew that the statement was specially directed at the scribes and all the group they represented. None who heard His words that day would ever be able to forget what He said; it seared the mind. He was making enemies by the minute, laying up wrath against Himself with almost every word He spoke — the day of reckoning must come! Yet how truly He spoke; though in many His words stirred up hatred, to many also they brought enlightenment and hope and comfort: only one sin was unforgivable. Only one? What a gospel! Be it ever so great,

except for the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit there is no sin or blasphemy a man can commit that God will not forgive. From the moment a man or a woman realizes this wealth of generous love, he or she can never possibly think that Jesus has an unclean spirit. Those scribes were wicked men; they were clearly implying that Jesus was an unclean man possessed of an unclean spirit: they had to be exposed; but Jesus was more concerned with their peril than with their wickedness and folly. They were in danger of eternal damnation and that concerned Him greatly. He was not damning their souls to hell, but giving them most solemn warnings. His purpose was also to prove to the multitudes that their scribes were full of sin and totally unreliable guides to thought and opinion; to follow them was to endanger

their own souls and perhaps believe themselves into hell with them.

By this time Jesus' mother and half-brothers had succeeded in finding their way through the crowds to within calling distance of Him. They too were worried about Him and had come to add their influence to the mounting weight of their friends' opinion. Did they not all care for Him and want Him to draw back before He went too far? It was very subtle, their last concerted attempt to get Him to come back home; it was now or never and they realized it, so did He. Whether or not they had all heard the recent exchanges we cannot tell, but if so Mary of all people knew that her Jesus did not have an unclean spirit. She must also have known deep down inside that the family's attempt that day would be useless; theirs was a hopeless cause; He would never come home again, they were

spending their energies in vain. Mary knew who He was; it was natural that she wanted to speak with Him. But about what? Nothing she could say would deter Him from His mission. She knew He was the man of destiny and that she might as well try to remove God from His throne as try to hold her son back or turn Him off course. He had already made clear to her what her position was when He had spoken to her in Galilee at the wedding. 'Woman what have I to do with thee'? He had asked her, and she had not been able to answer Him; there was nothing to say, there was still nothing to say. She stood outside the house with her sons and called Him. She called Him, her sons called Him, the multitude called Him, they all called Him — 'Jesus' — but He was deaf to their call; whoever sought to call Him from

His commitment sought in vain; to them and their call He was as a dead man.

What lessons those chosen apostles learned from their Lord that day! What a beginning to their apostleship. Who among us can tell what thoughts went through their minds and how greatly their lives were affected by it all? What a Man He was; what an example He was of all He taught, and what methods He used! He taught them no theory and no doctrine, He gave them no class lesson, He turned them to no book; everything was by demonstration, they only had to look and listen; it was the most perfect beginning any company of men could possibly have. From dawn to dusk, in the mountains or on the plain, among the multitudes or in the house, it was a day of contact with God and the crowds, with little or no sleep and no chance to rest. They had been totally without food,

yet they were brim-full of life and energy; it was a revelation to them. From the beginning those men were given the opportunity to see what apostleship could mean for them in terms of hard work — full days of twenty-four hours spent in ceaseless labours among the multitudes for God, utterly forgetful of self. They took stock of everything: the blasphemies, the inclusiveness and exclusiveness of forgiveness, all He had said about satan and Himself and the Holy Spirit. What a solemn warning that had been, and so necessary; it was so terrible that the Lord never repeated it. They were grateful for everything, but perhaps to them the most wonderful thing about it all was what He said to the multitude in their presence about His mother and His brethren and themselves. They could scarcely believe their ears when

they heard Him say, 'Who is my mother or my brethren?' and then looked round on themselves as they sat about Him: 'Behold my mother and my brethren,' He said. 'Whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother and my sister and mother' — everyone was astounded! It was wonderful music in the ears of the apostles though; it sounded to them as though He regarded them as being His family. Whatever effect His words had on the family and friends from Nazareth, the truth so loved by Jesus must have come over very clearly to the apostles. They felt they had been called and chosen to do the will of God; His family only exists for that purpose, it consists only of men as they were meant to be, doing the things they were meant to do.

There was never quite such a day as that day. Many months later, towards the end of

His earthly life, the Lord said to those same men that time would come when they would wish to see again one of the days of the Son of Man: He did not promise that the opportunity would ever be granted them, nor did He specify any particular day; He just left the idea with them. Whether or not the opportunity to express their ideas ever arose we do not know, He simply sowed the suggestion in their minds and left it at that. Perhaps, given the opportunity, some may have cited this very first wonderful day of trainee apostleship as the best. It was certainly a most unusual one, beginning with their calling and ordination and ending with their inclusion by the Lord into His family. How deliberately He did it. To Him, if they would do God's will, they were more than apostles, they were brother, sister and mother and all to Him also. Did it really

mean He had switched His loyalties and allegiance from His earthly family to them? He had certainly left His own flesh and blood for them; not that He had joined them to Himself and to each other yet, He had not. They did not exist as a body of men until He formed them around Himself; they were His close friends and companions now though. It was a most wonderful and satisfying experience to hear Him speak as though they were His closest relatives. Soon however the same test would come to them; when it did would they leave their own flesh and blood for Him as He had for them? They did not know He was leading them up to the critical decision which, at present, lay hidden from them in the near future. So much turned on those words, 'Whosoever shall do the will of God'. None but those who do God's will are in the family of God.

All biblical authors who write of this theme are clear on this point; as clear as Jesus. This is why the Lord included Mary and her sons by her husband Joseph in His statement: it was an ideal moment for Him to introduce the subject of the relationship God had in mind. Mary was His mother simply because she did God's will, that is all. Mary's great claim to fame is that, given the opportunity, she willed to do God's will and yielded up her all that it should be accomplished in her. There were other factors involved in this of course: she had to be a virgin, she must be of the household and lineage of David; she had to belong to a certain generation also. However, apart from being a virgin (which was not uncommon among unmarried women in those days) and submitting her will to God, she had nothing to do with what happened to her. The other qualifications

were bestowed upon her by heredity; as far as she had anything to do with it they were providential blessings rather than virtues. Her chief virtue lay in her obedience to the will of God, which implied her willingness to forego marriage if that was the price. Every generation will call her blessed because she yielded to God's desires and co-operated with Him to achieve His immediate purpose. Thereby she became an instrument of His love and the handmaid of His good pleasure. Jesus loved His mother, He did not snub her that day; on the contrary He publicly honoured and exalted her. The only thing that could possibly be wrong about it was people's misunderstanding of His remarks and their consequent misinterpretations of His attitude towards His mother. She knew though; Mary understood. Everybody thought that Jesus was a member of her

family, and although she had consistently denied it, by all the laws of nature according to men's thinking He was; but He was not. Everybody was wrong; it was entirely the reverse: Jesus was not a member of Mary's family, Mary was a member of His family. By consenting and co-operating with God to be Jesus' mother she did the will of God and thereby qualified to become Jesus' sister; it was so simple and yet so real.

Wonderful as it was, this was not the only reason why Jesus talked about His sister when speaking to His apostles about doing the will of God. He was very intent to make them see that not only Mary but others also, whether male or female, could become His fellow-helpers in the family of God. To those apostles it came perhaps as the greatest revelation of the day: 'Whosoever shall do the will of God': they had been greatly

privileged and mightily blessed, but privileges and blessings were not thereby made exclusive to them; blessings abound for all who will fulfil the conditions. They had that morning given themselves over for just that purpose, and had been specially ordained by the Lord unto it. Consequently they had witnessed enough in one day to know that it was not going to be easy; however, undeterred by that, they were determined to go through with it. They could not help but have noticed though that Jesus had quite definitely refrained from using the past tense. Doing the will of God had to be a living experience; He did not say, 'Whosoever has done', but 'Whosoever shall do'. Neither did He say, 'Whosoever shall do the will of God as Mary did'; He did not put their action into the living present extending into the future, and hers into the thirty year

old past. He did not want them to think in those terms, lest they should rely on some past act and pin their faith about themselves to that. He meant them to look at Him, not her, and understand His remark to mean, 'Whosoever shall do the will of God as I have done and am doing and shall forever do'. Did Mary hear what He said? If she did, what did she think when she heard Him use the tense which indicated the living present? She had responded so splendidly in the past, but why was she there that day? Had she come with intention to restrain the son whom she knew she ought not to attempt to restrain (Him or anyone else) from doing God's will? If that was her intention she was reproved for it, but O so gently. He praised her. He exalted her to a position which in His heart His apostles also held, no higher and no lower. The apostles could have learned such

glorious lessons of love from Him, had their understanding been quickened and their ears opened to hear. He was not only training them to deal with enemies, but also teaching them how to handle dear ones and friends, and cope with these strong family ties which could so easily bind them and nullify their call.

Chapter 3 — THE KEY TO ALL PARABLES

The King in His Kingdom

The next session of training through which the Lord took the apostles, although seemingly of a different nature altogether, was really the next in series on the same theme. He chose a different location and taught them other things, but did not vary the underlying message. This time He wanted to give them a lesson about people at large, so He took them down to the seashore. The first day's ministry started in secret on a mountain top; the second commenced at sea level in public; the point of both was to show that He was sovereign Lord of all. The surroundings were familiar enough to them; He chose the spot very carefully in order to achieve the maximum effect. As usual the people in their

multitudes came flocking to the shore, pressing in upon the apostolic band till, by sheer weight of numbers, they were forced further and further out to the water's edge. Something had to be done, so the Lord did it, He entered with His apostles into one of the ships beached there and pushed offshore a little, leaving the crowds standing on the land. It was a natural as well as a convenient thing to do; the ship proved a most convenient pulpit, but it was also the beginning of an adroit manoeuvre. What no one but the Lord knew was that He had engineered it all; the act was parabolic. He had set the scene for what He wanted to teach everybody, not least His chosen apostles. Sitting there in the boat with them, He was not only as a Son among brethren, He was also as a king enthroned in His kingdom surrounded by His courtiers,

reigning over them and above the whole sea of humanity. Having established this position He started teaching the people the truth about themselves.

I Speak to Them in Parables

Everyone who had ears to hear would learn much that day; but He specially wanted His apostles to listen very closely to Him. As usual He turned to His favourite method of teaching when speaking to the multitudes and used a parable; it was important to everybody that He should get His meaning across understandably. The situation was ideally suited to His purpose, all except the little company in the ship were on the land. He wanted to reveal to the multitudes some secrets concerning the kingdom; conditions were just right. He began to open up the truth they ought to know about themselves in relation to the kingdom, so He began to

talk about ground, upon which all but thirteen of them were standing. If they had ears to hear they could not miss His meaning or fail to grasp that He was talking to them about themselves. As the story unfolded they learned that they were being classified into four distinct groups, and that a sower was sowing His seed among them with a view to reaping a harvest from His labours; they learned also that He knew there would be four different results from His labours.

This parable was the first of eight which the Lord told in course of unfolding the progress of the gospel and the development of the kingdom throughout the age of grace.

Matthew later wrote down seven of these parables in running sequence in his Gospel, but omitted the eighth. John omits all of them; Luke intersperses his Gospel with a selection of them, while, in his record, Mark

includes the first and the eighth. Neither of these two last-mentioned writers was among the chosen apostles at the time the parables were told. It is most instructive to note the different ways in which those writers approached their business of recording the gospel of Christ. They are each so refreshingly different, setting down the truth in an order suited to their purpose under the Holy Spirit and quite deliberately are not self-explanatory. Mark's commission with regard to the Lord's life and ministry at this juncture was twofold: (1) to record how the Lord used the so-called parable of the sower to teach His apostles the difference there is between people, and (2) to make clear the distinction between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God.

Matthew spoke almost exclusively of the kingdom of heaven, but not so Mark; he

spoke exclusively of the kingdom of God. He also records something the Lord said which both Matthew and Luke omit, but which shows that the Lord regarded this parable to be of immense importance. He practically said that if they did not know what He meant by this parable they would not understand any other parable: this then is a key parable.

The eighth parable which accompanies the so-called parable of the sower in Mark's Gospel is a very brief story on the same theme; its importance is quite out of proportion to its size. The Lord's estimation of it is revealed by His first utterance 'so is the kingdom of God'. To gain fullest benefit from it, this parable must be added to its larger companion in relation to which it is in the nature of a postscript. It was added by the Lord to give everybody clearer

understanding of what He had already said. He longed that His apostles should fully grasp and understand what He was talking about; it was vital that they should be able to distinguish between various kinds of people and how to teach them and to know in what the kingdom of God really consists. It was during this session that the apostles asked Him about His teaching methods. He was the master of the parabolic method, but why did He use it so much? He answered this question by referring to the words God spoke to Isaiah the prophet, thereby corroborating the genuineness of Isaiah, and at the same time assuring His apostles that by telling parables He was fulfilling God's word and explaining His meaning.

The remnant of Israel to whom He had been sent were behaving in exactly the same way as their forebears to whom Isaiah was sent.

They were gathering in their multitudes listening to the One they verily believed to be the prophet of the Lord; their hearts were waxing fat on it, their minds were being fed with new ideas and they thought it was all very wonderful. They did not know that their eyes were being blinded by what they saw, and that they were being made deaf by what they heard. Constant hearing Of the word and partaking of material benefits, without recognition of who Jesus is and what He is teaching, dulls the understanding. The more they came and listened to Jesus, their popular preacher, without totally responding to God, the worse they became; it was inevitable — such is the law governing human responsibility in the kingdom of heaven in respect of hearing the gospel. The very fact that He constantly called Himself the Son of Man should have

alerted them to truth, for, just like Ezekiel in his day, the Lord was becoming to this people as nothing more than a lovely song. With penetrating analysis Jesus later said of His generation that they were like children sitting in the market place playing their music and singing to one another; they loved it, but it was not real, and they were damning their own souls. His descriptive parables and His remarks about them were proven true; it is a very responsible thing to hear the word of the Lord; men's destinies are settled by their attitude towards it.

The Lord was careful also to make a clear distinction between His close associates and those who were without (as He described them). He did not forsake people because they were without, neither did He force them to remain there; He did come though to make clear to all men just who were

without and why they were there. One of the reasons why God sent Him was that God might be justified in the sight of all. But although Jesus told and explained some of His parables exclusively in the presence of His apostles, He did not tell them primarily for their sake. They heard them of course, but it was not His main purpose to teach the apostles by parables. He told them that it was given to them to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; they were not to regard themselves as belonging to the company that were without; they were in, they had been chosen. How much benefit they had gained at that juncture from their privilege it is difficult to estimate. It seems they had only a little grasp of truth then, and had not yet come to the full knowledge of who the Son of Man really was, but they were being taught of God and were learning all the

time. They recognized their ignorance and were willing to admit it, and did not hesitate to ask the Lord to interpret to them a parable if they did not grasp its meaning. Although they had been given to know, they had not yet arrived at the realization of that knowledge, and did not know the mystery of the kingdom of God as they one day would when born of God. Nevertheless they were with God's King in the kingdom of heaven on earth as it was manifest at that time, and were eager to learn. They had ears to hear and wanted to be taught, so they approached Him with confidence and asked Him to tell them what was the unrevealed meaning hidden in the parable of the sower; they wanted to know what He was saying to them. Who was the sower? What was the seed? And what did the different grounds represent?

The Heavenly Sower

They were familiar enough with the types of ground He introduced into His story and the results of sowing or trying to sow seed on them. They also knew that no one deliberately sowed seed on wayside ground; no man scattered seed just to feed birds; every farmer's purpose is to reap a harvest; all that was simple. But who was this sower? What sower was this that deliberately sowed seed on wayside or stony or thorny ground? None of the three synoptists say who the sower was, for the simple reason that the Lord did not name him. The reason for the anonymity of the sower is that he could be anybody; in the context of the parable and His purpose in telling it, the sower can be any man sent by God with the seed. It is assumed by most interpreters that the Lord was referring to Himself; so He was, but not

exclusively. The assumption is based upon the Lord's interpretation of the parable of the wheat and the tares, which is the second in the series of the parables of the kingdom of heaven recorded by Matthew. The thing that should be noted is that the Lord very carefully and significantly did not say He was the sower upon the first occasion, He only identified Himself as being one of the sowers in the so-called parable of the wheat and the tares.

By the strict logic of ordered thought, this first parable should not be called the parable of the sower, and for that matter neither should the second parable, which more properly should be called the parable of the sowers. The fact is that, in the kingdom of heaven on earth, there are two main sowers, namely Christ and satan, and two main subsidiary groups of sowers — saints and

demons, or if it be preferred, Christ's agents and the devil's agents. Herein lies one of the main distinctions between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God on earth. In the kingdom of God enemy agents cannot sow their seed; the only one who sows seed in the kingdom of God is God. That He does sow seed in the kingdom of heaven also is unavoidable; it is not possible for Him to do otherwise, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth. But satan cannot sow the seed in God's kingdom; it is exclusively God's sphere of operation. When thinking in terms of the kingdom of God, the more proper approach to reproduction of the seed is to consider the planting of God's seed, not the sowing of it. Mary is the example of this, not a farmer's field. When God sows His seed it is definite, pointed, personal and productive; it is always sown in good ground. Although God

seems to mix His metaphors in teaching, He does not mix or confuse His truth thereby. Happy indeed is the man who knows wisdom and gets understanding; where others grope in darkness, he shall see; when others only guess, he shall know. When once the mind, clear from traditional interpretations, passes into the mind of Christ and the consistent truth of God, it becomes obvious that in this first parable the Lord was not directing the apostles' attention to the sower but to the ground. The sower is the same throughout, so is the seed (it should be noted here that Mark does not mention the word seed; Luke does and so does Matthew, but only in the interpretation; the word 'seeds' in the parable is only introduced by the translators). It is the ground that is so different. This is the point the Lord is

stressing here, and He is doing it for His apostles' sake, that they should go out to minister to men with understanding; this is Mark's concern.

In a comparatively short while those apostles were to be sent out to become sowers, and the Lord wished them to have proper regard to the word they were going to sow: it was good. Throughout the entire sowing over all kinds of ground the seed would be the same, but they must understand that it would not produce equal results in every place, or among all peoples. They were not to be surprised at the different responses with which they would meet, things would be no different for them than for Him. Further, they were neither to be particularly over-elated nor greatly disappointed at the results they may or may not achieve; these would depend very

much, though not entirely, upon the people to whom they preached. The parable is a common sense analysis of all mankind for the purposes of gospel preaching and, as may be expected, seeing that it is the Lord who made the analysis, it is a brilliant one. The Master Sower makes plain that public preaching is to be regarded as broadcast scattering of seed; it must be sown everywhere, almost indiscriminately. As a whole men should be regarded in much the same way as a farmer would regard different kinds of ground; the Lord defines four kinds — wayside, stony, thorny and good. From these respectively, according to His classification, four different kinds of results should be observed and may confidently be expected.

The Lord sought to make this clear to the apostles during His interpretation of the

parable by a sudden and most unexpected shift of emphasis from that which was sown to that on which it was sown; this switch in emphasis is a very important one indeed. Why He did this appears at first sight to be a mystery, for it is unexplained, yet it is most pointed and quite deliberate. He knew it would be mystifying of course, but by doing this the Lord was ensuring that, when they went out to preach, the devil should not be able to gain an advantage over them. Part of the message He was giving them was 'do not be deceived into judging yourselves or doubting the quality of the word you preach by the apparent results you obtain'; what an important truth this is. He knew that this mistake could so easily be made by every preacher of the word and become a stumbling-block leading to their downfall. When they went out to sow they would not

only be in competition with the devil, but up against the natures of men as well; besides this, they could also become victims of their own over-confidence; all these are dangers which must be avoided. What an important move the Lord made then, in keeping those men with Him during those days; it must have been a very formative time. The truth of this parable must be proved among themselves, they must learn to test their own hearts; first they must discover their own responses to His word; in a sense they would be their own teachers. He had chosen them in love in order to use them in His kingdom, but they also were ground upon which to prove the truths He wanted them to impart to others. The office of apostle is a very high one, carrying with it responsibility greater than men can normally bear. He was going to send them out to preach the

gospel, and He knew that to the people they would unavoidably represent Him; that was absolutely unpreventable, and He did not wish to prevent it, therefore they, as He, must be greater than their task. His work would be tested at last by His choice of men for companionship and office; on the human side He was staking all on them. They did not know that then, but He did: His reputation, His kingdom, His Church, the validity of His choice and the whole of the future was bound up with those men. To Him they were of far more importance than any of the miracles which either He or they wrought, or any words that could be spoken. He Himself was the Word, and had been in the beginning, but He had to become flesh in order to validate the Word. He had been kept back with God ages before He was sent, and likewise He kept His apostles back with

Him as long as he could before He sent them out; their course of training was to be an intense one, they must learn and learn fast. The hearing of the word is the real secret of it all; it is the way people hear the word, their attitude towards it and the attention they pay to it, which counts. The state of the heart, the disposition of the spirit towards God is most important, and whether or not men will listen and pay attention; above all whether they believe and receive the word of God: this is the deciding factor. The key word to the parable is receive this is what the shift of emphasis indicates.

From the Lord's interpretation of the parable it was obvious that He had two other very important things in mind, namely association and identification. With certain types of people He only associates the preached word; with some He

both associates and identifies it. It is very important for everybody in the world to know this, for He makes the distinction between people solely upon their rejection or reception of' the word they hear. This is a most solemn thing to know; there are scarcely any more important things to know in the world than this. Whatever response a man makes to God's word, and however he regards it, it is a seed, and he is for ever after associated with it and held responsible for it. He may reject it and let some airy creature snatch it away, but he cannot disassociate himself from it; in God's mind he is associated with the word and by that reaction to it he is classified. The wayside ground is Christ's description of a hard man's momentary fancy, a passing interest; it matters nothing to him that God has spoken, he does not receive it; he is a fool. The stony

ground is the shallow man who, to a degree, receives the word of God and then lets it die within him; he will not give all his heart, only some of it, and that only superficially. As soon as things get too hot for this man he withers away and dies; the seed has root in itself and rests in him awhile, living on itself, but it never did take root in him at all, he never allowed it to do so. This man has no roots in himself, he cannot stand alone, his roots are always in others, trying to draw from them all the time. He was not so hard on the surface as the wayside hearer, but he was just as hard underneath. It is a terrible thing to kill the word of God within the heart. The thorny ground is the man who grows up alongside his brethren as green as they; he is not hardhearted as Mr. Wayside and Mr. Stony, he is good and tender and has plenty of depth and is well rooted. This

man is full of promise but never full of fruit; he is also full of thorns; to the sower he is the sorriest tragedy, perhaps more of a tragedy than either of the other two, for he seemed so promising. What went wrong with him? This is the man who receives the word of God right enough, but receives other things as well — the 'broad-minded' man. Such men are strange mixtures, very fruitful in all the things they receive, except that which is God's, and the thorns flourish and bring forth fruit after their kind, but God's word is choked to death.

Having dealt with the three different grounds of fruitlessness and death, the Lord turned to the fourth ground. Of all the four this is the only ground of life, and it must have given Him great pleasure to speak of it: 'these are they which are sown on good ground'. Listening to Him it must have

seemed to His hearers that He was intending them to reverse the roles of the word and the ground. Was He in reality saying that not the person but the word of God is the true ground of Life and should be preached that way? Instead of thinking that men were the ground, should they think that men are the seed and that they should therefore plant themselves in the word they hear? If so the whole of their thinking must undergo a complete revolution — and what a revolution! How were they to understand the whole of the parable? Were they to think about the ground of death in the same way as He now seemed to be suggesting about the good ground? Is it true that the word of God and not the seed should be thought of as ground? The answer is 'Yes' and 'No', it is both. Jesus was both Son of Man and Son of God and He always

spoke from that position. He always saw things from both viewpoints, that is why He could tell stories full of human meaning which rang true in the ears of men, and yet at the same time invest them with the meanings of God so that they rang true to Him also. This was Christ's genius and in this parable it shines through very powerfully indeed. Above all He wanted His apostles to be able to think as He thought, and live and speak and act as He did in the kingdom of God on this earth: to be able to do so was God's gift to them.

This is what the Lord meant and was really speaking about when He said it is given to you to know the mystery. He never hid the fact that it is mystery, human being and nature is a mystery because it came from God who is Himself a mysterious being. To understand Christ's interpretation we must

go back to the beginning of creation: in the beginning we read, all was God, God and His word only. God spoke, saying, 'Let the dry land appear,' and it happened; the word, by His intention, became the ground — the word was the ground. That is how it was at first. Then He spoke again saying 'Let the earth bring forth ...', and the ground brought forth every manner of growing thing standing upon its own roots in the earth — tree, herb, grass etc., bearing fruit and seed in itself. This time His Word was seed: first it was the ground, then it was the seed or the plant. So we see the truth from which Jesus spoke and something of the mystery of the kingdom of God. The mystery of God's kingdom is the mystery of God Himself. John, who hardly gives space in his Gospel to parables, reveals the Source of all parables and the key to them (especially this one) in

one brief phrase, 'In the beginning ... the Word was God'. Almost before getting started on his own Gospel he gives the key to all the Gospels and their contents. The Lord based His parable upon the miracle of Himself, who was the Word and Seed made flesh. His apostles must attain unto this understanding; the importance of seeing this principle of eternal truth cannot be overestimated; to grasp this is to possess a key to God's method of working. This is why He introduced these elements of truth into the parable of the ground, and why He should say, so mysteriously, that this parable is in the nature of a key. Many locks to the understanding of truth will yield to this key, and many doors will be opened up once this principle is mastered.

The Ground of the Kingdom

The Lord's deliberate move was to bring everything back to 'as it was in the beginning'. The truth is, and always has been, that men are the seed and the word is the ground. In terms of the parable this ideal state can only be achieved by men who: (1) receive the word of God; (2) associate themselves with it, and (3) thoroughly identify themselves with it, letting it take root deep in their hearts; that is the first stage. Then when the word has taken hold in a man everything will change, the word will become the ground of life and he the seed, deeply rooted in the word of God which is in him. Life will then become the expression of the word which is preached to him in order that it should become the ground of life; when the genuine identification has taken place the true identity will be recognized and established.

This is why the 'postscript' parable is so valuable, it is by way of being a final footnote to the parable of the ground and is the reason why the Lord deemed it necessary to add it. Matthew follows up his version of the parable with the parable of the sowers and their seeds, which is mostly known as the parable of the wheat and the tares. In this story there is no talk of different kinds of ground; the whole world is just one field and the ground is man, humankind is the same the world over. The emphasis the Lord is making in this particular parable is that the sowers are different, so are the seeds. But in this little postscript parable recorded by Mark, except in one thing, the Lord takes a different course from that entirely. At first they may seem very much the same, for in both He speaks of one ground only, but, although

they are akin, they are not alike; the ground is not the same.

In this small parable the Lord is taking up again part of the truth to which He drew attention in the first parable; He wants to talk further about the good ground, but not in the same way. His subject here is good ground, God's ground; He is speaking of the kingdom of God exclusively. There is nothing wrong with the ground, there is nothing wrong with the seed, there are no birds, no stones, no thorns, the ground is not shallow; everything is right, so everything follows its normal course. The man spoken of sows his ground and then carries on his ordinary living; he goes to bed at night and rises up next day; it is all very simple and straightforward. No enemy has sown his ground with bad seed, nobody has uprooted his crop. What else should a man expect? If

anyone had asked him 'How is it that you have such marvellous results? How do you do it? What is the secret? He might have said, 'I don't know, I cannot tell you, I didn't do it — all I did was sow the seed, the ground has done the rest. The seed was good of course, I only use the best, it is such a good piece of ground that it brings forth fruit of itself'. It seems that the man almost regarded the ground as a woman, a wife, a mother, and he himself as the husband, and in a sense he was right; he was the husbandman, he had married himself to her. Mother earth had brought forth his seed; she did it herself. All he had to do was to carry on normally, and when the fruit was ripe he put in the sickle and the harvest came. What a lovely little story! 'So is the kingdom of God,' says Jesus. It is paradisiac.

This is the knowledge of the kingdom of God which His apostles had to acquire; they could, for it was given to them to do so. God's kingdom is one hundred percent good, there are no wayside places in it, there is no stony ground, thorns do not grow there, neither are there any tares in it. Enemies may try to contaminate it, but their seeds do not take root there. All men must know this, apostles especially. In the kingdom of heaven it is different, many things contrary to God's word abound there, but not in the kingdom of God; when a man is planted in His kingdom all is safe and all is good and all is well. But we must also know that in whichever kingdom a man may live every seed will produce its own fruit; although all the seeds are equally good, they do not all produce equal results. The Lord pointed this out in the longer parable. He

said that, even in the good ground, some produce thirtyfold, some sixtyfold and some a hundredfold. At first this seems very surprising; isn't all the seed the same after all? Is some of the seed inferior? Has some less potential than others? Are there three grades of seed? Questions multiply! The answer to all these questions is 'NO'. There is no difference in the seed whatsoever; the word of God never varies in quality.

The basis of the explanation of this seeming anomaly lies in a word found in Hebrews chapter four, the writer is speaking of the gospel which was preached to Israel. He reminds his readers that the same gospel was preached to them also, and then says, 'But the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it'. He speaks it as a warning; for the same reason we too, although we be the

children of God, can fail of the grace of God. Although we may be good seed in good ground — the very best — unless we live by faith ever after, that is by faith of the same nature and fulness as that by which we become children of God in the beginning, we shall not bring forth the fulness of fruit we ought. In all the seed there is potential for a hundredfold, and we must so order our lives that we achieve that fulness, ever remembering that the harvest is God's.

Everything God speaks to us is packed full with one hundred percent potential.

Growing in His kingdom, grace our natural atmosphere, love our sunshine, true doctrine dropping as rain or distilling as dew upon us and the winds of the Spirit moving us, there is nothing to prevent us from being abundantly fruitful to God our creator. From the Lord's remarks it becomes clear that, in

the realm *of* fruitfulness, so much depends upon us. The measure of attention we pay to what He says is a determinative factor in God's kingdom. The measure of desire is immense, but that is not the measure God means; capacity for desire is limitless, and hope is just as boundless, but the measure God fills is the measure of faith. Growth and fruitfulness are determined by faith. If we do not use it faith will be taken from us, the devil will rob us of it. The seed must continue in the good ground by its own roots, but it must not rest from growth, it must fulfil the law of its own nature or perish. we have faith and all that comes with it, and live in all those gifts, the Lord will give us more, He says.

Chapter 4 — WHAT MANNER OF MAN IS THIS?

Miracle on the Sea

Listening to Him telling His parables to the multitudes and then hearing Him expounding them privately in their own ears, the apostles must have felt the most privileged people on the earth; they were. It had been a wonderful day, packed with excitement and marvellous ministry; their hearts were full of love and thankfulness, and, as night drew on, they contemplated a joyous evening. Full of pleasure the apostles were looking forward to a time of peace and quiet, a place of rest somewhere together with the Lord; but it was not to be. The Lord thought otherwise, 'Let us pass over unto the other side', He said.

Already the light was fading, shadows were growing long with approaching sunset; night was drawing on, and they knew that to set out now would mean that they would certainly finish their journey in the dark. Nevertheless, disappointed though they may have been, hearing the Lord's wish they set aside their own feelings, helped Him send the crowds home, and prepared for departure. When all was done to His satisfaction they took Him as He was into the ship and set sail into the coming night. Not surprisingly a little flotilla of small boats, filled with people bent on following Jesus wherever He went, set sail with them. It is not clear how far those little boats went; whether they did any more than accompany the Lord a little from the shore as a gesture of goodwill, and then returned to land, or whether they continued with Him right out

to sea is not revealed. Apart from one reference to these persons, nothing more is said about them or their purposes or what happened to them, they remain unknown; the story continues with the Lord and His apostles.

Jesus was tired, it had been a long hard day, He had been teaching and answering questions almost non-stop for hours, so now, with the relaxing of the pressures, helped by the rocking of the ship, He succumbed to nature's demands and fell asleep: the apostles sailed on in the failing light, unaware of what lay ahead, but conscious that it was getting very dark. The night came on suddenly, it was darker than usual — too dark for their liking, and the wind was picking up incredibly fast. Gale force winds began to blow, and soon thick storm clouds began to build up overhead;

visibility became nil, and all normal light was blotted out. Many of those men knew that sea; they were experienced fishermen who had lived on it, and by it, day and night since childhood; all the signs filled them with apprehension, and when, within minutes, the storm broke, they knew what it meant. The little ship was helpless. Mountainous waves drove in upon them almost washing them overboard; winds tore at the rigging, and the ship tossed and yawed and dipped about uncontrollably; every moment they were threatened with death. The apostles were desperately afraid. Men of the sea though many of them were, they were helpless; this was no ordinary storm, they had never been in anything like it before, it was terrifying and, incredible though it seemed, Jesus was asleep. It was unbelievable. How could He sleep through

this? It wasn't natural! Could a man be so tired that He could sleep through such a storm? They were astounded by it; there was something strange about this. How was it possible?

The question they ought to have been asking themselves was not 'how?' but 'why?' Jesus was not sleeping simply because He was tired — they were all tired, but threat of drowning drives all possibility of sleep away from human hearts; they could not sleep. How could He? He seemed completely undisturbed. They were baffled; surely they were beholding a miracle. Their Lord was sleeping the sleep of eternal security; He was entirely unaffected by outward circumstances, sublimely indifferent to them, and seemingly ignorant of their need, He was completely at rest. What an example, what a lesson! He was in the same

boat in the same storm as they were: He felt absolutely secure, they were dreadfully afraid. But neither the storm nor exhaustion was His prime reason for staying asleep; sleeping through a storm in a boat in the midst of the sea was not a habit of His, and it was neither the time nor the place to commence the practice. He was sleeping with purpose. For Him everything was going according to plan, and nothing devil or man or wind or water could do could alter that. He knew what was happening; in fact it was what He wanted to happen — the devil was trying to break His men, and through them to break Him, so He stayed asleep.

He knew it would be a terrible trial for the apostles, but He was confident of them and even more confident of His Father. All unknown to the apostles, He was continuing their education, and the lesson, though

unannounced, was still the kingdom of God. Strangely enough His sleep was the main part of the lesson, though they could scarcely believe it; that sleep was surely the most supreme demonstration of His power possible to imagine; it was also a revelation of His utter contempt for the devil. The raging elements were as much a manifestation of satan's hysterical frustration at being so humiliatingly ignored, as of his hatred and malice against the apostles; it was also a demonstration of the basic conflict existing between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of satan in the universe.

The Lord's object was to teach the apostles the way to handle the situation whenever they were involved in a skirmish with their enemy. It may seem more than ridiculous to say so, but those men should have joined

Jesus in sleep. That was impossible to them of course, they were incapable of it and He knew that; nevertheless, amazing though it was, it did not deter Him from showing them the truth. The devil's ragings could not touch Him in Himself; they left Him unperturbed. Being an apostle as well as they, He was showing them how an apostle should conduct himself when all hell was raging in the kingdom of heaven and satan seems to be reigning and not God. The difference between what was presently happening and His former method of teaching was that now He was using natural elements as a demonstration of spiritual elements. Those men really were being given a proper training.

His method was still parabolic, only this time He was not making up stories as illustrations of truth, but using elemental forces instead,

and, out of necessity, the apostles were caught up with Him in the vortex of it all. They didn't like it one little bit; they loved His stories but, O dear, sometimes they were afraid of His demonstrations; He never turned from His purposes because of that though. Only a few hours earlier He had told them of the man who sowed seed in his ground and then went home to bed; it was quite natural, there was nothing unusual about that, all farmers did it. The man was sure of his seed and sure of his ground and sure of himself; he obviously saw no reason at all why he should lose any sleep. That was exactly how Jesus felt in that ship; He was as confident of His apostles and the seed He had sown as the man was of his ground and the seed he had sown. The apostles were not aware of these things, and certainly did

not share His confidence, but their insecurity did not change Him.

It was not the storm that brought the fear to their hearts; the storm only revealed what was already there. They did not know what was happening, but He did; as the present grows out of the past, so are present events made necessary by past happenings; in this case they were engineered to illustrate the truth they had heard. Those men were beginning to discover the price of apostleship. He had told them that it was given to them to know the things of the kingdom of God, and that they had been chosen for that purpose, but they did not understand what that meant in terms of personal cost. They would never have come to the knowledge of the kingdom and have been able to understand what He meant and why He did such things unless they were put

in circumstances where they could prove the existence and power of it for themselves.

The lesson was tough; it was a hard way to learn, but the Teacher was unrelenting.

To a certain extent they had been good ground. With the exception of Judas Iscariot they had each received the Lord's good seed and were going through a growing period.

Many stones and thorns had yet to be removed from their hearts, but, of the twelve, in the end only Judas proved to be wayside ground from whom the devil snatched away the seed. The others received it and were now being shown what Jesus had meant when He had talked about having root in themselves. At the same time they were also being shown something of what it meant to be good seed planted in the good ground of the kingdom. The Lord was confident of them, for although the kingdom

of God had not yet come, in His heart He had planted them there, and nothing could uproot them; they were safe, as safe as He. He knew of course that they were nearly frantic with fear, but that was only because of ignorance; not yet being planted in the kingdom experientially, they had not yet learned to live by knowledge of the powers of the kingdom of God. So, despite their mental pain and total misunderstanding of His purpose, quite conscious also of the sense of impending doom gripping their hearts, He slept on.

A Greater than Noah

The apostles tried everything they knew, but without success; the devil also tried all he knew, equally without success — the situation was at deadlock. Nothing fatal happened. The wind howled more, the terrifying mountains of water towered

higher and higher, the ship was rent and torn by unimaginable forces, but still it did not shatter or sink. It tossed and pitched and filled fuller and fuller with water, but all in vain; the devil's rage and might were in vain, the ship was still afloat. The Son of Man and His fellows were being held firm by the will of God in His kingdom; with Christ in the vessel nothing could sink them.

The apostles did not know that then, they only saw it by hindsight; it was marvellous in retrospect, but it was terrible at the time. With furies howling through the rigging and terrors filling their hearts, they could stand no more of it, and were driven at last to wake the Lord. Perhaps they thought they were saving Him from a watery grave, and certainly they thought it about themselves! 'Master, carest thou not that we perish?' they cried, and immediately He was awake.

That too astounded them; it was uncanny. Was there no end to the complexities of His character? Rising to His feet at their call, He rebuked the wind and said to the sea, 'Peace, be still', and it happened: immediately the wind ceased, the seas sank and there was a great calm. It was almost unbelievable, as unbelievable as His sleep had been to them previously. Absolute stillness, not a movement, not a sound; with all nature they waited, and in the silence He spoke again — 'Why are ye so fearful?' He said, 'how is it that ye have no faith?' To Him the mystery was not the storm or the miracle, but why they had no faith after all they had previously seen and heard and been through with Him. Gradually it dawned on them that, far from feeling fearful, He had not seen any reason for fear, and strangely that made them more dreadfully

afraid than ever. 'What manner of man is this?', they said one to another, 'even the wind and the sea obey him,' they whispered and floated on in the calm.

The apostles were frightened men. They had been in terrible storms before, but although this one had been frightening in the extreme, the Lord's behaviour was more frightening than anything else that had happened. The sheer unimaginable immensity of His power stunned them. Who and what was He? They had never met or heard of any other man like Him, He was phenomenal, far greater than they had ever imagined a man could possibly be. Plainly He was the greatest prophet of all time, greater even than He had shown Himself to be on that mount of wonderful blessings at the very beginning. Listening to Him there they had thought He was the prince of teachers,

infinitely preferable to Moses, and had made their choice. But what now? Who was He? There was not a man aboard that ship who did not know that he must get that question settled.

During the terrible storm it had seemed to them that the end of an era had come, that nature itself — perhaps even God — had erupted against them. Just what had been happening? They needed to know. Had the fountains of the deep been opened up and the windows heaven opened? Had it been the judgement and wrath of God that had been poured out from heaven and risen up from The deep against them? If so why? What manner of person was this man in the ship with them? They must know. He had simply said to the elements, 'be muzzled' and they were. His power and authority were tremendous, that was without

question, but to whom or to what power was He speaking? Whatever it was, His authority over it was absolute. But whose authority was it, God's or Satan's? Jesus' greatness thrust in upon their souls. He was far greater than Noah — that was obvious — and, perhaps even more amazing, their ship was more wonderful than the ark had been. Noah was a great man, one of the earliest examples of a man of faith, but he had no power over the waters as Jesus had: He had just displayed the same power over the waters that God had exercised over them in Noah's day. Furthermore the ark had never been in any danger of foundering, it had been specially built to withstand the fearsome storm and the prolonged batterings; it was immensely strong and absolutely watertight, and finally it had been totally sealed up by God. Their ship bore no

comparison with that; it was a frail cockleshell of a boat, wide open to the seas, and had been flooded with water till it was filled and awash; how it did not sink they would never know. If Noah's survival was a miracle, what was theirs? It was a thousand times more wonderful than Noah's. They had been the subjects of a staggering miracle and they were grateful for it, but ... who was Jesus and what manner of man was He? They must know the answer.

The Lord was not insensitive to their dilemma, He loved them and was fully aware of what was going on in their hearts and, strange as it may seem, that was the reason why He took them out on the sea that night. He wanted to give them all the evidence they needed to draw their own conclusions and resolve their doubts. They had been chosen by God, as chosen as Noah had been

in his day, though for a different ministry, and they had to be trained for the coming day and the work for which He had called them. The voyage in the darkness through the storm was a voyage of discovery — discovery of self and of Him. At His call they had come to Him, but if they were going to be sent out by Him in the future, they must be made ready and proved by Him in the present. The result of the test must have been very depressing to them; the miserable truth was that in the event they had no faith. Possibly also their minds went back to the parables He had so recently told — what sort of ground were they? This near tragedy seems to show that they were certainly not good ground; stony ground perhaps, but not good. The whole affair was proof that they had no root in themselves at all, they had no knowledge and no faith; He had, but not

they. The apostles had been living by His faith; they were alive at that moment because of it. When He later told them that they had not chosen Him but He had chosen them they understood perfectly what He meant, and were grateful as well as mortified. Had He not already known without asking, He could have asked them 'what manner of men are you?' But He did not ask rhetorical questions, He was no actor.

It had been a marvellous opportunity; He had taken them out on the sea to show them what He had said and meant about the ground. With none but angels and demons in attendance He had been able to show His apostles their own hearts, and give them a sight of His heart as well; they were ground, He was the sower and the husbandman — He went to sleep. Left to themselves in the

tempest all their natural abilities proved useless and all that was in their hearts was demonstrated to them. They were tossed, torn, blown around and about and up and down; heaved up to the skies they discovered blackness, thrown down in the trough of a wave they discovered gloom; death was everywhere) They were overpowered, overwhelmed, overcome, swamped, totally defeated, completely inadequate; they were terrified, baffled, lost, perishing. Had they known it, the elements were more of a mirror than a threat to their hearts; they had no resources; they were dead men and they recognized it. When they called upon Him though He rose immediately, completely unruffled as though He might have risen from His bed, and in a moment of time, with a word, cast out upon the waters the peace of His own bosom. The

waters ceased from their raging, stillness enveloped the boat and a great calm embraced them. What rest! Silence: surely the Spirit of God was moving over the waters, brooding upon the face of the deep as at the beginning of creation. It was a moment of awe.

Heavenly Warfare

There was a war on. The apostles had always known that of course, but now the Lord had introduced them to a little of the fury of it. A conflict not of their own choosing or making was raging and they had been caught up into it; the ferocity and power of it was frightening. It was only a brief encounter really, but to them it was a terrifying experience, a major engagement. They were all right though; physically they had come through unscathed and were safe, but the battle for their minds was still on. They still

had to be convinced in their hearts about Him — both He and Satan recognized that. Satan aside, the Lord knew that, if He wanted their total commitment and full cooperation, He must prove to them who and what kind of man He was. If He wanted those men to have power and be sent out to preach they must be assured that it was the right power and that they were on the right mission. Crisis point had been reached — it would go one way or the other now. If He wanted them to go His way He had to assure them beyond all reasonable doubt that He was who He was.

An apostle's assignment is a tough one; the engagement on the sea had been a toughening-up exercise; without forewarning He had deliberately led His unsuspecting apostles out into an arena of battle about which they had not the slightest

knowledge. It was suddenly thrust upon them. He had not given them any instructions or prepared them in any way for what was to come; He was dominating their lives. He did it because He thought best to do it this way, and it was certainly most effective.

In the tranquillity of the beautiful evening, following a wonderful day of success, the apostles had been as men saying, 'Peace, peace,' but He had been as one saying 'War, war'. Why was He so different from them? Why all this great conflict and contradiction? In Himself He had peace; rest was a feature of His life: they found it in His presence. But why did trouble spring up wherever he went? Always it was conflict of some kind, and they were being drawn into it. They knew that there is no peace in this world, nor in this universe of which it is a part;

what they did not know was that they were chosen to be leaders in the warfare.

Without intermission, from a beginning somewhere before the creation of the world, a constant warfare has been raging between the forces of darkness and the forces of light. Wicked spirits have been, and still are, in conflict with every other spirit not of themselves, including both angels and men, and even God Himself. Constitutionally and dispositionally the fallen Lucifer and his host are against God and His purposes with men, they constantly contend with Him for authority over them, with the result that there is unending warfare in the kingdom of heaven on earth. While this age lasts there always will be clashes taking place between men and angels and devils, because the earth is a heavenly body; whether we know about this and whether we like it or not, we

are all caught up in the same war. Universal peace, that earnest desire but impossible end, shall not come to earth until Christ reigns on it. Peace only reigns in the kingdom of God; peace can, and for some does, exist in the kingdom of heaven on earth, and can only exist therein, but it does not reign universally there. Wherever, that is, in whomsoever the kingdom of God is, it can only exist as the kingdom of heaven. Being His, it can have no other manifestation, and every Christ-like man must, like God, live in two realms also. The apostles had to learn that when they were planted in the kingdom of God they had been planted in the kingdom of heaven also, and had to live and labour in the kingdom of heaven on earth just as the Lord did. Like God Himself, they had to live inwardly in

utter peace, whilst being outwardly engaged in total warfare with the forces of evil.

When they had set out from the shore the previous evening all had been well. The Lord had been sitting all day in the ship like a king upon a throne addressing His people; it was heavenly. That little ship was like the kingdom of God in this world; only Christ and His chosen were in it, no one else. It was stable on the calm water, firmly anchored close to land. Just off from them on the shore the restless multitudes were gathered, standing still or surging to and fro under internal spiritual pressures as the word struck home or as the mood took them. Quite deliberately the Lord, with His own, had taken up a position compatible with His intentions to show the two different elements in which men exist; although so close, the people were a different company

existing on the land, an entirely different element from the ship. The Lord was trying to create the impression of two distinct companies existing in two different elements, generally considered to be one. This planet called earth, on which man lives, is a comparatively tiny particle of matter, surrounded by an airy atmosphere, and is moving around in an enormous universe; in fact it is not all dry land as the name suggests, for actually the greater part of it is under water. Nevertheless it is still earth, though earth covered by another form or element called water or seas, derived from a different combination of the gases of which the air consists. The little Sea of Galilee is a landlocked lake, a tiny 'island' surrounded by earth, where creatures of a different nature and different flesh and different habits live in a different element from that in which men

live. That is the parabolic impression the Lord wished to create. The Lord and His apostles were so close to the people, as close as sea is to land, so as to be called and named as one with it. Yet it seemed like a different world, a different kingdom. It was the same world, only the elements were different; the Lord and the apostles were related to their fellow men just as the sea is to the land, and could be just as easily distinguished.

To the understanding, this presented a perfect picture of the way in which the kingdom of God, though seemingly the same as the kingdom of heaven, is distinctly different from it. Christ and His apostles were in the kingdom of God and in the kingdom of heaven at the same time, but the people were in the kingdom of heaven only. It was an idyllic setting, but the Lord

knew it could give an entirely false impression to His apostles. There were other elements at work too; kingdoms other than the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven exist in the universe, and operate in this world; the apostles knew scarcely anything about these, and it was essential that they should be taught the truth about them. This was also a part of the Lord's intention when He commanded His followers to put to sea that day. Unavoidably there was a complete change of scenery and — what was more important for the Lord — there was a complete change of setting also. As the ship sailed away into the approaching night, the land and its peoples receded from view, until there was nothing and no one in sight, save possibly the other little ships and their occupants sailing along behind them. Even they would soon have been obscured

from view as. the sky above and sea around became quickly wrapped in darkness; the Lord and His apostles were cut off from human sight; it seemed that they, and only they, existed together in their own little world of love and power. Now the setting was right, the ship was God's kingdom and Galilee was the sea of humanity; the scene was set. The Lord went to sleep.

Suddenly there came the sound of a mighty rushing wind; it seemed to come from the heavens, filling the ship where they were sitting and the atmosphere around them. It also filled their hearts with apprehension and their minds with foreboding and the sea with turbulence. The waters stirred, rose, stood up and wrought terribly. Splitting up the little ships (if they were still there), it drove them apart with brute force, scattering them until all contact with each

other was lost and none knew where the others were. Howling and roaring like the fiends of hell the storm rushed at the apostles, flung them around, pushed them against seas like mountains, drove them into troughs like the valleys of the deep, tossed them aside and swept on. Fear filled the night, they could not flee from it, it was like a solid wall, and whichever way they were tossed they were driven into it; there was no escape. Surely the heavens and the seas were in agreement, they had combined against everything and everybody, joining forces to destroy them; everything was against them. Where now the fine picture of the kingdom of God upon the placid sea of humanity? Where the heavenly dream? Everything was turbulence, death and destruction stalked the waves, the clouds were black crepe, the wind a shroud, the sea

a grave and the Son of Man was asleep; He had opted out, or so it seemed. The idyll had vanished, the dream had passed, the kingdom of God had suffered violence, the sea of humanity had erupted, it had risen to slay them, it had rebelled against God and His kingdom. Why? Whence had it come? All had been well until

Until when? Until that sound of a mighty rushing wind came from the heavens. That is what started it all; it came from there, from the heavens. But wasn't that the dwelling place of God? Did He really want to drown His Son and His apostles? No, surely not! That could not be, it could not possibly be — God would not want to drown His own Son surely? Then who would? There was only one answer to that. Had it all happened on land, if some person or persons — Herod, Pilate, the Pharisees — had sought to

destroy Him and all His apostles on land, they would have known who it was: 'the powers that be', men of corrupt morals filling positions of authority, the confederation of evil forces working in and through those men and their powers, using them for satan against Christ. But it had happened on the sea, with not a human — enemy or friend — in sight; it could not possibly have been of man. It was entirely spiritual, a cleverly planned attack of elemental force, a primitive, naked assault by spiritual powers, strategically unleashed against Christ and His kingdom. The Lord knew it of course, and went to sleep to show His contempt for it all. Later He would waken to quell it all with a word.

'Be muzzled', He said, rising to His feet. In a moment it was done. It was almost as though He had muzzled the slaving jaws of

an unnumbered host of wild things, beasts, serpents, dragons, phantoms, stilling the howlings of every creature whose breath gushed out of its throat as the raging wind of hell. All along He had known it would happen and had allowed it, indeed had engineered it all. The prince of the power of the air hated Him so much that he just had to seize the opportunity when it presented itself, he could not withhold himself any longer. He pounced upon the sleeping Jesus and the labouring apostles with all malice, hoping to destroy every one of them, but that was impossible, he could not destroy the Lord and His men. The apostles, could not have known that the devil had been deliberately provoked to action by the Lord; the miracle was a demonstration of hate and of love. The incident was as a foretaste, if not a preview, of what would one day

happen in a more terrible form in the whole nation. Shortly the devil would stir up the sea of humanity against the Lord God and His Christ; the dreadful tempest would rage far more violently then.

Standing on the shores in the fading light the previous day, that multitude had looked so attentive and receptive; they were so eager to listen, and appeared so innocent of all evil intent. All day long they had stayed with Him, polite and deferential, waiting to hear His marvellous stories, hanging on His words, well behaved, there didn't appear to be much wrong with them. When the apostles had joined with the Lord to send them home they had heard no complaints; murmurs of disappointment perhaps, but that was only natural; everything was good-natured and happy. Could it possibly be true that all the time they were harbouring

wrong thoughts? Were they enemies of Christ underneath? Were demons hiding under that placid, pleasant surface? Could there be such a dread mixture 'of good and evil in the kingdom of heaven? They would soon see, and that before many months had passed. The seas and waves would roar, men would rise up against them, unbelievable hatred would be unleashed; they would even see demons at work among their own company, for satan would even take possession of one of their number. All of them would be scattered to their own, just as the little ships had been scattered on the sea that night; numbed and bewildered, they would hear Him say to His captors, 'This is your hour and the power of darkness', and they would flee for their lives: the entire sea of Jewish humanity would rise up and some would say, 'Away with Him; we will not have

this man to reign over us'. It would all come to pass and they would witness it; they would again see Him lying still and unresponsive, His eyes shut; but His head would not be on a pillow, nor would He be asleep, He would be cold and dead. Powers and forces and kingdoms and authorities would battle against Him in the dark, the waters would come in unto His soul, billows and waves would go over Him; He would cry out 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' and go down under it all and stay there till He died. But He would rise again and come with familiar words to them saying, 'Peace be unto you,' and there would be a great calm; He would also reprove them again for their unbelief. How could it be that still they should have no faith?

That night on the lake the apostles received instructions and were given an introduction;

it was a baptism they did not want and never sought, nor had they ever dreamt they would be called upon to endure it. The Lord had given them a demonstration of things as they were, at the same time granting them a prophetic insight into things to come. They tasted of demonic powers, saw into their own hearts, learned something more of the Son of Man, and were amazed at the hatred of the devil. It was all part of their training, and very necessary; it was their privilege, but it left them uncertain and confused, more. afraid of Him than they had been of death. The Lord knew that, He expected it to happen of course, so lovingly He applied Himself to correcting it.

He had brought them thus far and they had come through the test very well really; it had been an undeniably tough course, and it was not yet finished, more lay ahead; an apostle

must be an apostle of Christ. The further test He had planned must be taken, it would complete this present period of training, and when it was through they would see and understand it all He was sure, but not until then. So, in the calm of the after-storm, He lifted His finger and pointed to the other shore. Thankful to be alive, the apostles once more set course for the further coast and came over the sea to Gadara. The Lord had chosen the spot very carefully; the lesson they had to learn would be taught them there.

Chapter 5 — SON OF THE MOST HIGH GOD

Mountain of the Dead

Long before they reached land and stepped ashore the apostles recognized the place; they had arrived at the mountain of the dead. Whatever possessed Him to come here? It was a horrible place, weird and dreadful. Was there to be no end to fear? They had scarcely left the ship when a man came rushing out of the tombs towards them, running like a soul chased by all the demons of hell. He was totally naked, mad! Pieces of broken chain hung from him, his hair and beard tossed wildly about his head and face as he ran. His body was covered with countless scars of old wounds and suppurating sores; gashes freshly made, still bleeding, made by his own hands during the tortures of the terrible night, gaped among

the scars. He was filthy, wretched, miserable, tormented, and close to death; the apostles had never seen a more pitiful, fearful sight. The man was surely beyond all human aid. However did he have strength to run? In the past men had tried to help him, but without success; no one had been able to tame him, he was too far gone. Many times they had bound him with fetters and chained him with chains, but all in vain, as soon as it was done he had broken loose again; he seemed to have the strength of a hundred men. It was impossible to restrain him; an unclean spirit and many devils had taken possession of him, his strength was superhuman. Poor man, he was in a dreadful state, he couldn't live with his fellows; tombs were his home, corpses his companions and evil spirits his family; no one wanted him. Everybody was afraid even to come near him; there was no

remedy, nothing worked, whatever they did was useless; they gave up, he was doomed, already living with the dead, perhaps even sharing a tomb with a corpse. Often the nights were rent with his cries, his howls of pain echoed through the desolate mountain, but no one noticed; tears ran down his face, making furrows in the dirt, but no one saw. He cut his body with stones, trying to relieve the pain of his mind, but there was no respite for him day or night; all was darkness, death was his world. If any man heard him crying, beyond a pitying thought he ignored him; didn't anyone care?

This man is probably the most outstanding Biblical illustration and example of that death by sin which came into the world as by that one man Adam. Perhaps more than any other, this man could most justifiably be called Death, for he was surely the

embodiment and personification of the results of the death which has reigned over men since Adam's betrayal of mankind at the beginning. Ever since then death upon death has followed in the race, compounding and complicating sin, displaying itself in thousands of ways throughout history, but probably in none has it found such full expression as in this maniac of Gadara. With the exception of physical death and the ultimate death of Gehenna, every other state of death was manifest in him; so the Lord took the apostles to Gadara to meet this man. Possibly they were not altogether unfamiliar with people like him, but, as yet, they had not seen what happened when persons in his state met with Jesus; they were soon to be enlightened. It was with this in mind that the Lord gave command to set course for

Gadara that morning. While it was still fresh in their minds, because it was incomplete He wished to supplement the lesson of the raging storm and the unearthly calm, with yet another lesson; His purpose was to transfer the lesson from inanimate nature to unique humanity. What they had witnessed raging in the sea was rampant in men too — the apostles must make the connection in their minds, they must understand. The basic power which had so recently worked in the elements of the universe in an attempt to destroy them, also worked in men with the same intention; the scope of satan's activities is universal. Man is akin to his environment, one spiritual power embraces the whole and affects everything. This lesson was there for the learning, though whether at that time the apostles were in sufficient light to understand it is very doubtful, for

not long after these things the Lord protested to them, 'How is it ye do not understand?' But, anxious though He was that apostles should be men of understanding, He was not more concerned to teach them than to deliver others; He would do both together, and what a lesson that would be! Apostles were called and chosen for this.

From Despair to Hope.

When Jesus stepped ashore from the boat that morning to meet Legion it was as the dawning of a long new day for that man. To the apostles it was the end of a journey; to him it was an entirely new beginning. He did not know this when he ran down that mountain out of the tombs to meet Jesus that morning. John the Baptist had not been to Gadara and the hill of tombs to herald the coming of the Lord. Legion had not been

told, yet he came. Why? What made him do it? Hope? Did he come because someone had at last come to him? Someone had heard him. Someone cared for his soul. The night had been dreadful enough for the apostles, but how about this man? It had been far, far worse for him; he lived with terror and pain, and he had no Jesus; everything had seemed to agree together to torture him to death in a world beyond sanity. The storm had been terrible, it had seemed to call to everything in him; the howl of the wind without was akin to the wail of the hosts of darkness within; he seemed to be one with them. He raised his voice and wailed with them and the wind, but the wind whipped his cry from his lips and bore it away into emptiness; there was no one there, no one heard. The dead could not hear him, the tomb mocked him,

echoing his own despair, and the spirits within answered him with malice, jeering at him; hope was dead in him; they hated him, laughing at his desolation. He cried and cried and cried again; though no living thing heard him he would still cry; he could not help it, he would die crying. Perhaps the mountain goats and the creatures of the night heard him and were startled by his cries, but they did not come near; instead they withdrew and scurried away at his dreadful groaning. They didn't understand, and if they had understood they could not have helped him. It was dark, so dark, it was like black crepe all around him too, wrapping him up in a shroud of loneliness and terror; surely all nature, the whole creation, was groaning and travailing together with him in pain to be delivered. Someone must hear. Someone did hear: He rose and stepped athwart His

bed, He stood astride His pillow, He looked up and spoke into the night, 'Be muzzled,', He said, and whoever and whatever it was, was muzzled. Someone far out on the sea had heard him, Someone had seen him, Someone stopped the wailing of the wind; Someone cared! It wasn't the apostles — they hadn't heard him; they were as dead as he, though not so evidently, and not in his torments.

He came from across the sea, He stepped out of the ship. Someone had come for him and he knew who it was, he knew Him, it was Jesus. But how did he know?

How could he know? He had never met Him before. Those apostles must have opened their eyes wide that day, they were dumbfounded; even Peter was silent. It must have been the devils of course; all devils know Jesus: 'Go and meet Him on the

shore,' they whispered, 'stop Him, don't let Him come any further, this is your territory not His, tell Him to go away, He will only torment you, refuse to have Him'. So, confused, muddled, fighting for the right to live, the poor man went down to the shore, sanity and insanity wrestling within him; the frontier between them had been almost destroyed. But he fought to get to Him; he wanted to be free, become a normal man. He felt that he would never make it, he would die before he could reach Jesus, he would never do it: a voice broke into his consciousness, 'Come out of the man thou unclean spirit', it said, and suddenly he could make it, he knew he could. A few more steps, a final effort, he stumbled and fell down on his knees, and he was there; somehow he was at Jesus' feet. He worshipped Him. The devils within him

fought him, squabbling, screaming like pigs; the unclean spirit had gone, but they were still there. The agony within him was intense; he cried out, 'What have I to do with thee Jesus, thou Son of the most High God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not'. Jesus ignored his demented cries. 'What is thy name?' He asked; 'My name is Legion,' he answered, 'for we are many'. Identity between the man and the devils was total. He did not know himself apart from evil spirits. He even besought the Lord not to send the devils away out of the country — it was bizarre — he pleaded for them as though they were his friends. Only the Lord could distinguish between man and devils and who was speaking and who was not. The apostles must have wondered whatever was going on. 'Send us into the swine that we may

enter into them', the devils said. The apostles could scarcely believe their ears. What would He do? Jesus gave them permission to go where they wanted; He actually sent them, it suited His purposes, it would also teach His men another lesson. The result was amazing; the devils cleared out of the man immediately; he was totally delivered; the devils took possession of the swine, which, to the watching apostles' utter astonishment straightway worked up into a violent frenzy, and rushed, grunting and squealing, straight down a steep slope right into the sea, and were choked to death in its cold waters.

It was an unforgettable sight, one of the most amazing and terrible miracles they were ever likely to see; certainly they had never seen anything like it before. For the apostles it was the final episode of the

never-to-be-forgotten series of lessons the Lord had begun the preceding day.

Everything was clear to them now, they were at last convinced; they knew who Jesus was; they had seen; they had heard — the man had called Him 'Jesus, Son of the most high God': Jesus was the Son of God. The man had been quite mad, he had been out of his mind, a killer full of devils, but he had recognized who Jesus was, and without hesitation had confessed it: they felt ashamed of themselves. The man had never seen Jesus before, yet as soon as he met Him he knew Him, that was amazing, and the expression he used about God too. That perhaps was the most convincing thing of all, he called Him by the same name that Abraham had first used, and not only Abraham but Melchizedek also; they had both used it — 'the most high God,

possessor (or maker) of heaven and earth'. They had only just seen that Jesus was greater than Noah; now they saw that He was greater than Abraham also, and, although they felt a bit sheepish, they were glad. What a person He was! This Jesus was the Son of Man and the Son of God; was there to be no end to their discoveries about Him? That is why Jesus took them with Him when He went to deliver the man; they were only apostles in training. A maniac had taught those apostles who Jesus was.

The Lord was not the easiest person in the world to understand though — nobody could blame them for having had doubts about Him — their hesitation was understandable; they had to make sure. Not that they could do anything towards their own conviction; they could only watch and wait and see: this they had done, and

now Jesus had proved Himself to them. He had chosen His own way to do it and, for His purposes with them, by the terrible events of that awful night, the apostles had proved themselves to be well and truly in the kingdom. In spiritual experience this was not so, but, that God's purposes according to election may stand, they were, for they were the called of God. When they were regenerate they would see it all, He knew. So, irrespective of whether or not the apostles were in the kingdom of God as He was, Jesus treated them as though they were. If their education and training were to be of any use for the future He had to do it this way — He had no alternative. That morning Jesus had proved Himself to be the Son of God; He had done so during the preceding night, but the apostles had not seen it then. They had witnessed a

marvellous display of absolute power; they were sure of that, but were not sure whose power. That had been the unsettling point. Now they knew, but not until now.

The thing that had caused them the problem was Jesus' seeming indifference to them when they were in such danger. They would never forget that sleep, it was phenomenal. He knew perfectly well what was going on, yet He kept on sleeping; they knew it had been quite deliberate. Why? If He loved them how could He do it? They were in mortal terror and extreme danger and He didn't seem to care; that had been the real cause of their difficulty. What kind of a man was He that He could do that to them? They were hurt and offended and had felt they must re-think their position. He had chosen them and ordained them to be with Him, but did they want to be apostles of such a

person? Did they really want to be with Him? What about all those other little ships? What had happened to them? They had all set sail together, they were following Him too, did the storm overtake those other ships also? Where were they? Nothing was said about them; had the storm been localized to one ship? Were they the sole object of the exercise? If so the whole affair was more mysterious and wonderful than ever, and something very peculiar was happening to them. If it was indeed true that not one of the other ships was involved in the storm, then something like what had happened to Israel during the exodus had taken place with them.

Their history taught them that when the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt He made a way through the Red Sea by dividing the waters for them. Pharaoh saw the way and

followed in pursuit, but God closed the waters in upon Pharaoh and his host while the children of Israel were still crossing over on dry land; the miracle was entirely controlled and localized. The same God was at work with them, of this they were now sure; even so it was all so overwhelming; there were so many possibilities and alternatives that just didn't fit together. Nevertheless, now that they felt they knew who He was, they felt happier about Him. Long ago father Abraham had gathered his army and had gone through the night, even by a way he had never before trodden with his feet. He pursued his enemies, overtook them and put them to flight; he took the spoil, released the captives and reclaimed his 'brother' and 'son' Lot. It all seemed so similar, for Jesus had come through the night to Gadara by a way He had not gone with His

feet. He had put the enemies of the land to flight and had delivered a brother and son (whatever his true name was, it certainly was not Legion). He had put the matter beyond doubt; they now saw what kind of man He was and, believing Him to be the Son of the most high God, made a new commitment. They did not say so — Jesus did not ask them to — but before long, just a few days later, the great confession was made, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God'. It was now the firm conviction of all their hearts.

The Earth Filled with Violence

Those apostles now realized why He had set out across the sea and driven on through the darkness of that hellish night. Above the howling of the wind He had heard the cries of a tormented soul; it was all for that man's sake, for him He had been prepared to put

everything — them, their boat, their loyalty, even His own life it seemed — at risk.

Whatever they felt about that, it was all so plain, but why had they been so blind, so deaf, so self-centred? How could He love them when they were so selfish? They were so unperceptive, so unfeeling, they didn't know that the whole creation was groaning and travailing in pain; all they felt was their own suffering. The sight of self was awful — they were sickened by it. That poor man! What he had gone through! A night of terror? He had lived with terror, it had always been night with him. How had he survived? He had been full of devils, absolutely full of them, so full that he did not know himself, and was not able to distinguish between himself and them. He had actually called himself Legion. Was that possible? Could it be possible that a whole

legion of devils could live in one man? How terrible! If that were true, how many millions of devils there must be in the whole world of men, and look at the results: the poor creature had identified with them, he didn't want them to go, 'Don't send them out of the country,' he had pleaded. Could it be possible that a man should want devils? Could he be so attached to them that he would feel such dreadful loss if they left him? The whole tragedy of a man living in the devil's underworld opened up before their eyes — here was a fellow creature, a human being like themselves, who had been so rejected by human beings that he craved the fellowship of devils. Love he could not have, the sound of a human voice he never knew, loneliness was his habitation, his world was the void; satyrs, ghosts, ghouls were his companions and friends,

corruption, uncleanness and death his state; the spirits of the dead were better than no one and nothing. It was heart-breaking; pity filled the hearts of the apostles that morning; it had been self-pity the night before; they were ashamed of themselves. What had Christ opened up to them? Themselves: they hated themselves.

Would they ever forget it? The sound of those pigs screaming their way down into the sea haunted them; the pigs went mad: the devils had done it. Those devils wanted the swine — they were so unclean, and they had been living in that man! Whatever had it been like? Surely the earth was filled with violence; that man was, the swine were. On the sea the night before — that dreadful night — the air had been filled with violence, the sea also. Slowly the picture was forming in their minds; He had as it

were lifted the veil: the sea of humanity was a sea of pigs, they only went to their natural element. He was soon to tell them a story about a man sitting at a swine trough, hungry for their food; but that came later, and in a different setting. Violence was everywhere, in what was being unfolded to them devils and men and uncleanness were all mixed up together, everything was parabolic. No wonder the ship had nearly stood on its end and turned over in the night; the Lord had shown them all they needed to know, but they were not at the end; He seemed always to be lifting the veil on something further. They were so grateful to Him and glad for the man's sake; through him they had learned so much. He didn't know he had been an object lesson to them, but he had. Through him they had learned so much more of man's need. O the depths

of depravity to which men can sink; strangely enough, by contrast, they had learned of the mystery of spiritual life also — they saw how totally he and the devil had become one. He was not satan but he had been so totally possessed with the devil and that legion of foul spirits that he and they all were inextricably one. It had been an eye-opener to Christ's men. How completely a human being can be indwelt and taken over by another person besides himself and be one with him; strangely enough also, by contrast, they understood a little more clearly how Jesus could be both the Son of Man and the Son of God. They saw how that in His manhood He could live in the kingdom of heaven and in His deity He could live in the kingdom of God at one and the same time. His manhood lay in His soul, His deity lay in His spirit; He could preach the

kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God at the same time and as one, for He was in both all the time. They knew also that no one else was in that blessed state, and they included themselves in the observation. He was placing many clues to understanding in their minds. Although Christ and His heralds preached the kingdom of heaven at hand, millions were living in the kingdom of hell; the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of hell existed together on this earth, and the kingdom of God was here also.

The Kingdom Rejected

Jesus lived on this earth in the kingdoms of God and of heaven, He lived in the one and created the other wherever He went.; the man who called himself Legion lived in the kingdom of satan and of hell on earth, created among the tombs, a fitting habitat for that creation. But Jesus brought the

kingdom of God to Gadara to establish the kingdom of heaven there, and He did so; the man entered into it. His compatriots, the swineherds, came back and found it so: the former Legion was sitting, clothed and in his right mind, at the feet of Jesus, a new creature. Those swineherds recognized the man, but did not know who or what they now saw. They spread their news everywhere though, they could not refrain, but it was not good news to those who heard, they wanted their pigs, and came to Jesus and asked Him to leave the country. He had created trouble again! The apostles were still more amazed; it was almost unbelievable: surely there were others among them who needed deliverance. Those men could not mean what they were saying; they ought to have been imploring Jesus to stay and spread His blessings to the

whole community, but instead they were driving Him away. It did not make sense. Did they value pigs more than men? No wonder the man asked Jesus if he could go with Him; how could rejection go so far? It was better the man should go. He needed to get away from such a place, let him come with them; 'No', said Jesus, 'go home'. 'Go home to thy friends and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee and hath had compassion on thee', and that was how He left him. 'My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways', God says. The Lord went back down to the sea, got into the ship and left the man standing there, a lonely witness on the shore where he had first met him, though now he was a totally different man. With mixed feelings he stood there watching till he could no longer see Him, and then watched the

ship until it too faded from view and disappeared into the morning. Turning from the empty horizon, the man went into the city and witnessed to all exactly as Jesus had told him to do. How could he be or do otherwise?

Far out on the sea, drawing nearer to the familiar shore they had left the previous evening, the apostles found time for reflection; they had much food for thought. They Sat in the same ship in the same sea with the same Lord, but everything was different. There were still only thirteen of them; there might have been fourteen, but the volunteer was left behind; he had been marvellously delivered, and had a great testimony; but he was not a called apostle. He was a witness — he belonged there where he was delivered; he must stay where he was; he could not be denied. But they

were not wanted in Gadara; all of them — Jesus, His message, His power and His apostles were unwelcome there. It was not only devils who did not want them, men did not want them either. Everything was going exactly according to prophecy though, Isaiah had foretold it all: He was despised and rejected of men, they hid their faces from Him, and it was going to get worse, of that the apostles were sure, they could sense the growing hostility all around. Whatever made men react like that? Had they no pity? They must be really evil to act in that manner, it was totally unreasonable. Love of money, vested interest, these were the root of the evil; they valued pigs above men, and preferred prisoners of satan to the power of God.

To be with Jesus was to learn everything, to understand everybody, to be given insights

into characters, and to taste of the sour streams of the lives of men, their own and others'. They were not only learning the mystery of the kingdom of God, they were learning the mystery of the kingdom of satan too — its depths and lengths and breadths and heights, its extent and its limitations, its power and its powerlessness. They thanked God for its limitations, they had witnessed some marvellous exposures of those in the conflict with God and His kingdom; against Him the devil and all his hosts and powers were powerless. Ultimate strength lay with God, He could establish His kingdom as easily upon the winds and waters as upon the land; He was supreme. On this exultant note their thoughts turned homewards. What awaited them on their home shores? What new lesson were they to learn there? They soon found out.

Chapter 6 — DEATH HATH NO DOMINION

A Father's Agony

Hearts longed for His return to them. At that time He was very popular with the main body of people and He had hardly landed than the word got around that He had come. Before long the people were there and He was surrounded by the multitude again; it was heartening to see; how nice it was to be wanted. The needs of men and women were as great as ever though, and souls were pressing in on Him just the same. One, a man named Jairus, ruler in a local synagogue, wanted very much to get to Jesus. If ever a man wanted to see Him, it was he. He pushed his way through the crowds, fell down at Jesus' feet and besought Him with all his heart to go with him to his home. He was in great distress:

his little daughter, he said, lay at the point of death. 'Come and lay thy hands on her, that she may be healed', he pleaded, 'and she shall live'. The appeal went straight to Jesus' heart; what heart would not have gone out to him? So, accompanied by His apostles, Jesus went with the man. But the crowds were vast, they flocked around, blocking the way; progress was very slow. Naturally the father of the child was distraught; with every minute he became more and more anxious. Every second was vital; when he had left her she had been in an extreme condition. How he tore himself away from her he did not know: it had been an agonizing journey for him, and now the crowds! Jesus did not seem to be perturbed by it all though; the time factor did not seem to matter to Him, there was no hurry; Jairus would have run, but Jesus seemed to keep pace with the

crowd, not with Jairus, and then — what agony — suddenly He stopped: it was torture.

To Jairus' heart it seemed as though He did it on purpose. Didn't He care? He couldn't have forgotten: had He failed to grasp the urgency of the case? Jairus watched, helpless, as Jesus turned Himself about and looked around Him in the crowd as though trying to find someone: 'Who touched my clothes?' He said. Jairus was astounded; He had stopped, deliberately stopped; everybody stood waiting, amazed, perplexed; Jairus just could not believe it, it was so trivial. What a question to ask! He was in the centre of a crowd and here He was wanting to know who touched His clothes! A hundred or more people could have touched Him, especially His apostles. Those men seemed: to follow Him closer

than His shadow, it must have been one of them mustn't it? But what did it matter who it was? It really was an amazing question; the apostles were as surprised as anybody else, and naturally enough no-one admitted to touching Him. 'Thou seest the multitude thronging thee and sayest thou who touched me?' they said, but He ignored them. He stood His ground and continued to look around; He obviously felt that something unusually important had taken place and had no intention of moving on until the matter was cleared up. They had seen Him take that kind of stand in the boat.

Heart Cry of a Woman

The father of the child was nearly frantic with worry. Fancy this happening. It would soon be too late, if it wasn't already. If his child was still alive it could only be by the mercy of God. Why was Jesus so concerned

to find out who touched Him? Whatever did it matter? Was it so important? Nobody else, not even His apostles, thought it was, but He did; so also did a little woman hidden away among the people. She was the cause of it all: unnoticed by anyone she had crept up behind Him in the crowd, touched His garment and melted back into the crowd again, out of sight; it had been quite deliberate, she had come that day purposely to do it. She had not meant to be noticed though; all she wanted was to touch Him and go away as anonymously as she had come; notoriety was the last thing she sought. For twelve years she had lived out of sight in the backwash of humanity, well away from the crowds, nursing a sickness which was eating away her life. She had never sought the limelight, it was not her nature, but now, suddenly, she was known

and would soon be in the public eye: He was looking for her. The Lord had felt power flow from Him at her touch: she was healed and she knew she could no longer hide. But that poor child, what was happening to her? She was only twelve years of age; what a coincidence, the child had been born the year her own incurable bleeding commenced. O what irony that her healing might result in another's death, and one so young! Not daring to wait a moment longer, trembling and afraid, and feeling terribly guilty, she came forward out of the crowd to the Lord and told Him, and everyone else within sound of her voice, all that had happened. The Lord was satisfied.

It was another of those wonderful occasions when everyone marvelled at His power, everyone rejoiced with the woman: everyone, that is, except Jairus. He was

happy enough for the woman's sake, but how about his daughter? He was grief-stricken for her. Was she still alive? He did not see how she could be. It was terribly hard to join in another's joy. Scarcely a moment had passed when his fears were confirmed: servants came with news of her death; he was desolated. It had happened, just as he had feared it would: while the woman was being healed his daughter had died. 'Why troublest thou the Master any further?' the servant asked. The poor father standing close to Jesus thought, 'Yes, why?' But he was near enough to the Lord for Him to overhear the servant's words; the fear and disillusionment which welled up in Jairus' heart reached His heart. Before another word could be spoken He said, 'Be not afraid, only believe', and began to move on again towards Jairus's house. Those

words of faith and assurance brought hope to the man's failing heart, and he led the way home. Arriving there the Lord called to Peter, James and John, 'Follow me,' He said, and went in, followed by His men.

She is not Dead

The house was packed. Some people were playing the customary mournful tunes and wailing out their traditional laments, tears were flowing copiously, signs and sounds of death were everywhere. Jesus had arrived too late to do anything! Perhaps He had come to offer His apologies and pay His respects and join with them in their sorrow. But the young Master had not come to add His voice to their death dirge, their songs were not His songs. He had come to give life. 'Why make ye this ado and weep?' He said: they were shocked. Had this man no respect for the dead? Had He no heart, no feelings

for the bereaved? It was tragic. But as He continued, tragedy turned to farce — it was unbelievable. 'The damsel is not dead but sleepeth', He said. The mourners, at first outraged, became incredulous. Mourning turned to mockery; they laughed Him to scorn. How shallow was their grief and how false their tears. Cruel, heartless comforters, one moment they were weeping, the next they were laughing. What kind of people were they? Ignoring their scepticism and unbelief, without ceremony the Lord put them all out, allowing none but His three apostles and the child's parents to remain. He paused a moment until all was quiet and still, then He went into the room where the child lay; five pairs of eyes followed Him closely. He went up to her couch, took her cold young hand tenderly into His own almighty grip, and said to her, 'Damsel, I say

unto thee arise'; she did. Straight away she rose and walked about the room, just as though she had woken up refreshed from a lovely, deep sleep. 'Give her something to eat', He said; she was not a convalescent, she was hungry, she had not eaten for some while.

An Unexplained Command

With the exception of the Lord everyone was astonished beyond measure. The child showed no signs of having been ill even; it was amazing. What would the people say about this? The apostles had been surprised at all His miracles, but this! Wait till the world heard about it. It had been breathtaking to see those pigs fleeing down the slopes when the devils entered into them at Gadara; but this! Bad as it was, the Legion had only been living with the dead, but this girl had actually been dead. The woman also

who had touched His garment had at least been alive — she had only been dying — but this child had been dead. This was the miracle supreme; how the rest of the apostles would wish they had been there to witness it. But Jesus said, 'Don't tell anybody'. He wanted it all kept secret and charged all present, parents as well as apostles, to observe His wish, and taking the three men with Him He left the house. He wanted everyone to see how normal it was to Him to raise persons from death. Raising the dead was not something great to Him — just ordinary, one thing is as great as another in the kingdom, and everything has its place and time.

Peter, James and John, greatly mystified, followed Him back to the group they had earlier left. They were really puzzled. Why had He commanded them to silence? Their

friends would surely ask them what had happened; why had He refused to let them talk about it? What harm would be done by telling their fellow-apostles? They too were His chosen. If it was only a question of space and therefore of convenience which made Him decide not to take them all into the house, what would it matter if they were told? People would soon know anyway; everybody who had been associated with the event would know that the child had been dead and was alive again. A miracle like that could not be hidden. What was the point of refusing to let the apostles know in advance of the multitudes? Their Lord certainly did wonderful things, but sometimes He was very mystifying. If He did not want His apostles to know, why take three of them with Him? They were still inclined to ask, 'What manner of man is

this?' Although they now most truly believed He was the Son of Man and the Son of God, He was still a mystery to them; His ways were past finding out. What would the rest of them think when they did find out? They would be sure to question them again: 'Why didn't you tell us? Why should you three know it and not us? Are you different from us? Are you the three privileged ones?' They could imagine the questions; it would be embarrassing to say the least. They would have no defence, all they would be able to say was, 'the Lord told us not to say anything about it'. Nothing could be more true, if anyone was to be blamed it was the Lord. But there was no fault in Him, He was working to a purpose. All was being done according to plan as part of their training. Although none of those men knew it, the Lord was making known His will for the

future. As yet He had not revealed much of the distant future to the apostles. Beyond the little necessities of life's ordinary todays and tomorrows He had not spoken of His plans for His Church after He had left the world. He knew that before long He would have to declare Himself to His men, but the time for that had not yet come. He had been preparing them for that day of revelation although they did not know it, and had in fact made His intentions obvious to them all on the day He chose His twelve apostles. From the very beginning He had kept three men in view for special duties, and had indicated His choice in the order in which He had originally called His band together. First He called Peter, then James and John, and so on until He had named the twelve. By hindsight it is obvious that right from the beginning the Lord was shaping the first-

named three for special positions, and the episode in Jairus' house was part of their training. All twelve were very privileged men indeed and, if asked, would, without reservation, have said so; all of them were chosen for high office in His future Church, but they all had to understand that even among apostles some are called to particular ministries not common to all. The first three commenced their lives with Jesus and their brethren as being apostles among apostles; they were equal with their brethren, and remained so until the end of their lives. Only in their callings and ministries in the Church, according to the will of God, did they differ from their fellows: Peter became the great apostle of the Jewish branch of the Church; James was the first of them to be martyred and John became the great seer of the New Covenant, and the longest-lived of the band.

All this lay as yet undisclosed in the Lord's heart, but with these things in mind it is understandable that the Lord should wish to give special training to these three. When He halted His journey to Jairus' house that day He knew the child would die; to some that may have seemed heartless, but it did her no harm. In fact it honoured her, for He did not just heal her, He raised her from the dead too. This suited His purpose; He planned to give the chosen three a glimpse into the resurrection life and power that was in Him. By restoring the spirit to the dead body of the child, and re-animating her, a whole new realm of knowledge of Himself and His power would be revealed to them. To them it would be both a most important lesson and a declaration of future intent; so much would be opened up to them by it. At least they should be able to see that spiritual

resurrection is unto complete newness, and that by it the old malady is destroyed. The girl was not brought back to exist in the state of sickness which had killed her: raised from the dead, she was cured permanently. Death does not cure physical disease, it only releases the sufferer from it; normally the disease continues on in the body until it disintegrates. What the Lord was intending to teach His men by the miracle was the spiritual truth it illustrated, namely that He raises men from the death of sin into newness of spiritual life. Everything He did on earth, though so often related to and demonstrated in the physical realm, was always directed towards that which was spiritual, the things that physical events could not touch. In Jairus' house He was laying a foundation for faith.

The Resurrection and the Life

It is important here to distinguish between the, different stages of physical death to which attention is drawn in the Gospels, and to notice the precise point at which the Lord intervened in each case. There are three, each of them illustrating a different state of the spiritual death in which all mankind exists: (1) the widow of Nain's son: (2) Jairus' daughter: (3) Lazarus: each of these and the particular miracle the Lord performed to raise each of them to life has its own significance. Properly evaluated and considered, these afford an insight into the effects of evil in the race, and help to shape the doctrine of sin. This is altogether too great a task to attempt here, and it is not our purpose. Confining ourselves to our subject, we will seek out and learn the lesson about sin as illustrated by the death and resurrection of Jairus' daughter. This girl was

neither in her grave, as was Lazarus, nor being borne to her grave, as was the widow's son; she had died only very recently, perhaps only a few minutes, certainly less than an hour, before Christ came. She had not been prepared for burial, and corruption had not yet had time to set in; she simply lay there, tragically lifeless, upon her bed. She must have looked for all the world as though she may be sleeping. This maiden is an illustration of that death, common to all mankind, which consists in living in sin. It is death, and ends in death; in other words it is the normal state of human life. It is a congenital condition, quite unavoidable and inescapable — to be born is to be affected by it. The Lord Jesus came into the life of men to deal with this, and we need to take note that, when He went in to the girl He raised her from that death. We

also need to take note that, at the same time, any disease she may have had was cured. Those three chosen ones could surely not have failed to see this.

When the Lord Jesus came into this world, resurrection and life came into it, that men and women might have both. His own greatest personal achievement as a man was to perfect that life in this world and attain unto that highest calling beyond; He was fully aware that for Him the pathway to this lay through death. This was the undisclosed reason lying behind all the other reasons why He led three of His men to the house of death, and had taken the whole apostolic band through the deep waters of death to the shores of death and the mountain of the dead a few hours earlier. He wanted them to understand something of what death really was, to see different aspects of it and by

them all be enlightened in mind. When He went to sleep in that ship and left them alone to face the terrors of the night, that was also for this same reason. They were thereby obliged to face and discover for themselves a little of the terrors of the passage to the shores of the mountain of the dead.

It had been terrible; they had struggled and struggled helplessly and hopelessly with unnumbered and unnameable horrors, until at last they admitted their perishing condition; and when they believed that for them it was surely death, and only then, He acted. When He did, all was well as they could see; it had never been any other with Him, why then had they been so fearful? Why had they not gone to sleep and rested with Him? In His world there were no terrors, there had been no storm there. His

passage had been tranquil enough; He did not still the storm for Himself, but for them. Landing on the shores of the tormented, the apostles discovered that the groans and howlings in that place were not the shrieking and keening of the wind, or the flapping of canvas, or the creaking of straining boards, but the cries of the forsaken. The passage had been terrible enough, but this! It led to the indescribable, the unbearable; everything within them was silenced, save the sobs of the heartbroken. Had they come through all that for this? Was this journey's end for them? Those men did not know what they were seeing; He did though, He understood. God forbid that any of them should come to the end which this symbolized for all men.

The Lord could see Himself and a lonely hill and a cross and darkness and the floods and

death; He was going to become the reality of all that the apostles could not see, more than they dimly descried that day on the other shore. He was going to be Legion, He was going to be made sin and death too. Unto God and for their sakes He was going to become as every sinner and be made all sin. He would become as the tormented and the devil-possessed, the outcast, the filthy and the vile, the hated and the loathed. Golgotha was the mountain of the dead to Him; there He would taste of death for every man, and pass through the sea of death to do so, and arrive at the place of the ostracized and the damned and the departed.

He would pass through a thousand seas to reach man if it were necessary. To Him what men called death was only sleep. Left to Himself the passage from this world to the

next, as a man, would have been pleasant sleep, but for man's sake it was going to be awful beyond description: He was going to die the death that God called death. In company with their fellow-apostles, Peter, James, and John had been through the long dark valley that night on the sea; they also had landed on the terrible shore beyond, and had seen the great deliverance wrought at the end of it. They had also previously witnessed, almost unbelievably, His long sweet sleep and how calm and unconcerned He seemed to be about everything. This was why He took them into Jairus' house with Him; He wanted them to get everything into perspective, and see beyond sleep into the land of wakefulness. Jairus was one of the rulers of the synagogue, the local house of God. Geographically and spiritually it was a far cry from the place of death they had

visited earlier; things were different here. But although they were different, they were not right. He particularly wished them to understand this, for they were appointed to fill special positions in the future house of God. They did not yet know that, but he did, and what they were shortly to witness was a very necessary part of their training; the miracle was to be a parable to them.

So into the house of tumult and noise He went to ask His first question and make His first shattering remark:- 'Why make ye this ado and weep? The damsel is not dead but sleepeth'. The apostles knew what would happen — there could only be one response to that and He got it. It was customary to make tumult and noise and weep and wail; He knew that, which is why He said it, hoping His apostles were taking notice. They must understand that there must not be

anything like this in God's house; there is no death there: whether there or in her father's house and earthly home, the damsel was sleeping, that was all. He put out all the mockers and led the select few over to the bed where the child lay; there He proved His words: taking her hand He said to her, 'Talitha Cumi I say unto thee arise'. She awoke and got up, fresh and innocent as a newborn babe; He had proved His words, she was only sleeping, as He said. To everyone else she was dead. The seven of them stood there together in the wonder of it all; to five of them it was an astonishing miracle, to Him it was nothing much, quite ordinary; the girl was living in the glory of a dawning realization. What had been the chamber of death was now the house of the living, the girl had an abiding place in her father's house. 'Don't tell anyone', He said; it

must be kept secret; 'Give her something to eat,' He added, and left. Would she remember she had been ill, very ill, and that she had died? Or would she herself believe she had only been to sleep?

The Lord's command was clear. In view of what they had seen and heard, the challenge to the three was that they should no longer talk about physical death as death, they had been shown something different: in the presence of Life death takes other forms and meanings. He did not explain Himself to His apostles but let their puzzled minds grapple with it; ultimately they would understand. Apostles must understand, they must not be blind to truth in the day of power. Blindness is a form of death, a state of unconsciousness, a testimony to a whole realm of insensitivity. They must see the difference between the two states of sleep

which they had witnessed, His on the boat, hers on the bed: His was the sleep of life, a deliberate state of conscious life of another order in a spiritual world unknown to them; hers had been the sleep of death, an irremediable and involuntary state of total unconsciousness of the world and order they knew. Because He could sleep that deep sleep of joy and peace, free from all conditions of fear whatsoever, He was able to raise her from the dead. Having done so, He left the house of life and with His three apostles went to join the other nine, His mission accomplished.

Chapter 7 — A PROPHET IS NOT WITHOUT HONOUR SAVE IN HIS OWN HOUSE

He Came Unto His Own and His Own
Received Him Not

When the four of them reached the rest of the apostles and all the other waiting disciples, the Lord moved off with them towards His own country. He had to go, they needed His testimony there, but He went with mixed feelings. Nazareth was a place of memories, some of them happy and pleasant, some very sad and terribly bitter. It may have been thought by some of the apostles that His homecoming would be a memorable event, a really great occasion, and it should have been; but His former friends and neighbours didn't think so, they saw nothing in Him. Nazareth could have feted Him, proclaimed a feast, welcomed

Him home, but no, the Nazarenes were dead; to them He was nothing but the carpenter's son. Upon Joseph's and Mary's return from Egypt with the child He had been brought up in the town; He had lived there, served the community there. His very first miracle was performed in nearby Cana, but that did not seem to matter to the Nazarenes, and He had never sought fame by anything he did. His return was not to plead His cause with them, or to blazon His triumphs abroad; the rather He suppressed them; His own flesh and blood and boyhood friends ought not to have demanded such things anyway. They of all people ought to have known who He was, and loved Him for it, but they didn't want Him.

On the sabbath He went into the synagogue to worship with them and (if' opportunity presented itself) to minister to them

whatever they had need of, and to teach those who gathered there. At first they were greatly impressed by what they heard; He was certainly very gifted, astonishingly so. Where did it all come from? Everything they had heard about Him was evidently correct — that was undeniable. But what did those things matter? What was He doing taking the place of prominence among them? Jealousy and antipathy filled their hearts; He ought to be standing back with His family in the congregation, not up there in front of them, setting Himself up as a teacher, and they were offended at Him.

It was the end of the visit; He was full of love and power, desiring only to minister to them as to everybody else, but He could go no further with them; their intransigence and refusal to believe prevented Him from blessing them as He longed to do. He was

not offended with them, He had expected it, but their rejection was insurmountable to Him, and fatal to them: all He could do was to heal a few sick folk and leave. He had something further to say to them before He left though; it was nothing substantially new, a repetition of something He had said to them before actually: 'A prophet is not without honour but in His own country and among His own kin and in his own house'. It was the final moment of pathos for Him in Nazareth, His last farewell. He had said almost as much some few months earlier under somewhat similar conditions. He had phrased it differently and more briefly then, 'No prophet is accepted in his own country', but the message was the same, and there He left it. Except for the worse, things had not changed one little bit in Nazareth, even in His own family; what at first was non-

acceptance was now dishonour. He was sorry to have to add that about His own flesh and blood relatives, but it was very necessary; it was true.

That same synagogue was the place where He had earlier made His famous claim to be the prophet anointed of the Lord and sent to the remnant of Israel. On that occasion they had at first thought He was the most gracious person ever to preach in their synagogue, and they listened, transfixed, as He read Isaiah's prophecy to them, adding the words, 'This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears'. But when He shut up the prophecy and proceeded to take up events from their history and apply them to His listeners, everything changed: they found it offensive, they utterly misinterpreted His motives, and openly disagreed with what He said. Worse still, they refused to believe

Him, worked themselves up into a terrible anger, thrust Him out of the place and tried to push Him over the brow of a hill to His death. Only by withdrawing Himself from them had He averted a tragedy at that time. The place and method of His death had been planned long before He came to earth, and it was not Nazareth, nor was it by riot. A prophet could not perish outside of Jerusalem, He said later: a Saviour could though — just outside the walls, on a cross. It had been a nasty situation while it lasted and He could not help feeling the injustice of it all; to be rejected by one's own friends and relatives is painful, but He had to accept it, there was no alternative, it was part of the price of service. Nazareth's loss proved to be someone else's gain; He was more acceptable to strangers than to His own, but what a loss was theirs!

During His discourse on the mount of beatitudes He had said that a city set on a hill cannot be hid; He was not speaking particularly of Nazareth, but it was just such a city. Just how many of its eons may have been pushed over the edge of the cliff we do not know, but we do know that they sought to destroy their most famous son that way. There was no hiding the fact that they hated Him. He could not forget it; they never allowed Him to. He knew He was running a risk when He went back, but that did not prevent Him from going, He was fearless. This return visit left Him sadder than ever though; it was not only His countrymen who did not want Him, His own kith and kin no longer wanted Him either. They were ashamed of Him, He was an embarrassment to them and they wished to see the back of Him. This had a great effect on the Lord,

actually making Him marvel, which was fairly unusual for Him. If ever He belonged anywhere on the earth it was at Nazareth, but if there was anywhere on this earth He was totally unwanted it was at that same Nazareth; so He turned His back on it and left it, apparently for the last time.

It appears that He never went there again; instead He went through the surrounding countryside, to towns and villages and farms, teaching and showing the kingdom of God. What He found in that district is not recorded, but it is quite likely that the unjustified anger, and the unnatural rejection and murderous spirit of the Nazarenes had affected the whole surrounding countryside, for there is no evidence that any works of power took place anywhere in that region during this period. One of the Lord's instructions to His apostles

shortly after this seems to indicate His sad acceptance of the status quo, and that He was following His own advice to others — 'Cast not your pearls before swine lest they trample them under their feet. and turn again and rend you'. Was Nazareth a city of swine? He had certainly poured out some of His pearls in the synagogue there, and without question the men would have rent Him to pieces in consequence if they could have done. He did not want His apostles to be treated as He had been, so He gave them warning.

Came the Time to Send Them Forth

How human the Lord was, and how wonderfully His deity and His Father's plans for Him dovetailed with the progression of events in His earthly life. His rejection by the Nazarenes and the severing of all ties with His family not only had a far-reaching effect

upon Him personally, it also signalled the next move towards the completion of God's plans in relation to Israel. The time had come; He had called His apostles in order to send them forth to the people, He had kept them with Him for a long enough period of training; now the moment had arrived, He had been moving to this point all along. He evidently believed He could send them forth as He intended, one with Him in heart, preaching one message and doing His works in His name; this alone would prove their authenticity. Unless they loved Him and were devoted to His cause and had become imbued with His Spirit — unless they were in total agreement with Him and would live only for this cause and unto His ends, He could not send them. He had been utterly faithful with them over the weeks, showing them the kind of things He was going to ask

them to do. Their training had been rigorous; lesser men might have been broken by it, but they had continued with Him; hopefully they had benefitted from it all, and knew what to expect when finally He did send them out. There can be no doubt that the decision to do this coincided with His own personal rejection at home and the confirmation of it to His heart by the coolness of His reception in the neighbouring villages. It seems that the determination to thrust forth labourers for the national harvest arose as much from His rejection and sense of personal abandonment, as from God's fixed intention and eternal policy. It was as though, being so manifestly an outcast from Nazareth, He decided that He had fulfilled His obligations to His own family and former friends, and

now felt free to devote Himself entirely to others.

He had told the man of Gadara to go home to be a witness there and had left him behind for that purpose. That is always the hardest thing for a man to do, and, as though to share with him in personal courage, He Himself had returned to His own home for the same reason. Tragically He found greater death there than at Gadara or in Jairus' home; the Nazarenes would not let Him help them or even talk to them. With sorrow He finally turned from His own family to the thousands of families scattered throughout the land. Not that until then He had been unmindful of them. He had not, but as well as definite purpose, there is always perfect timing about all the Lord does. Those apostles could not but see that whenever their Lord made a move it was

right; everything pointed to it and led forward to yet greater things He had to do. When the great apostle Paul wrote, 'all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose', he was certainly right; those apostles were certainly 'the called'. What the Lord did at Nazareth was a very difficult thing to do, but it was a wonderful example to them. It is not easy to turn from home and family, to count them as enemies and live for God on this earth; yet that is what He did, and the Lord expects the same of every apostle.

Many things have to take place in a man's heart and circumstances before he can do what has to be done, but if a man will follow his calling above all else, he will find that his very ministry will force it. upon him; he will have to do it. The degree to which this may

become necessary may vary in differing cages. If a man has a family which belongs entirely to Christ the degree of enmity may be diminished or even be non-existent; but it must ever be borne in mind that family ties are more often than not the hardest to break, and therefore can be the greatest hindrance to the callings of God. The Lord Himself said that His calls and demands would divide families and households as with a sword. He never hid the fact that His claims must be regarded as being greater than any other, and would under some circumstances generate enmity. Most often the true benefactors of mankind are regarded, by them, as enemies; they are the friends of mankind though, and do not hate them, but cannot avoid being hated themselves.

It was like this with the Lord: His recent ministry in Jairus' home had brought the family great joy, but it was tinged with sadness for Him. Everybody else thought it a great miracle, and from their point of view, indeed from every human angle, it was. He did it with foreknowledge of coming events though: underlying it all, the tragedy of what awaited Him shortly in His own home among His own family lay heavily upon Him. The thing that lay so poignantly on His heart was that Jairus' daughter was so greatly loved and wanted by her parents, but it was all so different for Him. She had been physically dead, but there is a greater death for humans than that death; to be unwanted, rejected and cast out so undeservedly by His family when He had so loved and served them was worse than death to Him. It had been bound to happen of course, it was

inevitable and He knew it. The simple human logic of it made it unavoidable from their point of view: He had left home, thrown up His job and walked out on the family. He was His mother's firstborn son, but He was not Joseph's first-begotten, so it is not certain that, upon Joseph's death, Jesus received the double portion of the firstborn. However, assuming that He had, it was His human duty to look after His mother until the day of her death, or His own. He was the oldest son and, in respect of the inheritance, He was expected to act in lieu of His 'father' to Mary, and become as a father to His 'brothers'; that is why the double portion was allotted.

Imagine the disgust that would have filled the family and the whole village when Jesus walked out on them; it appeared that He had broken with all tradition and

disregarded their culture, as well as rejecting His family obligations. More than that, He had shown marked preference for a band of men virtually unknown to the family, and had chosen to be with them rather than stay with His own flesh and blood. Their reasoning was that if He wanted strangers rather than His own, then let Him have them; He had rejected the family so His family rejected Him. To them it seemed that they had gone 'the second mile' with Him, for after He had left home they had gone after Him to try to restrain Him, but He had refused their kindness. In their hearts, after that refusal, they had cast Him out, and now it seemed to them He was challenging them to do it again publicly. They did it, but this time they did so knowing He was the Son of God and that He was speaking out from the eternal life He was living in the flesh.

Jesus purposely took His disciples with Him to Nazareth, and when all this happened He was glad He had done so, for it would surely happen to them if they continued with Him. He would be no blind leader of the blind; if they followed Him at all they must make up their minds and follow Him with their eyes open. He would not send anyone out on service unless first he had counted the cost. Many a man called of God has fallen down on this point: national culture, family ties and moral and social obligations have proved too powerful for him to endure. Every man who would serve Him must follow Him closely, following in His footsteps, giving attention to detail. Apostleship does not rest in power or position, but in following the Lord, eating His flesh and drinking His blood; that is to say, an apostle must hunger and thirst and deliberately

choose to live the kind of life Jesus Christ lived as a human being of flesh and blood; each one must be prepared to have the same kind of things happen to him as were done to his Lord. Only by eating His flesh and drinking His blood can a man prove such close kinship with Jesus that the things which happened to Him happen to him also. This is what Paul meant, and consequently he said that he bore in his body the marks of the Lord Jesus. To eat Jesus' flesh and drink His blood as daily diet is a hard thing to do. The Lord wanted fellow-sufferers. Having taught them this, He set about sending them out.

The Day of Empowering

His first step was to call the twelve to Him once more, the day of their empowering had come: they must be sent out and be apostles indeed, but they must not go alone.

He said of Himself that He was not alone but that the Father was with Him, and He paired them off into six couples. The Lord made this pairing for several reasons, but primarily with regard to the statement in the law that in the mouth of two witnesses every word may be established. There were also matters of companionship and fellowship and propriety to be considered, and doubtless His move was made with these things in mind also. However, His chief concern was that the testimony should be safeguarded according to the Mosaic law. Having linked together the various couples, He gave them power over unclean spirits and then proceeded to give them their instructions regarding their journey. They were to take nothing with them save a staff only: they were not to take bags or purses, no food, no money, just one pair of sandals, and only

one coat. They were not only to be apostles, they were to be pilgrims also: 'In what place soever ye enter into an house, there abide till ye depart from that place,' He said; they were not to settle down anywhere, but to keep on the move. It was almost as if He was not expecting them to find too many people ready to receive them either, and if they did find a welcome anywhere they were to respond to it without hesitation and be grateful. 'Whosoever shall not receive you nor hear you,' He said, 'when ye depart thence shake off the dust under your feet for a testimony against them. Verily I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgement, than for that city'.

At last the apostles were going to become apostles in more than name, but what an onerous task He gave them. It was no. easy

calling; the terms of apostleship are very hard. The calling has many hardships, but the sending eclipses them; every apostle must face this, for only by his sending is his calling substantiated. The Lord sent them out with nothing but their ministry; the only gift He gave them beyond their commission was power; He evidently regarded that as sufficient. He had nothing else to give, and in His estimation nothing else was necessary. It was all He had been given when His Father had sent Him! He knew it was sufficient. When they reached their various spheres of ministry their only reason for being there would be because He had sent them; they were to speak to people solely in the authority He gave. It is a tribute to those men, as well as to His marvellous teaching and example, that the apostles never sought anything more of their Lord. (The question

may well be asked: 'If these be the original terms of apostleship, how many among us would become apostles?'). Obediently and without demur those apostles went out forthwith, preaching everywhere that men should repent, casting out devils and anointing the sick for healing as He said. In their ministry they were like multiplications of Jesus, and they kept on going as He commanded until the land was filled with their Lord's praise. They did exactly as the Lord said and proved that His words were true; by their obedience the whole nation became aware of Him.

Although the apostles were never sent to the palace in Jerusalem, the good news penetrated Herod's house and reached the king's ears; strangely enough, wicked man though he was, it brought him relief. Herod was a man with a guilty conscience: he had

murdered John the Baptist not long before, and when he heard of Jesus' doings he said that John the Baptist had risen from the dead. He had no grounds for thinking this, and could easily have verified or disproved his theory by the simple means of exhumation, but it seems that no one took him seriously. The devil's advocates thrive on irrationality, and fear fosters many illusions. Whatever Herod's motives were, he was without doubt provoked to make his statements because the apostles' ministry was so effective. Quite unintentionally he paid a wonderful tribute to those men. Their fame lay in their ministry, for, as a result of their labours, people heard of Jesus; whatever conclusions they drew from that was not the apostles' responsibility. They applied themselves to obeying their Lord's

orders, that was as far as they could go, and it was all He expected of them then.

Total Commitment

In the eyes of the people the apostles' praise may have lain in their power and works, but their real commendation lies in their commitment to Christ. Their secret of success lay in their willingness to stay with the Lord until they were sent, that they may learn of Him and do as He would do and speak as He would speak. He did not tell them this when He called them at the beginning; what He was seeking from them was implicit obedience and total conformity. When He is training people, everything works together to the end He has in view. No opportunity is wasted and no time is lost and nothing is in vain. Another of the praiseworthy things about those apostles is that they were not seeking power,

consequently they were not always begging the Lord for it. This may be because when He ordained them He did not mention power, nor did He tell them He was going to give them any in the future; He intended to but did not say so. They were quite satisfied that He should ordain them to be with Him, for them that was high enough privilege, they did not seek rewards. It would appear from scripture that they were content (at least at first) to be observers and not workers; they knew they had much to learn, and that is how the Lord wanted it. But from the episode on the lake and the remarks He made to them after He had stilled the storm, it seems the time was approaching when He was expecting them to think about doing something more than observe Him at work. Upon waking He had said to them, 'How is it that you have no faith?' Plainly the Lord was

expecting that by this time they should have had faith to deal with the situation themselves without His intervention. He was there with them, that should have been sufficient. Obviously He was not wishing to have to still the storm Himself. What had happened was in a way a foretaste of what would happen upon occasion when He finally sent them out to the work. They would be looking for divine intervention, while all the time He would be waiting for them to exercise faith, and live confidently in conscious knowledge that, though unseen by them, He was there with them.

One of the foremost reasons why the Lord kept them with Him for that period of time was that they should learn His methods and discover some of the secrets of His ministry. They did not discover those all at once, and were very likely hesitant to attempt to put to

use those principles they did learn. One of the most vital secrets of all was faith, and the exercise on the lake was arranged by the Lord to show His apostles their great need of this power. His approach to this was twofold: (1) how to live by it; (2) when and how to use it. He did this by the best means possible, namely example. He demonstrated that He was living by faith by going to sleep and staying asleep till the apostles called on Him. Faith made Him oblivious of the dangers and fears that wracked the nerves of His companions, He appeared to be quite unconscious of them. For Himself there was no need to rebuke the wind and still the seas; He only did it at last on behalf of His friends. Who can tell what went on in the minds of the apostles — their thoughts, and the exchanges that passed between them? Who can recount the agonized cries and

prayers that must have ascended to God from their needy souls at that time? In the calm that descended afterwards it must have been a sickening thought to them at first (though perhaps finally an encouraging one also) that it had been in their power to do the miracle if they had been living by faith like their Lord. What an example He set them!

The whole of His life was lived on behalf of others, that is why He could, and did, so readily die for men. He never performed one miracle for Himself; all personal benefit He gained from what He did accrued from His selflessness in doing it. One of the most outstanding lessons of the whole episode is that apostles must lay down their lives and interests and learn to rest perfectly in the assurance of impossibility and impotence. It was quite impossible for the devil, or the

storm he worked up, to drown them; living with Christ on mission as they were, the devil was impotent to destroy it or them. The moment always comes when it is right to use faith in power; when that time arrives the heart must move in the assurance of possibility and power. to the point of certainty and action.

It is very noticeable that when the apostles were with the Lord He spoke to them about their faith, but never once did He speak to them about their power, for they had none. On the other hand when He sent them forth He spoke about power and not a word about faith. It may be assumed from this that if faith be there, power will certainly be granted; power works by faith. As far as the narrative allows certainty of statement, it would appear that when they went out they did nothing by faith but all by power, as the

Lord Himself. The word faith is not mentioned in connection with their ministry any more than it is mentioned in Genesis chapter one in connection with God's works, or in the Gospels with reference to Christ's ministry. In the beginning God did it — He just did it; there is no record that He had faith to do what He did or that He believed He could or should do it, He did it; He had the power. It is the same also with Christ and even so the apostles: they just did it. They did not believe they could do it, they did it. He gave them power to do it and sent them to do it and they did it. This affords us a very real insight into the truth of the kingdom of God: all that was required of those men was that they should obey. Another of the most important reasons why the Lord kept those apostles with Himself that length of time was that they should learn the discipline of

obedience; when they had learned that He sent them out. He sent them because they had learned the discipline and obedience, as well as the importance and power, of faith. This is what the protracted period of training was all about; they had to be with Him and learn of Him, that they themselves may be given His power.

Discipline and Obedience

Discipline and obedience have to be learned, nobody is born with them. It is obvious when a man has learned these thoroughly, for they will have become habits of his life; he can then be said to be living by faith, but not until then. Such a man is not for ever struggling to work up or receive faith any more, neither does he try to exercise sufficient faith to accomplish some great work; he is comprehensively living by faith. Therefore He is not particularly working by

faith, or specifically doing faith-works; the works he naturally does are by faith because he is living the faith-life. When a man is living by faith he has the spirit and disposition of faith; he does not exist making conscious efforts to try and live by faith, he is living, just living. It seems that even Herod, wicked man though he was, had some grasp of this when he said 'John Baptist is risen from the dead'; the reasoning, though erroneous to a degree, was very simple and quite correct — the works were the result of the life — he lived, he worked. John the Baptist was a man sent from God; that he never worked any miracles of the kind men call miracles is immaterial; he did God's works. If any man is sent by God he does not work for what he has received, or to do that for which he is sent, whatever it is — he does the works,

that is the proof of his calling. If a man does not do God's works God has not sent him.

The apostles accomplished their commission, that is all; it was a great one, and because they accomplished it we think they were great men. Had they failed, our estimate of them would be entirely different. The Lord called and chose and ordained them for His great purposes with Israel and the Church; He trained them, commanded them and equipped them for these things, and their praise is that they remained loyal to Him in all. Except that they did command men to repent and believe the gospel, they did not specifically demand that men should believe for anything; like their Lord they were ministers of grace. To the degree that faith is a necessary part of repentance, the people believed, but faith was never demanded of them. The

Palestinian crusade was an operation of grace: it was mounted by Christ to show the Jews God's heart towards them; the present dispensation and disposition of God towards all mankind is grace; grace is the function of a higher law than the law of Moses. The apostles had to discern and learn that just as the goodness of God leads to repentance so does the grace of God lead to faith. In His love God generates and encourages faith in hearts by being undeservedly good and gracious towards them; these were the vital lessons to learn. The apostles assimilated the truth, but only slowly; it was a big step from law to grace but it had to be taken, for men possessed of unclean spirits and filled with devils could not be expected to exercise much if any faith. James, who was not one of the twelve original apostles, speaks very significantly about this when giving

instructions about healing by anointing: he says it is the elders who have to pray the prayer of faith, not the sick person.

This repression of practically all mention of faith in connection with the ministry of the apostles during the Palestinian outpouring is surely to point out that the ministry is primarily of grace and power, and not of conscious faith. Everything took place because it was the will of God, and was accomplished at the command of Christ. If power be bestowed by Him upon anyone it is given with purpose and directed to an end. Sending is by authority and in power; it is sovereign, and all that is required of the sent one is obedience; this given, everything will function properly in accordance with the will of God, as in the Lord's life and ministry; His ends will then be achieved. During the apostles' Palestinian ministry the whole

country was in a state which can best be described as one of faith. It is not possible to assess all that the people did or did not believe, but it is certain that they were in a general state of belief and expectation, if not of total conviction: into this nationwide atmosphere of expectation the Lord sent His men. He Himself had brought this state of national belief into being; He did it with foresight for this purpose, so when He sent His apostles out He knew that all He needed to do was to endue them with power, and commission them into the ministry.

No Mighty Works

The apostle John says that when Jesus was made flesh, 'He came unto His own and His own received Him not'. All the apostles witnessed this — they had been with Him when He had met with solid unbelief in His own town among His own kith and kin. It

must have amazed them when Jesus could not do any mighty works there; to them it must have seemed impossible that such a thing could ever happen. On the lake they had seen Him take command of the very elements, and at Gadara drive a host of demons out of a man. How could it be then that at Nazareth He seemed well nigh powerless? It had been the same upon His return in Jairus' house: He had raised a girl from the dead, yet at Nazareth He appeared to have no ability to do anything remotely like those things. Why, (and perhaps this was the greatest thing of all), a woman had shown them that power even flowed out of His clothes. He had not spoken to her and apparently did not even know she was going to touch Him; she just crept up unnoticed and took healing from Him unawares; seemingly He became aware of it only as it

happened. The conclusion was that He did not even need to exercise His will to heal; she exercised her will, and healing was there for the taking. He was just walking along the road when it happened; it was marvellous. Yet in His home town, save to lay His hands on a few sick folk, He could hardly do anything, and He was among His own relatives and former friends! Those apostles would have been completely staggered by it. Why? How could it be? If He had not led them the way He did and allowed them to experience something of it themselves they could easily have been stumbled at Nazareth.

The Lord had taken them there quite deliberately, it had been a further part of their training. He knew that when He sent them out very shortly they would be asking the same questions about themselves.

During the course of their ministry they would enter some towns and villages and not be able to do any mighty works there, and they would ask themselves and one another, 'Why?' 'How could it possibly be that, such wonderful things happened in the last town we visited, and here we can do nothing, or next to nothing?' Although empowered and authorized by the Lord, at times next to nothing would happen, and they would think they had failed, but they would not have failed any more than He had done under the same circumstances.

General deliberate unbelief held upon the grounds of prejudice and pride will always hinder the flow of the Spirit and prevent the operation of power. It happened with Jesus and it will happen with His people.

It was harder for Jesus to go to Nazareth and stand among His own than to sleep in the

boat on the raging sea, or step ashore at Gadara, or stoop over that bed in the ruler's house. In the boat the apostles had no faith, at Gadara the devils would not co-operate, in Jairus' house there was neither faith nor unbelief; it was all the same to Jesus. But at Nazareth there was universal rejection of Him, stubborn refusal to believe, and He could not work. According to the Lord's statements, made later when similar situations prevailed, it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah at the day of judgement than for that city. The happenings (and the things that did not happen) at Nazareth were just as necessary for the apostles' training as the miraculous happenings on the sea and on the shore and in the house by the synagogue. They had to learn that the ministry was not only a gospel of grace and power, it was an instrument of

judgement too. That is a very saddening thing for any man to think; it was very saddening to the Lord, but it is true.

He Sent Them Forth

All this, and many things beside, led up to the great day of commissioning, preparing the apostles for their national campaign. Altogether their tour of ministry was a great success, and they gradually filtered back pair by pair to the Lord, flushed with triumph. Overflowing with joy they recounted their exploits to the Lord; it was just as He expected. It is most rewarding for a man to see the fruits of his labours and be able to rejoice in his own works and not in another's; but although such fruits are sweet, they are accompanied by a danger which the Lord quickly pointed out to them. They were only beginners, and it is common for beginners to think that power and

authority, resulting in signs and wonders, are proof of maturity. The apostles were in very great danger of believing themselves to be real men of God, but they were still only babes. To be able to perform miracles, wonderful as this was, was not then, nor is it now, the mark of true apostleship; they had not been called just for those things, He had far greater things in mind for them. Later on the Lord proved this to them in a most unexpected way. Because there remained so much more work to be done He called another seventy disciples to Him and ordained them to a ministry equal to that which He had given the apostles; the seventy went out and did precisely the same kind of things the apostles had done. Very likely this was most surprising to the apostles; it should have been very illuminating and instructive to all: He made it

very obvious that He did not call men and make them apostles merely to go forth and preach and perform miracles. They thought it was great of course, but the Lord had far greater things than that in mind for those men.

The calling to apostleship was not for the immediate works to which He sent them (as He so swiftly demonstrated), but for the future. He had greater intentions for them, but these He reserved in His heart; the time of disclosure had not yet come. He sent out the other seventy and we do not hear much more of them, but the twelve He kept with Him: for the positions they must one day occupy they needed much, much more training. A great deal more change was necessary if they were to properly fill the positions for which they had been selected; they needed to be like Him in person, and

not just be able to do works by delegated power. The delegation of power and authority was easy enough for Him if He wished, but to make these men like Himself was a far, far harder task; no amount of delegated power could accomplish that. Had Christ only wished to make them miracle workers He could have bestowed power on them for that purpose immediately He called them on the mountain, or even before that if it had been right to do so; but He did not do so. One day they would see that the ability to perform miracles was about the least of all their many accomplishments.

Flushed with victory, they had just returned from a most wonderful tour of duty to report resounding successes everywhere; miracles had taken place all over the land. They had been received by the people as angels bringing the blessings of God to

them; they had no idea how hard their hearts were. To them it had seemed such a mission of mercy, and, if the testimonies of others were to be believed, hundreds, if not thousands of people thought so too. Christ's men had to learn that success can be brutal, and that unfeeling power degenerates into 'professionalism' so very easily. Of itself success is not brutal; but, unless it is tender and understanding and of God, it cannot be other than harsh self-promotion. Paul said sufficient to make all men of understanding realize that loveless power, even though by it a man may perform spectacular miracles, is a thief; it leaves the person who wields it with nothing, and less than nothing, of value in God's sight. In His estimation, power and success in operation, without love and tenderness and compassion, are retrogressive in effect, and must be regarded

as subnormal. In God's eyes everyone who exists and works without His love is actually non-existent in His kingdom. In the last analysis lovelessness is both the enemy of God and the enemy of all mankind.

Chapter 8 — AS SHEEP WITHOUT A SHEPHERD

To Be With Him

As we have already seen, Mark states that the primary reason why the Lord called the apostles was 'that they should be with Him', all other reasons were quite inferior to that. His call was not the call of a Master seeking servants, it was the call of a Man seeking love, a soul seeking fellowship, a Son seeking brethren. Just before His death these men were to hear His voice speaking to His Father through the darkness of the night, 'Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory'. His heart was still the same, the 'purpose of the call remained unchanged, it was the same at the end as at the beginning. He called them apostles as

being men of the new age which had not yet dawned, He was the daystar of it; then they would be men of His heart and nature, true apostles then able to fill their office. The everlasting purpose of the call was not to send them out as the mere word suggests, that would only be for a little while anyway. The main purpose of the call, expressing His dearest wish, was to gather them in and keep them with Him for ever. He loved them and wanted them for more, much more, than immediate service in the land; or future positions in His Church even; they were Father's gift to Him for eternity for whatever plans He had for them in heaven when all earth work is done. The object of the call was not more work, but to be with Him as He is with the Father. John said of Him when on earth that the apostles, and others also, beheld His glory, and there can be no

doubting the fact that they all thought He was the most glorious person they had ever met, or even heard of. But Jesus' prayer was that they should behold the glory which He had with the Father before the world was; apparently His earthly glory was not to be compared with that unseen and eternal glory. He so wanted them to behold that.

The great difference between the apostles and the seventy other disciples did not lie in future preferential treatment in glory for the twelve though, but in future position and office in the Church on earth. The seventy, like the twelve, were His followers, but to what degree or extent we do not know, doubtless that varied from individual to individual; but the apostles had been with Him from the beginning. Perhaps it ought to be assumed that they retained the power and gifts which He had bestowed upon them

with their sending, but there is no evidence of this to be found anywhere in the Gospels. Beyond the Palestinian period of ministry there is no mention that they ever did another miracle while with Him on earth; this is perhaps the clearest of all indications that they were being trained for future greater things. The Lord wanted them for foundations of life rather than as partners in enterprise. They, their works, their words and their post-Pentecostal works, were to be foundational in His Church, which, next to the throne of God, is of greatest importance in the kingdom of God. They were not just instruments of temporary service in a temporary kingdom of heaven on earth; they did not know that yet though. The apostles only saw greatness as being men of power on earth, labouring in one sphere of service in a very limited aspect of the

kingdom of heaven; to a degree they understood their position and rejoiced in delegated power among men, but they knew little or nothing of divine strength and having power with God — a vastly different, though closely related, thing. They needed a whole lot more training yet, so the Lord set about giving it to them.

Compassion on the Multitudes

Conditions would need to be right though. He had in mind a place in the desert across the lake, near to the shore. It would be an ideal situation for the purpose, so without telling them about His plans He persuaded them to get into a ship, and they set off for their destination. He wanted it to be a private session and a rest period for them, but it proved otherwise. It was impossible to get away from the crowds; some of the people spotted their departure and,

guessing what was afoot, set off running round the end of the lake, and as they ran others joined them, intending to find Him on the further side. The Lord must have been aware of this, but He did not order a change of course to some more remote spot; He evidently decided to let things work out. He would accommodate them first, and then continue with the series of lessons He was conducting with His apostles in relationship to the sea. He would also take advantage of the presence and needs of the multitudes, using them as an extra opportunity to further the training of the apostles. By the time the ship reached land crowds of people had gathered on the shore. It was an amazing sight, they had actually outrun the boat and were waiting for Him when He arrived. People were everywhere, they just could not get away from people; it seemed

that they were always there. Was there no respite from people? What would Jesus do? He did just what would be expected of Him: He stepped out of the boat, looked upon the multitudes, had compassion on them and went to them. To Him they were as sheep without a shepherd, and He was their shepherd; He heard the call, responded to the pull, and all thoughts of rest and recreation for Himself and His apostles fled from His mind. He dismissed all ideas about taking a break, and gave Himself to the people without another thought; grace engrossed Him utterly in His Father's business; He too was a servant. To His apostles it was one of the greatest of lessons in self-sacrifice. What an example He was of all He sought to teach them.

This was meat and drink to Him; time and surroundings and personal needs and the

purpose of their visit seemed to fade from His thoughts, He was absolutely absorbed. The day gradually began to wear away, He didn't seem to notice it though; all that mattered was the needs of the people, and the opportunity granted Him. He seemed to take it for granted that the apostles would have the same mind about it as He. Without even a word of consolation or apology to them He had flung Himself into the ministry, apparently expecting His apostles to think and do the same. They felt they could not very well refuse of course, so, masking their disappointment, they rallied around Him as usual and waited and watched. Although evening was coming on He showed no signs of drawing to a close, so they thought they had better remind Him of the time and mention the people's needs. They approached Him and suggested that He

should cease teaching the multitudes and send them away. Their reasoning was faultless and their concern commendable; their thoughtfulness for everybody was manifest — the people were away from home, they had no food, therefore they needed to go home and get some rest and some food; or if not home, go somewhere, anywhere. Obviously they should not be detained here, this was a desert place; they should be off now if they were to get to the surrounding villages and towns, and should go quickly too, before it got too dark to see. They did not say that they themselves were without food also, but He knew that, He also knew what was in their hearts. Quite probably they were not at all pleased with the turn of events!

Give Ye Them to Eat

Imagine their surprise then when the Lord met their suggestion with the words, 'Give ye them to eat'; they must have wondered whether they had heard Him aright. What a suggestion to make! They hadn't even brought any for themselves, so how could they give anything to anyone else? 'Shall we go and buy two hundred pennyworth of bread and give them to eat?' they said. Scripture does not give any indication of their mood; perhaps they were piqued and were being more than a little sarcastic. They knew that it would take far more than that to feed such a crowd, there were thousands of them. Regardless of their feelings, the Lord, undeterred, said, 'How many loaves have ye? Go and see,' and off they went. A search of the crowds revealed that the people had been as improvident as themselves; except for a lad who had five

loaves and two fishes, there was no food among them whatsoever. That touched the Lord's heart. They so wanted to come to Him that they had forgotten all about food.

Wonderful! But what would they do? Jesus knew what He would do: 'Bring them ... to me', He said, 'make the men sit down': all eyes were on the Lord. Taking the little store in His hands He lifted His eyes and heart to heaven, and everyone who watched knew that something wonderful was going to happen.

He was determined to feed the people; He was also determined that His apostles were going to do as He said. He had commanded them to give the people to eat, He had meant what He said, and He was going to see that they did so.. They had to learn that He never asked them to do impossibilities, and, whatever the circumstances, they must

do His will, that must be paramount. His word must be obeyed; true apostles must not only feed the flock, they must show them that Jesus Christ is Lord; miracles are for this purpose. Healings and miracles of deliverance are all well and good; He had sent His apostles to do them, but they are only momentary things, beginnings, they are not the food of healthy people; for every day living it is necessary to eat. Men and women are not just victims of satan in need of deliverance, or sick people needing healing; they must not be regarded by gifted people as prospective objects of miracle power; they are souls that must be fed, and on no account may they be turned away hungry or be made to fend for themselves. Besides this, it was highly unlikely that there was anyone among them needing physical miracles; no blind or ill or lame people

would have been capable of getting to the spot, it was so out of the way. In Christ's view, apostles must be shepherds, or they may as well not be apostles; they are not sent of God to send people away.

Irrespective of any spiritual lessons they might learn, the apostles knew by this time that something of a spectacular nature was about to take place. The crowd was huge; five thousand men were there, about a hundred groups in companies of fifty.

Expectancy and excitement hung in the air and all eyes were on Jesus, certain by this time that He was going to feed them; their expectations were not in vain. They watched Him, He was speaking to God, then He began breaking the loaves and the fishes and handing them to the apostles, who in turn began to move in among them distributing the pieces as they went. The

miracle was ceaseless, the most continuous miracle they had ever seen: as the pieces were broken they grew, a piece of bread became a loaf, a piece of fish became a whole fish. On and on it went till everyone was supplied; they all ate and were filled, feeding their hearts as much on the miracle as their stomachs on the fare.

Before the eyes of the people, and hopefully to the hearts of the apostles, that day a pattern was set. It was perfectly obvious and very simple: the Lord's hands took the gift, multiplied it, passed it into the hands of the apostles, who passed it on into the hands of each individual. It was all happening just as the Lord had determined. He wanted the apostles to see that feeding of the multitudes must be a joint co-operative miracle in which He and they worked together as a team; the Lord fed the people,

the apostles fed the people, and with the same food — that was important, very important indeed. It was something entirely new as miracles went: those people (and indeed the apostles themselves) were fed as a result of a continuous operation of power from the Lord to them through the apostles. The Lord did not feed the people directly but indirectly through His men.

It was another great day of learning for the apostles; they gained fresh knowledge of themselves and of the Lord, and a real insight into His ways; these perhaps were the most outstanding lessons of all. They saw how little He required of men, approximately one five-thousandth; it was astounding. If five loaves and two fishes was only one lad's meal, each loaf and fish must be multiplied by at least five thousand if each one was to be fed equally. And some

people may have asked for and received a double portion. Why not? It was staggering. And what a miracle of grace it was; no one was asked to believe anything or for anything, the Lord just did it. It was all grace, providential grace. The Lord took the most minimal response, magnified it and multiplied it again and again and again, almost to infinity. How large an amount came from so small a response. O how great is the Lord's power, and how great is the lesson. But small as was the amount, and small though each loaf and fish was, it was still too large for the Lord, He did not, would not, do the miracle except He broke down what was given Him. Small as it was, while it was whole it was still too large; to be suitable for His purposes it had to be broken yet smaller.

He so much wanted His apostles to assimilate this. Did they see that the miracle was not by anyone's faith but by His grace? They must have noticed that He did not call for anyone to believe anything. The apostles themselves had been a disgrace; their attitude had been the very opposite of faith, and entirely without grace. He moved in faith-knowledge though; that was sufficient. Except He had, whatever would have been the outcome? Did they notice the boy's generosity though? His sacrifice had made it all possible: what would the Lord have been able to do apart from that? Those apostles had nothing to offer Him. He fed the crowd by what the boy gave Him; His response was to that. How great was His grace to the apostles that He should include them in His grace to men as well.

The Shepherd Heart Revealed

As the Lord had said, the people were as sheep without a shepherd, and what a great shepherd-heart the Lord had, He really cared for the people. That day the Lord showed all who had eyes to see that He was the Great Shepherd of souls, and that the apostles were His appointed under-shepherds. To them it had been a simple demonstration of social care and spiritual principle; He had planned it. In a way it was a kind of repetition of the instructions the Lord had given them when He sent them out on mission some weeks earlier. Strangely enough, on that day they had started out with nothing as they had on this day. The difference lay in this, that at the end of this they finished up at nightfall with a basketful of bread and fish each, plus the discovery of the spiritual law that in giving man receives and in feeding others a man is himself fed.

This is the way it happens in the kingdom of God: men, especially apostles, must put others first, if they do this their own needs will be met, though this must not be their reasons for doing so. To some the miracle may have seemed to imply that God's servants only have what is left over; others may have seen that they ate of His abundance; all learned that the hungry must never be sent away empty. Every preacher of the gospel knows the truth of this. He waits upon his Lord for the word that he may minister it to others; if he does that he will finish up with a basketful of choice food for himself, and have enough to give others yet again.

It was a wonderfully satisfying ending to a totally unexpected day for everybody concerned. For the apostles it may have been a disappointing start, but in the end

they had enjoyed it; what happened next though must have sickened them, perhaps it surprised and rebuked them also. Again it was disappointment for them; they were certainly being put through a rigorous programme. The Lord told them to get into the ship and go to the other shore, and would not go with them; He would remain behind to dismiss the people, He said. This kind of thing distressed and mystified them. Why did He act so unexplainably at times? In many ways He was entirely unpredictable. They knew He had His reasons for everything, but what lay behind this particular move? They had always helped Him with the crowds. What had changed? Why would He not allow them to help Him this time? Had they behaved themselves so badly that He now thought them unfit even for that? Bad moods are miserable things,

and often very costly; sometimes they result in forfeiture of privilege, and speculation about it only deepens the gloom. By His unfailing grace the Lord had more than made amends to the people for His apostles' rudeness; their behaviour had been inexcusable; but, loving as ever, in the end He had made them ministers of bountiful grace. Their attitude had been partly due to limited vision; that was quite understandable to Him, nevertheless it had distressed Him, and He did not want them to undo the good He had done, or unnecessarily offend the people.

Naturally the apostles were unwilling to go and leave Him there, but He laid constraint on them: 'Go to the other side,' He said. It was the last thing they wanted to do. Go without Him? Surely He knew that their failure did not mean that they did not love

Him. Besides, they remembered a most unpleasant and terrifying experience on a dreadful night not so long before; they could never forget it. That night the familiar sea had felt like a wilderness to them, a battlefield where they had been beaten and bruised by the enemy. There were scars in their memory, they had been at their wits end, helpless, lost and dying — and He had been with them. What if it happened again and He was not there with them? It did not bear thinking of, and if they had their way it would never happen again. Not only that; how would He get back to the other shore if they took the ship away? Had they so deeply offended Him that He would not travel with them any more? Had He finished with them? They knew they had behaved badly: was this their punishment? They dare not disobey Him though.

Reluctantly they got into the ship, thrust out from the shore and slowly pulled away, watching Him. Should they wait? He showed no signs of changing His mind; He didn't seem to need their help or want their company, not at present anyway. He was in complete control and quite resolute; the people were obeying Him, and He was directing them away. The apostles watched as the crowds finally dispersed, toiling off along the shore and over the countryside away to their distant homes, leaving Jesus alone by the sea. At last, His purpose accomplished, the Lord began walking along the shore too, heading towards a close-by mountain; reaching it, He began to climb. They must have guessed what He was going to do then, but what should they do? He had said they were to go across to Bethsaida, but should they go back or go on? With mixed

feelings they bent to the oars and set course
for the distant shore.

Chapter 9 — I AM THAT I AM: JEHOVAH

Far Above All

The last time Jesus had gone up a mountain it had been very different; they had been close to Him, wide awake, alert and ready to hear His call. Apostleship for them had started on a mountain — they wished they were there with Him now. It still lived in their hearts: they could recall the anticipation that gripped them as they had listened, hoping He would call their names; how quickly they had responded to Him. Every one He had named then was in the ship now, all pulling together for the unseen shore; but they did not like it. He had separated Himself from them. Why? Since their return from mission they had hardly been with Him, and when He had announced a private trip somewhere away

with Him for a rest they were pleased beyond measure. Hope and delight rose in their hearts, they would have Him to themselves for a while; what an opportunity to enjoy Him alone, a rare enough privilege these days. But instead of that their hopes had been dashed, it had all gone wrong, crowds had appeared from nowhere and their day of joy vanished. They had reacted badly they knew, but surely He knew that their churlishness had only been because they loved Him and had been so disappointed.

Sometimes they felt so distant from Him; He was so different from them, and at those times there seemed such a great gap between themselves and Him. He was so great, so far beyond them, and often did such surprising things; He was so able, nothing ever caught Him off balance. They

felt so completely inferior to Him, yet they had discovered that although at times they felt shattered by Him it was always for their good. Perhaps this would have a happy ending too. After all, He had not just told them to go away, He had also mentioned a destination as though He would rendezvous with them there. The thought lightened their sadness, and they gave themselves to rowing.

Also Under Authority

High up on His mountain the Lord looked out and followed their progress, He knew His men, and with what reluctance they had left Him; He knew they had gone against their will. It was only natural that they should wish to be with Him, He was their Master and they loved Him; He loved them too. He also had a Master though; He had a work to do, a plan to fulfil; that is why He had sent

them away. For their sakes as much as for His own He must let His apostles into something more of His heavenly secret. He knew who His Master was but they did not, nor did they know who, their own Master was. They had heard the Gadarene man who was delivered from the Legion say that Jesus was the Son of God, but He had never said so Himself. He had done many things and given them enough signs, each one pointing to a certain conclusion, but it had not yet dawned on them who He really was, or if it had they had not yet confessed it. Now the time had come for Him to declare Himself; they must hear a clear statement about Himself from His own lips; every apostle must make up his own mind about Him.

He was well aware of what had gone on when the apostles had passed among the people with the loaves and fishes. Besides

receiving their thanks for the food and noting their reactions, they had also given their opinions and made speculations about Him. The apostles had also become aware that there was a new move afoot, the people were wanting Jesus to be their king. To the apostles that may have seemed a very wonderful idea, but not to the Lord; very far from it, it was ominous; things were becoming very serious. It was plain now why they had chased after Him round the lake, insurrection was brewing in their hearts; whether He wanted it or not they were planning to take Him by force and make Him king. Rebellion was in the air; the crowds were in the mood for civil disobedience and open revolt. Jesus could foresee trouble, He wanted no part in that; He had not come to do on earth what Lucifer had done in heaven; He was neither a political agitator

nor a militant. Warfare and bloodshed were abhorrent to Him. He knew also that Pilate, the Roman procurator, was a notoriously bloodthirsty man, who would not hesitate to murder people at the slightest pretext. Bloodbaths belonged to warring kings of earth, not to Him. His kingdom was not of this world. He had no more come to take the kingdoms of the world by force than He was prepared to take them as a gift from satan. He was not going to have His name associated with national or international rivalries; He had not come to recruit an army but to raise a church. The only bloodshed He would countenance for the establishment of His Church was His own (no other was needed) and the time for that had not yet come; He would have something to say about that later.

He decided to send away His apostles immediately; they must not for any reason be contaminated by popular political ideas or implicated in party feelings or movements; it is so easy to become infected by inflammatory talk. Such is the state of human hearts that, even under the sound of the gospel, they had no heart for truth; that place of grace had become a hotbed of nationalistic ideas breeding seeds of civil disobedience. The hands that handled bread and fish must not handle the sword; oars yes, let them handle oars, let them pull for their lives or sail away, but apostles must not become slaves to nationalistic ideas, He would not have it.

All the time the people were eating, the situation had been worsening; they had been trying to settle the most vexed question of all — who was Jesus? He was a

prophet they were sure, perhaps a reincarnation of one of the great prophets, but which one they were not certain: all sorts of ideas were in circulation about Him, all of them wrong. Although He did not question the apostles about it until later, He knew that some men did think He was a prophet — or 'that prophet'; some, more specific than that, had named the prophet, but none of them was right. The apostles had heard it all and had their own opinions about it; they did not say what they were though. They had taken Him as their king, but not in the same way as the crowds wanted Him to be their king. They were utterly deceived of course, no one could force Him to be king, that was impossible; no one can force Jesus to be anything. What they did not understand was that He already was King. If it was only by the majestic way

He controlled that inflammatory situation and dispersed the people He proved that; the wisdom and courage with which He dismissed His disciples and sent them away also proved it; He held sway over all.

What a great King He was, and in what realms of power He moved. By His power that day He had both established kingdom of heaven conditions on earth among men, and had defeated the purposes of satan on their behalf also; but O He longed for more for them. The whole situation had been fraught with devilish traps, but it had also provided Him with the opportunity He needed to reveal Himself to His apostles in a new and decisive way. So important was the moment that He would not attempt to proceed any further without a period of discussion with His Father and Head about it, so for a while He retired from social activity and public

view altogether. He even withdrew from His apostles and went into the mountain alone. He really belonged in the kingdom of God; God, His Head and His Father, was His Master; it was He who had sent Him, He discussed everything with Him and did everything for His sake. David said that the earth and the fulness thereof belonged to the Lord; the multitudes certainly had that demonstrated to them that day; He had proved Himself to them by supplying them from His own fulness by using a little of earth's provisions. When He ascended the hill of the Lord that day it was with clean hands and a pure heart. He wanted nothing of this world; He was an apostle from another world and His purpose was to bring that world's good to this earth. All He wanted for the people and His apostles and

for Himself was the will of God; to Him nothing else mattered.

Times spent with His God and Father alone were very precious to Jesus and always much too short, the hours sped by almost unnoticed; they always did when He was in communion with Him. It was sheer bliss to be alone with His Father God, love overflowed, joy filled their hearts and peace reigned supreme. These were times of refreshment and confirmation for Jesus, and of decision-making too; His apostleship was always renewed on those occasions, and when He left that mountain some hours later it was with new determination to carry the plan of salvation right through to completion. Meanwhile, to these men in the ship out there on the sea it was the fourth watch of the night and they were feeling tired. As usual they had carried on, non-

stop, through another exhausting day, and it was proving to be another long hard night. There was a strong wind blowing which showed no sign of abating and the seas were running high; the signs were ominous. Was it going to be a repetition of that other dread occasion? The thought of it made them shrink; they were no cowards, but it was sufficient to fill the strongest heart with fear — and Jesus was not with them. Where was He? Minutes without Him seemed twice as long. Conditions were just right for the Lord though, so was the time, and He left His night watch. As though coming forth afresh from the Father He stepped down from the mountain of holiness on to the sea and started out for Bethsaida in pursuit of His apostles.

Be of Good Cheer — I AM

This Man! What can be said about Him? Who is He? What is He? Where was He and why? The apostles were soon to discover. Almost unbelievably He appeared, stepping out of the gloom, spectral, striding across the waves, drawing nearer and nearer to the ship, coming abreast of them, passing them by. They were absolutely astounded; He wasn't coming aboard, He was ignoring them. What was happening? The apostles were utterly confused. They were certain it was Jesus, walking on the water to come to them, surely, yet He was passing by as though unaware of their presence. It couldn't be Him though, they must have been mistaken, He wouldn't do a thing like that; it must be someone else — a spirit — they cried out in fear. Whether they cried His name or just shrieked in terror we shall never know, but it was sufficient: He stopped

in His onward surge, turned to them and started to speak. Once again His voice rose clear above the sea and the wind, but not as before; then He had said, 'peace be still'; this time He uttered the most amazing words they ever thought they would hear from human lips, even from His, 'Be of good cheer, I AM, — be not afraid'. They were astounded. I AM? Had they heard aright? Could it be? Was He really saying He was That I AM? First the apostles could scarce believe their eyes, then they could scarce retain their senses, now they could scarce believe their ears. What had He said? They were sure He said it, He had spoken the sacred name, I AM; Jesus had said He was the I AM.

What a moment to make the declaration! The Lord certainly had a sense of occasion. Who among them could have anticipated

this or, being asked, would have said that Jesus was or would have claimed to be that I AM? For some while they had been increasingly convinced that he was the Son of God, but to have said so was quite another thing. Was 'Jesus' one of the names of I AM? He had claimed so; there was no avoiding the issue now. But what a time to thrust it upon them; the apostles had no opportunity to give the matter considered thought; in any case they were not religious philosophers cosily calculating percentages of truth and error from a remote distance. They were in a crisis, caught up into something undreamed of for which they had not asked, emotions were running high and they had to make a decision. They had seen and heard most tremendous things, unseen and unheard by men before. Jesus was standing on the sea, waves tossing Him up

and down, wind tearing at His clothes, hair blowing about His head; what a sight! And He was claiming to be God. It was impossible for a man they knew, yet, there He was, declaring His deity, completely unaffected by any of these things. Ever since they had known Him He had done and said surprising and wonderful things, but never anything like this. Would there be no end to their amazement?

This whole episode was so different, but yet so similar in many ways to that former recent experience; this was not an encounter with the elements as before; He seemed to be using them this time, not rebuking them. On that former occasion He had been with them in the boat, but this time He was noticeably outside with the elements. Before, to them He was a man asleep in the boat and they had asked

themselves, 'What manner of man is this?' This time He had seemed to them to be a spirit of the wind and the waters. Before, He had rebuked the elements and made them cease from their raging; this time He let them blow and toss. Before, He was the Man, this time He was the Spirit; before they saw the spirit of the Man, this time they saw the man of the Spirit. Before there was much of satan in the event, this time there was nothing of him; this time all was of the Man and the God, and everything lay between the apostles and the I AM.

Jesus spoke and the name, the name by which God first identified Himself to Moses, came across the sea, and the voice of God was upon the waters. Was He going to pass them by as when He had put Moses in the cleft of the rock while He declared His name to him and passed by? The Lord let them see

His back parts; He almost passed them by, but they saw His face too and it was familiar: it was the face of Jesus, and He was I AM, as well as their Lord; they knew that they knew Him. God had said that He would identify Himself in every generation by this name; it was as though creation and the burning bush and the cleft rock were on the sea that night; history and eternity had merged; Jesus had certified to His apostles that He was God. If it had happened on land, if Jesus had stood on the shore within hearing of all the people, especially the scribes and Pharisees, and had said what He had just said to them, He would almost certainly have been stoned to death. Likewise, if He had said it when He was feeding the multitudes, they too would most probably have done the same thing, even though He had fed them. It would have been

blasphemy in their ears and, however popular and powerful and good He was, they would not have wanted a blasphemer for their king. When later He made an almost identical statement before the high priest, the whole nation rose against Him and raged for His blood — "Away with Him, away with Him, we will not have this man to rule over us".

Jesus had not made His declaration upon the land before all men precisely because of these things, but what a place to make the announcement. Why wait till they were in the midst of the sea, and in such dramatic manner, in the dark, in the storm, when they were full of fear? He did the strangest things. No one could ever say that life with Jesus was tranquil or predictable; apostolic training was far from easy. What can be done with a man standing on the water in a

dark night of storm, declaring that He is God, the Great I AM? There could be no doubting His words or His meaning; nor yet, (as He changed course and began to move towards them across the sea,) could they mistake His purpose. Perhaps by this time it was beginning to dawn on them that the Lord had a special reason for revealing Himself to them when they were in the midst of the sea. Surely they were the men who David had in mind when he said that they who go down to the sea in ships discover His wonders in the deep, for that is precisely how they were finding it to be. How else could they have described what was happening to them than 'His wonders'? They had been familiar with the wonders of His creation and of His powers in the sea since they were boys, but now they were discovering the wonders of Him; but why

choose to make His revelations in the sea? Why not the land? Quite simply because He found it impossible to get them alone on the land; always when they were on shore or inland the crowds were around, clamouring for attention as they had just seen. If He had anything to say to His apostles it was perforce in the hearing of His other disciples or the multitudes; He found so little opportunity to speak to them privately. A ship on the sea was the ideal place; there He had them in isolation without any possibility of interference. Besides this, so great was the magnitude of the revelations He had to impart to them, that people in general could not be expected to receive what He had to say. 'Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God', He had told His apostles. To the people this knowledge was not as yet given; they had to

be told everything in parables, that seeing they should not see (all) and hearing (some things) they should not hear (all). The apostles had to see and hear secrets hidden from other people's eyes and ears, that those secrets should not be forever lost, or Christ's coming have been in vain. So it was that the wonderful revelation was borne above the wind to their ears that night, where there was no one else but He and they, and He could say to them, 'I AM your God,' and each of them could say to himself and to each other', 'I am His apostle'.

Whom Say Ye That I Am?

Those men knew that this was the moment of decision and committal for them, and that the way they responded at that minute would be of absolute importance. Both the Lord and the apostles — every one of them — were aware that everything would turn

on this issue, all was at stake; it was now or never, and they scarce had time to think. What they did must be done in a hurry. All the crises of God's chosen ones are engineered by Him; this whole incident was thrust upon those men unasked, they could do nothing about it; they were not entirely helpless though, they were free to make response as they would later. The Lord came right up to them and boarded the ship before they could do anything about it; not a voice was raised against it, but they were powerless to stop Him even if they had wanted to. As soon as He came aboard the wind dropped, the waves ceased: they were amazed beyond measure to the point of soreness, almost like a pain in the mind. They were speechless. The atmosphere in the ship was dreadful; in its way it was worse than the storm; their hearts were as

hard as stone. The apostles had never been reached in heart, nothing He had ever done or said hitherto had reached their hearts; they were His servants but they were not one with Him; they had only been at one with the person they believed Him to be. They had not really considered the miracle He had wrought on the shore, even though they had co-operated with Him in it; the greater implications and deeper meanings of it were hidden from them. What was the use of knowing the mysteries of the kingdom if they did not grasp the mystery of Him?

The steps by which they had arrived at their present position were progressive; perhaps they recognized this. He had first taken them over the sea to Gadara to show them that He was Lord of' the elements; arriving there He had shown them that he was Master of the demon world. Following that, He had

proved to them that He was the Lord over the departed spirits of men, and most recently had demonstrated His complete ability to supply and satisfy men's bodily needs. These were not the ordinary kind of miracles with which He seemed to fill His days; each one in its order was a sign purposely given to demonstrate the fact that He was indeed God manifest in flesh, and now, to complete the series, this final one was accompanied by an outright declaration of His Godhead. These men were now without excuse; they should have been utterly convinced that He was their God; indeed, their own senses with the minimal degree of spiritual insight should have told them that. They had first seen Him walking on the water and were convinced that He was a spirit being; then when He came up into the boat they were equally convinced

He was a human being, for they felt His flesh and bones. It really was Jesus, they knew it was, that was why they received Him aboard so willingly. Yet, so full of' unbelief is the human heart, that despite all this they still wondered deep down inside if' He really was who He said He was. Their hearts should have been overflowing with joy; to have Him with them again was wonderful; but His latest claim put everything, especially this particular incident, on a different level altogether. Could He possibly be right? He never once boasted about His miracles, He was amazingly humble, but they had heard Him say at one point, 'the works that I do testify of me'. Thinking back over the past there was no evading the fact that all He had done and said had been leading to this end, and if there was any one group of men on the earth who should have known by now

who He was it was the apostles, so He presented them with the test first. He expected them to know; by His choice they had witnessed things none other had seen, and, as He had said, 'unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required'. The Lord was forcing them to a decision, they could not run away, they just had to face it and make up their minds one way or the other, and then be brave enough to state their conclusions, or rather make their confessions.

He had the future in view; He was not training them for high office in the nation, His kingdom was not of this world, nor is it to this day. He had no political or commercial or industrial executive positions in view for them; He was not running a military academy or an educational institution; when He sent them out, His call

was for labourers in the harvest or ploughmen in the field. He had come to lay the foundations of a new city and to create a new society — a Church — in fact a whole new creation. They did not know that, He had not told them yet, nor did He intend to do so for a while; that could wait. He bribed nobody, nor did He try to win men by offering them top positions in the Church or by promising them preferential treatment in the future kingdom; He never attempted to buy their loyalty. Their reasons for following Him must be on an altogether higher level than that; they must be personally convinced of Him and accept all His claims, fully convinced in heart as to who He was, and devoting themselves to Him for that reason alone. They must believe Him to be God as well as man, and love and worship and follow and serve Him without thought

of reward, or because He was the most pleasant and lovable human being they had ever met and had chosen them to be His companions.

One Master — Even God

Jesus had proved that He loved humankind, He was unquestionably their greatest benefactor and teacher; it was a privilege and joy to serve mankind with this popular Master, but that was not enough. All men who serve with Him also love and serve Him personally out of deep inward conviction that Jesus and God are one. The things He was expecting of each apostle was utter devotion to Him on a person to person basis, and total spiritual commitment springing from the fusion of his inmost will with His. He had not as yet mentioned all this to them, but He could not delay the issue any longer; by their own choice as well as by His

election they must become martyr-spirits, and know what it is to embrace His cross and espouse His cause. No man, however great his gifts and personal abilities and however constant his following and whatever his achievements, has ever embraced Christ's cause until he has embraced His cross. Those men had followed Him closely, been on mission, preached the gospel as they knew it, and performed miracles, but without knowledge of the cross in relationship to sonship their apostleship would be temporary only. Until then He had taken them along as they were able to go, leading them into truth as they were able to bear it; admittedly it was faster than others had gone, a crash course in fact: now they must face the greatest of all truth — Jesus was more than their Lord and Master, He was their God — He, the person

of the unwritable name — I AM before Abraham was or anything else could have been.

He knew their hearts were hard; He had known that from the beginning. He also knew that they themselves did not know their own hearts; that was one of the reasons why He had sent them away from the multitudes. The people He had just fed must make up their own minds on the evidence He had given them, and the apostles must do the same. He had called them apostles and to a certain extent they were, but they certainly were not shepherds, for their behaviour showed that they did not have shepherd-hearts. It was not that they did not have the food to feed the multitudes, or had not the power to multiply the little they had, it was their wish to send the people away that belied their

calling. Their attitude and what they had said was plain common sense of course, but apostles must not react to people's needs on the basis of humanistic common sense, nor seek to rationalize away Jesus' commandments — He had said, 'They need not depart; give ye them to eat.' They had said, 'Send the people away'. Apostles, above all people, may not talk like that. Shepherd-apostles must neither leave nor send away human sheep to fend for themselves as best they can. If, as everybody could see, apostles are men next to Christ, people have a right to expect great things of them. An apostle must not be a wolf to scatter the flock, any more than a prophet must be a wolf in sheep's clothing! Christ had not been angry with them because they had no power to multiply loaves and fishes, but He was greatly disappointed that they

wanted to send the people away. The apostles had many things, but not tender hearts.

A shepherd-heart is caring and tender, it will always provide food for the sheep; it is a gift from God. The man who possesses it seeks neither success nor his own good, he puts the welfare of others first and supplies their needs before his own; a good shepherd lays down his own life for the sheep. A shepherd-heart is large and strong and tender, it enables him to go on when he is tired, walk on when he is weary, know the way and lead on when he wants to rest. Compassion will move him when He would be still, rouse him when he is tired, stir him when he looks upon the masses, lift him to the superhuman, if not the miraculous, and make him so want to give that he will somehow find a way to do so. These things

and many others like them had yet to be learned by the apostles; but, although that time had not yet come, when He left His mountain-top appointment with the Father that night He was determined that the present issue must be settled immediately. He had chosen to make the revelation exclusive to His chosen men in the midst of the sea, but all was done with a view to its outworkings in public. When they accepted Him on His own terms and for who and what He was, those apostles were caught up into the power of God in a new way. Before this they had been given power and authority to go out and do works, but now they were caught up in the power rather than the power being given, and in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, they were transported over the sea to another shore.

They must have felt they had been caught up in something far greater, almost terrifyingly greater, than themselves, something unimaginably bigger than they had ever thought or dreamed. Whatever they had thought or had been taught about the Messianic kingdom of heaven on earth, their conclusions could not have been anything like this. Who could have foreseen or foretold the things which were happening to them? They had become involved in frightening things, and perhaps if it had not been for Jesus they would have opted out long before. There had been thrilling times when it seemed to them that they had been exalted to heaven; those were wonderful moments, they could not deny that, but there had also been occasions when they had seemed to hover on the brink of destruction, moments when they could have

felt almost thrust down to hell; they had to admit that too. But through it all there had been Jesus: He, Him, His personality held them; a bond had been forged between themselves and Him that nothing could break, and they had stayed on with Him. They did not really understand the things that were happening to themselves or to Him; He knew that, and did not expect them to understand, how could they? He was deeply appreciative of their loyalty; even though at times they had been baffled beyond description they had remained with Him, and He was determined to reward their faithfulness. Months later, before He finally left them for the cross, He commented on their tenacity, 'Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me'. He did not say

what His temptations had been; in some respects perhaps they themselves had partly been the means of some of them. Certainly their hard-heartedness and inability to see into what was happening, and above all their lack of compassion, were all very grievous to Him. He just could not carry on, nor allow them to think they could continue with Him any longer except He had their wholehearted co-operation. He had given them power, but, unless it flows from a heart of compassion, power only hardens a man and makes him callous; they must be made to see what compassion is and what it can accomplish. With this in mind He moved swiftly and brought them all over to the further shore; for them it was to be the land of final choice and open declaration.

The overall effect of the miracle beyond the sea was far greater than anyone but He

knew; He had performed it for this purpose, His eye as much on the future as upon the present need. He was aware of the conversations that had gone on among the crowds during the meal and was well aware of the power of speculative assertions; originally sin had been strengthened in heaven among the then un-fallen angels by these means. He also understood all the fears and doubts with which His men were battling; they had to get beyond all that though and come absolutely clear on this issue, or He and they could no longer continue together. The prime reason He had ordained them to be with Him was that they should discover who He was, not what He. could do. When He had sent them out on mission they had not made the discovery, they had obeyed Him and used His power and authority without knowing who He

really was, but that could no longer be; hard hearts filled with confusion were not the rock upon which He could commence building His Church. Uncertain foundations would result in an unstable edifice and total collapse; that must never be, hence the move.

Chapter 10 — THE TRUE BREAD FROM HEAVEN

God in the Midst

They had not long been back on land before the crowds caught up with them again, hundreds of them from across the sea. All were talking of yesterday's miracle, asking questions, mostly from wrong motives and for wrong reasons; few were genuine, and those who were hopelessly confused and mixed up; ignorance abounded. They were not entirely to be blamed. for that; their national teachers and their rulers knew no more of truth than they themselves; more significantly, none of them had been called to apostleship and none had been in the boat. However, with so little time left and such vital issues at stake, the Lord simply had to face everybody with reality. The

times of national blessing were running out, Messianic providence must lead to recognition and acceptance of God in the midst of His people, otherwise the blessings must cease. The thing to be decided was not whether it was time for all men to serve God under Jesus' rule and guidance, but whether they would believe He was God and accept Him as God. They were all taken up with the miracle of the loaves, it was the latest sensation, but few, if any, had considered what it meant. They must though: all, including the apostles must make decisions and choices, so in His own masterly way He took charge of the situation and directed things to the end He had in view. Carefully He led the conversation round to a topic of vital historic importance which would provide Him with the perfect illustration for His purpose.

The latest sign was a live talking point among them, though neither the miracle nor the Lord had made the impression on them for which He had hoped. Whatever else it did, it did not prove to them that He was God, and that had been the whole point of it. Their reasoning followed a very normal pattern — their fathers had eaten miraculously supplied food in the desert, and not on just one occasion either; moreover they were not sitting on the grass at some seaside spot, they had eaten manna all the way across the wilderness for forty years. That did not prove that Moses was God though; he never made any such claims, how then could Jesus claim to be God when He had only provided them with one meal? His answer to that was, 'Verily, verily;' He agreed with them. It seemed as though they had made their point and had shown Him

His folly, but He had not finished — 'I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world'. Would they agree with that?

This was the crux of the matter, and He brought them right to it knowing full well that this would bring everything to a head; it did. The Jews immediately started to murmur at Him. They understood plainly now that He was not just claiming equality with Moses but something much, much more. If He had been content to let His reputation rest upon their estimation of Him all would have been at least well, if not completely acceptable, for there was a very real sense in which Moses was (a) god, for God had told him that He had made him a

god to Pharaoh; but he never claimed to be God to Israel. Israel did not worship Moses as God, he had never wanted them to; if they had attempted to do so and he allowed it, God would have punished them for idolatry, and him for blasphemy and devilry. The apostles themselves were having difficulties with the same problem; they knew that if they accepted Jesus as God they would have to worship Him; they also knew that if it was wrong to do so they would be in sin, and so would He. Worse still, it would mean that the Pharisees were right and He was Beelzebub indeed as they said. When they had formerly enquired among themselves 'what manner of man is this?' it had been as much from reason as from fear. What made this human being more than human, what spirit addition did He have? From whence did that 'extra' come? Were

He and His power of God, or was He of the devil? By this latest and greatest of miracles to date their problem had been resolved, but they were a mere handful; perhaps, other than His mother Mary, no one else knew who He was. This was the vital point that had to be settled by everyone though, so the apostles listened to the questions and answers with sympathy and understanding, and perhaps more than a little apprehension; something decisive would be bound to emerge.

It was evident that He was forcing the issue, the apostles could sense it; He had forced it upon them just previously in the midst of the sea, and they were glad. Somehow there seemed to be a new resoluteness about the Lord's manner; it appeared to have taken hold on Him since the miracle beyond the sea. He had been very firm about feeding

the multitude — the way He had insisted upon it (He had made them search and search till they found the lad with the loaves and fishes), and then the way He had done it — everything about it had seemed so ordered and predetermined and unusual. His insistence that they should set off for the further shore, for instance, plus the fact that He would not go with them: that was not usual, they knew something was afoot, but could not tell what. It was all so plain now of course, they knew why He had gone up the mountain alone; it was not so much that He did not want to go with them or that He did not want them with Him, it was because He had to spend time alone with God over the matter of His self-revelation — first to His apostles and then to the rest of the people. He had reached crisis point and so had they, He knowingly and they unknowingly but just

as really, hence His resoluteness. Those apostles felt He would never let things go now till the matter of who He was and who they believed Him to be (and accepted Him as) was cleared up — at least as far as was possible at that time.

His statements were unmistakable. He was making the people face up to truth. They had talked about manna, but as much as they venerated Moses they knew it was not He who gave their forefathers that bread from heaven, God did that. Surely they were guilty of putting Moses in the place of God weren't they? They were doing with Moses what they were accusing Jesus of doing with Himself, and by implication they were also accusing the apostles of being idolaters. They were totally wrong of course, wrong on every count, chiefly in that Moses was not God, and what God gave Israel was not

bread, it was manna. It had to be gathered from the desert and converted into bread; every day except the sabbath they had to go out and gather it, they had to do it all for themselves. Ready-made bread had not come down from heaven, only the wherewithal to make it. Why then should they demand that He should come down from heaven bodily? They were being inconsistent. On the confession of Israel, manna was a mystery; they described it as seed and called it 'Man' ('na' should be written in italics), It was an acknowledgement on their part that they could only live by eating it; the manna became their life, they lived by it, without it they would have starved and died. Yet history proved that they were not grateful to God for it; they openly said they loathed it, calling it 'this light bread'.

True to their spiritual tradition, the Jews of Christ's day were objecting and refusing to accept what God was giving them. Contrary to their own national testimony, they were saying in effect, 'no-one saw you come down from heaven, you can't be God: we know that Joseph and Mary were your father and mother, you were born into the world just like the rest of us'. They would not receive the truth of His unique birth, even though their scriptures predicted it. They had convinced themselves that God was not His Father, that He was not born of the Holy Spirit, and that consequently the Father was not giving them the true bread from heaven; but He was. Jesus was God's bread, and He was sent down from heaven to be man's bread. Though of a different kind than manna, and given in a different way, He was God's seed; He had to be made bread by

Mary, that is to say He had to be made flesh and blood by her in the normal way. The Jews and everybody else had and still have to accept that the flesh and blood Man Christ Jesus of history was and is God — I AM.

By the miracle He declared His identity and showed His intentions by making them eat what He provided from the original seed gift of the five loaves and two fishes. There was no alternative, they ate of Him and did so willingly; similarly everybody must accept what Jesus says about Himself, namely that He is both bread and meat and drink, and if any man wishes to live he must eat Him. Jesus is the Son of Man simply and solely because He is the Son of God, and He is the bread of man because He is the bread of God. No one has or can have God, unless in spirit He eats the flesh and drinks the blood

of Jesus Christ; eternal living is only possible by reason of this food and drink. Christ's flesh and blood is the spiritual man's only sustenance; there is no other basic certainty that a man has eternal life than that he eats and drinks Christ. It would have been completely pointless of God to have given men eternal life without providing the food necessary to sustain it after it had been given; people must eat and drink to live. All food is eaten for that which it contains, not just for what it is; the food itself fills the stomach, its content imparts life. Jesus had not given them manna in the desert just across the sea; neither had He given them a vessel full of seeds — He gave them solid food. When He spoke of the bread of life He meant His eternal life lived out solidly and consistently in human flesh and blood. He could do so because He was both the Seed

of God and the perfect human being; only the perfect Man is and can be perfect bread for mansoul.

This insistence that they must eat Him was provocative in the extreme to His hearers, yet He persisted with it, knowing full well that His words could only gender strife and lead to division. Everybody was under stress; even those who claimed to be disciples were feeling the strain, it was most severe and the break would surely come soon. The people at large and the majority of disciples had not received all the teaching or been put through such severe training as the apostles. How then could they be expected to know? Whoever then were the people to whom all this teaching about eating His flesh and drinking His blood was most pointedly directed? The apostles! It held meaning for everyone of course; where substance and

sustenance of spiritual life is concerned there is no difference between man and man, but it was to the apostles that the Lord was chiefly directing the truth. In His wisdom He did not say these things to them privately as He had done on other occasions previously, but chose to say what He said publicly because He wanted the public to hear it also. There is always great wisdom in what the Lord does; His sense of occasion and timing is perfect. He was shortly going to leave the world and when He did so His apostles would find it utterly impossible to follow Him as they were doing at present, for He would no longer be visibly with them in a flesh and blood body. Being with Him everywhere and listening to His words the apostles, without knowing it, had, to the extent possible to them then, been eating His flesh and drinking His blood. Perhaps to

have suggested that to them would have surprised them, but it is true — those men did not commit themselves to a cause or to mere words, but to Him. Without saying so, this is what He wanted and what He taught them from the beginning by the simple method of keeping them with Him.

Eat My Flesh and Drink My Blood

It naturally followed that they also embraced His cause as well as Him, but He made it unmistakably clear from the moment He chose them that their calling was to Himself, not to service or to a cause. So they followed Him, and as they followed He became meat and drink to them because they fed on His words and drank in the spirit of everything He said and all that His works indicated and meant. They probably did not know that at the time, nor that by His words and works He was actually speaking and working out

His life, that is the life that was in Him, of which His flesh was the embodiment. His words were His life, and because His life (that is He Himself) was in His flesh (that is to say in the flesh and blood body which men saw and followed and handled), when men devoured His words and drank in His Spirit and the glory of His works, they ate His flesh and drank His blood as well. The actual flesh and blood of the Lord Jesus was a manifestation of the word of God, it came into being as a result of God's word to and through Mary. Quite contrary to what spiritually minded men may think, they do and must feed on flesh and blood. Men must follow men; Paul realized this, and said 'Be ye followers of me, even as I also am. of Christ'. This is also the reason why men are called shepherds; they are the God-ordained leaders of the flocks of God, and

we are under command to follow their faith. The flesh and blood bodies of these men are. of no moment: 'the flesh profiteth nothing,' as Christ says of His own body. We do not follow that; we follow what it embodies; in this connection it should be the embodiment of the man's faith, as was Christ's.

Undoubtedly when God pronounced that 'the life is in the blood,' and forbade man to drink it, He was speaking with all these things in mind — He would not have men drinking animal blood or human blood. But Christ, having commanded us to drink His blood, poured it all out on the ground precisely so that men should not drink it. Men must not imagine that they actually drink the physical blood and eat the actual flesh of Christ at the communion; the 'magic' of priestcraft is illusory — a deception

deliberately practised against the declared will of God. We need to eat and drink the spiritual (that is the real eternal) life and person of Christ, whether at the communion or in the every day. To do so is the clearest if not the only acknowledgement and declaration of human faith and need; by this we declare that Jesus Christ is God and that Jesus of Nazareth was God manifest in the flesh for our initial salvation by sacrifice, and for our continual life by sustentation. These things must be for ever made clear, and unmistakably so, even at the risk of confusing some men's minds. Those apostles had got to confess publicly that He was God, and that they were following for that reason. Not for a moment did He ease the pressure; on the contrary He increased it, taking everybody beyond the bounds of human credulity or possibility. He left them no

option; they must now take the leap of faith and come clear or drop back into unbelief.

It is amazing how much a man can do because he believes in someone or something. Every person listening to Jesus that day believed something about Him; what it was or to what degree, and what difference it made to each person's life, varied considerably no doubt, but they all believed something. Many of them had come a long way since they had first believed, but although they had come so far, they had not yet reached the point of faith and committal which God at some time requires of every believer. Mere believers must be disillusioned; they must either be galvanized into faith or else become disbelievers; He could no longer entertain hangers-on among His disciples. He therefore spoke the offensive words, and

then asked, 'Doth this offend you? What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where He was before? It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life'.

That did it. It was too hard for many of them to take; they could not walk with Him any more and just dropped out. It really was strong stuff, altogether too much for mere believers to accept; that is why He said it. When He had said, 'I came down from heaven,' they had not found it the easiest thing to accept, but when He suggested that there was a distinct possibility that they might see Him go back up to heaven bodily it was too much. But that was the final proof that He had indeed come down from heaven originally. He said it because people of mystical inclination might possibly have

believed, irrationally enough, that in some metaphysical way He had come down from heaven. No one had witnessed it, but, despite its illogicality, to a certain extent that could perhaps be accepted by some; but there could be nothing metaphysical about ascending to heaven. Reason says that that is impossible, for there could be nothing metaphysical about that, it would have to be both bodily and physical. If He meant that He was going to ascend to heaven as He was, a human being of flesh and blood and bones, they couldn't believe it. They had either quite forgotten or were deliberately refusing to remember that their scriptures recorded that Elijah had ascended into heaven in a whirlwind, and that Enoch did not die but was taken directly up from earth to heaven by God. If some of them had remembered they may also have recalled

that neither of those men had talked to their contemporaries about eating their flesh and drinking their blood.

When Jesus revealed that the secret source of His human spiritual life was the Father, and then said that because this was so His flesh was to be the daily source and sustenance of men's lives, He was making statements far beyond the imagination of everybody else who had ever breathed. This was the ultimate claim to deity, and not just deity but unique deity. They firmly believed that God had occasionally come down to earth previously and that presumably He had ascended up again, but no one had seen that happen. Only one man had ever claimed to have seen another man caught up to heaven bodily, and that had been during the course of a very unique miracle. Had Elisha not seen Elijah caught up bodily it

would have been presumed that he had just vanished like Enoch had done before him.. Quite obviously none of the prophets contemporary with Elisha had believed his story; they could accept the possibility that the Spirit of the Lord for some reason had caught up Elijah temporarily and then cast him on to a mountain somewhere, but it was just too hard for them to believe that God had taken him up to heaven. They went and searched for him but never found him, for God had indeed translated him straight up into heaven just as he was, a full-grown man. Elijah was a 'really great prophet and a terrific man; he suddenly appears in scripture without any mention of father or mother or kith or kin or birthplace, but it had never been claimed that he had come down from heaven.

Although in human terms Jesus' claims seemed excessive; they were absolutely true; they were also utterly unique. He knew when He made them that He was asking men and women to believe things which reasonable people had never before been expected to believe. His hearers were not superhuman; therefore, as politely as possible, without entering into any argument about it or causing any disturbance, people began to withdraw from Him. Knowing their difficulty, the Lord did not seek to detain or dissuade them but let them go. If they could not believe Him, especially about this, they were not the calibre of men He wanted for disciples. When He said such things as, 'except a man deny himself and take up the cross and follow me', and except a man take up his cross and follow me he cannot be my

disciple', He had this kind of crisis situation in mind. He was not just talking about being persecuted and becoming an outcast of society, or a man marked out for death; these are perhaps the least and most bearable aspects of discipleship. He was meaning much more and far greater things than that; He was talking about self-crucifixion, that is the crucifixion of the will and of the mind, the deliberate choosing of God's will, the determination to receive and act upon God's word, even if it be totally contradictory of one's own thinking and expressed word.

Jesus expects every man to crucify his own fleshly lusts; his prior religious beliefs' and his personal interpretations of scripture must, if necessary, be put to death. The cross is total, the whole man in every realm of his spiritual being must be impaled on the

cross and permanently affected by it. The cross is both the way to, and the means of, the release of the spirit from bonds of self, and the ascension of the soul to life in Christ. Those disciples listening to Jesus that day refused the cross and left Him; millions have done it ever since. Jesus, knowing that to men His bodily ascension to heaven would be proof of His deity, planned it to be public and visible; men would see Him rising from earth to heaven before their eyes. He would not be mysteriously taken in secret like Enoch, or suddenly whisked away like Elijah, unseen except by one devoted man. His ascension would be open and obvious, observed by accredited men appointed for that purpose, and it would be attested to by the angels of God; when it happened it would be the final proof given by God at that time.

When Jesus said these things, to the majority of those who heard Him it was in the nature of the proverbial last straw that broke the camel's back. They knew that if He ascended up bodily to heaven, and was seen to do so, it would mean that He had also come down from heaven originally. This would leave them with no option but to believe that He had indeed been born of the virgin and that He was being accepted back, as well as up, to heaven, and that He was God. They therefore left Him, thereby giving notice prior to the event that they had rejected the claim. There were others, at least twelve, who received His testimony and stayed on with Him, thereby testifying of their faith in Him. They did not fully, or perhaps even partially, understand the mystery of the bread, as He later rather reprovably implied; but, even if they could

not receive them as Spirit and Life at the time, His words had been very acceptable light to them. If nothing more, they were convinced that He was who He claimed to be; He challenged them though: 'Will ye also go away?' He asked. It was an hour of testing for Him as well as for everybody else. Would He lose everybody? To their eternal credit, in the crisis the apostles remained steadfast. With Him and for Him they had been through much in many places, hearing and doing and seeing many things, and they had made up their minds to follow on despite all. At last they believed and were convinced that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God, and they confessed it. Going even further Peter said, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life'. As usual he was speaking for them all. His words reached Jesus' heart, the truth was

seeping into their minds; joy rose in His heart, 'have not I chosen you twelve?' He said, and then the sorrow came surging in, 'and one of you is a devil,' He added. What a response. It had been an attestation of loyalty, but Jesus knew that it was not true of them all. Judas was one of the Lord's chosen; selected and taught and sent out by Him on service with his fellow-apostles; he was a special man. Yet time would come when he would choose eternal death and not eternal life. Judas was a devil.

What a time it had been! The feeding of the multitudes had sparked off a train of events which were to have eternal effects, as well as mark the apostolic band for life. The miracle itself, tremendous as it was, had been the least remarkable of everything which had taken place within the last few hours. The events and effects resulting from

the miracle were far more numerous and of greater importance altogether than the miracle itself. To name but two of these: (1) the first plain declaration by Jesus that He was God; (2) the first open disclosure by Jesus that the devil was already operating within the apostolic band. The first declaration, breathtaking though it was, could not have been so devastating to those men as the second must have been; that second revelation must have been shattering; all the more so because He did not say who the devil was. In His wisdom the Lord left each of those men to work it out himself. Even at the very end they had not discovered who the Lord was meaning: 'Lord, is it I?' they asked at the supper. What a dilemma! They must have been amazed and shocked, but Jesus had let the devil and

Judas know that He was not deceived by them.

From its outset that day had been a time of very straight talking and hard sayings. In every relationship with Jesus the time always has to come for hard sayings and plain speaking. Sooner or later all men, especially apostles, have to face up to facts and see things as they really are; by Jesus' honesty with them those men had done just that. The glamour had gone, the popularity had passed, original attraction had deepened into committal; they knew what they wanted and where they were going and with whom they wanted to be. Peter had meant what he said. Although they had not yet entered into all the Lord meant them to have, they all understood in measure what He had been saying; many times as they had listened to His words they had been

inwardly fed and built up and strengthened in their minds. Although many found His sayings difficult, the apostles grasped somewhat of what He meant about eating His flesh and drinking His blood. They had not been subjected to a voice like a trumpet speaking a barrage of words from heaven out of the weird firelight, as their fathers had been at Sinai. The voice to which they had responded was a man's, and the words coming from His mouth were His spirit and His life; He only spoke what He lived in the flesh, He was true bread for men, the bread of God supplied from heaven. The apostles feasted their souls on all they saw and heard.

Little wonder then that they had taken no bread with them when they crossed the sea a few days earlier. From the very beginning it was all planned right down. to the last

detail. Bread for the multitude could not be bought anywhere, even if the apostles had enough money — the search was on for bread. Out of all that great crowd only one lad was found with bread; he only had five barley loaves and two small fishes — what were they among so many? It was incredible, only one among that huge crowd with any bread. But of course! For the sake of the miracle it had to be that way, for he was not only going to share his bread with others; in his way he was also going to be an illustration of the One who is the bread of life to all. That is why the Lord was so adamant about the fragments that remained after they had all eaten. It could not have mattered so desperately much if some of the scraps were left lying around surely, but He said, 'let nothing be lost'. Those fragments represented His flesh, His blood, His words,

Him — they must not be left for wild animals to eat or the birds to scavenge or the crowds to trample underfoot. For those who had eyes to see and ears to hear, everything was plain; in so many of its features the miracle was a parable.

The lad gave all to feed the multitude and so did Jesus. Wherever He was He spoke the words of God; they were the true expression of His soul, and because of that they were bread; His soul was bread. At a later date, standing in the temple at Jerusalem, the Lord carried this point further under another figure. This time He spoke of water, bidding men who were thirsty to come to Him and drink, promising them that, if they did so, rivers of living water would flow out of them. John assures us that Jesus was speaking of the Spirit which they that believed on Him should receive when He

had been glorified. What an amazingly new man He was! As they listened to Him the apostles' education on basic elements of human being and personality was altogether revolutionized and advanced, though it was by no means completed as yet. They learned that, when thinking in terms of human personality, spirit is to be regarded as water, even as soul is to be regarded as bread. They also learned that the sustenance, continuation and retention of eternal life in the human being is as vital as the reception of it. These were the things the Lord was majoring upon during this period of ministry. This truth was the main emphasis throughout His teachings, following the miracle of the loaves in the desert and the outpouring of the water in the temple: His strong insistence was upon flesh and blood and not upon soul and spirit; though

perhaps surprising, this was necessary for very good reasons.

The Jews could speak all sorts of high-sounding words about soul and spirit in such a way that everything could become entirely unrelated to flesh and blood fact, and in the end come to nothing. The apostles had been in great danger of falling into this trap. This is why He kept them with Him so long before sending them out. They had to learn that, unless what they believed was manifest in (that is outworked through) the flesh, their faith was vain. The incident of the terrible storm on the lake was included in their training partly for this reason. They had implicit trust in Jesus; had they been asked they would have declared that they had great faith in Him, and the fact that ultimately they appealed to Him for help is undoubtedly proof of that. The miracle was

wonderful when it happened, and the lessons to be learned from it are many and greatly beneficial to us all. Which of them is the most outstanding to us is perhaps not the easiest decision to make, but there is little doubt that to the apostles the greatest miracle of all was Jesus; their question — 'What manner of man is this?' reveals it. The thing that gripped them was that here was a man of the same kind of flesh and blood as they themselves, subject to the same conditions as they were, who did not react to those conditions in the same way as they did. To them that was the mystery and the majesty about Him. In the same way, though with a slightly different meaning, to Him that was the mystery about them also; that is why He said, 'Where is your faith?' and asked them why they were so fearful.

When it came to the test, the apostles' faith was found to be non-existent; it worked in neither realm. They were afraid of death: obviously their faith was not working spiritually: they could not affect their outward conditions, therefore it was not working in flesh and blood. The Lord's final word to them on the matter was, 'How is it that ye have no faith?' What a summary of their state! A later apostle said this, 'Great is the mystery of godliness', and then specified that mystery, 'God was manifest in the flesh'; he was speaking of Christ. Except we now positively eat and drink that flesh and blood manifestation of God, we have no spiritual life in us at all. For all human beings presently living on earth, the only eternal life and godliness we can possibly have is that which is manifest in the flesh. If it is not manifest there it is because it is non-

existent, in which case faith is only an empty boast. This is why the Lord so insistently reiterated that men must eat His flesh and drink His blood. We must either accept God manifest in flesh with a view to Him being manifest in our flesh, or reject Him altogether.

The apostles had been coming to terms with this in their minds; they had accepted the truth of God in Christ, and Christ as the Son of God. What they had seen and were now seeing much more clearly, as a result of the feeding of the multitude and the things He had said since that occasion, was most convincing: He had told them to give the people to eat and had made them do it when they thought it was impossible. He had compelled them to act as shepherds and that was fine, but it was what He had said since then that was causing them so much

thought. When He gave the people the food, He looked upon it as giving them His flesh and blood; so really did He give Himself that even in giving bread it was as though He gave His entire self, with the result that they ate of Himself. The power whereby He did the miracle and His thoughts towards them and the words He spoke, together with the love wherewith He loved them, all were identified in His heart with the food He gave; they were one, the bread and fish were the expression of all that.

The apostles saw that, since they had been selected to feed the flock, if they were to do it as He commanded they had to do it in the same way as He. It was not so much the miracle of the loaves, vital as that was; they would not be called upon to perform that same kind of miracle, but they would be expected by Him to feed the flock from their

hearts; their flesh and blood must be in it just as His were. Having now considered the miracle in the context of who He was and all He had since said, they understood it as He wished them to understand it, and they saw their total failure to measure up to their calling. The immensity of apostleship is that a man must so live that, when he gives whatever he gives or does or says, his whole soul and spirit and flesh and blood must be in it. in other words it must be an outworking of the twin commandments, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all ... and thy neighbour as thyself. So really did this truth grip those men that it changed their whole outlook on calling and ordination, and they felt that to be apostles they could do no other or less than He; this is how He viewed shepherding.

A typical example of this total change of understanding which came over these men is furnished by Luke in the Acts of the Apostles after the power to be and act as Jesus had come upon them. The very first miracle of the new era took place as a result of this revolutionary concept, and the truth of it is based upon this realization. Peter's whole approach to the man at the gate of the temple was, 'Such as I have give I thee,' Peter gave all he had and he gave it 'in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth'. Having given himself over, spirit, soul, flesh and blood, to Christ, he could and did give of his entire self to the unnamed man also. Peter and John were utterly identified with the gift and the Giver., and also with the man. That is how they had come to see it now; the miracle of the loaves was perhaps the Lord's most effective of all miracles, and most

probably this is the reason why it is the only one recorded in all four Gospels. It was the miracle whereby He taught His apostles why He did miracles.

There can be little doubt that this is most probably the reason why all four Gospel writers included it in their accounts. It was a turning point in the life of everybody connected with the Lord in His earthly ministry, and it was the miracle whereby He taught His apostles why He did miracles. Its effect was not only local and immediate, it extends throughout all time also, and far beyond into eternity. Certainly it brought forth the Lord's most wonderful, as well as His most devastating teaching to date, it also brought the apostles to understanding and precipitate decision. Their knowledge and training were not completed thereby; by no means were they ready to become

foundations in the Church; the Lord had not yet spoken to them about that, they were not yet ready for such disclosures. In any case they were not called, to be apostles of the Church: they had to be apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ. They would have a future position and function in His Church, a very important one, but it was not to be the most important by any means. Among men their role in the churches may appear to be so great that they may be held to be the important people, but in reality this is not so. Everything in Christ's Church is judged upon its merits; office only bears importance and power in relationship to the person filling it. That is decided entirely upon the quality of the relationship of that person to Jesus Christ, and his likeness to Him. This is what was decided during this episode; the apostles came to the conclusion that Jesus

was God manifest in flesh. That settled, they were ready for further training, and their Lord took them on into it.

Chapter 11 — WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING

Apostles in the Making

One of the most noticeable things about the language of the four Gospel-writers is its unpretentiousness; what humble men they were after the Holy Ghost had come to them. In nothing is this more marked than with regard to their attitude towards the use of the word apostle: the name is comparatively little used throughout the whole length of the Gospels. This is both surprising and remarkable when it is remembered that two of the four Gospels were written by apostles, and the other two by authors in close touch with the apostolic band. From internal evidence it is plain that, rather than to be called apostles, these men much preferred the general title disciple. This is possibly because the name is more

closely associated with following than the word apostles suggests, but more likely it is because their own hearts and the overshadowing Spirit preferred the humbler title; it is a description far more suited to their state at that time. It is also an indication that, whether called disciple or apostle, all who devotedly followed Christ on earth were classed as His disciples; titles, as such, meant very little then, and the passage of time has not improved their worth.

Apostles were really chosen and entitled by the Lord for the position they should hold and the work they should do when He left the earth. To a degree they occasionally fulfilled the meaning of the name during Christ's ministry here, but not properly; they could not, they were not able to because Christ was not in them. His purpose at that

time was to lead them on to that event, namely the baptism in the Spirit, whereby He could indwell each of them and make him an apostle indeed. Before then the thing that marked them out as being different from their fellow disciples was the extra training which Christ gave them. He selected them for this, and devoted Himself to it, preparing them for the positions they would hold in the future after they were regenerate and could live in the same Spirit in which He lived.

Mark is very careful to emphasize this, and takes up the events surrounding the miracle of the loaves and fishes to make the point. He refers first to 'His disciples', then to 'the twelve', saying, 'He began to send them forth'; not yet in this section has he directly called them apostles. Upon their return, when they 'gathered themselves together

unto Jesus', he does directly call them apostles, only to fall back again later upon the general term, calling them 'the disciples' once more, and this is the way he continues. Mark is not alone in this; both Matthew and Luke hardly use the name apostle in their Gospels, and John ignores it altogether in his. They all prefer the name disciple, for the simple reason that the apostles, during Christ's ministerial life on earth, were not apostles in the truest sense, nor could they properly fill the office that the name denotes.

Mark helps us to a closer understanding of the many reasons for this, mentioning one of the most outstanding of these which was so strongly brought out in the moment of Christ's self-revelation to them on the sea. The terrible fear that gripped the twelve disciples in the ship at the coming of their

God, Jesus, was caused entirely by two things: (1) they had not understood nor had they considered the miracle of the loaves; (2) their hearts were hard. This is a most enlightening piece of information, a unique comment on the miracle. This confirms that, like so many of Christ's works, this was a sign-miracle, that is, a miracle with parabolic meaning. So many of the miraculous works which Jesus did were signs deliberately given, pointing to something far more wonderful than the miracle itself, directing the mind to certain conclusions important for them to believe. This implies that, had the apostles understood the meaning of it, that self-revelatory episode on the sea might not have been necessary. It appears from this that the miracle was specially suited (if not purposely designed) by the Lord to His purpose to reveal to them who He was, and

they had not grasped its meaning. This is all the more sad because, as He had said to them, it was given to them to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God. Obviously they had not availed themselves of the gift; the blindness and hardness of their hearts had prevented it and, even in the face of such a miracle, they were still without understanding; they completely missed the sign. How extraordinary it is that mighty miracles and works of power, even if they be performed by men themselves, have no ability to convince hearts of deity. Neither those who observe them nor those who benefit from them nor they who do them become convinced thereby that God is, in this case God manifest in flesh and at work among them. The apostles were not really apostles then; they were disciples, but not yet apostles, for apostles know God.

The Spirit of God moving in Mark, directing him, draws his attention next to the effects of the ex-Legion's testimony in Gadara. Mark does not dwell upon Christ's exposition of His deity to those who had benefitted from the miracle of the loaves, instead he points out what witness to Christ in a hostile world can do. The apostles (so-called) who were with Christ all the time, were unbelievers, (at least as far as the most vital ground for believing was concerned, namely that Jesus was the Son of God) but the Gadarene knew and believed who Jesus was immediately he saw Him. This man had not even been a follower and disciple of Christ, he had not had the favours and privileges that had been heaped upon those twelve men by Christ, yet, without all the opportunities they had of gaining knowledge of Christ, he, not they, knew that He was the Son of the most high

God. That is why the Lord left him behind at Gadara to be His witness.

The man was far more advanced in knowledge than any of the apostles; despite all their advantages they were still so ignorant of His person that He dare not leave any of them on the hostile shore to be a witness unto Him. They had left all to follow Him, had eaten and drunk with Him, had baptized people in His name, preached the gospel, healed the sick, served Him and were called apostles; yet He could not leave or send one of them to be His witness among the Gadarenes. When He had sent them out He sent them two by two, but He Sent the ex-Legion alone, and single-handed he turned many to Christ. There they were lining the shore, waiting for Him to come, eager to receive Him; people who earlier had been fearful and hostile, begging Him to

go away, now wanted Him. Why? How?
Because a man knew that Jesus was the Son of God most high, and had said so before Him and His apostles, and had been delivered and healed because of it.

As Alive From the Dead

The great and obvious lesson for all to learn is that the ex-Legion was, to his countrymen and to all, a type of a man raised from the dead, a regenerate man. He had been living among the dead, filled with a living death, existing among the tombs, and Jesus Christ the Son of God had come and made him a proper man; he was a witness unto Him. He later said to His apostles 'after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you ... ye shall be witnesses unto me'; when He said it they were not yet witnesses to Him. They were not witnesses to Him at Gadara either, so He took them away and left behind the man

who was a witness to Him. The saddest thing about those apostles was that, only just a few hours before He died, at least one, if not all of them, still did not know Him: 'Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?' He said in the upper room — the ex-Legion knew who He was the first time he met Him: what a contrast! And he was not an apostle; but as the Lord said, 'by their fruits ye shall know them'. The lesson every man has to learn is that lack of understanding, unless rectified, renders a man unusable by the Lord. The apostles seemed at times to be unable to grasp the meaning of even the simplest of things.

The miracle of the loaves was such an important sign that some time later the Lord virtually repeated it. The effect on the disciples was to leave them still unchanged

though, and consequently the Lord found it impossible to hide His disappointment: 'How is it that ye do not understand?' He said. He was not exasperated with them, but reasonably enough He was greatly disappointed at their obtuseness; it was amazing to Him. If a man filled with devils, a stranger, could recognize Him, and being delivered could witness to Him among his people with such effect, how was it that twelve men, specially chosen by God to live with Him, could be so ignorant?

Not only were they ignorant, it appears that they were also very mixed up, for they completely misunderstood a simple statement the Lord made, even though He had particularly said they should hear and understand it. They so failed to grasp the plain, simple truth He spoke that they thought it could only be a parable, and

asked Him to explain it to them. He began His answer to them with these words, 'Are ye so without understanding also?' He expected them to understand. Had He been asked to describe the state of the people at that time He may well have answered, 'they are so without understanding', but He did not want to have to say that about His apostles also, yet He did, He just had to.

Long before this He had told them that parables were not for them but for the people; they, the apostles, did not need them, He said. To apostles it was given to understand the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but events proved otherwise, they did not understand them. This was a case in point; they did not understand that nothing which enters a man from without can defile him, or that a man is defiled by the things which come out of him. Those apostles were

looking for hidden meanings where there were none and failing to see the signs indicating hidden meanings when those signs were plain for them to see. At that period of their training it appears they could scarcely, if at all, detect the difference between the parabolic, the literal, the material, and the spiritual.

A Special Sign

John, in his Gospel, records very few miracles; those he does record are all sign miracles; he leaves out all others as though he considered them all to be at least of less importance, if not unimportant. Noting this degree of selectivity, it must surely be that when he wrote it he looked back upon his trainee period with a regret that was very real indeed. Being one of the chosen twelve he had been deliberately involved by the Lord with his fellow apostles in the miracle

of the loaves. It was a very special miracle in a way that the generality of non-sign miracles were not. The miracle was not only very special for that reason alone, it was important in that both it and another like it were the only miracles in which the apostles had a part. That of itself should have been sufficient to have made them aware that something out of the ordinary was taking place; it should have been a sign to them, but alas, at that time it was not.

The Lord repeated the miracle for a reason, and it is difficult to escape the thought that the reason was His deliberate inclusion of the apostles in the distribution of the food if not in the actual process of the miracle. It is certain that the Lord repeated some of His miracles over and over again as He discovered identical needs in different parts of the land, but in none of them did He

involve His apostles as co-workers in the miracles in the same way. The distinctive feature about this particular miracle was that the Lord did not do it in response to faith but as an act of bounteous love; it was sheer grace. If Christ had not fed them, the people on each occasion could have gone off somewhere and found food eventually if not immediately. Some may have fainted by the way and that concerned Him, but no one would have died as a result of it. They would have continued hungry a little longer, and might perhaps have wondered why someone with such power had not had pity on them, but nothing much worse than that. In any case a day's abstinence or a few days' fast from eating would have done no one any harm. Why then did He do it and do it that way? He was giving everybody,

especially the apostles, a sign of particular importance.

It is a feature of Biblical writings that, when repetition of anything is made it is for the purpose of emphasis. This is particularly a feature of the Hebrew language and style. The Lord Jesus was by human birth and culture a Hebrew of the Hebrews, a master of the Hebrew idiom and, upon occasion, when making an emphasis He employed this method of speech. John cites occasions when the Lord said, 'Verily, verily', and by the double affirmative made people realize that, in His eyes, the thing He was saying was most important. We see then that by doubling up on the sign of feeding the multitudes the Lord was endeavouring to teach the apostles, and even the multitudes involved, a most vital truth.

This truth is made the more important to everybody when it is realized that in no other case did He repeat any of His signs. This fact, when considered, is of itself really significant, but when it is taken into account that the second feeding of the multitudes took place at a time when the Pharisees were seeking a sign from heaven it becomes of greater significance still. Whether they were genuine or not, the Pharisees were seeking something from the Lord (they called it a sign), which would satisfy them that He was genuine: He gave them nothing; He had already given to His apostles and everyone present upon the occasion a sign from heaven and all who had eyes to see could have been greatly enlightened and deeply instructed by the miracle. This is why He sighed so deeply in His spirit when He was asked for a sign: the whole generation

was seeking one, but they were only willing to accept what they thought to be a sign; the ones He gave they never saw.

Blind and Deaf

The most disturbing thing to the Lord about the whole affair was that the apostles did not see the signs He gave either. When they are considered, the things He said to them, either in the ship or on the shore when they landed, reveal that a very serious spiritual condition existed among those men. The Lord virtually charged them with being blind, deaf, unable to reason properly, incapable of remembering even the most recent happenings, having no understanding (this He repeated) and being inexcusably hard of heart. These things were put to them in the form of questions which perhaps lessened the force of their impact, but His words must have gone deep. He intended them to, they

came from the deep of His being and He wanted to reach theirs.

At times like these it is with gratitude that we read Mark's kindly description of the twelve — disciples; save in name and the fact that they had, been sent out once to the people they certainly were not apostles, that is, men most nearly in the mould of Christ. Men of the condition implicit in the Lord's words are not apostles; apostle was a name for the future; the twelve were chosen beforehand, by sovereign determination and with foreknowledge. At that time they still belonged to and lived in the condition of that generation, not the regeneration. The Lord knew that, but He was human enough to be saddened by it, and tried once more to show them their state and how different they yet must become. Landing at Bethsaida once again He did another of His most

mighty works for which the place became famous.

Chapter 12 — BETHSAIDA

The Blind Man

Bethsaida, it seems, was one of the fishing ports from which Jesus often set sail, and to which, after a while, He returned. Almost certainly whenever He put out to sea He was accompanied only by the twelve; He did this quite purposely, taking advantage of the opportunity to turn the ship into a teaching class and, upon such occasions, the sea became a great training ground for the apostles. Thus it was that, stepping ashore at Bethsaida with His men one day, the Lord took advantage of a blind man's need to demonstrate to the apostles something of their own condition. The miracle the Lord performed on this occasion was indeed a peculiar one. It was not a clear-cut miracle like the one by which, with a word, He gave

Bartimaeus instantaneous sight; this was a two-stage miracle of a strange character. First He spat on the man's eyes and then laid His hands on him, the result was that the man could see, but he did not see the truth: he saw men as trees walking. He had sight but something was very wrong with his vision: he could see but he could not see aright. Hearing the man's incorrect description of his fellow men, the Lord laid His hands on the man's eyes again and this time his vision was corrected; he could see things as they were.

Following this ministry the Lord's words to the man strengthen the conclusion that He probably did the work in two stages for the sake of the men standing by watching and listening. Jesus told him to go to his own house and not to go into the town of Bethsaida, or tell any man what had

happened to him. That may seem a strange command, for how could a thing like that remain hidden? But the Lord knew He was dealing with a people fast becoming satiated with miracles and sensations and this was not for their good. This latest of them, being new and so different, would only provide them with a further talking point; besides it was not intended for them but for His disciples: He wanted them to see the point of the miracle and read its meaning.

A phrase of Paul's may be very applicable to the condition of the apostles at that time: 'Blindness in part is happened to Israel ...'. It is a very significant statement, seeing that it was made by a man who, while on a journey to Damascus in time past, had himself been blinded by the Light of the Lord. Those apostles had received some degree of knowledge and understanding, perhaps as

much as any unregenerate man could be expected to have under the circumstances. Perhaps they saw the Man Christ Jesus as a walking tree; who knows? Certain it is that, more than all other men, they had some light and had more vision, but they, needed the Lord to do something more for them so that they could see and understand properly. As that depended entirely on Him they could do little about it; they just had to wait until their Lords a mission to Israel was completed. When that was accomplished He would be free to get on with the mission closest to His heart, namely building His Church. Then the apostles would be translated into the kingdom of God and made apostles indeed, foundational men upon whom Christ could build His Church. Until then they must be with Him and labour as His servants, only half conscious of

spiritual things in the kingdom of heaven on earth.

In that condition they had failed to see the truth which the Lord later sought to demonstrate to them by the two miracles of the loaves. Upon both occasions, by what He did in the present He had tried to make clear to them what their position would be in the future. When the loaves at last lay in the hands of the Lord, and He was standing in the midst of His apostles who were grouped around Him before the whole multitude, everyone there knew that something extraordinary had to happen. Even though He did a miracle, (and they knew He was quite capable of that), if He was going to feed them He still had to get the food to them. How was he going to do that? There were thousands of them, and there were precious few hours of daylight left. He

certainly couldn't walk to each one and give them each enough to eat, even if He ran He couldn't do it. Would He do it by securing their help and getting them to pass the food to each other row by row, or from front to back? But that too was out of the question time-wise; it was possible, but certainly not practicable. They just had to wait and see.

They did, but how much of the miracle they saw is not known. It was not to be a direct miracle to each of them from the hands' of Christ; He 'had planned it otherwise: the miracle and the miraculous food was mediated to them through the hands of the apostles. Whatever the multitudes understood by the continuous miracle is not known, and what the apostles saw more than the crowds is equally unknown, but what the Lord expected them to understand from it is surely this: that, besides being a

miracle of breathtaking proportions, it was a kind of preview of what was going to happen later.

The True Bread

When He had left the earth and they received life and power from above and became apostles indeed, they would also receive revelation from Him of a nature and quality not given directly to ordinary men. With this they must feed the children of God, it was to be their staple diet, as bread and fish was staple diet to the ordinary man's physical life. They could not give that life, but they must nourish and feed it in whomsoever it was manifest. They were to receive directly from Him the revelation and doctrine of the Church, which He had been unable to give to them or to the multitudes while on earth. It would be instantaneous, continuous and spontaneous, and must be

ministered in abundance; they must give as freely as they would receive, without fear that anything would be lost. That they failed to understand this as they fed the people that day in the wilderness is only to be expected, the Holy Spirit was not yet given to them; nevertheless the Lord was very disappointed with them at that time.

He was looking into the future, and was very concerned about the kind of bread they should minister to the people when He left the earth; it must be the right kind of bread. The apostles themselves must make sure that they ate the right food; in particular they must beware of the doctrine of the Pharisees. Doctrine works in a man like leaven works in dough. By substituting the word doctrine for the word leaven He made clear to them what He meant by leaven, and laid down for all time how the figure should

be interpreted. The leaven in the bread they were to feed to the multitudes was to be the doctrine of Christ: He is both the bread and His doctrine is also the leaven in the bread. It is the leaven that makes the bread what it is, causing it to rise, transforming it from a flat piece of dough into a loaf. But they did not seem to understand the significance of these things, which was a grief to His heart, hence the miracle at Bethsaida which proceeded from sightlessness to partial sight and distorted vision to full sight and corrected vision. It was both a sign to them of their present state, and a surety that one day, now not so very far off, it would be rectified.

There was also another thing He might have hoped they would not miss (though He probably did not expect them to understand it then) namely this: the source of the

loaves. The apostles themselves supplied the loaves this second time, not a lad in the crowd. Nothing whatsoever was borrowed from the people this time; the Lord took the bread from the apostles, the bread was theirs and His, they lived communally and shared their food; they had seven loaves between them, conditions were perfect. When He and they had fed the five thousand the main emphasis was grace, that is why five, the number of grace, is so prominent: five loaves, one hundred groups of fifty. This time the emphasis is upon the number seven, the number indicating perfection. The multitudes were fed by the Lord and the apostles as from themselves alone the second time; it was perfect, just as He wished it. That is, exactly in accordance with His plans for Himself and His apostles regarding future ministry in His Church.

Chapter 13 — CAESAREA PHILIPPI

Whom Say Ye that I Am?

How amazingly everything developed according to plan in the scheme of teaching and training the Lord had in mind for His men. Having brought them thus far, and having shown them their distorted view of things, He moved off from Bethsaida into Caesarea Philippi. There He put to them the question, 'Whom do men say that I am?' Having received their answers He followed it by another much more vital question: 'Whom say ye that I am?' The answer to the first question was varied, and though indicative of the multitudes' guesses, was largely immaterial at the moment, though not inconsequential in the long run. What the people thought did matter in view of the subject He was about to raise with the

apostles, namely His crucifixion, but His immediate concern was the answer the apostles would give to His question.

Speaking for all of his companions, Peter said, 'Thou art the Christ'. As far as it went the answer was correct enough, He was the Christ, but, upon hearing it, His heart must still have been tinged with sadness. The revelation He had made to them on the sea was greater than that; He also knew that their understanding of Christhood, like their understanding of apostleship, was very limited indeed. Their knowledge of Christ was according to the flesh, they did not know Him according to the Spirit.

Even after His crucifixion and resurrection His conversation with two of His disciples revealed the dismally low and limited hope they had in their Messiah; it was all so very earthly, fleshly and materialistic. When

therefore Peter voiced the apostles' conviction about Him, He knew exactly where He stood with them, and what they anticipated from Him, and could not but have felt disappointed. They were still either very doubtful or very fearful about Him, or both; what Peter said was only a repetition of what they had said following His discourse on the bread of life after the first miracle of the loaves, yet on the sea that night He had told them plainly that He was I AM. Doing so He had committed Himself to them, but they were not prepared to commit themselves to Him. Had they done so all would have been well; not one of them need fear that any confession he made to Him or about Him before the company would be leaked by Him. He charged them that they should not tell any man of Him, and having given them such a charge He

would certainly not betray their secret. The doubt was whether they would keep His, especially in relation to what He was going to say next; the real reason for His coming and their calling lay in His next sentence.

Contrary to the rosy hopes and false ideas and expectations they entertained of the kingdom, the Christ they followed was the Son of Man who had come to suffer at the hands of men. He must be rejected, He said, killed even, and after three days He would rise again; not as from Bethlehem or Nazareth this time, but from the dead. It was shattering to them, and for the first time an apostle turned on Him and rebuked Him: it was a really bad time in everybody's experience. The release of the secret had just the effect to be expected, but it was necessary to them, this was their only hope; they had no possible hope of becoming real

apostles in the kingdom of God and Church of Christ except He should die and rise again, yet they rebelled against it. He had no recourse but to rebuke Peter, he really had gone too far; he was an apostle-elect, the first named of the twelve, and the self-appointed spokesman for the band, and what a band they were! One was a devil, one had been called satan, and one at least was a chronic doubter; what the rest were we may only guess. Whatever was He going to make of a company like this? Without the cross to which they all so heartily objected, nothing much at all! The plight of Peter at that moment was parlous, without hesitation Christ called him satan. It was a devastating thing to say, but it was true. Peter, like Lucifer, was the first called — Lucifer of the angels, Peter of the apostles; Lucifer was a leader, so was Peter. There was

difference between them though: Lucifer knew what he was doing, Peter did not; Lucifer acted deliberately, Peter did not; therefore Peter was not cast out as was Lucifer, but was put behind for a while.

The Real Cross

Everything was all right with the apostles all the time the Lord used the cross figuratively, they were quite prepared to accept it as a symbol of death and rejection; after all He was bearing it Himself: if that was the price of being with Him, then so be it, they were not cowards. But actual suffering and rejection and crucifixion was a different thing altogether: talk about rising again from the dead afterwards left them unimpressed. At that moment, to the Son of Man, the apostles were just about the same as every other man, they looked and talked like the rest. To them He was Christ, but not I AM,

He was wrong not right, worthy of rebuke and not praise. The revelation of His crucifixion and resurrection, which should have been the mountain peak of all truth to the apostles, was regarded by them as being the complete opposite — they felt it just could not be true, but it was. Commanding Peter with his satanic suggestion to get behind Him, He called the people and His disciples together and began to preach to the whole company. The time had not yet come for the truth of the cross to be preached to the masses, it was as much for them as for the apostles, but the people were not ready for that yet.

The things that had to be destroyed from the minds of the apostles were the ideas associated with their interpretation of His Christhood; unless that was done they would never get the concept of apostleship

right. They thought He had come to save them all from Roman domination and to set up a Messianic kingdom on earth; in short they wanted Him to head an insurrection and take back the land from the Romans for Himself and His people. He killed that idea completely when he said, 'What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?' Far from wanting to gain the land and all the people in it, He wanted to keep His own soul. He did not think as they did: He knew that the world could not be gained unless He accepted the cross; if He refused that and evaded crucifixion, His own soul and everybody else's would be lost. The trainee apostles had to learn that, and understand that they could not be His disciples, leave alone apostles, unless they took up the cross; He said that to save self, that is to

keep the soul from the instantaneous and permanent death of the cross, is to lose life altogether.

No soul can have salvation unless it accepts both the shame and the discipline of the cross permanently. The Lord was vehement about this; He knew His words were devastating to His hearers, cutting across all their imaginations about the kingdom of heaven and shattering their fond dreams about His Messianic mission. This was His deliberate intention, and He pressed on to His next shocking statement which must have stunned them all, none more than Peter. This entire generation was adulterous and sinful, He said, and if any one of them was ashamed of Him and of His words, of him the Son of Man would be ashamed when He came in the glory of His Father with the holy angels. With that he closed the

session; what more was there to say? In a space of about five minutes the Lord had disillusioned them about Himself and Israel's grandeur: their hopes had been raised only to be dashed because they were false hopes. He left them bruised and bitter, smarting under His accusations, and sure of at least one thing if not more — He was not going to be king over a lot of adulterers. They were married to their own ideas, but their ideas were misconceptions based upon misinterpretations of scripture — they had divorced themselves from God and were later to declare it openly.

Crisis point had been reached; that must have been obvious to all, especially the apostles. Had those men been ashamed of Him and what He had just said? If they were, how mixed up and confused they must have been; if not, why did Peter rebuke Him?

Poor Peter, it is not the easiest or most desirable thing to be spokesman for a group; the position is often thrust upon a man by other people's default rather than by personal choice. The Lord knew everything about it though, He loved Peter despite his blindness and was already planning to restore his soul. The time had come for Him to make yet another of His exclusive revelations about Himself, the third in series. This one, He decided, though as important to them all as the other two were, should be even more exclusive than they had been — it should not be to all the people, nor to all His apostles, but only to the chosen three. A little earlier He had spoken quite openly before all of His Father's glory and had said that He would come in it; but, as usual, nobody had the least idea what he was talking about.

The True Glory

What is glory? Unless one of the shepherds who saw the glory on the plains of Bethlehem was there, none of them had ever seen it. The word was in use among them and they had a hazy idea of what was meant by it, but who knew what glory was or could define it? The priests in the temple talked about it, the scriptures mentioned it, but no one knew what it was or could describe it. When He said He would be coming in His Father's glory what did that mean? Without conceding anything to popular inquisitiveness, the Lord decided to let at least three of His apostles have a glimpse into the background of what He was talking about. Peter, the spokesman, being one of the three, was included in His intentions, and this would in some measure be a gesture of love towards him: it had

been a nasty blow to be told that he was satan and put behind the Lord's back. To be included still in the Lord's special choice would assure him that his Lord was not petty or easily offended. The Lord had left him in no doubt that he had offended Him and hurt His feelings; this must have made Peter realize that the cross, with its sufferings and death leading to His resurrection, must be of the greatest importance to Him.

It is doubtful whether Peter and all the other apostles connected these things with the Lord's mysterious words about coming in the glory of His Father with the holy angels. If he and they had made the connection it is most likely that their conclusions about its timing would have been wrong, for even after the Lord's death and resurrection they were still hoping for a great national coup to take place; but it did not. The Lord was not after

that kind of glory. When the Lord spoke about glory He meant and spoke of His Father's glory, not earthly glory. Before he could come in Father's glory something else was scheduled to take place on earth first — the kingdom of God must come with power. Knowing this, the Lord passed on immediately from talking of future coming glory to an imminent coming kingdom; the former could not be yet, nor must they hope to see it happen now, but the latter must soon be established, and they could expect to see it and be in it.

Some of them standing around Him as He said these things would not taste of death until they saw the kingdom of God come with power, He assured them. Some of them? Why not all of them? Why did He not say they would all be in this? He would have loved to have said so, but if He had it would

not have been true. He was looking out over a very mixed multitude, and He knew that some of them would taste of death before they saw the kingdom of God come with power. To Him it was tragic that some standing there would never see it at all, either before or after they tasted of death, for to see the kingdom of God a man must be born from above. All who heard Him, if they lived long enough, would see the coming and going of the historic date set for the establishment of the kingdom of God in power on the earth, but not all would enter into it, for not all would desire to be born again. The Lord knew that He was talking to the people in riddles, it was unavoidable; if He had spoken to them any more plainly they would not have understood it any better. Nicodemus, their great and honoured teacher who came to Him in the beginning,

had not been able to grasp what He told him; the more He went into detail with him the more mixed up Nicodemus had become. The Lord felt He might expect His apostles to grasp something of what He said though, for He had told them at the beginning that it was given to them to understand the mysteries of the kingdom of God: they were the privileged ones.

The True Power

The Lord had carefully led them along to this point, telling them that the kingdom of God was like this or that. They had not heard what He had said to Nicodemus though, and He knew that this latest statement would set their minds, if not their tongues, working hard. What did He mean by 'come with power'? If it was not already here how could He have expected them to understand Him when He said it is like this or that? Was it

still future after all? Anyway they had power, He had given it them, and by it they had gone forth at His bidding to establish kingdom of heaven conditions in the land; hadn't the kingdom of God come to Israel with power then? If so, was He talking of a different kind of power? Or, if it was the same power, was it to be revealed in a new way, accomplishing new things and directed unto far greater ends? It was difficult to define it or phrase the question, but was it to be THE POWER as compared with power, that is the power they already had? Power unlimited, God's power exercised by God alone? They believed stoutly that the power they had been given by Christ was God's power, but they had discovered that it was very limited in them, they had not been able to accomplish with it what they had seen Him do. Whatever else they may have

thought about this power, the Lord knew that it had not accomplished in them what they most needed, the birth-power had not come upon them, and that is the greatest power of all

Obviously too there was a greater power than they had ever known, the power of a greater person, whose power was far, far greater than power to perform miracles: the power to be, and be the person He is, the power of I AM: THE POWER. The apostles could recall the moment on the stormy sea when Christ had revealed to them for the first time that he was I AM. With the announcement He gave such a demonstration of power which convinced them that He had only told them to cross the sea for that purpose. As soon as He came into the ship the wind ceased and in a moment of time they were transported, ship

and all, to their destination. It was an incredible miracle, almost an unnecessary one; it was entirely gratuitous; there was no need for them to be transported in an instant to Bethsaida. With Him in the boat and the sea calm, they could easily have got to shore; the only explanation is that the I AM-God was with them and THE POWER. But they knew nothing as yet as they ought to have known, nor had they seen the kingdom of God as He saw it, and as they should shortly see it; they were not yet in it, nor could they be until it came.

How gracious the Lord was with His men. Although they did not know it, He was actually taking them through another series of teachings; this time the course comprised four lessons. To be with Him was always to learn, but at times He gave particular attention to teaching them things vital to

future Church doctrine; this was such a period. Although by this time He had introduced to them His intention to build His Church, He did not tell them that they were now to be instructed in truth related to it; that was not His method of teaching; He did not run a college with set classes, nor did He publish a curriculum of lessons: He simply opened His heart to them as they continued with Him on His itinerary. The sad thing was that as soon as He mentioned to them the very first of the four subjects, namely His crucifixion and resurrection, He was rebuked, but this did not deter Him. He passed on straightway to the next point He wanted them to grasp, namely His second coming. He did not fill in all the details, now so well known, but without actually saying so He nominated the two major events within which the Church age should be

comprehended. From that again, without using words, He passed on to speak of the day when the Church would actually be founded on earth, that is the day of Pentecost. On that day the Holy Spirit would come and the kingdom of God would be established with power in people's lives. Some of them would live to see that, He said. He would die and rise again and go home to His Father and glory, and there He would stay until an unannounced future day; but in place of Him the Holy Spirit would come and stay, that Christ's Church could be born and built in Him.

Chapter 14 — THE HOLY MOUNT

The Privileged Three

The Lord rounded off this series of revelations with one of those lovely touches, so characteristic of Him — a glimpse into the kingdom of God, including a revelation of Himself and the glory into which He should pass when He left the earth following His resurrection. This was a more exclusive revelation, which for His own reasons He granted only to the three selected apostles.

This revelation was wonderful in the extreme, and must have been a real eye-opener to the men. Although given only to the chosen trio, this was the third in the series of revelations of Himself to His apostles. It was not the last though; there was another one to come, but that was

reserved until after the resurrection. Like the first two, this last would be made to all the apostles, but this particular one was not made known to all, and by His orders it was not to be told them until after He rose from the dead. It was now quite obvious to the rest of the twelve that, by selecting these three only to accompany Him on special occasions, the Lord was saying something of real significance to them all. Although there is no hint of jealousy or even of discontent among the nine about it, this constant seeming preference for Peter, James and John must have seemed strange. What was He trying to tell them by it? They all knew that the Lord never did anything in a haphazard way; whatever He said or did was Spirit and Life. As He said when He had fed the multitudes, nothing must be lost,

everything had significance and importance and meaning.

They were all aware by now that He was going to be crucified, that He would rise from the dead, and that He was going to build a Church for Himself: not all the powers of hell would stop Him; He had made that clear to them. They also knew that the kingdom of God was going to come with power and that some of them would see that happen (not all of them — Judas Iscariot committed suicide before it came); but no one knew why He had selected Peter, James and John for special knowledge, nor did they know what that special knowledge was to be. Were they special men, supermen of a kind? Were they greater in themselves than other men, and therefore deserving to be privileged beyond their fellows? Nobody ever claimed that they

were; certainly they themselves never thought so, neither did Christ say so. Paul later observed and said that they appeared to be pillars of the church at Jerusalem, but nothing further is said along that line to imply that they were to any degree men of different nature, deserving to be exalted above their brethren; they were just men. Yet the Lord, by His constant preferential treatment of them, might have been thought to be showing partiality and displaying unwarrantable favouritism among His apostles.

This was not so and they all knew it, for although they all had to be reproved by Him at times, none came under His rebuke and criticism as severely as those three. James and John were once told that they did not know what spirit they were of, and were surnamed 'sons of thunder', while Peter was

openly called satan. Those three men were no better than the rest of them, they might even have been called the worst, so they were not specially selected and granted sights, if not insights, because they merited them more than the others. Perhaps their brethren were annoyed at their reluctance to speak of the things revealed to them by the Lord and wondered at their silence, they would have been superhuman if not; but they kept His secrets and earned their brethren's respect. Had they been asked, the trio would not have been able to give a reason for being so honoured by the Lord, for He never told them why He did it; beyond saying that it was His will there was nothing to say. The Lord was saying something by it though; He had been saying it right from the beginning.

After spending that night alone in communion with His Father, He emerged in the freshness of the morning as a man with His mind made up, clearly determined on a certain course as those disciples well knew. They did not know what decisions had been made on that mountain; all they knew was that He called out the names of twelve men who He wanted to be with Him. He called the names of Peter, James and John first and that was very significant; had they known it, He. was making known His intentions to them all then. As with so much that He said and did, the order of His choice was full of meaning; that trio was to be to them all as a parable. Gradually he brought those three into prominence among the apostles, it was as if He forged them into one. Their names were linked together almost as one, as links in a chain almost; nobody else quite knew

why, but He did. Nobody on earth knew what was in His heart, or saw the vision of the Church so dear to Him; nor did those apostles, including the famous trio, realize that their fullest and truest function would be in the Church, not in Israel. Least of all did they know that by these three men the Lord intended to reveal facts about God hitherto unrevealed.

The apostles knew that there was one God, and that being one He was also first. They also knew that their scriptures began with the words, 'In the beginning God ...' and recorded Him as saying, 'let us make man ...'. They believed therefore that God was the one and only living God, that He was first and that He spoke of Himself in plural number; but they did not know that God was triune. By calling Peter, James and John first, and forming them into an exclusive

group of three that should have superior revelation and knowledge, the Lord was seeking to make them to the rest a faint picture of God. They represented the idea of trinity, that was what the Lord wanted. He knew this would not be seen then, but, when the kingdom of God came in power, His purpose by this trio would be seen the more clearly. Peter, the initial preacher, prophet, apostle of the Church, having the keys of the kingdom of heaven and being so markedly appointed by Christ to shepherding, represents the Son. John, mysterious, loving John, unfolding the mysteries of God, spanning all time from the beginning to the ending, lying in Christ's bosom, revealing His bride, speaks of the Spirit. John's direct connection with James through blood ties is a faint indication of the fact that the Spirit proceeds from the Father.

Of course no human relationship or grouping could properly set forth the mysterious trinity, and can but feebly serve to that end; nevertheless, by these pointers, we may perhaps legitimately discern the deep underlying truth. Those men were not three in one, but were joined by the Lord to project the idea of the Blessed Trinity, who in some measure they were called to represent.

These three were specially blessed upon this occasion, because they alone of the apostles were granted the third of the four revelations by which the Lord made Himself further known to men. All twelve were there when He made Himself known on the two former occasions, both of which took place on the sea, that is at sea level and on a very unstable element indeed. As if in utter contrast to those, this revelation was

purposely made on the most stable element on earth, a mountain: a very high mountain we are told. The first revelation was of Christ the man, the second was of Christ the God, this third one was of Christ the King. On that mountain top that day those men were granted the crowning revelation, the Man-God-King, and were allowed a peep into the glory of the kingdom He had been talking about. Peter said of it later that they were eyewitnesses of His Majesty, and called that mountain the holy mount. They actually saw Him transfigured into glory within Himself. Before their eyes He became a far more glorious looking person than they had ever seen Him to be before. Everything which could be changed was changed, not beyond recognition though, they knew it was still Him. He did not step out of and leave His body and assume another, neither did He

take another form; He was still the same flesh and blood Jesus they had always known. He did not change His clothes and don royal robes, nothing of that nature happened at all; everything remained the same, yet everything was so different. His face changed, as though it had been remodelled, and His peasant clothes turned white and began to shine, and they heard the Father's voice talking to Him.

The Everlasting Glory

Peter, James. and John were overawed; they were in a kingdom of glorified spirits, a kingdom beyond death, yet they had not died; it was glorious, they were exhilarated. The glory, the everlasting glory, was there, yet they did not feel glorious for they were not yet glorified; everybody else they saw except themselves was changed, but they were not, they were onlookers. There were

seven persons there, six visible and one invisible: He spoke, but was not seen. Of the six visible ones three were of earth, two were of heaven and one was of heaven and earth. In that glorious realm the apostles were the odd ones; they were completely out of their natural element. The only four visible human beings of that generation present were themselves and Jesus, and He was transfigured, He belonged to both realms, but not they. Moses was there, so was Elijah; both were changed and glorified and in communion with Him, but Peter, James and John were not. They could see what was happening, they could hear what was being said, but they were not part of it and did not understand what was going on; they were living in a different world altogether. This became altogether too apparent as soon as Peter opened his mouth

to speak: 'Master', he said, 'it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses and one for Elias'. The revelation ended immediately — Peter had finished it: it was an intrusion, an imposition, an impertinence, the intervention of unregenerate flesh; it ended the audience with God, the glory departed, the privilege was ended. Poor Peter, the first called of the apostles; his carnal mind was at enmity with God. He felt awful; he and his remarks were right out of place; his profoundest desires and highest 'spiritual' motives were obviously offensive to God; he proved no better on the mountain than on the sea. His companions felt no better either; all three of them were gripped with fear.

The predominant feature of all the Lord's extraordinary revelations of Himself to His

apostles was shock, the result was always fear. Upon this occasion greater fear still was to come. Peter's well-intentioned words drew the Father into the conversation: He spoke to them very clearly, and in what a voice! It was the voice of supreme authority in the kingdom; after it no one spoke another word. Conversations and discussions which had been taking place between various ones when Peter broke in immediately ceased; Peter had done it again. He had not meant to, his well-meant contribution was made in answer to things he had heard said by Jesus and Moses and Elias, but what he said was totally unacceptable to everyone in heaven. Those men were chosen to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven but O how ignorant they were; despite all the revelations received and lessons taught they did not

know the mysteries yet. God the invisible God spoke; Jesus' Father, understanding but indignant, broke in, and those apostles learned that all the Lord's claims about Himself were true; His Father said, 'This is my beloved Son: hear him'. It was the end of the revelation: the glory disappeared, a dark cloud overshadowed them — and fear. Cowering on the ground it was like heaven to hear the familiar voice of the Lord speaking to them again, comforting them; they were back to normal. He led them down the mountain; the lesson had been given, but what had they learned? Following Him from the scene they felt more bemused than when they went up the mountain, and when He spoke to them He added nothing to their understanding, for it was again about His death and resurrection, cautioning them not to tell anyone the things they had

seen until 'the Son of man was risen from the dead'.

Mystification increased in the minds of the chosen three. Why place this burden of silence upon them again? Was it right for some apostles to be granted more privileges and have more knowledge than others? Apparently the Lord thought so, but it did not make their position any easier; they were bound to be misunderstood, if not envied, by the rest, and what did the rising from the dead mean? They had just seen and beard Moses and Elijah alive and conscious in glory, actively engaged in conversation with Christ. Elijah had not died, he had not risen from the dead, neither had Jesus, and they themselves had been included in the bright cloud without dying. It was all a great mystery to them and the Lord offered no explanation; they had once more

been made privy to secret spiritual mysteries, but this time with a difference. Before, the secrets had been introduced to them, but this time they had been introduced into the secrets. They had actually been in the cloud of glory in what they could only assume was the kingdom of God, at least a temporary manifestation of it, but they knew that although they were in it they were not of it. In the glory Christ was transfigured as of nature, but they were not, the glory was not natural to them.

Another Kingdom

How truly the Lord had spoken to them about the kingdom of God. They had known that something new and wonderful was about to happen when He led them up the mountain, but they had not expected this. This revelation opened it all up to them: they had seen and heard things undreamed

of, they now knew what He meant by the mystery of the kingdom of God; they had proof of its existence, it had been manifested to their physical senses; more, they had actually witnessed its presence here, and had been in it. It had been a mountain top experience indeed, and although they were strangers in it and their experience of it had not lasted very long, the kingdom of God was here, unseen and unheard by men, but here nevertheless. No glory, no voice of God speaking, no spirits of just men made perfect holding conversation with their Lord, no radiant transfigured Christ, but the kingdom was here. It had not yet come in power, but it had come, or was it that they had ascended into it? Whichever it was they had been in it. They could now grasp a little of what the Lord had meant when He talked about coming in the glory of

the Father and the holy angels, although they had not seen any angels. Many things were still hidden from them which they would see and understand later; but the Lord had not said they would understand, He had said it was given to them to know, and what knowledge they had! The secret lay only with the three though, no one else knew, or would know until the kingdom came with power; then it would be an open secret. The privileged trio could hardly be expected to understand that everything was happening according to the election of God in His eternal kingdom. He was revealing in His kingdom on earth a pattern similar to that which has always been in heaven. Father, Son and Holy Spirit have always known everything in advance, and Peter, James and John were in measure their representation on earth, though they did

not know that at the time. Perhaps after the resurrection, when they were released from Christ's sanctions and could speak freely with the other apostles as He said they could, they were able together to get things into perspective. The significance of the Lord's actions could then be understood, especially as two of the trio continued together awhile as the Church began to take shape in the future era of the Spirit.

Chapter 15 — IN THE NAME OF JESUS OF NAZARETH

Servant of All

During the very earliest days of the Church the two apostles more prominently active than the rest were Peter and John. Of the two Peter is by far the most prominent. After being mentioned in the beginning as being an activist James disappears from view and is not mentioned again until his execution by Herod some years later, so in the wisdom of God he is removed from the scene. But James the Lord's brother, who was not one of the twelve, becomes the presiding elder in Jerusalem. By this means James is shown to be there in the background of the apostolic band, and then, removing to be with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, the first martyr apostle. Meanwhile

Peter and John are the ones in full view, promoting the kingdom of God among men; Peter, representing the Son, is the active preacher. In a remarkable way and with great boldness, one day he actually assumed the role, if not the mantle, of the Son, by announcing at the Beautiful Gate of the temple that he was there speaking and acting in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth; that was greatly daring, but it was no idle boast. He demonstrated the truth of it by telling the lame man lying there to rise up and walk. So confident was Peter that he lifted him to his feet: he was acting as Christ Jesus. John, Peter's companion, said nothing, did nothing, save stand with Peter; he was there but scarcely noticed, silent and quite content for Peter to have all the glory. It was the same when John was imprisoned with Peter and the healed man; Peter and

the man are the prominent ones — both are mentioned, but, except being referred to in company with Peter as unlearned and ignorant, John is not in the foreground at all. He stands with Peter to hear from the council that they must not speak in the name of Jesus, and as one person and one voice with him, defies them. When the gospel reached Samaria through Philip, John again displayed the same kind of self-effacement. Being sent there from Jerusalem with Peter, John appears in a supportive role as usual, while Peter takes the lead; without overtaxing credulity, it is possible to imagine Peter saying of his modest companion in those days, 'he is glorifying me'. After this, except for information that the two preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans, John slips out of the picture, leaving Peter,

and later Paul, to hold the focal, leading positions.

Both the Father and the Holy Spirit together exalt the Son. The Church is the Church of God, but it is not called the Church of the Father, neither is it called the Church of the Holy Spirit, it is the Church of Jesus Christ. The Father and the Holy Spirit begat the Son through Mary, and the Father and the Holy Spirit, without Mary, beget all the other sons to be members of the Son's Church. Apostles are apostles of Christ, and, if only they had known it, these three who came down the mountain with Him that day held the key to His Church in their hearts. It was in their conversation as in wonderment they gazed upon His receding back and puzzled over His words. What did the rising from the dead mean? It meant that all they had just seen (although it had been shown them before

Christ's death) only belonged to an age of resurrection: the rising from the dead is the key. The kingdom of God is a spiritual kingdom, which can only be entered and enjoyed by human beings when they have experienced the death and resurrection of Christ, that is when they have been born of God from above.

Alas, at that time none of the apostles knew the experience. They believed the kingdom of God existed; indeed three of them had to some extent seen into it, but none had entered it. The Lord lived in it permanently, and Peter, James and John knew that should it manifest itself anywhere at any time He would be transfigured in harmony with it, but not they. They loved the idea of the transfigured Lord, and wanted to make Him a tabernacle and forever keep Him like that up the mountain. It was a ridiculous

suggestion of course, just as satanic as the earlier suggestion that He should not go to the cross. He had come to build His Church, He wanted nothing made for Him by man. Besides, how could He stay in isolation up a mountain transfigured in a tent, while down below Satan was destroying the souls and bodies of men living in a faithless and perverse generation which knew not God? The apostles did not know, neither for that matter did they appear to care; they were an inconsistent group, at times they seemed to be without self-interest in their calling, but at heart they were a selfish and jealous company, very concerned with personal prestige. This was all brought to the surface when the Lord led them away from the mount towards Jerusalem.

He was heading for death and resurrection and all that it would mean, but this seemed

not to have sunk very deeply into the apostles' understanding. Their concern was as to who was or should be greatest among them. Names came up and claims were considered and disputed, and it is easy to understand why; this was the second time the Lord had apparently shown marked preference among them. It had been Peter, James and John again, why should it be only they? Was it always going to be only they? If so, who of them was the greatest one? Pride had been injured, and venom was spreading among them; the poison of asps was under their tongues. Unlike Lucifer, they were not directly challenging the Lord, but they were contending with each other, and what was that but challenging the Lord's choice? Peter, James and John had not asked the Lord to choose them instead of the other nine, it was His sovereign choice; incipient rebellion

was arising among them, and the Lord warned them of its consequences: 'If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all and servant of all'. He was both the first and the last, both the Lord and the servant of all.

As a Little Child

How deceptive and destructive is self-importance: deceptive because self-importance means self-unimportance, destructive because self-importance means that the person can never be important. Self-effacement is the hallmark of all true spiritual life; in the kingdom of God what I am is more important than who I am. To demonstrate this the Lord took a child, nameless and unknown, to the apostles, and set him in the midst of them; who he was He did not ask, nor did it matter. Having established that, He then took the child in

His arms and said to the apostles, 'Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me receiveth not me, but Him that sent me'. What did the apostles make of that? It seemed to make no impact on them at all; not even John gave any indication that he had the faintest understanding of what the Lord had demonstrated to them. It was just as though the Lord had not said it; Peter, the spokesman, was silent, and when John made answer he turned the subject altogether and started talking about someone casting out devils.

Well might those apostles flounder about, snatching at straws; they were out of their depth. It did not seem to matter whether He was on a mountain top transfigured in a secret kingdom or down by the sea, a man in

full sight of all, He was way beyond their comprehension. That child He took in His arms was so like Himself: He was a nameless child in the world. All the apostles had a known father; the chosen three had — Peter was the son of Jonah, James and John were sons of Zebedee, but Jesus was the son of no man, He was just Jesus of Nazareth. There were others like that boy in the land — nameless. The apostles had been seeking the big name, wanting to be number one; who among them wished his father to be greater than he? Christ said in effect, 'take a nameless child in my name, and thereby take me, and receiving me receive My Father'. What self-effacement — receive a child, receive my Father; the Lord was somewhere in the midst of it all. He always thought His Father was the important one; after Him others, nameless ones,

unimportant, unknown, perhaps unwanted and without a father's name. Poor apostles, they were confounded; in their embarrassment they could not find an answer to give Him, nor could they think of anything to say until John blurted out, 'Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and we forbade him, because he followeth not with us'.

It was all there, all the pride and self-importance — 'followeth not with us'! Followeth not with whom? US. Sad to say humility did not grace the apostles during their traineeship; instead the desire to be first and greatest consumed them, particularly John and James. The sight of Christ transfigured in glory set off desires in them that seem at first to be so good and commendable, yet were so utterly selfish. They imagined the Lord enthroned in glory

and themselves also enthroned with Him, one on the right hand and the other on the left, holding the chief places in the kingdom. That was the measure of their own estimate of themselves. They never gave a thought to Peter; he also was one of the chosen three, and had been with them on the mountain. There was no concern in their hearts for their fellow apostle's eternal welfare.

Perhaps it may be charitable to think that they believed he had forfeited any right he may have had to a throne when he tried to dissuade Christ from the cross: they had heard him called satan and ordered by the Lord to get behind His back.

If this is so, it only shows how lamentably they had misjudged Christ, and how little they knew Him. Whatever may be the truth of the matter, their reasoning was misplaced and entirely ineffective; their premise was

also without foundation. They had heard the Father say 'this is my beloved Son', and because of that knew perfectly well that Christ was a man under authority; they had also heard a centurion say things which showed that he recognized this. There was no excuse for the two brothers, they had given way to pride and selfishness, and on the day when they brought their request to the Lord they completely revealed the things which had been working in their hearts. The request was refused of course; the Lord neither had the power to grant it, nor had He any wish to be embroiled in their selfish schemings. He dealt with it in His usual gracious way, but the rest of the apostles were very angry with James and John; to them it was a deceitful act, they did not like it at all and did not hesitate to make their feelings known. James and John had been

given privileges and entrusted with knowledge denied their fellows, and were using, or attempting to use, these things to their own advantage, perhaps they did not recognize it, but such abuse of privilege was, to say the least, very distasteful to the nine.

For Whom it is Prepared

The Lord's response to the rather subtle approach of the two erring apostles must have been very reassuring to all the rest.

'Master, we would that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall request': that was the way they approached it, but with masterliness befitting the name He refused their request and answered, 'What would ye that I should do for you?' They wanted Him to say 'Yes', but He did not; He could not so easily be caught. He did not want them to think that they were barred from sitting on

either side of Him though. Those seats are left open but they have to be earned.

A throne is prepared for a certain kind of person, a person who has been prepared and fitted to occupy it, one who has lived a certain kind of life on earth. Let everyone understand that desert, as well as desire, has to be taken into consideration when allocation of position is made in heaven. That is how it was for Him, that is how it must be for everyone else; they did not know what they were asking. By requesting a throne and a crown and glory they were asking also for a cup and a cross and shame, a baptism into another kingdom not a glimpse into it. They said they could drink the cup and endure the baptism but learned that even that would not ensure the throne for them. There was not a man among them who was not affected by this world's ideas

and practices, its favours and positions and authority and power. All conceptions of lordship and greatness and exercise of rule based on gentile kingdoms and methods of government must be banished from the apostles' minds. Christ was not going to have His Church ruled by any of the many earthly methods developed by men, whether they be Jewish or Romish. His Church, when it was established, would be a theocracy, namely a kingdom where every man would be directly ruled over as an individual by God and as a company by those He appoints.

Seeing that all the men to whom the Lord spoke were Jews His reference to gentile government must surely have been made with special purpose and must have sounded strange in the apostles' ears. The power of rule is a most glittering prize in the

eyes of men and is very much sought after by them. It represents absolute power, enabling whosoever has it to dominate people's lives; it is extremely deceptive, because it brings the illusion of supreme authority and of having people's lives in hand. The deception of this form of rule was exposed by the Lord by the word He used: those that are accounted to rule — 'accounted', the word really means 'appear to'. The rulers, governors, lords and authorities of this world do not rule, they only appear to rule; they pass and enforce laws, they use force and at times violence, and make people do their will. Some of this is approved of God, but this kind of rule is not to be in the Church. All that kind of rule rises from ambition and pride, and of necessity must use force to impose its will. The apostles were directly commanded by

the Lord not to set up any kind of government; whether gentile or Jewish it would not be of God; in due course He would reveal what He wanted. The Lord did not proceed to outline to the apostles any form of government for His Church; they were not even proper apostles yet, nor had the kingdom of God come with power, nor was the Lord building His Church. His purpose was not to lay down a framework of law, then to force His Church into it, but to bring His Church into being and let government emerge in and from it. Law is dead and will spread death; the Church is living and will produce life.

It is a remarkable fact that the Lord never laid down a set of rules as such for His disciples. He gave commandments, which had to be obeyed if men wanted to be His disciples, and took the chosen twelve

through a severe course of training, but everything was purely voluntary. He left everybody perfectly free to make their own choice; the relationship between Him and His was made and kept by mutual agreement: at any time everybody, even the apostles, could have left Him. Because there were no laws there were no punishments, the Lord laid down no penal code, such as Israel's or the Jewish or Romish legal systems exacted on the criminal. That He gave warning of punishment was more from the position of foreknowledge than of citing from a legal code or a criminal law. He spoke as from living by the law of the Spirit of life within Him, which is the only law that can save and keep men from the law of the spirit of sin and death. To live and be affected by either of these laws is to enjoy the benefits of the one or to reap the consequences of

the other. In a man's experience each of those opposing states is destructive of the other, they cannot exist together in any man's life. These laws are not of a legal system, neither are they imposed by a governing body of any sort; they are basic, moral, and spiritual.

He Shall Be Your Slave

Those men must have listened to their Lord with amazement as He continued His discourse. He could have said of Himself what Paul later said to Timothy about himself: 'Thou hast fully known my doctrine and manner of life'. Neither Christ nor His apostle laid down laws, they gave commandments. Speaking to His men, the Lord mentioned three things which should be looked for in a man if he is to be considered for any kind of office in the Church; He did not codify these things, He

used not to speak in that manner, He did not come as a lawgiver. Moses had been that to Israel, but Jesus brought grace and truth into the world. Nevertheless, only as these three qualities are found in a man's life will he qualify for office or be able to bear any form of rule in His Church. The first has to do with a man's estimation of greatness, and the degree to which he exercises his will and deports himself to achieve it. If any man rightly understands what real greatness is, he will at once forsake all human estimates of it. Thrones and crowns and offices and government and rule and all desires for authority will flee from his mind; his one desire will be to serve all others in the lowliest of all positions: 'he shall be your slave', said the Lord. This true slave will not lay down his life in service with an eye to earning anything thereby, nor will he labour

with a view to promotion; he will take on the form of a servant and stay in that form, nor want to forsake it for ever. The second is like it and is really a reinforcement of the first.

All ideas of being first or the chief among the great ones, or even a leader among equals, must be abandoned. Slavery, addiction to the humblest, lowliest, most menial tasks — lovingly fulfilled for all — shall be the hallmark of the chiefest saints and apostles. The third is the most salutary of all: in simple humility the Lord pointed to Himself and His own example, and although He did not say it, inferred, 'be like me': He never said 'I am the chief, I am the greatest among you', nor did He say, 'I am the Son of God', but instead began by saying, 'even the Son of Man'.

So much so-called apostleship is based upon the spirit which says, 'I am a son of God'; it is the wrong mentality, a prohibitive approach.

Sounding so spiritual, it is so carnal. Every apostle must be and think and say he is a son of man, and know he has been born into a family of slaves; this and this alone is the only correct approach to apostleship; it was both the concept and practice of Christ. Never was this so openly demonstrated than at Calvary; it gripped and flooded Peter's mind on the day of Pentecost, 'Jesus of Nazareth, a man', he said. He did not say that the Christ of heaven was a God approved of men. The thing that filled the hearts of those apostles when they were made apostles indeed was the wonder of the man called Jesus. The Lord was a man approved of God among them. This was what the Lord sought to impress on His apostles that day. Apostles are not to be ministered to; they must not come to any people with any such thing in mind; to

whatsoever group or church they go, it must be to minister. An apostle must have a supreme end in view as Christ did, and give his life for it; the whole life must be spent for the salvation of others. The purpose of God in creating apostles is that sons of God should prove to be sons of men: the object is not to prove that sons of men can be sons of God, but the exact opposite. The Apostle sitting there among the apostles talking to them was the Son of God; He could have said, had He wished, that already He had become Son of Man by laying down His life (that is the life to which He was used as Son of God) with the intent of further giving His life in the future to ransom the souls of men. Apostleship is by example: meekness is the qualification for lordship, rule is by influence, persuasion by pervasion of the senses bringing heart-assurance to men, and

authority is affirmation of it. Apostleship is not open to self-seekers; seeking things or positions for self, either in this life or the next, even for the best of reasons, is sufficient to disqualify even the choicest from the office. Trainee apostleship for those men was an extraordinary time of instruction and correction not now available to men, and was very chastening indeed: upon this occasion it was James and John who received the correction. The Lord had a wonderful way of teaching; sometimes He deliberately engineered circumstances, sometimes He allowed things to develop as of natural order. He knew that if they want to do so men can learn much from everyday happenings as things take their normal course. His next lesson was of this latter order.

Chapter 16 — JESUS, SON OF DAVID

Bartimaeus

To the apostles the event was probably what might be called an ordinary everyday occurrence. It was one of those by the way experiences, as unplanned as it was predictable. The Lord was on His way to Jerusalem and had reached and passed out of Jericho. As usual the crowds thronged Him, lining the road impeding His progress and slowing Him down. The Lord showed no signs of irritation though, He always moved with purpose, He never seemed to be in a hurry. He made appointments in His heart and always kept them on time. The final Passover was one of the times appointed by God, and, whatever happened, Jesus was determined to be at Jerusalem for the occasion. He was in fact moving towards

Jerusalem for that very reason. He had already kept an appointment at Jericho with Zaccheus, the taxman who He surprised up a tree; calling him down He surprised him even further by insisting that He come and stay with him that day, which He did. Leaving the surprised and disgusted city again (presumably the next day, almost certainly along the same road. where the sycamore tree grew), the Lord continued His journey. By the side of the road, probably on the spot which he had made his own by usage, sat a blind beggar named Bartimaeus. Hearing the noise of the passing crowds he, not unnaturally, enquired what was happening, and was told by someone 'Jesus of Nazareth passeth by'. Immediately, to the astonishment of everybody, he began to cry out, 'Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me'.

It was not unusual for beggars to call out to passers-by. They were expected to; it was the way they drew attention to themselves. What was so astonishing to everyone was the way he addressed the Lord — 'Jesus, son of David'. Bartimaeus was a blind man, but he was also a man of great discernment; he had great faith and being a beggar he was also most importunate. No one could shake his convictions or shut him up: 'Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me', he kept crying. Louder and stronger and clearer he cried, till his cries reached the Lord's ears, halting Him. 'Call him', He commanded; they did. Bartimaeus rose, cast away his garment and, led by willing hands, went to the son of David. 'What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?' He asked; 'Lord, that I might receive my sight,' he said; 'Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole', said Jesus. Immediately it

was done; Bartimaeus received his sight and, without further reflection or any hesitation, followed Jesus in the way.

Just what did the watching James and John think of that? He had granted Bartimaeus his request but had refused theirs, and they were apostles! The Lord had actually invited Bartimaeus to make his request, but had virtually told them that they ought not to have made theirs. The apostles had so much to learn about their Lord and His ways, and so little time left in which to do so. What conclusions they drew from these incidents is not possible to know, and perhaps if conclusions were drawn they may have been incorrect. They may not have connected the two events, nor thought of them as they are laid out by Mark for our reading, though possibly before they died they may all have read his work and seen the two events in

this perspective. By then, of course, the Holy Spirit had come to bring all Jesus' words to their remembrance, and to lead them into all truth: surely their joy must then have been full.

As they continued in the way towards Jerusalem they learned much as they listened to the Lord. They did not know what next to expect of Him, but it was in His heart to demonstrate to them what Bartimaeus, in his blindness, had in part seen and expressed. Bartimaeus was not alone in believing that Jesus was the son of David: many accepted that He was of royal lineage, though whether they believed that He was God's child at birth is another thing. Just what this meant to everybody and how each person thought it would work out for them all we cannot know, but that it was quite different from what the Lord meant we may

be sure. The time had come for Him to present Himself to the nation as their king, and He proceeded to prepare for that. The company had reached the Mount of Olives, and there He made the first move towards the accomplishment of Bartimaeus' heraldic cry. That man had been both a sign to the nation and a revelation of its condition, specially to the apostles, though probably unrecognized at the time. To them he was an example of those of whom the Lord had spoken at the beginning, preceding His interpretation of the parable of the ground: 'Unto them that are without all these things are done in parables, that seeing they may see and not perceive; and hearing they may hear and not understand'.

Blind Bartimaeus, sitting by the wayside and so surprisingly ignored or seemingly unnoticed by the Lord, was, to the Jews, a

parable, and more than a parable, a sign. The parable lay in what the Lord did to that man; it was 'a parable in deed' having exceptional national significance. The Jews had eyes and did not see, and by passing Bartimaeus by yet halting awhile in His progress to Jerusalem to heal him, the Lord was showing them that their day of grace was almost past. When Bartimaeus cried out the Jews tried to stop him; tragically they did not want him to be healed, and tried to prevent it. For His part, before he stopped His journey the Lord let him keep shouting, so Bartimaeus shouted yet 'the more a great deal'. It was all carefully calculated by the Lord; He was not heedless of the man's cries as seemed to be the case. By continuing as though unheeding His purpose was to alarm the people and alert them to their need; the nation must be made to act before it was

too late; it was vitally important that they should lay hold of the opportunity within their grasp while they may. Whether or not the apostles understood the significance of all this, or wondered why He should pass by Bartimaeus so seemingly unconcerned for him, the Lord did it most of all for their instruction. In all that He did the Lord was working to a pre-arranged plan which none but He knew, progressing to a certain place in Jerusalem and to a point in time when He should stand and say, 'My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer'. With that pronouncement, now so soon to be made, time for the Jewish nation would enter its final period of privilege which, in turn, would last but a few more days and then run out. In a matter of weeks, with the birth of the Church on the day of Pentecost, Peter would announce gentile salvation and

worldwide grace with these words, 'Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved'. The Church gospel period would supersede the national gospel, which because of its limitations would have passed away, being swallowed up in the gospel of the worldwide love and salvation. Quite probably, indeed almost certainly, except for the healing of Malchus' ear in the garden, the miracle wrought at Jericho was the last physical healing the Lord performed on a human being before His death, hence its importance. The very last miracle of all, that is the resurrection, was wrought in a different realm altogether; it was the great sign to which the Lord referred in that game temple in the beginning. It is of some significance that the replacement of Malchus' ear was almost certainly the final miracle the Lord did before He was

apprehended, jailed and crucified. Sight was given to Bartimaeus, hearing to Malchus: seeing and hearing are the two most important senses to which the gospel makes its appeal. John says, 'that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you'. So the very last miracle was on the organ of sound — we must 'hear' the word, for that is how all begins, as John says again: 'In the beginning was the word'. Bartimaeus, so greatly blessed, his eyes now opened, an unwitting sign to the nation, followed the Lord and witnessed His next moves as He prepared to present Himself at Jerusalem as David's son. If Bartimaeus stayed on with Him to the end he must soon have realized that his convictions about Jesus, though true enough, were woefully limited and totally inadequate. His eyes were open and he had some degree of spiritual perception, but

beyond that he knew very little, save, to follow Jesus as He went. The way led to the capital city and Herod's palace, and to all kinds of happenings that he could never have anticipated when he made his declaration by the roadside.

Bethany

First of all the Lord sent a couple of His men to Bethphage to fetch a young donkey for Him; it was tied up outside a house which stood at a place where two ways met, He said. They found the place without difficulty, and, as the Lord had told them to do, they began to loose the colt to bring him to Jesus. But the owner of the colt and some men were standing around, who, seeing they had not been consulted, naturally enough wanted to know why the disciples were untying the colt: 'The Lord hath need of him?', they answered, and immediately the

owners let the colt go: there was still some goodwill towards Jesus among the people. The apostles therefore brought the colt to Jesus, who mounted it and rode into Jerusalem. The crowds loved it, waving palm branches of greeting, some even casting their garments on the ground for the donkey to walk over. Everyone was chanting blessings and crying out, 'Hosanna; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord: blessed be the kingdom of our father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord'. 'Hosanna' they cried, asking Him to 'save them now'. 'Hosanna'. They felt that their great moment had come; but He that came in the name of the Lord did not go to Herod's palace or to Pilate's house, He went to the temple, God's house. Entering it He looked round about at everything, and then, with His disciples, left for Bethany, leaving

behind Him unnumbered disappointed hearts. The kingdom of David had not come as they thought, neither had they been saved as they expected; He that had come to them in the name of the Lord was a big disappointment to them. The day had dawned full of hope, but it passed away in hollow emptiness. Their faith was rootless and died without fruit.

The Lord turned His back on His own house, it had been commandeered by spiritual brigands; He went to stay at Bethany (the house of ripe figs), in the home of Martha, Mary and Lazarus. Bethany was indeed a place of fruitfulness to Jesus; there he found love, the love denied Him at Nazareth where He ought to have found it. No one in the house was an apostle; the two sisters and their brother were three simple folk, ordinary people who loved Him and

ministered to Him. In that home He found His 'family, Martha and Mary were His sisters and Lazarus was His brother. Martha served, Mary anointed, Lazarus lived. In a sense Lazarus was nearest to Him of all, for he was alive from the dead; Jesus loved them. By everything He did at this period the Lord was saying something which He wanted His apostles to see and hear and understand, but despite their many privileges they were still so slow to see and hear. The very fact that He chose to stay in the town of Bethany should have spoken much to them, especially when they witnessed an incident which took place the very next morning.

The Lord was on His way with the apostles from the house of ripe figs to His own house, the temple, in Jerusalem, when He saw a fig tree some way off; feeling hungry He went over to it hoping to find some fruit

to eat, but when He reached the tree there was nothing on it but leaves. Disappointed, He said to the tree, 'No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever', and turning His back on it left it and continued on His way to Jerusalem and the temple. To His apostles it must have seemed an extraordinary thing to do; they did not know He had done it specially for them and that it was part of His final message, a symbolic word to the nation. Those men did not see in Him all He was, and almost certainly they did not make the connection between His action and what Adam did in the beginning. The Lord had several reasons for going to the fig tree, one of which was that, unknown to them, He was the last Adam. Unlike first Adam, He had no use for fig leaves, He had no shame to hide, nothing to cover. Leaves! He had no use for them; if there was no fruit, then

there should be no leaves. He cursed the tree.

To the apostles He must have seemed in a strangely aggressive mood that day, for when He entered the temple He began once more to create havoc in it just as He had done three years earlier. He cast out the moneychangers, overturned the seats of the dove sellers, and spread general confusion everywhere; it was pandemonium. He was very angry indeed and would not so much as allow a vessel to be carried through the temple — it was a den of thieves, He said; they had made it like that. 'My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer', He cried, and all who heard Him knew that He was making claim to Godhead, it was absolutely unmistakable; the temple was His house; Jesus was God! Moreover His temple-house was no longer exclusively for

the Jews but for all the peoples of the earth; He could not have made Himself more unpopular. Furthermore He was not going to have people coming into His house to be robbed by men. What a day that was! He astonished everybody but Himself, and, as it began to close, He retired with His apostles to the Bethany home, leaving His house to the scribes and chief priests plotting to destroy Him.

In the morning He carefully returned with the apostles by the same route to the temple, making sure that they should pass by the fig tree; to the apostles' amazement it was completely dead, dried out from the roots. Ever the spokesman, Peter, astonished, said, 'Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away'. Astonished as they were, the response of the Lord astonished them even more;

without offering any kind of explanation for the incident, He said, 'Have faith in God, for verily I say unto you, that whosoever shall say unto this mountain Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith', and that was the end of the episode.

Unlike the occasion when he passed by Bartimaeus, He did not halt in His onward journey but kept going. The fig tree died because He spoke to it, answered it in fact, Mark records, as though it had spoken to Him; it had. The condition of the fig tree when He first approached it was the condition of the nation which it symbolized. Nothing could have spoken to Him more plainly. He had come to the nation when He was thirty years of age to work upon it, and

after about three years of unceasing labour there was still no fruit unto God. Because of that He cursed the tree, and in doing so symbolically announced the end of that period of' ministry to the nation, He therefore passed the tree by on the second occasion, it was dead. Everything was done with deliberation and forethought, His action was a calculated sign intentionally given to the apostles. Three or more years of divine visitation of love and power from on high had produced nothing for Christ as it ought to have done. The nation had been given its opportunity and had failed to produce what it ought to have done and was rightly expected of it; early promising signs had faded away, the green leaves had given hope of life and eventual fruit, but no, nothing for Him, so He left it dead. The 'passing by' of, and then the pause to call

and heal Bartimaeus had been very significant; it was a warning sign, the last of many, but it had gone unheeded, perhaps even unnoticed, as He knew it would, so He shrivelled up the fig tree; it was a solemn pronouncement of judgement to come. The apostles knew He was not moved by selfish motives when He cursed the tree, there was not an ounce of selfishness in Him. But there was no escaping the assumption that, because there had been no fruit for Him, He was not going to allow anybody else to have fruit of it either. Whatever else the Lord meant, and for whoever else the episode held a message, for the apostles it was a further step in their training in relationship to His future Church. It was no good their thinking that they would be able to obtain the fruit which He had been unable to get from the nation, they would not. He would

reinforce this later with the command to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, but the apostles were not ready for that yet, so He left them wondering.

The Faith of God

There would be a little response from the Jews but it would not be national or for long; He had indicated this by the sign of Bartimaeus. Jerusalem and Judea would be reached to begin with, but then they were to go to Samaria, and afterwards to the whole gentile world. The days of exclusive ministry to the people of the fig tree were over; the gospel was to them first, but not finally, it was also to the Greek. The apostles did not know, nor did He tell them, that before many months He would raise up a man without their nationalistic prejudices, a new apostle free in heart and mind to carry the

message to the whole world; He was determined that His house would be the house of prayer for all nations as He had said. Christ knew that what He was determined to do would require great faith; even to believe it was a big thing for the apostles, they had been brought up on narrow nationalistic views of Messiahship. 'All nations', He said. When John wrote, 'God (so) loved the world', grace had wrought a great work in his heart. The mind of the whole apostolate had been changed by then, but O it took a long time to get there. The Lord knew that what He said could not be accomplished by man's faith; that is why He said, 'Have the faith of God'. Much as He loved and admired them, and although He had given them much, they could never accomplish His will by their own faith, only by God's.

By what He was doing and saying in the present He was seeking to teach them lessons and give them instructions for the perplexing future. If they had enquired of Him how He caused the fig tree to wither away and die He would have said 'by faith', but they did not do so; they had no need to enquire, they had seen Him do similar things many times in the past and knew how He did them. What they did not understand was the vast and immeasurable difference that lay between His faith and theirs. How painfully they would have recalled the occasion when He had said to them, 'where is your faith?' Except it was He, and He was so kind, He might have said again, 'where is your faith now? Are you still so Without understanding?' But He did not; He was asking big things of them and He loved them. They had tried their own faith on so

many occasions and it had failed. It failed precisely because it was their own and not God's; by God's standards they had no faith, and after he had shown it to them the Lord told them so. 'How is it that ye have no faith?' He had said on that memorable occasion. They, and perhaps everyone else, would have argued that they did have faith; had they not left all and followed Him? They surely believed. Such is the power and extent of human faith, it can accomplish much, but not enough.

Apostles must have the faith of God. Men must be able to assume that in them the human and the divine are wedded and are one. Divine faith in a man is the conviction and operation of God's will, plus the knowledge that He purposes to do this particular thing and has the power to conform everything, even contrary things, to

His designs. Those men had lived with Him long enough to discover that His faith was His own, and theirs was theirs — and O the vast difference between them! His was the faith of God. Faith is constitutional in God; without it He would not be God, indeed could not be at all; this was the faith which Christ was inviting them to have; it is a basic requirement for apostles, and in His view without it no man can be an apostle. Like God's love, God's faith is eternal, it never fails, it cannot. Christ did not doubt in His heart about anything He said, He gave commands and things obeyed Him; all things answer to His will; that is, they respond to His faith, and the fig tree was no exception. This was the power that killed the fig tree; by doing it the Lord showed to all who had eyes to see that the times of the Jewish nation should end at a certain point of world

history, and the times of the Church should begin. All that the man Christ Jesus did was to act in co-operation with the will' of God. When a man does that, it is faith; that is, power, and the results are assured.

When the Lord held before the apostles the possibility of moving trees and mountains He was neither exhorting them to try a few experiments, nor inciting them to attempt great things according to their own will; rather He was warning them against attempting anything outside God's will. Mountains and trees are part of God's creation; mountains especially were placed in position by God, so, unless it is God's will that they should be removed, His faith cannot be operated by man to remove them. This is one of the reasons why the Lord taught His disciples right at the beginning of their discipleship to pray 'Our

Father ... thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven': prayer in the knowledge of His will, wanting that and that only to be done on earth, is prayer with the faith of God.

However, His instruction to them then was only an attempt to lay the foundation of prayer in their lives, it was a general approach to prayer. The apostles had to learn how and when to apply the general principles of prayer to their particular desires, for, except they be the will and desire of God, attempts to move mountains will prove abortive. Unless there be first a heart conviction, consonant with the tenor of life, that it shall be done, it will not be done. The apostles could not have failed to notice that at no time did the Lord remove any mountains — rather He climbed them! To Him they were the high places of teaching and prayer and election and communion and

transfiguration and tears. According to the Lord, to speak with the faith that can move mountains a man must speak without a doubt in his heart, and with nothing unforgiven between him and his brethren. The faith of God knows no doubts and no division; doubts divide the soul, and unforgiveness divides between souls; both destroy wholeness and unity. God always operates in calm assurance.

All apostles must learn and practise these lessons; Christ never taught theory, He taught by example and demonstration. Among the many hallmarks of apostolic calling and appointment, some cardinal features we must all look for and expect to find are revelation, manifestation and demonstration. How slowly those men learned of Christ. Paul, the great apostle by eternal generation, said that the lesson a

man learns from Christ is 'the truth as it is in Jesus'; Christ teaches Christ in Jesus. Jesus had the faith of God, so had Paul; but none of those trainee apostles had it. By the Lord's own words they discovered that they had no faith, and by their own confession they could not pray; so now, at the end of their apprenticeship in the kingdom of heaven, He took them via the fig tree to the temple to teach them about the will of God and themselves. The temple was for prayer, the tree was for fruit. Earlier in their discipleship they had heard a man say he could see men as trees walking, and now they had seen Christ destroy a fruitless tree because it bore nothing for Him. There were two basic lessons to be drawn from this connection: (1) a man must bear fruit unto God or his life is useless; (2) the fruit must be there when Christ wants it. Amid all the

tumult of the questions and theories in their hearts, they heard Him say, 'Have the faith of God'. With their questions unanswered they followed the Lord to the temple, watched Him as He entered and took command of it, stood in awe as He cleansed it, and listened in silence as He pronounced it a house of prayer for all nations of men. Faith and prayer. Had they discovered an equation, namely that faith and prayer equals fruit unto God? But equations are only theories unless they prove correct in practice; they must produce more and increasing fruit.

Chapter 17 — QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Pharisees and Herodians

The next time the Lord specially called His apostles' attention to something, He was sitting in the temple by the treasury. He was particularly concerned that they should not miss the importance of what had just taken place there; it was a kind of culmination of the cumulative teaching He had been giving in the temple over the last day or two. The temple authorities had challenged Him over the recent happenings there; they could not deny His power and dare not defy Him, but they questioned His authority and the source of it. The Lord refused to disclose it; He knew very well that if He told them they would not believe Him. Without saying this He asked them a question which He knew they could not answer without admitting

that He and His power were of God. Being astute enough to understand that they were being manoeuvred by Him into making that admission they *said* they could not answer Him. They very well knew the answer and were lying to Him, so the Lord refused to answer their question and turned to telling them parables. In the first, without directly saying so, He told them: (1) He was the well-beloved son of God who had come to them to collect the fruit of His vineyard; (2) He knew perfectly well that they recognized Him and had planned to kill Him; (3) because of this, the Lord would destroy them and their temple and build another. Their own scriptures declared this, as also that He would become the headstone of the corner of that temple. Their response was to desire even more to murder Him, and they would have done so there and then but they were

afraid of popular opinion. The apostles must have listened to this with almost heart-stopping apprehension; the clash they had always felt must come must be very near now, the Pharisees and the Herodians were all gathered round Him. It seemed the second wave of attack was being mounted and the apostles watched with anxiety as the enemy took up position and threatened to engulf Him. 'Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not?' they asked; it was such a seemingly innocent question. Knowing their hypocrisy, the Lord asked to see a coin of the realm, 'Whose is this image and superscription?' He asked. 'Caesar's' they said. 'Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's', He said, 'and to God the things that are God's'! They marvelled at Him. It was all they could do; there was nothing

more to be said on that subject; it was closed. They just could not catch Him.

The third attack followed at once, but compared with the first two it was lightweight and stupid; anyone else but Jesus would have answered it with the contempt it warranted. The Sadducees produced a parable to insult His intelligence, but only succeeded in revealing to everybody that they themselves had little or none. Their story turned around a supposed family of seven brothers who each in turn married a certain woman and died leaving no issue; afterwards she died also. The question was, to whom did she belong and whose wife would she be in the resurrection? (not that they believed in that). The Lord's answer was very direct, the woman did not belong to any of them, but to God. The trouble with the Sadducees was

that they neither knew the scriptures nor the power of God, in fact they did not know God at all. Having heard His answer to the Pharisees and Herodians they should have known better than to ask their question, but such is the nature of intellectual pride that it rushes to establish itself in further ridiculousness as a horse rushes into battle, knowing nothing till it dies.

Not Far From the Kingdom

What would happen next? A scribe, a genuine soul, nearly convinced of Christ, acknowledging to himself the Lord's great wisdom, asked Him which was the first and great commandment of the law. 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all ...' came the answer, 'the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself': the man was perfectly satisfied with his answer. 'Thou art not far from the kingdom of God', the Lord

said, and everybody's questions were silenced. Then the Lord launched His counter attack, asking His own question and pointing to the scriptures which would help them to find the answer. He was David's son, but how was He David's son if He was David's Lord? How could that possibly be? The answer (which neither He nor anyone else gave) was 'by being both'. But that was humanly impossible, for in David's day and in his own words his Lord was sitting at the right hand of the Lord in heaven. How then could anyone say He was his earthly son? There was only one way that could possibly happen, the Lord would need to perform a miracle whereby He became a man: He was forcing them to this conclusion, and some were gladly receiving it. With His stories and doctrines and answers to questions He had been carefully leading on His apostles to the

final point He wished to make that day. So far He had taught them that they must render to God the things that are God's: that primarily all souls were God's: they should love God with all. Now they were to be shown the logical end of such a faith as this.

Over Against the Treasury

All the while He had been speaking the Lord had been observing the people, watching how they had been casting their money into God's treasury; Christ was a most observant person, very interested in money; how people handle it is a sure indication of the state of their soul. Watching people give to God is most instructive. The Lord was really keeping watch over the treasury of souls. God is not dependent on money, but such is the state of humanity that money has been promoted among us to life-saving proportions; undoubtedly it is worshipped.

Only once had Christ ever called a man a fool; it was in a parable involving the use of money. On another occasion He challenged His hearers by asking what price a man would put on his own soul, and what profit a man would gain from gaining the world and losing his own soul. Giving to God is a man's estimation of Him; amounts are not reckoned by God according to their actual sum, but according to what they represent; money talks.

A poor widow woman caught the Lord's attention; she was moving along in the stream of men and women coming to pay their dutiful tithes or make some special offering to God; He was greatly moved by what He saw. She was obviously a widow and very poor; when she reached the chest she stretched out her hand and cast two mites into the treasury and passed on

without a word. The Lord did not stop her or ask her name; self-effacingly she passed on, and He let her; unknown to herself and anybody else she had made a very real impact upon Him. The amount of money was negligible but her gift was incalculable — the woman had cast in all she had, and, not for the first time, the Lord marvelled at the faith of a human soul. To Him it was wonderful, 'She has cast in more than everybody else', He said. Many had given into God's treasury that day, how much had been gathered is not disclosed and it does not matter; however many had given and whatever the amount was, that poor widow had given more than all the rest put together. As He watched, the Lord was thrilled with her, she had demonstrated to perfection all He had meant when He said, 'Render ... to God the things that are God's';

the two mites were Caesar's, they had his image and superscription on them, but her soul was God's and so was her money, and she converted what was both Caesar's and hers to God. The tragedy is that most people convert the larger portion of what is God's to Caesar. This poor widow, casting in all her means of living, loved the Lord with all she was and all she had; she thought nothing of herself and her own needs but gave Him all her means of living; God knew that He was her treasure. Calling His apostles to Him, Jesus said to them in effect, 'take note; the measure of a man and the state of his soul is not gauged by what God gives to him but by what he gives to God'.

The Lord saw this incident as a priceless opportunity to make His apostles face reality; it must have humbled them to know how much He thought of her, and that He

thought they could learn so much from this poor widow; compared with her they had little of which to boast. A short time earlier Peter, speaking for them, had said to the Lord, 'we have left all and followed thee'; it was a very commendable thing to do, not many had done it; they had much to boast of. It was true, and He reassured them that because they had done so they would never want, either in this present world or in the world to come; they were quite safe, their future as well as their present was safe. No such assurances were given to this poverty-stricken woman though; she gave with no guarantees. The apostles were well provided for: the Lord could command stones to be made bread for them, or take a barley cake and multiply it into more than enough to feed them and thousands more besides just because they followed Him; but she was not

so privileged, He had not called her. She made no avowals of faith or works or devotedness to Christ: she entered God's house, cast in all the (means of) living she had and left without saying a word, slipping quietly away to nothingness, back to her poverty. What went through those men's minds who can say? Surely they must have learned that office-bearing is nothingness, emptiness, if a man does not first cast all the living he has into God's treasury. Not for the first time had the Lord made a woman's action a lesson to the apostles. He let her come and give and go without guaranteeing her anything, or making her one promise or promoting her to any position. What did those men think? How about if it had been them? In an earlier exchange between the Lord and the apostles, they had said, 'what shall we have therefore?' They had wanted

something in exchange for their allegiance: she wanted nothing. James and John had sought the highest rewards for their hire: she asked for nothing. Quite possibly that may have been because she already had everything she wanted — a loving, life-giving spirit and a warm and generous heart.

Shall a poor widow shame an apostle? By this time Jesus' own mother was a widow. What if the throne on His right hand and on His left hand, so much sought after by apostles, were prepared for Mary and this unknown woman? Neither had worked a miracle, but each in her own way had cast in all the living she had, asking for nothing in return. In all her limitation of knowledge, this poor widow had quite possibly 'cast in' more than all the apostles put together. The Lord did not say this to them, but it was not for nothing that He called their attention to

her; He so much wanted His men to lay hold of the secret of God which this woman had learned. To love is to give, to give fully and selflessly, without seeking notice or wanting a compliment or even an encouraging word, is to live. There is no evidence that the woman even realized that the Lord had noticed her, nor is there any indication that He blessed her or supplied her with more than she had ever possessed before, much as we may love to fondly think that to do so would have been just like Him. How fervently He hoped that His apostles would learn their lessons that day; without a shadow of doubt they were equal to any He had ever taught them at any time, whether on sea or land. Apostles have to face the fact that there may be (perhaps certainly are) whole tracts of life in which they have never moved and have had no experience. There

are degrees of love and understanding still lying beyond us all, and sometimes men in office, even highest office, are far outstripped by people of lowlier knowledge and humbler position. All those men could do was stand and observe; Jesus marvelled.

Signs of the End of the Age

Beyond the few words He spoke about it all at the treasury the Lord made no further comment; what he had said was the crowning statement to everything he had said in the temple that day, and He rose and left the building, followed by His disciples. As they walked out one of them said, 'Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!' He answered, 'Seest thou these great buildings? there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down'. He must have been torn within at times by the stony hearts of

those men; it seems as though nothing He had said so recently to them at the treasury had made any impression on them. He halted and sat down over against the temple. Eager to learn more, four of the apostles approached Him for a private session about the future — when? what sign shall we look for? A sign? He had shown them one in the temple, a poor widow casting in all she had, but apparently that had aroused no curiosity in them — perhaps because it was so personal and very much concerned with the present! What is the use of asking about future signs if present and obvious ones are ignored? When people seek signs they become vulnerable, it is so easy to be deceived in that realm, so the Lord starts with a warning, 'Take heed lest any man deceive you'.

Apostles are men of whom much is expected; they are considered to be men of revelation; the Lord called them for that, they are the teachers of the churches; if they be deceived, how shall the churches stand in truth? The first reason they were called and the greatest revelation the apostles ever received was that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of Man and Son of God — I AM, indeed — and it was on this point that the Lord issued His first warning. Men would arise and give signs enough if apostles were looking for such things, sufficient to deceive even the very elect of them; they were not to look for or be deceived by any of those kinds of signs, they were no indication of the fulfilment Of His words. The Lord gave them three clear signs: (1) the abomination of desolation standing where it ought not; (2) the fig tree becoming tender and green; (3)

the sun, moon, stars and powers in heaven darkened, eclipsed, falling and shaken. There would be much else of great significance taking place, but these three signs were the ones to look for. The first one they would all perhaps live to see, the latter ones would come to pass in time, but the apostles would not be on earth when they happened; they would have finished their course and gone home.

Those apostles had no real need to know the things the Lord had unfolded to them, they did not so very vitally affect them.

Nevertheless the Lord, in His wisdom, thought good to release to them, at least in broad outline, some of the knowledge in which He Himself moved and which had shaped His life. Besides this He wanted His Church to be given some guidelines, so that in their day men and women would be as

fully instructed about the general direction of events as were the apostles. We all are under command to watch as events unfold throughout time; not that we should forever be looking for things that are coming only to pass. The Lord wants everybody to be concerned with eternal things, that which has come to stay and not to pass; if a man gets the certainties right, the uncertainties will not bother him. The most significant thing about His great prophetic foreview of things that must come to pass is where it begins and ends: the Lord commenced it by sitting over against the temple, and finished it by talking about a house. Whether or not the apostles noticed it, this was the more significant because only a day or so earlier He had stood with them in the temple and called it His house.

So it was that He began His great prophetic word of knowledge to His apostles by telling them that the temple they so much admired was going to be razed to the ground. In the purposes of God it would be replaced by another which He would build Himself, as unlike that temple as it was possible to be. Although He had not yet told them, those apostles were chosen to be foundation stones of it, He was going to build on them. He, like them, would be in the foundation too, the chief corner, but unlike them He would also be the headstone of the corner. He is the Master of the house, the apostles were His servants to whom He gave work to do and authority to do it; above all, it seemed He set a porter to watch. The work of the porter is to watch the doorway; he carefully scrutinizes everyone who attempts to come in, his eyes are on persons, he is not

looking for signs. The signs are there, they will come and go in the Master's absence and all will point to His return; He has not said when He is coming, but He is coming and all must be in readiness for that great event. Whatever may be the events of the age he wants His people to be alert, that is why He was not too explicit about things; He gave them enough, but not too much knowledge. A man's ignorance is as valuable and necessary as his knowledge in these affairs; He would come when the time was right. It was no use asking Him when it would be, He did not know; only Father knew that. Their business was to watch; He says it unto all, and the apostles' job was to pass on the message — Watch!

Chapter 18 — THE ALABASTER BOX

Back in Bethany again soon after with their Master, the apostles were invited with Him to a meal in the house of Simon the leper. If they had ever been in a leper's house before it is not recorded; nor is it certain that Simon was in the house or at the meal with them, or whether he was excluded by reason of the disease. They certainly were not there without being aware that they were running a certain amount of risk, but the Lord made no mention of it, nor it seems did He care at all about His own or the apostles' physical welfare. In view of what happened it was exactly the right place to be. Simon's house was obviously one of the Bethany homes open to the Lord; the households of Martha and Simon were evidently on very good terms and had joined together for a meal. It

was a carefully planned occasion: Martha served the meal, Lazarus her brother sat with the Lord at table, but, as before, Mary was not there apparently, or if she was she was not at first visible. Whether or not this had all been planned between them is not revealed, but Mary enters the idyll as a benefactress and prophetess, a woman having an alabaster box of ointment.

This was to be a never-to-be-forgotten occasion for everybody there, especially the apostles who had followed in close attendance upon their Lord. As may be expected Lazarus was a centre of attraction; he had been recently raised from the dead, literally brought out of the tomb by the word of the Lord with his graveclothes still on; the house was the leper's house, the house of the creeping death. Martha served, and helped serve the meal there; Mary entered

the scene with her box of ointment and anointed the Lord for burial: the connection between these things is too obvious to be missed. The link between them was death: Lazarus had been overcome by death, the leper was being overcome by death, the Lord was going to overcome death, the ointment was always used to anoint the dead. What a setting.

The connection between Lazarus and Simon was very real, the name Lazarus is rooted in the word 'leper'; somewhere back in its history, whether ancient or modern, the Bethany family were associated with leprosy, they were branded, which may explain their friendship with Simon's household. The connection between Lazarus and the Lord is so well known that little need be said about it. The connection between the Lord and Simon, and therefore his household, is not

so obvious; it may have been through Judas, who, we are told, was the son of Simon.

Whether or not the traitor was the son of this Simon is not disclosed, but the possibility of it, though unprovable, is worth considering. It was most probably an all-male supper: perhaps fifteen, certainly fourteen men had gathered for the meal, and before long everybody's attention became fixed on the Lord Jesus and Mary. How many ladies were there besides Martha and Mary and what their reason was for being there is not said. The one woman among them whose purpose for attendance was distinct from all the rest was biding her time, waiting for the right moment.

The supper was made for the Lord. The apostles were simply invited because they were His men, that is all, and they knew that. This would be made abundantly clear

when the great moment planned by Mary arrived. They must have looked back upon this occasion with very mixed feelings, for it was one of the occasions when the apostles were shown up in the worst possible light; their behaviour was abominable. Mary was the only one in Bethany, (perhaps the only one in all Jewry) most certainly in that room, who had any understanding of the Lord's person and objectives, and above all of the time. The apostles seemed to have no idea of those things; their complete insensitivity and lack of belief and understanding was little short of tragic. Despite all He had told them they still did not believe He was going to die. They had no understanding of what He meant when He talked about Himself as being the bread of life, or of how He could possibly become that. Worse still, from remarks they made, their estimation of Him

as a person and what He was worth was incredible to the point of being almost unbelievable.

We cannot tell just how the sacred act was done. Certainly the Lord would have occupied the place of honour. All we know is that at some stage Mary produced her precious ointment and poured it over His head. Whether it was announced or unannounced, the Lord accepted the gesture with humility and grace befitting a king. The unmistakable odour of spikenard filled the room, the house, everyone's nostrils; all eyes were upon Him and the woman. Approval and disapproval rose in hearts and eyes, murmurs of praise and criticism filled mouths — there were none so critical as those men who were believed to be so loyal to Him. It doesn't seem possible, but it is true, that every single one

of those apostles felt and said that Mary's generous outpouring of oil upon His head was a waste of money. Once again a woman's uninhibited love and generous gift showed up and completely condemned the miserable, miserly souls of the ignorant apostles. They knew much about miracles and power and authority; privilege and knowledge denied others had been granted them by the Lord, but their estimation of Him was so abysmally low that they begrudged Him the love and devotion of just one woman. That supper proved a disaster for them, they were a disgrace, yet to Him it was so important; they couldn't tell why. With love in His heart, He said that the occasion must be remembered because of the woman and what she did, yet in kindness to them it would have been best forgotten. He wanted it remembered

though. Why? With the exception of Himself and the next great supper so shortly to be celebrated, He never said that of any other person or event. That these two suppers should be so pointedly emphasized, and that the supper in Bethany should be linked thereby with the unique supper in Jerusalem, can only mean one thing, that supper in Simon's house was very important, they both were. The first one was to be recorded in remembrance of Mary, the second is to be enacted in remembrance of Him.

Mary's act was far more significant in the Lord's eyes than either she or anyone else in the room but He realized. All four Gospel writers record it; only seldom does this happen, and this very fact alone is sure enough testimony of its importance to Him. Just how much Mary understood of what

she was doing, or what her loving act implied we cannot know; the Lord understood it though. For all time and for all eternity, for the sake of earth and heaven, for men and for angels, what she did must be recognized. What the apostles felt after He made such a statement can only be left to the imagination — perhaps envy, even jealousy. Humiliation? They had certainly been indignant at what she did, and full of reproof against her. They did not see her as the Lord saw her. To Him the woman and what she did was as the fulfilment of the word of God, reminding Him that He was the seed of woman and His Father — even though she was not His mother who gave Him flesh. Her name, as His mother's, was Mary, and at that moment she represented the womanhood that had borne Him, coming to anoint Him and mark Him out

among men as the Son of God. She came also as representing the Holy Spirit to anoint Him for His burying, pouring oil upon His flesh, seeing through and beyond His flesh into the spirit of the Man. She anointed Him unto His burying, but not as a pitiful victim of a murder plot; somehow, uniquely, she knew He was the mighty triumphant Victor of death, the King by whom death would be defeated.

Throughout this whole time Lazarus, Mary's brother, sat beside Jesus observing all.

Lazarus had been dead, slain by disease, but, much as she loved him, she had not given her precious ointment for him when he died; she had withheld her spikenard for the Lord. For some time Mary had been aware that the Lord she loved was going to die.

Whether hints of it had drifted through to her from the disciples or not, when He had

raised her brother from the tomb she realized that her intuition had been right. Her brother's illness and death, followed by his reanimation, had convinced her of that; upon consideration she saw that the Lord had wanted Lazarus to die; if He had come to Bethany when they had sent for Him her brother would not have died. He could and would have healed him if He had been there. At the time it had grieved her very much that He did not come, but His delayed coming, coupled with His claim to Martha that He was the resurrection and the life, led her to the belief which she now held and upon which she acted: most likely the whole family were convinced of His intentions. His response to them had proved that He had power over death and the grave and the spirits, souls and bodies of men. Obviously He was the sole arbiter of life and death and

of the destinies of men, and it was not such a great step to the realization that, in order to be this, He had to die Himself: He must. Perhaps during the past few days while staying in the home, the Lord had insisted that He must die. This conviction had been the dominant theme of His conversation with His disciples much of the time lately, and if she heard it Mary had not sought to dissuade Him from it. He must die; as she saw it there was no other way; being truth, He could do no other. The apostles had not seen this, they thought that if He wanted to raise people from the dead He had to stay alive. Surely that was logical, wasn't it? But Mary's logic was different; she saw to the heart of the matter: a man does not conquer death by remaining alive, he only eludes it. Mary had come to see the truth of identification; how complete her grasp of it

was we cannot tell, but there is no doubt she saw that the Lord had raised her brother from the dead because He Himself was going to die. Therefore she went to Simon's house that evening to anoint her Lord to His burying. Maybe the whole event was staged for that reason.

'Stop', cried the heart of Judas; 'stop' cried the hearts of all the rest of the disciples. Judas put it into words for them, 'why was not this ointment sold and the proceeds given to the poor?' 'Let her alone', cried the Lord's heart, 'she hath wrought a good work on me, she hath done what she could', He said; no one could have done more. Perfume of Spikenard filled the house, the scent of death and burial was everywhere, it smelled like a place but a few steps from a tomb, an open tomb where there was no death or corruption or graveclothes, and He was the

living One. And Mary — she was the bride worshipping the bridegroom, anointing Him in this marriage of death and life. Not for her the pretentious boastings of men who said that they would die with Him; the uncomprehending apostles might (and surely did) say that, but not she. Hers was the gesture of faithful love reaching through the veil; theirs was the cry of banality. The oil was on no one but Jesus and Mary, on His hair and head and feet and on her head and hands: they were one in heart. As far as she was able Mary understood Him and His mission; He needed not to say to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life'; she knew He was, and by her ministration had told Him so. She had done what she could, she could only anoint His body to the burying; His spirit was already anointed, she could not anoint that. He came into the world as the

Christ; His Father had sent Him as the Anointed One; Mary had perceived and was finally convinced of that. If an apostle has to be a pioneer, a person with spiritual perception and courage, what, an apostle she would have made. And those who were apostles, what of them? They all murmured against her, criticized her action, accused her of waste, said she was wrong and, by implication, that the Lord was wrong also for allowing and approving of her extravagance. How tragic; what a monstrous thing to imply! She shamed them all. In vain to say they wouldn't have done so had they known; they should have known, they had every bit as much, and more reason than she or anyone else to know the Lord, but they didn't.

This supper was of great significance to all there, especially to Judas, it proved to be

one of the turning points of his life. He was the one who led the rest of the apostles in their united criticism of Mary and the Lord. How truly had Jesus spoken when He said, 'have not I chosen you twelve and one of you is a devil'. What did He think of them now? He must have been hurt to the core; how thankful too He must have been for the love of His three friends; they seemed to value and understand Him more than all the rest. Being Jews, the apostles would never have suffered a woman to teach or to usurp authority over them, yet in a trice, without opening her mouth or attempting to rob them of one privilege, Mary taught them more than any of them knew or had been prepared to admit. Mary became the lowliest servant of all and stepped into a position higher than any of the apostles could fill. As far as is known none of the

apostles had ever washed His feet or anointed His head, but she had anointed both — and they thought it was all wrong. Poor, poor apostles! They acted like lost souls, blind, deaf, unfeeling, misguided, weak, having no sense of value or knowledge of what was really going on. As for Judas, he was most lost of all, and for him Christ made the final decision; it was one of the greatest decisions either of them had ever made, an irretrievable act of committal. Leaving the supper room, Judas went straight to the temple and arranged with the priests to betray the Lord into their hands. In the traitor's judgement an alabaster box of ointment was far too precious to 'waste' on the Lord; all He was worth was the price of a slave, and that is all he asked for. Perhaps it was with this in mind

that a later apostle wrote, 'the love of money is the root of all evil'.

It is impossible to read the stories of Judas and Mary without making comparisons.

Each was called by the Lord, he in heights of joy on a mountain top to be an apostle, she in depths of sorrow in her home, and then only indirectly through her sister, to nothing special. He could claim to be an apostle, she could only claim to be little sister to Lazarus and Martha; he could heal the sick and cast out devils, she could not even get her prayer answered; he had a love for money, she had a love for Christ; he took the place of the devil, she represented the Holy Spirit; he handled silver, she handled oil; he was cast out, she remained; he hanged himself, she saw the Lord crucified and risen; Judas became less than a man, Mary became more

than a woman. Who was greater, Mary or the apostle?

Thank God that not all the apostles were like Judas Iscariot, and we have reason to be glad that they were just disciples, only trainee apostles, at the time. They may not have counted it a compliment if they had been told that there were rivalries among them unworthy of their calling. The fact is they were a lot of 'old men', forgiven but carnal as can be, trying to follow and serve and emulate the 'new Man' who they had come to love. To give them their due they were only with Him because, in the first place, He had called them for that purpose. Despite their failures He loved them and had done His best for them under the terms of the covenant then in being, but all His efforts proved woefully inadequate to meet their basic need. They were not therefore

entirely to blame, and, as He said, He had not come into the world to condemn sinners. Therefore, without condemnation, though with candour, we will pass quickly over the next few events, pausing only to notice with sadness the way those apostles staggered through the closing days of that age.

Chapter 19 — THE SIGN OF THE PROPHET JONAH

A chapter of tragic apostolic failures must have left people like the Bethany family wondering what those men were made of. Another supper, the exposure and expulsion of Judas, avowals of loyalty and bravery from all the rest, unreliability in the Garden of Gethsemane, falling asleep on duty, the final betrayal of the Lord, and the utter cowardice; all of this followed by total abandonment of their Master by the whole company; it was a sorry story. Worse was to follow: in the judgement hall before Pilate, perhaps with the exception of John, not one of them admitted that he was a disciple, let alone an apostle, or raised a voice in support of the Lord; one of them actually denied that he had ever known Him or been near

Him. Out of all the men in the land, a counsellor named Joseph and the famous Rabbi Nicodemus, neither of whom were apostles, were the only ones who lifted a finger to help Him and then only when He was dead. Of His apostles, save John who stood by the cross with Mary His mother, there was no sign. It was the same when He was buried: no apostles, only another couple of Marys sitting by the tomb. Where were those men? Hiding! Why? There was no price on their heads, they had nothing to face but ridicule and shame. But of what were they ashamed, or rather of whom? He had said 'follow ' and they had done so, but at the critical moment they ran away from Him. They couldn't face the cross, and it was to this that He had called them; if a man is not an apostle at the cross he is an apostle nowhere. It is not therefore surprising that

they gathered themselves together in a room and shut themselves in locking the door, hoping they would not be found by anyone connected with the authorities.

For three days they wallowed in fear and misery together — dark days of despair lightened a little with hope. Three of them were nursing secrets they could not reveal to their companions unless the hope was fulfilled. It had happened to Him exactly as He predicted about His death, so perhaps they had reason to hope He would rise from the dead as He had also predicted. But their hearts were hard, and they had no faith, so they sat and cowered and mourned, while three women made their way to and from the tomb, making plans, lovingly preparing spices with which to embalm the body as soon as the sabbath was past.

To those courageous women, standing trembling before the tomb, bearing their odours and preservatives in the dawning light of another day, angels spoke the first message of the resurrection. Half fleeing in fear and half flying with joy they raced to Peter and John with the news. Cheer and courage flowed into them, immediately the men were lifted out of their gloom; excited to some sort of belief or inquisitiveness, they ran and ran till they reached the tomb. John, first there, stood and waited, while Peter, less fleet of foot than of tongue, pounded and panted up to the entrance gaping open like a cold dark throat in the rock. John stood by as he had stood by the cross earlier, waiting and wondering; Peter went in, leading the way, John following him. The light penetrating into the inner gloom was not bright, it was enough though,

sufficient for them to see that the body was not there. As their eyes became accustomed to the dim light they made out the graveclothes lying flat on the rock, collapsed as though the body had been dissolved into thin air or spirited away out of them, but there was no sign of Him.

The two men stood gazing on a sight they never expected to see and would never forget, Peter very confused, John gradually believing; things were beginning to fall into place and come clear to him. He was a man who waited and observed, a thinker; inner things, the things of the spirit, meant more to him than outward things; to him miracles, though they may be great and wonderful, meant less than that which they indicated: they were signs. The place was full of miracles and suggestions; standing there, the dawnings of what later he wrote when

reporting his meeting with Christ on Patmos, began vaguely to appear — 'I am He that liveth and was dead and behold I am alive for evermore and have the keys of hell and of death'. Peter had not been given those keys, he could not unlock or even begin to grasp the mystery of the miracle: the tomb had to be opened by Christ and the stone rolled back by an angel; it was all becoming plain. Angels sat in the tomb, lighting it up for the women to enter and see that the One they sought was not there; but, when John and Peter went, there were no angels, no light, no one to speak to them — apostles were expected to see and believe. The light of faith was considered by God to be sufficient for them; the sign of the prophet Jonah had been given, and so had the sign of the temple.

Peter and John returned to their companions in the apostolic hideway: there all was unbelief. The atmosphere was dominated by a strange mixture of emotions, ideas and beliefs; some said one thing, some another, no one had it right, not even Peter and John, they all needed more yet, but what? The Lord knew and returned to show Himself to His men with the infallible proofs of His resurrection that they alone could verify; their training must be continued further, it was not yet finished. Their ground of knowledge and belief must be shifted from seeing and handling to hearing only, that is, from carnal knowledge to faith knowledge, from the human to the divine. It was a big transition for them, He knew, but until that happened the whole of His future plans were at risk. Those men were His and the Father's apostles; humanly

everything now depended on them, and here they were plagued by fears and doubts, victims of their own imaginations, rejecting everything they heard, refusing to believe anything they could not see with their own eyes and handle with their own hands.

Thomas is the one usually singled out and blamed for this kind of attitude, but, with perhaps the exception of John, it was equally true of all the apostles; there was very little difference between them.

Even at the empty tomb John, who might be quoted as being more perceptive and therefore thought to be more spiritual than the rest, saw and believed, so he says; he might even have handled the graveclothes as well. Wherein then was he or any of the others better than Thomas when he stated his famous preconditions for faith? He was only demanding equal privileges with his

brethren; their believing was the result of having been given proofs or evidences. At that time none of them merited the special blessing reserved for those 'who have not seen and yet have believed'. Their minds might have gone back to that supper in Bethany and the sight of Mary anointing Him in faith and love, to His burial, or to the centurion at whose words the Lord marvelled and said, 'I have not found so great faith, no not in Israel': both he and she believed to the point of conviction, and proceeded to the point of commitment on what they had not seen. They are examples of true faith and they received honourable mention. Even so all of them were living and moving in a different day from the Church era; they had a long way to go to reach the faith spoken of by Paul, which had yet. to be delivered to the Church. The weaning

process from treacherous human belief to the divine, that is, from the faith of man to the faith of God, was a long and laborious task.

The effects of the Lord's appearance among His apostles were almost ludicrous, the men were incredulous; fear and joy competed in hearts for the ascendancy, astonishment filled every mind, but not faith in anyone. 'They believed not for joy'. It seems impossible that they should rejoice to see Him and still not believe, but it was so: to Him that was a serious state of affairs. 'He upbraided them because of their unbelief' — they never had believed as they ought, and they still didn't believe, even though they had all said they did. With one voice they all affirmed Peter's statement that they believed He was the Christ, the Son of the living God. Only a few days before — less

than a week — they had said to Him 'by this we believe. 'Do you?' He had questioned, 'do you now believe?' Really?

They were between the supper room and Gethsemane when that conversation took place, and, hearing it, He broke out into prayer to His Father: 'Father ... they have known surely that I came out from thee and they have believed that thou didst send me, I pray for them'. They said they believed, so He prayed for them because He knew that although they believed they were believing on the wrong grounds; it came out of their own mouths — 'by this we believe' — by this. That was their trouble, they had to have reasons for believing, this reason or that reason: the faith of Christ had not yet come to their hearts. Theirs was a belief which rested upon human calculations, deductions from given facts, personal assessments. O

how much lay in the Lord's exhortation, 'Have the faith of God'; this faith comes from hearing the word of God alone.

The source of the apostles' trouble was themselves; their hearts had not changed. Nothing they had seen and heard and done or believed had changed them in heart; they were hard men, and the Lord told them so. He had told them fairly recently that they had continued with Him in His temptations and that rewards were granted them; they had done as well as anybody and better than most, and, though they did not know it, the end of their trainee apostleship was at hand. Before long they would be baptized in the Holy Spirit and everything would change; they would have the nature of faith then, a new heart also, and would be able to live the eternal life as they had seen it in Him. The birth from above would accomplish all the

basic changes their calling and election demanded, and He commanded them to tarry in Jerusalem for it. They would be real apostles then, with an apostle's nature as well as an apostle's call and name; they would also be fit to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, and the Lord could and would build His Church.

PART II — THE NEW APOSTLE

Chapter 20 — AN APOSTLE OF JESUS CHRIST

Introduction

Apostles are very important people. They are not important in themselves, neither can they be made important, either to God or to the Church, by men or by themselves. Unlike men who are born eunuchs, or can make themselves eunuchs, or can be made eunuchs by men, apostles have neither this birth qualification nor this ability; they are called and made apostles by God alone.

'Apostle' is a name given by Jesus Christ to a man of His selection bearing an office in His Church, but to bear that name does not of itself make a man an apostle of the Church. Surprising as it may at first appear, scripture

does not anywhere indicate that any man is, or can be, an apostle of the Church.

Whenever the title apostle is given to any man in scripture it is always used in relationship to Christ; for example, 'an apostle of Jesus Christ'. Although it was the Lord Jesus who first used the word as a title, He did not coin it, He simply took up the word, invested it with special meaning, turned it into a title denoting an office and ordained men into it. When the Lord did this the Church did not exist; He had the Church in mind, and called men with purpose of heart to build it, but as yet the Church was not in being. The title was originally given by Him to a very select band of men He chose from among the thousands who followed Him during the early period of His ministry. Those men were first and more properly called disciples, that is, 'learners', but

subsequently became known variously as 'the apostles', 'His apostles' or 'the twelve'. Although the office of apostle was an innovation among men at that time, its functional meaning was not new either to men or to God. The Old Testament is full of stories of men raised up of God and sent to their fellows with His word and to do His works. God called and sent and equipped Moses with powers as great or greater than those He gave any man, either before or since. He also made reference of Himself to Jeremiah as 'rising up early' and sending men to Israel; in this sense each of these was an apostle of God. John the Baptist, the forerunner and herald of Christ, was also a man sent by God as the apostle John tells us, but he was not known as an apostle. All of these men were God's sent ones; they were His mouthpieces to Israel and represented

Him; their lives and ministries were foundational to the spiritual life of the nation. As far as office went they were prophets and kings, in some cases priests; but, though never given the New Testament title apostle, there is little doubt that in course of their ministry they partially, if not completely, filled that role.

Confirming this basic function of the true apostolic ministry, Paul says that the Church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. It may well be that the close association of the two offices for the purpose of church-building is to point out that there is very little difference between them. All apostles are prophets, they must be; the apostolic office includes and embraces all the others. The apostle does not have a monopoly of the gifts of the Spirit, nor is he a specialist in one only: he

must be able, when need arises, to function in every way needful to that situation. The prophet on the other hand is not expected to exceed his office, though he may at times accomplish things not usually associated with that calling but with an apostle's. Certainly neither of them, apostle or prophet, or both of them together, are the chief foundation stone of the Church, for Christ is that; nevertheless the work of both apostle and prophet is foundational in the Church, next to Christ the most fundamental of all.

Quite noticeably, in all periods of history these two offices have been combined in a man without his being specially called by either name. Abraham was not called an apostle, but it was never clearer of any man that God called him and sent him to Canaan; later He said of him that he was a prophet:

consistent with this there was never a more fundamental person than he in all Israel. Moses, already referred to, was a prophet mighty in word and deed before God and man also, yet God gave neither of them the titular position of apostle or prophet. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself was never called an apostle in His lifetime, nor was He referred to as 'the prophet Jesus', yet He was the supreme manifestation and example of both offices, and prior to His crucifixion His earth ministry lay chiefly in both these offices. It was He who first used the word apostle as a title, bestowing upon selected men of His choice the title which was first bestowed upon Himself in heaven by God; significantly enough, in the epistle to the Hebrews, as mentioned earlier, it is used in combination with its companion title and office, High Priest.

When he calls Christ 'the apostle and high priest of our professions', the writer links together two ideas which, to the Hebrew mind, denote opposite extremes of thought: the apostle is a man sent out (from God to men), the high priest is one who enters in (from man unto God). Christ the Apostle was the Man sent from God to men; in this God set the pattern for all time; every true apostle is a man sent to his fellow men by God; Paul says apostles are Christ's gifts to men, they share Christ's office and represent Him. Paul very definitely knew and said that he was elected and sent by Christ personally; God uses no intermediaries in his election. It was the same with the original twelve: Christ only gave to men those who His Father had given to Him: every apostle is an apostle of God. In Christ's eyes this was the most precious thing about His apostles,

they were given to Him by God that He should give them to men: 'Thine they were and thou gavest them me', He said, speaking of them to His Father. Whatever their intrinsic worth, those men were precious to Him chiefly because His Father had chosen them for Him: He was God's, they were God's. Whatever other impression He made on them during the last hour or so of His life with them on earth, He made sure that they knew they were given to Him by God: they had to know that they were apostles of God and of Christ.

At the moment of speaking they, with Him, were approaching the greatest crisis of their lives; unknown to them, they were accompanying Him to the garden tryst with His Father and His appointment with death. When the time came they would run away, but He would go through with it — it was His

appointment, not theirs — yet. God had made the appointment for them, it was pending, but as yet neither death nor they were ready. He had said that He was going alone before them to prepare death and what lay beyond it for them, but had not yet disclosed the fact that they too needed preparing for these things. It is doubtful whether they understood very much of anything He was saying to them at that time. He did not blame them for that, they were on the wrong side of the cross to understand essential spiritual things clearly. They were also mere men; they had not been baptized in the Holy Spirit, nor did they know that they had yet to be baptized into their Lord's death and that they should be buried and planted with Him there and rise again into newness of life. The Lord knew that in their present state such things were altogether

too much for their minds to grasp, so He did not speak of them. He only unfolded truth to the apostles as they were able to bear it; the more important things were reserved for the future when the Spirit of truth should come to them from the Father; they would understand then. Besides, God had in mind to add to them another man who He had not yet called, a man who would say things like, 'to me to live is Christ and to die is gain', 'I have been crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live', a man who understood and would write much about apostleship. A man who, like his Lord, would come unto his own and not be received of them, who would be a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, yet one through whose ministry many would receive eternal life. When God did raise him up he was not at first accepted by the original apostolic band; for various

reasons they were loath to accept him. For one thing they had not chosen him, and for another, unlike them, he had been the Lord's worst enemy.

Saul, Who also is Called Paul

For fourteen years the original apostles were not fully persuaded of the genuineness of the claims of Saul of Tarsus; they had already chosen another to take the place of Judas, and, blinded by their choice, could not believe that Paul had been chosen by the Lord to be an apostle equal in status and power with them, but he was. He never had it easy and never once boasted himself above Matthias; he had no jealousy or pride in him to exalt himself above the one they chose to be the twelfth man. Quite the opposite: when writing to the Corinthians he honoured him equally with the eleven original men by including him in 'the twelve'

of whom he spoke. 'Saul who also is called Paul' was the thirteenth man — a very odd and humble man indeed. He called himself an abortive, though all he meant by that word is not explained. It could have a dispensational meaning but that is highly unlikely; it could also be a reference to the fact that he was born from above in a most unusual manner and in a quite unexpected hurry. There were no preparations for apostleship, he did not have three years of intensive training as in the case of the eleven, all was over and done in a few hours. More than likely it was a comment on his election to apostleship. As far as it is possible to tell, following the selection of Matthias which was perfectly acceptable to all, Paul was the first new apostle chosen by Jesus from among all who were being born from above since Pentecost.

Paul was called and presented by God independently of men in such a manner that his advent was a complete shock to everybody, including himself. It is not therefore surprising that in many things Paul's statements about apostles and apostleship differ from those which the other apostles made in their writings; he came into the office in rather a different way from them, and from an entirely different social and cultural background. This resulted in an approach and an understanding of a different order from theirs. Besides being inspired, his words on apostleship are also very illuminating and explicit: one of them in particular is most expressive: 'I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death'; he understood. In reality of course he was appointed unto life, but as it were unto death also. He was only

paraphrasing Christ's own words and putting them into another context: Christ said except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die it abideth alone, but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit'. Paul was interpreting the Lord's thought in terms of the lower apostolic office he held — he certainly had a way of putting things. Having made that terse statement, he proceeds further to explain to the Corinthians why he said it and what he meant by it; again his words are very trenchant and explicit: 'For we are made a spectacle unto the world and to angels and to men, we are fools for Christ's sake'. He was under no delusions as to the purpose of the apostolic calling; he was a very practical man and entertained no visions of himself being exalted to heights of fame and grandeur thereby; instead, in some strange way, he saw himself, and

indeed all apostles, as a theatre. His whole being was a stage, he felt, a kind of platform, a setting where the life of salvation was being portrayed, acted out by God. He was completely gripped by this idea, and realized he had been chosen by God for this very reason; he knew that in his life the fullest meaning of salvation and the utmost consequences of the gospel were to be enacted to the full before all: the thought thrilled him.

We should be thankful that this disclosure of the apostle's thoughts was made representatively. Indeed it would not be difficult to imagine that they had been expressed or written by any or all of the original eleven. Not one of those men could have doubted that Jesus had appointed them all to death. His oft-repeated words, 'Take up the cross and follow me', though

figurative, were plain; they understood His meaning perfectly. In those days when any man took up the cross it was his own; everyone who saw him knew he was appointed to death, it was the last public act he did. After that he was crucified — by others — and became a public exhibition and scandal: that was his final association with the cross, the cross bore him. Paul understood this and translated it into experience so really that, when writing further about this death, he said, 'I die daily'; it was a permanent daily experience with him, which is exactly what Jesus wanted. Paul knew exactly what Jesus meant and had rightly interpreted His words; it was the only way to live, indeed it was both the basis and reason for life. He found that, because of this, he could fight with the bestial natures of men, or the beastly spirits of devils in

men, whatever they were. Wherever he met them, whether they were wolves or foxes or lions or bulls or dragons or serpents: anything, anywhere, he could face and conquer them; being already dead he was more than a conqueror in every place; they simply could not slay him. Being risen with Christ he was able to live daily in the death of Christ, thus making death permanent in him by adding each day's death to the previous days of death. In order for an apostle to be an apostle there must be no resurrection of (the) self: Paul had come to an agreement with his Lord to eliminate it. He knew there was no once for all death for the self life; that old Adamic, devil related nature was crucified, dead and buried, but he had discovered that the natural part of him needed putting to death also, daily. Being born again and being able to see

himself as apart from the old Adam, he also recognized and saw himself for the first time. At last he saw 'I myself' — his person as distinct from Christ, the new Adam within him. Both he and Christ were as distinct from old Adam as it was possible to be, it was wonderful — and he knew that he had to be kept dead. This apostle knew that, as he lived on earth daily so he must die daily lest, through his natural human appetites, he again became very much alive to sin and the flesh and the world and to satan and satanic powers. By the application of this furthest extension of Christ's death to man's needs Paul was able to overcome all his own enemies as well as the enemies of the Church and of Christ and His cross.

A Spectacle to the World

This death of the cross was such a permanent feature of Paul's daily living that

he became most usable to God, He was able to use Paul most powerfully; humbly recognizing this and desiring it too the idea of the theatre was born. Taking it up, the apostle used this figure to great purpose, applying it to himself and his fellow apostles with great power, and what a figure it is. Can it be true? Can it possibly be that a man should look upon himself as a theatre and want to be one? He did. But a theatre is a non-person, a thing, a background, a room for a platform or stage; it has no personality, it is only a place where something is enacted by some person or persons playing a part. Of itself the theatre itself does not do anything; it only fulfils a purpose, indeed it is purpose built and only exists for that purpose. A theatre is inactive, lifeless, a place where other persons who live and think and speak present themselves and their message to

others. The platform does not live or move or think or speak, it is a facility only, it has no power, it has nothing to say or do; the spectacle being presented within it is what everyone wants to see and hear. A theatre has a use, but it is useless of itself, it is dumb, blind, deaf, dead. A theatre cannot even make itself, it has to be constructed by someone else in accordance with its maker's wishes and the architect's plans; it is designed to exist for their pleasure and purpose alone. A theatre may be considered a work of art and classed as an architectural masterpiece, but even to that it makes no contribution and can make no claims; it has no beauty as of itself, it is an expression of a living soul but not its own.

Primarily though a theatre is functional, it is desired, designed and created entirely by someone for someone's use. That

preliminary work accomplished, the theatre becomes a place where people gather to view a spectacle and hear a message; except that were so, there would be no reason for its existence. A theatre is a place for the display and advancement of art and culture where history and prophecy meet and past and future are joined in the present, where great personages and names are revered and their work and words treasured, almost adored. The theatre does not exist for itself but for others, always others. Except living persons are in it, it is cold and expressionless and empty, a shell only; authors, actors, audiences and technicians alone give it life and meaning and warmth and make it useful and relevant to mankind. To have fullest effect, noises other than the voices and music of the cast must not be heard; the theatre must be soundproof; nothing must

be allowed to distract or detract from the real purpose for which it is built. It must also be audio-visually perfect — people must be able to see clearly and hear correctly; they attend only to enjoy the advertised production.

This then is what Paul so plainly saw about himself and all others called apostles. He puts it so pertinently: 'Apostles', he says, 'last as it were, (we are) appointed to death'. That is a penetrating and succinct observation about the theatre, it is appointed unto death — to be dead enough for someone's use. He is really repeating to the Corinthians what he had previously said so plainly to the Galatians in a different way: 'It pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me by His grace to reveal His Son in me'. In these words the apostle presents the substance of God's

activities in the theatre — the revelation of His Son, His 'production'. Paul did not confer with flesh and blood about that, he saw quite clearly what regeneration by the Spirit is all about; from the very beginning he understood that he was the dead theatre, not the living production. God crucified him when He crucified His Son, He had to; if He wanted His Son to be revealed in Paul there was no other way. From that moment Paul only lived by the faith of Jesus Christ. He was God's theatre; as a theatre comes alive by the presence and power of the persons on the stage, so did Paul by the presence of God. God had chosen him for the direct purpose of using his person for the revelation of His Son. Paul had no objection to this, rather he rejoiced at the privilege; moreover he saw that, although it was not clear to anyone except Christ at the time,

this was the very reason why God gave his predecessors to His Son and why He called them apostles.

Men are not called apostles just because they are sent ones; God is not interested in mere definitions of words, nor is He primarily concerned with bestowing titles, or filling offices, or giving power, or distributing gifts; these all have their place in His kingdom and are necessary for that reason, but are not of paramount importance in His Church. This is the basic reason why He did not bestow the title 'apostle' on John the Baptist or others who, like him, were sent from God before him to do or preach mighty things according to His will. Other titles were bestowed on them, denoting the work they did and the office they filled and the function they had in the kingdom, but none were called apostles for the simple reason

that they were not apostles. Whatever a man is or does in. God's kingdom is by God's sovereign choice alone. No man can earn or deserve the title he is given; whatever the title is, it is bestowed by God before ever the man is saved. No man becomes an apostle, he either is or he is not according to God's choice. On earth positions and titles have to be earned, but not in God's Church. An apostle may have to win acknowledgement of it from men but not from God.

While the twelve were with Christ on earth He called them apostles, but they were apostles in name only; they were not apostles in themselves until Pentecost; it was the baptism in the Spirit that made them true apostles. Before that they really did no more, if as much, as many Old Testament prophets had done before them; indeed during the three years spent with the

Lord not one of the twelve ever prophesied, or if he did so it is not recorded that he did. We may well ask the question, why then did Christ call them apostles? It cannot be that He did so because in the strict etymological significance of the word they were at a certain time sent out by Him to their countrymen, for He also sent out seventy others and did not call them apostles although they did the same works. He obviously chose them with an eye on the future, that is, what they were going to become according to the will of God after His decease by that baptism. Concerning the first point, it should be noted that the Lord only sent them out once, and then only for a very short period and in their own country; He really chose them to be with Him as Mark says. They were little more than privileged disciples given opportunity to

serve Him and His purposes, most of which lay in the future and were as yet undisclosed to them.

Concerning the second point, a man is not an apostle because he is sent out, and certainly not because he is called an apostle by men: to be an apostle a man must be called an apostle by Christ, this is the first qualification. The second is like it, he must be indwelt by Christ who is The Apostle.

These two are the basic requirements for the office. While Christ was with His men on earth He was not dwelling in them, He was without them as both He and they were painfully aware. For about three years Judas Iscariot was as much an apostle as any other of the twelve; he was called and chosen and equipped and sent out with Peter and James and John, or any other of them, but neither he nor any other was an apostle from the

beginning as was Paul. Unlike him they were not indwelt by Christ from the beginning of their call, they were disciples called apostles, followers of Christ in the flesh; they were not crucified, dead and buried with Christ and therefore indwelt by Him, nor could they be. No man is an apostle who is not indwelt by The Apostle, any more than any man is a Christian unless he is indwelt by Christ.

Called an Apostle

In the mind of God, when a man is designed by Him to be an apostle he is called that from the beginning, that is, when the idea of the Church first formulated in God's mind. Paul was, as he said, called an apostle. Translators of his letters had some difficulty with this; trying to interpret the truth correctly they inserted the words 'to be' in the text and made it read 'called to be an

apostle', but that is not what Paul wrote; he was an apostle when he was chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. He said he was an apostle by the will of God, he was indwelt and taken over by Christ right from the beginning with this in mind. Paul was not primarily called to be an apostle, he was called because he was an apostle, although in the outworkings of life he had to become what He was called; but this same thing is true of all God's children. Even father Abraham in his day had to become what God had already made him, as Paul tells the Romans. Christ indwelt His man Paul with special purpose to make him. an apostle, he really was an apostle of Jesus Christ. What every man is in Christ, whether member, apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, teacher etc., he is such because Christ is in him in that capacity. So greatly was Paul overawed

and appreciative of God's grace to him, that he said, 'I am not meet to be ... an apostle because I persecuted the Church of God... I am the least of the apostles'; he meant it. He was a modest man, but it was not to display a measure of modesty and humility that he said so; he said it because it was true and he knew it was true. On the very day of his conversion he was sure of it; Christ gave him to understand that he had been persecuting Him, He opened their dialogue with, 'Why persecutest thou me?' The question laid bare Paul's heart and opened his eyes to see himself. From that moment onwards Paul had no delusions about himself at all; he immediately became Christ's slave.

Least of the Apostles

The fact that from the beginning he was destined to become Christ's apostle made

no difference to Paul's self-estimation; one flashing moment of revelation was sufficient to make him realize that he was nothing and less than nothing. When later he discovered his calling and office it left his reasoning unaltered, in fact it further convinced him that if he was an apostle he was the least of them. When he considered what the other apostles had gone through, their personal loyalty and love to the Lord, the suffering they had endured, much of which he himself had inflicted on them and on the churches of Christ, he felt ashamed of himself. If a group of men ever deserved to be called apostles they did, but he had done nothing to deserve the honour; he could find few points of comparison between himself and them. On the contrary he knew his attitude and actions were sufficient to have disqualified him completely from all honours

and favours from God for ever. Paul did not need persuading that all was of grace. Christ had come to live in him; that alone would have satisfied his grateful heart for ever; to be chosen an apostle was grace upon grace undeserved. All that was commendable in him was of Christ, he wanted no more or other than to be possessed by Him utterly, that He should have complete monopoly of him and bold unhindered sway in his being for ever. His desire was granted him; Paul became the theatre of God. Paul's humanity and person became Christ's, he was completely taken over by God. All the actions and works and words people saw and heard in him were Christ's; if there was anything to applaud or to praise in him it was of the Lord. 'I live no longer I, Christ liveth in me', he said with truth and triumph. 'His spirit worketh in me mightily', he

insisted, 'not I but the grace of God that was with me': people listened to him and read his words with wonder and full acknowledgement; they knew he was not one whit behind the company of acknowledged apostles, though they seemed to be among the last to accept his call. Paul was completely occupied and taken over by the Lord.

Appointed Unto Death

In Christ's mind His apostles had always been appointed unto death; unless this was so they could no more be apostles than He was the Apostle. Time and time again He had hinted at this to them and following His death and resurrection and their Pentecost they knew the reason why; Paul here expresses it: that others might live. These men embraced this; for this reason they were firmly appointed, thoroughly adjusted

and totally disposed to death. Every one of them was mentally conditioned for it and never sought to avoid it, but rejoiced that they were predestined, chosen and led to death. It appears this was understood and agreed upon in measure among the apostles even before Christ died. When He was so determined to go to Bethany all of them fell in with Thomas's suggestion that they should go with Him and die there. They did not then know the meaning and power of the cross or all that death to sin and self meant, but they loved Him. Their prognostications were unnecessarily gloomy and unfounded, but they were prepared at that time to face what appeared to them to be their last hour, and that is most commendable.

As men go, those first apostles Jesus chose were good, devoted and reliable. Theirs was

no easy lot; they found conditions of apostleship hard and their minds were carnal; their very fleshiness prevented them from recognizing what was meant by death; we all should have been the same had we been one of them. They loved the Master they could not understand, and when they first followed after Him they thought they were privileged above all others; He had called and predestined them to a most marvellous life, and in one sense they were quite right. Their minds could easily envisage Messianic glory, but they could not grasp and believe that they were predestined to the spiritual death which all that glory presupposed. At that stage of their calling they could not accept the thought of crucifixion or of what the death of the cross meant; in any case they did not know what

that implied or what could be accomplished by it.

They could comprehend discipleship in measure, and responded to apostleship in a Messianic kingdom on earth according to prevalent fleshly understanding of these things, but not crucifixion and death. Being His most important men was easy, within limits it was a delight to them. But death? No! Normal human reasoning has it that, in order to serve a man must live and that is so true, but Jesus seemed to reverse that idea. He was so different; He taught them that in order to serve God a man must die. So foreign was the idea of death to the apostles' philosophy of life and service and so repugnant was Jesus' repeated statement to them about death, that at one point Peter actually reproved Him for it. Nevertheless the truth, even though it is hurtful, is the

truth and the Lord persisted with it; 'If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters,' (whatever was He saying?) 'yea and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple'. It was shocking; He intended it to be.

Yet There is Room

He had just concluded a parable when He said it. The story was about a certain man making a great supper and bidding many to it. It was one of those sad yet happy little stories He sometimes told when depicting the hearts of men, for many, He said, refused the invitation (or was it a summons?) and sealed their doom. They excused themselves upon such trivial grounds that the master of the house was justly angry and in the end changed his attitude towards them; he turned

completely round and utterly refused to have them on his premises. Insulted, he turned from his former generosity towards them and commanded his servants to go out and bring in the poor, the maimed, the halt and the blind. Many of these underprivileged ones came as soon as they were called and he was greatly pleased by their response; but, being informed that still there was room for more, he sent the servants out with fresh instructions: 'compel them to come in', he said; he wanted his house to be filled. Although at first many had despised his invitation and were rejected by him in consequence, happily in the end he succeeded in thoroughly furnishing his house with guests as he desired. The original guests refused his generosity but his provision was not wasted; for everyone that refused there was another

willing to accept what those first foolish people had lost for ever.

It requires very little stretch of the imagination to see that the Lord intended us to grasp who the master of the house is; it is Himself; His is the house, He made the provision, He does the bidding. The feast significantly enough is a supper. The supper meal in that land served a dual purpose, it was the final meal of the past or passing day and the first meal of the coming new day; in Jewry days ended and commenced at sunset. When Christ came to this earth the Jews had a standing invitation to the feast, they were God's people, but they rejected His Christ. Their refusal to accept Him and His provisions effectively resulted in the invitation being withdrawn from them and extended to the gentiles, many of whom gladly respond to the call. It could not have

been difficult for the apostles to guess who fills the role of the servants that know the Lord's intentions and desires, and are shown to be combing the streets and the lanes for those not formerly included in the invitation. What an unlikely company is finally gathered in to what to them was an entirely unexpected feast. The abundance of the provision and the vastness of the house results in the report that 'yet there is room' for more to come. This time the search is among the highways and hedges; all who could be found must be compelled to come to the supper. So the blessed Spirit, through many servants, moves in compulsion on people's hearts to fulfil the Lord's will. His words must have seemed unusually forceful to those men listening; they were certainly left in no doubt about His intentions and perhaps also His methods: first invitation,

then bidding, then compulsion; His house was going to be filled.

Compel Them to Come In

This then was the reason why the Lord called men to forsake all and take up the cross. To serve Him properly a man, especially an apostle, must have very definite qualifications. To invite men to supper is not difficult, but to bid and if necessary compel them to come is not the easiest of tasks: of himself a man cannot do it, he needs power beyond his own. The very fact that men should need compelling to come to God's supper is evidence of itself that something is radically wrong with them. Men are their own enemies, their minds are at enmity with God; they do not know what is good for them, or if they do they will not respond to it; all men are by nature fools, the only difference between us is that some

are bigger fools than others. This was quite plain to the apostle Paul, who said of himself from another standpoint that he was a fool for Christ's sake and seemed to find extraordinary joy in the experience. He realized that all he was called for by Christ demanded that he should become a man utterly dead to self-life and self-interest. Only then, he knew, would the Master of the house have complete freedom in him and be able to use him fully for the ultimate work of compulsion if need be.

To follow his calling among men, especially among his own relatives, is not an easy task at all; already he may have offended them deeply by refusing to go their way and instead taking up the cross. Only Christ in him can do that, it is not natural in any normal man to wish to take up the cross and be dead to his own dear ones, loving them

enough to hate them in this respect as Christ said. Unless a man be dead to his own interests in his own dear ones and to their interests in him he cannot be sufficiently dead to be alive to Christ's interests in them and to bring them to the supper of the Lord; it is such a difficult thing to do. Only the Holy Ghost in him can do it. It is very often a far easier thing to win strangers to Christ than to bring one's own wife or husband or father or mother and sisters and brothers and children to that supper.

The supper of the Lord was introduced into the world for men by the Lord Himself. The Master of the house actually prepared the meal and made it ready Himself; He did not employ or make use of another to do it, the supper is entirely His own work. At the last meal He ate with His apostles in the upper room He made quite plain to them what the

supper was: 'This is my body which is broken for you ... this cup is the new testament in my blood'. It was truly a supper, for it was both the final meal of the day or dispensation of law and the first meal of the day or dispensation of grace which was about to dawn. It was the symbolic meal of the New Covenant; He said it was in His blood. It was in His body too, it had to be; it was in His flesh, for His blood was in His flesh and they all sat down and ate and drank of it together, the Lord and the small body of apostles; it was one common meal over which He presided. It was highly mystical too and primarily spiritual, for they ate bread and drank wine yet they ate and drank the body and blood of Christ. Later, when all that was in Jesus was consummated by the cross and death and by resurrection and ascension to God, when

the feast of love was fulfilled in heavenly communion between Father and Son and everything was perfected as it had always been, the apostles partook of the Spirit too, for He also was poured out to them.

The Holy Ghost has Come

He had to come of course, He is the final necessity. He is the One by whom the body and blood of the baby Jesus came. It was He who ensured that Jesus' flesh and Jesus' blood could be the flesh and blood of the Son of God. Without the Spirit, bread could not be or mean other than bread, and wine could not be or signify other than wine; only the Spirit of God in a man can create the reality of which these elements speak and make them mean something other to him than they naturally are; he who thinks other than this is deceived. This is why the final blessing of Paul, given to the Corinthians

following months of patient waiting and ministry by letter on most vital issues, was couched in these terms: 'The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Ghost be with you all'. The communion is only by and in the Spirit, it is not in bread and wine. This is why Paul said to those same Corinthians that he had personally (not traditionally note) received from the Lord and delivered to them the Lord's original request to the Original apostles in the upper room: 'This do in remembrance of me'. Paul had to lay it down as a commandment to the erring church in the same way as he had to lay down rules to them about other things over which they had gone wrong. But the commandment was not so much a command to do it as a directive to do so in remembrance of Him; apart from the Holy

Spirit that is quite impossible. The wine of true communion in the Spirit is the spiritual content of the life in the pure sinless blood of Jesus; human communion with God can only exist in that life, for it was the life of the one human being who lived all His days in unbroken communion with God. Thereby the spiritual impact of His flesh on others was also pure; His body was the means of expressing His life in flesh.

I and My Father are One

Jesus was unique, a wonderful complexity of persons and natures. He was a human being 'made of a woman', as all other humans are, but not by the same means. Begotten of the Father, He was God the Son as an individual, yet although so distinctively the Son, God the Father and God the Holy Spirit were in Him. Birth as a man was new to Him; His human spirit was kept divine by being

indwelt by and integrated with the divine Spirit, which identified Him distinctively as the Son. Besides this, He was conscious that the Father dwelt in Him, and confessed that the Father and He were one. People who observed and listened to Him were amazed to hear Him claim that the words coming out of His mouth were not really His but the Father's, and that it was not actually He but His Father who was doing the works He did. This was staggering and hardly believable to them; did He mean He was an automaton? Was He saying He had no will of His own? Hadn't He a mind of His own? Had He no power of His own? They did not understand it and never really discovered the secret; when He said such things he was speaking as the Apostle. What Jesus was saying was, 'I am a theatre, I am appointed unto death, I live yet not I, Father liveth in Me'. Apostles

are — must be — a complex of persons, a kind of theatre in which persons appear each to be themselves and to play their part and to do their works and to present a message. These must so behave and act and speak that they give an overall effect of unity and oneness. As with Christ the Apostle, so with an apostle. The degree is different and that difference is very great, but the principle is the same.

Chapter 21 — A PATTERN

By the Grace of God

Another point of significance, which should also be of great interest to all the churches, is Paul's word to Timothy concerning the importance of his (that is Paul's) position in the Church. As we have already seen he referred to himself as one who was born before the time. In his modesty he supposed he was not a whit behind the chiefest apostles when, but for his humility, he could have said that in some realms and for some things he was unique. It would be a profitable exercise for all of us to go through the New Testament and list the things in which, as far as the records go, he was the one apostle to experience them. This we will not do here, but will select an event or claim which was his alone. Perhaps the greatest

among these was the claim he made to the young man he called his son. It is greatly to his credit that he did not make the statement publicly but as it were privately. It would have been equally true had he said it publicly to one of the churches but such was his modesty he never did so. We could all learn so much from this man's conduct if we would.

Before proceeding to examine his claim, let us note that the letters he wrote to Timothy and Titus and Philemon were not written with a view to publication, whether by mouth to a church or by being included as chapters of a book. Perhaps not one of the New Testament writers ever thought that their works would be included in a book; certainly Paul's private letters were only intended for the eyes of those who received them. That they were treasured and kept

and later published as part of God's inspired word is our gain; we thank God for them and perhaps most of all for this letter to Timothy.

A little over half way through the opening chapter of his first letter to the young man he breaks out into a testimony to the exceeding grace of God in his life. Describing himself prior to his regeneration he cannot refrain from self-recrimination as many former unspecified atrocities carried out in the name of God flood into his mind. He had been a religious fanatic without equal among his contemporaries actually bent on murder and destruction when the Lord saved him. This abundance of grace he found in Christ Jesus towards him, such love and faithfulness, was a constant source of amazement to him: 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners,' he wrote, and added 'of whom I am chief'. What an insight

into this man's estimation of himself, and what an indication of the kind of thoughts that kept him so humble. Happily that was only one of his discoveries: he also said that the Lord enabled him for that which He counted him faithful and put him into the ministry, 'the glorious gospel of the blessed God' was committed to his trust; what an honour and what a gospel and what a man! In this Paul was unique among the apostles: he was given a personal revelation of the gospel, as he testifies to the Galatians; as far as we can tell no-one else, either before or since, was so privileged. But more to the point, his next claim is the one which concerns us here. He knew, presumably from the same source, that God had a further purpose for him than this. He states it in these words: 'Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ

might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting'. That was one of the most sweeping statements Paul ever made; again it makes him unique among the apostles.

Last of All

Given sober consideration it is a staggering claim, all the more so because it is absolutely true. It has never been denied or contradicted by anyone and was never modified by himself; among his fellow-apostles everybody recognized that it was true. Let every teacher and preacher of the gospel recognize its truth. God not only set forth the apostles last, in this one man He also set forth an example of His ways with men and of His calling and election to apostleship. Paul thought and said that God had set forth the apostles last, but all he

meant by that he did not make clear. We know what he said and what he did not say by those words, but beyond that it is difficult to know exactly what was in his mind when he said it. He did not say that he was the last of the apostles, but later added 'last of all He appeared unto me'. Reading this in context of the risen Christ's manifestation of Himself in human bodily form to various individuals and groups before His final ascension, it seems that Paul is claiming that Christ appeared to him in the same manner, if not the same form also; this may well be. If indeed this be true, the greatness of Paul's claim over the rest is that he saw the Lord after Pentecost, that is, more recently than the other apostles; if this be so his gospel was given in order to be complementary and confirmatory to theirs.

We also know that, though not in the same way as Paul, John the beloved saw the Lord at a later date still. The Lord came to him on Patmos, but it was not an 'appearance' as when He appeared to him with the rest of the apostles following the resurrection; on the isle the Lord came to him in a vision. The only description of the risen Lord given in scripture is the one given by John following this vision; other than that we know nothing of His appearance to the apostles. Of His appearing there is ample proof, it needs not to be discussed; what He looked like is immaterial in the main. The point is that apparently He revealed Himself in different ways at different times to different people. Paul was one of these; he was visited personally by the Lord following his birth and there is no doubt he was so visited because he was a chosen apostle. 'I am

nothing' he said (a statement ranking with his remark about himself being a theatre) and did so as part of a statement setting out his claim that in nothing was he behind the very chiefest of the apostles. He greatly disliked to speak of those things but the necessity was thrust upon him; only this kind of pressure made him reveal the fact that Christ had appeared to him. People were saying that he was not an apostle when he knew that he was. They were also saying, 'well, if he is he's not one of the chief apostles'; the inference from that is, 'as far as fundamental things go, he can be ignored'. This is why Paul advanced his claim. It was absolutely vital to the churches that they understood the gospel which had been entrusted to him; both the gospel and his apostleship had to be defended. Following His resurrection, Christ had

appeared to Peter personally, as everyone knew; to some superstitious minds this proved that Peter was the most important figure in the Church. Many believed that no one else had been granted such a personal and distinct audience and inferred from this that Peter must be the very chiefest of all the apostles, which was not true. Paul also saw the Lord. It was a personal private meeting at a more recent date too; there were witnesses of it also, which Peter could never claim.

Born Out of Due Time

As previously stated, Paul called himself an abortive. Christ had said, 'Ye must be born from above'. But Paul's was no ordinary new birth, nor was his election to apostleship according to the previous pattern either. In principle it was the same but the manner and order of it were not; he expressly says

that he was born again before he was elected an apostle, a claim which none of the others could make. His election to that select company was not according to the pattern Christ set when He chose His apostles while on earth, nor was it according to the pattern they had instituted among themselves after he left. They had chosen Matthias according to their own wisdom, using the traditional method of Jewry; they cast lots for him, asking God to confirm their choice by electing one or other of the two men they had cited. They knew positively well that they themselves had not been chosen like that; they had heard Jesus Himself say that the Father had given them to Him, yet they would not wait for anything remotely like that to happen. Without a word of commandment or any hint of instruction from the Lord they assumed that

someone should be elected to fill the gap left in their numbers by Judas' suicide and decided to cast lots to (supposedly) ascertain the will of God. Tradition dies hard; they had not yet moved out of that Old Covenant under which they had been born, they needed a new birth, the kind that Saul of Tarsus later had and into which they themselves entered at Pentecost. The disappointing thing about this sad fact is that, since His resurrection, the Lord Jesus had been regularly visiting them and not once had He breathed a word about making up their number to the original twelve. Judas went 'to his own place', Luke assures us, but it may always be doubtful among us that Matthias was put into the position the former apostle had forfeited. 'Who hath known the mind of the Lord or who has been His counsellor?' His ways are past

finding out. No one can tell Him when or why or how to do anything, but surely the Lord Himself would have replaced Judas with Matthias if it had been His will to do so. Although it may mistakenly arise, we may perhaps be forgiven the thought that the apostles' choice was an officious presumption by men and not an official election by God. Perhaps the greatest mischief arising from it may be that they set a precedent among the churches which has lasted to this day. Procedures by which men fulfil their own will may have changed, but hearts have not; presumption is not faith and bears tragic fruits.

There can be little doubt that Paul was Christ's thirteenth election to apostleship: he was elected to be the teacher of the gentiles and what a gospel he taught. Unlike Nicodemus, the teacher of the Jews, he

needed not to ask, 'how can these things be?' Being born from above as Christ said, Paul knew all about the method God employed and set it out in his writings. This man was specially raised up of God for this, and we must never forget it. By the time the Gospel accounts are finished and we reach the Acts of the Apostles only eleven of the original apostles were left. Anxious to make up their number they short-listed two men and in effect asked God to confirm their choices and cast their lots; the lot they cast had to fall on someone and whichever it was he could only be one of their choices. They asked God to pick one of the two who, in their opinion, was fit to be an apostle and should be promoted to that position; by doing this they were allowing God no alternative. The folly of it all apparently did not occur to them. They did not appear to

see that whichever way the lot fell they would without fail finish up with their own choice. God was not to be drawn into that; the Old Covenant and its ways was finished forever. There is no clearer evidence in the New Testament that those men had not yet been born of the Spirit. Sons of God would not have cast lots to know their Father's will; the indwelling Spirit tells them, that is one of the reasons why He is given. Perhaps the mistake was due to their impatience and short-sightedness, plus the strange almost obsessive idea that there must be twelve apostles, no less and no more. But even if the idea had been right they should have waited for God to choose His man and make His addition to the number, they could then have confirmed His choice and all would have been well; alas, they did not do this, but instead reversed the spiritual order.

Perhaps this found acceptance with men, but did they please God? Although it seems that none of these proceedings were according to God's will it did not frustrate His purposes; He knew how and why it had happened and did not reprove the apostles in any way. They had meant well and He had already endured their carnal ways for some three or so years, knowing that only the baptism in the Spirit could change them: they could not be different till they were made new. Why, just a few hours before His crucifixion when they were all together in the upper room their abysmal ignorance of Him wrung from Him the sad, sad question: 'Have I been so long time with you and yet hast thou not known me Philip?' Neither Philip nor any of them knew Him, therefore they did not know His ways. 'How can we know the way?' Thomas had asked.

Weak and Beggarly Elements

They should have known the way apostles are made though; they had learned that, as well as being chosen by Christ Himself, a man has to be given to Him by His Father also. God had not formed them into an apostle-selecting committee; they were not authorized to try and recognize certain men and then ask God to elect them into their company. God has not handed over that privilege and authority to anyone. Unless they thought they were a special people, unique in time, chosen by an exclusive method never to be repeated again in heaven or earth, they knew that what they did that day was a presumption based upon an assumption. Although not directly mentioning lot-casting, Paul included that practice in what he called weak and beggarly elements, it was a rudiment of the world;

soldiers cast lots for Christ's garment at the foot of the cross as He hung dying there. In His mercy and wisdom God had incorporated very many weak and carnal things into His Old Covenant with Israel; He did so because they were a carnal people, they had not received the Spirit. God had planned to pour out His Spirit upon them, as both Isaiah and Joel prophesied, but not until the great day of Pentecost, therefore He had no alternative but to adapt and move in worldly elements. Although things had changed quite a bit during Christ's ministry on earth, to a large extent it was still the same with the apostles before Pentecost. To Christ was committed the task of bringing in the spiritual things of the New Covenant, but until the Spirit came He had to superimpose them on the fleshly things of the Old Covenant which had not yet been

done away. Because of their spiritual significance the Lord chose to include in the New Covenant two ordinances involving the use of worldly elements. His wisdom in so doing cannot be questioned, but apostles should note that, these have been nothing but a source of carnal and divisive trouble ever since.

The Lord set about the elimination of carnal elements by first choosing men and enduing them with power that they should move among their fellows under His authority and in His name. Then, after He had died and risen again, He breathed on those same men (with the exclusion of Judas and Thomas) and imparted to them the Holy Spirit with further authority to remit or retain sins. Before His final ascension He followed this up by visiting them fairly frequently, joining them in meals, spending time with them,

preparing them for the future, teaching them by the Spirit the things they ought to know. However, there was yet another and most vital position into which they had to be brought, namely life in Himself; this He accomplished by incorporating them into Himself and Himself into them by baptizing them in the Spirit as John Baptist had said He would. At that time they received the life of Christ, that is, they were entirely regenerated by receiving His spirit and mind which kept them from reverting to the old carnal methods again. What they then thought about the day when they had resorted to the lot, and the results of it, is not disclosed. Matthias was numbered with them, but if he ever was an apostle and did the works and showed the signs of an apostle is not known. Like those who chose him he was chosen pre-Pentecost, but not

by the same means or by the same person;
what he became after he was regenerate we
do not know. Did he and they who chose
him regret that the lot had ever been cast?

Chapter 22 — BY THE WILL OF GOD

An Example

When Paul commenced writing to various churches, he authenticated his epistles by calling himself 'an apostle of' Jesus Christ by the will of God', or by using a phrase akin to that. To the Galatians he wrote, 'Paul, an apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead'. By this he was also stating his authority to write to them; perhaps too he was defending his position. This was certainly the case when he wrote to the Corinthians. But was he also protesting against the carnal method employed by his fellow apostles in the matter of' Matthias? If so, bearing in mind what he wrote to Timothy, a third point emerges. Possibly Paul was laying down the first law and only true

basis of apostleship for the whole of this dispensation. Without acrimony and entirely without malice also, in faithfulness to the apostles and for everybody's safety, he is insisting that, since the coming of the Holy Spirit, apostles must be chosen by the risen Jesus Christ and God the Father alone. This is so obviously true that it ought to be accepted by all without exception. No men, even if they are apostles, have any say whatsoever in the election of apostles; it is done entirely by God.

Paul knew the attitude of the apostles at Jerusalem towards him; they were very wary of him at first. He understood that perfectly, they were quite right to be cautious of him; he was equally cautious of them; no one can accuse him of trying to curry favour with them. He did not even present or commend himself to them for over a decade following

his conversion and election. He did not go up to Jerusalem to confer with them, nor did he think he ought to submit himself to them or work with them or serve them in any way. Whether or not people may have been surprised by that, or think it would have been better if he had done so, or if some argued that it would have shown love and humility if he had done this, was immaterial to him. Quite probably it never crossed his mind to do so; he was not highhanded or disrespectful, but simply got on with the job for which he was called. People at Jerusalem had nothing to do with his election; in fact they must have thought it about the unlikeliest thing that would ever be; but there is evidence that he longed to be accepted by them and wished that things could have been different. Whether the apostles were piqued with him at first is not

revealed; in such grave matters caution is always commendable if it is not another name for prejudice. It would be quite wrong to impute unworthy motives to them, and to speak wrongly of others, especially our betters, is sin; but to read Paul's writings is to become aware, (indeed it is distinctly noticeable), that in some quarters among the churches, if not among the apostles, Paul had to fight for recognition of his office.

All this adds significance to Paul's claim to Timothy, his spiritual son, that God had set him forth as a pattern to all men for the rest of the Church age. Every man who believes on Jesus Christ must take Paul as his example; we may not take any man we choose, or select some other great person as God's pattern-man for us. Reading the Acts of the Apostles (both before and after Pentecost) and Paul's epistles, it is easy to

see why. Whether it be conversion or regeneration or election to the apostolate, Paul is the pattern-man. When stating his claim he is very careful to select a word meaning under-pattern. He does not attempt to usurp Christ's unique position, but neither does he. minimise his own; humbly but unequivocally he states his own. Things that happened prior to Pentecost in the lives of those who were apostles before Paul, wonderful as some of them were, were pre-Christian, therefore at that time they were sub-Christian men and their lives and conversions were not exemplary and must not be copied. Christ called them disciples and apostles and friends; it was true, but He did not call them Christians because they were not Christians. The name Christian was a later introduction, it came into use after Paul arrived on the Church scene preaching

his gospel; the Lord gave the name 'Christian' to the church at Antioch by divine revelation. From there it passed into general use and is now the most common name for Christ's people throughout the world.

The name Christian should be understood to mean 'Christ's one' a person belonging to Christ and, by extension, a person bought by Christ or owned by Christ; more than that, by intention of God the word Christian means 'Christ in a man'. The reason the Lord never called the apostles Christians before Pentecost was that until then it was not true of them; He was not in them. They were His by gift from His Father and by His own personal choice, but not yet His by redemption or by purchase, nor yet by possession or by reason of occupation. Unlike them, Christ's life was manifested in Paul almost immediately from the moment

he was called; this is why he is set forth as the example. Those who were apostles before him are not to be taken as typical examples of God's salvation for this age; they did not become regenerate until three years or so after their initial conversion to Jesus Christ; in this their example should not be followed. They needed a series of conversions before they knew Christ was within them, they did not even know the Christ who was without them, so He said. Those of them who were inspired to write about themselves for God's book knew better than to commend their experience as being that which God wanted for any man. Not so with Paul though, he was specially raised up of God to be the person all men should take as an example throughout this entire age of grace. To miss this point is to

leave the door wide open for error and make allowance for sub-Christian experience.

Followers of me

Further proof of Paul's uniqueness in this thing is that no one else but he among those early apostles makes so bold as to say 'be ye followers of me'. Most probably they would not have dared. What an amazing statement that is! Knowing the inferences that could be drawn from his statement, Paul adds, 'even as I also am of Christ'. Remembering their own former fickleness none of the other apostles could have written like that; their following had been far from perfect, but how boldly Paul speaks; he could. As well as being typical of the man it is a testimony to his positive assurance and proper self-assessment. It is an extraordinary command (for command it is); he is really telling people to imitate him — 'be ye imitators of

me'. He is not asking people to leave all and follow him as people literally left all and followed Christ around Palestine; Paul did not mean that he was seeking disciples for himself, he disciplined men to Christ. The imitation he was attempting to secure from his readers was by example; he was an imitator of Christ, who as a man was Himself an imitator of God His Father. Christ said of Himself that He could only do what He saw the Father do and it is written of Him that He was led of the Spirit: He followed, He imitated. Paul was saying 'this is what I do; you do the same, imitate me, follow my example in this'. He was really confirming the fact that he was their example and ensample. He was an ordinary man; Jesus was not. As the New Testament unfolds the word disciple, with its idea of follower/learner, is purposely phased out by

the Holy Spirit. As if by common consent those who wrote the later books of the New Testament deliberately omit it from their works, for although it appears in profusion in the Gospels it occurs scarcely anywhere else in the whole Bible. Luke, who wrote two books of the Bible, uses the word frequently in his first work, the Gospel bearing his name; he also uses it, but much more sparsely, in the opening chapters of the second book he wrote, the Acts of the Apostles. Before he lays down his pen, about two thirds of the way through, the word disciple disappears altogether from the book of Acts and thus from the entire Bible. Seemingly, before any of the epistles were written, the word had dropped out of the Church's vocabulary completely, for it is not to be found in any of the epistles of Paul, or James, or Peter, or John, or in the book of

the Revelation of Jesus Christ; He did not use it. True to His word He refused to refer to His men as disciples again from the moment He declared them friends. Luke was not an original apostle and there is no certain evidence that he subsequently became one: it appears he was a Greek convert who became a biographer of Christ, a travelling companion of Paul and the historian of the Church. He not only recorded the life, acts and facts of Christ, he also reflected the language and terminology of the apostles, who apparently ceased using the word disciple at a fairly early stage of spiritual understanding and church development, therefore he did so too.

The element of danger implicit in the word was not unrecognized by the Holy Spirit and the apostles, indeed by all who were raised up of God to further the record of the New

Testament. It is not that words themselves have any power, but that except in the realm of the suggestion and distinction of ideas they have little significance; this is especially so in the preaching of the gospel. Paul says, 'the gospel of Christ ... is the power of God unto salvation'. Words, to accomplish what people understand by them, must be accompanied by power; of themselves they can enlighten the mind, but without the power they are empty and can be misleading. Those pioneers knew that all too readily men attach their own ideas and meanings to words; they also know that some men become disciples of another man because they are 'devotees of their own convictions' and not of Christ. Therefore, most likely to avoid error latent in men's minds, the Holy Spirit dropped the use of

the word 'disciple' altogether in favour of the word 'saint', meaning 'holy one'.

It is mostly Paul who uses the word saint. Peter refers to 'strangers', 'pilgrims', 'sojourners'; John wrote of 'children', 'sons of God', 'young men', 'fathers', and James frankly addresses the twelve tribes. All four use the ideas implicit in the names they introduced, but generally each follows the particular line of expression suited to his special commission and distinctive message; they did not copy each other. This is only to be expected and is very praiseworthy, but, even among such great men, Paul is outstandingly different. Above all his contemporaries and fellow-apostles the man was a message in himself; he and they knew this — it is the reason why he alone is found saying, 'Be ye therefore imitators of me even as I am of Christ'. Nor was this singular

statement to the Ephesians an isolated instance of his apostolic counsel; in one of his letters to Timothy, who he sent to Ephesus on his behalf, he went much further than this even. To this young man Paul wrote explicitly of himself that he was the pattern for all men who should afterwards believe on Jesus Christ.

Paul knew the testimonies of all the other apostles, he knew their experiences and how they became disciples of Jesus of Nazareth; he also knew that they could not possibly be the pattern for everyone to follow; he realized that God had specially raised him up to be that. The things that had happened to him were in principle the true pattern of God's dealings with all men in this age. Those twelve men were called in the closing days of a dying age; none of them knew, nor at the time could know, what

regeneration was; their actions and behaviour therefore cannot be taken as the pattern for all men in the same way or to the same extent as Paul's. He was called in the new age and therefore straight into regeneration, and although events and circumstances may differ and almost be unique to every man, God still uses the principles of the method He used with Paul; they do not change. Paul was not seeking to make himself better than the others, he was simply stating the truth.

The meekest of Men.

Moses once wrote of himself that he was the meekest man on all the earth; it was a tremendous claim but it was not idle boasting, he wrote it because it was true: he was meek enough in the hands of the Spirit to write it, and so it was with Paul. He could write of himself that he was a pattern, the

first of many, the prototype of millions of fellow human beings yet to follow. All those other mighty men were great in their day and great and many are the lessons we all may learn from their lives and teachings, but they are not the pattern set forth by Christ for this age. The reason for this distinction is very simple: the records show that in their beginnings their lives were defective; they did not show forth the way of eternal life as truly as the Lord wants it to be revealed. This was quite unavoidable of course, in the nature of things it could not have been otherwise; Christ did not blame them for this, it was not their fault. Nevertheless, for this reason, they could not be the perfect example of the salvation He wished to reveal unto all mankind; but, as we have seen, in Saul of Tarsus He found a man through whom He could do this.

'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am chief, wrote Paul. Neither Peter nor John wrote that or anything like it, neither did any other contributor to the New Testament. They may have thought it of themselves and perhaps said so too, but the fact remains that none of them said so in writing: Paul did, he heralded it forth. And not only that, he also said he was the least of the apostles and the least of all saints; no man could think or write lowlier things of himself. Far from self-exaltation, this man was, by his own designation, the least of all God's children who described themselves in scripture (except perhaps David, who said of himself, 'I am a worm and no man'. This he said by the Spirit who, through him, was speaking prophetically of Christ, the rejected King, the great Pattern-Man for all men, for all time).

Paul, with his vast knowledge of scripture, would have known that; perhaps this is why he followed up his claim to be the under-pattern with the words, 'Now unto the king eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God be honour and glory for ever and ever, Amen'. The apostle wanted no glory and honour for himself, all must go to God, the King eternal.

When Christ Jesus came into the world, He came as the promised Messiah in the fulness of time, everything about Him was perfect; but, as before noted, Paul wrote of himself that he was an abortive, born before the due time. He was speaking of his new birth of course, not of his natural birth, which presumably was as natural as anyone else's. To the Galatians he refers to this as being separated from his mother's womb and makes reference to his second birth as

having been 'called by His grace to reveal His Son in me'. His conversion and regeneration, already referred to, were so sudden and dramatic that, upon consideration, he could only liken his experience to an abortion. One moment he was riding along the road and all was well, the next minute he was blinded by a tremendous light, thrown to the ground, named personally from heaven and challenged by Jesus for persecuting Him. It was utterly bewildering and totally new.

The Lord had never done such a thing before. There was not one among all the other apostles who had been so treated by the Lord. Perhaps the nearest thing to it was Matthew's call and his immediate response, 'he rose up, left all and followed Him', but it was not nearly as dramatic as Paul's conversion. All the Lord's first apostles were chosen from among His followers; they had

each been disciples of Jesus for some while before being placed in office. Being selected they became known as chosen servants of the Lord, absorbing His teachings, going on missions, preaching, baptizing, doing all He asked. They knew His mother, talked with His brethren, found out all about Him, left all for His sake and were faithful to Him for three or more years until He died. They witnessed His arrest and trial and crucifixion, entered His empty tomb when He rose from the dead, followed Him to Olivet and saw Him ascend to heaven. They were convinced 'by many infallible proofs', and finally they were born from above when the Spirit came at Pentecost: they were founder members of the Church. Paul neither witnessed nor experienced any of these things.

According to John those earliest apostles witnessed and heard many many more

things, so varied and great, that they could not possibly be published in their entirety; there were sufficient to make them the envy of all men, but their very privileges were the reason they could not be true under-patterns for their less privileged fellow creatures. They were called by Jesus to live with Him through an interim period of time in which He should take away the first covenant and establish the second.

Dispensationally they lived through the final stage of the Old Covenant and the introduction of the New Covenant; how then could their experiences be patterns to others who could neither know those experiences or live in that time? The things they saw and heard and experienced were unique, they could never be granted to others and will never be repeated on this earth. Those twelve men were privileged

above all men to live exclusively with Christ through that little age within the ages. But not so Paul; his experience was the classic demonstration and epitome of the new birth into the new age then unfolding.

There were other great apostles also in the early Church, Barnabas and Apollos, to name but two, but little or nothing is known of their conversions. Both were important men but neither of them were patterns of salvation in the way Paul was. As already commented, though preceded by the goadings of which the Lord spoke, Paul's birth into the kingdom was swift and sudden and without any previous preparation. His conversion was a marvellous demonstration of power from on high, containing all the elements of the gospel he so soon afterwards embraced and effectively preached. Those may be summarized quite

easily: (1) he saw the light; (2) he heard the voice calling his name; (3) he fell to the earth; (4) he made his response; (5) he discovered who Jesus was; (6) he accepted His authority; (7) he was led to a street called Straight in Damascus; (8) he prayed and fasted for three days; (9) he was baptized in the Spirit and then in water; (10) he straightway commenced preaching Christ.

The End of All Things

Right from the beginning Paul knew the truth that sets men free. Much that had already become tradition among the earliest apostles was reversed in his experience; perhaps he could rightly be called the apostle of the emancipation. Things which had become accepted as truth and were being preached as doctrine and fast becoming 'law' in the church were shown to

be false; his conversion was new. But not only was his conversion new, the 'order' of his baptism was new also. Unlike the first apostles, he was baptized in the Spirit before he was baptized in water; that was revolutionary and quite the opposite to what Peter preached on the day of Pentecost. Almost everything of 'order' and 'practice' was changed by this man. Whereas with them the call to office came before regeneration, it was not so with him; likewise with everything to do with the cross — with them it came after three years — Paul commenced there; spiritually he went straight into the death that was the death of death wherein he engineered and spread death. At the time he was Saul of Tarsus, hater of Christ, murderer of Stephen, persecutor of saints; when Christ had dealt with him he was Paul of nowhere and

everywhere. This was the man who became a slave of Christ Jesus, called an apostle, that is all, but it was all. The Lord smote him to the dust, blinded him, had him led to a place where He intended to straighten him out, and left him there praying and fasting. That street called Straight became to Saul the narrow way to life; to him it was as the narrow tomb, the one and only direct road to new life for all men. The Lord slew Saul outside the city and buried him for three days within it to await a resurrection into newness of life and the whole wide world of men.

Nothing could be plainer. Neither could it be more plainly demonstrated to the open mind that Paul's resurrection was by the baptism in the Spirit; nor could it be more convincingly displayed that, by that experience, the man was raised from

blindness to sight, from darkness to light, from death to life. Old man Saul was slain and new man Paul was born as a result. It all happened at once; the proud Pharisee, the enemy of Christ, the epitome of satan, the serpent of Eden, the dragon of Jerusalem, the scourge of the Church, disappeared; in his place the humble saint, the friend and brother of Christ, the revelation of Jesus, a lamb of God, the founder and promoter of churches appeared. It was a miracle far exceeding all the experiences of the former apostles; Paul's experience, not theirs, is the example and pattern of the birth of the sons of God. From them, their spiritual experiences, pilgrimage and testimonies we may all learn much, but in His wisdom God selected none of them to be the pattern, under His Son, of the birth of sons and of apostolic perfection.

Years later, very near the end of his long life of service for his Lord, Paul wrote to his dear Philippians and in few words indicated the kind of thoughts that went through his mind and the exercises of his heart while lying in that 'straight tomb'. 'What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung'; in the preceding verses he lists some of those things he now counted as fit only for dogs. Lying there, at last seeing everything in truest possible perspective, he took stock of his life before the Lord, weighed up the differences and made his eternal decision. He determined to get to know this Lord. For the past three or four years he had lived a life of continuous

opposition and offence to Christ; now he was going to win Him, get into Him, into His heart, His mind, His ways, His Spirit, His pains, His death, His resurrection, everything that was possible for a man to be and do and have.

Paul was like that, he was absolutely determined to know the full power of God. At first he could have thought it was the power of the mighty baptism in the Spirit, for he had been raised up out from death by it, and truth to tell it was the beginning of it all; but wonderful as that was it was only a foretaste, an experience, one event in a lifetime. He hungered for more; he wanted to know what was the secret power of that resurrection, how it was possible for Christ to attain to rising from the dead. How did he do it? He wrote of this often and thought of it more; how was it that He could rise from

the dead when no one else had been able to do so? The spiritual quest drove him on. To the Romans he wrote 'Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father', and in slightly different words told the Ephesians the same; but why should He be raised from the dead by the Father's glory? How could it be? Wonderful though the Father's glory is, full of resurrection power and vital to the occasion, Jesus had said of Himself that He would rise again: first He said that His Father would raise Him, then He said that He would raise Himself. How could it be? Why should He be so sure of resurrection and why the duality of it? With his utter single-mindedness and devotion to Christ Paul soon found out: Christ was able to rise from the dead because of His own righteousness as well as by the Father's power.

One of the astonishing things about Saul of Tarsus was his claim to perfect righteousness. He was righteous before ever he knew Christ; he knew he was and said so: 'as touching the righteousness that was in the law blameless', he said of himself and he was not the only one able to make the claim. Throughout Jewish history and even earlier there had been righteous men on earth, and God had borne testimony to the fact. Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, to name but a few: these and many others were righteous in their day, but they had lived and died and their bodies had remained dead. Wherein then lay the secret of Jesus of Nazareth that He should be able to say with confidence, 'Destroy this body and in three days I will raise it again'? His righteousness must have far exceeded the righteousness of every former saint of God; certainly, Paul thought,

it absolutely outstripped all his own past concepts of the virtue; it was a new righteousness altogether. So utterly new and great was this righteousness that once having seen and tasted of it he wanted no more of his own righteousness, he only wanted Christ's.

The Righteousness of God

Paul came to see that the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ included, perfected and transcended the righteousness of all others and he did not want his own or anyone else's righteousness. His own had been the righteousness of the law; the righteousness of Abel and Enoch and Noah and Abraham and Sarah, being pre-law, was by faith, but he saw that, though wonderful, it was partial. He wanted completeness, Christ's own personal righteousness — the true, original righteousness of faith. Nothing

could satisfy Paul but the righteousness of the God-Man and he wanted it direct not second hand. He wanted to be in Christ in conscious experience in everyday life, and know faith and righteousness as Christ knew it within Himself: this, Paul knew, was the secret power of Christ's resurrection.

All the early apostles knew it too, it rings through Peter's thrilling words on the day of Pentecost when he spoke of Christ, 'Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death because it was not possible that he should be holden of it'. Jesus was so righteous that death could not possibly hold Him; righteousness was the power of the resurrection because righteousness is the basis of incorruption and therefore of eternal life, a life impossible to corrupt. Christ was born righteous, there was no sin in Him at His birth; this was the basis of the

sinless life He enjoyed on earth. But He knew that He had to live righteously before God and man all the time He was here: like everyone else He had to work out His own salvation. Because He did this to perfection, when at last He laid down His life for us the salvation that was in Him was made available to all mankind.

Paul's great driving ambition was not just to be righteous though. To him righteousness was something far greater than being made righteous by imputation through faith, like Abraham. He needed that initially, as do we all, and in common with all men he also needed that righteousness to be imparted to him so that it could become his nature. But he realized that, though so great and necessary, it was only a beginning; from then onwards he had to live a life of righteousness and do works of

righteousness. This he accepted without reservation and succeeded at it more than most of his contemporaries; but his devoted soul could not rest there even, he loved his Lord so much. Realizing the purpose of God in making him righteous, he said that all this was done so that he could be found in Christ having the righteousness of God. The possibilities granted him by that privilege were so great that he set out wholeheartedly to reach the mark God had set for him to reach; he pressed towards it, he said. Likewise God has set a mark for every one of us to reach.

At first light no one sees it; Paul himself did not see it when that light first struck him, but as it increased he saw it all clearly, and once seeing it he never let it out of his sight; tenaciously he set his soul to attain to it. The pursuit never wavered, nor did his

determination slacken. Consequently the light never grew dim in him but increased more and more unto the perfect day. His reward was that he saw clearly what the prize of the high calling of God in Christ really was and understood it; the mark set by God for His Son was set by Him in turn for each of God's sons: the mark for the prize was the death of the cross. From the moment he realized this Paul made it his aim; everything he wanted lay beyond it, and the prize for everyone who reached it was to know the power of Christ's resurrection. When Christ came into the world He came as the resurrection and the life, He brought it in; but, having come into humanity, He had brought it into a new element, He had to attain unto the resurrection of the dead as a man. The apostle's vision stabilized on this, his heart

was fixed. At new birth resurrection and life came into him; he was of it but he knew also that he had to attain to it just like his Lord, and that in order to do so he must be made conformable unto His death. By nature Paul was the type of man who must achieve the highest. It was not that he wished to be better than everyone else, he wished to be the best he could be that is all; whatever he did he did it with all his might. It had always been like that with him, whichever course he took he always pressed along it all the way with all his strength to the end, confident that he would eventually reach his goal.

His testimony, given at various times in different parts in verbal or written form, reveals the kind of person he was. At one time he called himself a Pharisee of the Pharisees; 'exceedingly zealous', is another of his self-descriptive phrases. To piece

together his self-deprecating testimony and the testimonies of others about him is to discover an exceptional soul indeed: he was a most remarkable man. Salvation did nothing to lessen his zeal, it corrected it; formerly it had been misplaced, that was all; being born from on high he gave his powers as completely to Christ as he had given them in the past to the devil. The Lord had totally redeemed him, he acknowledged it and kept nothing back from his Redeemer; he had never been one for half measures. As he had both reached the top and had gone further than his contemporaries in Judaism, so would he do in Christianity. The good news is that the top prize is open to all who will go for it, there is no competition; in attaining to the reward we do not deprive anyone else of the opportunity to gain it. But because there is no competition it is not to be thought that

there is no opposition, there is, very much, very much indeed.

For Me to Live is Christ

Before a man can begin to attain to anything of high degree in Christ he must realize that he is expected to work out his own salvation in his own life just as Paul and Christ did in theirs. Because Christ did that, His own personal salvation became our redemption by the cross, and thereby became salvation for others. Our salvation is nothing other than the result of Christ working out from Himself the inward spiritual and soul states of His manhood right to the final moment of earthly life on the cross where, at the last, He poured out the life blood of His body also. That same salvation is evidently in us when, in course of daily living, we also are able to work out from ourselves soul-states comparable to His. That being first

understood, a second equally important truth must also be thoroughly grasped, namely, 'for to me to live is Christ and to die is gain'. This is a basic principle of eternal life and absolutely vital to achieving the prize. The verse is set by Paul in context of physical life and death; it could be set there because it is everlasting truth. The principle involved here is unvarying because it is of itself invariable, whether in terms of earthly life in the body of man's flesh or in the spiritual life in man's soul, or indeed in the life of pure spirit, even in God Himself, it cannot change. It requires very little thought to understand that, to a man living Christ in the flesh, as Paul says he did, on this earth, physical death can be nothing but gain. Death gives such a man entrance to God's glorious presence. Paul is using this principle in this sense here, but his statement is only an

application to his circumstances of a long understood reality; he had done some deep thinking and was stating his conclusion. 'To me', he says, '(I want you to know that I have weighed it all up) to die is gain'. In principle he had already proved it, the life he lived he had achieved through death. Before any man can live the Christ life he must know the Christ's death, he must 'be made conformable unto His death'. The death of Christ must be made effective in us before we can live Christ. Each of us must fully grasp this truth and be able to say, 'Yes, Paul, as to you to live was Christ, so it is to me; I think about it as you do, I have learned that to die is gain'. Paul learned this from Christ Himself by the Holy Spirit; he actually learned to think like Christ; so must we all. Unless a man learns to think like the Lord he will never be like Him. Once the great

spiritual birth has taken place the equally important mental change must take place or the life will not change. The fundamental change is part of the regenerating process. Regeneration changes the spirit and thereby the nature of the mind, which in turn governs the disposition of the mind, changing it from wanting to sin to wanting to please God and finding in itself the ability to do so because its nature has been changed. From then on the content of the mind is a most important factor in the development of life; this plays such an important part that it is simply not possible to exaggerate it. It is utterly impossible to alter a man unless his thinking is changed. Christ Himself knew this about His own self and said, 'as a man thinketh in his heart so is he'. Every man's mind must therefore be changed from the mind of his own self to the mind of Christ.

This is accomplished by the unifying and blending of the two minds so that identical thoughts, words and actions seal the assertion 'for me to live is Christ'. This is what Paul discovered in himself, the mind of Christ was 'to die is gain', so was Paul's; this is what made Him so different among men. No man can be an apostle who does not manifest this in his life and make it imperative in his preaching. This is the very heart of apostolic teaching; if the heart be lacking the talking is empty, treacherous and false.

Chapter 23 — TO DIE IS GAIN

Willing to Die

These were the things the former apostles had to learn. To their utter amazement the twelve apostles heard from His own lips that their Lord was actually living to die. They couldn't believe it at first and tried to change His mind and sought to turn Him from it, it was so unnatural; but this they found could not be done, His mind seemed fixed on it. At first He talked about being killed, later He said He would be scourged and slain, then He spoke of being betrayed to sinners, then again of being crucified (lifted up) and finally of dying. Perhaps to them all these statements may have appeared to be the same, but not so to Him or to the spiritual mind. They are all about the same event, but they are not the same; killed, slain, crucified,

these things are what men did to Him, but the final thing He did Himself. His death was voluntary; to the former He voluntarily submitted, but to death He never submitted. He conquered death, all the forms and powers of it, and then dismissed His spirit from His body because, in the plan of God, He had to die in order to rise again for the sake of men.

Men tried to make Him die, they tried their hardest and did their worst, but they could not accomplish it; He died Himself, His death was an accomplishment, a glorious exodus. When soldiers came back to try and kill Him by hastening death by shock, as they thought, they found He had died already. They killed the two thieves, but not Him; that no man could do, He died voluntarily, offering Himself without spot to God. That is why He came; to Him and to God death was

gain, all gain, sheer glory. What preceded it at men's hands was not glorious, but that moment of dying was glory, sweetest victory, His greatest triumph. The death of the cross was the most wonderful miracle He ever accomplished: it was the application of an eternal principle to God's deepest desires and man's greatest need, it was perfection outworked to greatest degree. Christ died. The cross of the death was pain and shame to Him, but He made the death of the cross glory and perfection to us because it was that and so much more than that to Him.

The Servant of All

Paul saw this so very clearly, he could because he had developed that same mind of Christ in himself; he thought about things exactly as Christ had always viewed it in eternity from before the beginning of time. That is why Paul, when about to unfold the

way to highest exaltation and show the way Christ reached it, said, 'Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus'.

Everything commenced in the mind of God; Christ was exalted by God above all others because, though in the form of God, He did not think He should reach out and try to catch hold of and hang on to equality with God. He did not think like that, He just was not like that, instead He quite deliberately emptied Himself and took on the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of men. Being found in that fashion He continued the process already begun, and, humbling Himself still further as His earthly life progressed, became absolutely obedient in everything, until in the end He found no difficulty in obeying unto the death of the cross. Everything was unto death, He knew death was the reason for it all, He had to die,

death was something He had to do, something to accomplish — a new death. This death became the death for God, ousting and replacing the death of sin which for so long had so reigned over men that every man was born in it. When the moment of death arrived for Jesus He was absolutely fitted for it; since then it has been the desire of every one of God's children to live that same life.

'Even the death of the cross'; God made Him in the likeness of men because He was able to, and God also has highly exalted Him because He was righteously able to. God does things because He is able to do them; He does them because He has the power to do them and also because it is right to do them, that is, because all righteousness has been fulfilled. The death of the cross did exactly that, it fulfilled all righteousness, and

so did the resurrection. Jesus was so absolutely righteous that He was righteous enough to die, to rise again, to be exalted in consequence, and to be given a name which is above every name. Whatever that new name is we are not told, very probably it is the same one to which John alludes, saying that only the Lord knows it. But we know the reason why it has been given Him; His Father has given Him an additional name so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

What was Jesus' secret? How could He do such a thing? How could He stoop so low and be exalted so high? Paul set himself to discover that secret, and having done so he knew the answer: Jesus could do it because of the kind of mind He had; being in the form of God His mind was already formed.

Wonderful as it was to be God He obviously would not think it was a great thing to be equal with God. Why reach out to be what you already are? A man, because he is a man, does not think manhood is something yet to be grasped after: he is a man, why reach out for something he already is? Even so with Jesus, being God He did not think it marvellous to be God, He could not reach out to be who He was or to become anything higher than He was; He could reach out to become something lower though, and this He did. He thought He should become a man, a servant of God and man, and while still God He poured His mind into that mould. He had a servant mentality, which prompted Him to be born of a virgin in a manger. He did not think He was being humble, it was natural to Him; thought and disposition and action were one in Him, He

found no difficulty in this. The particular miracle of being born a human was not difficult for Him; nothing was too difficult or beyond the power of God.

The Lord Jesus took upon Him the form of a servant long before he became a human being, He did not need to change in that area; servitude was not new to Him, He only changed form, not function. He did so that He might take up another form of service, the most vital service He had ever rendered or could render to His Father, namely to die the death of the cross, that was all; He became man to do this. It was terrible and wonderful, possible to Him only because He had formed the cross mentality in Himself. Jesus thought the cross; He mastered the cross because He had the mind of the cross; it was the only way He could possibly endure the cross when He came to it. He mastered

it in His mind before He left heaven, this is why and how it was the mind of His spirit on earth when He became a man. Paul had discovered this great secret of Christ's, it became the mind of the apostle; it must be the mind of every apostle, and he wanted every other believer to discover it too; unless Paul had found it he could not have accomplished what he did. In the steps of his Lord and in his measure Paul emptied himself and took upon himself the form of a servant, and being in the likeness of men he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. This man does not make these claims about himself, he was far too humble for that; but who can read the statements he makes about himself and not find a remarkable parallel between his spiritual life and experience and Christ's? Earlier he says, 'look not every man on his

own things, but every man on the things of others', and from this exhortation passes on to his wonderful sevenfold declaration of Christ's glorious progress to highest exaltation:

1. Paul was equal with his peers, in his own set there was none higher than he, he had nothing to reach out after; in the Jews' religion he was perfect.
2. Paul also emptied himself; he did not divest himself of his manhood and humanity; like Christ he retained his original essential being and identity. What things were gain to him he counted loss, and suffered the loss of all things.
3. Paul also took upon himself the form of a servant, 'I made myself servant to all that I might gain the more' (for God). He was a prince among the apostles, perhaps the very

chief, but he became a servant and 'laboured more abundantly than them all'. He did so quite voluntarily as did Jesus, yet (as with his Lord), though necessity was laid upon him, he did this thing willingly and there was reward for it.

4. Paul was among the chief of the apostles but he never thought about that or himself above what he ought, and was made in the likeness of men; 'Be as I am for I am as ye are,' he said, and 'Sirs, we also are men of like passions with you'.

5. Paul was found in fashion as a man among them, not a god, and he told the Corinthians not to let anyone think of him above what he was seen and heard to be by them. He sought no unproved position or honours among men.

6. Paul truly humbled himself; so lowly did he become that he knew nothing by himself; if ever he did attempt to speak unaided, as by or from his own understanding, he said so.

7. Paul once said, 'I have no commandment from the Lord,' and revealed how completely he was under obedience to Christ. 'I speak this by permission, not of commandment', was his honest statement on certain issues. Paul was an obedient man, as far as is possible to discover he was utterly obedient, unquestioningly so, and his obedience was constant, like Christ's it was unto death. 'The time of my departure is at hand', he once wrote to Timothy, 'I have finished my course'. At his death he had completed the 'Course in Christ-likeness' set by God and offered by Him to all His sons, that before they leave this earth they may

be able to complete their education in sonship.

Unlike Peter his fellow-apostle, Paul was not crucified as Jesus was, he did not undergo quite the same physical torture as his Lord, but with Him he knew the secret and power of death in a way known to few others. He died the death that Christ made available for him by the cross; he did not end his physical life thereby, he died at the very beginning of his spiritual life, and what began then he maintained all through his life in the flesh. 'I am crucified with Christ', he said, 'nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not frustrate the grace of God'. He saw that unless he knew permanent death to sin and self, leading to the constant life of Christ in

himself,. God's grace to him and His purposes with him thereby would be frustrated; he would be useless to God, to himself and to others, and would die an absolutely frustrated man.

All the basic requirements and conditions necessary for this life were wrought in Paul during that first encounter on the Damascus road and in the city. At the time he hardly knew what was happening to him, but in retrospect he saw it all so plainly. He was dashed to the ground, cast down to the dust, taken back to man's primitive state; he was of the earth earthy: God reduced him to His original creative material; he heard the creative voice, he saw primeval light: he was a serpent. He knew he belonged to the generation of vipers damned to hell for his destruction of men: he realized that, of His everlasting mercy, from that dust God was

going to make (create) a new man of him. All former light was blinded out of him, superseded by the Light of the glory of God in Christ, blacking him out from the knowledge of the light of this world; he saw that the light in him, in which he had been walking, was darkness.

By nature he was the sinner, the man Adam of his day; in spirit he was the progeny of the serpent satan, a combination of devil and man, an angel of light like Lucifer himself, a minister of false righteousness, the embodiment of sin and anti-Christ by disposition. O how he thanked God that he had found mercy; what if the Lord Jesus had never wanted him? The thought was like a nightmare to him. Three days of inward pain, buried out of sight, as it were physically dead — unable to eat, unable to drink, unable to sleep, praying while Christ

preached to his imprisoned spirit in the heart of the earth (his body). He too had been disobedient in the days of Noah (Christ) while the ark (salvation) was preparing. His heart and all the wisdom of it had been earthly, sensual, devilish, so had his body and flesh; he had been soulish, his spirit had been dead, buried in trespasses and sins. His was the dark, dark night of self-revelation and self-understanding by the Spirit, he saw what he was — and then the Holy Spirit came. It was morning.

A New Creation

In the light of God Christ commenced a new creation in him; he was made a new creature to live in the new creation in Christ; it was the key to all his enlightenment, in a flash and with increasing vision he saw that all is in Christ. Christ was his teacher, Christ was his lesson, he had Christ's Father,

Christ's Spirit and Bowels and Mind and Joy and Faith and His High Calling; all were his, he had them and was in them. They were his new creation, created by Christ for him and he was in it — in Him; he was entirely new, already in the life beyond death. He had had to die before he could get into it, there had been no other way open to God; everything was quite obvious to him, the whole secret of life turned on death, and he knew that unless he made men see this as he did he would utterly fail in his calling and mission.

Paul's ministry was based on the certainties of experience, the experience of the Christ of God and the experience of the man born Saul of Tarsus and born again Paul the apostle. Christ's experience of death on the cross was dreadful, not only because it was so barbaric and beastly (He said Himself by the Spirit through David that bulls and

unicorns roared and raged and mauled and tossed Him about there) but because He also had to bear the wrath of God at the same time. O how He must have praised and thanked His Father that, although He hated sin with an eternal hatred, He did not keep His anger against Him for ever. Hanging there, impaled by men, He bore them no malice, He had nothing against them, He was doing everything for them, this particularly. He was bearing the sin of the world and its cause and deserts; He was being made sin itself, all of it and its results: He was being made Adam, the man of sin who co-operated with the devil through his own flesh and bones (Eve) to bring sin and the sinful seed into the world; the man who illegally stole us all from God and sold us to the devil for less than thirty pieces of silver and traded away our birthright for less than

a mess of' pottage. Jesus paid back the price He did not owe, it was not His debt, nor was it ours; we did not do it, Adam did it and in him we all died and were rendered incapable of doing anything but sin. Only God could do anything about it; the situation was beyond the power or even the knowledge of men. Someone of the persons of God had to become a man, someone who had the knowledge of it all and the power to rectify the situation, someone who cared. So it was that Jesus became the sinner as well as the sin for every man; He also became our death and resurrection.

The death He died was the death of the cross because He had to be made vile and helpless and unclean and immodest and twisted and disjointed, a reject and disgrace of a man, a dreadful caricature of God's noble handiwork, a contradiction and denial

of everything good and pure and holy, a rebel, a criminal, a wretch, the devil's man. That was the reason for the cross; it was a purposely chosen means of death for the man identified with sin-insemination and consequent nature and subsequent practice. By the cross men vented on fellow men their outraged sense of justice, exacting the fullest possible price for crimes against humanity, and by it God exacted the fullest possible penalty against man for Adam's and the world's sin, and He exacted it from His Son. Jesus paid the price and bore the punishment as though He were Adam and every man, and as though He was besides all this the devil himself who had caused it all; He found He could do it because He loved His Father and loved mankind. What a wonderful person He is, what a wonderful disposition, what a mind He had and still has

that He should think out such a death and carry it through. He thought it out because He had that kind of mind because He was that kind of person, the kind of person Paul craved to be.

The apostle knew his desires could never be fulfilled unless he was made conformable unto death. For life to be life in a universe of sin a man must know death so profound, powerful and permanent that he is able to live completely and consistently unaffected thereby. This was Jesus' secret; in the world He lived as totally unaffected within Himself by sin as He had been in heaven before He came into the world. When sin commenced in Lucifer's heart and spread among the spirits of heaven it affected God to the extent that He took counter measures against it. He punished those sinners and cast them all out, putting some in everlasting

chains under darkness to await judgement. Angels are free moral agents, as able to sin and partake of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil as we humans, and those who chose to sin against God were suitably punished. Maybe the greatest temptation of God was levelled at the Son as being thought by Lucifer to be the most vulnerable person of the holy three because He had taken upon Himself the form of a servant. If so he was entirely mistaken; unlike Lucifer, whose ambition was to ascend to the heights, even the highest of all personages and positions in heaven, in the thought of His heart the Son had stooped to the lowest: His desire was not to be ministered unto but to minister. The devil was already defeated because he thought wrongly; incorrect thinking and calculation brought about his downfall.

Whatever may have been the point of attack on the Godhead in heaven, we do know that Lucifer, as a great dragon, stood waiting to devour the man child as soon as He was born on earth; he hated the Son. But though helpless in flesh, being born of obedience and humility, Jesus was kept by His Father because of His very virgin purity. Both in His birth and in His death Jesus was in utter physical weakness, the chosen weakness of servitude, and by it His strength was made perfect. To the human mind all this is incomprehensible because the human spirit is in rebellion against it and wants to be. Man thinks strength lies in the developing of all his powers, marshalling all his faculties to the task in hand and straining with all his might for its eventual accomplishment. But not so Jesus; He lay in Mary's lap and hung on Adam's cross at rest, helpless in any case

on both occasions, vulnerable to everything yet invulnerable and inviolate through all. He was the great Conqueror, He defeated the devil in heaven and on earth; so did Paul, so must every apostle. If he does not and does not teach men so it is because he has not known the experience by which alone a man becomes an apostle: his name therefore is an empty gibe to God, his calling a lie and his position vanity.

Chapter 24 — WHAT'S IN A NAME?

As Those that Serve

One of the more distinctly noticeable features of the Gospels 'in relationship to apostles is that the writers seldom make use of the word; in view of the fact that two of the Gospels were written by apostles this is rather surprising. Of the remaining two writers one of them wrote at the dictation of an apostle (it is thought) and the other as the result of diligent research among many witnesses of the events recorded therein. Seeing that few people had so much opportunity to observe the Lord and His activities as did those early apostles, it is safe to assume that, if they were not the chief sources of this writer's information, they were consulted whenever their information or confirmation were deemed

necessary by him. It therefore seems that the apostles, by common consent yet with regard to truth, agreed to keep themselves out of the limelight as much as was possible. The records bear unmistakable evidence that they much preferred to be called disciples rather than apostles and except upon occasions where it was necessary for some reason to use the more imposing title these men chose the more general one. It also appears that they did not do this because usually there were more than themselves present and it was therefore correct to use the inclusive term, but simply because they were humble men. Primarily they were disciples, that is learners; they never regarded themselves as being lords over God's heritage but labourers and slaves. There may be also two other overriding factors affecting the whole: (1)

the Holy Spirit is the supreme author of the scriptures; (2) the apostles may not have been too happy with some of their behaviour during the period covered by the Gospels. If these are valid reasons for the sparse use of the title apostle we must accept that: (a) the Holy Spirit was responsible for the suppression of the title, and (b) the apostles did not wish readers to associate some things with the true office of apostles lest others should copy them.

However valid or invalid this latter point may be, the Lord Jesus certainly encouraged them in a lowly attitude of mind. Surely one of His most unforgettable statements about Himself must have been, 'I am among you as one that serveth', but they could not have failed to recognize that, especially when He set them the prime example of washing their feet; this was the Lord's constant

emphasis. When He sent out the twelve on their tour of duty He put it like this: 'Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest'. On another occasion He told them to look upon themselves as unprofitable servants and to tell themselves that they were indeed that. He also told them that He did not call them servants but friends and said, 'you are my friends if you do whatsoever I command you'. In a breath He made it clear that only obedient servants were His friends. Labourers, unprofitable slaves, friends, apostles: what an array of classifications — scarcely titles any of them. In view of these things the title apostle is certainly not a very romantic one, and seeing it was the Lord Himself who chose it we must conclude that when He names people He does so with exactitude; the

name is precise and descriptive. We love to think that an apostle is a sent one', and so he is, but not in any sense is he to regard himself as an exalted one. He cannot go on his own initiative, nor can he choose where he is sent, he has to go wherever it is; he is a slave under orders. By this the Lord does not mean that an apostle is a friend degraded to slavery, but that he is a slave exalted to friendship with His master, who was also a slave.

Slavery is a most honourable condition. It is only associated with ignominy and shame because of sin. Slavery had nothing to do with nakedness and bondage and humiliation in the beginning, it was not the worst form of compulsory service under shameful conditions then. Men lusting for power, full of cruelty and brutality, have degraded slavery to mean that a man has no

life of his own and exists almost like an animal under the most inhumane conditions, sighing and groaning for release — even death. But that is not the proper concept of slavery. Slavery is the highest form of service possible to man; it is self-addiction in love to the person loved. Slavery is delightful freedom, it is emancipating, exalting, glorifying, elating, satisfying — pure joy. Jesus, the amazing Slave, said of Himself, 'I am not come of myself ... my Father hath sent me', and struck the note to which every devoted heart responds with conviction and gratitude. He was creation's greatest slave. Unless a man is sent to slave because he is a slave he is not an apostle and is not sent of God. On the other hand, that a man goes is no indication that he is sent; there are many running un-sent. To all who have eyes to see, far from being apostles these are not even

disciples, for had they been disciples they would have learned that disciples do not go unless they are sent, and that even if they do go they do not thereby become apostles.

The Test of Apostleship

It is Luke who, more than any other, popularizes the title 'apostle', especially in the Acts of the Apostles. He does not do this with flattery, neither does he do it with a view to elevating the person concerned, but chiefly for purposes of distinction. Paul also makes use of the title frequently, more than any other of the apostles because the necessity to do so was forced upon him. He knew he was an apostle and said so forthrightly, but only because his claims to apostleship were not accepted by the churches. This may be (almost certainly was) because the original apostles did not at first receive him as an apostle, he had therefore

to contend for his position. Not that he was wrongly over-impressed by it, he was not, but (and here we come to the nexus of the matter) in those days the title apostle meant so much more to everyone than it does today; it was imperative for him to fight for truth. The Church on earth was in its infancy so the churches in which it stood had to be very sure about claims being made by men. No more so than today. of course, but particularly so in those days because foundations for faith were being laid and doctrines were being formulated. It should be noted that Christ, in his day, did not advance or seek. to formulate anything remotely resembling doctrine or schemes of theology. He came to show them God, not to teach the service of God. His business and unavoidable responsibility was to live His life, be made sin, die His death, create

resurrection for men and thereby to lay down the foundation for all eternal life and doctrine. Another important thing to be noted is this: for the main part it was the apostle Paul who formulated the truth of Christ into doctrine. Neither Peter nor John ever attempted to do so. Paul did not know this when he was called at the beginning though, but there can be no doubt that he was raised up by the Lord for this ministry. How much we owe to him who can tell? This is why Paul contended so earnestly that he was an apostle. To him the importance of being an apostle lay in three things none of which was the desire to have a title or hold an office. The first of the three was that he was an apostle by the will of God; the second was that by that will he was an apostle of Christ; the third was that he was an apostle of Jesus Christ to the Church (not

of the Church it should be noted). No church produced Paul; rather he produced the churches; he said he fathered them and implied that he gave birth to them also.

It was absolutely imperative therefore that the churches should both acknowledge and receive Paul as the apostle he was. In those days there were many who called themselves apostles. Christ, through John, pointed this out to the church at Ephesus, commending them that they had not hesitated to judge these men and publicly exhibit them as liars. There were several recognized criteria by which a man's claims to apostleship could be tested, one of which was whether or not the person making the claim had met or known Christ. Not that this automatically qualified such a person for the office, but to the existing apostles this seems to have been a major qualification. It

certainly seems to have been a dominant factor in the minds of the eleven when they gathered to select a successor to Judas. They chose two candidates, one of whom, subject to God's hoped-for approval, they wished to ordain to apostleship. According to Peter and by the consent of the other ten the two men so favoured had of necessity to be known followers of Christ, consistent in discipleship and fully able to identify Him after He had risen from the dead. The reason for that qualification emerges in the statement that Christ showed Himself openly, not to all the people but to those who He had chosen to be His witnesses, with whom He ate and drank after He had risen from the dead.

That generally sums up one of the major conditions in the apostles' minds for election to the select company, it was therefore one

of their main objections to Paul. Their reasoning was very logical: Saul of Tarsus had not followed Christ and he had not been among the company to whom the Lord appeared in resurrection. Quite the opposite, he had been a persecutor of the Church and 'had done many things contrary to the name of Christ'. They had not chosen him neither had he submitted himself to them, therefore he could not be an apostle, so they thought. It appeared logical enough; since he had not known Christ in the flesh how could he be a reliable witness that He had risen from the dead? One of the main factors advanced by the writer to the Hebrews when stating the genuineness and originality of the gospel was this: it was 'first ... spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him'. The fact that men had actually heard the gospel from

the lips of Christ was of major importance in men's minds; such people were regarded as trustworthy witnesses.

This is what makes the four Gospels so invaluable; their worth is so incalculable because they are of such historical importance. Matthew and John were both followers and friends of Jesus, they knew Him. Mark is thought to be Peter's amanuensis and is said to be the young man who fled naked from the garden of Gethsemane when Jesus was betrayed by Judas there. Luke is frankly a historian; his genuineness is attested to by his history of the early Church. The reliability of that document has never been questioned, it is the only thing of its kind in existence. Luke never knew Christ in the flesh or heard Him speak, but he opens his Gospel by claiming to have consulted eyewitnesses and to have

thoroughly checked his sources of supply. It seems that none of his contemporaries doubted his capabilities and literary honesty and if one of his works is accepted on these grounds there is no sensible reason why the other should not be. Neither Mark nor Luke presented any problems to the apostolic company in Jerusalem, they did not lay claim to being apostles; if they laid any claim to fame it was as writers only, raised up by God to record historic events.

Paul was a different person; he came on to the scene proclaiming news. It was this that presented the apostles with their second major problem; Paul was preaching and teaching things that had an originality and authenticity about them. Unlike Luke, who later became his travelling companion, Paul did not consult nor consort with any of the first apostles, he checked nothing with them

and that to them seemed highly suspicious. So far from doing what they expected of him, Paul made claims (almost boasted) that this very thing proved both his genuineness and the genuineness of his message. This troubled the apostles even more and, when he claimed that he received his gospel by revelation from Jesus Christ direct, they were alarmed: without doubt he was claiming equality with them. This brings us to a further vital point in any attempt to establish the genuineness of an apostle.

As already pointed out an apostle is not an apostle just because he is a sent one, it is more important for him and everyone else to know who sent him: everybody must know that an apostle is a man sent from God. He and everyone must also be assured that he has come from Christ with a gospel revealed to him personally by the Lord

Himself; as far as he is concerned it must be original too. Each of the ten original apostles could claim that he had received the gospel he preached from the Lord, but only as being one of many; there is no scripture to prove that any of them had private tuition from Him; theirs was group instruction. Not being one of the original twelve, Matthias did not receive this tuition. Being a disciple and an ardent follower of Jesus for years he would have heard most if not all Jesus's general teachings. He may also have been one of the 'other seventy equipped and sent out by the Lord to preach and to heal the people as their famous predecessors had done. Because of this Matthias may not have been among the number to whom Christ 'showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs'. If this was so he would not have heard the Lord speak of 'the

things pertaining to the kingdom of God'. Therefore what he knew about the ministry of the risen Lord he would have received second hand. It is surely significant that Luke, commenting on this period, commences the whole section with a very clear statement about apostles, distinguishing them from all others by these words 'whom he (the Lord) had chosen'. The number of these by this time was precisely eleven.

By Revelation

Imagine then their reaction when Paul came on the scene declaring that he also had met Jesus Christ, and that the gospel he preached had been received by the Lord's revelation of Himself to him. Paul wrote this into his epistle to the Galatians together with a brief outline of his contacts with the accredited apostles and his reasons for

making those contacts. He went up to Jerusalem to see them, he says, only when God revealed to him that he should, and that was fourteen years after his first meeting with Jesus Christ. To the apostles assembled there he declared the gospel he was preaching, which to everyone's delight was received unquestioningly. As a sample of his revelation (though almost certainly not written for that reason) he makes a series of statements to the Galatians about the cross and the Holy Spirit not previously declared in writing by any man and unequalled anywhere else in scripture. These are of such a nature that they are either patently true or self-evidently false. Nobody had told him what to write or taught him the things of which he wrote and as far as we are able to judge from Luke's account of the twelve apostles' teachings

before that date none could have done so, or if so not in that way.

It is probably right to assume that, if not at the time of Paul's advent (or before that time), they all realized the fulness of the truth Paul preached, most certainly it was common knowledge among them before they finished their course on earth. It may also be true that part of the Lord's purpose in coming to them by the Holy Spirit after He was risen from the dead and before He ascended finally to His Father, was to teach them what later He revealed to Paul. If this be so we are not told and not one of them, by so much as the slightest hint in any of their recorded preached ministry or subsequent epistles, revealed that he knew the things revealed to Paul. Yet perhaps, despite this, it ought to be accepted that all the apostles had at least some basic

knowledge of the things Paul taught, else how could they have judged what he said? Knowledge of truth is subjective. All objective knowledge in the realm of the human spirit is recognition of possibility only, that is, recognition of what is possible by or because of the things it learns or observes, and is not real knowledge. If this knowledge be of historic facts it is belief, if it be of future things it is hope; all hope is based upon conscious or instinctive calculation, which in turn is either based upon or affected by belief in the historic thing. To be real, knowledge must be subjective or experiential; such knowledge is present knowledge, a living thing, which can only be present: knowledge is now. It is not the sum of a person's education or of his beliefs or his hopes, it is the sum of a person's experience — I experience this so I

know it. This will be affected both by a person's belief in historic things and his hope for future things, and perhaps owes more to both than he is aware of; but all judgements of the human spirit are made upon subjective experience. It was Paul who said, 'What man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him?' That is why he was prepared to submit what he taught to men's judgement: 'Judge ye what I say,' he said.

So it was that eventually he went up to Jerusalem to the apostles there to communicate to them the gospel he preached. He went without fear for he knew that, being apostles, even if they did not know all the things he taught they would 'know' him and recognize his gospel as being truth. After all they had been shown by the Lord Jesus Himself that not all apostles were

equal in revelation, nor were they all equal in position. This is actually brought out in the Galatian letter itself: Paul acknowledged it in these words, 'James, Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars'. Paul was not a person to be overawed by titles and personalities; as he said, 'God accepteth no man's person'. It did not matter to him who or whatever a man claimed to have been made; it was what a man seemed to him to be when he met him that counted to Paul, nothing else, and that is how he wished to be received himself, he said.

My Gospel

Of all the apostles chosen by Christ, Peter, James and John were selected for special privileges on at least three occasions; they were given particular revelations or granted privileged glimpses into things denied the other nine, who just had to accept the

position. There should therefore have been no difficulty among them about accepting that perhaps Paul was a specially chosen and gifted man, and so to be prepared when he declared his gospel to them, to believe him. He declared it with forthrightness — 'My gospel' he called it; he knew he was a man sent from God to preach around the world and write a gospel, though none of his writings are called by that name. He knew his presentation of Christ and the gospel was entirely different from that which was already written or was eventually to be written in any of the four Gospels, but he did not allow this to interfere with his own contribution or in any way to intimidate him. Their presentation was entirely objective and historical, his was entirely subjective and vitally present; the Gospels speak of a cross unknown by the writers during the

time of which they wrote: Paul's epistles speak of the cross known and understood; his writings were new. The degree of newness was emphasized by Peter's comment about their being hard to understand, but even so he made a point also of stating that Paul was a beloved brother, which indicates that by that time he was accepted by the apostles. The truth is that, although Paul made most use of the title it was not because he thought to be called an apostle was a thing to be grasped at but because he knew that unless he was accepted as an apostle his gospel would not find acceptance either. Everybody accepted the fact that the gospel was entrusted to the apostles, they were taken to be the official teachers and interpreters of its truths, and to them men sought for explanations and definitions and advice on their problems.

Yet, for all that, there is very little of these things to be found in the New Testament from them; the major burden of teaching was laid upon Paul. It is from Paul's writings that we learn the great doctrines of the faith and of the Church; he knew his calling and was therefore forced to make his claims and establish his office in unmistakable terms, especially in some quarters. This was necessary not only for the Jewish element in the Church and for that generation of believers, but also for all people for the rest of time.

One of the vast areas of difference that lay between Paul's calling and election and that of the original twelve was the time factor involved in their coming to a knowledge of the Lord. After being with Christ for three years the twelve did not know Him, whereas Paul knew Him from the moment he met

Him in the very beginning. The first enquiry Paul (at that time called Saul) made of Christ came from the ground on which he lay blinded and frightened, smitten down by the Lord: 'Who art thou Lord?' he cried out in astonishment and fear. The man was utterly bewildered and demoralised; confessedly he did not know the Lord; we can imagine His confusion then when he discovered that the Lord was Jesus. That is exactly opposite from the way the twelve came to know Him; they knew Him first as Jesus and only afterwards as the Lord, and then only in a titular sense; they never knew Him personally, that is spiritually. Perhaps one of the more amazing features of Peter's address on the day of Pentecost was his closing statement, here it is: 'God hath made ... Jesus ... both Lord Christ'. That was an amazing statement by any standards. Hadn't He been Lord and

Christ before? Hadn't He always been Lord and Christ? Peter himself had, at various times, called Him both Lord and Christ previously, why then did he make this special emphasis? It reads almost as though it was a new revelation to him! It was. At last Peter knew Him; Jesus had come to him in a new way and had baptized him and the other eleven (together with about nine dozen more) in the Holy Spirit with the baptism wherewith He Himself was baptized; now they knew Him within. After about three years they now knew He was Lord and Christ for He had proved it to them. Not so with Paul though, he knew who He was right from the beginning, and after three days he knew Him within! What a difference. This difference is so vast that it is altogether too great to be discussed here; it affected the early part of their respective

ministries to such an extent that they cannot be compared, they can only be contrasted.

The change in the man was so great that it was almost unbelievable; the disciples found difficulty therefore in accepting him. Not until the apostles in Jerusalem had examined him was he allowed to consort with those who were saved and be received by the church there. Perhaps the changing of his name from Saul to Paul is the best commentary on the work wrought in him, though whether the change was ordered by the Lord or initiated by man is not said; Saul means big or large, Paul means little or small. If it was the Lord who ordered the change it would have been for spiritual reasons only; if it was the disciples it may have had some physical overtones as well. On his own 'confession' he was a Benjamite, and Saul, Israel's first king, was also a

Benjamite. He was head and shoulders above every man in Israel; he truly exhibited his name. Saul, therefore, was a favourite name among the Benjamites and was bestowed by his ambitious parents upon the babe. Perhaps the babe did not quite achieve the gigantic physical stature of his illustrious forebear, he might even have been quite short, thereby giving ground for the disciples and apostles to name him more appropriately. Who knows? In religious stature he truly was head and shoulders above most, if not all, his contemporaries in his own nation, and who will say he was not the same among all his apostolic contemporaries? Whoever or whatever it was, the name Paul proved to be an accurate enough description of him, for he became one of the humblest and greatest of men in the churches of Christ and among the

apostles and elders. From a cursory reading of scripture this may not be very evident, for with the exception of Peter none but he calls himself an apostle. When writing to the Philippians he omitted to use the title; this may have been because there was such a loving relationship between himself and the saints there that he felt no need to assert his position. It was the same also with Philemon; he and Paul were old friends, they each accepted the other for what he was; there was no need for Paul to write to him in the name of an apostle; Philemon knew his friend was an apostle. Paul also felt no compulsion to tell the Thessalonians about his office or authority, he simply linked his name with Silvanus and Timothy and wrote on behalf of all three. Seeing then that he wrote fourteen letters and only called himself an apostle in ten of them, and Peter

wrote two and called himself an apostle in both of them, it may be conceded that, on percentages, Paul might be thought the more reticent about the matter.

Chosen by God

We have reason then to be very grateful for the caution of the twelve apostles, even though their objections were wrongly founded. Their steady insistence on what they believed to be the essential qualification for apostleship, namely knowing the Lord and being chosen and sent by Him with the revelation of the gospel, has been a bedrock of resistance and defence against untold abuses through the years. On the other hand their limited ideas for a while endangered the spread of the truth they were safeguarding. But they were living in the world during a time of rapidly changing spiritual ideas affecting whole nations of

men, and we are greatly indebted to them for their caution. Assuming that they had an agreed standard of judgement for the election of apostles (and this is only an assumption), it is nowhere to be found in scripture; this may well indicate that no such criterion existed and that they realized the sorry failure of their one known excursion into that realm. It does appear from Luke's record that, as the churches grew, men of apostolic stature emerged from among them and were acknowledged as such without causing any undue stress among the original eleven. Whether or not those men were vetted by senior apostles before acknowledgement or certification was granted them is not disclosed. There is evidence that letters of commendation were passing to and fro between churches concerning certain men, though whether or

not the practice was universal or met with everybody's approval or achieved its purposes cannot be assessed.

What is certain is that a spiritual church is quite capable of judging whether or not a man is an apostle of Christ, or more seriously, whether he is an impostor and his claims false. Paul's strongest claims of apostleship were made to an unspiritual church; he was forced to do it, it was distasteful to him and he called his attestations 'foolish boasting'. He felt more comfortable about it than he might have done, he said, because he knew that the particular group to whom he was writing suffered fools gladly. Whether or not by that he was referring to the church members or to travelling claimants to apostleship he does not say. What is beyond doubt is that argument about office and position is odious

to a genuine apostle; except carnality compels it, the necessity to defend a calling should never arise.

However, quite apart from the defensive position and the reference to 'foolish boasting', there are certain general standards of life and behaviour required of a man who is an apostle. These are best stated in the passages which give instruction on the election of elders. All apostles are elders of the Church of Jesus Christ and are elders emeritus in every local church they may be visiting in course of ministry. Quite obviously then their quality of life and standard of behaviour could not possibly be lower than that of the local elders. He who would be an apostle must first learn that he will not be accepted by any true church of Christ just on a name. An apostle is a man first, not an

official; Christ does not believe in or promote officialdom.

Bureaucracy is not a creation of Christ, it is a development of man. In its worst form it is dictatorship by a group instead of by one man, and being a human invention it inevitably produces officiousness, domination and cruelty. An apostle is not a dictator; he is not a bureaucrat; he is not a lone man assuming office and ruling over his fellows because he is a very powerful personality either. He may be greatly gifted or more talented than others, but these things are not the criteria; he is not a person elected to hold a position among his peers that together with them (because of their combined talents and gifts) he will form a body of men who bear rule over their fellows in the churches. Apostleship does

not lie in any of these things, it is far, far higher.

The eleven were in grave danger of falling into this latter error. Peter's emphatic (perhaps dogmatic) assertion that a man of their company must be chosen by the eleven (presumably to make up their number to twelve again), seems to have been born of his human assumption rather than divine command. Certainly there is no mention in the record that Christ commanded this to be done, nor should it be presumed that He either directed the lottery or approved of its results. Apostles are not elected that way, they are chosen of Christ direct, the reason being that they are not apostles of the churches as elders are elders of churches. Unlike elders, apostles are apostles of Christ to all the churches and all men; being His apostles, that is, apostles of Christ, they are

appointed by Him to the whole Church, which is His body, and therefore only one body throughout heaven and earth. His body subsists as many churches worldwide and is manifested in them. Apostles cannot be elected or appointed by men, it is not in their power to do so. Elders may be chosen by men and so may deacons, but neither apostles nor prophets may be appointed by the churches. They may, indeed they ought to be accepted by men, but they may no more be elected and appointed by men than was Christ Himself.

In the very nature of things it is impossible for men to choose apostles or prophets. How is it possible for men to choose who shall be sent to them by Christ, or decide who shall prophesy His word unto them? John, who in his Gospel does not use the word apostle or mention that he was himself

one (being so humble), is a wonderful help to us all in this realm. He gives an indication of the direction of his thinking by telling us that in the beginning was the Word and that the Word was with God and was God, and he follows that up with 'and the word was made flesh', the word of God was made flesh. In his own sweet way the apostle also conjoins this revelation with the information that a man was also sent from God who in himself was not God.

Nevertheless John the Baptist was a word sent from God to the nation, he was a prophet; the Lord was the Apostle: both came from God; the prophet by a more human method than the Apostle. The prophet openly said that he only came to prepare the way for the Apostle, and that, although he appeared on the scene first, he was not the first, the Apostle was first.

He was before me,' he said; he also said, 'He is preferred before me' — apostles first, then prophets — a divine order has been established in keeping with moral and natural order among the persons of God, that which has always been in the Godhead was established on earth.

Apostles are chosen by the Father first; secondly they are chosen by the Son; thirdly they are born and endowed and endued by the Spirit. Christ Himself made this quite clear, both by: (1) direct statement and (2) personal method. 1. Speaking of His apostles at the end of His life He said to His Father, 'Thine they were and thou gavest them me'. 2. He did not call them until He had spent a night in prayer with His Father. This latter constitutes at least a double check which all men should regard with understanding. Scripture makes obvious that the very first

men He called to discipleship were those He later called to apostleship, which seems to confirm that: (1) right from the beginning He was working to an eternal plan, pre-arranged in heaven before He came and (2) He was careful to re-appraise that plan with His Father before launching it officially in embryonic form on earth. At this point it is important to pause and consider that, in the heart of God, the Church is greater than any of its offices and therefore also of its officers (if we ought to use that term) including apostles. The body is greater than any of its particular members, and is the sum total of them; offices are held by members of the body only. Speaking of the body in another connection altogether, the Lord once said, though not in these precise words, it is better to enter into life maimed than, being unmaimed, go to hell. The plain implication

of His words is that, rather than lose the whole body we had better dispense with some of its members, important members too; for instance eyes, hands, feet. That is a perfectly commonsense, practical way of looking at the body and its members.

Excision from the body is a serious matter and not a pleasant thing to contemplate, but it is not entirely foreign to the mind of Christ as His words reveal. This is not an isolated statement either, for He introduced this same idea into His teaching on the vine: speaking of His Father, He said, 'Every branch in me that beareth not fruit He taketh away', and then, as though to add horror to shock, He added, 'men gather them (those branches) ... and they are burned'. In these two instances both the human and the divine element of judgement is introduced to our thinking: in the former,

men are told by Christ that, under certain conditions, men should, without hesitation, maim themselves if necessary; in the latter it is God who, for certain reasons, performs the excision. In the former it is an intensely personal and individual human matter; in the latter it is also an intensely personal matter, but it is between the members of the Godhead — the Husbandman is dealing with His many-membered vine, and men only burn up what God excises from it. In this latter connection it must be understood that in the body of Christ no member may say to another, 'I have no need of thee', and presumably in consequence excommunicate or excise it from the body.

Christ — The Great Apostle

All judgement involving eternal life or death in the Church, which is the body of Christ, is in the hands of Christ, the head of the

Church, working under the headship of God His Father. It must always be held in mind that it was God His Father who raised up Christ from the dead and gave Him (the words 'to be' are not in the original and may well be substituted with 'for the purpose of being') the head over all things to the Church which is His body — His fulness. Christ is the head over all things to the Church, but although to the Church He is the overall head (and He is this unto God, that is, for God and unto God) He is not the head of God: God is the head of Christ, as scripture says. The fulness of the Godhead bodily dwells in Christ; this makes Him the logical head of the Church, but it does not make Him the head of God. The fulness of God was in Him and He was the fulness of God; the Hebrews writer speaks of Christ as, 'the effulgence of His glory'. The fulness of Him is

(in) the Church; every gift, office and function in the Church is some 'thing' He was and had and filled and did, and whatever the thing was and however He did it, was the fullest, highest, greatest and most wonderful possible expression and manifestation of that particular thing. In every office He held, and in the way He discharged it, He was the proper Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Pastor, Teacher, and His use of and function in each and all of these offices proclaimed Him to be head of those things, for He used those offices and powers to perfection and was better than any other at being and doing that thing. He is also the direct head to, of and over all the members of His body, not just as being a body but over each person in it as an individual, for each one is a member or part of His person, that is of the body of His corporate

subsistence. Under God His Father and with His approval He has chosen to subsist in the Church in every one who belongs to it that He should fill every part with His fulness, that all of us together, added each to each to make the whole, should be the fulness of fulnesses — 'His fulness'. His fulness is the multiplicity of fulnesses, which is the aggregate of the fulness of Christ in every member. This is incalculable, but in its sum it is only the fulness of Christ, His body, His subsistence. He is the head over all persons and over all things He has given to those persons; both things and persons are only expressions of Him.

Over-consciousness of office and position is obsessive and is a sign of paranoia. Although the Lord did call the twelve and name them apostles, it is an interesting fact that there is no evidence that He did so immediately He

chose them. It may be right to think that He pronounced the distinctive title upon them at the same time, but it is not at all certain that He did so. He could have done so when He sent them out. Matthew does not even mention the name in that connection with the original selection. To him they were still disciples and that is what he called them, including himself. In fact, with the exception of Luke, none of the Gospel writers mentions the title at that time. Mark does not; instead he quickly passes on to the far higher calling — mother and sister and brother! John does not mention the word apostle, nor even record his or anyone else's election to the position, but he uses the word disciple frequently. From all this it may be deduced (and perhaps not incorrectly) that to genuine apostles the title meant and still means very little. At the same time the

ability to be or to be given the opportunity to be trained for apostleship indeed meant and certainly resulted in a great deal. The fact that Jesus had carefully chosen each of them to become a band of brothers meant everything to those men; the Lord certainly knew His business. They had been chosen to know Him.