

"WHAT THINK YE OF CHRIST?"

– MARK 8:27-38. – APRIL 10. –

Golden Text: – "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."
– Matt. 16:16.

IT was probably toward the close of the third year of our Lord's ministry that the incidents of this lesson transpired. In all this time of now three years from the beginning of John's ministry, we have no record that either John or Jesus had publicly proclaimed the Messiahship of the latter. There was wisdom in this. When we remember the expectations of the Jews for eighteen centuries, that the coming of the Messiah was to be the great event for their nation and for the world, and that his Kingdom was to accomplish the blessing of all the families of the earth, we can readily see that their ideas of the glories connected with this heavenly King were such that had Jesus announced himself the Messiah at the beginning of his ministry, the effect would have been disappointment to the degree of disgust. Without political or social influence, without wealth or name or fame as a leader and commander of the people, or a general of armies, he would have been regarded as mentally unbalanced to have made such a claim.

He merely took the position of a religious teacher with whom divine power was specially present, divine power manifested in the dignity of his manner, the grace of his lips, the authority of his teaching, and his wonderful works – healing diseases, casting out devils, walking upon the water, stilling the storm, etc. It would appear that John the Baptist knew more than anyone else respecting our Lord's mission. This is indicated by the sending of the query to Jesus, "Art thou he that should come, or look we for another?" John's knowledge apparently came less through Jesus than through the spirit of prophecy, which indicated to him that the one upon whom he saw the holy Spirit descend was the special ambassador of Jehovah. Even

John's faith was staggered by the absence of the glory and prosperity he had anticipated for Jesus. What, therefore, the sentiment of the masses would have been, had Jesus been publicly proclaimed the Messiah, we can readily imagine.

BE YE WISE AS SERPENTS, HARMLESS AS DOVES.

But now, after his disciples had been intimately associated with him for three years, and after John the Baptist had been dead for a year, the time had come for Jesus to prepare the disciples for the ignominy and death which he knew to be in store for him. But even then the matter was approached in a wise and careful manner. O, that all of the Lord's dear people could learn the value of wisdom in connection with their endeavors to serve the Truth! Our Lord not only taught us to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves, but he exemplified this lesson in his own course, saying on another occasion to the apostles, "I have many things to tell you, but ye cannot bear them now." We, too, should learn that there are opportune and inopportune times for mentioning certain truths, and that there are wise and unwise methods of presenting them. It is not enough that we do not speak untruths, it is not enough that we speak the truth; additionally we should see to it that we speak the truth in love, and love that is trained uses wisdom that it may accomplish the more good.

Our Lord would draw out the apostles and seek to crystalize in their minds the thought which he knew already was forming or formed. Leading up to his intention he inquired respecting the general voice of the people as to who he was. The answer that some thought him John the Baptist risen from the dead, and others thought him Jeremiah or one of the other great prophets risen from the dead (Matthew's account), showed that the public mind was being exercised – was noting that he was not an impostor. As we read later on, some of the people were ready to inquire, "When Messiah cometh, will he do greater works than this man does?" All of these sentiments indicated the wisdom of the course pursued by our Lord, and that it

was taking effect – that instead of being ridiculed, he was respected by the people, some of whom even thought to take him by force to make him their King.

Now the Lord addressed his disciples as implying that they were separated in his mind from the rest of the people, and should have a clearer knowledge of him than others, and his question is. "Whom say ye that I am?" – with the intimate acquaintance that you have had, what is your opinion? Peter, probably the eldest of the disciples, and in general a leader and spokesman amongst them, answered for them all, – "Thou art the Christ [God's Anointed One: Hebrew, the Messiah], the Son of the living God." This answer proved that Jesus [R3340 : page 92] had rightly judged that the time was ripe for such a confession of him amongst his apostles, and for the first time he intimated to them that their surmises on the subject were correct – that he was more than Elijah, Jeremiah, or any of the prophets – that he was the long-promised Messiah.

THE HUMILITY OF OUR LORD.

Our Lord's answer, given in another account, distinctly acknowledges the correctness of Peter's statement, and declares that flesh and blood had not revealed it unto Peter, but the Father in heaven. We are struck with the modesty of our Lord Jesus in respect to this proclamation of himself as the great Messenger of the Covenant. How beautiful a lowly mind is! and if it was beautiful and appropriate in our Lord, how much more appropriate it is for us who are his followers and who have nothing of ourselves – nothing that we have not received through him. How appropriate the Apostle's words, when, after speaking of how Jesus humbled himself to become a man, and to be obedient unto death, he exhorted us saying, "Humble YOURSELVES, therefore, brethren, under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time." Indeed, we may be sure that none will share with the Lord in his exaltation who do not learn at heart this lesson of humility. "The Lord abhorreth the proud but giveth grace to the humble."

Jesus charged his disciples that they should tell no man that he was the Messiah. This was an item of truth intended only for themselves as yet; and to have proclaimed it in a general way might have created more or less of insurrection, and might have hindered the carrying out of the divine arrangement respecting his ignominious death. They could still proclaim the Kingdom of heaven at hand, they could still speak of Jesus as the great Teacher and man, they could still wonder as to whom he might be; but the proper time for making him known as the Messiah would be after he had finished the work of sacrifice which the Father had given him to do. Indeed he could not be the Messiah except by accomplishing this work. He must purchase the world of mankind before he could become its Lord and Life-giver, its Restorer, its Messiah.

Now for the first time Jesus began to teach his disciples to expect his ignominious rejection by the Jews, his ultimate death, and his resurrection on the third day. Matthew's account makes this still more explicit, saying, "From that time he began to teach them these things." What a sifting, what a testing of the hearts of his apostles, and yet how wisely it was done! They must be prepared in advance for his shameful death, else it would prove such a shock to their faith that they could not recover from it, neither believe in his resurrection. But now, after nearly three years of experiences, and when they had just confessed him to be the Messiah, and by so confessing had crystalized the thought in their own minds, it must have been a severe blow to all their hopes and aspirations to be told of his ignominious death. How could he be the Messiah, and yet suffer death at the hands of his enemies? How could he bless all the families of the earth, and yet be put to death as a malefactor?

These things must at first have appealed to them as inconsistent; but all the more the announcement would prepare their hearts for the explanation of the Scriptures which Jesus was ready to impart. The statement that he began to tell them about his coming death implies that thereafter this was frequently a subject for discussion and

consideration between him and them. The same Lord, with no less wisdom, is still guiding in the affairs of his Church, and still teaches us line upon line, precept upon precept, as we are able to bear the Truth, and our preparedness for it will be proportionate to our nearness and fellowship with him. It is worthy of note, also, that the deep things of the divine plan are revealed to us only as we have confessed Christ. To this class it is given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom which are withheld from others. Only if we have fully confessed Christ are we granted a knowledge of the fact that all who would be his disciples must take up their cross to follow him, must suffer with him if they would reign with him, must be dead with him if they would live with him.

SLOW TO SPEAK AND SWIFT TO HEAR THE GREAT TEACHER.

Our Lord uttered this statement respecting his rejection and death openly – before the entire twelve apostles; but Peter, possibly elated by our Lord's words of commendation that the Father had revealed the matter to him, took our Lord aside privately to whisper to him that such sentiments should not be introduced nor expressed before the apostles – that it would be discouraging to them all, and that anyway there was certainly a mistake about the matter, for such things could never happen to him – must not happen; he must so order his speech and his conduct that these things would not happen. He must not violently antagonize the chief priests or elders, to thus lead them to conspire for his death. Allowance must be made for Peter, in that he was not only the eldest of the apostles, but quite a good deal older than our Lord, and that he was of a very ardent disposition, strong and impulsive. However, Jesus – who had a few moments before commended Peter for his appreciation of the fact of his Messiahship – now rebuked him, not privately, but in the presence of all the apostles. He probably knew that this would be the best method of correcting Peter's sentiments, which, should they spread amongst the apostles, would be very injurious to them all. Hence, **[R3340 : page 93]** our

Lord's rebuke was pointed, sharp, and made known to all the apostles. He said, Get thee behind me, Satan – adversary; thy words are not in accordance with divine wisdom, but in accord with human wisdom. We are not to understand that Peter was turned into Satan, nor that Satan got possession of him, but rather in taking such a position he was becoming an opponent of the divine arrangement, as Satan was and still is.

There is a great lesson in this for us. Even though we be the Lord's disciples, and honored ones at that, we might very easily reach such a position as would be antagonistic to the divine arrangement and thus put ourselves unintentionally on the side of Satan, and become his ministers or servants. Our Lord emphasized this again on another occasion, saying, "His servants ye are to whom ye render service." It is not enough that we have named the name of Christ and have placed ourselves under his banner, and called ourselves by his name, and rejoiced to be accounted his servants; it is necessary that we see to it that we are rendering him service, and that our energies are not being spent in opposition to him and really in cooperation with the Adversary.

It is our opinion that a great many are in this very position today. Unwittingly they are on the Adversary's side of many questions connected with Churchianity and sectarianism, and especially does this seem true of many ministers in the nominal Church. We may assume that some of them, at least, have made a full consecration to the Lord, yet as a whole they are standing in opposition to the Truth – supporting the errors of the dark ages and helping to blind and mislead the people. Let us each be careful, let us each see to it that we be not disposed as Peter was to be wiser than the Lord, and to attempt to tell him how matters should be conducted. In everything connected with the Lord and his service, let us, as the Apostle exhorts, be slow to speak and swift to hear and to obey the divine plan.

THE MILK OF THE WORD – THEN ITS STRONG MEAT.

The foregoing special lessons were to the apostles apart from the multitude; but later on Jesus began to teach the multitude as well as his disciples some of the deep things pertaining to his mission and the conditions upon which any might become his disciples. There is a lesson in this also for us: We are not to put tests of discipleship to the forefront in the preaching of the Gospel. We are not to meet inquirers with the announcements of the "straight gate and narrow way" and the lessons of self-sacrifice, as they come to us to hear something about the Gospel of God's dear Son. There are primary lessons for them to learn first. They should be instructed respecting the goodness, love and mercy of God, respecting the redemption accomplished through the blood of Jesus and that it is free and for all, respecting the glorious times of restitution which God hath spoken by the mouth of all the holy prophets since the world began, and respecting the call of this Gospel age to association in the Kingdom. They should know these things with considerable clearness before being informed of the cost – the self-sacrifice even unto death which is the price of joint-heirship in the Kingdom. This appears to have been the Lord's method, and we cannot do more wisely than follow it.

The time had come when not only the twelve apostles but all of the people, who were deeply impressed with the teachings of Jesus, should know what it meant to be his followers. In other words, a time of sifting had come – the time for presenting doctrines that would shake off, sift out, from close sympathy, fellowship and discipleship, all except the Israelites in whom there was no guile. We remember that while there were thousands who attended the Lord's ministry and were miraculously fed by him – amongst all the thousands upon thousands who heard him and profited by his healing, his teaching, and the wonderful words which proceeded out of his mouth, only "about five hundred brethren" (I Cor. 15:6), true disciples, remained faithful to the end. The remainder were all sifted out by such teachings as these that were now for the first time promulgated.

The substance of these discourses is briefly stated to have been that, if any man would be the Lord's follower or disciple, he must practice self-denial and cross-bearing. Of course these words are used in a figurative sense: they signify that all who will be the Lord's disciples and share his Kingdom and glories, will be tested in faith and obedience to such an extent that they will fall out by the way unless their faith and interest are so deep as to lead them to ignore themselves, their own earthly interests, pleasures, appetites, and to seek chiefly for this joint-heirship with the Master in **[R3341 : page 93]** the Kingdom. They must regard the pearl of great price as worth more than all else, so that they will be willing to dispose of, to give in exchange for it, every earthly interest and thing – houses or lands, parents or children, the love and esteem of friends and neighbors – choose obedience to the divine arrangement at any cost, else they will not be worthy of the Kingdom. They must count upon such crossbearing, such a crossing of their own wills, submission to the divine will.

CHOOSING BETWEEN GOD AND MAMMON.

Emphasizing this lesson, the Lord says that it amounts to a question as to whether we love the present or the future life. He who sets great store by the present life, in whose heart the joys promised in association and joint-heirship with our Lord in the life to come does not overbalance present interests and hopes and aims, that person would lose the life which the Lord **[R3341 : page 94]** was proposing to give to his disciples – the life eternal, in the Kingdom, with "glory, honor and immortality." While our Lord used these words particularly in reference to the elect class which he is seeking as joint-heirs in the Kingdom, and therefore particularly in respect to immortal life of the Kingdom class, nevertheless there is a large sense and degree in which his words will always be applicable to all men – in the next, the Millennial age, as well as in the present age. Whoever will attain eternal life, either as member of the Church which is being elected now or as members of the restitution class which will be developed during the Millennial age, can only have the eternal life by a full

submission of himself and every interest to the will of the Lord. Whoever self-willedly refuses such complete submission will thus prove himself unworthy of eternal life on any plane, for the terms of life-eternal are full obedience to the divine will.

From this standpoint the force of our Lord's words is manifest: it would profit no man if he should succeed selfishly in gaining the whole world, and as a result of that selfish will, which is opposed to the divine will and its law of love, bring upon himself the utter destruction of the Second Death. What would compensate a man for the loss of his soul – his existence? Assuredly nothing would compensate, for without existence there could be no possession or pleasure.

The lesson then is that if we are granted hearing ears and understanding hearts in this present time, and a knowledge of the exceeding great and precious things which God is offering during this Gospel age, we would be without excuse before the Lord if we were to despise his offers and selfishly choose self-control and a share in the world rather than joyful submission to the divine will and a participation in the sufferings of the present time and the glories which shall follow when, as members of the Kingdom, it will be our privilege to participate in the showering upon the world of the blessings secured by our dear Redeemer's sacrifice. (Gal. 3:29.) Similarly, those who will live during the Millennial age, after the present offer of the Kingdom shall have been withdrawn, and when the offer of restitution will be made to every creature, those who then selfishly refuse to submit their wills to the Lord's will fail to make progress in the highway of holiness toward perfection, and instead of gaining life eternal they will fail and fall into the Second Death. In other words, there will never be any other way of attaining life than a full renouncement of every selfish aim, object and desire, and the full acceptance of the divine will.

A SAVOR OF LIFE UNTO LIFE OR OF DEATH UNTO DEATH.

Our Lord sums up this lesson respecting the necessity for self-denial and cross-bearing by showing what it would really mean – that to confess him and the great truths of the divine plan for which he stands as the representative, would surely mean at the present time to bring upon one's self the opprobrium of the world, for whosoever will live godly in this life shall suffer persecution. To live godly will mean not only to abstain from crimes, but to live up to the light which God gives us, to be faithful to the principles of truth and of righteousness. Those who are blinded by the god of this world so that they do not recognize Jesus as the Messiah, the sin-bearer and coming King, are proportionately irresponsible at the present time. Their responsibility will come when this knowledge reaches them, and ultimately the knowledge of the Lord shall fill the whole earth.

The time, therefore, will come when they will be responsible, and when the Truth will be to them either a savor of life unto life everlasting, or a savor of death unto death everlasting – the Second Death. But those who know the Truth, and who allow shame to hinder them from espousing it, may be sure that they are not disciples of Christ, that they cannot share in the life which he is now holding out as the reward of the overcomers – immortal life. All those who will be acknowledged before the Father and before the holy angels at our Lord's second advent will have proved so loyal to the Lord and to the principles of righteousness that he will take pleasure in acknowledging them, and the Father will also acknowledge them as being copies of his dear Son, their Lord.

The Lord has given us examples of those who are bartering the glorious hopes and opportunities of participating in the Kingdom for the things of this life. The type in the Old Testament mentioned by the Apostle Paul is that of Esau, who for a mess of pottage sold his birthright. Foolish as was that transaction, it was only a type: much

more foolish is it for those who are now having the opportunity by the Lord's grace of becoming joint-heirs with the Lord Jesus, in the glory, honor and immortality of the Kingdom, to lose all these privileges and advantages and favors – to trade them, as it were, for a mess of pottage – for a more favorable condition in this present life, for greater honor amongst men, or for wealth, or for the affection and sympathy of husband or wife, parents or children. The prize is of so great value that nothing is comparable to it.

