

**R C H Lenski**

**Preaching on  
John**



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"The history of the Church confirms and illustrates the teachings of the Bible, that yielding little by little leads to yielding more and more, until all is in danger; and the tempter is never satisfied until all is lost. – Matthias Loy, *The Story of My Life*

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# PREACHING ON JOHN

**R. C. H. Lenski**

**Sermon Outlines**

**Sermons**

**Homiletical Hints**

\$2.95

# PREACHING ON JOHN

R. C. H. Lenski

*Preaching on John* is a series of exegetical-homiletical text studies in which the person of John the Evangelist and some of his choice teachings are treated. After submitting each text to a thorough and satisfying exposition in which applications to present-day life are constantly made, the author presents some sermon outlines and offers homiletic hints.

There is an abundance of helpful material here for a series of sermons on the disciple whom Jesus loved.

R. C. H. Lenski will be recognized as the author of a monumental commentary of the New Testament. He is also the author of several other helpful volumes for preachers, including *The Sermon: Its Homiletical Construction*, and *Preaching from Paul*.

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## A WORD OF INTRODUCTION

This is a companion volume to the author's *Saint Paul*. Those who have used that volume will know what this offers.

The text studies and the added homiletical hints are intended to assist the preacher in arranging for a series of sermons all dealing with St. John, both his person and choice portions of his teaching. Some of the texts offered afford material for more than one sermon. Thus from at least eight up to twelve sermons may be preached from the studies submitted.

May the Lord look kindly upon this humble effort to further the highest interests of His holy Church.

THE AUTHOR.

November 30, 1928.

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## THE FIRST CONTACT

### John 1, 35-42

Whoever undertakes to penetrate somewhat into the life and character of St. John will find himself baffled at many a point. In one incident after another John is present indeed, and even takes active part, but some one else, notably Peter, pushes forward, becomes the chief spokesman or actor, and thus leaves John in the shadow. Moreover, he himself never of his own accord steps into the limelight; only when absolutely necessary does he refer to himself in his own gospel, and then he always avoids mentioning his own name, in fact omitting the names even of all his relations, among them the mother of Jesus. Thus the very gospel from which one might expect to draw the fullest and richest material for a study of John and his personality, affords but little, and most of that must be sought in covert touches and unobtrusive hints. Even all the four gospels taken together furnish us few incidents in which John is the dominant figure — a strong contrast to Peter, who stands out boldly again and again, both in word and deed.

The moment this is properly recognized we see that it is characteristic of the man. It is part of his spiritual greatness. Peter blazes forth again and again — John is hardly mentioned. Yet in the final summing up, whatever greatness we may accord to Peter, it was not he who was closest to the heart of Jesus of all those so close to him, not

he who penetrated most profoundly into the thought of Jesus, not he who was used to transmit to all future generations in the church "the paragon of the gospels," "the one, tender, real crown-gospel of them all" (Luther), and together with this richest account of "God's Only-begotten" as he dwelt with men here on earth the visions of his glorious person in the world above, of his wondrous, mighty rule through all the ages, and of the new Jerusalem where he shall be forever enthroned — no, not Peter; for this the Spirit chose John. In the symbolism which the church has come to employ Peter's hand has been made to hold the sword, Matthew's the scroll, and John Mark, the penman of Peter in the composition of the second gospel, is pictured by the lion, while John is symbolized by the eagle. It is for us to note well the deep humility and lowliness of this disciple, and how this very virtue renders him supremely great. He is the absolute opposite of the modern preacher whose greatest weakness is the advertisement of himself in the emphatic pronoun "I." John is wholly unselfish, to the point of complete self-effacement. His heavenly Master alone compels him to refer to himself. This humility and submerging of self is achieved by the deepest and at the same time highest love. Even among the Twelve, when they followed Jesus here as his μαθηταί or pupils, John was distinguished as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." This is his greatness. We will do well to keep it in mind as now we take up this brief line of texts centering about the person of the beloved disciple.

This first text in our series takes us into the midst of the work of St. John the Baptist. There is the river Jordan; there are the crowds from all parts of the Jewish land and the borders beyond; there is the striking figure of the Advent preacher, clad in a garment of camel's hair, subsisting on the simplest food, the Messiah's divinely appointed herald, calling on all men to repent. Many did repent, and received at the hands of the Baptist the sacrament that remitted their sins. The Baptist had reached the height of his brief activity. Even the Sanhedrim at Jerusalem felt itself concerned in his activity, and sent an official commission of investigation, John 1, 19-23, to which was added another representing the party of the Pharisees, v. 24-28. Jesus himself had acknowledged the Baptist and his work by demanding baptism at his hands, and in connection with that baptism God had revealed to his messenger in a miraculous manner the identity of the Messiah, and at the same time the divinity of the Messiah's person.

These are the great facts involved in the account which St. John has left us in the second half of the first chapter of his gospel. He passes in review four consecutive days, telling us what noteworthy things occurred on each one of them at or near "Bethany beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing," R. V., v. 28. On the first day the two commissions receive their answer from the Baptist, v. 19-28; on the second day the Baptist proclaims Jesus as the Lamb of God, anointed with the Holy Ghost by God himself, and thus attested as the Messiah and Son of God, v. 29-34; on the third day

the Baptist, by emphatically repeating his testimony, turns two of his own disciples, Andrew and John, from himself to Jesus, and the first direct contact of these two is made with Jesus, followed at once by a similar contact on the part of two more, v. 35-42. Then comes the fourth day, v. 43-51, and the attachment of still two more of the Baptist's disciples to Jesus, followed by the departure of Jesus and his little band of six pupils for Galilee.

One feels, in meditating over these paragraphs, how indelibly the events here recorded impressed themselves upon the soul of John. He marks even the hour of the day when Jesus first captivated his soul, v. 39. In spite of John's reticence we here catch a glimpse of the man as he really was, and at a time all-decisive for his own person, his entire long future life, and the supreme interest of his soul.

Verse 35. — One cannot help but compare the time designation **on the morrow** as it occurs in verses 29, 35, and 43, and it is certainly best, whatever some commentators may say, to read each one of these datives of time as signifying the day immediately following the one mentioned before. Each time phrase heads a paragraph in a marked and formal way, and each paragraph narrates what distinguished that particular day. To run in one or more other days at any point between these "morrrows," is decidedly a mistake. — When John here adds **again**, he means to say that in a manner what happened on this day was a repetition of what happened on the day before — here was the Baptist standing "again" in a prominent place, and

“again” proclaiming Jesus as the Lamb of God. — The pluperfect *ιστήκει*, also written *ειστήκει*, is used in the sense of the imperfect, and, while here coordinated with the following *λέγει*, is after all circumstantial, since the chief thing was not the standing, but the testimony here once more uttered by the Baptist. — In a simple way the figure of **John** is made prominent in the scene here sketched, namely by placing the verb first and in the singular, and right after it the Baptist’s name. There are two other persons, their names not mentioned as yet. Of course, they also “stood,” but they are secondary to the great herald himself, mentioned accordingly: **and two of his disciples**. This is the partitive use of *ἐκ*, instead of the bare genitive. Not incidentally, somewhere along the road or pathway over which these men had come, did the Baptist repeat his great testimony concerning Jesus; no, he waited till he reached the spot where he had been making his proclamations heretofore, and there once more he stood as the great herald of the Messiah. Let us not miss the impressiveness of what this descriptive verb “was standing” so evidently conveys. The verb form, of course, is durative, as if we were to say: while John was thus standing — no need to add any details of what he may have been engaged in doing while thus he stood. — Now comes the chief thing: John looks up and sees Jesus walking some little distance away, and at once solemnly repeats his testimony of the day before. The aorist participle narrates merely the fact: **he looked upon Jesus**. The dative is usual with this compound verb. There is the hint

that the Baptist was aware of Jesus' presence in the neighborhood perhaps for some little time. — The Savior is described as "walking." That is different from the scene of yesterday when Jesus was coming directly unto the Baptist, v. 29. There is no indication that the participle: **as he walked**, is meant in any figurative sense, namely as engaged in his calling. It is a fact, Jesus had assumed his office and Savior-work, yet the mere statement of his walking says nothing in particular on that point. We are not told either whence Jesus came, or in what direction he was going. From what follows we may gather that he was going to the place where at this time he lodged. What had brought him close to the Baptist's preaching place just at this moment we cannot say, except that the whole narrative shows he was ready to gather the first disciples about him — that at least is what he actually began to do on this memorable day. — It was thus that the Baptist "looked upon Jesus as he walked," and at once, "fixing upon him his intense and earnest gaze" (Farrar), the Baptist speaks. The verb, translated **saith**, is the dramatic present, reckoned, however, as an aorist in force, recording the fact of speaking, though making this realistic and vivid, as if one were to hear it now. It is one of those touches in the narrative which makes us feel John's deep personal interest: as he writes λέγει, "saith," the Baptist's words still sound in his ears, though spoken decades ago.

They are indeed deathless words, freighted, after all those years that intervened before John penned them in his gospel, with meaning infinitely

richer than the mind of John grasped when those words first fell upon his ears and penetrated his heart: **Behold, the Lamb of God!** This is a briefer statement than the one made the day before by the Baptist, and yet it evidently intends to recall the full statement that preceded. It conveys the implication that the two men to whom the briefer word is now spoken were present the day before and heard the fuller statement then made. But still more must be said. The complete testimony of the Baptist on the previous day is not addressed to any one in a specific way; there were hearers, of course, quite likely many of them, and the great testimony rang out before them all. Now the situation is different. That mention of two of the Baptist's disciples standing beside him points this renewed testimony of their master directly and significantly at them. They had had time to talk and meditate over this wonderful announcement since the day before. Perhaps they had begun to feel what lay in the words as far as they were personally concerned. If Jesus was the Messiah, if their own master the Baptist attested him as the Messiah, and that by divine revelation, then they must follow that Messiah. Did not the call to do that lie in the very first announcement of their master? And now the word is repeated—in a brief, pointed, almost challenging way: "Behold, the Lamb of God!" Now it did penetrate. Whatever may be argued about the presence of other people within range of the Baptist's voice on this second day, this is beyond question as the text reads: the Baptist's second announcement was

meant for the two men at his side. — Ὁ ἄμνος τοῦ θεοῦ — the article conveys the thought that this is the particular Lamb of God, the Lamb in the most eminent sense of the word. Compare A. V.: “Art thou *that* prophet”; and similar uses of the article in Greek. Meyer is right in reading the genitive τοῦ θεοῦ as a true possessive: the Lamb which belongs to God, *his* Lamb, i. e. which he ordained as a sacrifice for himself. This is decidedly better than to make the genitive say: the Lamb which comes from God (origin), or which God presented to the world. — The word **Lamb** connotes sacrifice, and bound up with this, especially in the full title: “the Lamb of God,” there lies the idea of being without blemish, i. e. sinlessness, and the further idea of divine purpose or aim, i. e. expiation and redemption. Trench has well said the Baptist’s title for Jesus should not be referred back to this or that particular “lamb” mentioned in the Old Testament rituals, but rather to all of them, since each could typify and illustrate prophetically only some part of the stupendous work God’s own Lamb would perform. — The Baptist here omits his previous addition: “*which taketh away the sin of the world,*” yet the sense of his briefer statement evidently includes what this addition contains. In ὁ αἰών we have that frequent use of the attributive participle, especially in its present tense, which describes or characterizes a person. This is the kind of Lamb Jesus is. The term itself may mean either “to bear,” or “to take away.” For the latter compare John 11, 48; 15, 2; 17, 15; 19, 31 and 38, passages which show that this meaning is beyond doubt. — The



thing to be taken away is named as τὴν ἁμαρτίαν τοῦ κόσμου, "the sin of the world." This is one of those great collectives, easily uttered by the lips without proper comprehension by the mind. The preacher must therefore unfold what this collective embraces. Let him describe a few classes of sins. Let him set forth the damning power of a single sin, and then multiply this power a millionfold and again a millionfold. Let him use no specious distinction between the "sin" itself and the "guilt" of sin, for wherever the one is there the other is also. "World" means the universe of men, from Adam on down to the last babe born before the judgment breaks. Let us put away too all speculation as to just what the Baptist realized in his own mind in regard to the terms he here used. He spoke by divine revelation, thoughts which towered above his own mind; they still tower above ours, although we have the full New Testament light. And yet, as in the case of Simeon, Anna, and the long line of Old Testament prophets, the Baptist uttered no empty sounds, as far as his own mind and heart were concerned, no riddles or enigmas without key or solution, but glorious truth, which his mind beheld as truth, absorbed and penetrated more and more, and his heart trusted and rejoiced in with ever greater joy.

It was thus that John was introduced to the Savior. This was the highest service the Baptist rendered his disciple. It was God's call to John to follow the Messiah.

**Verse 37. — And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.** Two simple aorists record the great fact. Verbs of hearing

have the genitive for the person heard, while the thing heard is put into the accusative. The text reads as if the two disciples were the only ones within hearing of the Baptist's words, though we need not stress this point. Here is an example of the Word rightly heard. No need either of talking about man's natural powers when the Word is present with its efficacious power. When on the previous day the Baptist had uttered the same words about Jesus, in the presence, as we must suppose, of the usual multitude, these two disciples, although then too they heard, did not act. Why not at once? It is idle to speculate, though we may well recall in our own cases how we too often need a second or third call. "They followed Jesus" here, of course, means that they started to walk after Jesus. Yet beneath this obvious meaning there lies a hint of something more. We know what this following led to in their case, and how the very word was used afterwards by Jesus himself in calling men to discipleship. "They followed Jesus," thereafter never to turn from him.

Verse 38. — They surely did not go very far until, in John's simple way of telling it, **Jesus turned and beheld them following**. There are two aorist participles intended to state merely the fact. The first, passive in form, is used intransitively. The durative present participle for "following" pictures the two disciples as engaged in this act. — At once Jesus addressed them, and John again uses the historical present λέγει, just as in v. 35. The scene is before him as he pens the words — it meant so much to him. — Jesus is first to speak to

them who might have been too timid to address him themselves. It is evident, from their following him, that they are seeking him; hence Jesus does not ask *whom* they seek, but inquires: **What seek ye?** It is a master-question. It bids them look searchingly at their inmost longings and desires. "We are accustomed to seek what we have lost, or what otherwise is beneficial or desirable for us. But what was there more desirable, more longed for during forty centuries past on the part of so many illustrious men, the patriarchs, judges, kings, prophets, and all the saints of the Old Testament, than this Lamb of God, which John's testimony on the heights between the Old and New Testaments declared to be present at last?" Calov. Many are seeking what they should not, and others are not seeking what they should. Let us who preach the Gospel face the question of Jesus, in order that we may cast out all self-seeking, all seeking of ease in Zion, all worldly ambition even in churchly things, all unworthy aims, and rise to the height of our calling both as believers and as called servants of the Lord; and let us then also confront our hearers with this question, that they may find in Jesus what he came to bring. For there is a hidden promise in the question: "What seek ye?" Jesus has the highest treasure any man can seek, longs to direct our seeking toward that object, in order that for our everlasting enrichment he may bestow it. — The answer which the disciples make is itself a question: **Rabbi, where abidest thou?** Jesus is addressed with the usual respectful title for Jewish teachers. The Hebrew *rab*, an adjective meaning "much,

great, mighty," was used as a title: *Oberster*, or **Master**, the Greek for the honorary title *Teacher* (margin), as John himself interprets for his Hellenic readers. With the Hebrew suffix for "my" added we have *rabbi* or *rabbei*, though the possessive was hardly more than formal. Jesus accepts this title even to the last, cf. 13, 13, though κύριος, "Lord," came to be used more frequently on the part of his disciples. The two disciples of the Baptist here speaking to Jesus do not venture on a title derived from their own master's designation of Jesus as "the Lamb of God" or "the Son of God," v. 34. These designations certainly had their illuminating effect upon them, and yet they were not of a kind to lend themselves to personal address in conversation. — In the question: **Where abidest thou?** there lies the desire to have a private, undisturbed conversation with Jesus regarding the high thoughts and hopes which had begun to stir their hearts. One cannot say whether they expected to confer with Jesus at once, or whether they meant merely to find out where he lodged in order to meet him later. They probably meant to leave that to Jesus.

Verse 39. — They are invited at once. Jesus puts himself and the place where he lodged at their service without delay. There is something generous, and exceedingly kind and satisfying in this readiness. There never was a time when Jesus was not eager to satisfy hearts that truly sought his blessings. His answer to them is: **Come, and ye shall see.** They would have been happy if Jesus had said: Come to-morrow, or the next day, and see me. But he opens the door to them on the instant,

just as if he had been waiting for them. Kings and the great men of the earth hedge themselves about with ceremony and servants, so that it is difficult to reach them and get speech with them; one must make special arrangements in advance in order to secure an audience at all. Nothing is easier than to get an audience from the King of kings at once. The words are exceedingly simple: "Come, and ye shall see" — just a kind invitation, and a promise attached, but what a significance lies in the words! — **Come!** meant, of course, to the lodging of Jesus; yet who that knows Jesus fails to read in this gentle imperative something of the meaning of those other invitations when Jesus bade those that labor and are heavy-laden to come unto him, to come from sin, from the world, from darkness, misery, damnation — unto him, unto pardon, peace, rest, and salvation? The 46th Psalm tells us where Jesus still dwells, "the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High," the Church; and David joyfully exclaims that he shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever (Ps. 23). — Two simple historical aorists report the next facts: **They came therefore and saw where he abode.** They went along to the lodging of Jesus, perhaps a house in the hamlet near by, or a temporary booth of wattles, covered perhaps with the striped *abba*, the usual cloth worn in the east (Farrar). To come — to see — to abide with Christ, this, as one has well said, epitomizes the entire Christian life. — **And they abode with him that day** — this the extent of that first contact. We feel at once that these words cover one of John's great experiences. This

prolonged stay is eloquent of the impression made on the heart of John and his companion when they sat together with the Savior for the first time. Let us remember that they came from close association with another great master, the Baptist, the last great prophet of God, whose disciples they had been. They had found a greater — him, of whom the Baptist had prophesied. Who would not like to know what all was said in that humble lodging of Jesus? We do not know the words, we know only the immediate effect — they could hardly tear themselves away, they staid the rest of the day. The accusative of time signifies duration. Then must have begun what John recorded in v. 14: "We beheld his glory, glory as of the only Begotten, from the Father." — **It was about the tenth hour** — an incidental remark, but significant of the importance John attached to this meeting with Jesus. That hour shone bright in his memory till his dying day. But what hour in our reckoning was this, and how does John's gospel reckon the hours? The most learned commentators have broken their heads on the answer to this question. See *The Eisenach Gospel Selections*, 2nd ed., I, 241 etc., for a statement of the case. We must admit that the question is not yet solved, and so we pass it by here.

Verse 40. — Not till this point does John mention a name, and here it is only one: **One of the two that heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.** Involuntarily one asks: Who was the other of the two? and why is he not named here? We know the answer: it is John, the apostle, himself, who never

mentions his own name or that of a relative in his gospel. There is no doubt about this matter when all the data are compared. While John mentions Andrew he does not intimate which of the two, Andrew or himself, was first in making the move to follow Jesus. As before, so now again, both are combined in hearing the Baptist's testimony, and in then following Jesus. That is all. Only of one thing we may be quite sure: if Andrew had made the first advance, John would have recorded it to his credit, though he wrote his gospel years after Andrew was already dead. Either both acted at the same moment and from the same impulse, or — and this is quite possible — John was first, though declining to take the credit in a gospel written by himself. He writes here of Andrew, and calls him Simon Peter's brother, without further explanation, for he presumes that his readers know both men from the other three gospels, all written years before. The brother of Andrew is mentioned, not merely for the identification of Andrew, but apparently because of what immediately follows; and the double name of Peter is given at once, because in a moment we shall hear how Jesus himself gave him the second name. In the Greek "one of the two," the dual genitive is not used, since the dual had faded from the Greek of this period. It is a habit with John to append data like names of persons and places at the end of his narratives.

Verse 41. — This verse is closely attached to the foregoing by means of οὗτος; our English loses that because "he" is not emphatic enough in the translation: **He findeth first his own brother**

**Simon.** It is all about Andrew and Simon that John reports here, having drawn especial attention to the former in the previous verse. Nothing is said directly concerning himself and *his* brother James. And yet truth compelled John to intimate something here concerning himself. The reading  $\pi\rho\acute{\omega}\tau\omicron\nu$ , to which some cling, should give way to  $\pi\rho\acute{\omega}\tau\omicron\varsigma$ . If we keep the adverb an incongruity results, for Andrew is then said to “find first,” causing us to expect that he did something else next — and nothing else is recorded. If we use the adjective, we learn that Andrew *as the first* of the two disciples mentioned finds his own brother, making us infer that John, the second of the two, was a close *second* also in finding *his* brother. And this is the actual story. Thus also the reading with  $\pi\rho\acute{\omega}\tau\omicron\varsigma$  is generally preferred. It goes well with the additional touch that Andrew found **his own** brother,  $\tau\acute{\omicron}\nu$   $\iota\delta\iota\omicron\nu$ , instead of the simple  $\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon$ . It is all quite plain if we understand that John found also “his own brother” James. Only note that John gives credit here, where he is personally concerned, to the other man, Andrew — he was the first in this matter of finding. — The verb **findeth** is the vivid present in historical narrative, the action being very present to John’s mind as he writes — of course, not only Andrew’s action, but also his own. From the verb we cannot determine whether Andrew, and also John, sought his brother, or whether he happened upon him in leaving Jesus. But the situation itself as here portrayed, especially the deep impression made by Jesus on the hearts of his two visitors, inclines us to think that both forthwith sought, and



so found, their brothers. They could not refrain from imparting what they had found in Jesus. Let us remember too that Simon and James were also disciples of the Baptist, and if he directed Andrew and John to Jesus, he certainly wanted their brothers to follow the same course, namely attach themselves to Jesus likewise.—Mark this word **findeth**. It keeps recurring here in a significant manner, twice in v. 41, and again in 43 and 45. So the man in the field “found” the treasure, and the merchant-man “found” the pearl of greater price. At best our seeking is only like a blind groping which would be useless if God in his mercy did not lay the great treasure so near us, direct our groping hands and blind eyes right to it, until touching it at last, lo, we find it! Andrew’s finding his own brother, John’s doing likewise, is a fine example of home mission zeal. Would that we had more of it! Then too we should observe that right from the start there was a communion of saints in the following of Jesus: first two, whose faith is so blended together in the moment of its origin that we cannot tell which was first, that of John or that of Andrew. And no sooner are there two than the number doubles, and the two are increased to four, with two more immediately following. This is how the church has grown, and still grows to the present day.—Now the remarkable thing is the word with which Andrew greeted his brother: **We have found the Messiah**, which John interprets for his Greek readers, translating the term with **Christ**. Andrew combines himself with John and says “we,” not merely “I.” The

church loves to make joint confession. Of course, this agreement will strengthen the assurance for Simon. If John had had doubts, or had hesitated in seconding Andrew, Simon would have been far less impressed. — The tense of εὐρήκαμεν is noteworthy, cf. v. 32, 34 and 45; it is the extensive perfect. It points to an act of finding in the past the effect and result of which continues in the present. The Messiah once found becomes a continued possession. This is the glad news Andrew conveys. — John retains the word Andrew used, namely **the Messiah**, just as he kept “Rabbi” in v. 38, and writes “Cephas” in v. 42, though in each case he feels compelled to give the Greek equivalent for readers conversant only with Greek. He writes as an original witness; and these distinctive terms have a value of their own which ought to be preserved. It was natural for Andrew to use the title so familiar to the Jews: “Messiah” — he in whom all their hopes and aspirations centered. It was the Messianic hope that had drawn these men in the first place to leave their fishing nets up in Galilee and come down to the lower reaches of the Jordan where the Baptist, the great herald of the promised Messiah, was baptizing. They had not been disappointed in him, although he was only the advance herald. Now, however, their highest hopes were coming to fulfillment — they found the Messiah himself. The Baptist had called him “the Son of God,” v. 34, and most emphatically “the Lamb of God.” Andrew restates that in his own way, just as Philip does a little later, v. 45. The Hebrew *Mashiah*, Aramaic *Meshiha* agrees with the Greek

*Christos*, the verbal adjective turned into a noun, both signifying "the Anointed One," and the Greek is from the ceremonial verb "to anoint," as contrasted with the common verb "to oil." The term is appellative, like a descriptive title, and designates the high office of the Promised One, whoever he might be in his person. Then when this person was known the title Messiah or Christ came to be used directly as his name, always, however, retaining the original reference to the office involved. So also Andrew here declares that he and John have found the person, the man, who is the Messiah. To determine the nature of the office here involved, we must combine all that the Old Testament promised concerning the coming Savior, his prophetic, high priestly, and regal work. For that he would be anointed, and by the anointing he would be formally invested with that work. As high as was this mighty office, so high, we know, was the act of anointing — God himself sending the Holy Spirit (not merely some few of his gifts) upon his chosen Servant. We need not speculate how far the knowledge of Andrew reached regarding the Messiahship of Jesus. It is enough to know that there was certainly a right beginning, and Jesus himself would develop this unto fullest fruitage. Whether John, when he met his brother James, used the same designation for Jesus, who can say? Of one thing we may be sure, he did not employ a term that said less, and James too at once followed Jesus.

Verse 42. — When John reports concerning Andrew: **He brought him to Jesus**, that must mean on that very evening, for John is careful in

mentioning time in this chapter, and does not write "on the morrow" until we come to verse 43. When was it that John rendered the same service for James? It must have been close upon the act of Andrew—that is all that we can say. So Peter became the third disciple of Jesus, James the fourth, all, as we take it, on that day. When these two were "brought" to Jesus, naturally they were introduced to him, and we know from verse 42 how Jesus received Peter, and may thus conclude that there was an equally effective way in the reception of James. One might stop with the outward act indicated in the verb, but there surely lies in it also a hint that Simon (and in the same way James) was brought spiritually to Jesus, brought so as to believe in him and follow him. That is what all the following narrative, in fact, all the rest of John's gospel implies. Fruitful indeed, for John himself, as well as for others, was this his first contact with Jesus.

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#### HOMILETICAL HINTS

It is agreed that of the Twelve John is the youngest. We have no data for fixing the time of his birth, but we know that he lived to the times of Trajan, his life thus spanning almost a century, perhaps even more. In the prime of his early manhood, full of the highest and holiest enthusiasm, he and his brother, together with their associates joined the Baptist, received his message concerning the coming Messiah, and no doubt also his baptism for repentance and remission of sins. Here is an example of a young and ardent soul using aright all the grace that God sent his way. His godly Father Zebedee, a fisherman, puts no obstacles in the

way when his sons leave him to attach themselves to the Baptist. His noble mother, of whom many think that she was in some way related to Jesus' mother, from whom her son John seemed to have inherited his high characteristics, herself afterwards joins the women who ministered unto the Savior, and displayed the highest kind of ambition for her two sons. John seems to have been spared the dry-as-dust rabbinical schooling of the day. God had given him a mind calm but deep, and into it he received unclouded the shining truth concerning salvation, first from the Old Testament in his early youth, then from the Baptist, finally and in fullest measure from Jesus himself. What a delight to behold a man of this type! What a pleasure to read from his own pen how his soul was first knit to the soul of the Godman Christ Jesus! This is our task in the study of the first text here given.

They know this man ill who picture him as soft and somewhat effeminate, at least always gentle and yielding in his make-up. No, he deserves the designation Boanerges, son of thunder. Read his epistles and see how he knows no compromise between Christ and antichrist. It was he who in the Old Testament spirit of Elijah wanted to call down fire from heaven, with Christ's consent, to destroy the inhospitable Samaritans. The fires of his soul burned intensely.

John is rightly called "the divine," for his insight into the glory of Christ's person and into the heavenly depth of his teaching exceeds that of all the other inspired writers. He is the high soaring eagle who gazes at the sun with unflinching eye.

In our text we see the beginning of John's love for Jesus, that love which placed him into the inmost circle of the Twelve, and even in that circle nearest of all to Jesus' heart. And just as his love, born of faith, enfolded the Master it went out too and embraced men. We must recall what Clement of Alexandria reports concerning John. He had commended a noble looking youth in a city near Ephesus to the bishop or pastor there. The latter taught and at last baptized the youth. Returning some time afterwards John said to the bishop: "Restore the pledge which I and the Savior

entrusted to you before the congregation." The bishop replied with tears: "He is dead—dead to God—a robber!" Then John exclaimed: "To what a keeper I have entrusted my brother's soul!" He hastened to the robber's stronghold. The sentinels brought him before their captain. The latter fled from him. "Why do you flee from me, your father, an unarmed old man? You have yet a hope in life. I will yet give an account to Christ of you. If need be, I will gladly die for you." John never left him till he had rescued him from sin and restored him to Christ. Thus in later years he followed up his loving act of bringing his older brother James to Christ.

Ordinarily when we speak of finding an object the work rests entirely upon the seeker. The object sought can do nothing. The lost piece of jewelry can only lie in its place of hiding, and at best reflect a ray of light if the light happens to fall upon it. Everything must be done by the seeker, he must find the way to the piece of jewelry, the piece of jewelry cannot come to him. In the kingdom of God the very opposite is true.—If you are lost in a deep forest but have strong limbs to carry you out, that is not so bad; but when your limbs are paralyzed your only hope is that some one may find you. Here is your hope: God comes to man and seeks him out in his distress.—If your house were on fire you would call the fire department to extinguish the fire. Just then you would not be concerned about anything else. So the sinner when he has come to feel his soul is lost does not care to hear about philosophy or politics or social reform or eugenics, but he wants to learn about him who is the only One in heaven and on earth who can help him.—Some people just drift in religious things. The trouble is, drifting does not carry you to the right destination. You cannot drift down the Ohio river and arrive at St. Louis.—To find Jesus and then to lose him again is of no value. If some one gives me a dollar and I let it slip away the next moment, I have gained nothing.—You cannot keep the heavenly treasure like the farmer who puts the deed for his farm in a safety deposit vault and then concerns himself no more about the question of possession. Some people try to hold their re-

ligion in the same way. They are baptized and confirmed and get their certificates, have them framed and hung upon the wall or tied with a ribbon and laid away in a safe place. . . . The result is that they lose everything except their certificates. These may be sought out at their death to serve as a sort of basis for a funeral sermon, to preach them, if possible, into heaven. (Adapted from J. Sheatsley.)

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### **The Instructive Story of John's First Contact with the Lord Jesus**

#### *I. That Contact was divinely mediated.*

- 1) The early training of John, his attachment to the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus, and Jesus' coming to the Baptist at this time, were God's gracious leading to bring God (and others) into this first full contact with Jesus. — So it is in the life of every man who has found Jesus: divine grace reached out to him to bring about this contact, often in simple, sometimes in striking and remarkable ways. — So it will always be, is now perhaps with some here present today.
- 2) In John's contact with Jesus note that what he had heard at home of the Messiah to come, and what the Baptist told him of Jesus as the Lamb of God, all revealed to him the saving grace of God in Jesus. — This saving grace, which we all need as lost sinners, is the real point of contact to this very day. Everything else is secondary — this is the vital thing. Mark it well as you think back over your own experiences with Jesus, and note it well if this contact of grace is being made with you now.

#### *II. That contact made a deep impression.*

- 1) The impressive testimony of the Baptist. Every time Jesus is really brought to us now there is

the same impressive Word of grace. — The Baptist's testimony was deepened when John together with Andrew sat in long converse with Jesus. And the thing is repeated with every one now who sits down and visits with Jesus in his Word. "Come and see" him for instance in the Four Gospels.

- 2) John did not withdraw himself from this impression, nor did he dissipate the effect of it, or otherwise erase it; he received it by God's grace fully and completely. — The danger when contact with Jesus impresses us with the divinity of his person and the saving truth and grace of his doctrine; how the devil, the world, and our flesh seek to prevent, counteract, destroy this blessed impression. The sad result in some cases. The blessed result when the full impression is received: grace kindles saving faith, gradually deepens and strengthens it.

### *III. That contact produced an immediate result.*

- 1) John, as well as Andrew, brought his own brother to Jesus. Mark the full significance of this first result: it shows how John prized Jesus, what he had found in him and hoped yet to find. — Whoever comes into real contact with Jesus and receives the right impressions will show it by confessing Jesus and pointing others to him. No finer service can one brother render another, one member of a family, or one friend, render another than such confession and what it implies.
- 2) This first result in John's case is eloquent of the results that were bound to follow, all through John's life, and far beyond by means of the inspired Word John has left to us. — So it is ever in our own lives in continued confession of Jesus, in blessed joint association with Jesus, and in the work Jesus permits us to do in his church: the first small results expand and grow and work good things that last to eternity. Rev. 14, 13.



**Jesus' First Word to John: "Come and See!"**

- I. *A gracious Invitation.*
  - II. *A veiled Promise.*
  - III. *An attractive Assurance.*
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**How John Found Jesus.**

- I. *Jesus placed himself where John could come in touch with him.*
  - II. *Jesus revealed himself so that John could see who and what he really was.*
  - III. *Thus Jesus was received by John in true faith as the Messiah and Lamb of God.*
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**How the Young Man John Was Started on His High Career.**

It is surely an interesting, attractive, stimulating story. Let us trace the various lines as John himself indicates them to us in his account of how he was attached to Jesus.

- I. *The kindling of spiritual aspirations.*

How many young people aspire only to earthly "success!"

- II. *The impress of divine truth.*

How many learn everything else but the Word of revelation! or let this Word impress them too lightly!

- III. *The blessedness of soul experience.*

The actual meeting of Jesus always takes place in the soul. In his Word he still says to us: "Come and see!" Every Christian life and career has this experience back of it; and it is always something that touches your inmost soul.

- IV. *The awakening of true faith.*

Not a mere lip-confession, a transient stirring of the heart, an emotional uplift; but an anchoring of the soul in Jesus and divine truth and grace as contained in him.

*V. The first steps in the wonderful new life.*

Closest *association* with those of like mind (John and Andrew, and both with their brothers in following Jesus). — *Confession*: “We have found the Messiah!” — Leading others to Jesus, no higher or more blessed *task in life*.

Conclusion: Thus the career of John began, and we know to what heights it carried him. Suppose he had halted or balked, or chosen a different road. — Your career, in whatever station in life God may design for you; the blessed heights you may attain, exceeding any “success” the world alone can possibly offer.

## A FISHER OF MEN

### Mark 1,-14-20

It is necessary, to begin with, that we compare this text and Matthew 4, 18-22 with the account given us in Luke 5, 1-11. Any serious effort to weld these two narratives into one will meet with insuperable obstacles, for the details are altogether different. The conclusion is forced upon us — these are two different incidents, and not one only, told in a different way by different men. And yet the call of Jesus in both cases is quite identical. Its substance and figurative language is the same, although in Luke it is addressed amid striking circumstances to Peter, and in Matthew and Mark it is addressed under entirely different circumstances first to one pair of brothers, then to the other pair. The conclusion is justified: these two incidents occurred quite close together. The four men concerned, who hitherto had attached themselves to Jesus only in a general way as his companions and pupils, were now to become his disciples in a special way, as men selected for a new calling. While in Capernaum during these early days of Jesus' activity these men went back more or less to their trade as fishermen. While thus busied Jesus comes by and calls first one pair and then the other to forsake their earthly trade and to take up the higher calling, "to become fishers of men." That is the story of Matthew and Mark. But Jesus staid on at Capernaum, and during this interval the men

called as we have seen, occasionally still plied their old trade, spending a night now and then on the lake in the endeavor to add something to the support of their families. After such a night the Lord wrought the miracle described by Luke, and then said to the agitated Peter: "Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men." Compare the similar miracle which occurred after Christ's resurrection, as recounted in John 21, 1-14.

A wondrous vista had opened up for John when he first came into full contact with Jesus. It had brought no disappointment; on the contrary, it broadened and lifted the more fully he came to know the Savior. And now, all at once, a new light fell over the path his feet were treading: Jesus was choosing men to train and equip for the work of spreading the Gospel of the Kingdom and bringing many men to salvation. Here was the beginning of the apostolate, which of itself would lend a living voice to that Gospel through all the ages to come. Whatever enthusiasm and joy this prospect awakened in the other three men thus first called, it is easy to imagine in the heart of the young disciple John a glow of devotion and anticipation beyond that of the rest.

Mark has the simple story style which adds one incident to another just by means of **and**, *καί*. The news of the Baptist's martyr-death had reached Jesus. We know from other accounts how deeply this stirred the heart of Jesus — was it not a foreshadowing of his own violent death? All that Mark, however, reports in this line is that Jesus now himself takes up the Baptist's message: "The time is

fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe in the Gospel," to help finish this preliminary proclamation in the Jewish land. This is the setting for the call of the first four disciples to be turned into fishers of men. — We see Jesus **passing along by the sea of Galilee**. There is no hint either here or in Matthew of any multitude or of any preaching of Jesus by the seaside on this occasion. Jesus is walking along the shore, that is all. Just how much time the disciples hitherto attached to Jesus spent in his company during this period we cannot say. The narrative here shows Jesus alone, and four of his disciples busy with the work of their former trade. They probably came and went as occasion directed. The synoptists, like the LXX, use *θάλασσα* of an inland sea, Luke only of the Mediterranean, using *λίμνη* for the former, 5, 1. — While thus walking along the shore Jesus **saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea**, and the explanatory information is added: **for they were fishers**. They were busy again at their old trade, catching fish and selling them in the populous neighborhood where fish were one of the staple foods. This is a different scene entirely from the one sketched by Luke. There the fishing was past, here it is just about to begin. Only Simon and Andrew are mentioned as engaged in casting their net. Perhaps there were only these two working together in a boat, but we may be permitted to think that, like Zebedee and his two sons, they two had hired assistants. The Greek has only the bare participle for "casting," literally: "throwing around," the

technical term used in the business, and thus not needing the object "net." — Here is a strong sidelight on the character of the men chosen by Jesus for the high places in his kingdom. "For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence." I Cor. 1, 26-29. The men Jesus selected to become his apostles were not of the wealthy, highly cultured class, nor of the politically powerful, as if the means that signify so much for the world were the ones powerful likewise in the church. The weapons of our warfare are never carnal, although many have thought so; they are spiritual. But let no man think for a moment that poverty, ignorance, humble stations, and other earthly disqualifications are the open sesame for true success in the church. Farmers are farmers, even when they are earnest Christians; so also the workers in the different trades. Jesus chose humble men, but he chose them with a view to the training he had in store for them. So also none of them ever boasted of what he had brought to aid the cause of Jesus, but only of what he had received from Jesus. I Cor. 4, 7. And this was much indeed. Who does not marvel to this day, for instance, at the profundity and at the same time utter sim-

plicity of the writings of John? Inspired, yes; but remember inspiration did not remake these men, it used them as Jesus had trained and equipped them. With fishermen Jesus built his church, but not with what makes merely fishermen.

Verse 17. — Mark is brief, stating only the vital fact: **And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men.** The word must have been shouted with a loud voice, although Mark does not put it that way. The Greek here is interesting, literally translated it is: “Hither! after me!” Only the adverb, and the adverbial phrase — nothing more. Yet δευτε is compounded of δευθο and τε, and is used only with plurals. — What this call to come after Jesus implies, the next clause shows. **I will make** is a simple declaration on the part of Jesus. There are no ifs about it. The entire call is not cast in the form of a conditional sentence: “If you come, I will make” (condition of reality); or: “If you shall come, I shall make” (condition of expectancy); no, the coming of these men is taken for granted, and Jesus states only what he is going to do in their behalf. That positive future tense: “I will make,” has the ring of authority in it; it is masterful. Therefore also it sounds like a promise, with the highest assurance behind it. — Chemnitz writes: “It is God’s manner to invite unto himself each one with the voice he best understands.” Fishermen ought best to understand what “fishers of men” are. While Jesus thus calls these disciples away from their earthly occupation, he nevertheless, in using that occupation as an illustration and type of the

new work to which he calls them, honors their present earthly work. Not all are to be preachers, many must go on laboring with their hands — each in his station, as the Lord wills, and the two ranged together, also as he wills. It is a fine figure, one that can be extended into a little allegory if need be, this of becoming fishers of men, using the Gospel net, drawing men from the sea of the world to the boat of the church, and the shore of the kingdom above. Jesus, however, is content with the pithy metaphor adding nothing else. And the metaphor by itself is stronger. That work in which Simon and Andrew were engaged was downright hard work, sometimes dangerous. In the metaphor used the new task is not pictured as being easier or softer. Fishermen are often disappointed, as Luke's account also shows. Lest the metaphor used should make this thought too prominent, Jesus a few days after this first call wrought the miracle of the abundant draft of fishes, repeating it after his resurrection. These spiritual fishermen of his, not by their own skill and cunning indeed, but by their Lord's grace and gift, would make a catch tremendous in its totality. And so Luther writes to his friend Spalatin: "If the Gospel were of a kind that it could be propagated and maintained by the potentates of the world, God would not have committed it to fishermen." Walch 15, 64. — Mark inserts the infinitive: **to become** fishers of men, indicating plainly that they could not do this work as yet, but that Jesus would train and qualify them for the great office.



Verse 18. — **And straightway they left the nets, and followed him.** The aorist participle and main verb simply record the facts. They obeyed the high call. They accepted the great promise. They gave themselves by this act to the high office and work held out to them. It is not necessary to assume that in thus leaving the nets — observe that no mention is made of their boat — they simply abandoned them for any passing stranger to appropriate. Mark (and Matthew) is not interested in this part of the story, and thus says nothing further. The boat, we must assume, was a small sailing sloop, the handling of which together with the manipulating of the net would require more than two pair of hands. So we take it that Simon and Andrew left this boat, the net they had been casting, and such other nets as they had (note the plural τὰ δίκτυα), in the hands of their helpers or friends whoever these may have been. From Luke, too, we gather that a little later both boat and nets were used again by these brothers in fishing at night, and in fact Jesus himself utilized the boat as a kind of pulpit for his preaching. — We should not wonder either at this prompt obedience in answer to so sudden and brief a call: **straightway they followed him.** Jesus had duly prepared these men for the step he now wanted them to take. He never expects to reap where he has not first sown, yea, sown and cultivated. Luther writes on this readiness to exchange the yarn-nets for the World-net (Matth. 13, 47): “Their heart at that time was in the position, that if they had had much, yea the whole world, they would have abandoned it all. Nor is it for us to

be surprised that so quickly they were up and followed Jesus without promise or assurance, except that they were to be fishers of men; yet, what does Christ's Word not accomplish when it enters the heart? It is a living, active, fiery Word, it does not return without use and benefit." Walch XI, 2558.

Verse 19. — Just how Simon and Andrew were associated with James and John in the fishing business is not quite clear from the narrative. They worked in separate boats and each party, with its own nets, but side by side. Luke calls them "companions," "associates," "partners," μέτοχοι. But even this term does not determine whether they conducted their work as a unit, like present day partnerships, or, which seems more likely, in friendly association with each other, each party having its own equipment and taking its own profit. The latter idea fits both our narrative and that of Luke. In John 21 there are seven men, and the entire situation appears different, a joint expedition undertaken at the suggestion of Peter. — Whether Jesus paused till Simon and Andrew put up their nets to join him, or went at once to the other boat, is not indicated. Mark simply records: **And going on a little further, he saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the boat mending the nets.** They appear as a separate party, with their own boat and nets. The accusative ὀλίγον (sc. ὁδόν) = "a little way," and is used like an adverb: "a little further." Here we find John together with his father and brother and a few hired helpers. John is mentioned last since he is

the younger of the two brothers. The participle *προβάς*, "having gone forward," is aorist like the main verb, simply narrating the fact. These men were not fishing, but putting their nets into shape, hence the present participle, for the activity in which they were engaged. From *καταρτίζω* we have our noun "artisan"; it conveys the idea of making fitting or proper, putting into perfect shape, hence in this connection quite likely "mending." They may have been making ready to cast their nets presently, like Simon or Andrew. The point for us to observe is that James and John, like the other two brothers, were busy with the labors of their earthly calling, engaged in working with their hands for their daily bread. From this occupation Jesus calls them to their higher work.

Verse 20. — **And straightway he called them** must naturally be understood as a repetition of what had been done a moment before with Simon and Andrew. The Savior's words are not given, yet there is no reason to think that they were different in this case. "Straightway" evidently means that there was no introduction or preliminary statement of any kind, just as there had been none in the case of the other two. The action of Jesus makes the impression that he had purposely gone out by himself to the place where these disciples of his were busy with their ordinary labors, in order to call them to the far higher task he had in store for them. — **He called them** is highly significant in this connection. This is the beginning of what we find all through the New Testament in regard to the whole work of publicly preaching and teaching

the Gospel. It is finely summed up in Art. XIV of the Augsburg Confession (*Triglotta*, p. 49): "Of Ecclesiastical Order they teach that no one should publicly teach in the Church or administer the Sacraments unless he be regularly called." In this case the call is immediate, but that makes no difference as far as the validity is concerned. Here it was a call too first of all to submit to a course of preparation, and then to work as fishers of men. But it is only natural that unqualified men cannot, at least should not, be called to this great work. Jesus himself undertaking the preparation of the first group of fishers of men is evidence enough that in no future case should the preparation be slighted, hurried, or left inadequate. In his pastoral letters St. Paul has made that very plain. A fisherman must know how to handle his net. — James and John act exactly like Simon and Andrew: **and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went after him.** All that we said concerning the prompt response of the first two men applies in the case of these two. Zebedee and the hired servants were not called, and so they remained where they were. I Cor. 12, 29; James 3, 1. Jesus, of course, had no difficulty in making the distinction. — While the term for leaving their tools and companions is the same as the one in v. 18, the expression "went after him," especially *ὀπίσω αὐτοῦ*, is an unmistakable echo of the call itself, as Jesus uttered it in v. 17. It certainly means that John, with the other three, walked away behind Jesus, he going on before. But this is symbolic of the new relation now established. During

the following period of instruction Jesus showed the way, John and the others followed after him. That position they kept all through their apostolic calling. Jesus speaks of it in John 17, 8: "The words which thou gavest me, I have given unto them; and they received them." So also he said of the Comforter who would take his place: "He shall glorify me: for he shall take of mine, and shall declare it unto you." John 16, 14. In a way this position, following "after him," pertains to all believers, John 8, 31-32, but for that very reason also, it is the special mark of all true ministers of the Gospel, from the apostles on down, 1 Cor. 11, 23; 2 Tim. 4, 2.

Thus John was called to become an apostle, in company with others. When Peter afterwards mentioned how they had left all and followed Jesus, the Lord revealed to him how little it was that they had left, and how wondrously great were the things they would receive in exchange, Matth. 19, 27-29. The path to this glorious goal now lay open before John.

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#### HOMILETICAL HINTS

We have chosen this simple narrative as our second text on St. John because here is recorded the second great turning point in his life. Jesus calls him, together with his brother and two associates, to begin a definite course of training for the wonderful new office he intended to institute. John, together with the others, was to become a fisher of men. In extending this call to John the Lord was building on what he had already wrought in this disciple's heart: He did not build in vain — John, like the rest, unhesitatingly followed the call. A new vista opened before his eyes. It was glorious indeed, although the veil of the unrevealed future still dimmed the

view. Two things, however, were quite clear from the very start. To be a fisher of men, or, as Jesus stated it a little later, to catch men, meant to win them for Christ the Messiah and his eternal, spiritual kingdom. No work could be higher than that. And the second was, that Jesus himself would prepare John for this work, make him indeed a fisher of men, and crown his efforts with the highest and most wonderful success. We know how it all turned out in the years that followed — John became one of the great apostles of Jesus Christ, one of the glorious pillars of the Church, Gal. 2, 9, part of the everlasting foundation of the Church, in which Christ is the chief corner stone, Eph. 2, 20. — Let us consider all this a little more closely.

### John's Call to Become a Fisher of Men.

Here we see revealed the Lord's intention concerning 1) *The Gospel*; 2) *The Apostolate*; 3) *The Ministry*; 4) *The world-wide Spread of the Church*; 5) *The Consummation of the Kingdom*.

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This is one of the texts that cannot be read aright unless we put it into the fuller light of Holy Scripture; in fact, we will do well to add the light of all the past ages of the Christian Church. Then, and only then, will we appreciate fully what happened that morning when Jesus walked on the shores of the Sea of Galilee and called four of his first followers to become fishers of men.

Picture the scene of that morning. Old father Zebedee had taken his two sons, James and John, and the hired men who worked for him, to the place where they kept their boat and nets. Their friends, Simon and Andrew, joined them. There was plenty of work to do, for they were all fishermen, making their living by fishing with large nets in Lake Galilee and selling their catches in the populous towns and villages near by. Their thoughts and hands were bent on their work. Simon and Andrew had their boat ready in a little while, and made off from the shore. Presently they

were busy lowering their great net for the fish draught. In the meantime Zebedee's men were working in their boat by the shore, mending the net they had used roughly the day before, and getting ready as quickly as possible to cast it like Simon and Andrew. A little while later the lone figure of a man came walking along the shore. There was nothing especial to distinguish it — just like any other man who might be taking a walk on that pleasant shore in the morning. It was Jesus.

How simple all this looked, absolutely nothing remarkable or astonishing about it. Ordinary work, and nothing more. An ordinary passer-by, and apparently nothing more.

But now lift the curtain and see the things that are here wonderful to behold! This is Jesus — he whom John the Baptist had called the Lamb and the Son of God; he who had won the hearts of four of these men the first time he talked with them; he who had turned water into wine, who had mightily cleansed the Temple at Jerusalem, who had healed with a word or touch sick people, cripples, even demoniacs, who had preached the kingdom of God to the multitudes with words that sounded like heaven itself. And John was one of the four favored fishermen who had seen and heard all this. John bore the impress of it all in his own soul as he worked there with his father's net.

So simple the scene, so ordinary the actions of all these men — and yet so tremendous the heavenly realities that lie back of it all! And now all at once they flash out once more. Jesus speaks one brief word — and the effect of it reaches on and out to the end of time. Follow that effect in John and measure the blessing it brings to you and me today.

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### **John's Call to Become an Apostle of Jesus Christ.**

In particular what this call meant for him, for us, and for the whole Church. See

I. *What Jesus Made of John as an Apostle and thus left as an Inspiration for us all.*

II. *What Jesus Committed to John as an Apostle, and thus Bestowed upon us all.*

In other words, think of the faith, love, devotion, and character of John, and the blessed influence this has on us today; and then think of the writings of John, and what these mean for the Church of all time. These are the things which, in a marked way, began when on that notable morning John worked in his boat and Jesus walked upon the shore.

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A few suggestive thoughts:

Loehe: "To be caught by the Lord is the highest blessedness on earth; next to it there is no greater than to be allowed to catch men for the Lord."

Herberger: "Whoever casts in his own name catches stones, which tear his net. Whoever casts in the name of his friends catches frogs, which can do nothing but croak. Whoever casts in the devil's name catches salamanders and hell fire."

Chemnitz: "It is God's way to invite every man with a tone of voice that he is able to understand."

Luther: "If the Gospel were so constituted that it might be propagated or preserved by potentates, God would not have committed it to fishermen." — At that time their hearts were in the attitude, that if they had had much, yea the whole world, they would have left it all. It is remarkable too that they were up so quickly and followed Christ without promise or assurance, except that they were to be fishers of men. But what will not the Word of God accomplish when it gets into a heart! It is a living, active, fiery Word; it does not return without having benefitted and helped."

Luther has some excellent remarks on the catching of fish, Erl. 18, 78: What is done when a man catches fish? If it were not so common a thing, it would certainly be a marvel, that a man should undertake to go to the lake with a little net or line, and presently haul out quantities of fish. Thus also the lowly, weak Word of God is a little thing, and yet



it catches many men out of this mad sea. Luther pictures Peter coming with the lowly Word in his mouth, as his angling-rod, and declares that it is a wonder above wonders that such a lowly Word, with no honor before the world, should win so many people, with such a lowly net catch such great whales and little fish.

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### John's Call to be a Fisher of Men.

Let us briefly describe:

- I. *The preparation this involved.*
  - II. *The career this produced.*
  - III. *The blessing this has left.*
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### The Call of Jesus:

**"Come Ye After Me, and I Will Make You to Become Fishers of Men!"**

- I. Did John do a *foolish thing*, when he obeyed that call? It certainly looked that way judged by worldly standards. — And yet it was a *glorious, blessed thing* he did, looked at now with the eyes of faith.
  - II. How *foolish* in one way, how *blessed* in another, when to-day we follow the Lord's call of grace. — And when young men, like John, follow the call to become true ministers of Christ, it still looks *foolish*, and still is the most *blessed* thing such a young man can do.
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### When John Left His Father's Fishing Nets.

He went

1. *To witness with his own eyes Christ's work of redemption.*

2. *To be one of the first preachers of Christ's salvation.*
3. *To help found the Christian Church among men.*
4. *To write by Inspiration some of the greatest New Testament books.*
5. *And thus to aid in spreading salvation through all the world to the end of time.*

## THE GREAT AMBITION

### Matth. 20, 20-23

The story of John has a very human side to it, one which brings him right down to us, great and wonderful apostle though he became. His folks were by no means socially high, for they belonged to the numerous fishermen class that made their living from the waters of Lake Tiberias. The family of Zebedee was prosperous, however, and had some wealth and property as these things were counted in their community. But the father, as far as the records indicate, never gave up his lowly occupation. During the latter part of Jesus' ministry Salome, the mother, appears among a small circle of women "which ministered unto him (Jesus) of their substance," Luke 8, 2; Matth. 27, 55. Since Salome afterwards is called "the mother of Zebedee's children," Matth. 27, 56, it seems proper to conclude that her husband had died. She was thus no longer held fast in her home town Bethsaida, and therefore preferred to be near to her sons who constantly followed Jesus, and thus, more delightful still, near also to her divine Master, devoting her means to the support of the Lord. It was during this time that in her heart and in those of her sons there rose up a wonderful and great ambition.

The thing happened at a peculiar and significant time. Christ was on his last journey which would end at Jerusalem and in his crucifixion. The next stage of that journey was Jericho. Already on two

previous occasions the Lord had solemnly told his disciples about the end that awaited him. Even now they were all amazed that Jesus was setting out to go to Jerusalem. And now for the third time Jesus gathered the Twelve about him, and with fuller, clearer, more startling and more terrible particulars told them that he would be betrayed to the priests and scribes, condemned, handed over to the Gentiles, mocked, scourged, and — crowning horror of all! — crucified but that on the third day he would rise again from the dead. It is Luke who particularly informs us that the disciples understood nothing of what Jesus really meant. Not that they put away all thought of suffering, but that they persisted, in spite of all that Jesus said so clearly even now, in holding fast to their dream of earthly glory, and thus interpreted away the actual and full sense of the Master's words. This is the time and this the situation into which we are placed by Matthew as well as Mark with their narratives on what we have ventured to call "The Great Ambition."

**20. Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping him, and asking a certain thing of him. 21. And he said unto her, What wouldest thou? She saith unto him, Command that these my two sons may sit, one on thy right hand, and one on thy left hand in thy kingdom.** Mark reports nothing concerning Salome's part in this grand request. It is Matthew who furnishes us the information that the mother actually took the lead in placing the matter before the Master. It does seem strange that so close to the plainest kind of revelation that Jesus

is travelling to his ignominious death this mother and her sons are able to conceive a request for the highest places of honor in an earthly kingdom of Jesus. But let us not condemn them too hastily. Had not Jesus himself told the disciples in answer to Peter's question, what they would get for forsaking all and following him, that they would get much indeed? "Verily, I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life." *Matth. 19, 28-29.* Compare *1 Cor. 6, 2-3; Rev. 2, 26-27; 3, 29.* The thing that Salome asked was by no means snatched out of the air; it had a real basis in the great promise of Jesus. We also must read correctly what Jesus said about the Twelve sitting on twelve thrones "judging" the twelve tribes of Israel. This judging is not like that of a judge in court, for he needs no throne, but like that of a king or ruler who governs a nation; it is not one act of pronouncing a verdict, as at the last day, but a permanent office administering all kinds of affairs.

Now with three persons implicated in this request, one wonders, which of the three conceived the idea. We will not go astray in thinking that it was the mother, and not the sons. For it is Salome who acts as spokeswoman when the request is actually made. But the sons fully consented, for neither of

them draws back, both of them appear to second their mother's remarkable petition. Though the whole thing was a mistake one cannot help but admire this mother, a lowly fisherman's wife, picturing to herself her sons in the highest possible places of honor in the earthly kingdom of her divine Lord. She asks nothing for her own self. Her glory shall be only this that she has given birth to two such sons. This is the highest mother love. So many mothers seek only worldly wealth and transient honor for their children. Here was a humble woman with far grander ideals. To be great in Christ's kingdom — there is nothing to compare with it in all the world.

This mother fired her sons' hearts with her own lofty ideals and ambitions. She had consented to part from them when first the two joined John the Baptist. Did Zebedee perhaps demur? We cannot imagine it of Salome. That move had resulted in the most wonderful result — her sons were chosen disciples of the Messiah. And now, rising to the height that had thus come to her and the children she had borne, she stimulates them to even greater hopes and desires. The spirit of the mother flamed up in the heart of her younger son John more ardently than in the heart of the older James. John was about twenty years old when he first joined the Baptist with his brother. All through we see how John stands far ahead of the more retiring and less profound James. It must have been so when now Salome takes them both and goes to make her request for them of Jesus. **Then came to him the mother of the sons of Zebedee with her sons,** most likely

when they found Jesus alone, with none of the other disciples to interfere or object. The ten did not hear what took place until a little while after. — The two participles for **worshipping him and asking him** are aorists, simply recording the facts of these acts, which also were in their nature single, brief acts. In that word “worshipping” we must see the low obeisance and humble prostration of the three, by which they honor Jesus as the Messianic King. It is like the malefactor’s address which acknowledged him, though hung on the cursed wood of shame, the eternal King with a heavenly kingdom. Salome, John, and James were truly asking a royal gift at Jesus’ hand. — Note how the request is veiled at first: asking **a certain thing of him**. It is like saying to Jesus: “I have come to ask a certain favor of thee; wilt thou grant it?” An earthly ruler might have been greatly flattered by such a veiled request, and might have bound himself in advance by consenting to grant it before knowing what the actual request would be. Of course, Jesus is different. **And he said unto her, What wouldest thou?** We may take it that Jesus knew, for so often we are told that the thoughts of men were not hidden from him, that not merely their actions but their hearts as well were as transparent to him as glass. Very likely it was thus on this occasion. But Jesus wants Salome and her sons to say in their own words what this mysterious wish is. So in the most natural and simple way he bids Salome to speak out. Mark brings out the fact, which also we can gather in a way from Matthew’s narrative, that all three were preferring the request for he

puts it thus: "We would that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall ask of thee." The very human side of it all thus comes more clearly to view, namely the evident hesitation at once, and as it were bluntly, to ask the tremendous thing they all three had in mind. Jesus exhibits for us the caution we all ought to follow in the matter of blank requests and blanket promises. Sometimes such promises are asked of us with the appended assurance that they shall in no way conflict with our obligations to God or to the state, as in the various secret orders. But even thus to make the promise is to let others decide for us what conflicts with our obligations; and that means to surrender our consciences to them. Also there may be a conflict with some other obligation not thought of by those asking the promise. Finally, if the thing to be promised is in every way right, good, and beneficial, why should it not court the light at once and avoid the appearance of doubtfulness or evil? The only safe and right thing is to follow the example of Jesus.

Salome now states the request in direct and simple fashion: **Command that these my two sons etc.** The Greek is  $\epsilon\lambda\eta\tau\epsilon$ , "state," or "declare," and the aorist means: "once for all." Jesus is to do this as the great King, hence the translation: "command," or even "decree," is perfectly in order. Mark has "grant," which matches the request as made by John and James and leaving the mother out. The assumption is, of course, that the matter lies wholly in Jesus' power to do as he may please. Now here is a strange thing. Usually the disciples were of little faith, which means that they expected



too little of Jesus, rated his power and ability far too low. Here is a case where the persons concerned ask too much of Jesus. They treat him as a royal personage about to come out of the obscurity in which he has lived hitherto, and presently to ascend his glorious throne. With far-reaching forethought they want to preëempt for themselves the very highest of the honors which shall then be forthcoming. Being first to see the near approach of the glorious future, first to honor Jesus by acknowledging it, and first to ask for positions in that kingdom that shall be, they confidently expect that Jesus, like some such earthly king, will grant their early and honorable request. Here εἰτε is followed by ἵνα καθίσωμεν, sub-final, where the classics would have a different construction.—In the way Salome designates her sons: **these my two sons**, we catch the voice of her mother-love which is so happy and proud to have such sons in the following of Jesus the great King. — She wants that her sons **may sit one on thy right hand, and one on thy left hand, in thy kingdom**, which conveys the idea of a grand throne-room, with the king sitting in state and all the royal court doing him honor, and on the right hand and on the left the chief ministers of the King, next to him in glory, and reflecting the light shed upon them from the throne. So Solomon honored his mother Bathsheba by having her seated on his right side, 1 Kgs. 2, 19; comp. Ps. 45, 9. So Micaiah, the prophet, saw the vision of the heavenly court, the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left, 1 Kgs. 22, 19; 2 Chron. 18, 18.

Another picture of this sort we find in Neh. 8, 4, Ezra standing in the pulpit before the people with his assistants on his right and on his left; comp. also Zech. 4, 3 and 11-14. While in cases of division and judgment the right hand signifies honor and acceptance and the left shame and rejection, in a royal court or assemblage both sides are places of honor, the left only slightly less glorious than the right. Apparently Salome, as well as her sons, had not decided which of the two should sit on the right hand and which on the left, willing to leave this much at least to Jesus. John as well as his brother second this request with all that it implied of lofty ambitions on their part. This is hardly like the John we know from the wonderful gospel that bears his name. In that gospel he hides himself, never mentions himself or even a relative of his by name, displays the great ambition of humility, not that of pride. A great change had been wrought in John. Then he was young and dreamed still of the earthly kingdom the Jews so fondly expected; when he wrote the gospel he was old, ripened in faith and holiness, and his heart had learned that he who humbleth himself shall be exalted. This process of purification and sanctification has been exemplified in many others; for instance, in loving mothers who were glad to have their sons forego all earthly glory simply to serve the Master in the office of the holy ministry, and in sons likewise, happy to devote their lives to this holy calling which brings no great earthly honor and advantage, but when rightly carried out, the Lord's favor and commendation.

But Jesus answered and said, **Ye know not what ye ask.** Are ye able to drink the cup that I am about to drink? They say unto him, **We are able.** He saith unto them. **My cup indeed ye shall drink: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left hand, is not mine to give, but it is for them for whom it hath been prepared by my Father.** These words are briefer than in Mark's narrative, though the sense is exactly the same. Mark adds what Jesus said of the baptism with which Jesus would be baptized, and how they too should be baptized with the same baptism. Jesus is very gentle with these petitioners. Luther says that he severely rebukes the pride of the Pharisees, but the ambition of these his disciples he treats as a different thing, for there is faith in their hearts, and this pride of theirs, while still mingled with the thoughts of the flesh, is already in course of being converted into that humility which alone is great in the kingdom of God. — Note that Jesus is now answering John and James, and not their mother, although she too is answered in what he says to her sons. **Ye know not what ye ask,** means that they do not realize what their request actually implies. "They sought the exaltation, but they did not see the step," Augustine. Bengel interprets: "Ye know not what my glory is, what it means to sit at my right and my left, to whom it belongs, and what it requires." The idea is not, that if they knew they would not desire those high places, but that they would not make a request which plainly reveals their mistaken notion as to how those places may be obtained. Accordingly Jesus points

out the way to those places and in fact to all high places in his kingdom. — **Are ye able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?** Note the difference between πειν and μέλλω πίνειν; the former an aorist infinitive for the simple act of drinking, the latter a present infinitive, matching μέλλω, for “I am about to drink.” Jesus uses figurative language, but entirely clear and at once understood by John and his brother. John 18, 11 shows what is meant by “the cup”: “The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?” So also the prayer in Gethsemane that if it were possible this cup may be taken from him, Matth. 26, 39 and 42. The cup signified the Passion of Christ in all its bitterness. In that precious Lenten hymn, “Over Kedron Jesus treadeth,” occur the following lines which bring out the meaning,

“Praying that the bitter death  
And the cup of doom may go”

The contents of the cup are usually understood to be the wrath of God because of our sin. To drink the cup means to undergo the bitterness of the Passion, the suffering for our sin. — Strange answer that Jesus received from John and his brother: **We are able.** Alas, it proceeds from the same ignorance as their petition. The simple fact of the case is they were *not* able, for no man on earth is or ever was able to endure what Christ did for our sins and earn ever so lowly a place in heaven, to say nothing of the highest ones.

But the confident assertion of these ambitious disciples leads Jesus to admit that in a certain way they shall indeed share his suffering: **My cup indeed ye shall drink.** Well then, one might say, they ought to obtain the places thus earned. But at once we see, that this does not follow, for the idea of earning is absent here. There are really two ways of drinking the cup of which Jesus speaks here: one the way impossible for John and James and every man, *the way of merit*, the way in which Christ suffered and purchased all heaven for us; the other, *the way of witness for Christ* in complete self-sacrifice, by Christ's help and after the manner of his example. "In the offering which Christ made to God for us there is one element which we will never be able to copy as such. The Son of God gave his life as a ransom for many; by his suffering and death he rendered complete atonement for the sins of the world; his sacrifice was the propitiation for the sins of the world. Now there is no sacrifice we are able to make, no offering we are able to bring, which will have any atoning or propitiating power. . . . Our best offerings are not without some stain of sin, and are therefore so far from making good any sin of our own" — and we add, win any place for us in heaven — "that they themselves have need of Christ's merit to make them truly acceptable to God. If then we would follow in the footsteps of him who gave his life for us, we must for ever put aside the thought of meriting anything before God by our own doing and suffering. We are to bear the cross our Lord

lays upon us only that we may praise his name and magnify his grace." See the author's *His Footsteps*, p. 344 etc. But while there is no comparison on the score of merit, there is one on the score of witness-bearing. Christ died also as a witness for the truth; and he calls us to be his witnesses, Acts 1, 8 and 22; Luke 24, 48; John 15, 27; Acts 2, 32. In bearing witness for Christ the same kind of suffering may come upon us as came upon him. So also this (and let us note well, only this) kind of suffering has come to be called "the cross"; and we are to take up the cross (this witness-bearing with its painful consequences) and follow Jesus.

The Scriptures frequently refer to this kind of Christian suffering. 1 Pet. 4, 13: "Rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings." 2 Cor. 4, 10: "Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus Christ." Gal. 6, 17: "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." How this suffering comes upon us Jesus himself tells us: "Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my sayings, they will also keep yours." John 15, 20. Also v. 18: "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you." It is incorrect to think that by the cup Jesus necessarily meant martyrdom. James indeed was beheaded, Acts 12, 2, and his cup included martyrdom. But John in his long life was simply "our brother and companion in tribulation,

and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ," Rev. 1, 9. He indeed suffered imprisonment, Acts 4, 3; 5, 18; scourging, Acts 5, 40; his life was endangered, Acts 5, 33; he was in exile, Rev. 1, 9; but he did not die a martyr. The tales that he had to drink a cup of poison and, in order to fulfill the saying of Christ regarding baptism (Mark 10, 39), was immersed in seething oil, coming away from both ordeals unharmed, are inventions of men like Origen who could not be satisfied unless they had the most literal kind of fulfillment for Christ's prophetic statements. — The hatred of the world, more or less tribulation and persecution, in some instances even bloody martyrdom, are the lot of all Christ's followers, their cup, their baptism, which they share with him to whom they are joined as disciples and believers, whom the world first hated and still hates, and whom it would again nail to the cross, if he should walk on earth in lowliness as once he walked.

So John and James shall drink Christ's cup. But how about the places at Christ's right hand and his left? **But to sit on my right hand, and on my left hand, is not mine to give, but . . . for whom it hath been prepared of my Father.** In the first place note that there are indeed such places. The correction which Jesus makes in the thoughts of his two disciples and their mother is not that they have misconceived his kingdom of glory entirely, that this is invisible and utterly spiritual without glorious places for men with souls and bodies; the chief correction is that they have

misconceived the way to these glorious places. They are not Christ's to give, especially not according to a kind of personal favoritism. "So he declares *as a man*, that he has no authority, that he is a servant, and answers the disciples according to their view of him." Luther. Those places therefore cannot be secured from Christ as favorites or deserving servants of an earthly monarch receive grants from him according to his mere arbitrary will. In fact, it is already too late to come and ask for these places now as they have already been assigned. To whom Christ does not say, John, however, and his brother are by no means shut out; nor does Christ say that he does not know to whom the places are assigned, but he leaves the veil over them — in due time John and James and we all shall see to whom the places are assigned, and the sight shall meet our approval and cause us to break out in praise to God. The words **of my Father** point to the Father as the one whose will Christ came to do in all things, whose will is salvation and glory for all disciples of Christ whether they receive the highest or the lowest places above. How the Father allotted the places Christ does not say, but we may well apply the rule: "He which soweth sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall also reap bountifully." 2 Cor. 9, 6. "And they that be wise (or teachers) shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever." Dan. 12, 3. Let us glory now in the labor and the cross, so shall we glory at last in the crown and diadem.



**HOMILETICAL HINTS**

Ordinarily we ought to put Christ forward in a text like this, and make most prominent the cup he will drink. But this text is to help to show us St. John, and so all that the text contains must be focussed on the disciple and not primarily on the Master.

In John we see a great ambition which even the Lord recognizes, but which still has clinging to it grave imperfections which must be purified away. John was one of the Twelve. That in itself was the loftiest kind of a distinction. We know that John belonged to the inner circle of the disciples, with only two other associates. This lifted him still higher. Now of these three John was closest to Jesus; so that he was known as the disciple whom Jesus loved. Perhaps this closeness to Jesus helped to foster the thought that he and his brother might finally be enthroned at Christ's right and left hand. Thus there was some actual basis for the request Salome made for her two sons. And yet there is something amiss about it all. None of these three petitioners had really and fully caught the spirit of Christ. We see this at once when Christ rebukes the ten who were greatly offended at John and James, and when he points to himself: "Even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many," verse 28. That spirit had not taken possession of John, although the beginning had been made. It is often so today. Christians want to rank high in the church and receive the great honors; but they lack the spirit which really lifts a man high in the sight of Christ, the spirit of lowly, humble, unassuming service and sacrifice. This thing of being great in Christ's kingdom is contrary entirely to the ways of the world and the ideas of the flesh. Neither the world nor the flesh know a thing about becoming great through lowliness. It always seems ridiculous to worldly people to tell them such a thing. So John also, with his mother and his brother, was still far from the high goal, and it was a vain endeavor to grasp that goal as he was now trying to do.

What John at this time imagined about Christ the King and his kingdom was very lofty indeed. We feel part of it in the way the request is made of Christ. But even if Christ should have responded to John and should have become such a king and set John at his right hand in that wonderful kingdom, how pitifully small after all would it have been. It would have been earthly — and all earth is far beneath the Only Begotten Son of God. Even if all the *goyim* or heathen nations had been made subject to Israel, and Christ had ruled in splendor a thousandfold greater than Solomon's, it would have been a cheap grandeur for the Omnipotent King of Heaven. The same is true of all millennial dreams — they are all, and have to be, less than the real kingdom Christ founded and which shall be revealed at last. John thought he was asking much of Jesus when he thus pictured Jesus as a supreme earthly King. He learned better afterwards. See how he speaks of Jesus in the gospel he wrote late in life, John 1, 1 etc., and likewise in Revelation, chapter 1, 9 etc. Why even the lowliest place in that real kingdom of Christ which shall be revealed at last, is far beyond the high places Salome wanted for John and James in the earthly kingdom they imagined Jesus was about to establish. Let us too put away all inferior ideas about our divine Lord and his heavenly kingdom. Both are so great that all our highest earthly conceptions of them are like baby prattle and a child's sand houses when compared to the infinite realities as we shall see and know them at last.

How easily we overrate ourselves. St. Paul warns us: "I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith," Rom. 12, 3. And we are liable to think too highly of those immediately connected with us by tender bonds (Salome of her sons: "these *my* two sons). To overrate anything is a mistake, and the overrating of self is the greatest of such mistakes. To think "soberly" of oneself means to keep a true balance regarding the estimate we put on our person, our virtues, our works and attainments, our merits and deserts. Often we even

make ourselves ridiculous by overrating — people secretly laugh about the importance we try to assume. Such overrating is a kind of pride which in reality lowers us in the estimation of those who soberly judge us, and especially in the estimation of Christ. Thus overrating defeats itself.

Beware of the spurious humility which purposely assumes a lowly air in order to be praised by others and thus elevated by them. Sometimes it succeeds with men; never with Christ, who always sees through the sham we put on. All pride is despicable, but none is so worthy of being despised as the pride which decks itself with a lowly, instead of a lordly air.

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### John's Ambitious Mistake.

#### I. *When he overrated himself.*

- 1) As worthy to sit at Christ's right or left hand in the kingdom of glory: apostle — of inner circle — "whom Jesus loved." Overrating his person.
- 2) As able to drink the cup of Christ, as a witness and martyr of Christ. The Lord intended to make him a great and worthy witness, but he was still far from that now. Overestimating his ability.

#### II. *When he underrated his Master.*

- 1) The character of his kingship and kingdom of glory, as something earthly. It was infinitely higher.
- 2) The character of his Master, as one who acted like lordly kings of earth in preferring mere favorites. He acted from far higher motives.
- 3) The way in which Christ would treat his request. John expected Christ to accede to it, others might imagine, Christ would rebuke John. Jesus did neither. He gently corrected John's mistaken ambition. He bears with our

mistakes still and patiently tries to raise us up to the higher spiritual, in order that in the end he may exalt us as much as possible.

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**John's Ambitious Request  
Shows Us**

**The Way to the High Places in His Glorious Kingdom.**

*I. Not the way John chose.*

- 1) The way of favoritism.
- 2) The way of earthly ambition.
- 3) The way of pride which defeats itself.

*II. But the way Christ illustrates.*

- 1) The way of deepest humility.
  - 2) The way of most devoted obedience.
  - 3) The way of witness-bearing and submission to the cross.
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**Drinking the Cup.**

"My cup ye shall indeed drink."

*I. How Christ drank it.*

*II. How we are to drink it.*

*III. How its bitterness ends in heavenly sweetness.*

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**The Patience of Jesus With Our Mistakes.**

*I. He sees our ignorance, and removes it.*

*II. He notes our willingness, and helps us.*

*III. He understands our weakness, and gives us strength.*

*IV. And in the end he crowns us for all that his patient help has done in us.*

## “WHOM JESUS LOVED”

### John 13, 21-26

This is the first narrative in which John designates himself by this reticent and yet highly expressive designation. The other places are John 19, 26; 20, 2; 21, 7 and 20. An impressive point is that in our text we meet both the disciple whom Jesus loved and the traitor Judas Iscariot — the one nearest to Jesus' heart and the one farthest from that heart. Not only that; the two do not appear here only side by side in glaring contrast, they appear at one of the most dramatic moments, when the traitor is revealed as such, and when John the beloved disciple acts as such in the act of that revelation. A good preacher is bound to catch this dramatic point and to use it — John, most beloved — Judas, who also might have been beloved, but who made himself accursed. Or: John, the Lord's beloved; Judas, Satan's beloved.

**When Jesus had thus said, he was troubled in the spirit, and testified, and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me. —** The words ταῦτα εἰπὼν, lit: “having said these things,” mark an interval, the more since John writes ταῦτα, a plural, and not merely τοῦτο, a singular. The washing of the feet, which the beginning of our chapter narrates, occurred, we take it, before the meal began. Jesus had waited to the last moment before the meal formally began. The company already lay upon the couches awaiting the Master's

signal. Then when none of the Twelve offered to render this service, so fitting and proper especially for the Paschal Supper, each fearing he would lower himself unduly by such servant labor beneath the others, Jesus himself arose from his place on the couch, laid aside his outer garment, the long, loose robe, took the long linen towel, bound it around him, and himself washed the disciples' feet, not merely formally as a kind of ceremony, but thoroughly, as any good servant would have done it. V. 12 shows that after the washing Jesus again took his place, and carefully explained the example he had given. Now either at the moment indicated by v. 12, or at least right after Jesus had finished his explanation in v. 20, the Passover meal began. It is hard to reconstruct the scene in all its details. In doing so we must take into account that during the formal feast, divided by passing the cup with wine several times, the one who was in the place of the house-father had to repeat certain things about the events celebrated by the feast, and certain Psalms had to be sung. At just what point, then, in the meal the exposure of the traitor took place, is not definitely indicated by any evangelist. Yet we may well take it that this occurred toward the end of the meal. Immediately when thus exposed, and even by Jesus' own orders, Judas left the room. The Passover meal then went to its last stage; but instead of being finished in the usual manner, the close was made by the Institution of the Lord's Supper. Thus the question is answered whether Jesus admitted Judas to the Lord's Supper; he did not—Judas had already left. Between v. 20 and 21 we have the

interval which allows the meal to approach near its end; this is the force of ταῦτα εἰπών.

Now the trying moment for settling with Judas had come. And we are told: **Jesus was troubled in the spirit.** The verb ἐταράχθη is very strong. It is, moreover, passive: something took severely hold of Jesus' spirit and shook it. His inner disturbance must have showed itself in his countenance, his voice, and action. The dative τῷ πνεύματι can refer only to the seat of the disturbance, it cannot denote the agent working the disturbance, i. e. the Holy Ghost. Augustine simply wonders why he who was so calm and collected when hitherto he had referred to the traitor should now all at once be so deeply agitated. What puzzles Augustine others have no difficulty in answering. The entire context points to Judas as the cause of Christ's severe inward disturbance—for now the terrible moment had come to take the final step with this traitor among the Twelve; the tragic moment when he would give himself wholly to Satan and his satanic work. He who might have been one of those sitting on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel, Matth. 19, 28, was about to become tenfold the child of hell and win a name execrable among men beyond all other names, to the end of time. The very thing that at one time shook David so deeply in Ps. 41, 9, was now to receive its most highly intensified counterpart: "Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me." Ahithophel is the Old Testament type of Judas, 2 Sam. 15, 12; 17, 1 etc., v. 21-23; even to the point of hanging himself.

Instead of merely *καὶ εἶπεν* we have two verbs: *καὶ ἐμαρτύρησεν καὶ εἶπεν*, both finite, hence both of equal weight. Why was it not enough in introducing the statement of Jesus to write: "and he said"? Because the evangelist wants us to understand that Jesus' declaration is more than surmise or a report from someone else. Jesus **testified and said**, and by personal testimony stated what he knew directly as a fact. The thing Jesus utters is too tremendous for him to utter it in any other way.—Now the preamble which Jesus so often used, and which John's gospel alone has preserved for us, is used here too to usher in the testimony and statement. **Verily, verily, I say unto you.** The two ἀμήν are really Hebrew words meaning "truth," and such an Amen used to be appended at the end to some solemn statement assuring the hearer that it was verity and truth. The peculiar thing is that Jesus doubled this Amen or seal of truth and placed the doubled seal at the head of his statements. He did this in speaking the vernacular Aramaic, and there is dispute as to just what the Aramaic expression was which our gospel in a manner imitates even in sound, it seems, as well as in sense. But the meaning is quite beyond question. The two "verily" or Amen are for assurance, calling on us to believe what follows, as being verity indeed; while the addition: **I say unto you**, is authority: I who not only know most positively, and besides cannot possibly deceive. Thus the Twelve were prepared to hear a most momentous declaration.—And, indeed, it was momentous! Jesus here publicly declares before them all: **that one of you shall betray me.** The words are brief,



but in their very brevity the more terrible. They are categorical and direct, like a blow in the face, not indefinite as heretofore. They must have exploded among that quiet circle of men like a bomb. Now in a flash they knew why Jesus was so agitated in his spirit. The very thought was full of shock and horror. All the evangelists use the same verb in reporting these words of Jesus, namely παραδιδόναι, translated "to betray," and meaning literally "to hand over," namely to the hostile Jewish authorities who had so long and by various means attempted to lay violent and murderous hands on Jesus. Even the dullest of Jesus' disciples could imagine what such a betrayal meant. And the most tragic point in the brief tragic utterance was that one of their own number would do the terrible deed! Now that one brief word Jesus uttered, and then paused in a silence that grew more tense and stifling every moment. There stood the word in their minds and stared at them — they literally cowered under it.

Briefly yet eloquently the effect of the revelation Jesus had made is described to us: **The disciples looked one on another, doubting of whom he spake.** John says only this: each looked at the other. His gospel was written last, and so he counts on our knowing what the other evangelists wrote before him, and on his part does not aim to repeat, but rather to supplement. — Note the imperfect tense in ἔβλεπον, which is often descriptive, picturing to the mind the action as it takes place, allowing us to dwell on it. Again such imperfect tenses picture what is happening and ask us to follow it, with presently the outcome of the thing

presented by some other tense closing the matter. So it is here. At first they looked one at the other in turn, each, except Judas, thinking it must be someone else than himself, since each of the Eleven felt himself guiltless. Then each was caught by a secret dread of himself. Though none had harbored such a thought, the positive statement of Jesus shook each one with secret misgiving. Before the infallible positiveness of Jesus their feeling of innocence wavered. Thus, as two of the evangelists report, they began, one after the other, to ask: μήτι ἐγώ εἰμι, κύριε; Surely, Master, it is not I, while ἀπορούμενοι, **doubting of whom he spake**, shows how each at first thought of some one else, and, as Luke reports, began to dispute among themselves who this could be, each finally ended with deep concern about himself. Jesus thereupon reiterates that it is one who is now eating with him from the same dish, thus referring again to David's experience with the traitor Ahithophel, but not yet pointing to the actual individual meant. He added, however, that the Son of man goes as it is written of him — it is all in the counsel of God, not in the least accidental. And then he pronounces a woe upon the traitor, that it would have been better for that man never to have been born. All this John omits, as having already been recorded by others. One cannot help but pause here and wonder how all this affected Judas. His heart must have been iron and adamant to cast it all off and not break down in utter repentance and confession.

With this picture painted before our eyes by means of the imperfect tense, John adds a few

details and then brings the whole to a final point: **There was at the table reclining in Jesus' bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved.** The verb εἶμι has no aorist in use, hence the imperfect, the ἦν often does duty in narrating simple past facts. This is the case here. The present participle **reclining** is merely attached in a predicative way to ἦν, as our R. V. also rightly translates. Jesus and John lay stretched out side by side on the same broad couch, each resting on his left side and elbow, and John in front of Jesus, so that in leaning back to speak to Jesus John's head would fall upon Jesus' breast, **in Jesus' bosom.** This position at table, which seems to have been the one regularly accorded John, is highly significant as regards John's relation to Jesus. There was an inner circle among the Twelve, namely John, Peter, and James, whom Jesus distinguished on various occasions, thus as witnesses of the raising of Jairus' daughter, as witnesses of the Transfiguration, and as the nearest witnesses of the agony in Gethsemane. But there was more. Of these three constituting the inner circle one was even more close to Jesus than the other two, and this was John. No wonder that under the cross John alone of the Twelve appears. The one of the Twelve nearest to Jesus was *not* Peter, though it would please the papists most mightily if this had been the case. It certainly would have boosted their claims for Peter as the first pope. But now the one disciple even at table most intimately connected with Jesus is John, not Peter. — The ἐξ in εἰς ἐξ τῶν μαθητῶν, just as in εἰς ἐξ ὑμῶν, is partitive. John never mentions his own name in the gospel he penned, nor

even the name of any of his family, not even that of Mary, Jesus' mother, who, it thus seems, was related to Salome, John's mother. In a way this is strange, yet in another way it is indicative of John's great humility, and thus a lovely trait. Instead of using his name he uses the description: **whom Jesus loved**. It is best to assume that neither Jesus nor John himself first used this designation, but that others who saw this close attachment, as here at table, and as afterwards under the cross where Jesus entrusted to John his own mother, so spoke of this beloved disciple. Now certainly Jesus loved all his disciples, and with that highest form of love expressed in ἀγαπάω, the love that fully understands and is moved by the highest purpose toward the loved person. And yet there may be great differences even in this ἀγάπη of Christ. We see it at once when we note that he thus loved the world, sinful and guilty though it was; and likewise he loved his own and loved them unto the end, John 13, 1. His love understood all about that sin and guilt of the world and had the wondrous purpose by his death to atone for it all; yet as regards "his own," who believed in him and were clean, John 13, 10, that same love understood their needs while in this world and had the high purpose to care for them as his own and to give them the highest blessings. It was the same ἀγάπη, and yet the objects towards which it was directed made a great difference in what that love would do and in what way it would show itself. So the difference between John and the other disciples. Of all the Twelve this youngest man, about twenty-two years

old at this time, understood the mind of his Master most. Their hearts were all near to that of Jesus, but John's was nearest. The Lord's Word and spirit had penetrated John's soul more completely than the souls of the rest. So we read in v. 1 that Jesus loved his own, namely the Twelve, and yet we read in v. 23 that John was the one of his disciples "whom Jesus loved." It is not a matter of the fountain of love in Jesus, which is always full to overflowing, but a matter of the vessel for receiving love on the part of any one of the disciples — some vessels grow larger than others under the training of Jesus, and thus are able to contain more. Thus John's greater capacity for receiving must have been a joy to his Master. It is the same to-day with the beloved of the Lord; some are nearer to him than others, some are able by his grace and training to understand him better, to reflect his spirit more perfectly, to receive more of his gifts and spiritual blessings, and thus to delight the Master's heart more than others. Here is an admonition to us to open our hearts more fully to Jesus. The place beside Jesus where one may lean back and let the head fall on Jesus' bosom affords room for many more Johns.

Now the narrative continues: **Simon Peter therefore beckoneth to him, and saith unto him, Tell us who it is of whom he speaketh.** The present tenses here and in the next two verses make the narration vivid. Everything here shows that John here tells something in which he had part. We must discard the reading: "he beckons to him to learn who it might be" etc. The beckoning shows that Peter most probably reclined with only one

other person between him and John. If Peter had been next to John, he would only have leaned his head back on John's breast, as John does when now he speaks to Jesus. If Peter was removed farther from John, Peter's word to John would have been heard also by Jesus. Peter's beckoning begs John to lean forward toward him. When John does this Peter whispers to him, and asks John to tell him of whom Jesus is speaking. Evidently Peter assumes that Jesus had told John, and that John already knew. This is incidental evidence — far stronger for being incidental — of the intimacy between Jesus and John, as recognized and accepted by the other disciples. The aorist εἶπε is for the single act of telling: "Tell," of course, means: "tell me," not: "tell me," or: "tell us"; and εἶπε is not the same as ἐρώτα, "ask." Peter, however, credits John with more knowledge than he has.

Anxious to know himself, and spurred by Peter's request, John in all simplicity turns to Jesus. Here is an instance which shows how near the mind of John was to that of Jesus — Jesus is entirely willing to indicate to John who the traitor is. **He, leaning back, as he was, on Jesus' breast, saith unto him, Lord, who is it?** We must note that οὕτως is not the same as οὖν, "then" (A. V.), nor "as he was" (R. V.), with his position as indicated in v. 23; nor *ohne weitere Umstaende*. The word means "thus," prompted by Peter's whisper. "Having leaned back on Jesus breast" is clear from v. 23. It also intimates that the question of John is whispered to Jesus, so that only Peter knew why John leaned back. It is a little matter, and yet one

sees again Peter's initiative among the Twelve. It is Peter, not John, who thinks of thus getting quickly and quietly the coveted information. It is Peter who thinks of utilizing John because of his advantageous position; the thing did not occur to the disciple immediately next to John on the couch. Initiative, natural leadership, quick, decided, masterful efficiency, are high talents, and therefore prized most highly among men, also in the church. And yet the masterful Peter, the leader of all the rest on various marked occasions, was *not* the disciple "whom Jesus loved" in the special way in which this was true of John. The mother of Jesus had no leadership that was worth mentioning in the sacred record; Martha evidently was more of a leader than her sister Mary — and yet these two Marys rank higher in the kingdom than many prominent women with efficiency and leadership. Yet somebody might point to St. Paul as undoubtedly a great leader in the church and at the same time very near to Jesus. It is true, Paul was both; but what gives him his true elevation in the kingdom is less his masterliness as a leader of men, and far more his intimate nearness to the mind and heart of Jesus. This is a subject not often dwelt on at length, yet worthy of closest attention. Paul wrote: "Covet earnestly *the best gifts*," and then showed in that wonderful thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians that *love* is the best gift. Judas had leadership, or how would he ever have been made treasurer of the company of Jesus; his administrative gifts did not prevent his downfall. Matthew was a business man; he could not have been a good tax-collector (publican)

without such ability. Now he did write a great gospel narrative; but compare it with John's gospel, and you will see why all the Church, like Jesus, has rated John far higher than Matthew. Some gifts shine on the outside, yet that does not make them the greatest ones; some shine hardly at all, and yet are the greatest. It is the depth that counts with him who always looks into the heart. We may bury some great synodical president and praise him in his coffin for the great things he has done for his synod; in fact he may have been quite a Peter, nor shall he miss his due reward. Yet some other man, not prominent at all in leading the churches, may outshine him by far on yonder day, when the disciples "whom Jesus loved" like John are bidden to take their places beside him. John plays second to Peter's first when he leans back and does what Peter tells him to do; and yet John is first, Peter second.

John uses the respectful address: **Lord**, to which also Jesus had just referred in v. 13: "Ye call me, Master, and, Lord; and ye say well, for so I am." While *κύριος* was a general title of high respect, it soon came to have quite a special meaning when used of Jesus. It meant "lord" in the supreme sense, namely divine Lord; and so to address Jesus meant, not merely to honor him with great respect as a high and honorable man, but to believe in him as the Messiah. That is why we capitilize the title, and why Paul writes 1 Cor. 12, 3: "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost." "Who is it?" merely asks in all simplicity, and no more. It assumes that Jesus intends to tell,



that he has made his announcement with that intention. It assumes, too, that Jesus will not be offended at the question, though he may make his answer, as he often does, in his own superior way. The question does not mean: "Tell me at least." It does not contemplate securing secret information for John alone, for John asks at Peter's prompting, thus for both of them. Peter too is watching to learn who it is.

**Jesus therefore answereth, He it is, for whom I shall dip the sop, and give it to him. So when he had dipped the sop, he taketh and giveth it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot.** Jesus, we see, has other considerations besides satisfying the desire of John and Peter. All through he is making the strongest effort to show Judas the enormity of his contemplated crime, to break his hard heart into repentance, and thus to save his miserable soul. That is why he even now refrains from making a public announcement to all the Twelve.

The whispered question of John is answered by Jesus in the same quiet way, a mark of special love for John. The tenses are all dramatic presents. That Jesus whispers to John, and does not speak aloud for all to hear, we see from v. 27-30, where Judas leaves the company after an order from Jesus, without the body of disciples knowing as yet that he was the traitor. Only two men know besides Jesus, John to whom Jesus makes the revelation, and Peter who watches the interchange which is followed by the giving of the sop to Judas. To the very last Jesus tries to make Judas turn. Every means is used and exhausted in his case. The door

to repentance is opened wide, and powerful urgings are made to bear upon Judas' heart to enter that door; the road to obduracy is not smoothed for Judas, but every obstacle of which Jesus' love knew is thrown in the path to block Judas' heart from entering it. Judas actually had to fight his way through to gain perdition. When Judas left, v. 30, he did not meet Jesus and the others again until he carried out his traitorous act at Gethsemane. — Jesus could have answered John's quiet inquiry with one word: "Judas!" He uses a different way, though just as positive, one that again vividly recalls Ps. 41 and David's experience with the traitor Ahithophel. At the same time, instead of Jesus branding Judas by name, he lets Judas by his own act brand himself — if he is indeed determined so to do. For even this act of Jesus was so designed as to give Judas a chance to decline. The traitor could hardly help but note the whispers between Jesus and John when all were keen to know whom Jesus meant. And then the act of Jesus dipping the sop and holding it out to him — Judas! It was all decidedly plain. Why did he not break down now inwardly and why did he not refuse the sop, turn and go out, and like Peter after his denial weep bitterly? For the same reason that when he had printed the traitor kiss on Jesus' cheek and Jesus said: "Friend, *wherefore* art thou come?" he did not break even then. The secret of human obduracy, its last and final cause, is a mystery in the human will, a reason of unreason, the opposite of all true reason, a devilishness which takes hold of man and in the very sight of damnation plunges him into it.

Three knew with full certainty: Jesus — John — Judas; the Lord — the disciple beloved — the traitor. The fourth, Peter, knew by inference.

We must not think, however, that John's question made Jesus hit on this method of answer. Note the article in τὸ ψωμίον, "*the sop*," the one Jesus already held in his hand. Before John asked, Jesus had already begun the act with the sop. This **sop** is best understood of bread, not of meat from the lamb. Nor does βάψω, **shall dip**, refer to the wine passed around at different points in the feast, since there is no record of any dipping into the cup of wine. Jesus dipped the sop either into the vessel with bitter herbs or salad, prepared with vinegar and salt as prescribed by the law, or into the dish, which the Jews added later to indicate the fruits of the promised land, called *chasoret*, prepared with vinegar and water together with figs, nuts, fruits (apples etc.), forming a thick mass. There may at this time also have been but one dish, since we know that in later times the bitter herbs and the *chasoret* were combined.

For the head of the Passover company thus to offer bread to one or the other at table may or may not have been a usual custom. Usually the former is assumed, though without further evidence. We may just as well assume the latter. At least this is true that in the present case the act of Jesus is highly significant. He is not content with the fact that Judas, like the rest, dines at the same table with him, and thus resembles Ahithophel; he makes the parallel much closer, by offering Judas this sop with his own hand — and Judas actually

takes it from Jesus' hand. We would like to know just where Judas lay reclined, whether he took the sop directly from Jesus, or whether it was passed to him at Jesus' direction; it is impossible to determine the point.

Both ἐκεῖνος and ἐγώ are emphatic: "*he* for whom *I myself* shall dip" etc. The reading with two finite verbs "shall dip" and "shall give" has the strongest attestation and lends equal weight to both actions. We must note likewise the use of two verbs in "he takes and gives," which makes the action graver and paints it exactly as John and Peter beheld it. The eyes of Judas too must have hung upon the hand of Jesus, glancing at the same time at his face and eyes. What did Judas read in those eyes and in the extended hand? Could he not behold the deep pain, the burning love, the mighty warning? He beheld it all — and he was adamant against it all. "He gives it to Judas" — and Judas takes it. John here again writes the traitor's full name: "Judas, the Son of Simon Iscariot," "Iscariot," the man of Keriot, goes with Simon, as in 6, 71 while in 13, 2 "Iscariot" goes with Judas. Keriot is the home of Simon, a town in Judea, making Judas the only one of the Twelve not from Galilee.

John — Judas: in the one we see what the love of Jesus is able to make of a man; in the other what the power of Satan is able to do to a man.

### HOMILETICAL HINTS

A disciple, the Greek for which is μαθητής, is not merely a pupil or learner, although we often use the word also for beginners like that, but one who has learned, and not merely intellectually or in an outward way, but so as to imbibe fully the spirit of his master. "The disciple whom Jesus loved" may thus be described as the one who most completely and profoundly absorbed the Master's very spirit. Too many are merely followers of Jesus, merely attached to him; too few are fully disciples welded together with him by having absorbed his spirit. Though let us remember that this spirit is identical with Jesus' teaching and doctrine, never a thing apart from it. Compare John 17, 8 and 14 and 17; 1 John 2, 5 and 21; and other passages. The spirit of Jesus is all in his doctrines, and is never conveyed to any man except by and through these doctrines. They who pretend to have the Master's spirit and ignore any of his teaching, whether consciously or unconsciously, lack the Lord's spirit. As deep as is the Lord's doctrine, so deep is his spirit; and only he who fully penetrates to the heart of that doctrine fully reaches the spirit of Jesus and is his disciple indeed, John 8, 32. It is a fine study to follow out in Holy Writ how "love" in the sense of Christ is the emanation of the truth as it is in Jesus. The mind of Christ is his light, truth, teaching, doctrine, and thus, and only thus, his spirit.

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#### The Disciple Whom Jesus Loved.

##### *I. Who most fully received his doctrine.*

All Christ's disciples received his doctrine by true faith, else they could not be his disciples at all. But some receive the doctrine more fully than others, not, however, in merely knowing more of that doc-

trine extensively, but in penetrating its full meaning intensively by means of the heart. John was first among the Twelve in this respect. His heart most perfectly understood Jesus. Hence he was so especially beloved, so inwardly near the Master. — In view of this, what is your position among the disciples of Jesus today?

*II. Who most deeply absorbed his spirit.*

Jesus' doctrine always changes the heart, renews it, molds it spiritually, makes it more nearly like the heart of Christ in faith, love, and all Christian virtues and graces. No man can be a disciple of Jesus without thus receiving the spirit of his teaching into his heart to shape it anew. Yet there are gradations here. Some receive his spirit far more deeply than others. John was the one of the Twelve in whom the teaching of Christ had implanted most deeply and richly its true light and power, in whom the spirit of Jesus dwelt most fully. Hence the Lord loved John with a special love. He was inwardly nearest to Jesus. — Think of this, and then tell yourself what your position is among Jesus' disciples today. How much of the spirit of this world is still in your heart?

*III. Who was therefore most dearly beloved of him.*

Jesus loves all his disciples as his own. Not to be so beloved is not to be recognized of him as a disciple at all. Jesus would give us all the fullest possible measure of his love with *all* the gifts that love has in store for us. It is not a question of his giving alone, however, but also of our receiving. Many gifts of Jesus' love we have not, not because Jesus would withhold them, but because we are not ready and fit and willing to receive them. John was the most ready to receive *all* that Jesus had to give; that was why he was best beloved. — Consider thus

your own place among the Lord's disciples. Are you closing your heart to any part of his love and gifts?

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### **The Apostle St. John in the Story of the Traitor's Exposure.**

Three disciples are especially mentioned when that exposure took place: Judas — Peter — John.

#### *I. Judas, the absolute opposite of John.*

Judas once also faithful — gradually turning from Jesus — finally yielding to Satan — a traitor apostle. — John, once too a beginner in faithfulness — growing nearer and nearer to Jesus — at last the one whom Jesus especially loved. — What a contrast! A warning for us, and an admonition at the same time.

#### *II. John, higher even than Peter.*

Peter, the efficient, shows his leadership again when Judas is exposed, by getting John to find out the traitor's name. Peter succeeds. Peter with his devoted energy stands high. — Yet John stands higher. He has not Peter's leadership, but he has a heart that even more fully understands the Lord. That is why Jesus loved him so, and in exposing Judas lets John know who the traitor is. — Using our gifts and talents for Jesus is a sign of our nearness to him; yet opening our hearts to receive all that Jesus gives places us still nearer. Not all have Peter's gifts and efficiency, but the way to Jesus' bosom is open to us all.

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### **The Love of Jesus When He Exposed the Traitor.**

- I. A love that would save the traitor even to the last.*
- II. A love that impressed all the other disciples.*
- III. A love that one disciple appreciated most,*

**The Ideal Disciple.**

We are not left to compose in our own minds what an ideal disciple of Jesus would be; among the Twelve one was a traitor, another denied his Lord, yet one stands forth as actually an ideal disciple — and that one was John. Learn of him!

- I. *Nearest to Jesus in knowing the Master's mind.*
- II. *Nearest to Jesus in understanding the Master's heart.*
- III. *Nearest to Jesus in receiving his most precious love.*



## A PERSONAL TRUST

### John 19, 25-27

Among the very exceptional things in the life of St. John is the personal trust which Jesus committed to him in placing his mother in the care of this apostle. Say what we will, this act in the tragic hour of Jesus' death casts a flood of light on the relation that existed between Jesus and the beloved disciple. When, moreover, we contemplate the circumstances — John the only one of the Twelve beneath his Master's cross, all the others scattered and fled — other relatives of Jesus, who might well have cared for Jesus' mother —, we see at once the great significance of this trust. Here too is the other side of love. The first is to receive of Jesus all his love and loving gifts; the second is to receive of Jesus some duty beyond the others, and to carry that out with fullest devotion. And yet while it looks like returning something to Jesus to have such a special duty imposed and to fulfill it, in reality it is only another way of receiving love, honor, distinction, and greatness from the Master's hands.

This word conveying Jesus' mother to the care of John is the third which Jesus spoke from the cross. Some few have attempted a different succession of the words, but have failed to convince the bulk of Bible students in the matter. It seems that Jesus in his seven words on the cross attends first to those affairs which pertain to his earthly obligations, and then, with all these out of the way, his

last words are those pertaining to his affairs with God. Jerome has very aptly said that this provision for Jesus mother is his *testamentum domesticum*, by which he sets his earthly house in order, as compared with the Lord's Supper, which we must consider his *testamentum publicum*, his bequest to all his followers.

The ruthless hand of criticism has not spared this sacred committal of Mary to the care of John the beloved. It is flatly denied that any of Jesus' relatives stood beneath his cross at any time during the suffering on Calvary. Least of all, we are told, could Mary have appeared there and the disciple John. Mary never believed in Jesus as the Messiah, and therefore he never had her with him — that is one reason; and John was too hopelessly weak and without independence for us to believe that he could have appeared at the cross in this dangerous hour. It is even flatly denied that he had a house to which he could have taken Mary. Our answer to these spurious results of a spurious criticism does not need to mince matters. It is the basest kind of slander to picture Mary as an unbeliever. Because Jesus did not expose her to the hardships and dangers of his constant shifting about, is no reason to brand her with unbelief. Because the brethren of Jesus did not at first believe in him, is absolutely no warrant to include in their unbelief the mother, whose faith is beautifully indicated already in Luke 1, 5, and who at once after the resurrection appears among the believers, Acts 1, 14. The slanders about John are rank inventions. As between such baseless figments and even one word of Holy Writ no man

even of only common sense will hesitate for one moment.

It is John's gospel alone which contains this account that concerned him so personally. We know that the fourth gospel purposely supplements the others. That is one point. Another is that none of the other disciples witnessed in person what took place here between Jesus and John; they all had it only at second hand. So it was most fitting for the one who personally heard the words that committed to him so loving a trust, to record those words himself.

John writes: **But there were standing by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary, the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.** The  $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$  is metabatic, merely continuing the narration. When John tells us that these women stood **by the cross**, which means "beside" the cross, we recall that the other evangelists also mention these women, but say that they stood "afar off." The two statements are not identical; yet they in no way conflict. For no one would suppose that this little group of women with the disciple John stood during the whole time that Christ hung upon the cross close by his side. Only by waiting for an opportune moment could they have moved up that close; perhaps when the scoffing high priests and others had withdrawn. Then when Jesus had spoken to them, when as it were he had bidden them farewell, and the strange darkness fell over the land, the soldiers becoming alarmed, cleared the space about the cross, and John with the women could stand only "afar off," watching for the end. This final watching

“afar off” the other evangelists have put into their records.

How many women does John mention? One answer is three, another answer is four, and both are made emphatically. Those who say three point to the two *καί*, which add to the mother of Jesus two more women; if three more were meant another *καί* would have to be added. Exegetically this is convincing, as against the proposition which insists on four women, grouped in two pairs, one pair unnamed connected with *καί*, and another pair with names also connected with *καί*. The trouble with this is that any reader after the first *καί*, when more designations are added, looks for the next *καί*, and the idea that pairs are intended does not enter his mind, unless something appears that indicates pairs, which the mere absence of *καί* between the pairs fails to do. To insist that, if only three women are meant, John should have written: “and Mary, the sister of his mother, of Clopas,” placing her name first, is a mistake, for this leaves the final genitive “of Clopas” in an ambiguous position. We are able to see only three women in John’s words. Mark 15, 40 and Matth. 27, 56 both name the second Mary as the mother of James and Joses; this agrees with John, who adds the information that she was the Virgin’s sister, and her husband’s name was Clopas.

Matthew and Mark, for some reason that is not known, omit the mother of Jesus. She is not mentioned even at the burial of Jesus. But these two evangelists tell us that John’s mother Salome was present. Those who count four women take Salome to be **the sister of his mother**, whom John

is said to designate only in this way. This close relationship, however, is nowhere indicated in the gospels. With the mention of only three women, John would omit his mother, which accords even more with his constant practice of effacing himself and his relatives as much as possible from his record. He would not mention himself in this narrative, if he were not compelled to do so on account of the part he has in it. Either he had to omit the incident altogether, or he had to indicate his own presence, and we are glad that he chose the latter.

John writes only **his mother**, and does not add the name "Mary," as one might well expect; he does the same thing in 2, 1 etc., and in 6, 42. This omission seems significant as indicating, in a silent way, some relationship between the family of John and that of Jesus. Many think that Mary and Salome were actual sisters, but no further evidence to this effect is at hand. **His mother** is properly placed first in this incident, because it deals with her. The second woman is Mary's sister, also called **Mary**, but distinguished from her as the wife of Clopas. It is unheard-of to make ἡ ἀδελφή mean sister-in-law, although this is suggested in order to escape having two sisters with the same name. Yet the two women may not have had the same father and mother, both being brought in from former marriages, one by the father, the other by the mother. Besides, many ancient texts have "Miriam" for the mother of Jesus, and "Maria" for her "sister."

Speaking in general, the Greek genitive of **Clopas** may mean, according to the connection,

“wife,” “mother,” or “daughter” of Clopas; here the latter two are excluded. We know her children (Matth. 7, 56), and a woman of her age would not be designated from her father. The Greek genitive is constantly used where “wife” is meant. Eusebius reports from Hegesippus that Clopas was a brother of Joseph, the husband of the Virgin. A marginal note in one of the Syriac versions states in so many words that these two brothers married two sisters. We may shake our heads at this, but two brothers have not infrequently married two sisters. Clopas is identical with Alpheus of the synoptists. — A reason is demanded, why this second Mary is designated so fully, when she has no special prominence in the gospels at all. But this is the very reason, and also because we have several Marys. Thus each needs clear identification. Matthew and Mark identify her by her children, John by her husband. John also indicates the reason for her presence, when he says that she was **the sister of his mother**. In this desperate hour this Mary stood by her suffering sister.

In other connections the woman mentioned third here is put first, namely **Mary Magdalene**, who appears in those other narratives as the leader of the women, just as Peter appears as the leader of the men. As such her name is recorded also in this place, yet since she has no active part in this brief narrative she naturally is not first, but last, the two sisters properly being put first by John. Other women, like John’s own mother, he could pass over in silence, but hardly Mary Magdalene. Remember how John also records that Jesus after his

resurrection soon appeared to her. She has been often identified with the sinful woman in the Pharisee Simon's house, Luke 7, 37 etc., but without a particle of evidence. Asylums for fallen girls have been called *Magdalenenstifte* in Germany, but they cast a disgrace on this woman which one can only deplore. The distinctive term "Magdalene" is usually derived from her original home, the town Magdala at the sea of Genezareth, Matth. 15, 39; no other explanation is at hand. — John does not mention himself as also present near the cross. Knowing his reticence, this is what we would expect. The narrative itself will show his presence, and that for John is altogether enough. It is Luke (3, 49) who tells us that among those that stood and watched "far off" were "all his (Jesus') acquaintance." Who these were has never been determined. There may have been a few men among them, but of course none of the Twelve. Nor is there any hint that they moved up close to the cross when John and the few women with him made that venture.

Stricken and crushed with terrible grief these few loving hearts, made bold in their timidity by their bleeding love, huddle beside the cross. Those painters err who picture the cross as very high. The Savior's feet were easily embraced by one standing on the ground; and with only a short stalk of hyssop one could reach a wetted sponge to his lips. It is well to keep this in mind as we read what now transpired. Jesus did not need to shout aloud in speaking to his mother and to John. The little group beneath the cross could hear him per-

fectly, while those farther away did not need to understand. **When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold, thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold, thy mother!** The Lord is fully conscious, in spite of all that his body and soul had endured. He forgets, he omits nothing. It was, of course, God's own providence that made this opportunity for Jesus to attend to this his last filial duty, and thus to fulfill to the uttermost the Fourth Commandment. As God shaped all things for Jesus, so also this, that his mother and a few others with John could come close up to the cross at this important moment. And he who is here bearing the sins of the whole world amid the most unspeakable personal suffering is nevertheless fully aware of what God is now providing for him. Another, amid severe suffering, might have his whole mind turned in on himself; not so Jesus. Another, enduring great agony, might overlook an opportunity such as God presented to Jesus, and think too late of how he might have used it; not so Jesus. Not for pity on his own suffering does this son turn to his mother, but in final, sonlike care for her in her lonely state and suffering. Even now as he dies she is in his heart. There is nothing more tender and touching in the entire gospel story than this love of Jesus for his mother. Usually mother-love is rated as the purest and strongest type of human love. The love of Jesus for his mother exceeds even all mother-love.

The record reads: ἰδὼν . . . λέγει, with the



main verb in the historical present for greater vividness, thus in effect an aorist, so that the aorist participle matches it. Of course, Jesus saw the entire little group before him. When thus the evangelist writes that he saw **his mother and the disciple standing by whom he loved**, we are to note, not only that Jesus saw in particular these two, but that his mind at once turned to what he wanted these two to do. Note it well: "his mother . . . the disciple whom he loved" — the two in all the world who in human relationship were nearest to his heart. A holy, human tenderness lies in these two names: she who once bore him under her heart and bore him ever in love within her heart — he whose head had lain next to his heart and on his loving breast. — It is now that John must mention himself, and he does it in the simple yet significant way we have already learned in the previous text. But he adds the significant participle *παρεστῶτα*, **standing by**, a perfect tense but always used with a present meaning. Many may read this carelessly as if it meant that John stood beside the cross. But why should such a thing be said of John only, and not equally of Jesus' mother? Was not, in fact, the entire little group thus standing by the cross? and has not this been stated already, v. 25? "His mother, and the disciple standing by" means that John was "standing by" Jesus' mother. It is an intimate touch in the narrative. Not beside any of the other grief-stricken women was this beloved disciple standing, but beside his beloved Master's mother. And why beside her? Surely, not merely by accident, as if the per-

sons in the group just happened thus to have placed themselves. We have every reason to think, first of all, that Mary's sister was close to her to help support her here in this terrible moment; and secondly, we explain this participle, referring to John only, by assuming that he too, the only man in the group, supported Jesus' mother, helping to hold her up that she might not sink in a heap in her overwhelming grief.—Yet one thing more must be said. The suffering of John was itself like that of Mary. These two belonged together, because these two were losing in Jesus' death more than the rest. Mary was losing her son, John the Master who loved him beyond the rest. Neither Mary nor John would ever have Jesus again as once they had had him in tender, familiar, loving intercourse. Never would Mary embrace her son again and lay her head upon his breast; never would John recline again beside him on the same couch at table and be able to lay his head on Jesus' breast. Yes, John supported Mary, but as one who himself needed support just like her. These two belonged together indeed. In love both nearest to Jesus, now that he dies, they are joined before him. And Jesus "saw" it, and his heart understood.

Alas, what has Roman Catholicism made of this scene! Some of it is actual blasphemy of Christ in the very hour of his atoning death. Catholic books are full of this derogation of Christ and exaltation of Mary. We are told that Mary comes with her passion to the aid of her son on the cross. Alone he could not have accomplished the task; he never by himself could have borne the

sins of the world and made atonement for them. The mother of God had to cooperate with the Son of God. That is a summary of Catholic teaching. It invents two Mediators, where there is only one. It robs Christ to deify and glorify Mary. In doing this blasphemous thing it destroys the real atonement and invents one of its own. Simply to state the facts is to abhor them. There is *one* Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.

No interval or hesitation ensues. The eyes of Jesus and of his mother meet, and these words come from her son's lips: **Woman, behold, thy son!** Wonderful brevity, yet full sufficiency. In Jesus' death Mary loses an earthly son, and gains another. In the highest filial love Jesus provides for the last days of his mother. He commits his mother to the care of one whom Jesus so loved that he could entrust to him this dearest charge. — That word **woman** has disturbed some. They hurry to assure us that the word means nothing disrespectful on Jesus' part, which, of course, is true enough. And yet, when all on this point is said, "woman" is not identical with the inexpressible tender title "mother" — and Jesus does not here, even as he did not at the wedding in Cana, say "mother." There is a decided difference, and one fully intended by Jesus. But the reason for his using "woman" and not "mother" is certainly not that Jesus wished to avoid paining his mother by using the more tender name. Nor is it that he wished to avoid making known to the soldier guards the presence of his mother, who certainly could have guessed that his words were applicable only to the woman who

was his mother. The reason lies deeper. Ever since Jesus took up his work of redemption a new relation to his mother took precedence over the old relation of mere mother and son. Jesus was still Mary's son, but now she was to see in him also, and above all, her Lord and Savior. Once she had him merely as her son, to command and direct as a mother, to obey her mother wishes, dependent on her parental position. This yielded to a far higher, holier, and more blessed relation when that son of hers began his mediatorial work to win for her, as well as for us all, eternal salvation. It was then that Jesus said to her γύναι, instead of μητέρα. Now on Calvary he is completing that heavenly work. And in that work, not as a mere human son providing for his mother, but as God's Son, her Lord and her Redeemer, fulfilling for her and for us all the Fourth Commandment, he is making this last filial provision. That is why he says "woman" here again, and not "mother." And she who had understood all along, understands now. There is no outcry from her, no heartrending call: "O my son, my son!" 2 Sam. 18, 33. She is silent in her grief — the true mother of this divine Son. — It is foolish to misunderstand the words: **behold, thy son**, i. e.: "behold, *me*, thy son!" No, Mary has enough to bear; Jesus is not harrowing up her feelings with such a word. And this perversion ruins the entire act, for it makes the word to John completely senseless. Nor should we read: "behold thy son," for then "thy son" would have to be in the accusative. **Behold**, ἴδε, not ἰδοῦ, means that Mary is to behold the entire situation and how Jesus now

meets it. — The words are short, yet plain. The greatest weight falls on **thy son**. Jesus leaves John as a substitute son to care for Mary. This is his last filial gift to his mother. John was doing a son's part even now for Mary; he shall go on doing that as long as Mary may need a son's care.

Behold, what Catholicism has made of this word of the dying Savior! Like Pius IX., Jesus too makes Mary, by this word of his, the patroness of all Christians, who are represented by the disciple John. It was not Mary who needed John, but John, and with him and in him all other disciples or Christians, who needed Mary. One of these Mary worshippers writes: that "in the person of John Mary receives all Christians as her children. And this capacity of Mary entitles us to the right and the trust, that we place all our interests in her hands." What a reversal of the facts! Had Jesus been dependent on Mary, and not she on him? Had she during his ministry provided for him, and not he for her? And since when is John the grand representative of all Christendom? Since when is he the one in whom we all are summed up? No; Jesus is not adding to the burdens of Mary, least of all a world-burden no human being can possibly bear. He is not deifying his mother, not making her do what he alone can do and does for us all. He is comforting his mother in this terrible hour, unburdening her, and sending her the human help she needs. The words of Jesus from the cross are not so much rubber for men to pull in this or that direction according to their self-conceived ideas; they are

words fixed and solid, with a sense as plain as day, the one true sense of the words as they stand.

**Then saith he to the disciple, Behold, thy mother.** This word is the exact counterpart of the one to Mary; it carries nothing new. That is why it has been asked, why Jesus added this word. Was not the word to Mary enough? Did not John understand, as well as Mary, what the will of Jesus was? Would not John have obeyed that first word with alacrity, without Jesus adding the second? Already in that first word Jesus made John his adopted brother, his substitute, his administrator. And John certainly rejoiced to assume this position and to render his beloved Master this loving service. There was good reason why Jesus should add this second word to John. Jesus is here making, we may say, his personal will and testament. With all its brevity that will and testament ought to mention each person to whom a bequest is made. So Jesus addresses John as he had addressed his own mother. Jesus is not asking John merely by indirection or by an inference to take charge of his mother; Jesus would not treat his beloved disciple in that way. So he speaks to John just as he had spoken to his own mother. All are to know that it is John, and John alone, to whom this personal trust is conveyed. — Why Jesus selected John has been questioned. Why could not some of her other relatives have taken charge of Mary? This was altogether for Jesus alone to decide, not for us now to determine. These are highly personal matters, and Jesus made the best possible provision for his mother. Of all men John was nearest to Jesus' heart, and so the trust

was laid upon him. — But how about John's own mother and John's duty toward her? Those who raise this question can scarcely mean that Jesus had overlooked this point, and that, while he acted filially toward his own mother, he was leading John to act unfilially towards his own mother. To think such a thing possible would be to charge a fault against Jesus in this most sacred hour. No; love is not halved by thus adding objects of love. No child loves either parent less for there being two parents.

Willingly John accepts his great Master's last will and testament. **And from that hour the disciple took her unto his own home.** Yet the phrase "from that hour" cannot mean that immediately after Jesus' words John took Mary away. It is all very well to say that Jesus wished to spare Mary, so that she might not witness his last agony and actual death. Mary was not that kind of a mother. As the Lord's handmaiden she was strong in spirit to bear the heaviest load. She would never have left the scene while her son still lived. In that she was surely like almost all other mothers are! And can we assume that John hurried Mary away to his home in Jerusalem, and then, leaving her there alone, hurried back to see Jesus die and after that to aid in his burial? That would have been cruel indeed to Mary thus to leave her when most she needed support. Note that ὥρα in Greek does not always mean "hour" in the sense of the English hour of sixty minutes. In Matth. 24, 36: "of that day and hour knoweth no man," day is the briefer, hour the longer period. It is like our word "time." So we conclude that John took Jesus' mother to

her home when the events on Calvary were ended. — What must we understand by “unto his own,” εἰς τὰ ἴδια? Evidently *in domum suam*, John’s home. There is a report that John possessed a house at the foot of Zion hill in Jerusalem, and that Mary lived there with him for eleven years, and only after that did John go to preach in the whole world. But there is also another, that Mary died and was buried in Ephesus, where John must then have taken her. We cannot trust either. Of course, there would be no conflict with the practice of the first congregation’s sharing earthly possessions for John to have property of his own in Jerusalem. But all the property of the Zebedee family seems to have been at their home in Galilee. It is simplest and best to take it that John took Mary to the home where he, his mother, and brother staid in Jerusalem, which in no way need mean that he possessed property in Jerusalem. When John left the city he took the mother of Jesus with him. We have no record of the details, nor how long Mary yet lived. It is enough for us to know that John perfectly fulfilled the personal trust laid upon him by Jesus.

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#### HOMILETICAL HINTS

There is an exquisite tenderness about this little pericope which the preacher should aim if possible to reproduce in his sermon or sermons. This tenderness centers in Jesus, but it enfolds also Jesus’ mother and John the beloved. Of course, this tenderness is not sentimentalism and should not drop to that low level under the preacher’s hands. As far as John is concerned his love for Jesus is rewarded by Jesus making



use of his love. So also Jesus' love for John is here shown by imposing on him a burden of love which Jesus would have imposed on no other disciple. This is something we and our people often misunderstand. We are liable to think that the more we love Jesus and Jesus loves us, the less will he ask of us. The opposite is true. Only a strong love on our part can bear some burdens and do some works for Jesus which a lesser love would shrink from. And such burdens and works are honors which Jesus' love can entrust only to those who stand highest in his love. Once that is fully appreciated we will rejoice when Jesus asks more of us than he does of others, and to complain will appear to us like proving unfaithful in our love to the Savior's great love.

Love is a thing that cannot be shut in. It is like fire, always trying to break forth. A love that allows itself to be confined will soon be smothered out. Love blossoms forth in deeds of love. The more it produces the happier it is, and the more it develops and can produce.— Love looks to the loved one, not to others who have less love. It seeks no excuses, it seeks only opportunities. It takes those opportunities, not as burdens to groan under, but as honors to rejoice in. There is nothing selfish or mercenary about love. It is greedy only of more ways and greater tasks by which to show itself. And when it finds these its heart is happy.

How happy John must have been shortly after Jesus' death when he realized that while he was accepting a task of love from Jesus, Jesus was performing for him an infinite task of love, namely, giving his own life as a ransom for John.

We do not impose a trust on just anybody. Discipleship in general was not sufficient in the case of the care of Jesus' mother. More was required. Outside of certain natural qualifications, an inner closeness and nearness which will not only justify imposing the trust, but justify the assurance of a happy and willing performance of the trust. Thus for Jesus ever to impose a trust means that we are near and dear to him, that he trusts us, and that he counts on our appreciation of being selected for such a trust. John had to care for Mary for years to come. Food, clothing, shelter, and all

the little things that go to make life pleasant he would have to provide. We know what it means to take someone thus into our house and to make complete provision for such an added member to the family. But John never thought of that. He thought only of how well he might please the Lord who had made him his trustee. So to please him was his joy. Jesus made no mistake when he gave this great trust to John.

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**The Personal Trust  
Which Jesus Committed to John.**

- I. *How much it meant for Jesus to confer that trust.*
- II. *How much it meant for John to receive that trust.*

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**John, His Dying Master's Trustee.**

- I. *So dearly beloved.*

Humanly speaking the dearest person in all the world to Jesus was his mother. To whom would he commit her earthly care when now he had to leave her? — To the friend who was nearest and dearest to him — to the beloved disciple John. — For every sacred trust we seek a heart bound to us by an equally sacred love. Jesus still has sacred trusts to confer. Can he confer any of them on us? How near are we to him in our love.

- II. *So greatly trusted.*

Jesus wanted his mother provided for with the same loving care which he had given her and which he would have given her still if he had lived to care for her. — He trusted John to be his substitute, he literally made John this trustee. — Jesus still has trusts to confer. He still needs hearts that he can

fully trust, that will never forget, never neglect, never get weary, but hold true to the last. Is yours a heart to be trusted like that?

*III. So signally honored.*

For Jesus to put the care of his mother in John's hands was a signal honor. A burden and task like that was a great distinction. — Many consider honor in the Church to consist of the praise of men; but the real honors are the burdens and tasks the Lord bestows on us. Only true hearts and loyal hands are fit to carry such burdens and fulfill such tasks. "Men heed thee, love thee, praise thee not; the Master praises — what are men?"

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**The Apostle John Beneath the Cross.**

*I. The courageous love he showed.*

*II. The sacred trust he received.*

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**Calvary's Scene of Love.**

*I. The love that drew.*

It was the love of Jesus that drew John to Calvary beneath the cross. — How great that love was on Jesus' part John knew afterwards. — The joy that Jesus' love did not draw in vain.

*II. The love that came.*

John's love would not let him remain away, though the other disciples all left. — His love joined that of the women, and lovingly helped and supported them. — What John's coming meant to Jesus: one of the Twelve faithful.

*III. The love that gave.*

It looked as if Jesus asked something of John, in reality he gave something to John's love: the opportunity to continue his love in a noble act of love. John understood and prized that gift.

*IV. The love that took.*

How gladly John took the task of love Jesus gave. He little knew what it meant. He thought to care for a dead Master's mother; he found that an ever living Master was taking care of both him and the mother he had in his care. It is Jesus' way still.

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**The Mother and Son on Calvary.**

- I. The mother that lost a son.*
- II. The son that gained a mother.*
- III. The mother and son that found a Savior.*

# GOD IS LOVE

## 1 John 4, 7-11

In a series of texts on St. John at least one text should be from his epistles. We have chosen the passage from the First Epistle in which John wrote twice: "God is love." It was he who put this mighty and blessed fact into this its briefest and thus most striking form. The statement is typically Johannine in form — so short, the words so very simple, the whole said in a fraction of a second, and yet eternity is not sufficient for us to fathom what all lies in ὁ θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν.

This section from John's epistle would be misconcieved if we would follow the commentators who make it merely an admonition to brotherly love. Read these verses carefully, re-read them, and you will see that the admonitory feature is quite minor. It is, as it were, only a corollary to the greater thing that John here writes about. That greater thing is that *love marks everyone that is born of God*, that we in fact can test by this mark of love whether we are really born of God or not. Very naturally when John lays this great mark of the regenerate life before his readers he also bids them exercise that love, for love always comes forth and shows itself. Let us bear in mind then that we have more here than a set of reasons for an admonition to love; we have here the real essence of the regenerate life.

Yet this has been gravely misunderstood. The

love which is thus the essential mark of the regenerate life is by no means something independent, but always secondary. In our epistle this appears when we read the entire fourth chapter. The first six verses on the testing of the spirits whether they be of God or not (true prophets or pseudo-prophets) deal with *faith in the true Word of God*. That is the primary mark of the regenerate life; after that comes the secondary, namely love. This is what we have long learned in the simple truth that love is the fruit of faith. Let us hold that fast as fundamental for this text from John on love. To increase love (the fruit) increase first faith (the root); there is no other way. The purer the faith the truer the love; the richer the faith the fairer the love; the stronger the faith the more abundant the love. When men try to increase love without faith they only get a sham love. The ratio of pseudo-faith to pseudo-love will always hold true, no matter what false teachers may say. With these preliminaries clear and fixed in our minds we may consider what John writes on love as *an essential mark of the regenerate life*.

**7. Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is begotten of God, and knoweth God. 8. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.**

Here we have what we may call John's fundamental thesis, and this expressed both positively and negatively. Think what lies in the address: **Beloved**, ἀγαπητοί. John means: Ye that are beloved of God; certainly not: Ye that are my beloved ones, or the beloved of your brethren. These

verbal adjectives are passive, hence involve an agent, and that agent in this case is God. "Beloved," however, is not meant in the general sense as God loved the world, all men in general; but in the particular sense: "beloved as children of God" who have been begotten of God. The beloved of God are all true believers. Right here we touch again the great fact that faith is the root of our love. By faith these believers have in their hearts embraced the love of God in Christ Jesus and made it their own. — There is a fine correspondence between "beloved" and **let us love**, ἀγαπητοί and ἀγαπῶμεν, the latter the hortative subjunctive. They who by faith have received the love of God in their hearts certainly must show it by letting love emanate from their hearts. The thing is really axiomatic in the spiritual realm. In the statement as here made the middle link is taken for granted. This middle link is that we love God or Christ, who first loved us. The beloved of God love him in return and show that love by loving **one another**. — This means the love of Christians for each other. Some of the commentators correct John by pointing to God as love, and then arguing that God loved all men, and hence we too should love all men. But this is a mistake. In this entire section John is not dealing with God's universal love, but with his love for those begotten of God. Of course, God loved all men. But God's love for his children, while it rests on his universal love, is a far narrower thing. God can give to his children many love gifts which he cannot even offer to the sinful world which as yet does not love him at all. Let us not mix things up here and start to rewrite

John's words on love. So the love of God's children for each other is a particular thing, different from our love to sinful men generally. It is like the love between the brothers and sisters in a family. It is the love based on a peculiar inner tie and relationship. It is mutual and reciprocal. There is a great difference here. God's love for the world is all one-sided — the world does not reciprocate his love. So our love for all men is one-sided — non-believers and unbelievers do not even understand our love. But God's children do reciprocate; and John writes to us as God's children to love each other reciprocally. It is perfectly right for John, and thus also for us, to lift out God's special love for his children, and our special love for the brethren.

Before we go farther let us remind ourselves what **love**, ἀγάπη, really is. It differs from φιλία. The latter is the term for mere affection, as when one person likes another. "Love" as here used is far higher, for it consists first of full and deep *comprehension*, and secondly of a corresponding *purpose*. We see this plainly when we note God's love for the world. He could not like the sinful, foul, stinking world; he could not press it to his heart with affection; its reeking sin and guilt made it abominable to him. Yet he loved the world; that means he understood its condition and had the purpose to free and cleanse it from its abominations. Again we see what love means when Christ bids us love our enemies. Can we run up and kiss them, throw our arms around them? We would earn a curse and a kick. Yet we are to understand the wretched, damnable hate of our enemies, and our



great purpose should be to change them and implant love in their hearts. And this definition of love holds good when the object of our love is worthy, just as when that object is unworthy. Love God means, appreciate fully his blessed love and worthiness of love, and let the whole purpose of your heart be to glorify and praise that love, and thus to respond to its worthiness. Love the children of God means, understand their relation to God and to yourself, and then let your heart's purpose be to respond to that twofold relation, so that every thought, word, and deed shall reflect it. — These people who have a wishy-washy idea of "love" as mere affection are far from the lofty and deep scriptural conception. Sweet words and sugary actions are not Bible love. The genuine love holds true when we see and feel many faults in our brethren; we will understand those faults as well as their real character as God's children still, and our purpose will be to free them from those faults. Mere affection is shallow, and often turns to dislike. That is why there is so much strife, dislike etc. among Christians. They lack the ἀγάπη; they try to get along only with φιλία. In fact, they do not even have the full true ἀγάπη for God himself. Yet where the genuine biblical love is the basis, there will also be a lasting affection in the end. God will like us and press us to his heart when we love him; and the more we love each other and in our love be like God, the more will we also live in true affection for each other.

Why is love the true and proper relation for God's children toward each other? Because **love**

**is of God.** While **for** is correct, it here means "because," since it states the real reason. In Greek an abstract noun like ἀγάπη may or may not have the article; if for instance it is to be marked as the predicate in the sentence it would lack the article. Our English idiom uses the article with abstract nouns only for special reasons. We are to love each other, we who are beloved of God, because love is of God. Yet what John here says, while a reason for our loving each other, is more. Since everything that can really be called "love" is an outflow from God, ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ, we could not be his children, his beloved, if we had no love ourselves. — This comes out plainly in the addition: **and every one that loveth is begotten of God, and knoweth God.** Ὁ ἀγαπῶν is the substantivized present participle of quality, used to characterize a person. "Every one that loveth" means every one whose character is marked by love and loving; every one who has that distinctive quality. Nor is there a single exception. There could not be. He who has this mark, namely love derived from faith, he is a true child of God, he alone. In John's words: **he is begotten of God,** God is his Father, he is God's true child. The perfect tense γεγέννηται states something more than just the bare fact that he is begotten of God. This tense states that at some time in the past God begot him, and so he now lives as one thus begotten. Note this present implication. To be thus begotten of God is regeneration. There is no regenerate person who has not in him the quality of love and the activity of loving. Only John says: he has been, and thus is, begotten ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ, which is not the same as

ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ, "by God." Ἐκ denotes source, ὑπό would denote agency. John means that the regenerate life in the believer, this life which is marked by love and loving, is an outflow from God. This ἐκ phrase with "begotten" is identical with the ἐκ phrase joined to "love." The entire thought is syllogistic:

All love is derived from God.

Here is a man who has this love.

Ergo: he is derived from God, i. e. begotten of God.

This thing is thus true of every man who exercises love. Thus love is the essential mark of every regenerate man. And this is how John comes to bid us love one another. — But there is an addition: such a man is begotten of God **and knoweth God**. Here we have the significant verb γινώσκει, which means far more than intellectual knowing. It is what the dogmatists call *nosse cum affectu et effectu*. It is knowledge in the sense of personal experience, hence knowledge combined with an effect. In other words, he who loves thereby furnishes evidence that he is regenerate and that he has had the saving contact with God by which his heart realizes who God really is. As a child knows its father from living contact and association with that father, so God's children know him. It is all very simple, this matter of our love and our loving connecting us with God, and yet it is wonderful and oh, so blessed.

"The love of Jesus, what it is,  
None but his loved ones know,"

and that is equally true of the love of God.

What John has stated positively, he now repeats negatively, in order to emphasize it and at the same time in order to make it clearer: **He that loveth not knoweth not God.** Of course, there would be no use to tell him to love others, for he has no love as the fruit of faith, and hence cannot love. So John simply says "he that loveth not," using again the qualitative present participle, only here with μή, the regular participial negation (it is a mistake to call it "the subjective negative," there is nothing subjective about it). John does not need to say, such a man is not begotten of God; that is implied. But John does say: he **knoweth not God**, using the same significant verb, now with the negative οὐ. Only the Greek uses the aorist ἔγνω. Robertson p. 844 remarks: in cases like this "the Greeks did not care to use the perfect," though they might have used it; here: "hath not known God." This aorist is *not* used instead of the present tense. In Greek it simply states the fact that this man, being minus love, is also minus the knowledge of God. Only it puts the fact into the past: he never did know him; or: he never even began to know him. In his whole life there is no point at which such knowing can be put. Look at his life — it is all a blank as far as knowing God, really having had an experience with God, is concerned. — And the reason is self-evident: **for God is love**, and ὅτι, "for," is "because." John is really using an abbreviated syllogism:

God is love.

Here is a man who is minus love.

Ergo: he is minus God.

That means, he never had contact with God, hence has no experimental knowledge of him. First John used the axiom: "love is of God," flows from him as its one fountain; now he uses what lies back of that axiom, namely: "God is love." Because God is himself love therefore love is and must be of God. The tendency especially of the rationalistic commentators is to reduce John's word and make it mean only, "God is loving." We need not bother with their efforts which all run in the same direction. If John here says only that God is loving, then his argument is a fallacy. One might know God as mighty, as omnipresent, etc., and thus really know him, if as far as love is concerned that were only one of God's activities. So rationalism when examined proves itself unreasonable or irrational in its contention. Even this reduction cannot be admitted that "love" is only *an attribute*, for there the same fallacy would result; in other words the conclusion would not hold that a man minus love cannot possibly have known God. In Dogmatics we may list *Amor Dei* among the divine attributes, but only as denoting God's Being or Essence. And when we do this we see the disparity as regards the other attributes. For in ἀγάπη as predicated of God there lie locked up all the great attributes of grace, mercy, loving kindness, goodness, patience, etc., which shows that "love" when predicated of God describes his very Essence. So also in the Scriptures "love" alone is predicated of God with the bare copula: God *is* love. We cannot say: God *is* omnipotence, or *is* holiness, etc., nor do the Scriptures speak thus. The nearest they come to this with any attribute

is in regard to wisdom, when in Prov. 9 "Wisdom" is personified. So we rightly conclude: love is *the essence* of God, his very Being. Some of the dogmatists have for this very reason defined God as love — a thing they have not done with any mere attribute. And John's deduction is true: no man minus love can possibly know God.

"If one were to keep saying, Love is a noble, high quality of the soul, the most precious and perfect virtue, as the philosophers speak of it, that would all be as nothing against this that John pours out in one statement: God himself is Love; his Being is nothing but pure love, so that if one would paint God and secure a likeness he would have to achieve a picture that is all pure Love, as if the divine nature were nothing but a furnace and glow of Love that fills heaven and earth. And again, if one could paint and carve Love, he would have to make a picture that is really no longer human, yea, not even angelic or heavenly, but God himself. Behold, thus the apostle is able to paint it, so that he makes of God and Love one thing, in order that by means of such a noble, precious, and lovely picture he the more allures and draws us that we try to show love one toward another." Luther.

**9. Herein was the love of God manifested in us, that God hath sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.**

**10. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.**

That God is love is evidenced by the supreme fact that God sent his Son for our salvation. It is

as if John would say: Look at the Only Begotten Son sent into the world, then you will see indeed that God is love. **Herein was the love of God manifested** has the verb in the aorist, because this thing is a historical fact. This manifestation actually occurred. The passive ἐφανερώθη has back of it God as the agent: this love was so manifested by God himself. The addition: was manifested **in us** causes much discussion among the commentators. They twist about and make the simple phrase mean: "in our case" (R. V. marginal reading); "on us"; "with regard to us"\*; "among us"; "with us"; etc., just about everything except the right thing which is: "*in us*," in our hearts. Much confusion results when this manifestation is taken as merely objective, and when a false contrast is run into the word, viz. *the hidden love reveals* itself. There is no hint of anything thus hidden, which then at last is revealed. And the verb simply means "was manifested," and nothing more. Yet when God manifests something, it ought to be plain that somebody must see what is manifested. I can *show* a thing a thousand times, but if I fail to get anybody to *see* it all my showing is nothing. God showed his love in sending his Son. Does anybody see it? The world does not, of course; but we do. So this manifestation has an objective side as coming from God, and a subjective side as actually reaching our hearts. — Now the historical and ob-

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\* The author hereby corrects his explanation in *The Eisenach Epistle Selections*, p. 563, where he was misled too much by the commentators.

jective fact is stated, in which this wonderful manifestation took place: **that God hath sent his only begotten Son etc.** The emphasis is on the object which for this reason is placed forward in Greek: "his Son the only begotten" — no less a gift did God send. John might have written only "his Son," for there is only one Son of God, existing from eternity, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, of the same essence as the Father, co-equal in every respect. But as in his gospel he uses the significant and unmistakable designation **the only begotten**, μονογενής. In our passage it is especially clear that this term cannot refer to the virgin birth of Christ, as Zahn (and with variation Luthardt) labors at length to prove. The word is metaphysical, and declares the eternal generation of the Son, as all sound commentators have held, and as we confess in the Athanasian Creed: "not made, nor created, but *begotten*," i. e. from eternity. Just as "his Son" did not become "his Son" by being sent (or becoming incarnate), so "the Only Begotten" did not become "the Only Begotten" by being sent (or becoming incarnate). He was both before he was sent, and was sent because from all eternity he was both. Compare the word as used in the Prolog of the gospel, *Eisenach Gospel Selections*, I, p. 87 etc.; 131 etc. What a gift to send into the world! Human thought is unable to rise to the height of such infinite love. — The verb is significant: **hath sent**. It embraces far more than the Incarnation alone, namely the entire mission of the Son for our salvation, beginning with the Incarnation and including all that the Son did to effect our salvation. The



Greek tense, too, is significant. It is not a bare aorist simply to record the historical fact of the sending. Our English "hath sent" might be read only in this sense. But the Greek perfect denotes this past fact of the sending and at once couples with that fact the continuous effect and result of that fact as this result is present to-day. God sent the Son, and now for ever he is before us as the One thus sent.

God sent him thus **into the world**, which means more than "into this earth" or earthly life. In all such statements as this ὁ κόσμος means the whole world of sinful men. Nor dare we make this statement too narrow, as though the Son appeared only among sinful men, so that some saw him while the great bulk did not. He was sent "into the world" on a mission embracing the whole world, affecting the whole world. While this is not said directly, it is certainly implied. So here the universality of Jesus' mission is indicated. — The purpose of this mission is put into the words: **that we might live through him**. Some might think that John should write: "in order that *the world* might live (or be saved) through him." But look at the aorist ζήσωμεν. It does not speak of a general purpose, but of an actual accomplishment. The universal purpose implied in the phrase "into the world" is actually realized only in those who believe, for which reason also a moment ago John wrote that God's love was made manifest "in us," not "in the world." The aorist verb tells us that the purpose of God was actually realized in "us," those of us who are reborn and thus live. It could

not be realized in those who refused to believe and rejected the gift of true spiritual life. "Through him" denotes mediation, even as the Son sent is the divine Mediator. Here then we who believe and live through the Son behold the wondrous love of God as it has actually shown itself to us.

The thought is so great that John repeats it in a different way. From the manifestation of God's love John advances to a statement on the substance of that love. And this statement is both negative and positive, thus complete and clear: **Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, etc.** If anyone wants to know in what love really consists, namely the very essence of love, he must not look at us who have come indeed also to love, but to God who is the original fountain of love. Note the contrast between ἡμεῖς and αὐτός, both of which have emphasis. It is utterly beside the mark to think, as Weiss does, of love as required by the law and manifested in the Old Testament saints. This blunders in several ways, for by the law there is no love and never was, it is only by the Gospel; and the Old Testament saints had no love by the law, what love they had was like ours by the Gospel. John is speaking here of the actual love of true believers. Note how he uses the perfect tense ἠγαπήκαμεν: we came to love in the past and now go on loving. But however perfect this love may be, we cannot from this love learn fully what love is. — For this we must go to that other love, which lies back of our love and is infinitely greater and divinely perfect: **but that he loved us, etc.** Here the historical aorist appears, be-

cause John means the supreme act of God's love in giving his Son for us. Thus again he is putting God's love concretely before us. — That this is correct we see from the addition: **and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.** That was a definite act. It is here viewed again in relation to "us," i. e. those in whom its object of love was actually accomplished. We need not repeat what has already been said in regard to the sending of the Son. Here John adds to the fact of this sending. He puts an apposition beside τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ, namely ἰλασμόν, "as a propitiation." This is one of the great terms in the Bible, and its study should include the verb ἰλάσκομαι as well. The term denotes propitiation or expiation, viz. the propitiatory acts, such as sacrifice and prayer. But not in the pagan sense. The heathen did not have, to begin with, the favor of the gods, but had to gain that favor by propitiations, also keeping these up lest the favor be again withdrawn. So they propitiated their gods. The biblical idea is entirely different. God, to begin with, is full of grace and favor to man. He needs no propitiating to be so disposed toward us. But in order that he may not because of our sins be compelled to change his attitude toward us, a propitiation is necessary, namely an expiation of our sins. And this propitiation must be one designed by himself, an institution and gift of his love toward us. He arranges the great Substitute for the expiation which is necessary for our sins. By this expiation God's love meets the requirements of his justice. With the propitiation rendered God's grace can continue toward us, and his justice cannot inter-

fere. Thus the propitiation does not change God (as the heathen imagined their propitiations), and the propitiatory sacrifice is not a tribute which is to satisfy God. We never read of "propitiating God." This propitiation affects *men*, by removing them from the range of God's justice and wrath. Thus too the Propitiator does not represent God or act for God; he represents sinful men who themselves cannot stand before God. His sacrifice removes our sins. So also this Propitiator receives from God and brings to us the blessing from God. And the abstract term here used by John: the "propitiation" for our sins, simply denotes that in Christ his person and his expiation, including the effect, are combined. When the commentators say that here the priest and the sacrifice are to be joined together in our thought, they misconceive the term. Compare Cremer, *Bibl.-theol. Woerterbuch d. neutest. Graezitaet*, by Jul. Koegel, 10th ed., p. 517 etc. These cardinal terms of the Gospel are so important that every preacher ought to give them the most intensive study, and not depend on the mere remarks of commentators, who so often have themselves failed to take the necessary time for this study. — The usual construction of the verb is with *περί*, hence this is used also for the noun: **for our sins**, or "regarding our sins." Note here how the propitiation deals with *us* and is intended to change *our* relation to God. There is no trouble in regard to God, who is only too glad to show us all his love; the trouble is with us and with our sins which would block his love. And so that love has done even this: sent Christ as a propitiation to remove our sins, so

that God's love can freely flow out to us now as his children. — Here again John speaks only of God's children, not of the whole world. It is for the reason already noted, namely that while propitiation is made for all, so many refuse to accept it; hence they in whom this propitiation attains its great purpose are rightly mentioned in a particular manner. When Calvinists use our passage to prove their idea of a limited atonement, they misuse it in an inexcusable way.

**11. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.**

Here is the application. The address: **Beloved**, simply takes up once more the same address in v. 7. Only we should feel that when John writes "beloved" he means: You who have actually received and experienced all this love which I have just set forth. — The conditional sentence is one of reality: **if God so loved us** — and he actually has so loved us. That is why the indicative is used in the protasis. It is an aorist because it speaks of the historical fact of the manifestation of God's love in the sending of his Son. The emphasis is on οὕτως, "so," namely as just set forth. — But the apodosis: **we also ought to love one another**, dare not be read in a superficial sense. This is no mere parallel: God loved — we love. Nor mere likeness: as God loved — so we should love. The thing is far deeper. The very Being of God is love, and his Being determines our being. We are not merely to imitate him in our feeling and acting. Our feeling and acting is to be like his because our very being is reborn, and thus

not made merely like his but spiritually united with his Being. We are begotten of the God who is love; that means his nature of love is now in us his spiritually begotten children. Born of God who is love we cannot but love also, just as he cannot but love. The same fountain in him and in us must produce the same stream. Only he is love from eternity in unchangeable Being; we have become love by a new birth. He is love underived; we are love spiritually, having derived this new nature from him. "We also ought," *οφείλομεν*, means obligation. Note that the Scriptures do not deal with the notion of "duty," which we so often are inclined to stress. It may come as a surprise, but "very little indeed is said in the Bible about duties — one is surprised when he looks for the word. The word we do find is 'ought.' First, the 'ought' of moral necessity: 'it behooves'; secondly, the 'ought' of moral obligation: 'we owe,' 'to be indebted.'" See the author's *The Active Church Member*, p. 119. Here John uses for us the idea of indebtedness. For all that we have received from the God of love we are certainly deeply indebted to him; and since we have received love in such measure from him, even to the changing of our spiritual nature, by our very new nature we are indebted to show love. — John writes again: **one another**, v. 7, but places this object forward of the verb. Let it not surprise us that John here says nothing about loving our fellow men. We ourselves have experienced God's manifestation of love only in ourselves as believers, or when we became believers; and so we are to show the love that has been realized in us by loving each

other, i. e. the believers. As John ranges around God's love those in whom this love is effective, so in that same circle our love is to show itself effective. That is the essential thing. And let us add, when this essential thing is realized as it should, there will be no trouble about the further manifestation of love.

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### HOMILETICAL HINTS

The greatest text in the Bible is this: "God is love"; for there is none greater than God, and there is nothing greater that we can say of God than that he is love. The words are so simple, just two nouns coupled together; but the human mind will never reach the bottom of this text.

In the wonderful picture which these few verses give us of God as in his very Being love, let us not fail to see that the fundamental answer on our part to that love is faith, and only after that love. All the manifestation of God's love which brings his love to us; his sending of the only begotten Son, his purpose that we should live, his preparation of the great Propitiation and its offer for our acceptance — all this is intended to awaken our faith and trust. Who would not trust this wondrous love? It is very essential that we understand this aright. So the heart of the Gospel: "God is love," appeals directly to us for faith, and always will. If God were not love — no matter what else he might be —, we might have misgivings. But now there can be none.

By faith we know God in his love. It is the only way. He who trusts his love knows that it is love and knows what that love is. He who mistrusts him by that very act remains in ignorance of his love, and nothing can ever help him except he come to trust. How does a child know its mother's love? Only by trusting that mother and her love. And you know, the child makes no mistake in regard to either. One might think all this about God and love cannot really be true.

That is one reason why John puts it concretely, and not just abstractly. The deeds God's love has done for us are incontrovertible facts. Now facts are stubborn things. Run your doubts against these facts and your doubts will be shattered to pieces. Take those facts to your heart, as actual, real facts, and see how they fit your heart, answer your fears, ease your conscience, all this by the propitiation of the Son, and you will indeed, by a living experience, know God, and know that he is love.

The common notion of love which men make of God for themselves is wholly foreign to St. John. God is not love in just being soft-hearted, unable to punish or hurt, just shutting an eye to our wickedness, like indulgent fathers and mothers. All that is exploded by the propitiation which God prepared for our sins, making his own Son that propitiation. The love that did such a thing is both holy and righteous. Let no man act presumptuously toward that love! Of course, presumption is *not* love.

And now comes the fruit of this faith in God who is love. It is love on our part. And even as the full measure of God's love is poured out into the hearts and lives of his children, so the love of these children will go out to God in return and will show that it does by loving each the other. It will be like in a family, where each child loves the parents, and for that very reason loves the other children of the parents, the brothers and sisters. And this is a closed circle, with the line definitely drawn, so that none other are loved just like that. And this love is an essential mark of the family relation of all those concerned, so that it would be abnormal and a bastard sort of thing not to have that love.

You can estimate love by its gifts. A mother will give her life for her child. That is why among men mother love is the highest mere human love known. Estimate God's love in the same way. He gave his Only Begotten Son. There is no possible higher gift. That is why God is love. If he had given less than this absolutely supreme gift one might qualify the statement that God is love. Now it cannot be qualified. Not one iota can be subtracted from it.

See how fitting it is that St. John should write: "God is



love," and not St. Peter or some other apostle. It was St. John who lay in Jesus's bosom and was most beloved of the Master. They all knew Jesus' love and God's love. They all wrote of it. St. Paul gave us the greatest chapter, 1 Cor. 13, on our love to each other; but it was given to St. John to put into this supreme form the highest fact of all, that God in his very Being is love. But now that God enabled him to state it, the great fact is the possession of us all.

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### How St. John Taught Us That God is Love.

- I. *He makes that love stand out in its manifestation.*
  - II. *He makes that love win our heart's faith and trust.*
  - III. *He makes that love move us to respond in love.*
- 

### St. John Unlocks For Us the Heart of God.

Many know about God, but do not know God. They use wrong methods, such as never bring them to the heart of God (intellectual ideas about God). How different is St. John, the beloved disciple of Jesus; let him unlock for us the heart of God.

#### I. *That heart is love.*

Here analyze love with its mighty *comprehension* and its wondrous saving *purpose*. And be sure to set this love before the hearers in concrete, tangible examples. Above all God is love, his very heart is love.

#### II. *The key is the Son.*

By him, and by him alone, we know the love of God. Whoever talks of God's love without the Son is like a man trying to unlock a safe without knowing the combination. — It is the Son sent as our propitiation who is like the key to the treasure heart of God.

*III. The unlocking is faith.*

The knowledge or living experience of faith in the Son and his propitiation is like getting into the very heart of God. To know God by faith is to possess the propitiation he has made (pardon), to be begotten of God (regeneration), to live (the new, undying life). For all others the heart of God is still sealed and locked, since they refuse to use faith, the one key (unbelief).

*IV. The treasure disclosed.*

God's love and all its gifts to his beloved children. His love and our answering love ("not that we loved God," implying that we do love him now that we possess his love). What joy thus to love God and receive his constant love! — His love and our answering love to each other, like a family of children. We loving the others, they all loving us.

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**"God is Love."**

St. John displays to us:

- I. The wonder of it.*
- II. The richness of it.*
- III. The fruit of it in our hearts and lives.*

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**Do You Really Know God?**

Let St. John help you to answer that vital question.

- I. Have you come into personal contact with his love?*
- II. Have you received the propitiation for your sins?*
- III. Have you been begotten of God?*
- IV. Is there love to God and his children in your heart?*

Is so, then you do know God by some inner contact of heart knowledge. And there is nothing so precious in all the world as this heavenly experience.

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St. John by Inspiration draws the curtain aside and shows us

**What God's Love Really Is.**

- I. *His love and propitiation.*
- II. *His love and our new life.*
- III. *His love and our knowledge.*
- IV. *His love and our love.*

## JOHN'S VISION OF CHRIST IN GLORY

Rev. 1, 9-20

A line of texts centering around the apostle St. John must offer some selections from the Apocalypse. Many have been reluctant about making more than an incidental use of this book, especially when they saw the extravagant lengths to which others allowed themselves to be carried who plunged headlong into the mysteries of this book. But non-use and timid hesitation is evidently not the proper thing. Not thus will we do our full duty in the face of all the wild millennialism and allied fanaticism which so abuse this part of Holy Scripture. By the true exposition we must repute the false. Nor is this such a forbidding task when it comes to the Apocalypse. It means simply that, keeping safe hold of the analogy of faith and taking with us the sound, tried principles of exegesis, we go to work with the best means at hand and thus set forth clearly what the Holy Spirit has here recorded for our learning. We will soon find a wealth of truth that is quite clear — that we must appropriate and use. We will also find, especially in this book, mysteries that to us remain dark — these we will note and leave as they are, the better posted, however, and fortified thus against the vagaries of foolish sects who think they are wise in their very folly.

When St. John is symbolized by the eagle because of his lofty flights and his unblinking gaze

into the fullest light of the sun, it is in good part because of the Apocalypse that he deserves this symbol. In this book, by the Lord's own aid, he rose to supreme heights indeed; in the visions here recorded for the Church he gazed upon the most wonderful heavenly glories. We shall gain much by humbly, reverently following him.

Among the visions we all need is that of the glorified Savior himself who appeared unto the apostle that he might draw for us, in humble human language, this picture of his supreme greatness. We think much of the lowly Jesus who once walked the earth under the burden of our sins and wrought out our redemption by the price of his blood. Some of his divine glory appears in his miracles, his resurrection, his ascension, and his mission of the Holy Ghost. We need still more, namely the vision of our Lord as now he lives and reigns forever in his heavenly exaltation. This mighty revelation of Jesus Christ is furnished us in fullest measure in the Apocalypse. If from the book we drew only this much, and no more, there would result for us a great uplift of faith, a strong steadying force amid temptation and tribulation, a deep devotion to his Gospel and his Church, and an intensified hope for the blessedness and glory that this heavenly Savior has prepared for us. In his name, then, and by his divine help let us feast our souls on **St. John's Vision of Christ in Glory.**

The Apocalypse is originally addressed to the seven churches once located in Asia Minor (1, 4), and through them certainly also to all who love the Lord's appearing ( Tim. 4, 8). The opening section

of this book is as wonderful as the Prolog in John's Gospel, in fact it constitutes a counterpart to the Prolog, both of these opening sections setting before us the Savior in his divine greatness. In the Apocalypse there is first of all a solemn announcement of what this book is: Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, and this announcement ends with a beatitude, v. 1-3. Then follow the address and greeting, and these end with a doxology, v. 4-6. Thirdly, note the apocalyptic promise, and this ends with what may be called the Lord's own signature or seal, v. 7-8. These three brief sections are preliminary. Now follows the real introduction, which states how this revelation came to John, and thus at once reveals to us the glorious Revelator himself.

Verse 9. — **I, John, your brother and partaker with you in the tribulation and kingdom and patience which are in Jesus, etc.** It is for the third time that John here names himself. In other places in this book John likewise speaks without hesitation in the first person, and in 22, 8 he once more authoritatively mentions his own name. The reason for his doing this may be gathered from the latter passage: "And I John am he that heard and saw these things." It is the voice of apostolic authority and personal witness. In the gospel which John wrote he could humbly withhold his own name, for those events had other witnesses beside himself, often many of them, and three other gospels had already been written before John penned the fourth. Revelation had but one earthly witness — **John**. He was bound to sign his own name. — But was this "John" really the apostle? If so, why did he

not put that down, instead of describing himself merely as "your brother," etc.? In answer to the latter point Zahn (*Intro.* III, 430) replies: "The most important consideration of all is the fact that the present work gave him no occasion to call himself an apostle. Any member of the Church possessing prophetic gifts may become the recipient of a revelation." In other words, to receive and to record a *revelation* is not a specific *apostolic* function at all. With apt irony Zahn continues: "John has never been able to satisfy his critics. When, as in the gospel and the epistles, he refrains from using his title of honor explicitly, it is evidence that he has occasion to conceal something; on the other hand, if, as in Revelation he mentions his own name, it is the sign of disagreeable obtrusiveness. If he emphasizes, as in John 19, 35, I John 1, 1-4, the fact that he was an eye-witness, it betrays a suspicious design; if, as in Revelation, he lets his historical relation to Jesus remain in the background, it is proof that the relation did not exist. When he happens to speak once objectively of the twelve apostles, this is just as conclusive evidence that he was not one of their number, as if he called himself the presbyter instead of the apostle." — That the writer of Revelations is beyond question the apostle John is plain from the way this writer designates himself — simply "John," without prefix or addition, a name which at that period, and in Asia, every Christian would apply at once to the great apostle who dwelt in Ephesus. Take in addition that he calls himself a servant of Christ, one who bore witness of the Word of God and of the testimony of Jesus

Christ, and that an eye-witness (v. 2), who for the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ was in the island of Patmos, a fellow sufferer with those to whom he writes (v. 9), authorized to make this wonderful revelation to the churches, a fellow servant with angels and prophets — and the proof is complete, there is only one John whom all these descriptions fit. Every critical effort to substitute some other John (John Mark; or the imaginary "John the presbyter") abandons all historical ground and operates with conjecture alone! There is abundant ancient testimony that the apostle John wrote Revelation, which men like Luecke and Duesterdieck may contradict and seek to invalidate, but cannot overthrow. Especially noteworthy is the statement of Irenæus: "It (Revelation) was seen no very long time ago, but almost in our own generation, at the close of Domitian's reign," which fixes the date of writing at about the year 95. Eusebius records the tradition, which he does not question, that in the persecution under Domitian John the apostle and evangelist, being yet alive, was banished to the island of Patmos for his testimony of the divine Word.

The humility of John, so notable in his gospel, appears here in another manner when he describes himself to his Christian brethren as **your brother, etc.** "Brother" here must not be identified with the following term: "partaker with you in the tribulation," etc. While there is only one Greek article for the two nouns, and thus the two constitute one general concept, still the two elements in that concept remain: "brother," and "partaker." It is not



his high office that John stresses, but first of all his fraternal relation to his readers—he is their brother as also redeemed, reborn, and believing in Jesus Christ. The Christian should always overshadow the church officer, no matter how high the office ranks. In every office bearer the Christian should be supreme. John, too, is avoiding any suggestion as though Revelation were a work of his own; quite the contrary, he suggests to his readers that Jesus Christ might have granted this Revelation to any other “brother” just as well, and it would then have been just as worthy of faith as it is now. — But the fact of John’s being a “brother” of the Christians to whom he writes, connects him with them so closely that he shares their painful lot: **partaker with you in the tribulation and kingdom and patience which are in Jesus.** The term “partaker” carries with it the idea of fellowship, communion, close association. — The phrase with ἐν states the domain in which this fellowship occurs. There are three nouns, with one article for the three, thus combining the three, however distinct each may be in itself, with reference to the partaking. The first is **tribulation**, in the sense of pressure brought on by persecution. When John suffered banishment to the island of Patmos he had a strong taste of that tribulation. In the individual letters addressed to the seven churches there is mention of tribulation enough among them at this very time. But while this actual infliction of suffering should certainly be recalled here, “the tribulation” mentioned by John is broader; it includes all the evil which the foes of the Church inflict upon her —

of it all each member bears his share, and thus becomes a partaker. — When John now places beside “tribulation” the term **kingdom**, we at once feel the strong contrast. But not as Daechsel puts it, referring the “tribulation” to the present, and the “kingdom” to the future. The “kingdom” is here now, and by grace through faith we are partakers of it. Of course, this “kingdom” extends also into a glorious future. — Now follows another striking term, namely **patience**, which has rightly been called “the morally mediating factor,” linking together our participation first in the “tribulation,” secondly in the “kingdom.” This “patience” is the believer’s quiet endurance, willingly bearing the tribulation caused by the world’s hatred, for the sake of the blessedness enjoyed in the kingdom. — The final phrase: **in Jesus**, modifies all three nouns preceding, even also as they constitute one grand whole. All three are “in Jesus,” that is in union and communion with him. It is significant that John here uses the Savior’s personal name, and not one of his official titles. This is a touch which betrays the apostle who personally knew Jesus, who walked and talked with him in a familiar way.

The predicate, ἐγενόμην, is an aorist, stating the past fact historically as such (I) **was in the isle that is called Patmos** (at present Patmo, or Palmosa). It is a fair inference that John wrote down the account of Revelation after the great vision had passed. This is most natural also for other reasons. We cannot entertain the idea of those who think the writing was done while the ecstatic vision was in progress. — Now John does not say

that he was *banished* to this island, and therefore some have concluded that the ancient tradition to that effect is false. But the tradition is too well attested to admit of any doubt. John is not the man to thrust his personal affairs forward where this can be avoided. And pray, what would take him to this tiny isle in his old age, where there was but a handful of people and undue hardships for a lone stranger? Not even a plausible guess has been hazarded.—The *διὰ* phrase states the cause for John's presence in Patmos: **for the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus**, i. e. because of this Word etc., on account of it. We must compare v. 2, where we read of John that he bare witness "of the Word of God and of the testimony of Jesus Christ," and then the apposition: "of all things that he saw." The identical expressions in v. 2 and v. 9 must have an identical meaning, and the latter must be governed by the former. The effort to make "the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus" signify the revelations received at Patmos, i. e. the contents of the book John was writing, is beyond doubt specious. In neither verse can this meaning be held. In verse 2 the aorist ἐμαρτύρησεν forbids it. The relative clause in which it occurs simply characterizes John as an eye-witness of the life and deeds of Jesus while on earth. The aorist in the relative clause cannot be the so-called epistolary aorist, which looks at an act from the point of time of the reader, not of the writer; and for the simple reason that John is not writing an epistle. After John has himself called this book of his an "Apocalypse," it is impos-

sible to designate it by the far broader and more general terms: "the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ." On the other hand, these broad terms fit exactly the work of John as an apostle and writer of the fourth gospel and the three epistles. He taught, preached, and wrote, and thus bore witness during his long past official career of **the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus**. In the Gospel especially he recorded most fully Jesus' own attestation to his divine Sonship and Messiahship. So also in v. 9 it is incomprehensible why the revelation John is about to present should not have been plainly called "revelation," if he meant to say that in order to receive this revelation he had been led to go to Patmos. To use a *διὰ* phrase for this purpose would be singular indeed and misleading. Why should he avoid a purpose clause of some kind, when he meant to say that he came to Patmos for such a purpose? On the other hand, all is plain when in v. 2 John states that his whole life-work hitherto had been that of an apostle and eye-witness of Jesus, and when now in v. 9 he tells us that on this very account (*διὰ*) he suffered banishment to a lonely isle. There is no conceivable reason why the Lord should have sent him to such a place for the purpose of receiving these visions, when Ephesus, where he had labored so long, would have served just as well. — The term **word of God** has a well defined meaning; it signifies in general the Gospel of salvation. The same is true of the second term: **the testimony of Jesus**. In a marked way Jesus is called the witness, the bearer of testimony, his words and deeds a μαρτυρία, a testimony or attesta-

tion intended to call forth and enkindle faith. In both terms the appended genitives are simply possessive: the Word which belongs to God; the testimony which belongs to Jesus. As an exile John was driven by the ruthless persecution of the emperor Domitian, or rather some of his agents in Asia Minor, to Patmos, a tiny island opposite Miletos, quite barren, with few people and scarcely any communication — a fit place for exile.

Verse 10. — John continues in narrative fashion using simple historical aorists to state the past facts. **I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day.** That was on a certain Sunday during his exile. Daehsel fancifully records the exact date as Oct. 19, in the year 66 — for which he furnishes absolutely no proof. We know it was about in the year 95, and there is no closer date. The **Lord's day** is simply Sunday, which already in the earliest apostolic times came to be the Christian day for assembly and public worship. The designation here used is the first we know of "Lord's day." Christ made that first day of the week peculiarly his own, distinguishing it by rising from the dead on that day, and 50 days later pouring out the Holy Spirit on that day. Only the Greek uses an adjective with the noun "day," not a genitive. — Now we learn how John received the Revelation — he was **in the Spirit.** That means he was awake, not asleep; he did not see these visions in a dream. To be in the Spirit is the opposite of coming to one's self, Acts 12, 11. Ordinarily our natural senses are fully operative and responsive to the natural world about us as well as to our own body. But God's

Spirit is able to inhibit completely this responsive connection between a man's spirit and the world about him, and to bring his spirit into direct contact with the invisible, the higher, or spiritual world. This action is charismatic. In the rare cases recorded by Scripture this opening of the mind and spirit directly to the other world is a gift, granted for brief moments or periods and for specific gracious purposes. There is absolutely nothing pathological about it; it is also beyond all psychology, because it is miraculous, wrought by God himself. We call it ecstasy, or an ecstatic state, because the spirit is taken out of the ordinary contact and placed into one entirely new and superior. It cannot possibly be self-induced. Where such efforts are tried a rank sham is the result, a dangerous self-delusion, and a condition which the devil is only too ready to use for his lying and destructive purposes. There are latent possibilities in the mind and spirit of man, which in some individuals and under given influences come into exercise and are quite wonderful, reaching far beyond ordinary consciousness. These, however, while rare and thus strange, lie in the field of nature, and there are dangers here too, due to misuse and false ambitions. See Delitzsch, *Bibl. Psychologie*, 2nd ed., 284 etc. Our versions have **Spirit** capitalized, it seems, because the ecstatic state is produced by the Holy Spirit; it is hard to choose between this and the uncapitalized "spirit," referring to the spirit and inner ego of John himself.—With this spirit thus exalted above the material world about him John's first sensation was that of a mighty voice addressing him:

**and I heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet saying, etc.** The aorist again states the simple fact. Two things deserve notice: one, that the ordinary sensations and actions of John are still used — he hears, sees, feels, and tastes (10, 9), he turns, falls prostrate, etc.; the other, that wonderful things revealed to him are made to pass before him in the order of time (note for instance 8, 1). Yet we must remember that all this was in the ecstatic state, far above any ordinary experience, and yet even so a condescension of the great Revelator to John as a human instrument. — The great Revelation begins with a voice speaking to him. John writes: I heard it **behind me**. Why thus, and not above him, or before him, who can say? All we dare venture is the thought that the mighty sound of that voice and the command it utters were first of all, to impress John, then the other sensations were to follow — it was the order the Revelator chose. — That **voice** was **great**, and the kind of greatness meant is pictured to the reader: **as of a trumpet**. It was thus loud, reverberating, with great volume and penetration. Because angels are said to have trumpets and to blow them with a tremendous sound is no reason here to think of an angel speaking, and certainly by a trumpet intelligible words are not uttered. The “as” shows that nothing is meant but a human simile. Some commentators hesitate to identify the speaker in this case, though why is hard to say, when there is only one person mentioned in the following and the word of command he utters fits his lips in every way. It is Jesus. The ringing loudness of

his voice is in harmony with his heavenly majesty. — In the Greek the participle for **saying** is attracted in its case to the genitive of the immediately preceding word “trumpet,” a change quite permissible in that tongue.

Verse 11. — The words addressed to John are these: **What thou seest, write in a book, etc.** Here we have the present tense, but certainly not as if the point of time were stressed. This is really set aside, and the tense is what the grammarians term a timeless present, i. e. one in which the time feature is disregarded. Only the durative idea is kept—the vision will proceed from one thing to another. So also seeing is all that is mentioned, while evidently hearing is included. Thus we speak of a “vision” even when parts of it are words heard. — The two aorist imperatives, **write and send**, are peremptory because of the tense. While the sending is a brief act, the writing takes time, but by this tense is viewed also as one compact act. The mention of **a book** indicates to John that the vision about to be granted him will take in many things sufficient for an extended record.— This record which John is commanded to make is intended for **the seven churches**, local assemblies of believers and confessors—they are to be the first recipients. One might ask why this restriction was made, why John was not bidden to publish his book for all the many churches existing towards the end of the first century, why, in fact, he was not told to publish it for the Church of all future ages. All that we can answer is that, as the seven specific epistles to the seven churches here named,



which are embodied in Revelation, indicate, the whole book had a special message for these churches, and therefore they were to be the first recipients. If we pry further and ask why the number of churches was made seven, no more and no less, then we come upon the first symbolism of number in this book. Seven is the sacred number, composed of three, the number for God (Trinity) as the God of salvation, and four, the number for the world (with its four corners, four directions), and the two combined in a union and communion, which gives us the Church. Seven individual churches thus by means of this number point to the basic idea in the Church generally. — The order in which the seven churches are named is geographical, viewing their location from the isle of Patmos where the Lord made this Revelation to John. There is a line toward the north for **Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamum**, and another line toward the south for **Thyatira, Sardes, Philadelphia, and Laodicea**. There were other congregations in this general territory, and that brings up the question why the selection was made as it was made. Daechsel and others are quick to answer that in these seven churches, and in the order in which they are here named, we have portrayed the entire course of the Church through all the coming ages. The first age is that portrayed by Ephesus as a type, and the last age by that of Laodicea. This then is used also in interpreting all the following visions; these are made a historical drama in seven grand chronological acts. The thing is done in this fashion: Ephesus, the apostolic church; Smyrna, the post-

apostolic martyr church; Pergamum, the oriental Greek church; Thyatira, the occidental papal church; Sardes, the Protestant, dead orthodox church; Philadelphia, the faithful Lutheran church; Laodicea, the church just prior to the millennium. This type of arrangement may captivate some people, but historically it fits too little; secondly, all the seven churches existed actually when Revelations was written, and all the other churches in that age were like these seven, and the same thing is true of most all other ages, for instance of our own, in which all sorts of variations are found; and thirdly, the great visions of John cannot possibly be divided into seven great dramatic acts tallying chronologically with the order of the seven churches in Asia Minor. The entire fanciful scheme is a grand piece of misinterpretation.

Verse 12.— Using simple narrative aorists John continues: **And I turned to see the voice which spake with me.** It was a most natural impulse, and all through the revelations which follow we will see John acting in natural fashion. His eyes behold heavenly things, he moves amid un-earthly surroundings, he speaks with glorified beings, but throughout it is the John that we know, despite the ecstatic state. “To see the voice” is a brief way of saying that he sought to see the person speaking to him. — He first tells why he turned, and then states what he beheld after having turned: **And having turned I saw seven golden candlesticks, etc.** The glorious vision was before him as he swung around. He tells of it as it met his eyes when now he gazed. There is no exclamation of

surprise, no dramatic form of expression, only a simple record of the astounding facts. — There stood before him **seven golden candlesticks**, or more literally *lampstands* (margin). We should not think of holders, bearing candles that were lit, but tall, grand pedestals, each bearing an ancient vessel for oil, in the nozzle of which lay a wick burning with a clear, bright flame. These holders were set in a circle, it seems, their lamps held high, so that the figure of the Lord stood in their midst. They were of gold, the most precious metal, and as such gleaming in the light with great beauty. These lampsticks are plainly symbols, representing the seven churches already named. Kemmler writes: "The churches of the Lord are lampstands, as bearers of his light, which is to benefit their entire surrounding, and ultimately the whole world. They are not themselves the light, just as little as a lampstand by itself is able to shine, but their light is that of Christ's Spirit, who works by means of Word and Sacrament, and not only illumines them, but also makes them instruments for illumining others." The symbolism here employed recalls the figure Jesus used when he calls his disciples the light of the world, only here these disciples are presented collectively in groups as congregations, and thus the light with which they shine is not merely their own faith and life in a dark world, but the shining Word of God which they maintain in their midst in public preaching and teaching. — So also the lampstands themselves are **golden**, symbolizing their great value and preciousness for the Lord of the Church. In all the world there is nothing so great and glori-

ous as the churches which hold aloft the shining Word of the Gospel. The world may not prize this kind of gold, but the Lord himself bestows it, Rev. 3, 18. — There were **seven** lampsticks, each church constitutes one. This number, as already indicated, is also symbolical. We may say, as many real churches as there are at any time, so many lampstands lift aloft their precious light — only here this multitude is symbolized and pictured by seven select ones. In 2, 5, in the epistle addressed especially to Ephesus, the warning is issued that unless this church repents the Lord will move its candlestick out of its place. That is symbolic language for the withdrawal of the Word, the church suffering this penalty ceasing to be a church in the Lord's eyes.

Verse 13. — Now follows the heavenly vision of Jesus himself: **and in the midst of the candlesticks one like unto a son of man, etc.** It was his voice that John had heard, and now he saw him with his eyes. He was **in the midst of the candlesticks**; that marks his position. It is most natural and in harmony with all that John says to think of a figure standing, not sitting, and not moving about. — This figure is Jesus, as both the significant designation "one like unto a son of man," and the entire following description, especially v. 18, show. **One like unto a son of man** is the expression found in Dan. 7, 13, which is the Old Testament basis for the briefer "Son of man" so constantly used by Jesus himself in the gospels. It designates Jesus as man, having the human nature, and at the same time more than man, whose person is divine. Here it is the Lord with his human nature glorified. That

glory John had seen long years ago on the Mount of Transfiguration; now he beholds it, unfolded and revealed even more fully.— We are given the description in detail. First the garment: **clothed with a garment down to the foot**, a long flowing robe reaching to the feet. The simple accusative is quite in order with the passive, though our idiom requires “*with* a garment.” This accusative is the adjective for “reaching to the foot or feet” (3rd declension with acc. ending of the 1st, Robertson 258), and we must supply the noun as understood, χίτων or ἔσθῆς. No color is mentioned, quite possibly because this was understood from the adjective itself, namely a glorious white. Some have thought that this garment was high priestly, i. e. like that of the old Jewish high priests. Yet the entire appearance is not priestly, but royal, and so Ebrard seems to be right, when he calls the garment *ein Prachtgewand*. — **And girt about at the breasts with a golden girdle** shows how the flowing robe was confined beneath the arms. All we can say is that the girdle goes with the garment, and as such has no symbolical significance. The same is true of the position of the girdle **at the breasts**, instead of at the hips. Josephus reports that the priests wore the girdle in this position. But it was **golden**, made of gold, and this points to royal splendor. In 15, 6 the angels are shown with such girdles; see also Dan. 10, 5. The girdles of the high priests were only ornamented with gold, Ex. 28, 8; 39, 5.

Verse 14.— Now follows a description of the hair, the eyes, the feet, and the voice. **And his head and his hair were white as white wool**, *white*

**as snow.** That the hair as crowning the head is meant we see from the addition of only one αὐτοῦ, "his"; the head as far as the hair was concerned showed this wonderful whiteness. From the description of Jesus here given we find, at the head of each of the seven following brief epistles, some one feature repeated in the address. The whiteness of the hair, however, is not referred too. But this likeness to bleached **wool**, which is intensified by the additional comparison to **snow**, is so unusual, that there must be a symbolical significance in the color. Compare the same feature in the "Ancient of days," Dan. 7, 9, of which Delitzsch rightly says that it does not depict old age, or eternity, but this whiteness of the hair is intended for venerableness and majesty, and he adds purity and holiness. The entire figure thus gleaming white and flaming fiery bright carries the impression of heavenly holiness and majesty coupled with power to destroy all sin. The whiteness alone might denote mere quiescent purity, holiness resting in his majestic person, but the addition of fiery flame in the eyes, and burnished brass as from a fiery furnace in the feet, adds the touch of penetration and power directed as a resistless force to uncover and crush all sin. — **And his eyes were as a flame of fire** — not their color is meant, but their flashing penetrative power, before which absolutely nothing can remain hidden. In 2, 18 these flaming eyes, combined with the brass-like feet, are again mentioned; and fitly so when we think of "the woman Jezebel" and her fornication.

Verse 15. — **And his feet like unto burnished brass, as if it had been refined in a furnace.** The word χαλκολίβανος has not yet been cleared up as to its etymology. Does it mean “fine brass,” or **burnished brass**, or “brass of Lebanon”? The answer has not yet been found. The reference to metal is plain from the addition: **as if it had been refined in a furnace.** Only this does not reproduce the participle exactly, which should be “fired” instead of “refined.” And the readings vary, some connecting the participle with the word for “brass,” others with “feet.” The meaning to be conveyed is that the feet resembled some kind of bronze or brass, glowing bright, as if the white heat of a furnace were in them. The symbolism of this description is not difficult to determine: crushing, burning power, to reduce to dust and ashes whatever should fall beneath these feet. This is the Lord’s omnipotence directed by his holiness against all sin. — To this description of the figure itself is added that of the voice: **and his voice as the voice of many waters.** In verse 10 we have the comparison to a trumpet, which some think must therefore be a different voice, namely that of an angel. But no angel is ever hinted at. In v. 16 there is another reference to this voice. We must combine all three: the tone as of a trumpet, the sound as of a cataract, the penetration as of a two-edged sword. We see at once how John struggles to convey by means of different figures all that gave this voice its marvelous tone and power. All three comparisons unite in the idea of forceful power, and the second, that of “many waters,” brings to mind elemental, resistless power. Only

we must hold fast that it is the **voice** that is here described; it utters words, and these express the speaker's will. This is the voice which in the beginning spoke with creative power; which in the Gospel speaks with regenerating, saving, gracious power; which in the judgment shall speak with overwhelming, damning power.

Verse 16. — From verse 14 on there are no verbs — none are necessary for the dramatic strokes with which the Lord is pictured. Each new feature is added by a simple *καί*, and then the noun with its modifiers. This continues in verse 16, except that in the first two statements there are descriptive present participles, though turned into finite verbs in our translations. **And he had** (literally: *having*) **in his right hand seven stars.** In verse 20 the Lord himself declares that these **seven stars** “are the angels of the seven churches,” though the absence of the article should be noted, hence literally: “are angels of the seven churches.” The stars symbolize these angels. Commentators debate just what the word “angels” is intended to designate, whether actual angels, or messengers sent from the churches to John in Patmos, or personifications of the spirit of these churches. “Stars” are teachers, distinguished from the churches as such (lamp-stands), and yet belonging to them as their leaders and representatives. In the seven epistles to the seven angels these angels are held responsible for the conditions found in their churches. That these teachers or pastors are likened to stars is very proper when one recalls Dan. 12, 3: “And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firma-



ment; and they that turn many to righteousness *as the stars* for ever and ever." Perhaps we may add that stars shine by reflected light, and so these "angels" as the Lord's messengers bring his Word to their churches. They give what first they have received. That they should be called "angels" is quite in line with Hagg. 1, 13, and Mal. 2, 7, where prophets and priests are so designated, and after all "angel" is only the transliterated ἄγγελος, which denotes "messenger." Having these stars **in his right hand** both matches the Lord's standing in the midst of the golden lampstands, and brings out a difference. Both stars and lampstands belong to the Lord, both shine with the light of faith kindled by the Word, both have a beauty and glory from above. But the preachers and teachers of the church, as the Lord's messengers to the church, are in a peculiar way "in his right hand," to act as his agents and ministers in the churches, there to carry out his will, and his will alone. The right hand is the hand of authority; it symbolizes the will, the person's purpose and intent, and the power back of both. In all preachers of Jesus Christ is his right hand. He is their authority; his purpose they serve; his will they do; his Word they speak; and his power is back of all they thus rightly do in his name. Yes, the seven stars are fitly symbolized as being held in the Lord's right hand. — Perhaps it is proper to state here that we should not try to visualize too closely the hand holding the stars, nor inquire how when this hand held the stars it could be laid upon the prostrate form of John, v. 17. — John has twice told us of the Lord's "voice," and now he adds: **out of**

**his mouth proceeded** (literally: *proceeding*) **a sharp two-edged sword**; the Greek reads: "a sword two-edged, sharp, going forth" all three (including the final participle) descriptive modifiers of **sword**. The word used denotes a broad, heavy sword. The Greek says "two-mouthed," where we speak of **two-edged**. He thinks of the sword as devouring, biting into the foe, its two keen edges literally two mouths. And these are **sharp**, whetted to a keen edge. This mighty weapon is finally pictured as **proceeding**, going forth, to execute justice and judgment upon all the foes of the Lord. This durative participle describes a quality of the sword; it is such as ever goes forth on its deadly mission. The symbolism is bold and striking to a degree, yet let us recall Is. 11, 4: "He shall smite the earth with *the rod of his mouth*"; Is. 49, 2: "He hath made my mouth *like a sharp sword*"; Eph. 6, 17; "*The sword of the Spririt*, which is the word of God." Because the Lord's Word when uttered in judgment smites unto death like a sword, therefore this Word itself is called a sword, and the Word leaving the mouth is described as a sword going forth. No hand needs to wield this sword, it is a living, active thing itself to destroy the Lord's enemies. — Here is the first reference, though by implication alone, to the enemies of the Lord and his Church. He will deal with them; his Word is their death. Luther sang:

"With might of ours here naught is done,  
Our loss were soon effected.  
But for us fights the valiant One,  
Whom God himself elected."

This is the comfort of the Church amid all her tribulations and persecutions; this her ultimate triumph. — The description closes with the statement: **and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.** Does ὄψις here mean **countenance** or **face**? One hardly expects the face to be mentioned last in a detailed description of a person, way after the garments and the feet. The usual word for face is πρόσωπον, and this too occurs regularly in Revelation (4, 7; 9, 7; 10, 1; etc.). By ὄψις here is meant *appearance*, the effect of the whole figure when one looked at it. This was indeed **as the sun shineth in his strength**, undimmed in any way by cloud, fog, or haze. Here the glory of the Lord is impressed upon us, his heavenly majesty and splendor, which like the full radiance of the sun is too intense for poor mortal eyes. And yet this Lord, so glorious in might, we constantly forget, challenge by our disobedience, contradict in his wisdom, and offend by our mistrust.

Verse 17. — The effect of this vision of Jesus in his heavenly majesty upon John is in accord with the description just given: **And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as one dead.** John records the simple fact, and no more. “As one dead” is more literally: “as dead.” We do not think that those passages should here be brought in which state that no man may look upon God and live, for here Jesus meant to reveal himself to John, and John looked upon him, saw him, and yet did not die, merely swooned, fell unconscious, “as dead,” yet not dead. See Matth. 17, 6 for a parallel. Ebrard is certainly astray when he thinks this falling down was due

not merely to fear, but also to love, hence active as well as passive. There is no hint to this effect, nor is it possible to imagine such a thing. John was completely overwhelmed. This was not fear in the sense of fright or terror, but fear in the sense of overmastering awe. John was still in the body, though "in the spirit" his senses were open to the other world. Yet, even so, this was the effect upon him. Let this effect upon John, together with the description he gives us of Jesus, help us to realize the infinite greatness and glory of our heavenly Lord. — John fell prostrate. wholly overcome. Then the Lord stooped, **and he laid his right hand upon me**, an action at once gracious and kind, in the nature of blessing and help. We are not told of anything further in regard to John, namely that the Lord raised him up, or that John arose himself — he effaces himself in the divine presence. Not what he now did is of importance to his readers, but what the Lord said unto him — words of utmost weight to us all. — **Saying, Fear not**, the present imperative, dismissing any continuation of fear. It is the word addressed almost every time to poor mortals when heavenly beings come into contact with them. Our sinful, mortal state is bound to succumb in fear before such presence from above. But because of the grace in these revelations the recipients of it are assured, encouraged, and strengthened, so that they may properly receive what is intended for them.

Verse 18. — The words that follow are the Lord's communication to John relative to the revelation that has begun. Properly they begin with the

Lord himself whom John sees standing before him in his majesty. They sound like a signature or seal placed at the head of all that is to be revealed. This marks all that follows as absolutely authoritative, and couples it with the power of him who here speaks. "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things which are written therein." Rev. 1, 3. **I am the first and the last.** It is beyond question that this designates Jesus as *God*. In v. 8 is a close parallel: "I am the Alpha and the Omega"; and again in 22, 13: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." As regards the similarity of these three designations there can scarcely be a doubt. The question is in regard to any difference. Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. This designation refers to *language* written or spoken, and let us say to the divine *Word*. "I am the first and the last" is taken from the idea of *time*, and refers let us say to the course of human *history*. Finally, "the beginning and the end" refer to some great, extended *work, or plan*, which has an inception and a consummation. We will venture to combine the three: 1) in all revelation, 2) in all human history, 3) and in the work, the kingdom, and the saving plan of God — Jesus stands, the wonderful Jesus whom John here sees, at both ends, thus embracing, governing, and directing the whole. This is his stupendous greatness, supremacy, kingly glory. Luthardt has the applicatory thought: "If he stands at the end as at the beginning, who will dare to vaunt himself in the middle?" And Stef-

fann: "Who would not cling to him to the end, to whom the end belongs?" — The following evidently goes together: **and the Living one, — and I was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore.** The comma and dash is better than the semicolon of the R. V.; the punctuation of the A. V. is also good. The substantivized present participle ὁ ζῶν should not be read as a relative clause: "he that liveth," but as the usual Greek qualitative designation: **the Living one**, whose mark and sign is to be ever living. — The proof for this is added by way of coordination with καί, not by way of proof γάρ: **and I was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore.** The aorist records the past fact that Jesus at one time was indeed dead. He died on the cross and lay dead in the tomb. But note the wonder, he is living unto the ages of the ages, namely **for evermore**, to all eternity. Both his having died thus, and his eternal living, refer to his human nature. It is the mark of the incarnate Son of God. — That he died for our sins and rose for our justification is not touched upon here, although it lies at the bottom of this designation. What is brought forward is the result, not in time, but beyond in the other world: **and I have the keys of death and of Hades**, namely hell. To have the keys is to possess complete control. While, because of ourselves, we may here think especially of *men* who may be sent into "death" and "hell," or delivered from both, the words are general and include the power of Jesus over the *devils*. Duesterdieck rightly observes that **death** is not a place which is opened or shut by a

door and keys; this is true only of **hell**. "Death" is really a personification, the porter of the gates of "hell" — and Jesus is master of both. Thus to both "death" and "hell" belong keys, but to each in a peculiar way. These keys Jesus has, so that only at his behest does "death" unlock or lock the doors of "hell." — The plural **keys** is symbolic, namely of a twofold power, to preserve from hell, and to cast into hell. Compare also this twofold power in Matth. 16, 19; 18, 18; John 29, 23. — **Hades** is literally "the unseen" (place), and in the New Testament signifies throughout hell, the place of torment for the damned. On the translation of *scheol* by means of *hades* (which in spite of the R. V. should not be capitalized!), and on the Romanizing figment of an intermediate "hades" between heaven and hell, as promulgated by the speculation of some modern theologians, who completely lose their balance whenever they read the word *scheol* or *hades* in the Bible, compare the author's *New Gospel Selections*, 312 etc., where the subject is fully treated.

Verse 19. — Since now Jesus has revealed himself in his majesty and power to John, and has lifted him up from the fear that at first laid him prostrate, the Lord gives him further command: **Write therefore the things which thou sawest, etc.** The connective **therefore** bases the command to write on the Lord's word and act in v. 17-18. Our dogmatists distinguish in Inspiration the *impulsus sive mandatum ad scribendum*, and the *suggestio rerum*. One of these mandates we have here: **Write** (compare v. 11), and the things to

be written are fully stated. — First, **the things which thou sawest**. This can mean only the vision just received by John, which really is the basis, and in a manner also the key, for all else yet to be revealed. For the majesty and power of the glorified Lord dominates Revelation from beginning to end. As this vision of Jesus put John into the right attitude for receiving the further revelations, so it had to be recorded for us that we might read those revelations aright. — Next he is to write **the things which are, and the things which shall come to pass hereafter**, literally: *after these*. This last phrase, “after these,” combines “the things which are” and “the things which shall come to pass” (or: which are about to occur). These present and these future things are connected. That appears already in the seven epistles to the seven churches, where the present condition of these churches is stated from the view-point of the Lord, and where promises and warning threats regarding the future are then added. It will not do to make “the things which are” cover these seven epistles (Rev. 2-3), and “the things which shall come to pass” cover all else, from Rev. 4 on. For just as there are future things in the seven epistles so here are present, even past, things in the rest of Revelation. In true prophetic fashion the great visions granted to John present all that is to come like one great portrait, the actual stretches of time either taken out altogether, or foreshortened and sometimes just symbolized. So the old prophets, and John the Baptist, painted the two comings of Christ and his kingdom of grace and of glory all in one portrait.



The fulfillment alone revealed the intervening time distances. It is the same in Revelation regarding the things which are and the things which shall come to pass hereafter.

Verse 20. — And now John receives at once the Lord's own interpretation of part of what he has seen in this first vision. This was necessary for the writing of the seven epistles now to be dictated to him. **The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven candlesticks**, pertains directly to the seven churches now about to be addressed. **The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches**, their divinely appointed messengers, leaders, teachers, in the holy ministry, responsible for the spiritual condition of the churches committed to their care. **And the seven candlesticks are seven churches**, holding aloft in a sin-darkened world the light of the Word, and themselves shining amid the darkness by the light of faith and a new life kindled and fed in them by means of the Word.

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#### HOMILETICAL HINTS

Several sermons might be preached on the grand text herewith presented, say one on Jesus our Glorious Lord, one on the Church and the churches belonging to the Lord, and a third on his "angels," the ministers of the churches and their relation to the Lord. Three wholesome messages might thus be conveyed by us as messengers to our churches.

One of the favorite terms used for sermons is "message." The Lord is asked to bless such a message when about to be delivered, or just after it has been delivered. That term is

quite in place. Only let it be a real *message*, taken from the Lord's lips, from his Word, and not merely a fine piece of pulpit oratory, some brilliant ideas of the preacher (or let us say "speaker") himself.

One fine thing in the symbolism here used regarding the glory of Jesus is this — it is transparent, its meaning is quite obvious. There is glory, majesty, power and might; there is holiness and righteousness, not quiescent, placid, inactive, but dynamic and intense in suggested energy; and finally, by no means to be overlooked, the saving grace and power of the Lord. The latter is in his names "Jesus" and "Lord," in the reference to his death and resurrection, in the mention of the "Spirit," "the churches," "the kingdom," the command to write the Lord's revelation and Word, and the mention of his "angels" or messengers. But the entire text has poured out over it the light of that other world, and thus brings home to us the infinite issues involved in the Lord's work here on earth, issues which all culminate in the great judgment to come, the destruction of the Lord's foes, and the glorification of his faithful believers.

This is a text that gives the right kind of shock to much of our ordinary Christianity, its playing at being Christian, its half-hearted efforts at faith and Christian living, its indifference and lack of response to the Lord's Word, its compromises with the world, its readiness to yield to human authority, its attempts to get by with the least possible measure of devotion, its unspirited ways and methods, its sickly sort of faith, its unmanly love, its broken-winged hope. Here is a text to jolt the sleeper out of his drowsiness, to put new iron into the sluggish blood, to throw prostrate all sickly pride whether of money, reason, or social standing, to shatter the mirage of shams in which so many wander through life, and put into their place the stupendous overwhelming realities of our great Lord and his everlasting kingdom. The thing that laid John low at the Lord's feet must in some measure get into the preacher who absorbs this text, in order that he may transmit it with something of the same effect to the people who need it so much.

Connect the text fully with St. John. While it is true

that Jesus could have chosen some other human instrument for his vision without changing the vision in the least, there is something highly appropriate that for this last book of Holy Writ, and for this stupendous revelation of the glory of our Lord, that Lord should have chosen the disciple whom he loved so eminently while on earth and who like none other pictured to us in his gospel the divinity of our Redeemer. John the divine was indeed a proper instrument for conveying to us these visions of things eminently deserving to be termed divine.

There are many things wrong with the angels of the churches. Some have ceased to be angels at all, their candlesticks emit no light, and the angels themselves no longer shine with light reflected from the Lord—they are dark stars. That is true of all those who have given way to rationalism, false science, and clerical professionalism which aims to have a name, an income, a position, while it sacrifices the true prophetic power and the cross that goes with fearless confession. But our own Lutheran angels—some of them are pin-head stars, little more than phosphorescent glow-worms. Look at the inroads they allow the devil and the world to make. Listen to the way they try to salve their consciences. See the uncertainty of their step. Catch the false ring in their preaching “service” instead of Christ’s blood and righteousness, morality where justification should resound, little applications to life where doctrine, faith, heroic confession should flash like the light from the countenance of the Lord. Where is the John spirit ready to go into exile and death “for the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus”? There is fool talk of “vision,” meaning big numbers and deeds to impress the world in its worldly way, and too little, if any, talk of “vision” in the sense of St. John whose soul was filled with divine and spiritual realities.

Christ is the heart of the Gospel, but what kind of a Christ? All love? soft-fingered and afraid to hurt any of our pet sins? all patience to wait until *we* see fit to amend? just gentle and kind so that our knees never need to quake before him and our proud heads never need actually to drop into the dust? Well, just follow the beloved St. John into

this first vision of Revelation, and you certainly will get a new and very, very necessary view of Christ. Yes, this is the Christ that we forget!

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**St. John's Vision of Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church,  
in Glory.**

He beheld

*I. The majesty of his person as Lord of the Church.*

The Son of man (God-man) — The First and the Last (his saving plan reaching from eternity to eternity) — dead, yet living (triumphant in redemption) — holy (before whom no sin can stand) — almighty (terror to foes — assurance and comfort for the Church) — holding the keys of death and hell (the final issues judgment).

Here is the impression we need of Jesus Christ as Lord of the Church.

*II. The glory of his purpose as Lord of the Church.*

The candlesticks (believers and confessors shining with the light of his presence and Word) — the stars and messengers (his witnesses and ministers to preach and teach his Word) — his voice and Word and the two-edged sword (by which he carries out his will to draw believers to himself, and to destroy all unbelievers) — the tribulation and kingdom and patience (trials of the Church, example St. John) the things which are and which shall come to pass (till on the day of judgment all is complete).

And again, here is the work of the Lord of the Church as it really goes forward in this wicked world till the great day of judgment shall crown it at last.

Conclusion: St. John fell prostrate — the Lord's: Fear not!

What miserably low ideas men have of the churches! They are to be servant maids to do the odd jobs men design; courtezans, to please and tickle everybody in an entertaining way; quacks, to administer palliatives to the world's rottenness when it stinks too badly. Go to school in St. John's Revelation. Get the Lord's own view of the churches as he gave it to St. John in Patmos.

### **St. John's Vision of the Golden Candlesticks.**

In this divine symbolism see displayed

#### *I. The function of the churches.*

Light-bearers in a sin-darkened world, hence candles (lamps).

Lit with the light of the Lord's own Word, as candles (lamps) must be lit.

Spreading the light of salvation by public preaching and teaching.

The members letting their light shine by true confession and Christian conduct.

The churches that cease to be candlesticks, error, worldliness, etc.

Warning to those whose light grows dim.

#### *II. The preciousness of the churches.*

These candlesticks are golden, i. e., precious, costly (the same metal in the Lord's golden girdle).

The Lord prizes the true churches — in all the world no gold like their gold, their faith and faithfulness.

Churches built on human authority, wisdom, etc., valueless.

Is the true gold in our church, in you as a member?

#### *III. The responsibility of the churches.*

The Lord is in their midst, his eyes ever upon them. Nothing is said about the world in which the churches are placed, in order to bring out what all the churches need, namely that they all look to the Lord alone — then all else will be well.

Woe, if the Lord's eyes burn with indignation upon us! If we listen to what others do or say, yield to the spirit of the times, etc.

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**St. John's Vision of the Seven Stars in the Lord's Right Hand.**

- I. *Stars*, shining with reflected light (Christ's in the Word) — fullest radiance — possible dimming or darkening.
  - II. *In the Lord's Right Hand*, the divine power of his Word and will in his ministers, to condemn, smite down, destroy falsehood and sin, to lead to victory and triumph true faith, confession, faithful living.
  - III. *Fear Not!* — owned, acknowledged, upheld by the Lord's right hand — no servants or tools of men — partakers with all faithful believers of the tribulation and kingdom and patience in Jesus — suffering for the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus — crowned by his hand at last.
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**The First Apocalypse at Patmos.**

This revelation deals with

- I. *The Son of man* — his holiness — power — salvation — judgment.
- II. *The Seven Candlesticks* — shining — precious — with the Lord in their midst.
- III. *The Seven Stars* — their light — held in the Lord's right hand — his angels (messengers).
- IV. *The Keys of Death and Hell* — the power to save — the power to condemn.

Conclusion: St. John prostrate and lifted up. His revelation to overwhelm us in our sinfulness that we may be purified and cleansed, and to lift us up that we may go on in the tribulation and kingdom and patience in Jesus.

## THE THOUSAND YEARS

### Rev. 20, 1-6

Whether we wish to or not we will have to occupy ourselves with Rev. 20. We might prefer to pass by this chapter, but the millennialists are determined, not merely not to pass it by, but to make it the very citadel of their doctrine of a glorious earthly reign of Christ and his Church for a thousand years before the end of the world. This is the chapter that furnishes them the thousand years and thus also their distinctive name: chiliasts, millennialists. What they find in this chapter they carry into any number of other Bible passages, and so set up the claim that the Scriptures contain and teach their doctrine of millennialism. Nor have we to do with only a few Lutheran chiliastic teachers, such as Delitzsch, von Hofmann, Luthardt, and preceding them Bengel, or one or two anti-Christian sects such as the Adventists and Russellites. The sectarian world generally accepts millennialism as a matter of course. And while there are many variations of teaching among them, they very largely agree that an earthly reign of Christ in glory and triumph is one of the great biblical doctrines. We cannot pass this challenge of error by in silence. It is our duty to meet it, and to meet it exegetically on this their chief *sedes doctrinae*.

John's greatest distinction for the Church is, of course, his wonderful gospel. But next to that precious book we must place the Apocalypse, the

one great book of New Testament prophecy. Three other evangelists wrote gospels, John alone wrote an Apocalypse. To Paul certain wonderful visions were granted, and he received his entire gospel by way of a grand revelation from the Lord, Gal. 1, 12, but to John was given much more, namely a revelation of "the things which must shortly come to pass," Rev. 1, 1, and he was bidden to write the things which he saw, "the things which are, and the things which shall come to pass hereafter," Rev. 1, 19. Even a brief series of texts and sermons centering on John ought to contain some of the distinctive sections of the Apocalypse such as the one herewith presented.

As regards the interpretation of the prophetic visions in the Apocalypse one decisive point is settled. These visions do not present the course of history in consecutive order, for again and again one vision after another brings us to the end of the world. Thus in 6, 12-17, we have the first description of the end; in 7, 9 — 8, 1 we are at the same point; likewise 11, 18 places us at the judgment; again the end is described in 14, 13 etc. Likewise in chapter 16, 17-21; and in 19, 1 etc. we are once more at the same point. At least six times before reaching our text, always from different angles, we are thus brought to view the final judgment and the end of the world. So these visions overlap. We may say they start at different points and all run up to one grand center. This is important and decisive for chapter 20. It means that this chapter, which again leads us to the final judgment and the end in v. 11-15, cannot start in v. 1 etc. at a point



immediately following the events with which chapter 19 closes. In all these visions which present the end to us seven different times in seven different ways the start is made now from one, now from another preceding point as best suits the great Revelator and the purpose he has in mind in each case.

Chapter 20 contains four brief visions, the first two of which form our text. These visions deal with Satan and his overthrow. This, of course, ends with the final judgment. But we see at once also how only certain pertinent facts are here presented to John's view by the Lord: 1) the first binding of Satan; 2) the rule of the saints in heaven; 3) the final tribulation and conflict; 4) then again, and for the last time, the great judgment.

**1. And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. 2. And he laid hold on the dragon, the old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, 3. and cast him into the abyss, and shut *it*, and sealed *it* over him, that he should deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years should be finished: after this he must be loosed for a little time.**

When Bousset in the fifth edition of Meyer's commentary makes John compile material from all kinds of sources in composing for instance this 20th chapter of the Apocalypse, working in even old Persian and pagan teachings, he concocts a mess that no Christian reader can digest. This kind of thing may seem learned, it is nevertheless utterly

worthless and even vicious. Other volumes of this commentary have been worked over by new authors in similar manner in the later editions, completely destroying the usefulness of this work for people who want real commentaries. John records what he **saw**, what the Lord revealed to him in a supernatural way, not what he had gathered together by reading or in some other way. Here he saw **an angel coming down out of heaven**, descending to the earth. There should be no doubt as to who this angel really is. For he is described as **having the key to the abyss**, which vividly recalls the image of Christ in 1, 18: "I have the keys of death and Hades"; 9, 1. That alone would be enough to identify this angel with Christ. Now this angel lays hold of Satan and binds and locks him up. It is the Stronger One come upon the strong man keeping his palace. There is only One who is able to deal thus summarily with Satan, namely Christ. Those who think this is only one of the ordinary angels miss the chief point in this vision of John. Why Christ is here seen as **an angel**, instead of the Son of God, is easy to understand. "Angel" means "messenger," and when Christ came to earth to free us from the power of Satan, he himself tells again and again, in John's gospel, that "he was sent," and that his mission as the Father's messenger was to do his Father's will. That he came down out of heaven here points to his divinity, though his coming includes his entire mission, and not merely his Incarnation.

**The key to the abyss** is the key to hell, for we know of no other abyss for the confining of

evil spirits. Hell is thus described as a vast depth, which in no way conflicts with other descriptions, in particular those that speak of fire. This abyss could be closed, as the angel's action here shows, and as the mention of a key also indicates. This **key** is plainly figurative, denoting the power to close and to open, to lock up and to free. — The same thing is true of **a great chain in his hand**. The angel is pictured as having a human form, like the other angels that appear unto men on earth. This simply means that the beings and things John was to see were made susceptible to his powers of seeing. So this angel has hands. And over **his hand** he carries a **great chain** for the binding of Satan. This is figurative for the power to render Satan helpless. Someone has said that the chain was so great because it was to be wound around Satan many times; but this seems a bit fanciful. It was **great** because it was intended to render the mightiest of all evil spirits utterly helpless. — Right here we may say what has to be said in interpreting this chapter. It is full of figurative terms, and of expressions which bring supernatural beings and objects down to human powers of comprehension and visualization. It is therefore just plain folly to insist on literalism in trying to explain and grasp what John records. Really it is not merely literalism that is thus insisted on, but a gross mechanical materialism, which really condemns itself. As with figurative and symbolic language generally, so also in this chapter, this language bears its own stamp so that it is easily recognized and never leaves us in doubt. Only when

we read figures with our own blinding preconceptions do we get things mixed and turn figures and symbols into literal expressions.

Evidently, when John continues that the angel **laid hold on the dragon, . . . and bound him for a thousand years**, this too is figurative throughout. He is bound, of course, with the "chain." The verb κρατέω with the accusative means to overpower, and thus "to lay hold of." What John saw was exactly what he here records. This great heavenly angel grasped the great evil angel with overpowering might and locked the chain securely about him, making him a captive. And then he **cast him into the abyss, and shut it, and sealed it over him**. John saw the thing done in just this way. Whether the chain was used only till the mouth of the abyss was reached, or whether the chained devil was cast in as he was bound, is not plain. But he was summarily dealt with. There was no if or and about it. After he was hurled down the door was **shut**, which because of the mention of the key in v. 1 must mean "shut by locking with the key." On top of that the entrance was **sealed over him**. This, it seems, was not because the locked door was not enough to hold the devil in. A seal is not like some especially strong lock. Remember the seal affixed to Christ's tomb. Seals of this kind are for inviolability, to show on inspection that no one has surreptitiously tampered with the door and (in this case) let the captive out. So the devil was confined and rendered captive and helpless by one far mightier than he.

The names here used for the devil are identical

with those in 12, 9, with the evident intention of connecting that first victory when Satan was cast out of heaven with this binding and confining him in hell. There are four names, since four is symbolic of the world, and the devil is the prince of this world. The first two are plainly symbolic: "the dragon, the old serpent"; the second two, added in a relative clause for explanation, are literal. The symbolic designation **the dragon**, according to Lange, denotes his bestial quality, a union of serpent and swine.\* The bestial idea is correct, though this embraces also the second designation: **the old serpent**. Now "dragon" is wholly symbolic, since there are no actual dragons among the beasts of the earth, though there are actual serpents. Dragon is a mythical figure, and as such highly expressive of what the devil really is, namely an unspeakable horrible monster. The term denotes the extreme of ferocious, murderous, and cruel power, and thus conveys the impression of horror

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\* *Critical, Doctrinal and Homiletical Com.*, New Testament, vol. X, translated by Philip Schaff, p. 36. In the introduction this commentary presents quite a complete and detailed study of the symbolism used in the Apocalypse. This symbolism is far more extensive than we usually suppose, and while Lange may not have explained each and every symbol properly, he certainly has advanced the true study of this sacred book beyond all other commentators. At the same time the grandiose conception of the Apocalypse, its Inspiration, and the true way of interpreting it, are here presented with such force, that all students should examine this work. There is much yet to be done, but Lange points in the right direction and explodes ever so many false conceptions.

upon men who are the dragon's prey. The author is not certain of the swine and serpent idea as combined in "dragon." — Paired with "the dragon" is the apposition **the old serpent**. This is a plain reference to the first temptation in Eden, when the devil used an actual serpent by which to approach Eve. That is why the adjective "old" is appended attributively. In the "serpent" the power of cunning and deception is symbolized. Thus "dragon" stands for "a murderer from the beginning," and "the old serpent" stands for the expression: "stood not in the truth, because there is no truth in him," to which Jesus adds in John 8, 44: "When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own; for he is a liar, and the father thereof." Note that "the old serpent" is a nominative in apposition with a preceding accusative, a phenomenon frequent in Revelation and occurring also elsewhere in the Greek of this time, Robertson 414.

Now follows the relative clause with the unfigurative names: **which is the Devil and Satan**. This clause means to tell us plainly who is really meant here. Διάβολος is the generic term for "slanderer," and is here used specifically as the name for the chief of the devils. It is the same with ὁ Σατανᾶς, which as a common noun means "adversary," but is here used as the proper name of God's and man's chief adversary. Both of these names retain their root meaning when applied to the Evil One, characterizing him as what he really is.

We are now ready to consider **the thousand years**, χίλια ἔτη. Note that this time designation

appears four times in our text; and four is the number of the world. We are told when the 1000 years begin, what shall transpire during their course, and when they shall reach their end. The way these thousand years are thus repeatedly mentioned is quite pointed, as if to draw especial attention to this number "thousand years." Only after one has carefully studied the entire symbolism of numbers in the Scriptures and in the Apocalypse in particular is one qualified to speak on this number 1000. The Bible Dictionaries under "number" give some insight into this subject. Lange in the introduction to his commentary covers this ground thoroughly. But we cannot stop with the symbolism of numbers alone, we must add, as Lange does, all the other lines of symbolism used in the Apocalypse. When this is done, one is bound to see that it would actually be foolish to entertain seriously the idea that the number 1000 used in our text can be anything save a symbolic number. Really we ought to arrive at this conclusion already by studying merely our text. It is so full of symbolic and figurative expressions that it would be exceedingly strange to find that the "thousand years," so significantly repeated, should, in the midst of all this picture language, be meant in the ordinary literal sense. A wider study puts the figurative sense beyond the shadow of a doubt. The "thousand years" denote symbolically an æon, a grand, complete era of time marked and distinguished as such by what transpires in it. How many actual years this æon of a 1000 symbolic years embraces is in no way indicated. That one thousand natural

years are meant, or approximately that many, is an assumption wholly without foundation. The æon here spoken of is marked and characterized in the plainest way. During this era Satan shall be bound in the abyss, and Christ and his glorified saints shall rule as v. 4 states. — With the symbolic point settled the greater question looms up, as to when this æon begins and when it ends. It would take us entirely too far afield to discuss the various answers which this question has received and still receives to-day. All we propose to do here is to set forth the true answer, and in connection with that show how erroneous are the ideas which seek to find the 1000 years in the past and also to find them in the future, in both cases as a 1000 natural years. The Bible knows of *only one binding of Satan by Christ*. “When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in place: but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armor, and divideth his spoils.” Luke 11, 21-22; and the parallels in Matth. and Mark. Comp. Is. 53, 12. “And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.” Col. 2, 15. “For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.” I John 3, 8. Also Gen. 3, 15. “The prince of this world is judged.” John 16, 11. “He also himself likewise took part of the same (flesh and blood), that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.” Heb. 2, 14. The question here to be decided is whether Christ’s victory over Satan on



Calvary and in Joseph's garden is symbolized in v. 1 and 2 in our text, or whether this symbolism refers to some other victory over the devil, either to one somewhere in the course of church history, or to one yet to come. To take either of the last two alternatives is to drop the Analogy of Faith, and to interpret v. 1-2 of our text independently of this Analogy as presenting a *novum*. Such an interpretation must prove that Christ's redemptive victory is *not* meant here — a task quite impossible, if mere assumption is ruled out. There is no period of past church history, whether of a 1000 actual years or less, which fits the description given in the text. Whatever chiliastic commentators may assert, no church history has ever recorded such a period. Read these histories one and all, and see that this is true. At present the tide has turned toward the future, and we are told that this period of 1000 actual years of most glorious victory shall arrive just prior to the end of the world. To bolster up this claim we are urged to believe that chapter 20 narrates what shall occur subsequently to the things recorded in chapter 19. But this is impossible, since chapter 19 already describes the final judgment. Moreover, we have already seen how Revelation reaches the final judgment no less than seven different times. When thus the chiliasts place the 1000 years into the future they really do so only on the basis of their own bald *assumption*. To be sure, once this assumption is treated as fact hundreds of other passages are read in the same false light, and the Scriptures are stuffed full of chiliastic references in an amazing way. The whole proceeding shows how dangerous

it is to leave the Analogy of Faith and to follow some notion of our own in interpreting Scripture. Men possessed of a fixed idea become wholly unbalanced exegetically and cannot be trusted even with the simplest Bible language.

Jesus bound Satan when he died on the cross. Forthwith he began to divide the spoils. This our text describes: **that he should deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years should be finished.** This is a description of the spread of the Gospel and the Christian faith during the entire New Testament era. Before this time only one nation had the saving truth; Satan ruled all the rest, deceiving them at will. When Christ sent out the apostles it took only three hundred years until the Gospel spread through the entire Roman empire. Satan could not hinder it. Jesus himself prophesied: "And this Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world *for a witness unto all nations*; and then shall the end come." Matth. 24, 14. We are witnessing part of this glorious work to-day. The Bible is translated into all languages and mission work has spread to the ends of the earth. Satan is unable to hold his own. Here we must let Scripture interpret Scripture, instead of imposing our ideas upon the sacred words. The binding of Satan and his confinement do not mean that he and his damnable work will be wholly banished from the earth. The symbolism of his binding is explained by this statement regarding his inability to go on deceiving the nations as once he did so triumphantly. — The matter is made plainer by the addition: **after this he must be loosed for a little time.** Here again

the Analogy of Scripture and the Analogy of Faith must help us to keep our balance. When the New Testament era draws to a close the "great tribulation" shall set in, Matth. 24, 21; there shall be false Christs and false prophets, "insomuch that if it were possible they shall deceive the very elect," v. 24; "iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold," v. 12; and Jesus himself asks: "Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" Luke 18, 8. Thus the loosing of Satan is the renewal of his unchecked deception of men. The work of spreading the Gospel shall then come to an end. This final period, however, shall be only "for a little time," even as Jesus foretold: "Except those days should be shortened" etc., Matth. 24, 22.

After thus picturing the beginning of the New Testament era as Christ's redemptive triumph over Satan and the victorious spread of the Gospel among the nations, this whole era is spread out before us in the next three verses as the triumphant rule of the glorified Christ in the midst of his saints over all the earth.

**4. And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus, and for the word of God, and such as worshipped not the beast, neither his image, and received not his mark upon their forehead and upon their hand; and they lived, and reigned with Christ a thousand years.**

**5. The rest of the dead lived not until the thousand years should be finished. This is the first resurrection. 6. Blessed and holy is he that**

**hath part in the first resurrection; over these the second death hath no power; but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.**

The formula: **And I saw**, recurs several times to introduce scenes and actions unveiled before the vision of John. This is a new scene. The previous one took place on earth, for the angel came down out of heaven; this new scene is placed in heaven, for it deals with "souls." — John beholds **thrones**, the term again is plainly symbolic. These are not the elevated seats of judges, as some have supposed, but thrones of rulers. This is evident from two items in the further description: 1) from the **judgment** given to the occupants of the thrones, a term that must be read in the Hebrew sense of *mishpat*, "judgment" not merely in rendering judicial verdicts, but in administering right and justice in general; 2) from the term **reigned**, ἐβασίλευσαν, denoting kingly rule, this significant verb repeated at the end of v. 6. — **And they sat upon them** simply states the fact that certain persons occupied these "thrones." This is the force of the aorist ἐκάθισαν. The thrones were all occupied. And now a great guessing develops among the commentators in regard to the persons occupying these thrones. Because in other connections thrones have been mentioned in the Apocalypse, these are brought in here, whether they fit or not. Let us stick to the context. John did not count the thrones and states no number. He at first omits to say just who sat on these thrones. But we can be very certain that in so significant a vision as this he is not going to let us

merely guess who occupied these thrones, and what the real significance of this symbolism is.—To complete the pictures of the thrones John adds: **and judgment was given unto them.** We have already explained the “judgment.” That this “was given” unto the occupants of the thrones, means that God or Christ was the giver. A great honor was thus bestowed upon the persons seated on the thrones.

After thus fixing our attention on the thrones as such we are now informed with great completeness in regard to the persons who sat on these thrones. For it is simply impossible to dissociate what now follows from what has just been said regarding the thrones. Every reader has in his mind the question as yet unanswered, who the enthroned persons are. Here is the answer: **and souls of them that had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus, and for the Word of God.** This is the first group. Then follows the second group: **and such as worshipped not the beast, etc.** This is not merely a further description of the ones beheaded, for then there would be no *καί* before *οἱτινες*. There are *two* groups: 1) martyrs, 2) other saints. That all these souls sat on the thrones and had judgment given unto them is placed beyond doubt by the final clause in v. 4: “and they lived and *reigned* with Christ a thousand years.” So it is wrong to imagine three groups: 1) judges; 2) martyrs; 3) saints generally. To reign, *βασιλεύειν* is certainly to have judgment. John’s vision of *all* the glorified saints on thrones, reigning royally, is in fullest accord with Scripture. “Do ye not

know that the saints shall judge the world? . . . Know ye not that we shall judge angels?" 1 Cor. 6, 2-3. "Until the Ancient of days came, and judgment was given to the saints of the most High; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom." Dan. 7, 22. "And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations." Rev. 2, 26. "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne" etc. Rev. 3, 21. In the parable one faithful servant is placed over ten cities, another over five. When the Scriptures promise the saints "crowns" this means kingship and royal rule in heaven. What all these, and other passages, promise John saw fulfilled in his vision. So we decline to make the occupants of these thrones only certain individuals, perhaps only the martyrs; they embrace *all* the saints in heaven. The Analogy of Scripture on a point like this is worth a thousand times more than the guesses of commentators. John says he saw **souls**, ψυχαί. This designation applies also to οἵτινες. Both the martyrs and the saints generally are described as "souls." John could not write πνεύματα, "spirits," because this would be misleading since it would make us think of angel beings. "Souls" is clearly and completely human. Now these "souls" are without bodies, for the period here described antedates the bodily resurrection. A great perversion results when "the first resurrection" in v. 5 is read as denoting a literal bodily resurrection, and as having taken place at the beginning of the 1000 years. More of this anon. The Greek ψυχή in some connections means "person,"

but there is no such connection in this instance, and no translator has used "persons" in our text. — In the first group are the souls **of them that had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus, and for the Word of God.** The verb *πέλεκισω* means to cut off with a *πέλεκυς*, an ax. Only here beheading is symbolic of all violent martyr deaths. Very few martyrs were actually beheaded, most of them died in other and usually more terrible and painful ways. Of the apostles we know that only St. Paul died under the ax. Moreover, why should the martyrs that were beheaded be thus singled out and put into a prominent class by themselves? There is no conceivable reason. Ebrard thinks, beheading points to the Roman way of execution. But he is mistaken. The Romans loved to crucify and to cast before wild beasts in the arena, and they used the ax only for Roman citizens as a more honorable mode of death. And why should the Jewish martyrs be left out in this way, James for instance, Stephen, and the men and women whom Saul helped to drag to their death? No, "they that had been beheaded" are *all* the martyr dead. — **For the testimony of Jesus, and for the Word of God** states the reason for their martyrdom. In 1, 9 the two phrases are transposed. "The testimony of Jesus" is the testimony which belongs to him and which he has personally made as the Great Witness. It is embodied in "the Word of God," namely the Gospel of salvation. These martyrs believed, confessed, and promulgated this blessed testimony and Word, and for that very reason lost their lives. It is very fitting that when

the saints in heaven are mentioned the martyrs should be put into first place. There is no reason to suppose that all of them were prominent men in the church, such as apostles and preachers. Many of them were just ordinary members, some of them women and even children.

The idea that only the martyrs were honored by being placed on thrones is both unbiblical and contrary to our text, which at once adds the second group of "souls": **and such as worshipped not the beast, and received not the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand.** These are all the other saints in heaven. They are described negatively in language used already in 13, 12 and 15-16 and here purposely recalled. These worshipped only the true God and the Savior Jesus Christ, and not **the beast**, which had two horns like a lamb, 13, 11, a pseudo-Christ, namely the papal Antichrist, but when he spake he spake as a dragon, as the devil, thus showing his true character. This is a drastic picture of the papal Antichrist who at one time so mightily ruled the church that he tried to mark every man's forehead and hand as his servant. Comp. Deut. 6, 8; 11, 18 on the origin of this marking on forehead and hand. Its meaning is plain: thought and action was to be governed completely by devotion to Jehovah. So the papacy, as a pseudo-Christ, tried to mark all men on forehead and hand, to control all their thought and action by its papal decrees, threatening death (remember the Inquisition, etc.) to all who disobeyed. On the other hand compare Rev. 7, 3; 9, 4 for the Lord's seal on the forehead of his true



believers. In our interpretation, however, we dare not be too narrow as regards the papacy. While this is undoubtedly meant, there are allied anti-christian powers and organizations, each in their way imitating "the beast" and trying to seal their servants in thought and act by some "mark." The Lord's seal on the foreheads of his true followers is the true faith which dominates their thought. It is not a "mark" but "seal," a term symbolic of the sealing made by the presence of the Holy Spirit in every true believer. These true saints, having passed by death into heaven, also sat on the regal thrones.

This is made very plain when John now adds: **and they lived, and reigned with Christ a thousand years.** "They lived" means: they had the ζωή or true life. This life they obtained here on earth by faith, and when death came this life remained theirs. Note carefully that John does not say: they lived again. Ἐζησαν, the aorist, "they lived," states only the fact, just as does ἐκάθισαν, "they sat." These souls lived, namely in the blessedness of heaven; in the entire context there has not been a single hint as regards their bodies. We may say their bodies slept in the grave here on earth. — Next we hear: **and reigned with Christ,** in company with him. Some have supposed that in the center of all these thrones there was a grand throne for Christ, but this is supposition. That Christ should reign supreme in heaven is taken for granted in our text. This phrase "with Christ," however, may well be taken as defining the Giver who gave judgment into the hands of these

souls. The word "reign" means "to act or rule as a king," βασιλεύω, as has already been explained. And this reign continued for **a thousand years**, all through the New Testament era. So we must not conceive of all these saints as being at once and all together in heaven, and there ruling during this era. John saw the entire 1000 years in one vision, i. e. he saw what marked and distinguished these 1000 years from beginning to end. Note that he does not say he saw *all* the saints — their number he leaves indefinite here; elsewhere the symbolic number 144,000 is used. Each martyr and true believer and confessor, when his earthly trial is over, lives in heaven and there rules with Christ. That is what John saw. Moreover, the 1000 years denote an earthly era. In heaven, however, there is no time, only timelessness; there the saints have no clocks and no calendars. Let us be careful not to impose these earthly designations and limitations on the heavenly state above. In our human way we can say only this: while here the New Testament era rolls on, all the saints that have finished their course rule gloriously above. — Perhaps a word should be added on this reigning of the saints, and on the judgment given unto them. The antichristian powers and rulers here on earth imagine they are supreme and that there is nothing to check their power and plans. Well, they are mistaken; let all true believers know it. The devil who is behind these forces and who embodies the real power that is in them, has long been chained, and as one commentator well puts it can reach out only as far as his chain permits him. So these evil

forces put up a great show and bluff of power; in reality they are already doomed. The real Ruler is Christ, who rules even in the midst of his enemies; and he shares this rule of his with all his saints, for they are all in perfect accord with him. Now this real rule extends over the whole world, even over the devils. And this real rule is by means of the Word which is the complete expression of the divine will. That means that every person, power, and thing that is contrary to the Word is bound to be crushed, defeated, cast down and cast out; and that every person, power, and thing in accord with the Word is bound in the end to triumph, to rise gloriously, to last forever. The saints in heaven rule thus actually and in the fulness of the power given to them. They see and know all that this rule means, and it is measureless joy to them. God's saints here on earth already begin this rule, because they have the Word which contains the divine will. Every one of us who believes and confesses this Word, who preaches, teaches, and lives that Word, by that Word judges the world and thus rules. Only here this rule is more or less imperfect, since it is exercised in humiliation on our part, not in glory as once it shall be.

As regards **the rest of the dead**, all those who lived and died in unbelief, John reports the opposite: they **lived not until the thousand years should be finished**. So all the "souls" mentioned in v. 4 belong to "the dead," evidently meaning the bodily dead. Yet though bodily dead, *ἐζήσαν*, they were alive, namely with life everlasting in heaven. This is what is in so many words denied concern-

ing the ungodly dead: οὐκ ἔζησαν, they were not alive. Never having won the true life or ζωή before their bodily death, as one by one they died bodily and their souls passed into eternity, they remained in that sad condition, devoid of the true life. — And this, John tells us, was the case all through the thousand years. In this respect v. 5 is the counterpart of v. 4. The godly die bodily one by one all through the New Testament era, and then their souls enjoy the heavenly life; the ungodly likewise die bodily one by one during this period, but then their souls enjoy nothing of the kind. That is all John says — no need, of course, of adding that they do not reign; no need either of further specifying their condition, because John's vision is not especially concerned with the ungodly. **Until, ἄχρι, the thousand years are finished,** or come to a terminus, τέλος, by no means implies, as some suppose, that the ungodly shall also live when the thousand years are finished. In sentences with "until," like the one we have here, there is no implication of what lies beyond. If what happens afterwards is to be stated, it must be done in a separate and new clause; observe how this is done in v. 7. Compare, for instance, Matth. 5, 26: "till thou have paid the last farthing." Here ἕως is used, which however is exactly like ἄχρι, and the meaning is that the person concerned will *never* be able to pay the last farthing, and by no means that at some distant future time that final farthing will be paid. See likewise Rom. 5, 13 and John 9, 18. This too is the constant teaching of Scripture: however bodily death finds a man, so will he remain

to all eternity; if it finds him possessed of spiritual life, he will live that life for ever in heaven, but if it finds him minus that spiritual life, he will remain without it for ever. — It is here too that chiliasm is forced again to falsify the plain words of Scripture. After inventing a bodily resurrection for the godly dead at the beginning of the chiliad, it invents a second bodily resurrection for the ungodly dead at the end of the chiliad — the one as false as is the other. — For when John now adds: **This is the first resurrection**, he plainly refers to what he has written in v. 4. When the souls of the martyrs and other saints pass into the heavenly life, this is “the first resurrection.” The term ἀνάστασις, “resurrection,” is here used symbolically. Some have supposed that this first resurrection is the spiritual resurrection when here in this life a man spiritually dead is raised by faith in Christ to spiritual life. Now the term “resurrection” can thus be used; only here it is *not* so used, for here “this” refers to godly souls, and to what happens to these godly souls when bodily death takes them out of this life. We say the godly die; John, however, tells us their bodily death is their first resurrection. For now they live indeed, in the fulness of the heavenly life, reigning with Christ in glory. Of course, there is no such resurrection for “the rest of the dead.” — As regards the bodily resurrection of the dead the Scriptures know of only *one* general bodily resurrection embracing the ungodly as well as the godly. Dan. 12, 2; John 5, 28-29 are decisive on this point. The effort to split this general resurrection into two sections, putting

a 1000 years between them, is exegetically hopeless. To effect such a split by means of a *sedes doctrinae* which is full of symbolical expressions, is to reverse the sane exegetical principle that figurative expressions in the Scriptures must be interpreted according to literal statements. Whoever does the reverse condemns himself exegetically, doctrinally, and even according to common sense.

In the sixth verse John explains in praise over all who have part in this first resurrection: **Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection.** Yes, happy in the highest possible degree, Rev. 14, 13, and holy indeed with a perfect holiness. The last trace of sin has been swept out by the hand of bodily death. Pure and stainless is the soul that passes into heaven, and hence happy and holy. One should see at a glance that this praise fits only the souls that enter heaven, and cannot be uttered of those who come to faith in this life, for some who attain faith in this life fall away again and thus end with anything but blessedness and holiness. — Why all such are thus praised as is done here John himself tells us: **over these the second death hath no power.** By safely passing the first or bodily death they are wholly and forever removed from the reach of the second death, which is the same as eternal death. Thus too the soul's passing into heaven is the first resurrection, and the glorification of the body and its passing likewise into heaven is the second resurrection. Here note again that the escape from the second death cannot be predicated of all who come to faith in this life; some are after all caught by the power

of the second death, for they lose their faith in this life and thus at last fall a prey to eternal death.

Beside the negative reason for blessedness and holiness John puts the positive reason: **but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.** The souls of all God's saints are here called priests and kings. This is true of them already in this life, Rev. 1, 6; 5, 10, as we have stated above, and true in a higher sense in the life to come. As **priests** they shall worship God and Christ in the perfection of holiness in heaven, and at the same time as kings they **shall reign with him**, namely Christ, **a thousand years**, thus once more in a pointed way naming this symbolic number, and repeating and hereby emphasizing what was said of the glorious position of the souls of the saints at the end of v. 4.

In v. 7 etc. John sees what shall take place after the thousand years of the New Testament era are finished. We stop at this point.

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#### HOMILETICAL HINTS

This is indeed a valuable text when used in the right way. It enables us to view all in one great vision what in the Scriptures otherwise is scattered in many passages. Here it is all put together — the victory of Christ over Satan, and the rich spoils of that victory bestowed on Christ's saints all through the New Testament era. Blessed indeed and holy are all that share in these spoils!

The supreme figure in the text is Christ. As we look at the world today, filled with antichristian forces, disregarding the testimony of Christ and the Word of God, as we

study the course of this world, often stained with martyr blood and always scorning Christ's saints, lauding its own heroes and seeking its own false glory, often enough discouragement takes hold of us, we grow less sure in our own testimony, and some are ready to yield completely. But look through St. John's eyes and see this vision. The prince of this world is already judged and undone. All his followers are doomed. The gates of hell cannot possibly prevail. And Christ rules supreme. His Word resounds in the world, and Satan cannot stop it. Thousands are saved and the world must permit it. And the real ruler over all this world is not Satan, but Christ and his saints. With the curtain here drawn aside we see the thrones in heaven, our brethren who have fought a good fight ruling as kings with the judgment of the Word given to them, and the will of Christ carried out triumphantly even in the midst of his enemies and in spite of them. Shall we waver in our profession when all this is revealed to us? No; with new strength let us hold out, defy the great Antichrist and all the little antichrists, go on with the promulgation of the mighty Word of God, until we too attain the blessedness of the brethren and martyrs who have gone on before.

This grand apocalyptic text rightly expounded destroys the main contention of chiliasm. It is always best to focus upon the main support of any error, for in shattering that with the power of truth, the whole error is bound to crumple up. There is no millennium of a 1000 years of earthly glory for the Christian Church prior to the final great judgment. If there is, this our text must prove and say it; and this our text says nothing of the kind. What a satisfaction for every preacher to get full exegetical assurance on this point! What a blessing for our people to get full assurance by way of preaching that this error so prevalent now is wholly minus scriptural support! — But this negative result of the study of this text is only one thing; the other, the positive result, is greater still: the victorious Christ; the Gospel that nothing can check; the triumph of the martyrs and saints; the judgment of the Word as we now preach it and as heaven corroborates it.



The triumph of evil and its representatives is doomed. It is a sham and hollow triumph. And "evil" means first of all every type of unbelief, and then also every fruit of unbelief in life and the works of men. Or, we may say, "evil" is everything that is contrary to the Word of God, that contradicts the Gospel, that opposes Christ. This evil is judged already, and will meet its final judgment at the hands of Christ and his glorified saints.

"Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection." Among the beatitudes in the Scriptures this may be considered the crowning one. It refers to the hour when the soul rises ("resurrection") to take its place amid the hosts of martyrs and saints in heavenly glory. In that hour is also assured the rising of the body from the dust of the grave to the same heavenly glory at the last day. It is Christ whose grace makes us triumph in the first resurrection. It is his Word which mediates this triumph for us in the face of Satan and all his power. Thank God for bestowing this beatitude upon us and for letting us taste all its comfort and joy already in this life.

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#### St. John's Vision of the New Testament Era.

- I. *The binding of Satan.*
- II. *The freedom of the Gospel.*
- III. *The thrones of judgment in heaven.*
- IV. *The blessedness of the first resurrection.*

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#### The Thousand Years of St. John's Vision.

- I. *Their extent* — from the time Jesus bound Satan, till the last great day.
- II. *Their earthly content* — the nations no longer deceived, the Gospel has free course and is glorified.

- III. *Their heavenly content* — the reign of the martyrs and saints with judgment over all Christ's foes.
- IV. *Their blessedness for us* — who are partakers of the first resurrection.
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**St. John's Vision of the Binding of Satan.**

- I. *He beheld the tremendous act.*
- II. *He describes the glorious effect.*
- III. *He adds comfort for us all.*
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**Does St. John Teach a Millennium?**

- I. *No; but the binding of Satan during the whole New Testament era.*
- II. *No; but the heavenly reign of the saints all through the New Testament era.*
- III. *No; but the free course of the Gospel all through the New Testament era.*
- IV. *No; but the blessedness of all God's priests during the New Testament era.*

Instead of the figment of a 1000 earthly years of glory St. John teaches us what is far greater, namely the triumph of Christ, his Gospel, and Church from his first coming on till his return in glory.

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St. John's Vision in our text cannot be exhausted by one sermon only. We may preach on the first three verses: "The Binding of Satan," and show fully what that means.—Next, on "John's Vision of the Saints in Heaven," their exaltation, their rule, and their final blessedness.—Next, on "John's Revelation concerning the Final State of the True Believers."

**SOLI DEO GLORIA.**