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THE

Bible

STUDENT

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THE DIVINE IMPERATIVE

By A. LAKE

Obligation, necessity, duty, command—all these familiar words of human experience convey to us the sense of the imperative. The pressure of circumstances, the responsibility of relationships, the dictates of authority all press upon us and issue in the ought and should and must of our life. The Lord Jesus Christ in the days of His flesh, living as man amongst men, subjected Himself to an imperative and often thus spoke of Himself.

The Language of the New Testament has a particularly emphatic impersonal imperative which He used from time to time and which was used concerning Him for us there is a wealth of teaching in tracing its usage. It is our present purpose to take a representative selection to show that gracious and urgent compulsion that actuated Him.

1. The Imperative of the Father's Will

'Thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing' said Mary when she and Joseph found the Lord in the Temple. 'How is it that ye sought Me?' was His reply, 'Wist ye not that I must be in the things of My Father?' and in that reply He at once declared both His Divine Sonship and His Divine mission. Here at last in the world where the first man had set his own desires and supposed interests and advantages above the doing of God's will was the Second Man. His consuming passion was to do that will, not by the pressure of external compulsion but as the expression of His own loyal devotion and submission to His Father. It is difficult for us to consider subordination without loss of dignity or position, but never did the subordination of Christ abate for a moment the plenitude of Deity which dwells in Him. Here in this so early declaration of His life's purpose we see His eager dedication to His Father's will, His complete immersion in His Father's interests, His earnest devotion to His Father's Glory. Later He was going to say, 'My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me and to finish His work'.

God's will had been flouted, His interests had been challenged, His glory had been debased down the long centuries of the human story until He came Who set all this and more as the activating motive of every thought, word and deed. It is no wonder that God should open heaven to declare, 'This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased'.

2. The Imperative of an Expanding Ministry

A little further in the Gospel of Luke we read how at Capernaum they would have detained Him. Multitudes had received the blessings of healing and deliverance and they desired to keep Him in their midst but He replies, 'I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also, for therefore am I sent'. The bonds of local need and of national aspiration could not limit the scope of the Saviour's ministry. 'Other sheep I have', He would say, 'who are not of this Fold, them also I must bring and there shall be one flock and one Shepherd'. The Fold of Judaism with its confining walls of legal rule and complex ritual could not contain all who would be brought in by the expansive grace of God. What was needed was a new order based on a relationship to a person, not a fold but a flock. Jacob had seen it on his deathbed when he prophesied, 'Unto Him shall the gathering of the peoples be'. Isaiah had declared that in Him should the Gentiles trust and Simeon in the Temple, holding the Young Child in his arms could say, 'A light to lighten the Gentiles'. We who had our place among the far-off aliens rejoice that we are no longer strangers but fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God. We look forward with joyful anticipation to the glad day when we shall surround the Throne of the Lamb with our praises and join with the numberless host from every kindred and tongue and peoples and nations. The river of Ezekiel's prophecy may serve to picture for us the expanding, vivifying ministry of Christ. For Him it is a *must*.

3. The Imperative of His Rejection and Passion

Here we come to the very heart and core of that awful necessity which was the essential purpose of His coming. The Lord Jesus had questioned His disciples, 'Whom say the people that I am?', following with the challenge, 'But whom say we that I am?' Peter answering said, 'The Christ of God' and He straitly charged them, and commanded them to tell no man that thing; saying, 'The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day'.

He gives Himself the oft used title, Son of Man, for He had come, the Second Man to discharge all man's unfulfilled obligations, to bear all man's guilt and sin, and ultimately to realise all man's

forfeited destiny. All of Manhood is summed up in Him apart from man's guilt. But why must He be rejected and slain? Because on the one hand it was inevitable. Man being what he is, fallen, sinful, rebellious, depraved, his rejection of Christ is the complete manifestation of his sinfulness. The cross lays bare the heart of man as nothing else does. 'You have killed', says Peter, 'The prince of life!' Cultured and ignorant, rich and poor, oppressor and oppressed, religious and profane, Greek, Jew and Roman all mankind united to encompass the death of Christ. It stands and will persist as the foulest crime that mankind could commit. The human race in the act of crucifying the Lord Jesus Christ plumbed the lowest depth of sin and is capable of any lesser crime. 'We will not have this man to reign over us!' they cried, and made the Cross inevitable.

But over against that humbling, revealing truth is the other—it was *indispensable*, for if the heart of man in all its sordid sin comes to light there, so also does the heart of God in all its matchless grace. The death of Christ was indispensable for the accomplishment of a three-fold purpose. It was an offering to God, other offerings had been made in earlier times of inadequate materials or involuntary victims but here came One, Who, in the perfect acceptability of His Person and the complete devotedness of His act, rendered the one true Burnt Offering of all time. Further it was the defeat of His foes as Paul says in Colossians, 'He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it'. The letter to the Hebrews teaches that through death He destroyed him that had the power of death. So Satan is a defeated foe and the conquest was at the Cross.

Thirdly, it effected the Atonement. Here was the manifestation of Divine character, here was the vindication of Divine law, here was the foundation of Divine pardon. It would need an exposition of the third chapter of Romans to unfold this. Salvation has its own blessed vocabulary; *Sacrifice*—the penalty has been paid: *Ransom*—the cost has been met: *Redemption*—the bondage has been broken: *Propitiation*—God's judicial displeasure has been removed: *Reconciliation*—the enmity has been dispelled from Man's heart. None of this could have come about apart from the death of Christ. All has been effected and more. God would have His grace liberated in the midst of a world of sinners and there was one indispensable means—The Cross was the Divine Imperative.

4. The Imperative of the Resurrection

To the dispirited disciples on the Emmaus Road the risen Saviour made a fuller revelation, 'Ought not Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?' There is a *must* concerning the Resurrection. It was the Divine answer to man's rejection of Christ. God has loosed Him from the pangs of death for it was not possible that He should be holden of it. Now all His claims are vindicated, His Deity is declared, His prayers are answered.

The believer, brought into blessing by the death of Christ, is enriched by His Resurrection, kept safe by His ascended life and finds his hope in His return. As far as the believer is concerned the Resurrection proves his justification, provokes his sanctification and promises his glorification. The same event assures to the world its future, impartial, final judgment. Luke 24:26, however, does not stop at the Resurrection. The glorifying of Christ was the immediate prelude to the gift of the Holy Spirit. The teaching on this great subject in the Gospel of John demonstrates that only when the Ascended Saviour had taken His seat at the Father's right hand could the blessed Comforter come. It has been aptly put that we have an Advocate at the right hand of power in Heaven and the Father has an Advocate at the right hand of weakness here on earth. The ascended Captor of captivity has received gifts for men and the continuing existence and witness of believers on earth is a consequence and demonstration of the presence of the risen Mediator in glory. 'If when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more being reconciled we shall be kept safe by His life'. How holily and completely are we represented in the courts of heaven by our great High Priest, what a welcome is there for us now as we draw near with true heart and in fulness of faith. Here too is the guarantee of the final perseverance of the saints. The glorious presence of the Forerunner, our Captain, our Prince-Leader means that the last and least of His followers will one day be brought to where He is in perfect suitability to those bright regions.

5. The Imperative of the Personal Encounter

Luke, from whom most of the key thoughts of this study are drawn, tells how the Lord came to Jericho and found there in a sycamore tree the chief tax-gatherer. He was one who would see Jesus but his own shortness of stature and the press of the

multitude prompted him to find a vantage point in the tree: but no seeker after Christ is ever left at a distance however small and the Saviour comes to the place, calls him by name and says, 'Today I must abide at thy house'. Salvation is not only urgent, it is intimate and personal. It is the meeting of the Lord Jesus Christ with the individual sinner, be he wealthy Zacchaeus in his tree or blind Bartimaeus in his rags. Both alike, despite the extremes of their social position, find the answer to their deepest need when they come face to face with Him. The blindness of the one and the ill-gotten riches of the other both vanish when the Saviour comes. Further it is a continuing relationship—I must abide. A host of other names and personalities crowd into the mind. He must needs go through Samaria because at the well-head would be woman, satiated with the sensual pleasures of this life and ready to drink of those eternal springs which rise from Christ Himself. Not for her sake alone did He obey the imperative. The Father seeketh worshippers and He would be worshipped by this outcast Samaritan even. There is a Me-and-thee quality about the Gospel which persists through the whole experience. Conversion is Me-and-thee meeting together, discipleship is Me-and-thee walking together, meditation is Me-and-thee communing together, and the Rapture is Me-and-thee meeting face to face at last. Thus we are led on to—

6. The Imperative of His Ultimate Triumph

'He must reign' declares Paul in 1st Corinthians 15, and the heart of every believer adds its Amen. The ultimate triumph of Christ is a Divine necessity from a number of viewpoints. It will be the culmination of God's work of grace in the Church. The forming of the body will be completed, the discipline of the pilgrimage will be past, the rewards of faithful service and stewardship will have been given and the exceeding riches of His grace will be in eternal display. It will be the end of Creation's weariness for even it looks forward with groaning expectation to the manifestation of the Sons of God; the desert shall blossom as the rose and there shall be no destruction or hurt in God's holy mountain.

It will be the consummation of man's history. All that has man's signature to it will be dealt with and wound up. His empires will be crushed by the Stone cut out without hands. His establishments of commerce, education, religion and culture will

fall under the judgment of Him Who has been excluded from them all. It will see the establishment of God's kingdom in the midst of men. No longer will tyranny provoke rivers of tears but the benign autocracy of the Prince of Peace, Who alone can be entrusted with absolute power, will bring peace, justice and plenty to all. It will witness the judgment of Satan and his consigning to eternal destruction. The age long conflict between good and evil will at last be resolved in the victory of God's Man, a victory gained at the Cross but awaiting His final triumph for its complete demonstration. It will bring heart satisfaction to the waiting Christ. He has toiled for His Bride and at last she will be with Him in perfect suitability to her position, rejoicing in and sharing His glory and ravished with the fulness of His love. It will secure absolute glory to God. His eternal decrees and covenants will have reached their fulfilment and He will be All-in-all.

THE PROPHET JEREMIAH

By PROFESSOR A. RENDLE SHORT

The attentive reader of the Bible will have noticed that though many of its chapters are historical, the history is written not at all as a scholar would write it. For instance, it relates all that happens to the laws of God. It is singularly discontinuous; we are told much about certain periods extending over a generation or two, and little or nothing about the intervening periods. Sometimes God is active and there are miraculous happenings; sometimes events pursue a quite ordinary course. Obviously we are intended to pay special attention to the periods that are dealt with in such detail. One of these periods includes the reigns of Josiah and his sons, and the few years following the destruction of Jerusalem. Here belong chapters in Kings and Chronicles, and the books of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Habakkuk, Obadiah, Zephaniah, and part of Daniel. It is a period of divine providences, but not of miracles, except the miracle of prediction.

Jeremiah is often thought of as a gloomy, repellent man who took a delight in foretelling disaster. Nothing could be further from the truth. He was of a shrinking, almost timid disposition, with a deep affection for his wayward nation. 'Ah, Lord God,