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AN EXPOSITORY STUDY OF ST JOHN'S GOSPEL

(Continued)

Prof. F. F. BRUCE, D.D.

II. Jesus Reveals Himself to the World (John 1:19-12:50)

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(iii) *The Father and the Son* (John 5:19-47)

Ch. V. 21—*For as the Father raiseth the dead and quickeneth them, even so the Son quickeneth whom he will.*—In Jewish belief God, and none but He, was the raiser of the dead; this was one of His distinctive prerogatives and one of the greatest tokens of His power. In the great Jewish prayer known as the 'Eighteen Benedictions', which goes back to pre-Christian times, the second section celebrates God in these terms: 'Thou, O LORD, art mighty for ever; Thou quickenest the dead; Thou art mighty to save. Thou sustainest the living with loving-kindness, Thou quickenest the dead in great mercy, Thou supportest the fallen, healest the sick, loosest those who are bound and keepest faith with those who sleep in the dust. Who is like Thee, O Lord of mighty acts? Who is comparable to Thee, O King, who bringest to death and quickenest again, and causest salvation to spring forth? Yea, Thou art faithful to quicken the dead. Blessed art Thou, O LORD, who quickenest the dead!' It is against the background of such words as these that our Lord's claim is to be properly appreciated. For He does not claim simply to be an instrument in God's hand by whom life might be restored, as Elijah and Elisha were; He claims that authority has been given Him to raise the dead to the life of the age to come. It is not only that eternal life is granted to those who believe in Him, as we learned in Ch. 3; it is that He exercises the divine prerogative of imparting this life. How He does so will appear anon. But first He claims a parallel authority to that of quickening whom He will.

v. 22—*For neither doth the Father judge any man, but he hath given all judgement unto the Son.*—From ancient days God had

been acknowledged as 'the Judge of all the earth' (Gen. 18:25). His judgement was constantly being exercised in the lives of men and nations; but it was expected that at the end of the present age He would consummate His work of judgement in one last assize. At that time, in fact, He would combine His twin prerogatives as raiser of the dead and judge of all. But, as the Son has claimed the authority to raise the dead, so now He claims the authority to execute judgement; indeed, He claims that the Father has placed this authority within the Son's sole jurisdiction and does not exercise it Himself. How this claim is to be reconciled with the statement in John 3:17, that 'God sent not His Son into the world to judge the world', will be seen more clearly as the discourse proceeds. But the Father's purpose in committing all judgement to the Son is noteworthy.

v. 23—*That all may honour the Son, even as they honour the Father.*—When Paul tells us of the high exaltation with which Christ's obedience to the point of crucifixion was rewarded by God, how He received 'the name which is above every name; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, . . . and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father' (Phil. 2:9-11), he uses language which implies that Christ, by divine decree, receives honours which belong to Jehovah alone. For it is Jehovah who says: 'I am God, and there is none else, . . . unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear' (Isa. 45:22 f.). But when Christ receives such honours, Jehovah's glory is not diminished or given to another. When the Son is exalted, the Father is glorified. So here the honouring of the Son is the Father's good pleasure.

He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which sent him.—An ambassador receives the honour due to the sovereign whom he represents; dishonour to the ambassador is an insult to his sovereign. So it is with the Son and the Father. The Father bestows the authority and the Son exercises it; the Father sends and the Son is sent; but so completely one are the Father and the Son, so perfectly does the Son manifest the Father, that no one can at the same time refuse the Son's claims and pay honour to

the Father. Our Lord's opponents thought they could do this very thing, but they were mistaken.

v. 24—*Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth him that sent me, hath eternal life, and cometh not into judgement, but hath passed out of death into life.*—How does the Son impart life? By the word which He speaks, since He does not speak by His own authority but by the Father's. To pay heed to the word spoken by the Son is to give credence to the Father in whose name He speaks. And this word is the Son's whole message to the world. The incident of the infirm man at the pool of Bethesda is a 'sign' of this truth; as he received bodily healing through the word spoken by Christ, so on the spiritual plane men receive life through His word. The Son, we have already been told, 'quickeneth whom he will' (v. 21); now we learn who those people are whom the Son wills to quicken; they are those who receive in faith His life-giving word. And further, they receive the assurance that they will not come into judgement. As in John 3:18, the judgement which the Evangelist has in mind is the adverse judgement reserved for those who reject the Son; but 'he that believeth on Him is not judged'. He does not need to wait for the last day to hear the verdict of acquittal; it has been pronounced already. And he does not need to wait for the last day to experience resurrection in the truest sense of the term; here and now he has 'passed out of death into life'. This anticipation of acquittal and the resurrection life sums up the essence of what is commonly called nowadays 'realized eschatology'.

v. 25—*Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour cometh, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live.*—When a man puts his faith in the word which Christ speaks, it is a veritable day of resurrection for him. Apart from Him in whom alone resides that life which is the light of men, we are dead; but when He comes and speaks His life-giving word, those who hear it are raised from their spiritual death. In Him the invitation once given through a Hebrew prophet acquires fresh fulness of meaning: 'Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live' (Isa. 55:3). And should

any one ask how the dead can be expected to hear, the answer is provided in a vision granted to another Hebrew prophet. When Ezekiel was commanded to prophesy to the most unpromising audience that ever a preacher addressed, 'O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD' (Ezek. 37:4), it was the breath of God entering into them that enabled them to respond. And it is that same Spirit who now enables those who are dead through their trespasses and sins to hear the voice of the Son of God and enter into life.

v. 26—*For as the Father hath life in himself, even so gave he to the Son also to have life in himself.*—None but God the Father inherently possesses life-in-Himself, unbegotten and uncreated. He is essentially 'the living God'. Human beings, together with all other living things, do not possess life-in-themselves; their life is derived from God, the source and stay of all life. To the Son alone, begotten but not created, has the Father imparted His own prerogative to have life-in-Himself. In fact, the Son's investiture with this prerogative is a necessary condition of His exercising the other prerogatives of raising the dead and executing judgement to which He has already laid claim. Nor is the Father's bestowal of life-in-Himself upon the Son something which began with His ministry on earth, or with the Incarnation; it is an eternal act, part and parcel of the unique Father-Son relationship which existed already 'in the beginning'. In the eternal order the Father, as Father, imparts to the Son, as Son, that life-in-Himself which it is the Father's to possess and impart; and on the temporal plane the Son reveals that life to men. Thus John can elsewhere speak of Him as the very embodiment of that 'eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us' (1 John 1:2). So greatly does the Father love the Son; so truly does the Son reflect the Father.

v. 27—*and he gave him authority to execute judgement, because he is the Son of man.*—Hitherto in this discourse the title 'the Son' means 'the Son of God'; this becomes explicit in v. 25. But here the authority to execute judgement is given to the Son because He is *Son of man*. The reason for this is not far to seek. In

Daniel's vision of the day of judgement it is to 'one like unto a son of man' that universal and everlasting dominion is given by the Ancient of Days (Dan. 7:13 f.). It is this Old Testament passage more than any other that underlies Jesus' use of the title 'the Son of man', although it is true here as elsewhere that He transforms and transcends the Old Testament foreshadowing by His interpretation and fulfilment of it. His execution of judgement is the reverse side of His life-giving activity. His presence in the world inevitably involves judgement, in the twofold sense which the Greek word *krisis* can bear—discrimination and condemnation. When He comes, there is a discrimination or separation between those who welcome the light and those who shun it. The former receive life; the latter are self-condemned. He does not come to condemn the world; His desire is that the world may be saved. But the *effect*, though not the *purpose*, of His coming is the condemnation of those who will not believe in Him. Here lies the resolution of the apparent contradiction between such passages as John 3:17 and 5:22, and the resolution will become clearer as the theme of judgement is further unfolded in the following discourses. But the judgement which is being determined now will be finally promulgated on a coming day, as Jesus proceeds to show.

v. 28—*Marvel not at this: for the hour cometh, in which all that are in the tombs shall hear his voice.*—The emphasis on 'realized eschatology' in the preceding words of Jesus does not mean the abandonment of a future eschatology. The raising of men and women from spiritual death in this age does not do away with the belief in bodily resurrection at the end of the age. But there is a close connection between the two resurrections. The fact that here and now the dead come to life as they hear the voice of the Son of God is the guarantee that His voice will raise the dead at the last day. This twofold resurrection is referred to again in John 6:54, where those who have eternal life already will even so be raised by Christ at the last day, and it finds clearest expression in the narrative of the raising of Lazarus (e.g., John 11:24-26).

v. 29—*and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done ill, unto the resurrection*

of judgement.—As the present resurrection does not exclude the future one, so the present judgement does not exclude the future one. Daniel had foreseen the day in which ‘many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt’ (Dan. 12:2). Here it is made plain that the Son of man whom Daniel had seen in an earlier vision is to be the Agent of God in resurrection as well as in the exercise of mediatorial sovereignty. But when the day of final separation comes, and life or condemnation is apportioned to men, there will be nothing arbitrary about the judicial decision. That decision will simply be the ratification of a decision made in this life. ‘They that have done good’ are those who have come to the light; the others are those who ‘loved the darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil’ (John 3:19-21). The former group have eternal life already; the latter are condemned already.

(To be continued)

THE PROPHECIES OF DANIEL

A. NAISMITH, M.A.

III. The Ram and the He-Goat.—Chapter 8.

From the commencement of the eighth chapter of Daniel to the end of the book the language used in the original is Hebrew, as in Chs. 1:1 to 2:3, because of the close affinity of the prophecies with the future of Daniel’s people, the Jews. Some of the events symbolized in the visions given to Daniel, and some of the direct statements of predicted events, though still future in Daniel’s lifetime, have since been accurately fulfilled: others concern the ‘time of the end’, the closing years of what our Lord termed ‘the times of the Gentiles’. Chapters 8 and 9 contain outstanding examples of predictions that have already had partial fulfilment. Three important prophecies, the theme of these last five chapters (8 to 12) are communicated to the prophet in three separate visions: the Ram and the He-goat recorded in Chapter 8, the Seventy Weeks toward the end of Chapter 9, and the great final vision in Chs. 10-12.