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A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

*THE LIFE OF CHRIST ACCORDING TO ST. MARK.*¹

XXXVII. THE APOCALYPTIC TEACHING OF JESUS, XIII.

THE last period of the public ministry of Jesus was followed as on earlier occasions by a time of private instruction to the disciples. The text of the discourse was a question from one of them ; as they left the Temple for the last time, this disciple was struck with its grandeur, especially with the massive stones used in its construction, and exclaimed, "See, Teacher, what wonderful stones ! what wonderful buildings !" Jesus took the opportunity of declaring the coming end of the old dispensation ; taking up His follower's words, He spoke first of the Temple, the centre and symbol of Judaism. "Are you looking at these great buildings ?" said He. "Not one stone shall be left upon another ; all shall be pulled down." At the moment He said no more, but when they had left the city, and were sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the Temple, the four disciples who belonged to the inner circle—Peter, James, John, and Andrew—asked Him privately when these things would happen, and what would be the sign of their imminence. In answer to this question Jesus unfolded His teaching as to the course of events after His death. Here again He appealed to the current Jewish beliefs, and His answer is largely a recapitulation of the signs and circumstances of the Day of the Lord as they were set forth in the Old Testament and in later Jewish literature, including apparently the Book of Enoch, in which the Son of Man is a conspicuous figure. The discourse might almost be called

¹ These studies do not profess to be an adequate historical and doctrinal account of Christ, but are an attempt to set forth the impression which St. Mark's account of our Lord would make on a reader whose only source of information was the Second Gospel, and who knew nothing of Christian dogmatics.

a summary of the wide-spread popular apocalyptic teaching of the times. Similar summaries may have been current amongst the Jews, and Jesus may have adapted to His own special purpose some well known miniature apocalypse. Now as ever He is loyal to the revelation made to Israel; He claims that it is fulfilled in Himself and His mission; and He holds to the old faith as interpreted in the new light of His own experience, an experience so profound and penetrating as to constitute a new Revelation. The national and political elements have disappeared, together with the warrior king winning carnal victories by fleshly armies, and instead we have: "Then shall they see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory, and then shall He send forth the angels and gather the elect from the four winds from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven."

The Day of the Lord is removed to an indefinite, though not utterly remote, future: "This generation shall not pass away, until all these things happen. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away. But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, not even the Son—only the Father."

In these last days of Jesus, in this final crisis, the frail body was quick with a life almost too intense for flesh and blood to contain; every faculty of mind and spirit was strained to the utmost, and there must have been marvellous workings in that debateable land of human personality, where nerves and senses blend with memory and imagination, hope and fear, faith and doubt. The teaching of Jesus shows that He often thought in pictures and parables, and that His mind was stored with images from prophetic and apocalyptic visions. These images are not aesthetic furniture of the mind, or even mere symbols; they were forms in which Jesus realized experiences of self,

and man, and God. Thus when His victorious spirit pierced the thick gloom of the present, and the Son of Man saw Himself triumphant in some vague unknown future, what He beheld were the visions of ancient Hebrew seers realized in His own Person.

XXXVIII. SCHEMES FOR THE ARREST OF JESUS,
XIV. 1, 2, 10, 11.

As after the Transfiguration, the scene changes abruptly from ecstatic visions to the deadly hatred of the enemies of Jesus, and the failure of His disciples. As day after day went by and the Passover came nearer and nearer, the overthrow of Jesus became a more and more urgent necessity for the Jewish officials in Jerusalem. They had to regain control of the Temple in order that the supreme festival of their religion might be properly observed; they had also to remove Jesus from the scene in order that the Galilean fanatic—as they esteemed Him—might not throw the city into an uproar by playing upon the excited enthusiasm of the thronging crowds of worshippers. If they left Him alone now, they might be forced to deal with Him during the feast when His arrest would be certain to cause a tumult. Even now it would be safer to come upon Him unawares, apart from the multitude, and take Him quietly. With this end in view they sought anxiously for a suitable opportunity, and Providence, as it seemed to them, came to their assistance in the very nick of time. Only two days before the Passover the priests were agreeably surprised by a visit from one of His intimate followers, who offered to betray the Master into their hands. A bargain was soon struck, and the traitor, Judas Iscariot by name, one of the Twelve, promised to find some occasion on which the priests could quietly and safely seize Jesus. From that moment he was

constantly listening and watching for information that would enable him to betray his master.

St. Mark does not tell us why Judas became a traitor ; but there were many causes at work which tended to alienate from Jesus even His most devoted followers. The devotion of all His disciples was tainted with personal ambition ; the sons of Zebedee, two of the innermost circle, and sought pre-eminence in the Kingdom of God by underhand means, and their conduct had been bitterly resented by their comrades. Judas no doubt shared the secular ambitions of his fellows, and expected wealth, power and honour for himself from the triumph of Jesus. When Jesus time after time threw away His opportunities, Judas no doubt felt that his own personal interests were being sacrificed, and his devotion waned and gave place to ill-will and resentment. The disillusion of these final days in Jerusalem brought matters to a climax ; Judas saw the last and greatest opportunities wasted ; he and his fellows, it seemed, would not share the triumph of a Messiah, but the punishment of an impostor. In any case Jesus was doomed, and Judas might as well save himself by delivering Him up to the authorities. Had he not deluded His followers with false hopes ? Was He not leading them as sheep to the slaughter ?

XXXIX. THE ANOINTING AT BETHANY,^F XIV. 3-9.

The story of malice and treachery is interrupted that the Evangelist may tell of a woman's passionate devotion to Jesus. The scene changes to Bethany, and we read how, while the priests were plotting His death, Jesus sat at supper in the house of one Simon the Leper. The generous sympathy that had made Him the guest of publicans and sinners had brought Him now to the table of a leper ! While they

were at supper the neighbours might take advantage of the easy access to an Eastern guestchamber to gratify their curiosity by staring at the Prophet and His followers. Amongst these onlookers was a woman with a small jar, who made her way to Jesus, broke the jar, and poured its contents over His head. As she did so the room was filled with the odour of precious ointment, and the eyes of all turned to her and to Jesus. The loving reverence of faithful disciples would understand her enthusiasm, and would welcome her deed as an act of due homage, the anointing of the Messianic Priest and King; but other spectators were cold and indifferent; the personality of Jesus did not move them from sober, practical, prosaic views; they were indignant at the waste of good ointment; some perhaps annoyed at the fuss which the woman was making over this very doubtful prophet; others not grudging the tribute to the Master, but calm and detached enough to realize that anointing with a moderate amount of ordinary oil would have served her purpose, and would have been more seemly and convenient for Jesus. If the good woman must get rid of her ointment, she might have sold it and given away the price to the poor. Possibly some poor folk, deserving at any rate in their own estimation, had edged their way into the room, and were there to illustrate and applaud the sentiment. The act might affect them as needy spectators might have been moved by the sight of Cleopatra drinking her dissolved pearls. Some of the company, as they recovered from the shock they had sustained, began to reproach the woman; but Jesus interposed in a tone of melancholy irony:—

“Let her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done well what she has done for me. You have the poor always with you, and can help them whenever you choose.”

If there was any sincerity in this cheap anxiety that some

one else's money should be given to the poor, they would have ample opportunity for exercising their benevolence.

“But me you have not always.”

The few short hours in which human ministry could soothe and relieve Him were fast slipping away ; the words express His feeling of isolation, His disappointment at the failure of the disciples to understand Him, His baffled yearning for sympathy.

“She has done what she could ; she has anointed my body beforehand for burial.”

He ironically re-assures those who thought this more than royal and more than priestly anointing an undue honour. They need not be alarmed. At the same time He quenches the sanguine exultation of any who held it to be the happy omen of His speedy enthronement as the Messiah. It was not really the prelude to His triumphant installation as Priest and King, but only a funeral rite performed a little before its time lest there should be no opportunity for honourable obsequies. He spoke as a dying man who knows that his hours are numbered.

He ended with a word of praise for the woman : “Wherever the Gospel is preached throughout the whole world, she shall be remembered, and men shall tell the story of what she did for me.”

The incident marks the growing coldness and indifference to Jesus even amongst His own followers. From this scene Judas Iscariot went away to betray His Master.

XL. THE PREPARATION FOR THE PASSOVER, XIV. 14-16.

At last the slow hours brought the morning of the day on which the Passover lamb was killed and eaten. Jesus had maintained so much reserve that His followers knew little of His plans and had not even been told where He intended to hold the Passover meal ; so they asked Him,

“ Where do you wish us to go and prepare for eating the Passover ? ” As the Passover was a family celebration this question implied that the Master and His disciples formed a family. Jesus’ answer reminds us of the circumstances of His ride into Jerusalem ; we get another glimpse of relations between Jesus and adherents who were not closely connected with His usual companions. With these adherents, on this occasion also, He had made secret arrangements without the knowledge of the Apostles. He bade two of the disciples go into the city ; there they would meet a man carrying a pitcher of water. Probably Jesus gave them other signs by which they might recognize this man. They were to follow him home, and say to the master of the house, “ The Teacher saith, Where is my guestchamber in which I am to eat the Passover with my disciples ? ” Then he would show them a large upper room, furnished and ready ; and there the two disciples were to prepare the meal.

The disciples went into the city, found all as Jesus had told them, and made ready the Passover.

Jesus was anxious that this meal with his followers should not be interrupted ; He knew there was treachery even amongst the Twelve ; and by these precautions He secured one last season of quiet fellowship.

W. H. BENNETT.