

ARTICLE VIII.

"THE GOSPEL IN THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT."

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THE paper which is here presented may be called a "study" of the Sermon on the Mount, just as an outline drawing in an artist's portfolio is called "a study." Nothing more than this is contemplated. Even within this definition, a single question is before us, as suggested in the above heading: What is the relation of the Sermon on the Mount to the doctrine of salvation?

It is assumed, at the start, that the accounts of Matthew and Luke are identical. Augustine contended that Christ first delivered the more complete discourse, as recorded by Matthew, on the mount. Then he descended to the plain and gave the shorter discourse, as recorded by Luke. But the verdict of the majority of scholars is, without doubt, the true one, that Luke reports the substance of the discourse which Matthew gives at length. The occasion on which it was spoken, was the election of the twelve. It is addressed primarily to the disciples, but also to the people at large. The object of the sermon has been set forth in a variety of ways. The Fathers taught that it was an "amplification of the Mosaic law." Augustine calls it, in the introduction to his commentary, "a perfect standard of the Christian life as regards the highest morals." In De Wette's definition, it is a "compendium of Christ's doctrine." Meyer calls the sermon, "the inaugural address of Christ's kingdom." According to Oswald Dykes, it is "the manifesto of the king." Tholuck names it, "the Magna Charta of the new kingdom."

With these definitions in mind, it should be said, earliest of all, that one may make the mistake of seeing *too little* in this sermon, or the equally serious mistake of seeing *too much*. One sees too little if he discovers in it only an enlargement of the Mosaic law. No error has been more common than this. Christ's teaching has been studied retrospectively. It has been placed alongside the teaching of Moses so as to show simply the fulness of the New as compared with the Old. The look has been backward, and not forward. Thus many have seen only a fulfilment of what had been taught and believed. They have failed to see a prophecy of what was to be taught and believed.

This mistake of seeing too little in Christ's sermon has been made by those who in their interpretation of the character and work of Christ are altogether at variance. The rationalist has found in it a masterpiece of practical morality, "the finest relic," says one, "of the purer type of Christ's doctrine." So exalted was its morality seen to be that the early English deists used to quote it as a proof of how "impracticable was the Christian religion for a world which could not dispense with soldiers, lawyers, and dealers in luxury." Over against these are found a large class who accept the deity and divinity of Christ, yet who find in the Sermon on the Mount only the Mosaic law plus certain wise counsels. Others, still, have taught that Christ does no more than unfold the Old Testament law, explaining and confirming that which already existed. They discover no doctrine of salvation anywhere in its teachings. Such are they who see too little in this sermon of Christ's.

But the other extreme position is just as fatal to a true interpretation, viz. that which sees *too much* in this discourse. A full compendium of Christ's doctrine is most surely not

words as they are popularly understood, come into this same mistaken way, though from opposite directions. The one sees how the pure doctrine of Christ differs from "the mysticism of John and the Judaism of Paul." He finds everything in the sermon which is essential to setting forth the true teaching of Christ. His cry is, "Back to Christ," the teachings of John and Paul to the contrary. But the rationalist finds himself side by side with one from another quarter, whose views of Christ's character are altogether unlike his. To such a one, the whole scheme of salvation is in the Sermon on the Mount, as he interprets salvation. He finds not simply the teacher of a perfect morality, but the full revelation of a redeemer. Quite unconsciously he comes to believe that the Sermon on the Mount is, all in all, a complete setting forth of the doctrine of Christ.

It may be noted just here that Count Tolstoi is an illustration of one who falls not into one of these two mistakes, but into both of them. He certainly sees *too little* in the sermon when he tells us in "My Religion" that "the law of Jesus as here set forth abrogates the law of Moses, and that the doctrine of Jesus aims primarily to teach men how they ought to regulate their lives with regard to one another." But Tolstoi surely sees *too much* in the sermon when he puts the essence of it into the refrain, "resist not evil," and then tells us that these words sum up Jesus' teaching. "If any one beat you, bear it. If any one would deprive you of anything, yield to his wishes. If any one would force you to labor, labor. If any one would take away your property, abandon it at his demand. Let the world practise this doctrine," says Tolstoi, "and the reign of God will have come upon earth." So fascinating is this interpretation of Christ's words that Professor R. T. Ely, in "Social Aspects of Christianity," quotes with approval a remark of W. D. Howells to this effect: "It is a sorrowful comment on our Christianity that Tolstoi's frank acceptance o

the message of Christ should make him seem to the world eccentric and mad." Then the Johns Hopkins professor asks, "What are you going to do about it?" Our only answer must be found in a rational interpretation of these sayings of Christ, whereby we see neither too much nor too little.

It should be freely conceded and firmly insisted that the gospel terminology is not in the Sermon on the Mount. The gospel is there, however, as the fruit is in the flower. The phraseology of the atonement is not found in this discourse. The words "ransom," "propitiation," "vicarious," are nowhere heard. But the absence of the words does not by any means imply the absence of the idea. The word "substitution," for example, is found nowhere in the biblical phraseology of the doctrine of the atonement. But surely, the idea of "substitution" is in the teaching of the Scriptures. "Vicarious" is not a scriptural word, but it certainly stands for a scriptural idea.

Just at this point, a question of supreme importance is in place, viz. In an exposition of the sayings of Christ, are we to assume that no other meaning is implied in his words than the one within the compass of his hearers? Are we in interpreting the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount restricted to such meanings as Christ's followers could take in? Our answer is an emphatic, No. There is in many of these utterances of Christ a meaning far beyond the occasion. This is but to say that Christ was not confined within the bounds of the religious thought of his day: he was raised above these limits. While then we must guard ourselves against reading into the sermon that which is not there, we have a right to assume that the doctrine of these sayings is not just that, and that only, which appears on the surface.

With this position thus taken, our attention is called to a few illustrations of "The Gospel in the Sermon."

In the "Beatitudes," we have a series of characterizations of the kind of people who are to make up the spiritual kingdom. "The Gospel of the Sermon" is "the Gospel of the Kingdom." Christ opened the gates of that kingdom, and invited man, whatever might be his condition, to enter. This kingdom was the gift of God bestowed on undeserving man. Blessings are invoked on those who in the right way long for the kingdom of God, and manifest the fruits in righteousness. This kingdom represents the supremacy of divine love. It manifests divine grace. It evokes from the heart of man loyal service. The benedictions are for those who are conscious of their need, long for this kingdom, and seek to come into that state where the promise shall be fulfilled. The kingdom is a gift, a gracious gift, a gift which carries with it forgiving love. The blessings here and hereafter are for those who are in earnest to accept of the gift because of felt need, and so to become citizens of the kingdom. We turn, for example, to the first beatitude, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Here the basis of Christian character is found in a fundamental grace called "poverty of spirit." Given this, which is the gospel's sole demand, and the full riches of the kingdom are assured. One has well said that "it is plain that this first word of Jesus in its gospel simplicity takes all that for granted which divines commonly speak of as 'salvation through grace, and justification by faith, and not of works.'"

Again, take the beatitude "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." Is the chief meaning that which we see on the surface? Is this a benediction and a promise for those only who are in sorrow for earthly losses? Was this all, or chiefly, what Christ had in view? Is Christ thinking specially of the political oppression of the Jews of his day? Has he peculiarly in mind those whose hearts were pierced with recent or remote griefs? Has he prima-

rily before him those whose conversion to Christianity brought temporal losses? All this surely. But more than this. The sorrow is sorrow for sin. It is the confession of spiritual poverty. It is a mourning for sin which looks toward God, and joins hands with a longing after righteousness. This mourning leads to a study of self and to repentance. Then follows the promise. It is the comfort of the Paraclete, the Comforter, whose full revelation was yet to be. For those who turn to God it is the reward of participation in this kingdom of grace, here and hereafter. Doubtless those to whom Christ spoke, failed to see all this. But the meaning of this beatitude is surely not to be limited by the occasion. How much then of the doctrine of salvation do we find in this one saying of Christ? Sorrow for sin, turning to God, and the reward for the repentant soul.

Or look once more at the beatitude "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." To a Jew, cleanness of heart would at once suggest the ceremonial cleansing of the body, the symbol of moral cleanliness. Christ surely holds up the life whose inward motives answer the outward profession, a life of supreme sincerity. But there is more than this. The benediction points to a heart which has come to possess inward purity, because it has experienced the opposite. Not only this, but such a heart recognizes the danger of defilement, and therefore the need of watching unto prayer. We have here in the heart made pure, a sensitiveness to sin, an experience of being cleansed, a looking to God for help, and a looking in faith with the unclouded eye which sees God. It is the sight of God which makes sin so sinful. We have here a blessing and a promise for a heart cleansed, sanctified, and assimilated to God. It is the "beholding as in a glass the glory of God," and being changed "into that same image."

So, also, the blessing on "the meek," who are to "inherit the earth." This beatitude points to a consciousness of

spiritual indigence, a condition made humble in view of sin and need, and kept humble through grace. Thus this saying is lifted up above the plane of simple ethics. We have something more announced here than that attainment is sure for the teachable spirit. A spiritual inheritance is promised, part of it here, but the full consummation hereafter.

The promise for the "peacemakers" is more than a blessing for a peace-loving people. Christ was not limited by the meaning which his hearers would naturally grasp. Here was the flower of the gospel in this simple sentence. Christ knew what was the root of dissension among men. He knew that the only remedy was in removing the cause. Peace-making was, in Christ's view, the planting of the peace of God in the heart of man. The peacemaker was one who had attained unto peace with God. The promise is that such as these "shall be called sons of God." Thus shall there be spiritual oneness between man and God. Such as these have entered into spiritual fellowship with Christ. They are at peace with God because that out of which variance with God and man comes, has been removed. Other Scriptures later on were to develop this truth and show how the peace comes, viz. by reconciliation with God,—how, being justified, "we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ," and so are able to be peacemakers. That these words at the time they were spoken were not understood in their comprehensive sense does not in the least prove that it was not in the sense in which Christ understood them. We may well believe that in these sayings of his Christ was willing to leave locked up truths which were to be found out in the evolution of the gospel;

blessedness, we are to note, is not made to rest in the possession of character, but in the promised grace of God, of which character is the condition.

We might stop just here with the evidence we have already found of the "real presence" of the gospel in five of the one hundred sayings of Christ in this sermon. But it is well to glance at some confirmations of the gospel in the beatitudes. It should be observed that the power by which man is to become a citizen of this kingdom is set forth as coming through Christ alone. The gospel puts supremest honor upon Christ. So does the Sermon on the Mount. The "I say unto you" is the refrain of all its teaching. Righteousness is to be longed for, but Christ is the power by which it is to be realized. Sin is to be hated and cast out, but Christ is set forth as the means by which this result is secured. The perfect atonement was yet to be made, but the atoning idea was now at work. Though the full evangel was yet to be proclaimed, yet the gospel which makes Christ the centre was already announced. There was no actual shedding of blood as yet, but the principle of remission of sin in Christ was incarnate in these sayings for every one of that multitude who grieved for sin, longed for grace, and was in earnest to become a member of the spiritual kingdom.

When we turn to Christ's warnings against all forms of deceit, how forcibly the doctrine of sin is set forth! Not even Paul in his masterly arguments gives a clearer exposition of the nature of sin than does Christ in the teachings before us. It is the deceitfulness of sin which is made to appear in impressive light in the rebukes to insincerity in alms-giving, in prayer, and in fasting. It is the same truth which is pro-

ing of the commandments. Here we see in a few direct sentences that sin lies in the motive rather than in the act, and that out of the heart, as the issue of life, come all things, good and bad. So also the peril of sinful living is seen in the graphic parabolic teaching of the "ways," broad and narrow, the "foundations," true and false. Where can we find more explicit teaching as to the destiny of the soul than in the closing verses of the third of the three chapters of this discourse? It is all there, and in very clear and impressive shape.

Then, if one seeks to find that doctrine out of which redemption came, the doctrine of the love of God the Father, where has it been made to appear with such strength and beauty as in this sermon? It is in the beatitudes, as we have already seen. It appears again in the reason Christ gives why we should love our enemies, "that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven," for "he maketh the sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." Divine love, says Christ, must be the rule and measure of your love. Divine mercy should make you merciful. The Lord's Prayer is really the incarnation of Fatherhood in God looking toward man in need. The petition for forgiveness involves a prior repentance in the child of God, but it implies confidence in the God who forgives. The closing verses of the sixth chapter cannot be surpassed in the impressive picture of God's dear care for mankind. If the doctrine of salvation involves, first of all, God's love for needy man, where has it ever been so clearly taught as in this same Sermon on the Mount?

These are some of the great doctrines of the gospel which the Sermon on the Mount reveals. The doctrine of God is here in the gift of grace. The doctrine of man is here in his need of grace. The doctrine of sin is here in the teaching as to its nature and effects. The doctrine of redemption is here as the provision whereby man's need is to be met. The law of God is here in what it requires. The love of God is here in what it imparts. The doctrine of the cross is here as Christ's teaching leaves man to see to what such teaching must inevitably lead. What more do we ask for? We ask for nothing save that which we have been privileged to see, viz. the doctrine of salvation in the soil of the Sermon on the Mount coming to its fruitage on Calvary, at the open sepulchre, and on the Mount of Ascension. Is then the gospel in this sermon? Yes; just so far as it could be. Christ's words reached far beyond the time and the experience of those to whom he spoke. They were a fulfilment and a prophecy; a fulfilment just because they were a prophecy. The law he fulfilled was the law of love. In fulfilling that law, he lived and died, and lives again. These teachings in which we find the gospel are the teachings of one on whom the Holy Ghost had descended. They are the words of one on whom the baptism of the Spirit had come. We study them, not as a moral code, nor as the full gospel, but we come to them to find that beneath the surface are the germs of the great doctrines which in the fulness of time found their completion in the death, the resurrection, and the ascension of Christ, certified to by the coming of the promised Spirit, whom the Father sent in his name.