

*THE DOCTRINE OF THE ATONEMENT IN THE
NEW TESTAMENT.*

II. THE JOHANNEAN WRITINGS.

IN a former paper I endeavoured to reproduce the teaching of Christ, as recorded in the Synoptist Gospels, about His own death and its relation to the salvation of men. I shall now give an account of His teaching on the same topic as recorded in the Fourth Gospel; and with this I shall expound a few words attributed in the same Gospel to John the Baptist, and a few explanatory words from the pen of the Evangelist. This will be followed by an exposition of the teaching of the First Epistle of John, and of that of the Book of Revelation.

Of these documents, the first two were accepted with complete confidence, as undoubtedly written by the beloved Apostle John, by all the early Christian writers, the earliest mention of the author's name being in the latter part of the second century. This unanimous tradition is supported by what seems to me to be strong internal evidence. The authorship of the Book of Revelation was not accepted with the same unquestioning confidence. It is however not only quoted in the latter part of the second century by Irenæus (bk. v. 28, 30) as written by John, but in the middle of that century Justin (*Dialogue with Trypho* ch. lxxxi.) quotes it in the following words: "a teacher of ours whose name was John, one of the twelve Apostles of Christ, foretold in a Revelation which was made to him, that they who believe in our Christ should pass a thousand years in Jerusalem; and after that there should be a universal, and in a word an eternal, resurrection of all men together, and then the judgment." Without further discussion of their authorship, these documents claim our reverence as very early

witnesses of the teaching of Christ and of the belief of those who heard Him.

In one of the beautiful pictures contained in the first chapter of the Fourth Gospel, the Baptist, seeing Jesus coming towards him, says, as recorded in John i. 29, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." The connection of the words *Lamb* and *sin* suggests at once the sacrificial lambs offered in the temple every morning and evening, as prescribed in Exodus xxix. 38-41, Numbers xxviii. 3. Possibly the near approach of the Passover, noted in John ii. 13, may have suggested also the Paschal lamb which (see Exodus xii. 5) in Egypt by its own death saved the firstborn from death. The definite term "Lamb of God" implies that He whom John saw approaching stood, even in contrast to the sacrificial lambs prescribed in the Mosaic Law, in a peculiar and intimate relation to God.

The forerunner completes his description of his Lord by adding, "who taketh away the sin of the world." The word *αἵρω* suggests effort, as when with a strong hand men lift up and carry a load; and removal, as when men carry away the load they have lifted up. In one or both of these senses it is very common in each of the four Gospels. This common use of the word and these associations of thought suggest that in this passage "the sin of the world" is represented as a burden pressing with full weight on the Lamb of God and by Him removed.

These words, following as they do a quotation from Isaiah in ver. 23, recall also Isaiah liii. 4-7: "Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one

to his own way ; and Jehovah hath made to light on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, yet He humbled Himself and opened not His mouth ; as a lamb is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that before her shearers is dumb ; yea, He opened not His mouth."

If the words of the great preacher do not assert expressly that Christ saves men from death by Himself dying, yet taken in their environment they suggest very strongly that this doctrine, afterwards plainly set forth by Christ, was already more or less clearly present to the thought of His mysterious forerunner.

In an important and conspicuous exposition of His mission, recorded in John iii. 14-17, Christ says to Nicodemus, "as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness so must needs the Son of Man be lifted up, in order that every one who believeth in Him may have eternal life." Our Lord here asserts that something similar to that which was done to the brazen serpent in the wilderness when it was set on a banner-pole before the eyes of Israel must needs happen to Him in order that men ready to die may live for ever. The word $\delta\epsilon\iota$ which asserts conspicuously the necessity of this elevation of Christ in order to save men, recalls at once the same word used by Christ in Matthew xvi. 21, "He must needs go to Jerusalem . . . and be put to death." The word rendered *lifted-up*, $\upsilon\psi\omega\theta\eta\eta\nu\alpha\iota$, occurs again in the same connection in John xii. 32 ; and is explained by the Evangelist : "this said He, signifying by what kind of death He was about to die." And this is the only satisfactory explanation of the earlier words to Nicodemus. The serpent of brass set on a pole before the eyes of Israel as a means of their salvation from death suggests irresistibly, when once a comparison with Christ is made, His body hanging upon the cross before the eyes of Jerusalem for the salvation of the world. And this reference is somewhat confirmed in ver. 16 by the

“love” which prompted God to give His only begotten Son in order that men might be saved. For, of that love, the gift of Christ to die was the crowning manifestation.

We must now go forward at least a year in the Sacred Life. Again, as recorded in John vi. 4, the Jewish Passover is at hand. Yesterday the great Teacher, whom crowds now follow, fed five thousand men with five loaves and two fishes. But to-day in doubt and unbelief some who so lately enjoyed His superhuman bounty ask Him to work a sign something like that in the wilderness when God gave to Israel bread from heaven. The Master replies that bread more wonderful than that given of old, the real bread from heaven, is now being given; and claims in ver. 35 to be Himself “the Bread of Life.” The mode by which this food is to be appropriated is then specified: “he that cometh to me shall not hunger, and he that believeth in Me shall never thirst.” “The Jews began to murmur about Him, because He said, I am the Bread which came down from heaven”: ver. 41. But in ver. 48 and again in ver. 51 Christ repeats His claim to be “the Bread of Life”; and adds that this bread differs from that eaten by the ancestors of Israel in the wilderness in that they died, whereas those who eat of the Bread now given will live for ever.

We notice in passing that bread nourishes only by its own destruction. And only by the destruction of that which has had life can life be maintained. Even in the bread we eat real vegetable life has been sacrificed for our life.

In ver. 51 Christ expounds the metaphor of bread by another metaphor: “and the bread which I will give is My flesh on behalf of the world’s life.” The new thought thus introduced at once increases the difficulty of the Jews. They ask, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” This difficulty, our Lord refuses to lessen, and

merely repeats in more emphatic language His previous assertion: "verily, verily, I say to you, unless ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, ye have not life in yourselves." He adds in ver. 56, "He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood abideth in Me and I in him."

These words, which sound so strangely in western ears, point forward in the most conspicuous manner possible to the approaching death of Christ. For, wherever flesh is eaten, blood has been shed and life violently taken. Consequently, by this startling phraseology Christ asserts unmistakably and conspicuously that His own death, which actually took place at the passover following, is a necessary condition of the spiritual nourishment which He has just promised to all who come to and believe in Him. It is a reassertion of His own words in chap. iii. 14: "the Son of Man must needs be lifted up." The emphatic repetition of the words *flesh* and *blood* reveal the importance, in the thought of Christ, of this mysterious condition of the salvation of the world.

In John x. 15 the good Shepherd says, "I lay down My life on behalf of the sheep." He thus announces His deliberate purpose to die for the good of men. That His approaching death will be voluntary and with a definite purpose, He asserts again in verses 17, 18: "I lay down My life, in order that I may take it again. No one taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself." The further purpose expressed in the words "that I may take it again" is in close harmony with Christ's reference in Matthew xvi. 21, xvii. 23 to His death as to be followed by resurrection. He thus asserts in plainest language that to die for man was part of the purpose He came to accomplish.

In John xi. 47, 48 the Jewish Sanhedrin is consulting about what is to be done to arrest the increasing influence of Jesus. They fear that if things go on as they are now

going He will win the faith of all men, and thus, by exciting the apprehensions of the Romans, bring ruin on the nation. The wily Sadducee who was then high priest saw in this fear an opportunity; and suggested that as Jesus was bringing ruin on the nation it would be better for Him who was only one to be put to death rather than to permit Him to destroy all. In these words, animated by hatred and craft, the Evangelist saw an unconscious and very remarkable prophecy of the actual and designed result of the approaching death of Christ. He declared that Christ was about to die on behalf of the nation and in order that the scattered children of God might be gathered into one community. This explanation is another assertion that Christ's death was by His own deliberate purpose and for the salvation of men.

In chap. xii. 22 we read that Andrew and Philip come to Jesus and tell Him that certain Greeks, strangers from the western world, desire to see Him. This inquiry, a foretaste of the conversion of Europe with its momentous influence upon the development of the Kingdom of God, greatly moved the Saviour. In these seekers from afar He saw a firstfruit of a great harvest. But He knew that this great result could be obtained only by His own death, that before the harvest can be gathered the seed must fall into the ground and die. The meaning of this striking metaphor is, to us who know what happened to Jesus during this feast at which these Greeks visited Jerusalem, evident. Before the Gentiles can be gathered into the Kingdom of God, Himself must be laid dead in the grave. The words before us are thus a reassertion of the absolute necessity of the death of Christ for the salvation of men.

We have already noticed a reference by Christ in chap. xii. 32 to Himself, which is explained by the Evangelist to be a prophecy of His death: "and I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all to Myself." We have here another

announcement that the success of our Lord's work was conditioned by His death.

In close agreement with chap. x. 11, we read in chap. xv. 13, "greater love than this hath no man, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

In chap. xvi. 7 Christ says that unless He goes away the Paraclete, or Helper, will not come. That the departure of the great Teacher would bring greater blessing than His presence, and that His removal from the midst of His disciples was a necessary condition of the gift of the Spirit of God to be the animating principle of their life, is another assertion that His death is an essential link in the chain of man's salvation.

In the Fourth Gospel, as in the Synoptist Gospels, a long and full account is given of the death of Christ, revealing its large place in the writer's thought.

The death of Christ and its relation to the salvation of men are perhaps somewhat more conspicuous in the Fourth Gospel than in the other three Gospels. That He was about to die for the salvation of men, is suggested, before His public ministry began, in a few words spoken by the Baptist; and shortly afterwards by Himself in His conversation with Nicodemus. It is plainly indicated in very conspicuous and startling words, spoken a year before His death. And this indication is confirmed by several later remarks. In each of the four Gospels we are taught, in language which leaves no room for doubt, that the violent death of Christ was essential for the salvation of men, and was a part of His purpose of salvation.

From the recorded words of Christ, spoken during His earthly life, we now turn to documents written by His followers after His death in the light shed upon that event by the birth and progress of the Christian Church. In these documents we shall find teaching much more definite than that which I have just expounded.

In 1 John i. 7 are words as startling as those recorded in John vi. 51, "the blood of Jesus, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin." Manifestly "the blood of Jesus" refers to His violent death on the cross. The writer affirms that this event in the past is a present means of Christian purity. He can only mean that, had not Christ died, there had been for us, none of whom can say that he has no sin, no cleansing from sin; in other words, that the death of Christ is a necessary condition, and in some sense the instrument of this cleansing. This strong language reveals the deep impression made upon the mind of the disciple by the death of his Master.

In ver. 9 we read, "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." These words contain no express reference to the death of Christ; but they imply that the justice of God is involved in the pardon of sin, in close agreement with the teaching of St. Paul in Romans iii. 26, "Himself just and a justifier of him that hath faith in Jesus." The great importance of this last passage we shall see at a later stage of our inquiry.

In 1 John ii. 2, after saying that "if any one sin, we have an advocate with the Father," the writer goes on to say that "Himself is a propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only but also for the whole world." Similar language occurs again in chap. iv. 10: "He loved us and sent His Son to be a propitiation for our sins."

The word rendered *propitiation*, *ἱλασμός*, is found occasionally in the LXX., *e.g.*, Numbers v. 8, "the ram of the propitiation"; Ezekiel xliv. 27, "they shall offer propitiation"; Psalm cxxx. 4, "with Thee is the propitiation." And it at once recalls the almost equivalent word *ἐξίλασμός*, *e.g.*, in Leviticus xxiii. 27, 28; and the cognate verb, *ἐξιλάσκομαι*, which is very common in the ritual of the Pentateuch. Unfortunately, the connection of the words is obscured even in the Revised Version, which renders

them, without marginal note, *propitiation* in the New Testament and *atonement* in the Old. But the meaning is quite plain. So Leviticus iv. 20, "the priest shall make propitiation for them, and the sin shall be forgiven to them"; and again, almost word for word, in verses 26, 31, 35; v. 6, 10, 13, 18. In some of these passages we have propitiation for sin almost word for word as in 1 John ii. 2.

In each of the above places the effect of propitiation is described as forgiveness. Evidently the sacrifices here prescribed were means ordained by God by which a sinner might escape the punishment due to his sin. The same verb occurs very frequently throughout the Book of Leviticus, *e.g.* sixteen times in chap. xvi. in reference to the great Day of Atonement.

This frequent use of a cognate word is at once recalled by 1 John ii. 2, where again we have conspicuous and repeated mention of sin and, a few verses earlier, of forgiveness of sins. The passage before us evidently means that Christ is Himself, not only the sinner's Advocate with God, but a means by which the sinner finds shelter from the anger of God against sin.

We notice that in the Mosaic ritual, where the word *atonement* or *propitiation* is often used, the only ordinary means of propitiation is a bloody sacrifice. This almost constant use of the word, taken in connection with the express mention of the blood of Christ in 1 John i. 7, leaves no room for doubt that the propitiation mentioned in chap. ii. 2 is brought about by the violent death of Christ on the cross.

Similarly in chap. iv. 10, after stating in ver. 9 that "God sent His only begotten Son into the world in order that we may live through Him," the writer further expounds the mission of Christ by adding that "God sent His Son to be a propitiation for our sins." The two phrases

are equivalent. For, to guilty man there is no entrance into life unless God provide for him a means of escape from the penalty due to his sins.

In the Book of Revelation we have three statements about the death of Christ in its relation to man's sin, each as definite as any passage expounded above.

In Revelation i. 5, at the opening of the wondrous vision, we hear a greeting of peace from each Person of the blessed Trinity; and a special song of praise to the Second Person, "To Him that loved us and loosed us from our sins in His blood." This outburst of gratitude, prompted by mention of the name of Jesus, directs conspicuous attention to the violent death of Christ as the means of our salvation from sin, in complete harmony with the teaching expounded above from the Gospels and the First Epistle of John.

In chap. iv. 2 we have a vision of the Father enthroned in majesty. In ver. 8 He is saluted as the thrice Holy, as Almighty, as He that was, and is, and cometh; and in ver. 11 as the Creator of all things. In the next chapter another scene opens before us. The prophet sees in the midst of the throne, among the four living creatures and the seated elders, "a Lamb standing as slain." Amid the splendours of heaven, the Son bears marks of His cruel death on earth. The significance of this vision of past death amid present and endless life is explained in the "new song" which bursts upon our delighted ears in ver. 9: "worthy art Thou to take the book because Thou wast slain and didst purchase for God in Thy blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation." The words in ver. 9 *Thou wast slain* followed by *in Thy blood* throws into most conspicuous prominence the death of Christ; and we are told that by that death Christ has purchased men for God: ἡγόρασας τῷ Θεῷ. The writer here asserts, in language open to no doubt whatever, that the death of Christ upon

the cross was the means by which He has restored men to their right relation to God as His possession.

The idea of purchase, expressed in this passage, is in close harmony with Matthew xx. 28, Mark x. 45, already expounded: "the Son of Man came to give His life a ransom instead of many."

In close agreement with 1 John i. 7, but in a form agreeing with the bold imagery of the Book of Revelation, we read in chap. vii. 14, "they washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." The former passage teaches that the purification attributed to the death of Christ comes to us from a source other than ourselves: the latter implies that the cleansing wrought for men in the death of Christ must be appropriated by each one for himself. In each passage the death of Christ is conspicuous as the means of purification.

Thus across the bright visions of the Book of Revelation falls three times the deep shadow of the cross of Christ. And each time the shadow kindles the radiance into a brighter glory.

To sum up. In a former paper we found Christ teaching, as His words are recorded in the Synoptist Gospels, that He was about voluntarily to lay down His life in order to save men, that for their salvation His death was absolutely needful, that it was to be the basis of a new Covenant between God and man, in order to gain for man forgiveness of sins. In this paper we have found a type of teaching differing widely in phraseology and modes of thought from that of the Synoptist Gospels. But in the Fourth Gospel we have found references somewhat more numerous than in the other three Gospels, to the approaching death of Christ as the designed means of the salvation He announced to men. In an epistle most closely related to the Fourth Gospel and manifestly from the same pen we found an assertion linking purification from sin with the

death of Christ, and two other passages connecting the deliverance from sin wrought by Christ with the ancient sacrifices prescribed in the Mosaic ritual as a means of forgiveness. Lastly, in the Book of Revelation we found three most conspicuous assertions that the blood and death of Christ were the means of deliverance from sin.

In our next paper I shall discuss the teaching of the Book of Acts and of the Epistles of Peter on the great subject now before us.

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THE MIRACLES OF CHRIST.

II.

WE have seen that what the Christian miracles imply is not a superseding of the forces of nature, but the wielding of them in a more than human grasp. Jesus Himself regarded them as a manifestation of God, that God who is now resting from creation, and into whose sabbath we that believe do enter. They cannot be a violation of this very sabbath by new exertions of creative power, for Christ did only what he saw His Father do, and was faithful as a Son in His Father's house. Now it is certain that the objections of science entirely fail to reach, not to speak of refuting, this conception of the miracles.

Invited to retain our faith in Jesus, but to reject the miraculous from our creed as an accretion, we have rejoined that this proposal ignores the existence of the supernatural in the very conception of Jesus. Thence it cannot, upon any theory whatever, be eliminated without denying all the laws of that human nature above which this conception towers, sublime, and even now without a parallel, although the model is before us, and although He is for ever repro-