

*JESUS MIRRORED IN MATTHEW, MARK, AND  
LUKE.*

VII. THE ESCAPES OF JESUS.

OUR main source of information for what I venture to call "the Escapes of Jesus," is Mark's Gospel. The narrative of the second Evangelist contains sundry intimations of the desire of our Lord to get away from crowds into retreats where quiet intercourse with His disciples was possible. For hints are not wanting that this was the leading aim of these acts of retirement. As a sample may be cited these words: "They departed thence, and passed through Galilee, and He would not that any man should know it, for He was teaching His disciples."<sup>1</sup> Of the instruction communicated to the Twelve Mark has preserved comparatively little, but he more than any other of the Evangelists has made apparent how much they needed it. One of his realistic touches is a question he represents the Master as addressing to His disciples: How do ye not understand?<sup>2</sup> The disappointment bordering on impatience to which that question gave occasional expression was, it is to be feared, a chronic feeling in Christ's mind in reference to the men whom He had chosen. They were far enough from being ideal scholars, and Mark, of all the Evangelists, takes least pains to hide the fact. That they did not understand is patent in his pages, and that their Master sought opportunities for dispelling their ignorance is equally so. Thus witness is indirectly borne in this Gospel to extensive instruction, unreported in its pages, which we are prepared to find in fuller reports of our Lord's ministry. It is noticeable that Mark, as if conscious of the defect of his Gospel on the didactic side, tries to compensate for the lack of detail by general statements

<sup>1</sup> *Mark* ix. 30, 31.

<sup>2</sup> *Mark* viii. 21.

as to activity in teaching where Matthew, *e.g.*, strong in the didactic element, represents our Lord as occupied in a healing ministry. Instances may be found in Mark x. 1, xi. 18, compared with Matthew xix. 2, xxi. 14.

The escapes of Jesus took place in all directions possible for one whose work had for its geographical area the western margin of the sea of Galilee. He might retreat to the hill country behind, or to the eastern shore of the lake, or to the northern borderland. He made His escape successively in each of these directions; first once to the hill, then twice to the eastern shore, then twice (apparently) northwards, making five attempts in all to withdraw into congenial solitude. The first three were escapes from the people gathered in immense crowds, the last two were escapes not entirely from the people, but also from their religious leaders.

1. *The escape to the hill.* "He goeth up into the mountain."<sup>1</sup> That this movement was of the nature of an escape becomes clear when we attentively consider all the circumstances. Very significant in the first place is the fact stated just before, that Jesus instructed His disciples to have a boat waiting "because of the crowd, lest they should throng Him."<sup>2</sup> A boat, of course, could be of no use for an ascent to the hill-tops, but the point to be noted is the desire and intention to escape somehow, and in some direction, when the crowd became inconveniently large and eager. Such a crowd, it is next to be observed, had gathered around Jesus at the time when He made the ascent, a motley company of diseased persons, elbowing their way towards Him, and pressing in upon Him from every side, that they might touch His body and so get rid, as they hoped, of their ailments, while demoniacs on their knees screamed in hideous chorus: "Thou art the Son of God." It was a disorderly scramble for a cure threatening

<sup>1</sup> Mark iii. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Mark iii. 9.

danger to the person of the Healer, and distasteful to His spirit through the superstition it revealed; and it is no wonder that with all His "enthusiasm of humanity" He wished Himself well out of it. The ascent of the mountain was the expedient He adopted for self-extrication. And the next significant circumstance to be noted is that He goes not alone but accompanied by a band of men whom, in a manner not indicated, He picks out of the crowd to serve as a kind of bodyguard. They are doubtless chosen with an eye not merely to this immediate service of protection, but to prospective discipleship, a first selection out of which, after due acquaintance in the hill retreat, a second will be made sufficient with those previously called to make up the inner circle of the Twelve. But a defence against the mob they are meant in the first place to be, so implying a resolute purpose to secure for a season relief from an overwhelming embarrassing popularity. That the device succeeded appears from the fact that the multitude is represented as reassembling on learning that Jesus had descended from the mountain. They had not followed, they had dispersed to their homes, but on the report spreading, "He is back again," the scarcely lulled enthusiasm easily revived.

How was Jesus occupied on the hill-top? Mark is silent on the point, but one cannot hesitate as to the answer. What could He be doing but teaching His disciples, considering their need of instruction, the extreme difficulty of finding leisure for this important work, and the welcome recreation that would come from so congenial a change of occupation? And seeing that the ascent of the mountain was of the nature of an escape from a too importunate crowd, the probability is that the sojourn up there was prolonged so as to give time for the vast gathering to disperse, and lasted for at least some days, during which a considerable body of instruction could be given in separate

lessons, each day having its own theme. In short, all points to this as the occasion on which the so-called *Sermon on the Mount* was delivered. That sermon, as reported in Matthew, is probably the summary of a week's instruction in a summer school at which the recently selected body of disciples, including the Twelve, were the audience. Instead of the "Sermon on the Mount" it might, as suggested in my first paper, be more appropriately called the *Teaching on the Hill*. For it is teaching, not preaching, and the persons addressed are not a large miscellaneous crowd, but a select band of men with some aptitude for disciple-lore. This distinction between sermon and teaching, people and disciples, while not without justification in Matthew's narrative, is by no means firmly adhered to there, and all traces of it have disappeared in Luke's version, where the famous discourse of our Lord assumes the character of an address to a large assembly such as that from which in Mark's narrative He is represented as making His escape. Yet the circumstances as described in the second Gospel, the probability that the ascent there mentioned was the occasion on which the discourse was delivered, and last, but not least, the nature of its contents compel the conclusion that a limited body of disciples, not a miscellaneous assembly, constituted the audience.

Why has Mark not reported any of that memorable teaching? Possibly because he was not able. Such a body of deep thought could not be treasured up for long years in the memory of any disciple, however attentive or intelligent; therefore Peter, Mark's apostolic source, could not repeat it from memory in his preaching. In all probability it would have been lost to the world, unless some disciple, Matthew, *e.g.*, had made written memoranda at the time. These memoranda, we must suppose, formed a place in the *Oracles of the Lord*, which, according to

Papias, that disciple compiled; and thence passed, in diverse versions, to the pages of our first and third Gospels. But why could not Mark also have got them from the same source? Probably for the simple reason that he did not know it. The contrary view indeed has been very confidently maintained by some scholars, very specially by Dr. Bernhard Weiss. While acknowledging the ingenuity of that able theologian's reasoning, I think the point very doubtful, and one of my reasons for doing so is just this, that Mark is so entirely silent about the teaching on the hill.

2. *The first escape over the lake to the eastern shore.* This took place, according to Mark, on the day of the Parabolic Discourse, and that it was indeed of the nature of an escape is very clear from his narrative. On the same day at eventide, when He had ended his address from the boat to the vast multitude on the shore, Jesus abruptly says to His disciples, "Let us cross over to the other side."<sup>1</sup> Whereupon leaving the multitude where they were (not sending them away, as the Authorised Version has it), the disciples take Him *as He was*, i.e., without delay, and without any preparations for a journey, along with them in the boat eastward as directed.<sup>2</sup> It was an escape along the only possible line of retreat, landing on the western shore being impossible owing to the vastness of the crowd. To get away even seaward was not easy, other boats having gathered around that in which Jesus was, full of people eager to get near the Speaker that they might hear Him distinctly.<sup>3</sup> These apparently trivial particulars, as given in the Second Gospel, are obviously realistic reminiscences of an eyewitness, and when duly considered call up a vivid picture of the situation. Jesus, weary with talking, and with the excitement of a great assembly (so weary that He falls asleep as soon as the boat begins to

<sup>1</sup> Mark iv. 35.

<sup>2</sup> Mark iv. 36.

<sup>3</sup> Mark iv. 36.

move), desires quiet and rest, and at a glance perceives that there is only one way of obtaining them, and gives orders accordingly. His disciples, gathering His wish from word, tone, and gesture, with the promptitude of experts move off at once, without a thought of where precisely they are going, or what is to be done in the matter of food and lodgings. Possibly their impression is that the voyage eastwards is simply a roundabout way of getting to the western shore, and so home, after the people have dispersed in the evening twilight. In that case the movement would have been simply an escape without an ulterior object. But it is probable that Jesus had more in view—the obtainment of a time of leisure in a region where He was unknown, during which He might discuss with the disciples the incidents of the day, and the lessons to be gathered from them. For the parabolic discourse, and especially the utterance of the Parable of the Sower, was an important event, which meant much for the people, for Jesus, and for the Twelve.

From all the synoptical accounts it is clear that the parabolic discourse, and especially the main parable, formed the subject of conversation between Jesus and His disciples. Over the time, the place, and the precise details of the conversation, a certain amount of obscurity hangs, but some points are clear: that the disciples desired to know why their Master had spoken to the people so, that He gave them explanations on that point, and that He further took pains to impress on them their responsibilities as disciples.<sup>1</sup>

As to the first, what the Twelve desired to know was probably, not why their Master spoke to the people in parables, but why He spoke to them in *such* parables? That He spoke to them in parables could be no surprise, for He had been doing that all along, in every synagogue and wayside discourse. But in parables like the Sower

<sup>1</sup> *Vide Mark iv. 10-25.*

there was, the disciples felt, a new element—a tone of disappointment audible, a spirit of criticism unmistakable. They perceived, of course, that these critical parables grew out of the Master's preaching experience; and at bottom what they wanted to know was, why He was dissatisfied? And His reply, in substance, was that for various reasons hinted at in the Sower, and further explained afterwards, in very many cases His efforts had been vain. The word had not fructified, the hearer had not heard to profit.

From reflections on this depressing topic the transition would be easy to the subject of disciple-responsibility. The moral of the parable discourse, so far as the Twelve were concerned, was: if the word fail of effect in so many instances, see that there be no failure in your case. The Master was saying to them indirectly: You are my hope, you, specially if not exclusively, are my good soil—soft, deep, and clean; see that ye bring forth fruit abundant and mature. This He said to them directly afterwards in private intercourse, when He exhorted them to take heed how they heard, so that they might understand, indicated that intelligence would be in proportion to attention, and imposed on them the duty of communicating knowledge thus attained; in parabolic language the duty of placing the lamp on the stand.<sup>1</sup> By the choice parable of the Blade, the Ear, and the Ripe Corn<sup>2</sup> He gave them to understand that He did not expect them to realize His ideal in a day. He would give them time, and be content if they brought forth the ripe fruit of their schooling eventually, as the result of a law of gradual growth.

3. The next escape also took the shape of a voyage across the lake, this time in a north-easterly direction. It occurred shortly after the return of the Twelve from their house-mission in Galilee.<sup>3</sup> Its character as an escape is

<sup>1</sup> *Mark* iv. 21-25.

<sup>2</sup> *Mark* iv. 26-29.

<sup>3</sup> *Mark* vi. 30, 31.

distinctly revealed in the terms in which the proposal was introduced by Jesus. Its ostensible aim, as therein represented, was to secure an interval of rest for the disciples, not, as one might naturally imagine, from the fatigues of the mission, but from the incessant demands created by a constant stream of people coming and going, not leaving even so much leisure as was needful for taking food.<sup>1</sup> The attempt to get away from the excited crowd in this case, as in the former, proved a failure, though not for the same reason. In the former instance the plan was frustrated through an unexpected encounter with a madman, this time defeat was due to the enthusiasm of a multitude determined not to be baulked, who, observing that the Master and His disciples were making for the head of the lake, started off at a run, and made such speed as to be on the ground before them.<sup>2</sup> In both cases Jesus had to do what He had not intended—perform a wonderful work; on the earlier occasion curing a demòniac, who imagined himself possessed by a legion of devils; on the latter feeding thousands of hungry people in a desert.

There is a mystery about this third flight from the people. One cannot but suspect that more than mere physical rest was aimed at. What was the meaning of sending the Twelve away *alone*, after the feeding, back to the western shore?<sup>3</sup> It looks as if there was something going on which made their absence desirable. And what did that coming and going of the people on the other side, before the eastward voyage, signify? No mention is made of sick being brought to be healed. Something else seems to be in the people's minds for the moment. What can it be? The fourth Gospel here gives us a clue in the remarkable statement that the people whom Jesus fed in the desert desired perforce to make Him a king.<sup>4</sup> If that was really the fact,

<sup>1</sup> *Mark* vi. 31.

<sup>2</sup> *Mark* vi. 33.

<sup>3</sup> *Mark* vi. 45.

<sup>4</sup> *John* vi. 15.

the idea did not come into their heads then for the first time. The project then only reached its crisis. That was what the coming and going had been about, and it was to the *disciples* rather than to the Master that the stream of visitors came, finding them not unsympathetic. The movement, congenial to the spirit of Galileans, and too easily put into their minds, may have sprung out of the house-mission. The Twelve had been only too successful. They had talked about the Kingdom, and this was what came of it—a political scheme. Wild as it may seem to us, it would appear perfectly natural to them. What was to be the issue of that immense enthusiasm? Was it to end in smoke? Was not the inevitable consummation to make the marvellous Teacher and Healer the actual head of a reformed state?

No better explanation can be given of Christ's manifest desire to separate His disciples from the people than the supposition that the Galileans entertained such a project, and that the Twelve more or less sympathized with it at the time of their return from their mission. Assuming this to be the fact, we understand what kind of "rest" was aimed at. It was, above all, rest from *illusions*, from the fever of false, foolish enthusiasms, from mental excitement over a fond scheme which, if not resolutely opposed, would end in disaster. Such rest Jesus must at all hazards secure for His disciples, if they are to be of any use to Him, to help and not frustrate His plans. The time has come when the question, Whither? must be dealt with. The Master knows the true answer to the question, but the disciples do not. A false issue is in their view. The first thing to be done, therefore, is peremptorily to negate the issue they contemplate. To accomplish this was the real motive of the voyage towards the north-eastern shore. The next task will be to make known the true issue. To secure leisure for explanations on this momentous topic was a

leading motive for the two flights remaining to be mentioned.

4. *The escape in the direction of Tyre and Sidon.*<sup>1</sup> Some Biblical scholars are of opinion that there was only one excursion to the northern confines of Palestine, which in the Gospel narratives has, through some confusion in the tradition, got broken up into two, a longer one into the territories of Tyre and Sidon, and a later, shorter one to the neighbourhood of Cæsarea Philippi. This question may be left on one side all the more that, even if there were, as I believe, two distinct journeys, they were one in general aim. The common purpose of both was to get away for a season, completely and securely, at once from enthusiastic but foolish crowds, from well-meant but futile political plots, and from the ill-will of religious leaders more to be feared than anything, that in solitude and silence Jesus might brace His own spirit for the fatal crisis which from concurrent signs He knew to be approaching, and at the same time prepare His disciples for an issue of which they little dreamt. That He went so far away this time needs no explanation. The reason simply was that not otherwise could He attain His end. The previous attempt to escape had failed because the place of retreat was too near the scenes of labour. The new movement of retirement, therefore, must be towards regions so remote that pursuit was not to be apprehended. And it must be northwards, not southwards, for geographical and for moral reasons. The northern boundary lay nearest Galilee, and the time has not come for the southern journey. Jesus will go to Jerusalem to *die*; He must go to the north to *prepare* to die.

The first of the two northerly excursions seems to have been of considerable extent. Mark names in connection with it Tyre, Sidon, *Decapolis*, and the Sea of Galilee.

<sup>1</sup> *Mark* vii. 24.

Connecting these points, we get a journey first northwards to and through the above-named maritime countries, then eastwards over the Lebanon range to the neighbourhood of Damascus;<sup>1</sup> then southwards and westwards through the region of the ten cities, and finally over the Jordan and back through Galilee to the original point of departure. If this was the route, it would occupy a considerable time. How were the days of that eventful pilgrimage filled up? The Gospel records here are very meagre. Mark tells us most, but even he reports only a couple of incidents, the encounter with the woman of Canaan, and the cure of a deaf-mute apparently at some point on the route through Decapolis. In both cases he takes pains to show how much Jesus desired privacy. In connection with the earlier incident he remarks that Jesus "would have no man know" where He was,<sup>2</sup> and in connection with the latter he carefully notes that Jesus took the deaf-mute "aside from the multitude privately," and after the cure charged all who witnessed it to "tell no man."<sup>3</sup> The second Evangelist stands alone in the emphasis with which he brings out this fact in reference to the later period of our Lord's life, though even he fails to explain fully its rationale. That, happily, with due reflection on the data supplied, we are able to do for ourselves.

Both the incidents reported by Mark possess their own distinctive points of interest. The prominent feature in the earlier occurrence is the seeming reluctance of Jesus to grant the succour craved by a distressed mother for her suffering daughter. In the latter, while still bent on privacy, He made no objection to working the cure asked, though in this case also the sufferer was not improbably a Gentile. What did that reluctance mean? In Matthew's narrative Jesus is reported to have pled as an excuse for it

<sup>1</sup> Pliny includes Damascus in Decapolis (*H.N.V.*, 16).

<sup>2</sup> *Mark* vii. 24.

<sup>3</sup> *Mark* vii. 33, 36.

that His mission was to the lost sheep of Israel. The plea might have provoked the rejoinder, Why then are you here? Israel's Saviour a fugitive from Israel's land! Perhaps that was just what Jesus Himself was thinking of at the moment, and also what He wished His disciples to reflect on. His position as a fugitive was fitted of itself to raise in His mind the question as to the ultimate destination of His Gospel. In the circumstances the coincidence of the Syrophenician woman's request, in spite of His desire to remain unknown, would readily assume the significance of an *omen*. An isolated case might thus be transformed into a representative instance, the whole Gentile world in the person of that Syrian mother saying in beseeching tones: Come over and help us! On that hypothesis the reluctance to heal becomes very intelligible. In other circumstances Jesus might have granted the request without hesitation and without remark, viewing the case as a mere exception involving no principle. But in the actual situation He has to realize for Himself the serious import of what He is asked to do, and also, if possible, make it apparent to His disciples. To Himself He has to say: My mission was to Israel, is this a new call? To His disciples: You sympathized with the wish of the Galileans to make me King of a reformed Israel; do you know what the request of this woman which you seem inclined to back really signifies? It portends the transference of the Kingdom of God from Jewish to Gentile soil. What Jesus said to the woman may be interpreted in the light of the same hypothesis. "It is not permissible, or it is not meet, to take the children's bread, and to cast it to the dogs," said He with apparent harshness. Had she known the whole facts of the case, she might have replied: True, Master, but have the children not already got their bread, and have they not themselves thrown it to the dogs? Is that not the reason of your being here? That would have been an

argument difficult to answer ; yet her actual reply to Christ's objection served her purpose even better, revealing as it did a humble faith which went straight to His heart, and suggested the thought : the Pagans after all, not dogs, but children.

Jesus, it seems to me, used the case of the Syrophenician woman to give His disciples an object-lesson *on the claims of the Gentile world*. And the whole of that circular journey in Gentile lands would be an education to them on that subject, and probably was intended by their Master to serve that purpose. What He said to them we know not, but we can conceive what the world itself would say. "The sun shines here as well as in Galilee ; why may not the gracious love of the Father in heaven be here also ?" Or was that too abstruse a lesson in theology for them as yet to comprehend ?

The leading feature in the later incident of this journey is the curious details regarding the manner in which our Lord effected the cure of the deaf-mute. These are probably not to be regarded as an indication of Christ's habitual method of working cures, but rather as something peculiar to the individual case, and on that account deemed worthy of note by the Evangelist or the original reporter. The acts specified—putting a finger into each ear, and touching the tongue—were not means, but *symbols* of cure ; and perhaps we should find in their use on this occasion a hint that the disease itself had for the mind of the Healer a symbolic significance : physical deafness and dumbness an emblem of the spiritual condition of Israel, or possibly of the Gentile world. Thus may be explained the sigh which Jesus heaved in working the cure. It was a sigh not over the physical malady of an individual, but over the spiritual malady of a people—in Israel's case, alas ! not curable.

5. *The escape towards Cæsarea Philippi.*<sup>1</sup> The imme-

<sup>1</sup> *Matthew* xvi. 13 ; *Mark* viii. 27 ; *Luke* ix. 18. There is no indication of locality in Luke,

diate occasion of this new journey towards the north was the demand for a sign on the part of the Pharisees, which to our Lord appeared a thing of very evil omen.<sup>1</sup> As to its pædagogic purpose in reference to the disciples there is no room for doubt. If on the earlier journey by the way of Tyre, Sidon and Decapolis, Jesus sought to familiarize His disciples with the thought that the kingdom for whose coming they ardently longed might eventually pass away from Israel, during this later one His aim was to initiate them into the mystery of His own ignominious fate. The two subjects were closely connected. The events involved were related to each other as cause and effect. The rejection of Jesus would have for its necessary consequence the forfeiture by Israel of her privilege, the passing of the vineyard into other hands. Logically, therefore, the fate awaiting their Master should have been the first subject of instruction for the disciples. But it was by far the harder theme, therefore it formed the subject of the later lesson. It was a wide theme, with many aspects, as well as a hard one, and there is ground for believing that during the weeks taken up with the Cæsarea excursion it formed the leading topic of many an earnest conversation. With reference to a certain stage of the journey, Mark states that Jesus was teaching His disciples, and was saying to them: The Son of Man is delivered up into the hands of men, and they shall kill Him.<sup>2</sup> There was not merely an announcement, but a course of instruction. The fact was stated again and again, and made the subject of explanatory discourse, in which it was pointed out what causes were at work inevitably leading up to such a catastrophe, and how well the event predicted would correspond with Old Testament prophetic anticipations. The leaven of the scribes, of

<sup>1</sup> *Matt.* xvi. 1 ; *Mark* viii. 11.

<sup>2</sup> *Mark* ix. 31. The verbs represented in English by "was teaching" and "was saying" are in the imperfect, implying continuous action.

which the Master had bid His disciples beware,<sup>1</sup> would afford matter for much talk, as supplying in its evil nature a sufficient answer to the question : Why take so gloomy a view of the future ? And the prophetic delineations of the sufferings of God's servants would receive their due share of attention as showing how likely moral fidelity and tribulation are to go together in this world. No fear of conversation flagging in the Jesus-circle in those eventful weeks.

The subject was first introduced on the way northwards towards Cæsarea Philippi,<sup>2</sup> and very appositely by a question which had, and was probably intended to have, the effect of eliciting from the disciples a declaration of their faith in the Messiahship of their Master. This faith was not the birth of the moment ; it was really involved in the sympathy evinced by the disciples with the project to make Jesus King. Jesus desired now to draw them into a confession of their faith that He might set it in a new order of ideas. Hitherto their logical position has been : the Christ (shown to be such by word, deed, and spirit), therefore worthy to be Israel's glorious crowned King. The logic of the scribes, on the contrary, has been : deserving by his conduct to die, therefore his Christhood incredible. Jesus wishes His disciples to know that neither their logic nor that of the scribes is sound, and that the truth lies in the antinomy : the Christ, yet doomed to an ignominious death. What an abstruse lesson for these poor fishermen and publicans ! No wonder they kicked against the goad. But there was no help for it. Both members of the antinomy were true, and neither could be seen in its full truth except in company with the other. What a tragic event the death of Jesus became when it was seen to be the death of a *Messiah*, and what a fierce light was thrown on the nature of Messianic dignities and functions when it was made clear that the destiny of a true Christ is to be crucified

*Matt.* xvi. 6 ; *Mark* viii. 15.

<sup>2</sup> *Mark* viii. 27.

by and for the world! It is not surprising that Jesus took great pains to indoctrinate His followers in these high matters, making them the absorbing theme of conversation from this time onward. Only by much iteration could they be made intelligible. After all His pains the disciples had not learnt their lesson when the end came. But one thing they did understand then: that what *had* happened was what their Master had again and again said *would* happen; and this helped to bring them safely through the crisis.

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