

The Life of Faith.

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II.

The Response to Faith.

JN 2^{23, 24}, 'Many believed on his name . . . but Jesus did not trust himself to them.'

The key to the text is found as soon as we see that the main verbs in the passage are the same (*πιστεύειν*). The Jews who saw our Lord's works in Jerusalem were ready to accept Him to the extent of making some confession of allegiance in baptism; they were ready to enroll themselves under His name; to that extent they had faith. But this was not enough for Christ. To that faith He could not make the proper response. He could not trust Himself to a trust so superficial. For in faith, as in love, there is an element of exchange. Trust is mutual, or there is no real trust between the parties concerned. On each side there must be the opening of the heart, the self-abandonment, the giving of oneself away to another. It is not easy to improve upon the word used in the Authorized Version in this passage. Faith is the 'committing' of oneself to another. Jesus could not do that, because it had not been done first by the Jews who approached Him. They were ready enough to wear His name as a badge; they knew nothing of that surrender which would have opened to them the heart of God, and have admitted them into His life.

But the position of the text is almost as suggestive as its wording. For having thus spoken of the faith that failed to elicit the proper response of faith, St. John proceeds to give in incident after incident instances of Christ's appeals for faith, and of the way in which He did 'commit Himself' to the true faith.

In his recent work on the *Johannine Vocabulary*, Dr. Abbott says that 'if we look at the Fourth Gospel as a drama we shall find that few of the leading characters are not placed at some time or other in such circumstances as to show us, or make us ask, what, or whom, or why, they believed, or were exhorted to believe.' Indeed, it would

almost seem as if the Apostle who, as we believe, wrote this Gospel, sets before us in its glowing words the many pictures of faith and unfaith that were seen in those three wonderful years when he saw, and heard, and his hands handled of the word of life (1 Jn 1¹). Appeal after appeal, instance after instance, crowds upon us as we read, until at last we reach what seems to be the climax of the whole in the struggle of Thomas. That struggle is seen in the demand for evidence made by the man who was in danger of 'becoming faithless' (*μὴ γίνου ἀπιστος*, Jn 20²⁷), and the final triumph of personal trust is seen when, without waiting for evidence, refusing the very thing he had demanded, with never a thought of putting his fingers upon the print of the nails or thrusting his hands into the side of his Lord, he who had been the most outspoken in his hesitation rises, by an act of trust in the Person of Him who appealed, to the highest pinnacle of faith attained by any one in the wonderful story, as he cries, 'My Lord and my God.' And when he has thus come to the end of his wonderful sequence, the Evangelist accounts for his Gospel with the words, 'These things are written that ye might believe, and believing might have life in his name (Jn 20³¹).

But full of interest though such a study is, we are more concerned here in noting the attitude of Christ to the faith, which, while manifestly imperfect, was nevertheless such as He could accept. To take only the first three instances that follow upon His rejection of the Jews, we find that to Nicodemus our Lord reveals the mystery of the kingdom of God; the new life which marks the entrance into that kingdom, and the uplifting on the cross—the pledge of the divine love by which that life is secured (Jn 3). To the Samaritan woman He reveals directly the secret of His Messiahship, but this is only after He has first claimed from her that she accept His statement that worship is to be no longer in Jerusalem or on Mount Gerizim, but wherever man shall worship in

spirit and in truth (Jn 4). That was not an easy statement for her to accept; but Christ claims that she make it on the basis of personal trust in Him. 'Believe me' (Jn 4²¹).

The case of the nobleman in Cana is still more remarkable. Our Lord treats him first just as he treated the Jews in Jerusalem. 'Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe' (Jn 4⁴⁸). Yet as soon as the agonized cry breaks from the father, 'Sir, come down ere my child die,' Christ grants him his heart's desire. We are left to conclude that between the first and the second appeal of the father something had broken down in the man's heart. He was now more dependent upon Christ than he had been at first. The fling of his soul upon the Christ was more complete than it had been; and He, who knew what was in man, found in that complete dependence an element of surrender to which He could respond, and the Christ was self-committed in that blend of power and love in which the sick child was restored to life.

To these He gave Himself, revealed to them His purpose, authority, and grace; but to the others He refused Himself, remained an enigma until His very speech only served to puzzle them. *τὴν λαλιὰν τὴν ἐμὴν οὐ γινώσκετε; ὅτι οὐ δύνασθε ἀκούειν τὸν λόγον τὸν ἐμόν* (Jn 8⁴⁸). And in the one case and in the other it was because He knew what was in man.

We have but sketched the outline of a study of faith as it is put before us in this Gospel; it may, however, suffice to throw light upon that which is a matter of great importance at all times, and which just now clamours for clear and accurate presentment. It would almost seem as if we were repeating in our day the circumstances in which St. John wrote. For his Gospel is from first to last a presentation of faith, a description of those who believed, and of Christ's answering revelation of Himself in power, and grace; in truth, and light, and glory. Yet St. John never mentions the word 'faith' in his Gospel. When we consider the part that faith plays in the New Testament scheme of spiritual life, it is a remarkable fact that, alone of all the writers of New Testament Scripture, he never mentions the word. He has a great deal to say about 'believing'; he refers to the *act*, as we have seen, with constant iteration, but of faith as a condition of the mind, as a conviction, he says nothing at all. It would almost seem as though

in order to emphasize his feeling that the faith that leads to life is to be found in a definite act of will rather than in some belief, St. John speaks of it from first to last as *something which we do*. And when he does so speak of it he uses an expression which, if we rendered it literally, would mean 'believe into,' and its object is always the Person of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. He seems to indicate, then, that in faith there is an element of movement; that it indicates the passing from one position to another, and that its proper object is a Person, not a creed. No one would claim, least of all the Apostle John, that the mind of man has no part to play in this great determination. Knowledge will appear in this as in every act of an intelligent creature. But when we have heard, when we have understood, when we have been convinced, we have yet to believe. To the Christian man there comes sooner or later the moment when we need something greater than proof; reason will have played its part, emotion will have brought its subtle aid to the spirit, until at last the sublime risk is run, the great venture is taken, a leap of some sort is made; compelled by the Personality that transcends all thought, the soul casts herself upon Christ. 'If I perish, I perish on thy shoulders; if I die, I die at thy feet,' she cries, and yields herself up, commits herself to her Lord, makes herself one with Him, and enters by such surrender of herself into that spiritual communion in which she finds not only pardon and peace, but that which includes them both, the gift of eternal life. Then for all the rest of life, and for what is after life, the soul will look out upon the world of men, of duty, of service, from the point of view of Christ, and will explain its whole purpose and power by the great words of another Apostle, 'The life which I now live in the flesh I live in the faith which is the Son of God' (Gal 2²⁰).

It is not to be wondered at that there follows all spiritual joy and power. For, as we have seen, such an act is followed by an act of mutual 'self-committal' on the part of Christ. To those who do not make such an act of surrender He can make no satisfying response. He meets their imperfect advances with reserve, a reserve conditioned by the reservation in the man. To those who will not be true to the truth that appeals to them in Himself, Christ has but one answer to make. In it He speaks the doom of all pride

and insincerity, and hardness of heart, as He did in the days of His flesh to the men who could not understand because they would not be true: 'Neither tell I you, by what authority I do these things.' And so He remains an enigma. He does not commit Himself to them, because they will not commit themselves to Him. But to those who do, there comes that revelation of Christ which is a revelation within the man, and which makes us one with Him in a fellowship which death itself cannot sever, and so in Him we have eternal life.

There is one other thought that springs out of the passage before us. It comes to us with the greater acceptance because we know ourselves deficient in that which to us seems worthy of so great a response. Our Lord reveals Himself, commits Himself, to men and women who to us seem scarcely worthy of His response. 'A proud old Pharisee,' we say, and there is always a touch of something like contempt when we speak of him 'who came to Jesus by night.' 'A woman that was a sinner,' and her allegiance seems as lightly given as all her love had been. The nobleman is concerned, but it is scarcely to obtain some spiritual gift for himself; it is rather to get his son healed if he can, and he comes to Christ as he would have come to any man who seemed to hold out anything like hope to him. Are these the proper recipients of so great a spiritual revelation? But the answer is, 'They are; for he knew what was in man.' We are too near to one another's lives to see into them, and to read the true issues of that which moves within them. The angle of refraction is too great: we cannot see beneath the deceitful

surface. But not so with Him. Lifted far above us in His exalted life, He looks down upon, and down into, the secret sources of our life. His eye travels over the deeps where thought and purpose are born. He sees the confusion created by our past years of sin and sloth, but in all the tangled drift and wreckage of our past He sees also some smallest gem of truth: the one thing of worth within us; the willingness to respond to the truth that appeals in Him; the submission of spirit, the obedience that makes us His. That He accepts; to that He responds; responds with the generous overflow of love which we call 'the grace of God.' He gives Himself to us, until His self-surrender shames us of our own; our love once more is cradled in humility, and we cry, 'The grace of God hath overflowed (*ὑπερπλέονασε*, 1 Ti 1¹⁴), and with my faith and love which is in Christ Jesus makes the full river of my life.'

Faith is the surrender of the soul to God in Jesus Christ; it is the giving of oneself up to Him; it has its counterpart in the gift of grace that brings God in Christ down into the heart of man.

It is small wonder that that which follows upon such divine communion is no less than eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Strong Son of God, immortal Love,
Whom we, that have not seen Thy face,
By faith, and faith alone, embrace,
Believing where we cannot prove;

We have but faith: we cannot know;
For knowledge is of things we see;
And yet we trust it comes from Thee,
A beam in darkness: let it grow.

Professor Harnack on the Second Source of the First and Third Gospels.

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II.

In a previous article we dealt with the Evangelists' treatment of their material. We pass now to the question of 'Q,' the supposed common source. The variations in the text of St. Matthew are sufficient to forbid the idea that St. Luke used his Gospel (p. 78). On the other hand, the resemblances in

the first group of parallel sections prove that 'in the parts we are concerned with the connexion between the two evangelists (neither of whom was the source of the other) must be *literary*; i.e. it is not enough to go back to common oral sources' (p. 32). In particular oral tradition is not enough