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JESUS SAVIOUR AND KING

Sermon preached before the Southern Baptists Convention at Hot Springs, Arkansas, evening session, May 11, 1900, by Joseph Judson Taylor, D.D., LL.D., Jasper, Alabama.

Matthew 13:54: "Whence hath this man this wisdom and these mighty works?"

These are sincere and searching words, born out of real perplexity and disclosing an earnest desire to know the truth. Years before the events here recorded Joseph and Mary returned from Egypt with the young child, and fearing to go into Judea they turned aside and dwelt in Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, "He shall be called a Nazarene." In that remote place, famous for its lack of learning and culture, degraded until its name became a reproach, their mysterious son spent his childhood, his youth, his early manhood. He walked the narrow streets which terraced the uneven ground; he trod the winding path which led to the big spring at the foot of the hill; in leisure hours he climbed the neighboring heights, that he might enjoy the scenery and commune with God, and as silently as the harvests grew and ripened in the valleys below he grew into youth and ripened into manhood, the ideal son, citizen, brother, friend. When the voice of John crying in the wilderness proclaimed the Kingdom of heaven at hand, he quietly passed out of the town, and went to be baptized of John

in Jordan. Holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners he sank into the waters, and he came forth with a holy purpose in his heart. Dead and buried to the past, he arose in new relations to walk in newness of Messianic life. He left Nazareth a carpenter, son of a carpenter; he returned the Christ, the Son of the living God. In his changed relations he appeared among his old friends, and his presence inspiring amazement and awe evoked the question: "Whence hath this man this wisdom and these mighty works?"

The question put by the Nazarenes of old has come down through the ages. It involves vital issues and invites devout study, touching as it does the essential things in one who is offered as Saviour and King for the entire race.

It begins with his personality, -- This man. -- The adroit attempt to make Jesus a mere myth, conjured out of high religious sentiment and set forth to meet the demands of a fanciful age, is not worthy of a serious thought. Apart from any question of inspiration, Gospel records being rated with Caesar's Commentaries, or Cicero's Letters, or other literature of ancient times, the life of Jesus is amply attested, and it is freely admitted by all capable and candid minds. Prophets, who perceived the ruin wrought by sin, foretold a man endued with power to lift the burden and lead the world from bondage. They saw him as a Child born of a virgin, as a Branch from the stock of Jesse, as a Man of sorrows acquainted with grief, as a Prophet sitting in Moses' seat, as a Priest forever after the order of Melchizadek, as a Prince in Israel gathering the people unto himself, as a King in Zion ruling in righteousness and imparting pardon and peace. Isaiah spoke specifically: "A man

shall be as a hiding place from the wind and a covert from the tempest, as rivers of water in a dry place, and as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." John also spake concerning him: "After me cometh a man who is preferred before me, for he was before me."

The people of Nazareth saw him growing up among them, running errands on the streets, working at his trade, entering their homes, eating and drinking at their tables. They knew his mother, also his brothers and sisters. His form and face were as familiar as his voice and they were as sure of him as they were of themselves. His foes became his witnesses, and the wrath of man rendered him praise. The lawyers who tempted him with words and tried to entangle him in his talk, the soldiers who felt the thrill of his presence and fell prone to the earth, the high priest who hired base men to witness against him, the governor who found him faultless and sought his release, the centurion who trembled at the portents of the crucifixion and confessed him the Son of God, the guard who fell before the angel at the open grave, --- all these and many more, who saw and heard and handled, testified of this man. In modern times men of power, like Strauss and Renan, Herbert Spencer and George Gilbert, who have denied his divinity and refused to worship him, have gladly traced his history and warmly praised his virtues. The man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all to be testified in due time, has had abundant witness, and has left no place for doubt in sane and logical minds.

This real man has disclosed qualities that have evoked the admiration of ages and nations. Great teachers may be great scholars, they must be great characters. The mere scions of the laboratory and the

lecture room, held in the fetters of a rigid formalism, can never become the expression of the noblest manhood; they are too bookish, too mechanical, too sapless to kindle the glow of enthusiasm in those whom they would instruct. Arnold of Rugby, Park of Andover, Harris of Richmond, Broadus of Louisville, were not learned beyond all their colleagues; but they possessed the rare personal quality that imparted life and beauty to vague abstractions, and fixed concrete truths even in listless minds.

In these high qualities which mark the real leaders of men Jesus stood preeminent. There was in his presence a subtle charm, which made Zaccheus confess and Peter weak, and caused unclean spirits to quake with apprehension and cry out in fear. He held in perfect poise the various elements of perfect manhood. He was aggressive, but not pugnacious; brave, but not reckless; calm, but not stolid; dignified, but not distant; enthusiastic, but not thoughtless; faithful, but not officious; grave, but not funereal; humble, but not obsequious; imperative, but not hasty; just, but not vindictive; kingly, but not domineering; lowly, but not groveling; meek, but not mellow; natural, but not boorish; original, but not pretentious; prudent, but not timid; quaint, but not affected; resolute, but not rash; steadfast, but not obstinate; tranquil, but not lumpish; versatile, but not fickle; watchful, but not suspicious; yielding, but not compromising; zealous, but not fanatical. He was the complete realization of Solomon's radiant vision: "My beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand. His head is as fine gold, and his lock bushy and black as a raven; his eyes are as the eyes of a dove by the rivers of water; his cheeks are as

beds of spices decked with flowers, and his lips like lilies dripping with myrrh; his mouth is most sweet, yea, he is altogether lovely." As the centuries have passed, he has grown in popular esteem until today he stands the foremost figure in all the files of time, the fulfillment of the prophetic saying, "His name shall be called Wonderful."

This wonderful man displayed wonderful skill in dealing with the issues of the times, ---This wisdom. The world has been blessed with many forms that have towered above the common herd as the oak towers above the reeds by the river's brink, heroes in war or peace whose genius to devise and strength to perform have won joyous applause. And yet the foremost of these luminous figures have sometimes lacked discernment, and have stumbled into the ways of folly and sin. Noah, who was chosen of God and saved from the flood, yielded to the seductions of the wine cup, and fell into drunkenness and shame. With all his meekness Moses was stung to madness by the chidings of the people; he was angered at the waters of strife, and spake unadvisedly with his lips. David, the champion of Israel, coveted Uriah's lamb, and thrust a dagger into his own soul. Elijah, the hero of Carmel, quailed before the wrath of Jezebel, and sitting under the juniper tree he weakly wished for himself that he might die. Paul and Barnabas, the one a preacher of righteousness and the other a son of consolation, came to the day of strife, and the contention grew so sharp that they parted asunder never to meet again. The wisest and best of the sons of men have sometimes failed in the emergencies of life.

This man never exposed a weakness, and never made a mistake. He was confronted by able lawyers and questioned by shrewd casuists; he was

assailed by all forms of enmity and tested by all phases of doubt, but he met every emergency, and saw the heart of every problem. Under all conditions he bore himself with the air of a master, and delivered his message with perfect assurance. As a philosopher he set the truth in abstract terms, but as a practical teacher he gave concrete rules to govern conduct: Agree with thine adversary quickly. Beware of false prophets. Cast the beam out of thine own eye. Do good to them that persecute you. Enter ye in at the strait gate. Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven. Give, and it shall be given unto you. With some specific word he touched every relationship in life, domestic, social, civic, commercial, and touched it with a skill that has never been surpassed.

His wisdom appeared also in the aptness of his teaching, as well as in its essence. He did not argue with men about his right to speak or their duty to hear; he simply uttered the truth, and left it to find its place in responsive souls. He announced no course of instruction, and he used no test-book; but with the discernment of a master he gathered lessons from the common things of life, the drawing of water, the making of bread, the sowing of grain, the brooding of chickens. He based his teachings on eternal verities, and he adorned them with lilies from the field, leaves from the fig-tree, branches from the vine. In the presence of penitence sobbing out its guilt his words melted with compassion and trembled with tenderness, but against the shams of hypocrisy and the stubbornness of unbelief his resentment roared like the thunders of divine wrath. To the humble soul earnestly seeking the truth he was as one that hath a pleasant voice and playeth well on an instrument, but to the gain-saying and disobedient he was as a refiner's fire and as fuller's soap. Unto a master in Israel who ought to have

understood he uttered the deep things of the Spirit, but unto a simple woman who yearned for a sight of the Messiah he said plainly, "I that speak unto thee am he." To the rich ruler hoarding his wealth he said, "Sell, give, come, follow," but unto Zaccheus using his money to repair past wrong and to relieve present distress he said, "This day is salvation come unto this house." To friends he unfolded the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to enemies and aliens he spoke in parables, that seeing they might see and not perceive, and hearing they might hear and not understand. The wisdom that astonished the Nazarenes of old has amazed the successive ages, and as men have compared him with the wisest of all time they have devoutly exclaimed, "Behold, a greater than Solomon is here."

This man of rare character and supernal wisdom was also a man of marvelous deeds, ---These mighty works. Primarily the phrase refers to what are called miracles, those displays of divine condescension wherein God stooped to the comprehension of his creatures. Dwarfed by disobedience, blinded by sin, men are not able to see God in the greatness of his works, or to read his will in the processes of nature, that move irresistably on. Moses may yearn to deliver his people from the taskmasters of Egypt, but the yearning takes no definite form, until he turns aside to see the bush that burns with fire and is not consumed, and to hear the voice that shakes the earth and also the heavens. The prophet may cry, "Thus saith the Lord," but with the cry he must also issue the evidence that he voices the mind of the Almighty. The herald of a new message always needs such credentials to establish his authority and to gain him the ear of the people whom he seeks to guide.

Jesus pitied the dullness of men, and humbled himself to their low estate, that he might be their Saviour and Friend. When they demanded a sign, he went about all their cities and villages, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, casting out devils and healing every sickness and every disease, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, "Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses." When they failed to see him in the majesty of his divine character upholding all things by the word of his power, he stooped to the realm of the senses, saying, "Go tell the things that ye do see and hear: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached unto them." It was the badge of authority placed upon him, God bearing witness both with signs and wonders and divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost according to his will. As men have witnessed these tokens of power, they have been filled with amazement and awe, and have gladly exclaimed, "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do the miracles that thou doest, unless God be with him."

He spoke, however, of greater works that he would accomplish through his people. Promising to be with them alway even to the end, he said greater works than these should be done, because he went to the Father. Ascending on high and leading captivity captive, he gave new gifts to men working in them as he never worked in the days of his flesh, pressing beyond the confines of Israel and calling the Gentiles, kindling hope, inspiring heroism, and elevating all the ideals of life. The Herods have hated him, and have plitted against him; but they have fallen before the wrath of the Almighty, and the angels on errands of mercy have

whispered in awe, "They are dead, which sought the young child's life." Kings of the earth have set themselves in array, and rulers have taken counsel, saying, "Let us break his bands asunder, and cast his cords from us;" but their fury has spent itself in vain, and his bands of love have been as cart ropes to draw the souls of men. Julian issues his edicts and Voltaire sneers, Hume argues and Ingersoll orates; but the miracle of the gospel continues, and men convicted of sin and stung of remorse find peace and joy in believing on the Lord Jesus Christ. Armed with weapons of destruction and driven by fear critics have conspired against him; they have defamed his biographers, and discounted the records of his career; they have denied the divinity that transcends their understanding, and in assumed tenderness they have laid him in the tomb of a good man, sealing the stone and setting a watch; but the same hour the messengers of God, endued with might, have smashed their seal, rolled back their stone, and let their victim forth in triumph. Sinners of every grade foaming in fury and quaking in fear have fought him with every weapon that hostile ingenuity could invent; and yet he abides, and his mighty works go on among the nations of the earth. Instead of the thorn he brings the fir tree, and instead of the briar the myrtle; and his work establishes his name, and becomes an everlasting sign that shall never be cut off.

These works appear more wonderful in consideration of the means employed. With imperial legions Rome vanquished Hannibal with his hereditary hatred, Cataline with his deep conspiracy, Pompey with his patrician sympathies. The unspeakable Turk advanced the standards of Mohammed at the point of the sword, the alternative being submission

or death. Men who have aspired to conquests have often appealed to force in the furtherance of their schemes. This man used no violence; neither did he strive nor cry nor lift up his voice in the streets, the bruised reed he did not break, neither did he quench the smoking flax. Learning has mightily moved the world, and the famous schools at Tarsus and Jerusalem, at Alexandria and Athens, at Cambridge and Oxford, at Berlin and Boston, have sent forth men equipped to mold or modify the thinking of the race. This man was a scion of no school, and it was a matter of surprise that he knew letters, he having never learned. Literature has mightily affected the growth of nations, and the masters of history and poetry and fiction have changed the currents of life. This man wrote no book; the only line he ever traced was scrawled in the dust before the woman's accusers, and that line was not preserved. Wealth has built cities, bridged chasms, tunnelled mountains, navigated seas, facilitated commerce, established institutions, unset governments. This man had no money; poorer than the foxes of the field or the birds of the air, he lived at the hand of beneficence, and when weary with toil he had not where to lay his head. He consorted with men in the humbler walks of life, and was known as a friend of publicans and sinners. When accused before the high priest, he had no counsel; when mocked in Pilate's judgment hall, he had no defender. Nevertheless his influence has swept down through the centuries, and he has been anointed to preach deliverance to the captive and recovering of sight to the blind, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. In it all he works neither by might nor by power, but by the Spirit that anointed him for his task.

The conclusion is inevitable. This man of wisdom and might is worthy to be King over all hearts in all lands. The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth shall perish away, but the Lord is the true God and an everlasting King. At his wrath the earth trembles, and the nations fall before his indignation. Great are his signs, and mighty are his wonders. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion endures from age to age. His eyes are as a flame of fire; on his head are many crowns, and on his vesture and on his thigh it is written, that he is King of kings and Lord of lords. Though a thousand millions of the race sit in darkness and the shadow of death, groaning out of their woe; though the Mosque of Omar stands on the mount of God, and the followers of the false prophet butcher the saints; though the seed of Abraham, scattered among the nations and knowing nothing of that circumcision which is of the heart still reject their own Messiah; though the Roman apostasy sways its millions and works its abominations as zealously as when Wycliffe protested or Luther defied, and nations that name the name of Christ drench the earth in blood, the Lord is not slack concerning his promises, as some men count slackness. He has infinite leisure for the accomplishment of his vast designs, and his word abide, though the heavens and the earth pass away. Yet a little while, and he that cometh will come, and will not tarry. Then shall be fulfilled the word that is written; the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and the nations shall flow into it. This perfect man of perfect wisdom and limitless power shall lead his faithful people forth conquering and to conquer. He shall drive the demon of

discord and hatred from the whole world; he shall speak peace to the nations, and his dominion shall be from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth. Amen.