

THE PUBLIC MINISTRY OF JESUS

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The Public Ministry of Jesus by Horace Davis

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HORACE DAVIS

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HORACE DAVIS

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I SHALL try to tell you the story of Jesus, in simple, human terms, having due regard to its historical setting. It is a wonderful life, and has had more power over men and women than any other life ever passed on this earth. To me it is very real, and if I can make it as real to you I shall be satisfied. I shall follow in the main the Gospel of Mark, because it is the oldest, hence the nearest to the facts, the simplest, and has the most continuous story.

THE GALILEAN MINISTRY

The opening note of time, however, comes from Luke, who begins his narrative in these words: "Now in the 15th year of the reign of Tiberius Cæsar, Pontius Pilate being the Governor of Judea and Herod the Tetrarch of Galilee, the word of God came to John, the Son of Zacharias, in the wilderness"—who cried to the people, "Repent ye, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand."

This strange, ascetic preacher appeared on the half-desert banks of the Jordan proclaiming the immediate coming of the Kingdom of

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God, warning the people to repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins. The old prophets had foretold that a time would come when the powers of Heaven would descend upon the Earth and establish the Kingdom of God right here; his enemies, the wicked, would be swept away to destruction, but his loyal subjects, the righteous, would inherit the earth.

This time had come, said John; the crisis was close at hand. "Even now the axe is laid at the root of the trees; every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but the Strong One that follows me shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire, whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly cleanse his threshing floor and he will gather his wheat into the garner, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

The fierce zeal of the Jewish people was deeply stirred by his preaching; from all parts of the country they poured down to the Jordan in throngs to listen to the appeals of the desert preacher, and thousands accepted his baptism of repentance.

The carpenter of Nazareth heard the stories of those who came back from the Jordan, and he, too, went down to hear the new prophet, being, says Luke, about thirty years old. Of his life prior to that day we know nothing ex-

cept what can be gleaned from the New Testament. His father, Joseph, was probably dead, and his mother, Mary, was left with a family of five sons, of whom Jesus was the eldest, and at least two daughters. He had received such education as fell to a boy in a village like Nazareth. He had read the history of his people and was steeped in the hopes and promises of the grand old prophets whose language he often quotes. His teaching also shows some acquaintance with the Apocalyptic literature so freely floating about Palestine in his day, picturing the sanguine hopes of the pious Jews.

He listened to the fiery appeals of John and received baptism from him in token of his sympathy and his faith in the coming of the Kingdom. Then followed the wonderful spiritual experience so variously told by different evangelists. The heavens opened to his vision and the Spirit of God descended upon him. Mark's language seems to imply that the Spirit of God entered into him at that time, inspiring and controlling his thought and action, and giving him superhuman power. As I read it, this was the crucial moment of his life. As he received the baptism he felt the power of God in his soul calling upon him to devote his life to the service of His Kingdom. "And straightway the Spirit driveth him forth into the wilder-

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ness." He wanted to be alone, to look into the depths of his own soul,—far away from the company of men, to meditate on his new hopes and seek strength from God.

Presently he returned to Nazareth, where the call to action soon reached him. John was cast into prison by Herod, and his mission came to an untimely end. Then Jesus felt his own time had come; he went down to Capernaum and began to preach, saying, "The time is fulfilled. The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent ye and believe in the good news."

He gathered around him a little group of devoted followers, probably men who had been disciples of John the Baptist; they were men from the humble walks of life, but, filled with love of their master and inspired by constant contact with him, they gave their lives to his ideals, and became after his death the germ of the Christian Church.

At Capernaum "he entered into the synagogue and taught; they were astonished at his teachings, for he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes." This is the first note we hear of his preaching; he taught them as one having authority, not like the scribes. The scribes based their religion upon established rules; they appealed to ancient authorities and cited eminent teachers. Jesus spoke fresh from the heart, full of the power of