

**IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE
MASTER:
SERMON OUTLINES ON
ST. MARK'S GOSPEL**

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GOSPEL

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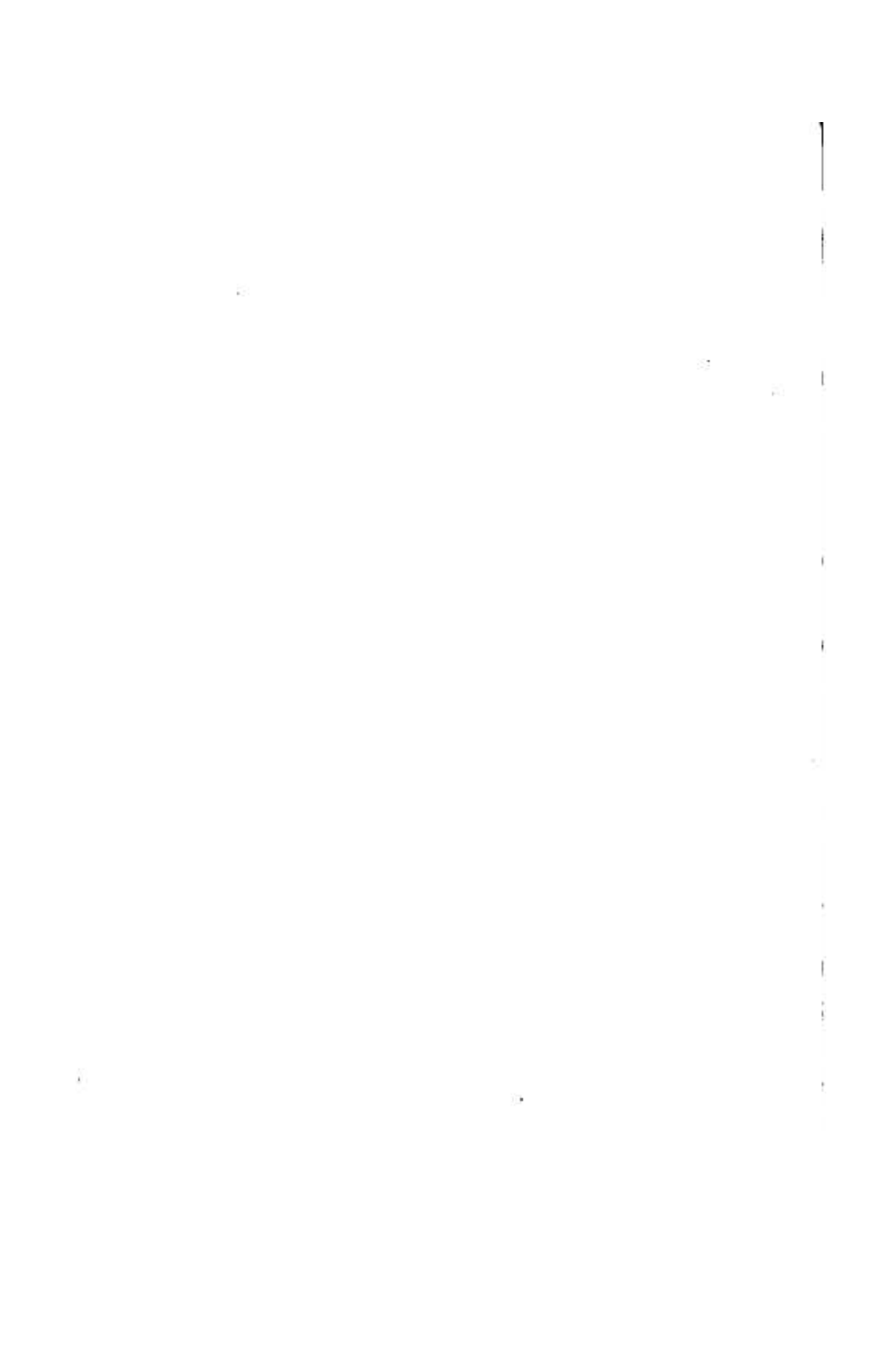


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PREFACE

THE following articles originally appeared in the *Church Family Newspaper*, and as now published form a companion volume to the author's books on Sunday Collects, Epistles, and Gospels.



IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE MASTER

I.—THE GOSPEL

"The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."—
ST. MARK I. 1.

ON the title-page of his Gospel, St. Mark writes the earliest Christian Creed—for the Creed of the early Church was: "I believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (see Acts viii. 37). And this Creed is the beginning of good news, for the good news begins with Jesus Christ. It is only when we begin with the fact of Jesus that everything else falls into its place as part of a gospel. And in the Sacred Name itself there is a sequence of revelation.

1. *Jesus*.—The good news begins with the story of a life lived under human conditions—an authentic fact of history. Unless this historic fact is true, we have no foundation on which to build. The disciples knew Jesus first as a man among men, sharing the common experiences of life. The reality of the humanity of Jesus was an essential part of the "good news," for it revealed a new idea of what human life might be.

2. *Christ*.—We sometimes forget that "Christ" was not at first a proper name, but a title—"the anointed king." So the good news is set against the background of history. The hopes of the men who refused at all ages to despair of the world are justified. He who bore among men the name of Jesus of Nazareth was the promised King "of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write." He sums up in Himself the expectations of a thousand years, through which the world was waiting for its King.

3. *The Son of God*.—It is not quite certain whether these words were in the original text. If they were added, it was a true instinct that recognized that the "good news" must

take us beyond the historic fact into the region of theology. Unless He is the Son of God, He cannot meet our deepest need by bringing us to the Father; the great separation still remains unbridged. St. Mark gives us no account of the circumstances of the birth of Jesus; he tells his readers, without any further explanation, that He of whom he is writing is "the Son of God." Behind all His words and deeds is the Divine Father, speaking unto us by His Son (Heb. i. 2).

II.—THE BAPTISM OF REPENTANCE

"John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins."—ST. MARK i. 4.

WITH characteristic abruptness St. Mark brings St. John the Baptist on the scene; the prophets had predicted that the coming of the King would be heralded, so now the herald appears. There is not only the baptism but the Baptizer, for the new kingdom is to depend on human agency for its establishment. A sacramental religion must have a ministry.

1. *The Need of Repentance.*—To men satisfied with themselves the announcement of an approaching revolution would not be "good news." So the first step towards repentance is discontent—not discontent with our surroundings, but with ourselves. For all true reform must begin from within. It is men's attitude towards themselves that needs to be changed first of all. Repentance is simply a resolute determination to be a different man.

2. *The Sacrament of Repentance.*—Repentance must express itself in outward act. Many religions have used ceremonial washing as the natural symbol of the inner cleansing that the soul needs. By public baptism the crowds that came to St. John committed themselves to a repudiation of their former manner of life. A sacramental religion cannot be a secret religion; it calls men out of isolation into the fellowship of a common ideal. So St. John demanded that his hearers should dissociate themselves by an irrevocable act from the old life of low self-satisfaction.

3. *The Outcome of Repentance.*—Repentance is the first step, for a man must declare war against the evil in himself. But St. John pointed his disciples to a fuller baptism that would not only repudiate the past but also reach forward to the future. It was not enough that the old life should die; the new life must come down from above (St. John iii. 3). By associating the laying on of hands with baptism the early Church expressed the twofold character of Christian baptism as cancelling the past and consecrating the future. St. John called men to close the door that led to the way of death; the door to the way of life must be opened by One mightier than he. "He shall baptize you in Holy Spirit."

III.—THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

"Jesus . . . was baptized of John in Jordan."—ST. MARK I. 9.

WHY was Jesus baptized, since He had no need of repentance? Perhaps the answer is indicated by His question to the Pharisees (St. Matt. xxi. 25). The King will claim immunity from no act that is included in the divinely appointed preparation for the kingdom. And while His baptism involved for Him no change of heart, it did involve a change of outlook. This change is expressed in the events connected with His baptism, as told by St. Mark. St. John tells us that the Baptist was permitted to see and hear what was invisible and inaudible to the crowds, but according to St. Mark the revelation was given primarily to our Lord Himself.

1. *He Saw the Heavens being Rent Asunder.*—It was as though the eternal world, pressing on the frontiers of the world of time and space, broke through at the moment when He was consecrated to His mission. The veil of the material world was rent (*cf.* St. Matt. xxvii. 51), that a way might be opened from heaven to earth and from earth to heaven (Heb. x. 20).

2. *The Descent of the Spirit.*—Through the open heavens there came, not a symbol of judgment or awful power, but a Power that descended dove-like, as It hovered over the face