

**THE POLITICAL AND
SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF
THE LIFE AND TEACHINGS
OF JESUS**

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The political and social significance of the life and teachings of Jesus by Jeremiah W. Jenks

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of the
Life and Teachings of Jesus

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To
My Sister

Preface

Every thoughtful person who has given even the slightest attention to the life and teachings of Jesus must have been impressed with the practical way in which he applied his principles of life to the every-day experiences of the people about him. As a student of social science and politics, it has been a source of satisfaction to me to see in how many cases the principles laid down by him have made their way, often without the will of political or social leaders, into the scheme of our modern life. The Christian religion has proved itself practical in politics, and statesmen are realizing as never before that God cannot be left out as a factor in public affairs. Like all of the great thinkers who have weighed the deeper problems of life, individual and social—Job, Aristotle, Dante, Shakespeare—Jesus looked deeper than the mere surface experiences of the day; and where they discussed and explained, he touched and solved the problems that are universal. The student is often struck by the modernness of the views of Aristotle in matters of politics. To a far greater degree may one notice the modernness of the teachings of Jesus on almost all questions of personal and social life, simply because he deals with the universal and his answers are complete for all time.

Some five or six years ago, at the request of the Cornell University Christian Association, I gave a series of Sunday morning talks upon the application of the life and the teachings of Jesus to political and social problems. The views expressed by me, of course, are not those of a special student of biblical literature or of the principles of theology; they are the views of a layman, a student of politics and economics, who has taken a very great interest in seeing how the teachings which Jesus applied in his own life fit themselves into the views and practices of the best thinkers of the present day, as they have molded the practices of those of the past, so that they are surely, altho too slowly, regenerating the world.

Except incidentally, these talks were, naturally, not at all doctrinal; but when at times a student asked for the application to the problems

of to-day of the sayings of Jesus, or when some of the more common church doctrines seemed to come normally within the scope of the discussion, I did not hesitate to express an opinion, tho I tried to encourage tolerant discussion. While for many years I have been a member of one of the evangelical churches, it is not expected that all the opinions expressed will satisfy every one; but they have been in many cases comforting to me, because they seemed to me to show the practical reasonableness of the teachings and practices of him whom, whatever some may think who regard religion as a mere sentiment, I believe to be the chief working influence in the world's history. I hope that these thoughts may be helpful to others; but I have no fault to find with those who hold different views.

To me the chief intellectual characteristics of Jesus are his spirit of impartiality, his broadmindedness, his aloofness from selfish interests. It will be seen that my belief in these characteristics has been the basis of my interpretation of some of his teachings.

The material used in the preparation of this series of lessons has been mainly the Gospels, but I have also been very much interested in reading some other books that have treated these same questions. I have not confined myself to those of any one school of thought or criticism; I have not inquired whether the books would support any special doctrinal views or not. I am not aware that I have taken any one of the writers cited as a chief guide. Some have been helpful on certain topics, others on different ones. Students will have the same experience. It is a useful practice for a student to read thoughtfully the views of different writers and to attempt to make a judgment. The power of judgment must grow by practice. Such practice under a wise teacher will be of the greatest service, and will help much in making the student more useful in his life work.

When these talks were first given there were a number of requests that they be published; but I felt that I did not have the critical knowledge desirable for the writer of a book on so vital a theme. My purpose in the talks had been rather to stimulate thought and encourage investigation than to expound my own beliefs. When, however, in the repetition of the course during the last year, the request came to put these talks into the form of suggestive lessons which might be used by students, it seemed to me that in this form they might prove useful. I send them out, not as critical expositions, but rather as a series of statements and questions that I hope may prove stimulating and helpful. Altho from the very nature of the study it is essential, if the course is to be most useful, that the viewpoint be primarily that of a study of Jesus the man, I trust that the spirit has been reverent thruout and that the effect of work

in this course may be to encourage not only further study but also better living.

It is a pleasure to me to acknowledge the very helpful assistance given me in the preparation of these lessons by Miss Emelyn F. Peck. In several instances she prepared the first draft of the outlines from notes and stenographic reports of my lectures; in many cases she has made the references, and she has usually verified them. Thruout, her suggestions have been valuable. Without her aid it would not have been possible for me to have prepared the course within the time at my disposal.

Cornell University, October 1, 1906.