

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

to the mutual relations of children and parents : from the child reverence is due to the parent—not because he is wise and just and good ; reverence is due to every man—parent or not—that is wise and great and good : reverence is due to the parent because he is the parent : the relation between parent and child is a divine institution, and the child should be subject to the institution. And to the child the parent owes duties by the same law—to the disobedient child, the ungrateful child, the unloving child. “*For the Lord’s sake*” we must recognise and discharge all the duties and services required from us by the institutions for the organization of human life ; and when for His sake these duties and services are recognised and discharged, we shall have done something towards bringing on the golden age we long for—when all states and all laws shall be just, and the social order shall illustrate the spirit of Christian brotherhood, and the Family shall be the visible symbol of the peace and blessedness of the Home of God.

R. W. DALE.

*JESUS MIRRORED IN MATTHEW, MARK,
AND LUKE.*

IV. THE SYNAGOGUE MINISTRY.

THE first thing the average reader of the Gospels has to do in reference to this department of our Lord’s work is to get it fairly into his mind that there was such a thing as a systematic synagogue ministry. With the exception of the narratives relating to visits made to the two synagogues of Capernaum and Nazareth, the Gospels contain only general statements, such as that in Mark i. 39 : “He preached in their synagogues throughout all Galilee, and cast out devils.”¹ Such summary notices, giving no details, make little impression on the mind. You read the words, pass

¹ *Vide* also in *Matthew* iv. 23.

on, and the fact briefly stated takes no place in your permanent conception of Christ's evangelistic activities. Even when we pause to reflect for a moment on what these general statements say, we are apt to think that they are not to be taken in earnest, as pointing to a deliberately planned, persistent, extensive effort to bring to the ears of the men of Galilee, through the convenient medium of the synagogue, the good news of the Kingdom of God.

The clearest evidence that this is a mistaken view is contained in Mark i. 38, where Jesus is represented as giving such a preconceived plan as His reason for leaving Capernaum. "Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also ; for therefore came I forth." He has addressed a Sabbath audience in one synagogue, and He desires to do the same elsewhere. The manner of His departure lends emphasis to the purpose. It was hasty, because He feared that the time of His Galilean ministry might be cut short, and His preaching mission interrupted, by the enmity of the scribes. A synagogue-ministry, as distinct from a street-ministry, depended on the good-will of others, and Jesus understood that it must begin at once if it was to be at all. The departure was secret, before the dawn, while men slept, because He feared detention by a people valuing His presence for the healing power displayed on so splendid a scale on the previous Sabbath evening. Evidently Jesus is very much in earnest about that preaching tour. It is not an afterthought, or a pretext, but a fixed purpose ; one of the main lines along which He means to conduct His work as the Light of Galilee. The prayer with which He ushered in the day on the eventful morning of that flight from Capernaum shows the same thing. In the life of Jesus, protracted solitary prayer was ever the prelude of important undertakings.

The plan was a large one. "In their synagogues throughout all Galilee": that meant many sermons. In

the time of our Lord there were many towns in that province large enough to have at least one synagogue. Josephus gives the number at 204, the smallest of them having 15,000 inhabitants.¹ Even supposing, with many modern scholars, that there is some mistake or exaggeration in the statement, it witnesses indubitably to a very thickly-peopled country. What a time it would take to go over all these towns, even if advantage were taken of the week-day meetings on Mondays and Fridays, as well as of the more solemn assemblies for worship on the Sabbaths. The scheme would assume more manageable dimensions if the purpose was to visit chiefly the smaller towns. This is suggested by the Greek phrase for which the English equivalent in the Authorised Version is "next towns," the literal meaning being the next *village*-towns.² It is not improbable that Jesus, knowing that a selection must be made, resolved to visit, in the first place, the lesser centres of population, having possibly only a single synagogue. He might be led to adopt this course by various considerations: His deep yearning to preach the gospel to the *poor*, the likelihood of greater receptivity to His message among *villagers*, the hope that much good work might thus be done *quietly*, with smaller risk of attracting the sinister attention of the religious authorities.

How far did Jesus succeed in carrying out His beneficent plan? The expression "all Galilee," used by the Evangelists, would seem to point to complete execution. But perhaps we ought not to press the "all," but take the fact to be that a very considerable number of places were visited in succession so as to justify such a colloquial exaggeration. This speaks to an interval of months between the time of Christ's departure from Capernaum to that of His return. From Mark ii. 1 indeed we might infer that the period con-

¹ *Vide his Vita*, chap. xlv., and *B. J.*, iii. 3, 2.

² *eis τὰς ἐχομένας κωμοπόλεις* (*Mark* i. 38).

sisted of only a few days. But a slightly altered grouping of the words does away with that impression. Instead of the rendering in the Authorised Version: "And again He entered into Capernaum after some days, and it was noised that He was in the house," we may substitute: "And He entered again into Capernaum, and after some days the report went abroad: He is home." The situation is easily conceivable. Jesus returns almost as quietly as He went away. He is some days in the town before they know. But when they know, what lively interest in the fact! The memory of events now some months old revives: the marvellous address in the synagogue, followed by an equally marvellous cure; the marvels of the day crowned and eclipsed by the wholesale healing ministry of the evening. They say to one another: the great Preacher and Healer is back among us again. "He is home."

Yes! home and welcome to most, but not to all. The situation is altered somewhat. The scribes are on the alert. So when the crowd gathers around the newly returned Master some of them are present to watch what goes on. And when a poor paralysed man, physically and morally a wreck, is brought to be healed, and Jesus, going to the root of the evil and aiming at reviving the smoking wick of hope in the poor sufferer's breast, says in cordial tones: "Courage, child! thy sins are forgiven," the scribes, by look though not by audible word, say: "Why does this person thus speak? he blasphemeth." Here at last is the mischief Jesus instinctively feared from the first, the well-grounded dread making him anxious to start on the preaching tour as quickly as possible, in hope to get over a considerable amount of ground before the latent antagonism began to reveal itself in active attempts at frustration. What if such attempts have brought Him back to Capernaum sooner than He otherwise would have come? What if secret correspondence between the scribes of Capernaum

and the rulers of synagogues in other towns have resulted in closed doors, opportunities of speech refused, a beneficent plan broken off half executed? It is not unlikely. Reading between the lines, we get this as a not improbable version of the story. Jesus meant to evangelise all Galilee, and He did actually preach in not a few synagogues, but ecclesiastical wire-pulling interrupted His work; the scribes compelled Him to return prematurely home, and they were there to watch him on His return.

Concerning the synagogue-ministry, we have, as already indicated, little definite information. Yet we are not so entirely in the dark as to its nature as we might at first imagine. We know the general features of that ministry, the estimates formed of it by the people and by the evangelists, and at least the text of one of the addresses.

1. The general features were *preaching, teaching, and healing* according to Matthew, *preaching and casting out devils* according to Mark. By preaching as distinct from teaching may be understood the proclamation of the elementary truths concerning the kingdom of God as a kingdom of grace: the paternal love of God, the hope that is in His mercy for the most sinful, the worth of man to God even at the worst, the duty of repentance, and the possibilities of sanctity for the penitent. By teaching, on the other hand, is denoted instruction in the theory, so to speak, of the kingdom: its absolute worth, its imperial claims, its moral ideal in itself and in contrast to current conceptions. From the nature of the case, and from the omission by Mark of any separate mention of teaching it is probable that *preaching* was the staple element in our Lord's synagogue discourses. Teaching was for disciples, preaching for the people. That healing acts were a frequent accompaniment of the preaching goes without saying. For even if Jesus did not start on His Galilæan mission with a set purpose to heal, He was always willing to give succour on

demand. And as disease is everywhere, and the desire for healing is not less universal, it may be taken for granted that there were few of the village towns where something similar to the incident in the Capernaum synagogue did not happen: demoniacal possession or some other human ailment cured by the Preacher to the astonishment of all. The story of Christ's visit to the synagogue in Capernaum may be taken as a sample of what occurred all over Galilee. One exception indeed is specified, and it may be viewed as an exception which proves the rule. Jesus, it is recorded, did no mighty work in *Nazareth*;¹ not for want of sick people, nor for want of power, but because the villagers would not give Him the chance. They were so chagrined at a fellow-townsmen being so distinguished that they would rather let their diseased relatives die than give Him an opportunity of showing His greatness. So far can prejudice go.²

2. The reported estimates of the synagogue ministry are various. That of the people, as is their way, was merely emotional, an expression of honest and intense admiration: What is this? A new teaching! and an unheard-of kind of power! That of the evangelists gives us some insight into the quality of the preaching which immediately created popular surprise. Mark uses the method of comparison: He taught not as the scribes; they *by* authority citing Rabbis of reputation in support of their dogmas; He *with* authority citing nobody, speaking out the intuitions of the soul, and leaving these to commend themselves to the minds of ingenuous hearers. Luke comes nearest to the heart of the matter when he employs the expression "words of grace" to characterise the utterance of Christ in the synagogue of Nazareth. I believe we shall not go

¹ *Mark* vi. 5.

² Euthymius Zigabenus, a Greek monk of the tenth century, author of a fine commentary on the Gospels, remarks: "It was not for Jesus to benefit them against their will" (*οὐκ ἔδει βίαιως εὐεργετεῖν αὐτούς*).

far wrong if we take that phrase as applicable not merely to that particular discourse, but to the synagogue discourses generally, and view it as referring not chiefly to graceful diction, but rather to gracious thought,—to matter rather than to manner. Gracious thought concerning the loving-kindness of God, sweetly and winsomely spoken, that in Nazareth and everywhere was the burden of Christ's synagogue sermons. Not that the Preacher is a man of one idea. He has many thoughts about the Kingdom, some of them deep and abstruse, fit only for the disciplined ear of the few; some of them severe and exacting; some of them stern in their bearing on the teaching and practice of the scribes and Pharisees; all of which He utters on due occasion. But the grace of God is His favourite theme. The Gospel of Divine love runs like a sweet melody through the rich, varied, sublime harmonies of His religious teaching. That God is good, that He is a Father, that He shows His goodwill to all in manifold ways in His ordinary providence; that He careth for the weak, the lowly, and even the low; that in Him is plenteous redemption, even for those whom men despair of: such were the things He delighted to say, said to all He met, and wished to say once at least in the hearing of all to whom He could gain access. Therefore, while there was doubtless endless variety in the colouring and contents of His synagogue addresses, there would be a certain pervading similarity, perhaps some ideas deliberately repeated in unvarying forms of language; for all great teachers who have some very decided message to deliver are apt to repeat themselves, not in helplessness, but because they cannot satisfy themselves without saying, and saying again and again.

3. The *text* of the address in the synagogue of Nazareth beginning, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me," happily preserved by Luke, supplied the best possible key-note for such gracious discourse. That it is historical I doubt not,

but it is also typical. It is the kind of text Jesus would choose for a popular sermon. The Scripture He was to preach from might not always be in His power. He might oftenest have to take His theme from the fixed lesson for the day in the Law or in the Prophets. Nothing, however, could come wrong to Him, for He knew His Bible intimately, and had some deep spiritual thought in His mind associated with every important passage, which He could utter in fitting language on the spur of the moment. Think, for example, what He brought out *impromptu* from the superficially unpromising words: "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."¹ From the greater number of Old Testament texts, whether selected by Himself or given to His hand, He would have no difficulty in eliciting the veritable Gospel of the Kingdom under one or another of its aspects by most legitimate exegesis. For no one knows till he has examined into the matter how much that is truly evangelic in spirit is to be found in the Hebrew Scriptures: in Genesis, in Deuteronomy, in the Psalter, and in the Prophets; how much that is in full sympathy with the splendid text from Isaiah which formed the theme of the Nazareth discourse concerning the anointing of Messiah to preach good tidings to the meek and to bind up the broken-hearted. One of the causes of admiration in our Lord's synagogue audiences would be the ease and naturalness with which He drew from familiar words precious truths which they had never seen there before, turning what had appeared "flint into a fountain of waters."² And when the word even to the popular view was manifestly not flint but fountain, another cause of admiration would be the happy manner in which, as if by a spell, He cleared the fountain of polluting, choking matter, so that its waters appeared pellucid as crystal, inviting the thirsty to drink from a pure well of salvation.

¹ *Matt.* xxii. 32; *Mark* xii. 27; *Luke* xx. 38.

² *Ps.* cxiv. 8.

“Let us make man in our image”; “I have surely seen the affliction of My people which are in Egypt”; “the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord”; “With Him is plenteous redemption”; “Thou, O Lord, art our Father”; “In Thee the fatherless findeth mercy”; “Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him I do earnestly remember him still”; “I will put My law in their inward parts”—what thrilling, gracious, unforgettable words Jesus could speak on such texts, making the hearts of His hearers burn as He talked to them on the Sabbath days! The synagogue teaching of the scribes was dry-as-dust even when they stumbled on obstacles like these, but that was their fault, not the fault of the sacred words. It was their unhappy way to choke all the wells with the rubbish of Rabbinical theology, and part of Christ’s mission was to remove the rubbish, and restore the intuition of the perennial sense of the Holy Writings.

More of the words and deeds of Jesus than we know may really have belonged originally to the synagogue ministry, though the connection is not indicated in the evangelic records. Some have tried to construct an inaugural synagogue discourse out of materials now forming part of Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount, piecing together, *e.g.*, the counsel against care, the lesson on prayer, the warning against judging, the law of reciprocity, and the closing parable of the wise and foolish builders, and offering the composition as a sample of what Jesus was likely to say in a *concio ad populum*.¹ This is purely conjectural, and not very probable conjecture either; for what we have been accustomed to call the *Sermon* on the Mount is in all probability rather a summary of *disciple-teaching* on various topics carried on perhaps for a week, during a season of retreat on the mountain plateau overlooking

¹ So Keim in his well-known work on the Life of Jesus,

the Galilæan lake. We have something more to support the supposition that certain parables in the evangelic collections, and some also of the recorded miracles had their primary place in the syngogue ministry. Luke gives the parables of *the Grain of Mustard Seed* and *the Leaven* as pendants to a syngogue incident,¹ suggesting the inference that they were spoken in a syngogue discourse. They happily illustrate a truth not too recondite for popular apprehension: that great things may grow out of very insignificant beginnings; and by their simplicity and brevity are well fitted for preaching to the million. The same remark applies to another couplet of parables, that of the Hidden Treasure and the Precious Pearl.² The one pair of parables would aptly clinch the moral of an address whose import was: despise not the kingdom I bring nigh to you because it seems a small, humble thing; the other with equal felicity would enforce the lesson: count the kingdom the chief good, joyfully secure it at all costs. That Jesus did use similitudes in these popular addresses may be taken for granted. "Without a parable spake He not unto them," observes Mark, with reference to our Lord's manner of speaking to the multitude.³ How could He fail to employ that method of instruction, having personally such a taste and talent for it, speaking to people accustomed to it, and knowing full well the power of the parables to entertain, to lodge truth permanently in the mind, and to make truth clear? To make truth clear, I say, for undoubtedly that was the real aim of the parabolic method, not, as one might hastily infer from certain words reported by Mark as spoken by Jesus in connection with the parable of *the Sower*, to hide truth from the eyes of the people, and tickle their ears with words to which they attached

¹ Luke xiii. 18-21.

² Matt. xiii. 31-33.

³ Mark iv. 34.

no rational meaning.¹ Of such an inhuman purpose Jesus was (need it be said?) utterly incapable.

Two miracles certainly, and one most probably, belong to the synagogue ministry. The first of the three is the cure of the demoniac in the synagogue of Capernaum, reported by Mark and Luke;² the second is the cure of the woman who had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, reported by Luke only,³ and the third is the cure of the leper, reported by all the three Synoptical Evangelists.⁴ Mark brings it in immediately after his general statement concerning the preaching of Jesus in the synagogues of Galilee, and the inference is natural that it owes its place to its being regarded by the evangelist as an anecdote of that ministry. In point of varied interest the last-mentioned healing act eclipses the other two, especially as reported by Mark, whose version of the leper-story is a good instance of his realism. Common to all the three narratives is the leper's "If Thou wilt, Thou canst," and Christ's peremptory injunction to the healed man, "Go, show thyself to the priest." Both features are interesting: the former as showing how completely even at this early period faith in Christ's *power* to heal any form of disease had taken hold of the popular mind, and how the more difficult faith in His loving *will* lagged behind; the latter as evincing a desire on Christ's part at once to make the benefit complete by adding to the physical cure social restoration, and to act in a respectful, conciliatory spirit towards existing institutions and established authority. That recognition of the priest's place and function gains added meaning if, as I have supposed, Jesus already feared the interference of the scribes. It assumes in that case the aspect of a policy of conciliation adopted in the interest

¹ Mark iv. 12.

² Mark i. 21-28; Luke iv. 31-37.

³ Luke xiii. 10-13.

⁴ Matt. viii. 2-4; Mark i. 40-45; Luke v. 12-16.

of the mission, in hope to make a favourable impression on synagogue magnates and retain their good-will as long as possible.

To these common elements of the story Mark adds the compassion of Jesus, and the assumption after the cure of an imperative, threatening manner to insure that the healed man shall go away at once and report himself to the priest, instead of remaining content with merely being whole. The addition of these traits is not an affair of mere word-painting. Both are valuable contributions to a vivid reproduction of the situation as observed by an eye-witness. Christ's compassion was a very noticeable feature to an impressionable onlooker like Peter, and one cannot wonder that he laid emphasis on it in reporting the incident. The pity of Jesus is a commonplace to us, but it was not such to the Galilæan villagers. It takes men little accustomed to anything in the world but callous indifference towards other people's woes some time to believe in exceptional, unique, phenomenal love like that of Jesus. They can more easily believe in miraculous *power* than in miraculous *love*. They are able to say "Thou canst," before they are able to say "Thou wilt." Mark's addition, therefore, only shows that he understood perfectly the situation, or, at least, that he is a faithful reporter of the words of one who did. The other particular peculiar to Mark is equally deserving of appreciation. It reveals another phase of Christ's love, in which it puts on an aspect of anger in its determination that the healed leper shall get the whole and not merely the half of the possible benefit. Jesus frowns, speaks imperatively and impatiently, and even thrusts the man out as it were by the shoulders, with an order to go at once. How life-like! how beautiful this subtle play of feeling, this sudden transition from one mood of love to another; from pity to impatience, from the softly spoken "I will" to the masterful "thou must"!

What now was the *result* of this ministry whereof so

scanty a crop of incidents has been preserved to us? It may be stated in a sentence: great temporary popularity, little permanent fruit. Of the popularity we find a trace even in the descriptions of the crowds that afterwards gathered around Jesus. Matthew follows up his general account of the synagogue ministry with a brief notice of the rising tide of enthusiasm in which Galilee occupies a prominent place. "There followed Him great multitudes of people *from Galilee*, and Decapolis, and Jerusalem, and Judæa, and from beyond Jordan."¹ In the corresponding statement of Mark, Galilee is even more pointedly indicated as the main contributor to the vast assembly. The second Evangelist distinguishes two crowds, a very large one coming from Galilee, and a considerable but by no means so great one coming from various other parts. What he says is this: "A *great* multitude from *Galilee* followed; and from Judæa, and from Jerusalem, and from Idumæa, and beyond Jordan, and about Tyre and Sidon, a multitude *great*"²—the epithet "great" following the noun in the second case, as if to say: "large also, but not so large." Galilee sends a larger contingent than all the rest of the country. This is what the synagogue sermons and the cures have come to. The Galilæans cannot part with the Preacher and Healer. They are as unwilling to lose Him as were the people of Capernaum when He suddenly left them after that memorable Sabbath evening. Therefore they followed Him in vast numbers from the various towns He had visited, crowding around Him, jostling Him, knocking against Him, in hope even in that rude way to obtain a cure for their ailments,³ insomuch that it was necessary to have a boat in readiness wherewith to escape sea-wards in case the pressure became utterly unbearable.⁴

Altogether a phenomenal popularity; yet, Jesus Himself

¹ Matt. iv. 25.

² Mark iii. 7, 8.

³ Mark iii. 10.

⁴ Mark iii. 9.

being witness, the abiding spiritual outcome seems to have been inconsiderable. The evidence for this is two-fold: the parable of *the Sower*,¹ and the complaint against the three cities, Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum.² The parable is in reality a critical review of Christ's past Galilæan ministry. Probably all the parables spoken from the boat on the day on which *the Sower* was uttered were of this character, though Matthew's collection contains some of a different type. Jesus was in the mood to tell the people who followed Him and admired Him what He thought of them, and what value He set on their discipleship. His estimate as given in *the Sower* is very depressing. In effect it amounts to this: much seed sown, little fruit. The word of the kingdom, that is to say, scattered with a free hand in the synagogues of Galilee, and, for one reason or another, in most instances no crop visible after sufficient time had elapsed to test the movement by results. The parable hints at some of the reasons of this unfruitfulness in its description of the various sorts of ground on which the seed chanced to fall. The beaten footpath, the shallow soil—a thin layer of earth on a bed of rock—and the land foul with seeds or roots of thorns, represent types of men with whom all religious teachers are familiar: the thoughtless, the superficial, and the men who are not destitute of mental power or spiritual depth but whose great lack is purity and singleness of heart. There were men in Galilee answering to all these types; some with whom the Preacher had not a chance, some on whom He soon and easily made an impression, some whose capacity and seriousness gave promise of something more than temporary interest, even of permanent discipleship, yet destined to disappoint expectation through lack of moral simplicity. The fewest were those whose minds resembled a soil at once soft, deep, and clean: men of honest and good hearts, sincerely regarding the kingdom of God as the chief

¹ *Matt.* xiii. 3; *Mark* iv. 3; *Luke* viii. 4. ² *Matt.* xi. 20; *Luke* x. 13.

end, and seeking it with generous devotion. It was altogether a disenchanting, bitter experience. It made Jesus feel, like the prophet Isaiah, as if He had been sent to the synagogues of Galilee not for recovery of sight by the blind, and of hearing by the deaf, but rather to make blind men blinder, and deaf men deafer than ever—as if this were the chief effect of His preaching as a whole, and of the parabolic pictures in particular, with which His addresses were enriched, and which seemed to His hearers their main attraction. If intention were to be judged by result, one might say that Jesus had gone on that preaching tour for the very purpose of shutting eyes and ears; but of course that would be a grievous, fatal misunderstanding of His spirit.

The disappointment connected with the synagogue ministry led to a change in the plan of Jesus. He resolved, henceforth, to devote more attention to the select few who showed intellectual and spiritual capacity for discipleship. From the great multitude he chose a limited number of susceptible hearers, and from these again an inner circle of twelve. In this small field He hoped in due season to reap a rich harvest of thirty, sixty, and an hundred fold.

The complaint against the Galilæan towns is informing as well as saddening. It gives us a momentary glimpse of an extensive ministry whereof very scanty memorials have been preserved. Chorazin, one of the towns named, is nowhere mentioned except in this reproachful word. It is supposed to have been situated on the highway to Tyre from Capernaum on the western side of the upper Jordan. It was, doubtless, one of the many towns Jesus visited in connection with His synagogue ministry, where He had not only preached but wrought some remarkable cures. For another thing noticeable in this complaint is that the emphasis of its lament lies not on fruitless preaching, but rather on fruitless *mighty works*. From this we learn that

healing acts, often remarkable, like the cure of the leper, were a common if not constant accompaniment of the preaching ministry in Galilee. We are not to suppose, however, that Jesus Himself laid chief stress on them. He looks at the matter from the point of view of His Galilæan hearers. He is aware that what they most admired and valued was the cures wrought on the sick, and what He says of them and to them is, in effect, this: "Ye heard Me in your synagogues, and, what is more important in your eyes, ye saw My works with astonishment and thankfulness at the time. And what has been the result? No change in spirit or in life: ye remain as ye were, as thoughtless, shallow, and preoccupied as ever." "They repented not."

No change noticeable in the life of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, selected to represent the many Galilæan cities visited in connection with the synagogue ministry—such is the melancholy verdict of the Preacher. The reference to Tyre and Sidon suggests that these three towns are named not merely because they had been exceptionally privileged, but because of their *commercial importance*. If so, then we get this result, that the commercial section of Jewish society was as inappreciative in its attitude towards Jesus as the religious section. Differing widely on the surface, they were at one in this, that neither sought the kingdom of God and the righteousness of God as the chief good of life.

Truly a sad account of a people with such a spiritual history behind it. How depressing to think that One anointed by the Spirit of the Father for an evangelistic mission should have no better report to give at the close! Alas! it is more or less the report and the burden of all high ministries in this world! Yet it is best not to say too much about it, or to brood over it, or to allow ourselves to be driven into pessimism by it. Keep cheerful and hopeful

always, and preach a real, acceptable gospel, telling men not merely that iniquities prevail against them, but that as for their transgressions God can and will purge them away. There is quite enough pessimism in the world without bringing it into the pulpit. Surely it is out of place there! And what good can it do? Men are saved by hope, not by despair; and if the preacher would make others hope, he must be hopeful himself. In spite of all disappointment, go on speaking sweetly and reasonably, now and then embodying truth in a parable, and leave the word to work like a charm. If that way fails, nothing else will succeed. So Jesus continued to do His work, while occasionally making His complaint. He was no pessimist. He was simply, as has been remarked, the one great religious Optimist who cannot be accused of shallowness, or of shutting His eyes to the evil that is in the world.

It is an interesting question in what relation the mission of the twelve disciples stood to the synagogue ministry of their Master. It may have been intended in part to supplement it by spreading the good news in Galilee more completely than Jesus had been able to do. But the mission of the disciples was not to preach in the *synagogues*: for that they were not yet fit. Theirs was a *house* ministry, not a synagogue ministry. They were to enter into the houses of such as were willing to receive them, and to stay there as long as they remained in any particular place, talking to the family and to such neighbours as dropped in concerning the Kingdom and its King. Of the kingdom they could say little beyond the most elementary statement of God's good-will to the penitent, but concerning the King they would have more to tell. Probably the main part of their conversation consisted of anecdotes about their Master, recollections of what He had said or done during His preaching tour; now a parable, anon a healing act reported for the entertainment and benefit of their hearers.

Such communications would in most cases insure for them a welcome, though in His instructions to the apprentice missionaries Jesus contemplated the possibility of an opposite reception: "Whosoever shall not receive you."¹ The words may express a fear suggested by personal experience of work frustrated or interrupted by religious prejudice in His own early effort to evangelise Galilee.

A. B. BRUCE.

THE GREAT COMMANDMENT.

(MARK XII. 28-34.)

BOTH in Matthew and Mark the question put to Jesus as to the great commandment in the law is connected with the repulse of the Sadducees. The first Evangelist represents the whole transaction in a less favourable light than the second. We infer from Matthew's narrative that the Pharisees hoped to succeed where the rival party had failed, and that the lawyer who put the question to Jesus did so in order to tempt Him, and that in pursuance of a plan deliberately formed at a Pharisaic meeting. "When they heard that He had put the Sadducees to silence, they gathered themselves together. And one of them, a lawyer, put a question to Him, tempting Him." The question was one constantly discussed in the schools, and no doubt, as Weiss says, they hoped, with the resources of their casuistical dialectic, to bewilder and confound the layman who ventured, in the simplicity of his heart, to give any straightforward answer. And in effect, in Matthew, Jesus does not give a direct answer. He is asked of what nature a commandment must be to be great in the law, but He declines to make distinctions in that which is throughout the will of God. He repeats two commandments, the significance of which does not belong to them as distinct from others,

¹ *Matt.* x. 14.