

# The Messiah's Earthly Work\*

## Part Two

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From the realization of the Messianic purpose in the life of Jesus we pass now to consider the bearing of his death upon the realization of that purpose, and first we must notice *the progressive unfolding* of the thought of death.

### III. The messianic purpose realized through death.

#### a. Progressive unfolding of the thought of death.

The evangelist Mark, when he gives Jesus' first formal announcement of his death, intimates that the Lord had referred to the same subject before, but in a veiled manner, for after recording what Jesus said of his death when he was at Caesarea Philippi, he adds that he spake the word *openly* (Mk. 8:31-32). We find in Mark's Gospel one obscure reference by Jesus to his death made prior to the sojourn at Caesarea Philippi. This reference was made on the occasion when Jesus was called to account for allowing his disciples to drop the fasts which the Pharisees and the disciples of John observed. He then said that the present was a time of joy for his disciples, and therefore fasting, which should express sorrow of heart, would be quite out of place. His disciples were sons of the bridechamber, and had the bridegroom with them. The time would come, however, when *the bridegroom would be taken away from them*, and then fasting would be appropriate (Mk. 2:20). Jesus does not intimate *how* the bridegroom would be taken away, whether

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by a violent or a natural death, or by a translation such as Enoch and Elijah experienced. The fact that his removal would cause them sorrow may best accord with the thought of a violent death, but plainly does not require it.

In Matthew and Luke we find another allusion by Jesus to his death, which antedates the word at Caesarea Philippi; but it is hardly more definite in its implication in regard to the method or significance of Jesus' death than is Mark's saying about the removal of the bridegroom (Mt. 12:38-41; Lk. 11:29-32). The occasion of the remark was the desire of scribes and Pharisees to see some sign from Jesus, some sign according to their own fancy of what a sign should be, in order that it might give convincing proof of the Messiahship of Jesus. Their unbelief and hostility were so bitter that they had just before this declared that Jesus was possessed by an unclean spirit (Mk. 3:30). In reply to this request of the Jews for a sign, Jesus uttered the severest words regarding that generation which he had thus far spoken. He declared that it was evil and adulterous, and that no sign should be given it but the sign of Jonah.

In Luke's version Jesus says that the Son of man shall be a sign to that generation as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites (Lk. 11:29-30). This statement is quite general, and does not suggest *how* Jonah was a sign. He came to Nineveh as a prophet of Jehovah, and so Jesus had come to his generation. The Old Testament does not say that Jonah told the Ninevites of his strange experiences as he sought to flee from the face of the Lord. That which is said to have moved Nineveh to repent was the announcement that judgment would soon fall upon it for its wickedness, unless it turned to the Lord. But in Matthew's version Jesus makes the sign of Jonah to consist in the fact that he was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish (Mt. 12:39-40). He said that the Son of man, in like manner, should be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. There is no reason to doubt the genuineness of this saying which Matthew records;<sup>1</sup> and it justifies, as Luke's version does not, the use of the expression *the sign of Jonah*. It does not imply that Jesus regarded Jonah's experience as prophetic of his own, or even that he regarded it as historical; but he saw in it a convenient illustration of his own thought. It was suggestive, but also obscure. The hearers would not regard it as necessarily foreshadowing the *death* of the Son of man, for as Jonah had been three days and three nights in the heart of the sea without tasting death, so might the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth without dying. Then the plain intimation that

<sup>1</sup>Holtzmann, *Lehrbuch der neutestamentlichen Theologie*, i. 279, thinks Matthew's narrative shows the ingenuity of a Jewish-Christian rabbinism.

he would be in the heart of the earth *only* three days and three nights would sooner turn the hearer's thought away from death than toward it. But the language of Jesus would at least suggest something dreadful as about to be experienced by him, and it taught that this dreadful experience, when it should come, would be a sign to that generation. We cannot doubt, however, that for Jesus himself, the sign of Jonah involved the thought of death and resurrection.

These two obscure sayings are the only words of Jesus, spoken before the crisis at Caesarea Philippi, which allude to his death, and one of these has no hint whatever as to the meaning of that event.<sup>2</sup> This period which, in the Synoptic narrative, furnishes but two allusions by Jesus to his death, included about three-fourths of his public ministry.<sup>3</sup> But from the day of the first formal announcement of death onward to the close of Jesus' life, we find references to his death comparatively frequent and perfectly explicit. All the Synoptists record three announcements by Jesus in very similar language, two of them near together and at the beginning of the last six or seven months, and the other near the close of this period (Mk. 8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34; Mt. 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:18-19; Lk. 9:22, 43, 44; 18:31-33). While these announcements are similar, it is to be noticed that the last one is made more dreadful than the first two by the addition of some details of suffering. Thus it is in this announcement that Jesus speaks for the first time of *mocking*, *spitting*, *scourging*, and according to Matthew, of *crucifixion*, as part of the cup of his approaching trial. Besides these formal announcements which are given by all the Synoptists there are no less than fourteen other references, more or less explicit. Of these, ten seem to belong to the last week; three are associated with the transfiguration and thus follow closely upon the formal announcement at Caesarea Philippi, and one belongs in the Perean ministry. Hence we conclude that, as far as the Synoptic report informs us, Jesus only *alluded* to his death during the first three-quarters of his ministry; that he spoke of it several times in the days spent near Caesarea Philippi, after the close of his public work in Galilee; and that in the last week he referred to his death still more frequently and fully.

But we cannot at once infer that, because Jesus gradually *unfolded* the thought of his death, therefore this thought was only gradually *formed* within his own mind. Gradualness of unfolding might, obviously, be due to other

<sup>2</sup> The word about bearing the cross (Mt. 10:38) is regarded as subsequent to the confession of Peter (cp. Mk. 8:34).

<sup>3</sup> See *The Student's Life of Jesus*, 242.

causes. And, moreover, it seems decidedly probable that Jesus, who everywhere reveals a profound spiritual acquaintance with the Old Testament and an unparalleled insight into the character of men, had from the beginning of his ministry seen that his way would be one of suffering. The reference to the removal of the bridegroom came very early in the Galilean ministry, and its accent is not uncertain. "The days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken away." From the beginning of the ministry, too, Jesus could not fail to hear a note of defiance and of inextinguishable hatred in the cries of the demoniacs and in the sullen murmurings of the scribes (e.g. Mk. 1:26; 2:7). And finally, there is no proof that, in the early part of his ministry, the eyes of Jesus were holden so that he could not read in the Old Testament what he plainly saw there in the later months of his life. But at the same time it is not necessary to suppose, and it is not probable, that Jesus from the beginning of his ministry foresaw the *details* of his suffering and death. These were not suggested by the Old Testament.

Hence we conclude that the lateness of Jesus' first explicit reference to his death is most probably to be attributed to the condition of his disciples. Mark says that Jesus spoke the word of the kingdom as the disciples were *able to hear it* (Mk. 4:33); and it seems quite certain that they had not been able to hear the announcement of suffering and death earlier than the days at Caesarea Philippi. Even then they were in danger of stumbling at it, and till the last day of the life of Jesus they failed to comprehend it. But while the disciples could not understand the saying about the death of their Messiah, they were at this time inwardly prepared to hear it, because they had come to have a personal attachment to Jesus which was stronger than their attachment to their own peculiar ideal of the Messianic kingdom. They had stood the strain of the last days of the public ministry in Galilee, when the multitudes and many of the disciples of Jesus had turned away from him.<sup>4</sup> They had acquired a strength of conviction which made it safe for Jesus to begin to teach them in regard to his death.

*b. The source of Jesus' thought of death.*

Jesus was clearly led to the thought of his death by his study of the Scriptures. The first suggestion of this fact is found in the account of the transfiguration scene. According to Luke, the three disciples on the mountain saw Moses and Elijah, and heard them talking with Jesus about his decease in Jerusalem (Lk. 9:30-31). One object of this vision which was

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<sup>4</sup> Cp. *The Student's Life of Jesus*, 264-267.

granted to the disciples was to reconcile their minds to the thought of the death of Jesus, which had now for the first time been formally announced to them.<sup>5</sup> It was to suggest to them that, both in the Law and the prophets, the death of the Messiah was foreshadowed, and consequently that their view, which was also the view of the Jews in general, that the Messiah should come in glory and abide forever, was incorrect. But if this thought was communicated to the disciples as the teaching of the Old Testament, whether by a vision or otherwise, we cannot suppose that Jesus had failed to find it there.

Again, as they went down from the mountain, and talked about the appearance and mission of Elijah, Jesus suggested that Elijah's restoration of *all things*, which the scribes taught, was in conflict with the Scriptures concerning the Son of man, which said that he must suffer many things and be set at naught. Manifestly, if Elijah had restored *all things* and had made them ready for the Messiah, there would have been no opposition to him, and he would not have been put to death by the Jews. Consequently that passage of Scripture which Jesus had in mind about the suffering of the Messiah, whatever it may have been, would have failed of fulfillment. It is plain that Jesus, at this time, read his death in the Old Testament, or, if not his *death*, as in Matthew 17:12, at least his suffering of many things and being set at naught (Mk. 9:12). In other words, he was convinced that he must experience an outward and ignominious defeat.

Once more, it is plain from the words of Jesus that the fate of the prophets had suggested that his own fate would be a violent death. In the parable of the Wicked Husbandmen, he represents God's messengers, the prophets, as being beaten and killed, and says that the householder's son — meaning himself — is to share the same fate (Mk. 12:6-8). At an earlier day he said that a prophet could not perish out of Jerusalem, and as this word was occasioned by Herod's threat to kill him while in Perea, he evidently thought of himself as being in the prophetic line. Their fate suggested his.

Again, on the last evening before the crucifixion, Jesus spoke frequently of his death as being foretold in Scripture. Thus, the Son of man goes "as it is written of him" (Mk. 14:21); and, again, "I will smite the shepherd and the sheep shall be scattered" (Mk. 14:27); and, again, "This that is *written* must be fulfilled in me, 'He was numbered with transgressors'" (Lk. 22:37), and, finally, "Thinkest thou that I was not able to pray my Father, and he shall give me presently more than twelve legions of angels? How then shall the Scripture be fulfilled, that *thus* it must be?" (Mt. 26:53-54). It seems plain

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<sup>5</sup> See *The Student's Life of Jesus*, 275-276.

in view of these passages that the thought of suffering, and even the certainty of death itself, was derived by Jesus from the Old Testament, though contemporary Jewish teachers saw there no such doctrine concerning the Messiah.<sup>6</sup> But his own experience from a very early day echoed the voice that came to him out of the Scripture, and confirmed it. He could not fail to see the deep-seated hate of scribe and Pharisee, and he knew that they would gladly kill him (Mk. 2:7; 3:6). He must have seen that his conceptions of the kingdom of God and of the religious life were fundamentally opposed to those of the teachers of his day, and that sooner or later there must be a determined effort to crush him. And thus the *experience* of Jesus was a commentary on the Old Testament text of a suffering Messiah, and as the opposition to him deepened, it may have served to make the word of Scripture plainer and more sure.

It is significant that, as regards the idea of a suffering Messiah, Jesus saw in the Old Testament what neither the Jews of his own day nor of previous generations had seen. To his disciples, who represent the popular belief of his day, the thought of the Messiah's death was intolerable. Jesus did not tell them of his tragic fate until he had bound them to him with strong bonds, and even then there was imminent peril lest their allegiance to him should be shattered against this rock. The words which the fourth evangelist puts upon the lips of the Baptist, "Behold, the lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world" (Jn. 1:29), can by no means be regarded as proving that the Jews were familiar with the thought of a suffering Messiah. The character of the fourth Gospel rather requires that we should regard these words as the evangelist's idealization of the Baptist's testimony; and this is required also by the fact that the *disciples* of the Baptist were the very men who could not bear the thought of the Messiah's suffering and death. It is obvious that Peter and the other apostles who had been pupils of the Baptist had heard nothing of this doctrine while in his school.

c. The meaning which Jesus attached to his death.

We come now to the great question, What significance did Jesus attach to his own sufferings and death? It is plain, as we have seen, that Jesus was led by the Scriptures to regard his death as a necessary part of the Messiah's career; but with the exception of five, or possibly six passages, he gives no suggestion in regard to the *ground* of this necessity, or the spiritual

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<sup>6</sup> Cp. Weber, *Die Lehren des Talmuds*, 333-348; Holtzmann, *Lehrbuch der neutestamentlichen Theologie*, i. 288.

*significance* of his death. In other words, out of something more than twenty Synoptic references by Jesus to his death, about seventeen treat it simply and only as a fact in the Messianic career. But before proceeding to an analysis of the exceptional words in which Jesus refers to the meaning of his death, it will be of advantage to take a rapid survey of the other words which show the character of his habitual allusions to this event. It first appears as a fact which will cause *sorrow* to his disciples. "Days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in that day" (Mk. 2:20). The three solemn and formal announcements which are given by all the Synoptists are simply announcements of the fact of death with more or fewer details of suffering and shame (Mk. 8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34). In the first, the *necessity* of Jesus' death and resurrection is explicitly stated, but in none of the passages is there any allusion to the meaning of the event. On the mount of transfiguration Moses and Elijah were seen talking with Jesus about his decease (Lk. 9:30-31), and as they came down from the mount Jesus charged the disciples not to tell what they had seen until the Son of man should rise from the dead (Mk. 9:9). But in neither case is there a word of explanation. Nor is there when, in the same hour, he said that it was according to Scripture that the Son of man should suffer and be set at naught (Mk. 9:12). On one occasion certain Pharisees told Jesus that Herod desired to kill him (Lk. 13:31). Jesus said, in his reply, that he must go on his way that day and the next because a prophet could not perish out of Jerusalem (Lk. 13:33). In the parable of the Wicked Husbandmen Jesus alluded to his own death at the hands of the Jews, when he said that the husbandmen killed the son of the owner of the vineyard (Mk. 12:6-8); and when he was anointed in the house of Simon he said that the act was an anticipation of the final anointing of his body for burial (Mk. 14:8). Then, on the last evening, he said that he had greatly desired to eat the Passover before he should suffer (Lk. 22:15), and, again, when speaking of the traitor, he said, "The Son of man *goes* as it is written concerning him" (Mk. 14:21). Here, also, belongs the word that the Scripture must be fulfilled in him which says, "He was numbered with transgressors" (Lk. 22:37). And finally, after the resurrection, Jesus told his disciples that the death and resurrection of the Messiah were *written*, that is, of course, in the Old Testament (Lk. 24:46). But in all these passages it is simply the *fact* of death which comes into view; nothing is said of the *meaning* of the fact. It is sometimes referred to as necessary and as foretold in the Scriptures, but nothing is said of its place in the Messianic work of Jesus.

Such, then, is the character of the habitual references which Jesus made to his sufferings and death. He spoke of them as approaching facts, but without explanation.

We pass now to the consideration of those exceptional words of Jesus in the first three Gospels, which involve more or less of explanation and comment on the fact of his death. And first, we notice that some of these words make the significance of the death of Jesus *personal to himself*. This is the suggestion of the message which Jesus bade the Pharisees take to Herod, "Go, say to this fox, Lo, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day *I am perfected*" (Lk. 13:32). This saying is obscure. If with Meyer<sup>7</sup> and others we understand Jesus to say that on the third day he will finish *the work of casting out demons and performing cures*, then of course there is here no direct allusion to death; and if with Godet<sup>8</sup> we understand him to say that on the third day he will finish *his life*, then plainly there is no allusion in the verse to the significance of his death. But we cannot regard either of these interpretations as well supported. For we find that in every case where this verb is used in the New Testament, with a personal subject and without an object, as here, it is used of a moral and spiritual process. So Jesus used it once, when he prayed that his disciples might be perfected into one (Jn. 17:23), and Paul says that he does not count himself made perfect (Phil. 3:12). The author of Hebrews uses this same word three times when speaking of Jesus (Heb. 2:10; 5:8-9; 7:28), and five times when speaking of other persons (e.g. Heb. 9:9), and in every case he thinks of a moral or spiritual perfecting.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, this meaning which seems to be required by New Testament usage suits the present context as well as the other. Jesus says, "I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I am *perfected*." That means that Herod cannot interrupt his Messianic work. It will go forward to its consummation at the appointed time. And that consummation will be in some sense his own personal consummation. The character of this reference to his death is similar to that of the well-known reference in John, where he speaks of the hour of his death as the hour of his *glorification* (Jn. 12:23). Doubtless the Pharisees did not understand this word of Jesus; and if it was reported to Herod, it must have been fully unintelligible to him; but this is not against the correctness of our interpretation. For the main purport of the reply of Jesus

<sup>7</sup> See *Handbuch Über die Evangelien des Markus and Lukas*, fünfte Auflage, 453.

<sup>8</sup> See *Commentaire sur L'Évangile de St. Luc*, Tome second, 154-155.

<sup>9</sup> Cp. Plummer, *Commentary on Luke*.



was perfectly clear. He told Herod, in effect, that he should keep right on in his Messianic work until the appointed time was fulfilled. And the one obscure term which he used had a subtle fitness in view of Herod's desire. He wanted to kill Jesus, and so destroy his influence. The death of Jesus would be, in his thought as in that of the Pharisees, the end of him and of his work. Jesus in his reply intimates that his death is his perfecting; it will make him the finished and absolute Messiah. Thus, in this passage, Jesus thinks of his death not in relation to others, but only as a necessary part of his Messianic experience and discipline.

Another word of Jesus which suggests a similar thought in regard to the significance of his death is that in which he speaks of his approaching baptism (Lk. 12:49-50). "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straightened till it be accomplished!" (cp. Mk. 10:38; Mt. 20:22). If he thinks of his sufferings and death as his *baptism*, then he must necessarily regard them as having a significance personal to himself. The very figure seems to require this, for a man's baptism is for himself. It may have most important consequences for others, but only by way of the man who experiences it.

The remaining word of Jesus which belongs in this class is also found in Luke's Gospel and nowhere else. It is the word spoken to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus. "Behoved it not the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into his glory?" (Lk. 24:26, 46). Here the suffering of death appears to be regarded as a necessary stage in the Messiah's progress to glory. This is the only aspect of it to which reference is here made, and this, therefore, seems to have been the aspect which Jesus regarded as of chief importance to his disciples at that time. They were to see that the death of their Messiah was not an accident, and not a fact unfavorable to the Messiahship of Jesus; but that it was rather a clear part of the divine plan and a necessary preparation for Messianic glory.

It remains to consider the Synoptic words of Jesus which refer to his death as having significance *for others than himself*. There are but two of these sayings, for the word about the sign of Jonah has, as we have seen, nothing to teach on this subject. The first of the two passages is the word which Jesus spoke to his disciples as they journeyed for the last time toward Jerusalem. He declares that the Son of man came to give his life a *ransom* for many (Mk. 10:45; Mt. 20:28). He had just laid upon his disciples the necessity of serving one another. Their spirit must be the opposite of that which exists in the world, where great ones exercise authority and lord it over the masses. The ground which Jesus gives for this law of service is his own example. *He* came to serve; therefore his disciples should serve. Now the

example of the Son of man apparently covers both the infinitive clauses in this weighty sentence. He came to minister and to give his life a ransom for many. The giving of his life is the final and culminating act of ministering. It is the highest evidence that he has a true spirit of service. Thus Jesus refers to his own life as furnishing a law to his disciples, and it seems impossible to interpret the passage as meaning that the disciples can imitate Jesus in serving, but not in laying down their lives. This interpretation would run directly against more than one explicit word of Jesus. He repeatedly told his disciples that they must be willing to lay down life for his sake and the Gospel's (e.g. Mt. 10:21-22). He said that if anyone would come after him, he must take up the cross (Mk. 8:34), and that in order to save one's life, one must lose it (Mk. 8:35). Thus, the teaching of Jesus elsewhere confirms the natural, grammatical understanding of Mark 10:45, which makes the example of Jesus that is to be imitated by his disciples an example which consists in serving *and* in laying down life as a ransom. Thus the logical connection of the verse with the preceding seems to mark off, at the outset, the general meaning of the word *ransom*.

It is to be noticed, in the next place, that the thought of the word *ransom*, since neither this term nor any word from the same root is elsewhere used by Jesus, must be understood in the light of his teaching in regard to the conditions of his salvation. Now the word *ransom* implies that those for whom it is given are in a state of bondage.<sup>10</sup> This bondage in which the many are held can be understood, in the teaching of Jesus, in one way only: it is the bondage of sin.<sup>11</sup> Jesus gives his life to deliver them from this bondage. It is not said that he gives his life *in place* of the lives of many, though the Greek preposition here used often has this meaning. That cannot be the sense of the word here, for the many have no longer lives to give, if they would. They are in bondage; their lives are already given away to sin. In the language of Jesus used elsewhere, they are *dead*. It is impossible, then, to introduce here the thought that the life of Jesus is given *instead* of the lives of many. Moreover, in cases of exchange, as when Esau sold his birthright *for* one mess of meat (Heb. 12:16), and Jesus endured the cross *for* the joy that was set before him (Heb. 12:2), the preposition employed is the same that we have in the verse under consideration, where it is said that Jesus came to give his life a ransom *for* many. This usage, therefore, suggests that Jesus gives up his life and gets *the many* in return. They become his possession, won by his sacrifice in their

<sup>10</sup> Cp. Wendt, *Die Lehre Jesu*, ii. 511-513; Beyschlag, *Neutestamentliche Theologie*, i. 154.

<sup>11</sup> Cp. Holtzmann, *Lehrbuch der neutestamentlichen Theologie*, i. 292.

behalf, or, as the fourth Gospel says, *drawn* by the power of Jesus when he is lifted up (Jn. 12:32). So the thought of the passage under consideration is that of delivering men from the bondage of sin, winning them to discipleship, by the laying down of Jesus' life.

Now Jesus had already been accomplishing this very end by means of his Messianic ministry. He had made the Father known, and through the influence of his teaching and his presence men had come into possession of a new life. They had been *ransomed*, and had found rest unto their souls (Mk. 2:5; Mt. 10:40; 11:25, etc.). A personal allegiance to Jesus had been developed in them which was sufficiently strong to control their thought and life. If, then, by his revelation of the Father he had led men into the kingdom of heaven during his ministry, he could do no higher thing by his death. He might conceivably ransom *more* by his death than he had ransomed by his ministry; but the deliverance would be the same *kind* of deliverance that he had already accomplished in his life.

We cannot say, therefore, that when Jesus speaks of giving his life a ransom for many, he represents his death, *apart from his life*, as *absolutely* necessary to the salvation of men. He had taught that God freely forgives the penitent, and he had himself welcomed many penitent souls into the kingdom of God without any allusion to his own death. We are, therefore, plainly constrained to say that, so far as Mark 10:45 is concerned, Jesus regarded his death as a service of the same sort as the service of his life. It naturally had an intenser meaning than belonged to any other single act of his divine ministry, for the highest that a man has to give in proof of his love is his life; but the meaning, though more intense, is not essentially different. If the death of Jesus was necessary, so in like manner was his life necessary. If his death ransomed, so, also, had his life.

The other passage concerning the significance which, in the thought of Jesus, his death had for others than himself, is the account of the Lord's Supper, "the weightiest, most precise, and defining expression which he has yet used."<sup>12</sup>

Of the bread which he took before the wine he said: "This is my body" (Mk. 14:22; Mt. 26:26), or "This is my body given for you" (Lk. 22:19), and "Do this in remembrance of me" (Lk. 22:19), that is, *eat* this in remembrance of me.

The bread represents his body which is *given* for the disciples, that is, naturally, given to *suffering and death*. This thought is required by the

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<sup>12</sup> See Fairbairn, *Expositor*, 1897, vol. v., 25.

context. The body must needs be broken, or given to suffering and death, in order that the blood may be shed, and the shedding of his blood is necessarily presupposed by the symbolic use which is made of it in the subsequent verses. In Mark and Matthew this thought is not expressed. The bread is simply given to the disciples, and they eat it. But the very fact that Jesus gives the bread to them implies that it is *for their good*, the thought that is expressed in Luke and Paul (Lk. 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24); and the fact that the bread, which symbolizes the body of Jesus, must of necessity be broken into pieces in order that each disciple may partake, implies the thought, which is expressed in Luke, that it is given to suffering and death. And since the bread symbolizes the body of Jesus, to partake of it inevitably turns the thought to him, and so the act has a memorial character, as Luke and Paul explicitly teach.

We have, then, in all the Synoptic narratives, expressed or implied, these thoughts regarding the body of Jesus which is symbolized by the bread: first, that the giving of the body of Jesus to death is *for the good* of the disciples; second, that they experience the benefit of this act of his as they *do the thing that is symbolized by the eating of the bread*. Now since the bread represents his body given to death for them, to eat the bread symbolizes the spiritual appropriation of Jesus as one who had given his life for them. And, third, we have the thought that eating this bread is a *memorial* service which brings him to their minds.

Now, as far as the meaning of the death of Jesus is concerned, this first part of the Lord's Supper contains only the general thought that it is *for the good* of the disciples. There is great emphasis given to this thought by the fact that Jesus, formally and in a most sacred hour, instituted the observance. This emphasis is further heightened by the circumstance that the Lord's Supper is the *only* outward observance which Jesus did enjoin upon his disciples.

But this thought that the death of Jesus is *for the good* of the disciples is not here more nearly defined. *How* it is for their good is not said. There is indeed a suggestion in the fact that the bread must be *broken* in order that the disciples may partake of it; and the suggestion is this, that the death of Jesus is necessary in order that his disciples may appropriate him. But this suggestion, thus stated, is not true, for the disciples had already appropriated Jesus. They had given their allegiance to him, and he was their hope and joy. They had appreciated his love, and fed upon it. But they had not appreciated it as it would be possible for them to do in case he should die for them. We may then hold, as a suggestion of the text, that the death of Jesus was to be

for the good of the disciples, because it would *promote* their appropriation of him, their use of him as spiritual nourishment. This suggestion appears to be confirmed by the service of Jesus as a whole. For the very aim of his work was that men should accept him as Messiah, and then live in obedience to him. To this end he gave himself to them in a continuous service of love. The culminating act in this life of love was the laying down of life itself. All his ministries had been for the good of the disciples, just as this was. All had been for the purpose of binding them to him and reproducing his spirit in them. But the laying down of life for them, as the last and supreme manifestation of his love, was for that reason peculiarly adapted to strengthen their personal attachment to him, and therefore peculiarly adapted to enable them to appropriate his spirit.

This suggestion, then, which the text itself furnishes in regard to the meaning of the death of Jesus, as far as the first act in the Lord's Supper involves the thought of death, commends itself because it views the death of Jesus as in harmony with his life. And the very fact that Jesus did not explain how his death was for the good of the disciples is a strong argument for the view that this *how* must be understood in the light of the life of Jesus as a whole. Had its meaning, in his mind, been foreign to the general teaching of his ministry, then he could not have left it to be inferred.

We pass now to the second part of the Lord's Supper in its bearing upon the thought which Jesus had in regard to the significance of his death for others. All the Synoptists agree that Jesus referred to his blood as *covenant* blood (Mk. 14:24; Mt. 26:28; Lk. 22:20). Mark and Matthew say, "This is my blood of the covenant," and Luke says, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood." In speaking of his blood as blood of the *new* covenant, Jesus recognizes a parallelism between it and the blood of some well-known *old* covenant.<sup>13</sup> Now the great covenant of the olden time was the covenant between Jehovah and Israel by the hand of Moses at Mt. Sinai (Ex. 19:24) Jehovah said to the people through Moses, "If ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me from among all peoples" (Ex. 19:5); and all the people answered and said, "All that Jehovah hath spoken will we do" (Ex. 19:8). Then again, after some days, in which Jehovah gave to Moses the ten words and other commandments, Moses came to the people and told them what Jehovah had said; and they all answered with one voice and said, "All the words which Jehovah hath spoken

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<sup>13</sup> Cp. Wendt, *Die Lehre Jesu*, ii. 518; Holtzmann, *Lehrbuch der neutestamentlichen Theologie*, i. 297.

will we do" (Ex. 24:3). Then Moses built an altar under Mt. Sinai, and offered burnt-offerings and peace-offerings unto Jehovah (Ex. 24:4, 5). He took the blood, sprinkled half of it on the altar, and after reading again the words of Jehovah, to which the people responded as before, he sprinkled the other half of the blood upon the people, saying, "Behold, the blood of the covenant which Jehovah hath made with you concerning all these words" (Ex. 24:8).

The blood which Moses sprinkled upon the people was a visible token that they pledged themselves to be obedient unto the Lord. It was the solemn seal of their covenant.<sup>14</sup> The covenant was made when the people accepted all the words of the Lord and thrice promised to be obedient to them. Consequently the blood which was afterward sprinkled upon them was not the *ground* or basis of the covenant.<sup>15</sup> It was a solemn ratification of the compact. It sacredly bound the two parties, Jehovah and Israel, to keep their promises to each other. There is no intimation whatever in the story that this blood was designed to have any purifying influence upon the people.

Accordingly, when Jesus spoke of his blood as blood of the new covenant, the presumption is that he thought of it as a solemn seal of an already existing covenant. His death, therefore, is not here presented as an act by virtue of which men are admitted into the favor of God, but as an act which solemnly assures them that they *are* now the objects of His favor, their covenant with God being sealed with the blood of Jesus.<sup>16</sup> This thought is not only made probable by the Old Testament scene which the language of Jesus calls up, but it is also required by the fact that Jesus addressed these words to men who were already members of his kingdom. The significance of this fact is very great. By their acceptance of Jesus and his revelation of the Father, the disciples had become as houses built upon a rock (Mt. 7:24), their names had been written in heaven (Lk. 10:20), and they had chosen the good part which should not be taken away from them (Lk. 10:42). When the Israelites accepted the book of the covenant and said, "All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient," they entered into covenant with Jehovah. So when men accepted Jesus as the Messiah sent by the Father, they entered into covenant with God and God with them; and they received the blessings of forgiveness and life, which the Father sent Jesus to communicate. The wine which symbolized the blood of Jesus was a visible pledge of the covenant which Jesus had established between his Father and his disciples. It was a solemn seal and ratification. The authority of the pledge was the authority of

<sup>14</sup> Cp. Dillmann, *Commentar über die Bücher Exodus und Leviticus*.

<sup>15</sup> Cp. Delitzsch, *Briefe an die Hebraer*, 414.

<sup>16</sup> See Fairbairn, *Expositor*, 1897, vol. v., 28.

the Messiah put in the most intense form possible, for the pledge was his own life-blood freely shed. As they accepted the wine which symbolized that blood, they thereby pledged themselves to God in the most solemn and sacred manner conceivable. The blood was the blood of their Messiah, their redeemer, their personal and divine friend. A covenant sealed with his blood bound them as nothing else could. The motive of gratitude to Jesus and love for him — a motive which would be renewed with every observance of the Supper — must hold them to their allegiance with unwasting force. This covenant was a covenant of love, a covenant which involved a spiritual apprehension of Jesus as the Messiah, a covenant to be true to God as revealed in Christ; and so it was indeed a *new* covenant, as Luke calls it (cp. Jer. 31:31).

But this statement does not exhaust the significance of the wine, or the blood which it symbolizes. It is, indeed, a divine seal on a covenant of infinite love; but this is not all. The blood of the old covenant was *sprinkled* upon the people, or rather upon a few who represented the entire host; the blood of the new covenant, under the symbol of wine, is *drunk* by each disciple. This act is obviously parallel to that of eating the bread, which symbolizes the body of Jesus. The blood which seals the covenant has also the profounder significance of suggesting how the disciples can remain loyal to the covenant, namely, by appropriating the very life of Jesus. Partaking of the wine is not different from partaking of the bread, unless we regard it as a more intense symbol.<sup>17</sup> Each act is symbolic of a spiritual appropriation of Jesus. But the appropriation of him is emphasized by the two symbols of food and drink, for the thought is thus expressed that the *entire* spiritual nourishment of the disciple is found in Jesus the Messiah. Therefore the significance of the death of Jesus, as seen through the second part of the Lord's Supper, is the significance of the first part, namely that his death promotes the appropriation of him; and it is also the significance of a *seal* upon the covenant which Jesus has established between God and his disciples.

It remains to consider a statement which Matthew has in regard to the significance of the blood of Jesus as symbolized by the wine (Mt. 26:28). He says this blood is shed *unto remission of sins*. It seems probable that these words are an addition by the evangelist, or, at any rate, are not words of Jesus. They are not only wanting in Mark and Luke, but also in Paul, whose teaching concerning the blood of Jesus would hardly have allowed him to omit these words from his account of the institution of the Supper, if he had known them

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<sup>17</sup> Cp. Hoffmann, *Die Abendmahlsgedanken Jesu Christi*, 96.

and had regarded them as spoken by Jesus. Moreover, these words seem to obscure the reference to the blood as blood of the *covenant*, which are common to all the four versions of the institution of the Lord's Supper; for the blood of the covenant, historically understood, was not "unto remission of sins." Further, these words of Matthew seem not to be in harmony with Luke's version, for he says, "shed *for you*," that is, for the *disciples*, whose sins had been forgiven already.<sup>18</sup>

But while the genuineness of these words of Matthew may be called in question, the thought which they contain is not foreign to the teaching of Jesus. They do not suggest that forgiveness *necessarily* rests upon the death of Jesus, and on this alone. Matthew says that the blood is shed *unto* forgiveness of sins. He does not say that the blood *must* be shed in order that sin may be forgiven. Jesus was speaking to those whose sins had been pardoned, and not on the ground of his death. Some of them became his disciples before he had even alluded to his death. To interpret the statement of Matthew to mean that the blood of Jesus *must* be shed in order that sin may be forgiven, would be to make Jesus overthrow his own Gospel of the fatherhood of God, and would set his word and his practice in sharp conflict with each other.

We say that Matthew's words "unto remission of sins" do not contain a thought which is foreign to the teaching of Jesus. Since the death of Jesus was a part of his Messianic work, it could be said of this, as of his entire ministry, that it was *unto* remission of sins. Forgiveness of sins was the first great end which the Messiah sought to realize, for this must precede the reign of God in the heart. The entire revelation of the Father which Jesus gave was unto remission of sins. His deeds of love and mercy were, in an important sense, unto forgiveness of sins. He came to call sinners to repentance, to seek and to save that which was lost; and so we might write over his entire ministry, as expressing the first stage in the establishment of the kingdom of God, these words, "Unto remission of sins." In this sense, and in this sense only, can the retention of Matthew's words be justified.

d. The teaching of Jesus in regard to his death according to the fourth Gospel.

In passing from the Synoptists to the fourth Gospel we are soon impressed by two facts in regard to the present topic of study: first, by the

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<sup>18</sup> Hoffmann, *Die Abendmahlsgedanken Jesu Christi*, 68-69, rejects the words *for you*, saying that Jesus did not lay down his life for his disciples, but for unbelievers.



greater frequency of the references of Jesus to his death; and, second, by the simplicity and uniformity of their content. Jesus speaks of his death in one way only: it is an act of *self-revelation*. And hence the purpose of his death is not different from the purpose of his life.

The first allusion that Jesus makes to his death in the fourth Gospel is obscure. It was on the occasion of the first Passover in his ministry, and he was in the temple. The Jews asked for a sign of his authority after he had cleansed the temple, and the reply of Jesus was, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will build it up" (Jn. 2:19). If the temple was a figure for the body of Jesus, as the evangelist thought (Jn. 2:21), then Jesus said, in substance, that his resurrection would be a proof of his Messianic authority. His death is, of course, involved, but nothing is directly suggested in regard to its meaning. This saying, therefore, is similar in its main purport to the Synoptic word regarding the sign of Jonah.

Again, Jesus says that the Son of man must be *lifted up*, as Moses lifted up the brazen serpent in the wilderness (Jn. 3:14). Now the serpent was lifted up on a pole in order that it might be *seen*, because the sight of it was a divinely appointed remedy for the bite of the fiery serpents (Num. 21:8). Accordingly, the lifting up of the Son of man, which Jesus puts in parallelism with the lifting up of the brazen serpent, is naturally thought of as an event that is necessary in order that he may be made manifest, that his character may be known. This view is definitely established by another passage which speaks of the lifting up of the Son of man. At the feast of Tabernacles, in the last year of the ministry of Jesus, he said to the Jews, "When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he" (Jn. 8:28). Their knowledge of his Messiahship is thus thought of as a consequence of his being lifted up; and we may hold that this *consequence* shows the purpose of his being lifted up, or at least *one* purpose of it. Thus the meaning of the death of Jesus, according to this passage, is that it makes his Messianic character known. It reveals him to men.

Now it is true that the crucifixion, considered by itself, did not have any such effect as this upon the Jews. His crucifixion, regarded from the human point of view, marked the lowest ebb of his cause. But the crucifixion is not to be separated from its great and necessary concomitants — the resurrection, the ascension, and the sending of the Spirit. It was all these events together which constituted the final proof of the Messiahship of Jesus. Yet inasmuch as his death was the fact which revealed his inmost spirit, not his resurrection, or ascension, this might surely be put forward as the vital and

determining element in the proof of Messiahship which Jesus said that the Jews should have.

Again, we have the thought of self-revelation by death when Jesus says that he lays down his life for the sheep (Jn. 10:11-18; cp. 15:13). The statement that he lays down his life is made in proof of the declaration that he is the *good* shepherd. The hireling is proven to be a hireling, when the wolf comes, for he leaves the sheep and flees. But the good shepherd is manifested as such by the sacrifice of himself in behalf of the sheep. Thus the fact of death is adduced in showing the character of the shepherd, and not because of its significance with regard to the deliverance of the sheep.

Once more we have the same general view of his death when Jesus speaks of the hour of his *glorification* (Jn. 12:23). It is plain from the context that he is thinking of the hour of his death. This will glorify him, he says, and will also glorify the name of his Father (Jn. 12:27-28). *How* the suffering of death will glorify him is not said, but it may be safely inferred from the seventeenth chapter, where the glorification of Jesus and the Father, both past and future, is accomplished through the manifestation of their character and the acceptance of their revelation by men. The cross glorifies Jesus because it reveals his love, and as it reveals him it reveals the Father. Now since the lifting up of Jesus is his glorification, he can say that, when lifted up, he will *draw* all men unto himself (Jn. 12:32). For when men see him as he is, when they know his heart, they are drawn to him. According to this passage, therefore, the death of Jesus is regarded as the culminating manifestation of his character. It differs from his acts of mercy and words of love only in degree. It is the same essential thought, but written in his own life-blood.

And it is to be especially noticed in this connection that, according to the words of Jesus in the fourth Gospel, the sole significance of his death in relation to God is that God is "glorified" thereby. There is no suggestion of any other meaning which it has. It glorifies Jesus, it glorifies the Father, even as the Father had already been glorified by the life of Jesus. There is here no intimation that the death of Jesus changes the attitude of God toward men. It glorifies Him in that it *reveals* Him. As the death of Jesus did not change *his* attitude toward men while glorifying him, no more, according to this Gospel, did it change the attitude of *God* toward men. It is not an event that *secures* His love, but an event that reveals and seals His love. No other aspect of his death in its relation to God is touched by Jesus.

And it is to be remembered here for what purpose John wrote. It was that his readers might believe that Jesus was the Christ, and believing might have

life in his name (Jn. 20:31). Therefore we must hold that, in his presentation of the work of Jesus, he mentioned every element which, in his judgment, was essential to the securing of life in Jesus' name. Hence, in his view, the vital aspect of the death of Jesus, both in regard to Jesus and in regard to God, was that it revealed the character both of Jesus and of God.

In the saying about the grain of wheat (Jn. 12:24-25), the suggestion is that as the death of the individual kernel is followed by much fruit, so the death of Jesus will have much fruitage. But the simile does not suggest how it comes about that the death of Jesus produces a rich harvest. This question must be answered, therefore, in the light of the other passages in the fourth Gospel relating to the death of Jesus; and the answer from this source is that the death of Jesus brings rich fruitage of disciples because it makes his inmost spirit and character known.

There remains yet one word of Jesus in the fourth Gospel which involves a reference to his death, and that is the word which was spoken in the synagogue in Capernaum about *eating his flesh and drinking his blood* (Jn. 6:51-63). This passage may be said to imply the *necessity* of his death; for though the figure of eating his flesh and drinking his blood contains no essential thought which is not involved in *believing*, he could nevertheless hardly have used the figure except in the certain anticipation of his own death. But if the passage suggests the necessity of his death, it also suggests that it is necessary in order that he may be appropriated. It has no other suggestion in regard to the ground of the necessity. The prominent thought of the entire discourse is not the *death* of Jesus, but the *appropriation* of him. His death is subordinate to this thought, and is mentioned only to give to it an intensely vivid expression. But the appropriation of Jesus is promoted by his death because that death, being the supreme manifestation of his love, helps men to understand him and draws them to him.

It is obvious that this thought of the death of Jesus is essentially the same as the thought of his words regarding the bread and the wine of the Last Supper, if we except the reference to the blood as blood of the covenant. Eating the bread and drinking the wine, as emblems of the body and the blood of Jesus, are expressive of the same fundamental thought that we have in the sixth chapter of John, namely, a personal, vital appropriation of Jesus.

Such, then, is the view of his death which Jesus presents in the fourth Gospel. It is the glorious consummation of the revelation of Jesus, and so of the character of the Father. It belongs in the same class with the words and works of Jesus. It is not presented as being absolutely necessary to the deliverance of men from sin, for Jesus said to his disciples on the last

evening, "Ye are clean" (Jn. 13:10; 15:3). They had already been bathed by the hearty acceptance of Jesus as their Saviour and Lord. Jesus was already glorified in them (Jn. 17:10), because they had received the words which the Father had given to him, and had believed that he was sent from God (Jn. 17:8). Their sins had been forgiven, and as in the Synoptists, so here, this forgiveness is not brought by Jesus into connection with his death. Therefore we say that the death of Jesus is not presented in the fourth Gospel as necessary to salvation except as his self-revelation *in general* was necessary to salvation. It was a part of his Messianic work and his Messianic revelation of the Father, the most intense part, and that which best represents the spirit of it all; but the fourth Gospel does not attribute to it a necessity which does not belong equally to the ministry of Jesus in his holy life and divine teaching.