

The Person of Jesus the Messiah*

Part Two

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IV. THE TEACHING OF THE FOURTH GOSPEL

a. The human consciousness of Jesus.

The thought of Jesus regarding his own person occupies a much larger space in the fourth Gospel than in the Synoptists. This is in keeping with the confessed purpose of the author, which is to prove that Jesus is the Messiah (Jn. 20:31). The kingdom of heaven, which is prominent in the Synoptists, gives place now to the King. In the teaching of Jesus regarding his person, which we find in John, there are marked peculiarities, and the emphasis upon some points differs notably from the Synoptic presentation; and yet I believe that no injustice is done to this teaching by the statement that it follows the same fundamental lines that we have found in the Synoptists.

And, first, there is *the truly human consciousness*. This is less prominent, as compared with the consciousness of Messiahship, than it is in the earlier Gospels, and this fact has sometimes led to the unjust conclusion that the humanity of Jesus is suppressed in the fourth Gospel.¹ In reality, however, the fourth Gospel, though especially concerned with the Messiahship of Jesus, contains an even more forcible affirmation of his humanity than do the Synoptists. I am thinking now of the words of Jesus himself, and not of the observations made by the author, though these, in which Jesus is represented, for example, as being *wearied* at Jacob's well

¹ Cp. Holtzmann, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, 455.

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(Jn. 4:6), and as *weeping* at the tomb of Lazarus (Jn. 11:35), do not betray a desire to deny the genuineness of Jesus' humanity. But let us consider simply the language which is attributed to Jesus. As in the Synoptists, so here, he ranks himself with men. He says to the Jews, "Ye seek to kill me, a *man* that hath told you the truth" (Jn. 8:40). He declares that the very reason why Messianic judgement has been given to him is his *humanity* (Jn. 5:27). He is a *son of man*, that is, a human being. He speaks of *his* will as distinct from God's will (Jn. 5:30; 6:38), though it is never opposed to that (Jn. 5:30; 8:29). He includes himself with the Jews as one of those who know what they *worship* (Jn. 4:22), thus taking a human position over against God. In line with this, he speaks of God as *his* God (Jn. 20:17), and as the *only* true God (Jn. 17:3). He *prays* to Him, as in the Synoptists. It is true that we see Jesus in prayer fewer times in the fourth Gospel than in the three earlier ones, and on two occasions he says that the words of prayer which he has spoken are on account of those who stand by (Jn. 11:42; 17:13). Once when an audible response was made to his prayer, he said it came not for his sake but for the sake of others (Jn. 12:30). But these features of the fourth Gospel are not important. One prayer is as significant in regard to the consciousness of Jesus as ten or twenty would be. The repeated statement that his audible prayer was for the sake of those around him, by no means shows that it was not *genuine* prayer. When he says that the audible answer to a particular prayer was not for his sake, but on account of others, he does not intimate that he could do without *any* answer whatsoever. He only says that he did not need this particular answer. He spoke a word at the tomb of Lazarus which implies the same life of prayer that we find in the Synoptists, namely this, "I knew that thou hearest me *always*" (Jn. 11:42). This word *always* surely implies that he was in the *habit* of praying.

While dependence is clearly implied in the simple fact of prayer, it is also repeatedly affirmed by Jesus in the most explicit terms. Twice the Jews accused him of claiming to be God (Jn. 5:18; 10:33). In the first case, Jesus in his reply declared his complete dependence upon God. He says and does only what the Father shows and teaches him (Jn. 5:19-30). And the reason why the Father shows him what to do is that the Father *loves* him — an ethical, not a metaphysical, ground (Jn. 5:20).

In the second instance where he was accused of making himself God, his reply was different but equally clear and important. He said that the Scriptures justified his language, for they call certain men *gods*, to whom the word of God came. The reference is to Psalm 82:6, where we read: "I said,

Ye are gods, and all of you sons of the Most High.” The word of God, which Jesus says “came” to these persons, is the word which appointed them rulers over God’s people,² and hence made them in a degree His representatives. If now the Scripture, which cannot be broken, calls these earthly rulers *gods*, it was certainly lawful for Jesus, whom the Father had consecrated to the Messianic office, to call himself God’s Son. Thus he rests his right to the term on his divine appointment, and not on his nature. So in both these most significant controversies, where Jesus is accused of making himself God, we have from him only expressions of a human and Messianic consciousness (comp. Jn. 10:29; 14:28). He affirms his absolute dependence upon God, and rests his claim to the title *Son of God* on his appointment to the Messianic office. Therefore we conclude that, while in the fourth Gospel there is relatively less said of the humanity of Jesus than in the Synoptists, the genuineness of the humanity is even more forcibly affirmed.

b. Jesus’ consciousness of union with the Father.

The consciousness of *perfect moral union* with God is far more prominent in the fourth Gospel than in the Synoptists. It is here directly and repeatedly affirmed, while in the Synoptists it is only implied. There are two general forms in which the consciousness of a unique moral union with God expresses itself in the fourth Gospel. First, there are the declarations which Jesus makes regarding his own will and regarding the character of his life. Thus he says that he finds his inward satisfaction in doing the will of God (Jn. 4:34), and that it is impossible for him to do anything of himself (Jn. 5:19, 30). This inability to do anything of himself is *moral*, for Jesus has a will of his own (Jn. 5:30; 6:38); but it is completely devoted to the Father. He does *always* the things which are pleasing to God (Jn. 8:29, 55). He is sure that God *always* hears and grants his petitions, and this assurance implies that he is conscious of unbroken obedience to God (Jn. 11:42). On one occasion he was troubled and seemed in doubt what to ask of the Father, but his holy *purpose* did not waver (Jn. 12:27). The question arose within him whether he should ask the Father to save him from the approaching suffering, but when he recognized that the Father had plainly led him to this suffering, he said, “Glorify thy name.” This passage, like the Synoptic scene in Gethsemane, shows the working of a truly human mind, but a mind which was at the same time ideal in its loyalty to the will of God.

² Cp. Meyer’s *Commentary on John*.

A consciousness of perfect moral union with the Father is further expressed in Jesus' statement that he had kept the Father's commandment (Jn. 15:10), and had accomplished the work which the Father had given him to do (Jn. 17:4); for a perfect keeping of the Father's commandment, and a perfect accomplishment of the Father's work, cannot have rested upon an imperfect moral union with the Father. Here belongs also the great word which Jesus spoke concerning the function of the Spirit, that he, when he should come, would convince the world that Jesus had in mind his own righteousness (Jn. 16:8-10). The sin of which he will convince men is the sin of not believing in Jesus; the judgement of which he will convince them is the judgement which they are to share with the prince of the world because like him they are opposed to Jesus. In like manner, he will convince the world, not in regard to the righteousness in the abstract, but in regard to the righteousness and consequently the truth of his claim.

Secondly, there is a large class of passages in which Jesus directly affirms a unique union with the Father. These passages constitute a marked feature of the fourth Gospel. They are such a lofty expression of the claim of Jesus that on two occasions they caused his enemies to bring against him the charge of blasphemy (Jn. 5:18; 10:33). The fundamental claim is contained in the words, "I and the Father are one" (Jn. 10:30). This appears in various forms, as, "The Father is in me and I in the Father" (Jn. 10:38), "He that beholdeth me beholdeth Him that sent me" (Jn. 12:45), and, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (Jn. 14:9). It is made abundantly plain in the words of Jesus himself that this union with the Father is a union of *character*, that it is ethical and not metaphysical. This is the only inference to be drawn from the saying, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (Jn. 12:45; 14:9). For plainly the *seeing* which is here meant is not physical, for the Father is spirit (Jn. 4:24), and as such is invisible to eyes of flesh. This seeing is defined in part in John 6:40, where Jesus says, "Every one who beholdeth the Son and believeth on him hath eternal life." "Beholding him" evidently means looking through that which is outward and material to that which is within: it is spiritual apprehension. The Jews beheld Jesus and his works, and yet they did not behold the real Jesus, the spirit and character of the man. Therefore in the passage in question, Jesus says in substance, he that hath seen my *character* hath seen the Father.

Again, after mentioning his words and works which the Jews had seen, Jesus said that they had seen and hated both him and his Father (Jn. 15:22, 24). This can mean only that the words and works of Jesus manifested the character of the Father, as they also manifested the character of Jesus; and

consequently to hate these words and works was to hate God. Once more, Jesus indicates that his union with the Father is a pure union of character when he prays that his apostles may be one as he and the Father are one (Jn. 17:11), and again that all believers may be one “even as Thou, Father, art in me and I in Thee; that they also may be in us” (Jn. 17:21). And then, according to another verse, this unity of the disciples which Jesus brought about was purely *ethical* and *religious*. They became one through their common love and loyalty to him, one in the purpose and the spirit of their lives. This is the only sense in which they became one; and the language of Jesus makes this unity the exact counterpart of his union with the Father. It is impossible, therefore, from the standpoint of Jesus, to predicate of his union with the Father anything which cannot be predicated of the *ideal* union of his disciples.

Finally, Jesus indicates that his union with the Father is purely ethical when he represents it as ethically *conditioned*. Thus Jesus gives, as the reason why the Father is with him, the fact that he always does the things which are pleasing to the Father (Jn. 8:29). The same truth is expressed in other words when he says, “If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love, as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in His love” (Jn. 10:17; 15:10). There is nowhere a suggestion that the Father is with him, or that he abides in the Father, because he is of the same nature or substance as the Father.

We conclude, therefore, that the oneness of Jesus with the Father, as far as we can learn from his words in the fourth Gospel, is a oneness of character. He was perfectly obedient to the Father, and so his will was the Father’s will manifested in the flesh. They who heard his words heard the thought of the Father perfectly transmitted. They who felt his love felt the love of the Father in its most appreciable, because human, form. They who submitted to his will thereby became submissive to the will of the Father. They who felt themselves quickened under his gracious influence were quickened by the power of the Father in the form of its highest potency.

In Jesus’ teaching in regard to his own person, according to the fourth Gospel, the most prominent fact is the *consciousness of Messiahship*. This consciousness expresses itself in the forms which are found in the Synoptists, and in still others.

c. Messianic consciousness in the fourth Gospel.

1. Messianic titles

We meet the two chief Messianic titles of the earlier Gospels, the *Son of man* and the *Son of God*, but with certain noteworthy, though not essential, differences. The fourth Gospel uses the second of these titles, either in the full form, the *Son of God*, or in the form, the *only begotten Son*, or most frequently, in the abbreviated form, the *Son*, much oftener than do the Synoptists. It is still used in a Messianic sense both by Jesus and by others; but in some passages, where Jesus employs it, the personal relationship of love between him and the Father becomes the prominent thought.³ Jesus plainly uses it as a Messianic title in John 10:33-36, for he there declares that it is applicable to him because of the high commission which he has from the Father; and again in 11:4 he uses it in the same sense. He said that the sickness of Lazarus was in order that the *Son of God* might be glorified, and then, at the tomb of Lazarus, he said that the object of his audible utterance was that the people might believe that God had *sent* him, or, in other words, might believe that he was the *Messiah* (Jn. 17:8). Thus the *Son of God* is glorified when men believe that he is the *Messiah*; and hence this term *Messiah* might be substituted for the *Son of God* in 11:4; in other words, Jesus plainly uses the term *Son of God* as a Messianic title.

In the other passages where Jesus speaks of himself as the *Son* or as the *only begotten*⁴ *Son*, the ethical element comes to the front; but this unique ethical union with God is the basis of Messiahship, and Messiahship is inseparable from it. But there is nowhere an intimation in the fourth Gospel, as there is not in the Synoptists, that the term is used in any other than a religious or a Messianic sense.

What I have said thus far concerns the usage of Jesus. On the lips of others, the title *Son of God*, in the fourth Gospel, has an exclusively Messianic significance, as in the earlier Gospels. Thus it is used by the Baptist (Jn. 1:34), by Nathanael (Jn. 1:49), by Martha (Jn. 11:27), and by the evangelist (Jn. 20:31). Nathanael employs it as a synonym of the Messianic title, *King of Israel*, and Martha and the evangelist use it as a synonym of *Christ*.

The title *Son of man*, though not as common in the fourth Gospel as in the Synoptists, is used in the same sense. It is Jesus' own self-designation, and is found only where the most obviously Messianic functions are affirmed. Thus the *Son of man* is the one who has unique knowledge of the

³ Comp. Beyschlag, *Neutestamentliche Theologie*, 1:238; Weiss, *Ribliche Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, 612; Stevens, *The Johannine Theology*, 124.

⁴ It seems probable that this epithet belongs to the author of the Gospel.

Father (e.g. Jn. 17:25), the one who is to be lifted up (Jn. 3:14; 8:28; 12:32), the one who has been consecrated by the Father (Jn. 10:36), the one who must be personally appropriated in order that the soul may have life (e.g. Jn. 6:53), and the one who glorifies God, and is himself glorified, by the crucifixion (Jn. 12:23, 28).

One passage makes the meaning of the title especially plain, and that is John 9:35-38. Here Jesus asks the man whom he had healed whether he believed on the Son of man, and then tells him that *he* is the Son of man, just as he tells the Samaritan woman that he is the Messiah (Jn. 4:26). It is manifest that this title is here a pure synonym of Messiah, for the faith which Jesus ever sought to win was faith in his Messiahship, and nothing else. When, therefore, Jesus tells one receptive soul that he is the *Messiah*, and another that he is the *Son of man*, he puts it absolutely beyond question that the terms are equivalent.

2. The call for faith.

The Messianic consciousness of Jesus has an emphatic expression in the fourth Gospel in the *call for faith in him*. In the Synoptists this call is implied rather than expressed. Jesus there asks for faith in connection with his miracles of healing; but that is faith that he is able to *work* the miracle, and never faith that he is the Messiah (e.g. Mt. 9:28). A call to accept Jesus as the Messiah is doubtless *involved* in his whole work, as reported by the Synoptists; and we see a company of disciples gather around him, who come gradually to the settled conviction that he is the Messiah; but the case is quite different in the fourth Gospel. Here believing in him as the Messiah is a conspicuous feature. The belief which is called for is always belief in the Messiahship of Jesus. Thus, when Nathanael confesses, "thou art the Son of God, Thou art King of Israel," Jesus replied, "Because I said unto thee, I saw thee underneath the fig tree, *believest* thou?" It is plain that the unexpressed object of this verb is the Messiahship of Jesus, which Nathanael had just confessed. Again, in 8:24, Jesus makes it plain what he wants men to believe. "I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins; for except ye believe that I am *he*, ye shall die in your sins." This *I am* is equivalent to *I am the Messiah*, as may be seen from the conversation with the Samaritan woman (Jn. 4:25-26). This is the one great truth which they are to accept. Jesus occasionally speaks of believing in God, but only in connection with belief in him whom God hath sent (Jn. 5:24; 14:1). This

faith in the Messiah is the work which is acceptable to God (Jn. 6:29), an act on which Jesus pronounces a beatitude (Jn. 20:29). This is the belief which he puts in parallelism with belief in God (Jn. 14:1). It is so vital that a refusal to cherish it constitutes the preeminent, and, as it were, the only sin (Jn. 16:9). This lofty claim that men should believe in his Messiahship is surely the utterance of a lofty consciousness.

3. Sent by the Father.

Another form in which we find the Messianic consciousness expressed in the fourth Gospel is the claim of Jesus that he came *not of himself*, but was *sent* by the Father. He affirms this directly some sixteen times, and implies it in yet other passages (e.g. Jn. 7:28; 8:42; 5:36, 38). In order to understand what Jesus means by the word *sent*, we must understand his meaning in the accompanying clause *into the world*. This meaning is clear from a passage in his last prayer, where he says, "As Thou didst send me into the world, I also sent them into the world" (Jn. 17:18). With this we may take his word to the disciples after the resurrection, "As the Father hath sent me, so send I you" (Jn. 20:21). Now it is plain that when Jesus speaks of sending his disciples into the world, he does not refer to their coming from some other world into this world. The sending is from his presence, and the world is the field of their labors. Therefore, when Jesus speaks of being sent from the Father, we are not to suppose that he has in mind a change of worlds, or a change in the form of his existence; but simply the change from the quiet life of a private citizen in Nazareth to the public Messianic career of preaching and establishing the kingdom of heaven. This view is confirmed by the reference which Jesus makes to a *sealing* and a *consecration* which preceded his coming into the world (Jn. 6:27; 10:36). This consecration by the Father can be found nowhere else than in the great event, recorded by all the evangelists, namely, the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus in the hour of his baptism, and the divine announcement which separated him unto the Messianic office, "Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased" (Mk. 1:10-11). This was the hour, according to the Synoptists, when Jesus became conscious of his Messianic mission. If, then, the consecration by the Father was in the hour of the baptism of Jesus, and if this consecration was *prior* to the sending (Jn. 6:27; 10:36), it is plain that Jesus could not have meant by the expression *coming into the world*, or being *sent from the Father*, a local coming from heaven to earth. When he says that he was sent from the Father, his memory goes back to the great hour by the Jordan when the voice of God resounded in his soul,

saying, "Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased." Nazareth was then left, and Jesus came into the world to accomplish the work of the Messiah.

4. Come forth from God, come from heaven.

Parallel to being sent from the Father is the statement of Jesus, repeated on several occasions, that he *came forth from God* (Jn. 8:42; 16:27, 28; 17:8). In 16:27-28 we have an authoritative suggestion as to the meaning of Jesus when he says that he came forth from God. In this passage he declares that the Father loves the disciples because they have loved him and have *believed* that he came forth from God. Now we know very well that Jesus required men to believe that he is the *Messiah* (e.g. Jn. 8:24). He did not demand belief in his preexistence, or in any other relationship to the Father than an ethical one. In view, then, of the explicit demand of Jesus for faith in his Messiahship, and in view of the patent meaning of the expression *sent from God*, which is similar to the expression in question, we must hold that his statement of having come forth from God is not an assertion regarding his nature, but regarding his Messianic commission. This interpretation is illustrated and confirmed by the words of Nicodemus, who says for himself and for others like minded, "We know that thou art a teacher *come from God*" (Jn. 3:2); and yet when he used this language, he believed that Jesus was a man, and had no more thought that he had come down out of heaven than that John the Baptist had descended from the sky. It is obvious that, on his lips, the words *come from God*, as applied to Jesus, meant simply that Jesus was appointed of God, as Moses and the prophets had been. There is no ground for a different understanding of the words when they are used by Jesus.

There is another expression of the fourth Gospel which is to be mentioned in this connection. Jesus speaks of having *come down out of heaven* (Jn. 3:13; 6:33, 38, 50, 51, 58), and also of *being from above*, and not of the world (Jn. 8:23; 17:14, 16). The meaning of all this language is made plain by Jesus himself, when he says that his *disciples* are also not of this world *even as he is not of this world* (Jn. 17:14, 16), and when he says to the Jews, "Ye are from beneath; I am from above" (Jn. 8:23; comp. 17:36). When he says that the Jews are *from beneath*, he evidently does not mean that they have come up to the surface of the earth from some subterranean abode: he simply characterizes them ethically. In like manner, the language must be taken ethically when he says that he is from *above*. And if, when he says that his disciples are not of this world, he refers to *character*, so must

he also when he says that *he* is not of this world. The language had no reference, then, to his origin. He is from above, and his disciples are from above, because they are not actuated by the spirit of the world, but by the Spirit of God.

In light of this sure result, we cannot be in doubt as to the meaning of Jesus when he speaks of *coming down out of heaven*. This is plainly parallel to *being from above*.

It is easy to bring the claim of having come down out of heaven into connection with the evangelist's doctrine of the *Logos* (Jn. 1:1-5), and to suppose that it means a personal descent out of heaven; but this interpretation is possible only when we take a superficial glance at the words in question. In John 3:13 Jesus says to Nicodemus, "No one has ascended into heaven except he who came down out of heaven, the Son of man." Plainly we must understand this *descent* out of heaven as we understand the *ascent* into heaven; but when Jesus uttered these words, he certainly had not ascended into heaven except in a spiritual sense — the sense that he had lived in personal fellowship with the heavenly Father. Hence the descent out of heaven must be figurative. The thought seems to be that of perfect communion with God, as when Paul says that the Lord has made us to sit *in heavenly places* (Eph. 2:6). The Scriptures make heaven, in a peculiar sense, the abode of God, and hence it was natural to express the thought of immediate fellowship with God by the figure of an ascent into heaven. Now this thought is all that the context requires; and, moreover, it is *just what* it requires. Jesus can declare "heavenly things," that is Messianic truths,⁵ because he stands in perfect fellowship with God. If he had said that he could make known the Messianic truths because he, personally, had been in heaven, his conclusion would have been too great for his premise. An angel might have come down out of heaven, but that would not have fitted him to declare the things of the Messianic kingdom. Jesus gives a real and sufficient ground for his authority to declare Messianic truths, and that is his perfect communion with the Father. This statement, then, that he came down out of heaven, like the statement that he was from above, is ethical.

It is in connection with the Messianic consciousness of Jesus that we must understand his *allusions to preexistence*. These allusions constitute a feature of that consciousness which is peculiar to the fourth Gospel. The

⁵ See Meyer's *Handbuch über das Evangelium Johannes*, fünfte Auflage, 163. The argument is equally strong if we take Holtzmann's view of the "heavenly things." See *Hand-Commentar*, vierter Band, erste Abtheilung, 54.

Synoptists do not touch this point. As already suggested, it is with *allusions*, not with a clear and fixed doctrine, that we have to do, with a point that, even in John, clearly belongs to the incidental rather than the essential. Therefore differences of opinion as to the meaning of these allusions — and there are wide differences among Christian scholars — are less significant than they would be on many another subject.

The first passage on preexistence is John 6:62, “What then if ye should behold the Son of man ascending where he was *before*?”⁶ In the preceding discourse of Jesus two words had given offense. He had said that He was the bread which had come down out of heaven, and also that it was needful to eat the flesh and blood of the Son of man in order to have life. He solves the difficulty of this last word when he says, in verse 63: “It is the Spirit that quickeneth: the flesh profiteth nothing. The *words* that I have spoken unto you are spirit and are life.” It is the difficulty of the other saying, more particularly, which is referred to in verse 62. The statement that he had come down out of heaven, or, dropping the figure, that he had authority from God to give life to men, would be justified, Jesus suggests, by his approaching ascension into heaven (comp. Jn. 16:10). The argument is not perceptibly changed by the clause “where he was before,” and hence the allusion to preexistence is subordinate. The prominent thought is the ascension.

This allusion seems to be most naturally explained with the aid of Daniel 7:13, which probably furnished the starting-point for Jesus’ use of the title *Son of man*. In a night vision Daniel saw one like unto a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven. But this coming from heaven does not assume a real preexistence there, any more than the fact that the four beasts of this same vision came up out of the sea assumes that they had really preexisted in the sea (Dan. 7:3), which is an impossible view, for Daniel says that the four beasts are four kings who are yet to arise upon the earth (Dan. 7:17). The only preexistence, therefore, which is assumed for the one like a son of man who comes on the clouds of heaven, is purely ideal. If now the word of Jesus in John 6:62 was spoken in view of the passage in Daniel, we should be justified in thinking that it contemplates the same sort of preexistence which we have there. Moreover, this result is confirmed by the fact that Jesus speaks of the *Son of man* as ascending where *He*, this is the same Son of man, was before; but Jesus was the Son of man, was before; but Jesus was the son of Mary, and his humanity is thought of as derived, not as preexistent. So it is obvious that this language cannot be taken literally. Therefore,

⁶ Wendt (i. 244-248) regards this saying as unhistorical on the ground that it does not suit the context.

in view of these considerations, I conclude that the preexistence alluded to in this passage is ideal, and this conclusion will be greatly reinforced by the other passages which bear upon this difficult point.

The second allusion to preexistence is the word of Jesus in the temple, "Before Abraham was born I am" (Jn. 8:58). The reference to Abraham had been made natural by the foregoing controversy. When Jesus had promised freedom through the truth, the Jews proudly replied that they were children of Abraham, and had never been in bondage. Jesus allowed their claim in a physical sense, but denied it in the spiritual sense (verses 37, 39-40). They were seeking to kill him, he said, while Abraham, on the contrary, had *rejoiced* to see his day. These words seemed to the Jews to involve a preposterous claim. They inferred that if Abraham had seen the day of Jesus, then Jesus must claim to have lived at least as long as from the time of Abraham. Hence their contemptuous question, "Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?" To this Jesus replied in words which involved a higher claim than that which they had just attributed to him, and declared, "Before Abraham was born I am."

Now it must not be forgotten that it is Jesus who is speaking, and that, in the preceding verses, he has been emphasizing his *Messianic* claim. He does not say that before Abraham was born the *Logos* existed; he says "I am." It is Jesus the Messiah, Jesus the man whom the Father had consecrated to the Messianic work, who speaks. Just before this he had spoken of "my day," which Abraham saw (Jn. 8:56), by which we must understand the historical appearance of Jesus as the Messiah. Abraham had seen this, virtually seen it in God's promise of a seed (Gen. 12:3; 15:4-5), and had greeted it from afar (Heb. 11:13). And now it is this one who consciously realizes the distant vision of Abraham, who says, "Before Abraham was born I am." Jesus, therefore, seems to affirm that his *historic* Messianic personality existed before Abraham was born. If that be the case, then its existence before Abraham must of course be thought of as ideal.

This view satisfies the context, for it involves the claim of a dignity and an importance which immeasurably transcends that of Abraham. The Jews had asked scornfully, "Art thou greater than our father Abraham?" and the words of the reply of Jesus are equal to a lofty affirmative. They imply that his work, his deliverance, which is the meaning of his *day*, had been the heart of God's plan from the beginning — a plan which embraced Abraham not only, but also all mankind. The Messiah who reveals God and redeems the world cannot properly be compared even with an Abraham, and it is noticeable that Jesus does not make a comparison. He does not say, "Before

Abraham was born, *I was*," thus simply affirming priority; but he says, "*I am*," an expression which suggests that he belongs to the entire course of history, if it does not certainly reach beyond the bounds of time. The projection of this present *I am* into the remote past seems to imply a conviction on the part of Jesus that his Messianic personality is above time, and that his Messianic *day* is part of the eternal order of things.

Strong as the argument seems to be for this interpretation of John 8:58, it may be well to suspend final judgement upon it until the remaining allusion to preexistence has been analyzed. It is a sound principle of exegesis that of several kindred passages the more obscure should be interpreted by the less obscure; and of the three allusions to preexistence made by Jesus the last is the clearest. This passage is found in the farewell prayer, and reads as follows, — "Now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was" (Jn. 17:5). This *glory* seems to be regarded as a *reward* for the work which Jesus had now accomplished. He says in the preceding verse that he has glorified God on the earth, having accomplished the work which had been given him to do; and now he prays that the Father will glorify him. This order of thought certainly suggests that he looks at the anticipated glory as his proper reward. Moreover, the *character* of this glory establishes the view that it is indeed the reward for the Messianic work. We have the following data for the determination of the character of this glory. Jesus speaks of a glory which he has already received (Jn. 17:10, 22), and also of a glory which he hopes to receive in the future (17:1, 5, 24). Again, with regard to the Father, Jesus speaks of having already glorified Him (17:4), and also of glorifying Him in the future (17:1). Now in all these passages the *glory* is apparently one in kind, though not necessarily the same in degree. There is one suggestion that the words *glory* and *glorify* have a peculiar content when Jesus is speaking of the future — a content essentially different from that which they have when he speaks of the past. Moreover, there is no need of making such an assumption in order to [gain] a clear and harmonious interpretation of the chapter. Therefore we must hold that the words *glory* and *glorify*, as used in this passage, now of the past work of Jesus and again of his future state and activity, have the same essential meaning. But this meaning, when Jesus refers to the past, is put beyond question by the language of Jesus himself: it is the glory of *redemption*. He has glorified the Father on the earth by accomplishing his work (17:4), that is, the Messianic work. He has manifested the Father's *name* to his disciples (17:6), or has given them the Father's *word* (17:14). And this is also the way in which he will glorify the

Father in the future, for he says that he will still make the Father's name known (17:26), and give eternal life to all whom the Father shall give to him (17:2). Thus the glorification of the Father of which Jesus speaks in this chapter is surely accomplished by the Messianic work of Jesus, as he makes the Father known, and through their faith in him brings men into the love of the Father and gives to them eternal life. This is the past glorification of the Father and it is also His future glorification.

Now in regard to the past glorification of Jesus, of which the chapter speaks, we are not left in doubt. Jesus says that he is already glorified in his disciples (17:10), and he indicates in what this glorification consists. He is glorified in them because they have recognized him as the Messiah, and have given their allegiance to him (17:8). This glory which Jesus has received from his disciples may be said to have been given to him by the Father (17:22), because the Father gave to Jesus that revelation through which Jesus had brought men to accept him as the Messiah sent from God (17:7).

Now from that which is clearly defined we proceed, and proceed safely, to that which is less clearly defined. The glory which Jesus has already received is as the chapter plainly teaches, the glory of having been recognized as the Messiah. It is the glory of having established the Messianic kingdom. Therefore we must say that the glory for which he prays (17:5), and which he anticipates receiving in heaven (17:24), is of the same sort, that is to say, it is the glory of doing Messianic work and of being recognized as the Messiah. It may differ vastly in degree from that glory which he has already received, but not in kind. One glory is the glory of *beginning* the kingdom; the other is the glory of *completing* the kingdom.

This important conclusion touching the glory for which Jesus prays is variously confirmed. The fact that the future glorification of the Father in this chapter is one of the same sort as His past glorification, which we have seen to be the case, makes it natural to hold that the future glorification of the Son is thought of as being of the same sort as his past glorification. Not only so; but the future glorification of the Father depends upon the future glorification of the Son (17:1). Now since this future glorification of the Father depends upon the future glorification of the Son; and since the past glorification of the Father depended upon the Messianic work of Jesus, we are fully justified in the position that the future glorification of the Son, which is to promote the glory of the Father, will consist in the continuation and completion of his Messianic work. It is for this, then, that Jesus prays.

This conclusion is made still more certain, if possible, by words which Jesus spoke earlier in the last week. He referred to the hour of his crucifixion as the hour of his *glorification* (Jn. 12:23), and also as the hour when the name of his Father would be glorified (Jn. 12:28). Now the hour of the crucifixion of Jesus was the hour of his glorification, according to the fourth Gospel, because by the events of this hour Jesus was most manifestly revealed as the Messiah. He regarded his crucifixion as the supreme act of self-revelation (Jn. 8:28). For this reason, he could say that his lifting-up was to be the great motive to draw men unto him (Jn. 12:32). Thus Jesus, on this occasion, thought of the culminating act of his Messianic work upon the earth as a future glorification, and he prayed to the Father in regard to this glory (Jn. 12:28). Therefore, when, a few days later, we hear him praying again for a future glorification of himself, which future glorification is not directly described, we are compelled to believe that his thought is upon the consummation of his work.

Therefore we hold as a fixed and unshakable conclusion, that the glory for which Jesus prays in the seventeenth chapter of John is of the same sort as that glory which he had already received (17:10, 22). It is the glory of being recognized and loved as the Messiah. He prays for the divine consummation of the great work which he has begun. He has received a foretaste of that glory, and he prays for its fullness.

Having now shown that the glory for which Jesus prays is the fruition of his Messianic work, or the *reward* for that work, it follows that he cannot have possessed this with the Father before the foundation of the world, except as it was his in the purpose and decree of God (comp. Mt. 25:34). Rewards are bestowed after the work is done, and then only can be appreciated as rewards. Jesus possessed this glory before the foundation of the world in the sense that it was divinely purposed for him. He knew that his Messianic work had been planned of God from eternity, and that the glorious outcome of it had been fixed, and was kept in store for him.

Thus in the very shadow of the cross, when to human view the work of Jesus seemed to be a complete and shameful failure, he calmly and confidently asks for the glory which he had with the Father before the world was. This is surely the utterance of one who was conscious of being the Messiah sent from God; but the preexistence which is involved is simply and only ideal. The glory of completed redemption cannot be literally possessed until redemption is complete. If now the preexistence of Jesus, according to the seventeenth chapter of John, is clearly ideal, this fact confirms that

interpretation which has been given of the other passages which are less clear. We conclude, then, that these three passages in John, in which Jesus alludes to his preexistence, do not involve the claim that this preexistence was personal and real. They are to be classed with other phenomena of the Messianic consciousness of Jesus, none of which, either in the Synoptists or in the fourth Gospel, have to do with metaphysical relationships.

This conclusion in regard to the meaning of Jesus' allusions to preexistence is in line with the fact that neither the Old Testament nor other Jewish writings, prior to the time of Jesus, know anything of a personal preexistence of the Messiah. When the conception of the Messiah was individualized by the people of the Old Covenant, he was usually thought of as a descendant of David (see Hos. 3:5; Amos 9:11; Is. 9:7; 11:1; Jer. 23:5; Zech. 13:1; Mic. 5:2; Ps. 79:20-21; 132:10-11), though this descent may not always have been understood literally;⁷ and whether as a literal descent of David or not, he was invariably thought of as a divinely appointed earthly ruler and deliverer. The glowing language of Isaiah (7:14, 9:6) cannot be regarded as presenting a conception of the Messiah fundamentally different from that of other Old Testament writers both earlier and later, which is the case when it is understood metaphysically; but it must be regarded as in line with Jesus' use of Psalm 82:6, that is, as an exalted description of one who was to be the supreme and final representative of Jehovah for the deliverance and perfecting of His people.⁸ When Micah speaks of him who is to be ruler in Israel as one whose "goings forth" are from "ancient days" (v. 2), he marks him as one who comes from an old and illustrious lineage. It is manifest that his thought does not go beyond an earthly ruler clothed with divine authority, for he speaks of the coming deliverer as one who will stand and feed his flock in the name of the Lord *his* God (v. 4).

Likewise in later pre-Christian writings, though the idea of preexistence begins to appear, it is only an ideal preexistence. The Sibylline Oracles and the earlier part of Enoch know only of a divinely sent king, sprung from the purified people of God.⁹ In the Psalms of Solomon the Messiah is a righteous king, the son of David, but without a trace of preexistence.¹⁰ In the Parables of Enoch, which probably antedate the life of Jesus,¹¹ it is said that

⁷ See Cheyne, *Jewish Religious Life after the Exile*, p. 47.

⁸ Comp. Schultz, *Alttestamentliche Theologie*, 772-773; Cheyne, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, 3d ed., i. 61-62; Briggs, *Messianic Prophecy*, 195-201.

⁹ See *Or. Sib.* iii. 652 f.; *Enoch* xc. 37; Hilgenfeld, *Die Jüdische Apokalypitik*, 143.

¹⁰ See Psalm 17.

¹¹ See Charles, *The Book of Enoch*, 113-115.

the *name* of the Son of man was called before the Lord of the spirits, before the stars were made, and that this Son of man was chosen and hidden before the Lord, before the creation of the world. Here is, indeed, the idea of pre-existence, but it is doubtful whether the author thought of this as real and personal. In the Assumption of Moses, which belongs to the same period with the Parables of Enoch, even Moses is represented as saying, "The Lord prepared me before the foundation of the world, to be the mediator of His covenant" (1:14); but it is not probable that the author thought of a personal preexistence of Moses. The origin of a belief in personal preexistence is later than the time of Christ.¹² But if preexistence in the Assumption of Moses is ideal, that is a reason why we should understand it in an ideal sense in the Parables of Enoch.

Since then the Old Testament conception of the Messiah is opposed to the thought of personal preexistence, and since other Jewish writings of pre-Christian date have no clear references to personal preexistence, we conclude that there is no historical reason for doubting the position taken in regard to the teaching of the fourth Gospel.

The last expression of a Messianic consciousness which we have to consider in the fourth Gospel is the fact that *Jesus accepted worship* from the man whose eyes he had opened (Jn. 9:38), and allowed Thomas to address him as *Lord* and *God* (Jn. 20:28). In the case of the man in the temple the homage is plainly paid to Jesus as Messiah. Jesus asked the unnamed person if he believed in the *Son of man*, that is, as we have seen, the *Messiah*; and when the man replied, "Who is he, Lord, that I may believe on him," Jesus said, "Thou hast both seen him, and he it is that speaketh with thee." Then the man, believing that Jesus was the Messiah, did him reverence. It does not follow from this that he regarded Jesus as of the same *nature* with God. The term which is translated *worship* is used of the homage which subjects pay to their sovereign, and simply implies that the one who receives it is of a *dignity* superior to that of the one who renders it (comp. Rev. 22:8). The word implies nothing in regard to the *nature* of the one who receives the homage. The man worshipped Jesus because he believed him to be the Messiah of his people; and Jesus accepted the homage because he was conscious of being the Messiah.

In the other passage, we are told that Thomas addressed the risen Jesus as *Lord* and *God*, and it is implied that Jesus accepted this homage. Then he said to Thomas, "Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed; blessed are

¹² See Stanton, *The Jewish and the Christian Messiah*, 131; Weber, *Die Lehren des Talmuds*, 340-341.

they that have not seen, and yet have believed” (Jn. 20:29). Now we know what belief Jesus sought from men, according to the fourth Gospel. It was belief in him as the *Messiah*. When, therefore, he said to Thomas, “Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed,” meant simply and only, Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed that *I am the Messiah*. It appears, then, that Jesus accepted the homage of Thomas as homage rendered to his Messiahship. His language seems to imply that any one who believed in him as the Messiah might be expected to adore him. There is no suggestion that he regarded the homage as implying that he was of the same substance with the Father.

Now we shall go safely if we argue from Jesus’ acceptance of the homage to the thought of Thomas when he said, “My Lord and my God.” If we do so argue, we shall conclude that Thomas was in the same spiritual condition as the man who worshipped Jesus in the temple (Jn. 9:38), and like him recognized Jesus as the Messiah. But if his adoration was for Jesus as the *Messiah*, then it is wrong to treat his language as a theological statement regarding the *nature* of Jesus. It is impossible to say that when this Jew addressed Jesus as *my God* his thought was that of the theologians of the fourth century, who said of Jesus, “Deus ex substantia Patris.”¹³ Since Jesus himself justified that Scripture which calls men *gods* on the ground that they *represent* God (Jn. 10:35), and since he once bases his claim to the title *Son of God* upon the fact that he has been *consecrated* by the Father to the Messianic work (Jn. 10:36), it is plainly wrong to regard the language of Thomas as an affirmation regarding the essential being of Jesus. Thomas is ocularly convinced that Jesus is risen from the dead, and so is convinced that he is the Messiah, and as the Messiah he worships him. Jesus accepts the worship because he is conscious of Messiahship. But the fact that Thomas calls him *God*, judged by the standard which is set for us in the usage of Jesus himself, cannot be held to involve anything more than a recognition of the office, the commission, the divine authority, and function of Jesus.

It may be remarked, in conclusion, that this interpretation is in harmony with the expressed purpose of the evangelist, which was to prove that Jesus was the *Christ* (Jn. 20:31). He does not set out to prove that Jesus is of the same *nature* as the Father, but to prove that he is the one anointed of the Father to give eternal life to men. Therefore, he appropriately closes his Gospel with the scene in which Thomas adores the Messiah.

¹³ See *Symbolum Quicumque*, 31.

This interpretation is also in harmony with the fact of the human consciousness of Jesus, which is evidenced throughout the entire Gospel; in harmony with the fact of Jesus' consciousness of the absolute moral union with the Father, which is manifest throughout the entire Gospel — a consciousness that uttered itself in such a word as "I and the Father are one;" and it is in harmony, finally, with the fact of his Messianic consciousness.

Jesus as the Messiah is the perfect revealer of the Father, the perfect representative of the Father, the perfect redeemer of those who accept him, and he is, therefore, infinitely worthy of the adoration and worship of all mankind.