

A Prayer
of Jesus

I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yea, Father, for such was thy gracious will.

CHAPTER I

PROMINENT FEATURES OF JESUS' GOSPEL

The Gospel is Simple

Yes! It is wonderfully simple. So don't be deceived by the intellectual contortions of the scholars and other ecclesiastics. A babe, a little child, a younger sibling, yes, even a prodigal son can understand it. In what follows I will use Jesus' very simple Parable of the Prodigal Son as our base. Most elements of Jesus' gospel are contained in this parable. They are the Father's house, the rebellious child, the loyal Son, the tempting world, the love of the Father, the Great Principle and the rebel's redemption. When we interpret these in the light of the Great Correlate enunciated by Jesus (to be defined below), they clearly reveal the fundamentals of his gospel. These include the will of God, the kingdom of God, the essence of righteousness and sin, the means of salvation, and the nature and purpose of the world and of human existence.

Many other otherwise dark mysteries also come under the light of the revelations of Jesus. Why was he so hostile to the Pharisees and they to him? What is the nature of good and evil? What is the character of God and of man and what are the ultimate causes of war, racism, disease and death? Why is the world as it is and why was it created? These mysteries all dissolve in the light of him who is the light of the world. The most astonishing thing is that it is all so simple, as implied by Jesus in thanking the Father that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes (Matthew. 11:25-27).

So, here immediately is a key, surely one of the most important keys: the churchmen have been looking for something complex in their attempts to understand ourselves, our world and our creator but the answers are simple – so simple that even a young child can understand. (Jesus seems to have applied the term "babes" to his disciples who were simple and unlearned young men and women.) How embarrassing it will be for the learned doctors and other academicians to admit that the answers they have spent their lives and energies seeking were right under their noses from the beginning, requiring no academic credentials to perceive and that they could have understood at a very early age. So, they turn down one fruitless blind alley after another. They follow each to its inevitable dead end and return without enlightenment. Then they marvel at the "unfathomable mysteries" of God when all they need do is listen carefully to a single voice speaking to them from the pages of the New Testament gospels that they might marvel at the brilliance of that light and the simplicity of that doctrine.

The Gospel is Hard

It is hard for us in another way, however, and that is another key to its comprehension. When we hear it, we hear something that we don't want to hear because it challenges the values that we have spent our lives developing and nurturing and we say, "No, he couldn't be saying that." But he is saying just that – exactly what he is represented as saying. So it is simple – very, very

simple; and it is hard – very, very hard. So simple is it that we overlook it; so hard is it that we can't bear it and these two things work against our realizing it within ourselves. Jesus meant every word he said, especially that part about the way that leads to life being hard. It is very hard for us to conceive, even more difficult to accept once conceived, and when accepted issues in a life of hard experiences.

The Source of Gospel Truth

There is one other thing that we must emphasize at this point, which is not well received in the world of New Testament scholarship. That is that, with rare exceptions, we must confine ourselves to the recorded utterances of Jesus of Nazareth as the source of the light. He said he is the light of the world – and so he is.

Many meet this thought with great resistance because they have convinced themselves that much of the gospels represent the words of later redactors and not of Jesus of Nazareth. If a redaction process was present, it was not extensive enough to mask his essential message. My greatest assurance of this comes from the perception of the message in all its hard simplicity. No Paulinist could provide these redactions, as is supposed by some scholars. No human agency would have created the message and written it back into the gospels, and it is much too profound and consistent to be a superficial extraction from the body of the message. All the “hard sayings” lose their mystery in its light and become the reasonable and necessary corollary to the message.

Others object to this because they want to include other New Testament authors as sources of the light. It is true that the New Testament writings outside the gospels (including Paul's letters), studied carefully and cautiously, can help us to understand Jesus. But these also contain erroneous doctrines, deceptive and misleading, which is why I emphasize that they must be read carefully and cautiously, always testing what is perceived there by the utterances of our Lord.

So we proceed on the basis of certain of the recorded sayings of the Lord, confident that his words are as he represented them. I firmly believe four things that he affirmed:

- 1. The source: For I have not spoken on my own authority; the Father who sent me has himself given me commandment what to say and what to speak, and I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has bidden me. (John 12:49,50)
- 2. The uniqueness: I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father but by me. (John 14:6)
- 3. The key: If you abide in my word, you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free. (John 8:32)
- 4. The finality and permanence: Heaven and earth will pass away, but my word will not pass away. (Matthew 24:35)

Jesus uniquely spoke the words of the Father in the world; Jesus alone is the way, the truth, and the life through whom all must come to the Father. If we continually abide in his words, we will know the truth and become free precisely as he promised; and his words have never passed away and will never pass away! So, Jesus of Nazareth is the sole and final source of the gospel.

The Truth is Absolute

This also needs to be emphasized here. The Truth as enunciated by Jesus of Nazareth is absolute. That is, it is not relative to any earthly human condition. Humanity and life on the earth simply does not qualify it. This is part of the hardness of the thing, and explains why babes can

PAUL: THE STRANGER

see it before the wise and understanding. Babes have not become relativized, conditioned or conformed to this world, nation, state, race, culture, religion, family or whatever else may be claiming the loyalty and devotion of the person. Therefore, if we are to comprehend, we must enter the quest of Truth with a willingness to be stripped of every preconception and value judgment. We must not permit our thinking to be dominated by fundamental ideas having any source other than Jesus of Nazareth. Especially, we must not yield to the influences of a church or minister, of the culture, of patriotism or any other thing of this world. Those of mature age will almost certainly need to radically restructure their thought processes and values.