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CHRIST'S METHOD OF DEALING WITH SIN

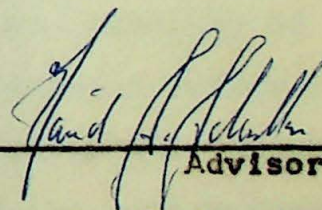
A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
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requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Divinity

by

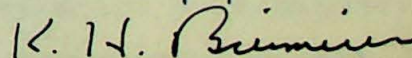
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Advisor



Reader

CHAPTER I

THE CHALLENGE OF DEALING WITH SIN

The Christian pastor is a man who has been charged with the taxing, and yet inspiring responsibility of proclaiming a message from God to man's situation.

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The question of how to meet this challenge has received many answers by varying practices. There are those who ignore the question of sin as irrelevant and unworthy of modern man's consideration. And at the pendulum swings to the opposite pole, we see that there are those who almost seem to delight in bringing before people the wretchedness of man's sin by a harping and haranguing technique. The challenge of facing up to man's sin needs the minister in

CHAPTER I

THE CHALLENGE OF DEALING WITH SIN

The Christian pastor is a man who has been charged with the taxing, and yet inspiring responsibility of proclaiming a message from God into every human situation. This message tells of God's gift of life which He gives to men through His Son Jesus Christ, Who gave His life upon the Cross and rose again that men might live. As the pastor seeks to impart this proclamation of life to men, he confronts in them the opposite of life--death! This death is variously described by its surface symptoms as hate, pride, selfishness, lovelessness, self-righteousness --all of which testify to the deathly predicament of man, namely, his sin.

As the Christian pastor discharges his primary task of giving to men God's life through the message of the Good News, he also faces the challenge of dealing with sin. The question of how to meet this challenge has received many answers by varying practices. There are those who ignore the question of sin as irrelevant and unworthy of modern man's consideration. And as the pendulum swings to the opposite pole, we see that there are those who almost seem to delight in bringing before people the wretchedness of man's sin by a harping and haranguing technique. The challenge of facing up to man's sin meets the minister in

every area of his work whether it be counseling, calling on the sick, checking the erring, or carrying on evangelism. Most noticeably, however, the question of dealing with sin will come to the pastor as he meets his people Sunday after Sunday from the pulpit.

In this study we attempt to suggest at least a partial answer by examining the methods that our Lord Jesus Christ used when He confronted the sin of His hearers during His ministry. We agree with Dobbins when he says that the example of Christ is normative for our approach today. In speaking of the importance of Christ's example for the entire field of evangelism, Dobbins says:

If the claims of Christ as to His person and power are valid, then we would expect a priori that the means which He employed to secure the acceptance of these claims would be of paramount importance and of enduring value to those whom He commissions to be His witnesses.¹

Our method of studying the approach of Jesus to the sinner will be to rely chiefly on the Gospel according to St. John and within that Gospel to give critical study to three incidents in the ministry of Christ, namely, His discourse with the Samaritan woman (chap. 4), His discourses with the multitude at Capernaum (chap. 6), and His final discourse with the authorities in Jerusalem (chap. 10). Our choice of the Gospel according to St. John for resource

¹Gaines S. Dobbins, Evangelism According to Christ (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949), p. 195.

material was based on the observation and conclusion that The Apostle John presents greater detail in relaying Jesus' words than do the Synoptists. We selected the three case studies within the Gospel, because, first of all, they allow us to examine Christ's approach both to an individual and to groups. Secondly, they permit us to see Christ dealing with people whose attitude toward Him ranges from respecting kindness to open hostility. Thirdly, limiting our study to these three incidents allows us the possibility of a more critical and detailed examination than would be feasible if an entire Gospel account would be used.

Thus, chapters two, three, and four are concerned with examining the methods of Christ when dealing with the Samaritan woman, the multitude at Capernaum, and the authorities at Jerusalem, respectively. Chapter five seeks to sharpen and heighten our inquiry by presenting the conclusions of three contemporary men who suggest what they feel to be the methods of Christ as He deals with man's sin. Finally, chapter six will present our own conclusions about Christ's approach to sinners.

In carrying out our study of these incidents in the ministry of Jesus we have consulted commentaries of a critical nature, but also have relied heavily upon the works of such men as Geikie, Lange, and Edersheim. We have used the scholarship of these men because, in our opinion, they have given great effort to describe the Sitz im Leben

surrounding Jesus' ministry and also the effects that Jesus' words may have had on His immediate hearers. These two factors we considered important in our study.

We may say at the beginning of this study that we take the attitude that Jesus' method was to emphasize His Messiahship and its benefits for men. He awakened men to their need of accepting His message without condemning them. When His message was misunderstood, but at the same time not rejected, He patiently repeated, clarified, and amplified His claims and promises until they became clear and were seen as a source of blessing for the hearer. When His message was not only misunderstood, but also rejected, Jesus injected into His method words of condemnation toward unbelief, but at the same time continued with crescendoing intensification His claims to be the Messiah and His promises given as Savior.

A term that will come to the reader's attention quite often in the course of this study is "conviction of sin." At this point we wish to define the concept by saying that "conviction of sin" "does not imply necessarily conviction of particular sins, but rather a conviction that I am without God and away from Him, and that it is my fault and not His that I am away."²

²Bryan Green, The Practice of Evangelism (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), p. 79.

Unless otherwise noted, references will be found in the Gospel according to St. John. All Biblical quotations will be from the Revised Standard Version of 1952.

As we pursue the conversation which Jesus had with the woman at Cana, our purpose is to become conscious of His method of bringing a conviction of sin. This discourse, then, contained in the fourth chapter of the Gospel according to St. John, is important for our study for several reasons. First of all, we can realize from a cursory reading of the incident that the woman whom Jesus was confronting was living a life that certainly was not above reproach. We know from verses 17-18 that she was living with a man who was not her husband. Thus, it is extremely relevant to our topic to analyze as far as possible just how Jesus dealt with this woman to whom He ultimately revealed Himself as the expected Messiah (v. 26). Secondly, in contrast to our studies in later chapters, we see Jesus dealing with an individual, a fact which allows us to see His approach to the specific needs of one person. In the succeeding two chapters we shall see Jesus dealing with larger groups. Thirdly, we see in the Canaanite woman a person who is not characterized by a latent or open hostility toward Jesus, in contrast to the ill-feelings of the people we shall meet in the discourses at Capernaum and Jerusalem. Her rather reverent

CHAPTER II

JESUS' DISCOURSE WITH THE SAMARITAN WOMAN

As we peruse the conversation which Jesus had with the woman of Samaria, our purpose is to become conscious of His method of bringing a conviction of sin. This discourse, then, contained in the fourth chapter of the Gospel according to St. John, is important for our study for several reasons. First of all, we can realize from a cursory reading of the incident that the woman whom Jesus was confronting was living a life that certainly was not above reproach. We knew from verses 17-18 that she was living with a man who was not her husband. Thus, it is extremely relevant to our topic to analyze as far as possible just how Jesus dealt with this woman to whom He ultimately revealed Himself as the expected Messiah (v. 26). Secondly, in contrast to our studies in later chapters, we see Jesus dealing with an individual, a fact which allows us to see His approach to the specific needs of one person. In the succeeding two chapters we shall see Jesus dealing with larger groups. Thirdly, we see in the Samaritan woman a person who is not characterized by a latent or open hostility toward Jesus, in contrast to the ill-feelings of the people we shall meet in the discourses at Capernaum and Jerusalem. Her rather reverent

attitude thus allows Jesus to use methods which finally lead her to personal faith in Him (vv. 29 and 39). For these reasons we feel that a study of Jesus' dealings with the Samaritan woman is important to fill out a primary and necessary facet of this paper.

In the fourth chapter of John we shall give special attention to verses 7-26, which contain the actual interview between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. Our approach to these verses will be to look briefly at the background and context of this story, especially the relationship between the Jews and the Samaritans. We want to follow the conversational discourse in a more or less expository method, since to appreciate Jesus' approach we feel it is necessary to see the development and progress of the talk. We will give special attention to Jesus' remarks concerning the woman's husband (v. 16), since the intent of this verse is given varying interpretations by commentators. Finally, we wish to draw our conclusions from the evidence which we have introduced and surveyed.

We may divide the interview into three rather distinct parts. Verses 7-15 use the theme of living water. Jesus there develops the metaphor to describe God's life-giving activity towards man. Then follows a transitional section in verses 16-18, which contains Jesus' searching comments on the Samaritan woman's marital relations. The theme of the last section, verses 19-26, is the purifying of

worship. Jesus here shows the inadequacy of directing worship to any physical tabernacle.¹

The context of this story reveals that the Pharisees in Judea were suspicious of Jesus' activities (4:1-2). John the Baptist's arrest was imminent, if not already carried out, as Daniel-Rops suggests.² Therefore, Jesus "left Judea and departed again to Galilee" (v. 3). Instead of following the route along the Jordan valley, Jesus proceeded to Galilee by way of the hill road through Samaria, perhaps to avoid the intense heat in the valley.

The hill road led through Samaria, which no Jew would enter without hesitation. The deep-seated ill-feeling between the Jews and the Samaritans was of long standing, dating back to the fall of the capital city of Samaria in 722 B.C. In place of the exiles which the Assyrians had bled from the northern kingdom, there came Assyrian colonists who had intermarried with a remnant of the northern tribes. When the exiles of Judah returned they would have nothing to do with this mixed race.³ The estimation of

¹C. H. Dodd, The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel (Cambridge: The University Press, 1953), pp. 311-15.

²Daniel-Rops, Jesus and His Times, translated from the French by Roby Millar (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1954), pp. 210f.

³Elizabeth Goudge, God So Loved the World (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1951), p. 95.

the men of Judah was that the Samaritans were as heathen, or worse. Daniel-Rops writes:

The Samaritans retaliated by intriguing against the Jews and finally, in the time of Ezra, a renegade priest from Jerusalem, having quarreled with the Temple authorities, went to Samaria and set up a rival sanctuary of the Most High on Mt. Gerizim. From that time the Samaritans had stopped at nothing to incense the Jews. . . . "The water of Samaria is more unclean than the blood of swine," said the rabbis.⁴

The differences which had originally separated the two peoples had hardened to a solid mutual hate. However, as Edersheim points out, portions of the Old Testament and traditional Jewish doctrinal teachings were preserved among the Samaritans. He lists: the unity of God, angels and devils, the Pentateuch as of divine authority, Mount Gerizim as the only mountain not covered by the flood, and strict observance of what Biblical or traditional law they received. They also looked for the Messiah, in whom Moses' prophecy (Deut. 18:18) would be fulfilled.⁵

This sketch of Jewish-Samaritan relations is important for background against which we may briefly place the attitude of Jesus toward this people of mixed blood. To obtain a more complete view of the attitude of Jesus we must turn to the Synoptics. No mention is made of any overtures to the people of Samaria in the Gospels of St. Matthew or St.

⁴Daniel-Rops, op. cit., p. 213.

⁵Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1953), I, 396ff.

Mark. At one place Jesus forbade the disciples to go through Samaria (Mt. 10:5). But St. Luke mentions several instances (9:51-56; 17:11-19; 10:30-37) that show that Jesus did not share the Jewish prejudices against the Samaritans. Thus, we may call attention to this wholesome attitude as undergirding His approach and method, namely, that these examples, plus our present consideration in John, chapter four, indicate that Jesus seemed to ignore customs and traditions that had in them neither kindness nor good sense. Nor would He allow hatred, whether it was racial hatred or personal hatred, to exist in Him.⁶

St. John also gives this detailed background material for the discourse:

He came to the city of Samaria, called Sychar, near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well⁷ was there, and so Jesus, wearied as he was with his journey, sat down beside the well. It was about the sixth hour. (vv. 5-6)

The dialogue begins with verse 7: "There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink.'" It has been noted that this request was unusual if not shocking.

⁶Goudge, op. cit., pp. 96f.

⁷Jacob's Well has been called one of the most exactly identified sites. It is one half mile south of Askar, thought to be the ancient Sychar. The well is an ancient stone one; its shaft is about eighty-five feet deep. The quality of the cool water is considered excellent. M. S. Miller and J. L. Miller, Harper's Bible Dictionary (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1952), p. 300.

The rabbis had decreed that it was improper to address a woman publicly, even one's own wife on the street or one's sister or daughter in an inn, "because of what might be said about it." Secondly, it aggravated the scandal that a true and pious Jew should address a heathen woman of Samaria. But it was neither the first time nor the last time that Jesus calmly broke traditional conventions, which, however honored they might be, were really only manifestations of the worst of Jewish exclusiveness.⁸

Although Jesus' thirst must have been very real after the hot and tiring journey, His request of the woman had far-reaching implications, which we will see developed as the conversation continues. But His method, too, as hinted above, was a bit startling in light of the prevailing conditions. Because He was aware of the transcending nature of His mission to show people their needs and sin and lead them to faith in Himself,⁹ He was willing to breach the social standards and conventions if He could thereby present to someone the message of God's will. Jesus went beneath the artificial distinctions of race and society and dealt with men on the deeper level of their common humanity.¹⁰

Relevant to the discussion of Jesus' method is a fact to which Trumbull calls attention. He feels that Jesus

⁸ Daniel-Rops, op. cit., pp. 96f.

⁹ David Smith, The Days of His Flesh (New York: Harper and Brothers, n.d.), p. 75.

¹⁰ Raymond Calkins, How Jesus Dealt with Men (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1942), p. 55.

always gave attention to men's temporal interests and needs. In the case of the woman he points out that Jesus uses as a beginning point the woman's interest and need for water and then led her lovingly and skillfully to a confession of sin and faith.¹¹ Thus, Jesus makes His discussion of spiritual matters extremely apropos to the situation at hand.

After Jesus' request for a drink, the text goes on: "The Samaritan woman said to him, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?' For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans"¹² (v. 9). While Edersheim feels this question of the Samaritan woman is the result of "genuine surprise,"¹³ it is probably also true, as Lange points out, that there is a certain defensiveness and hint of insolence in her tone in that "she seemed disposed to gratify her national feeling at His need of help."¹⁴ Lange continues:

She lays great stress on the circumstance that He,

¹¹Charles Gallaudet Trumbull, Taking Men Alive (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1938), pp. 173f.

¹²We follow the suggestion of the Nestle Text in regarding the second half of the verse as a comment of the Evangelist rather than as a part of the woman's answer. Eberhard Nestle, Novum Testamentum Graece, edited by Erwin Nestle (21st edition; Stuttgart: Privilegierte Wuerttembergische Bibelanstalt, 1952), p. 239.

¹³Edersheim, op. cit., p. 410.

¹⁴John Peter Lange, The Life of the Lord Jesus Christ, edited with additional notes by Marcus Dods, translated by J. E. Ryland and M. G. Hustable (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958), p. 56.

the supposed proud Jew, is the petitioner, that in His need He is not depending on her benevolence. Her tone leads the Lord to bring forward the opposite relation: that she is the needy person, and that He is the¹⁵ possessor of the true fountain of satisfaction.

We feel that such an estimation of the woman's feelings are probably correct.

Jesus, in His answer, gives no direct rebuke to this retort of the woman, but rather proceeds to lead her out of her national feelings to a new recognition of Himself. He says, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water" (v. 10). With a stimulating turn of thought, Jesus has turned His request to an offer. He uses the familiar metaphor of water¹⁶ to express the life-giving quality which God is eager to give. He also talks of the "gift of God," thereby alluding to her salvation.¹⁷ The method which Jesus uses right at this point is characterized by His desire to give and not to receive, and this same accent is continued when Jesus already points to His own Person as the source and bearer of the gift of God. He presents Himself as the

¹⁵ ibid.

¹⁶ The metaphor "living water" was used in the Old Testament to describe divine activity in quickening men to life (Jer. 2:13; Zech. 14:8; Ezek. 47:9). The figurative use of the term "water" alone was also common in Rabbinic literature. Edersheim, op. cit., pp. 412f.

¹⁷ A. Plummer, The Gospel According to St. John in Cambridge Bible for Schools (Cambridge: University Press, 1912), p. 108.

dispenser of God's living water, with all its implications of vital activity and cleansing power. In describing this offer of such great resources to this common person of Samaria, it has been said, "He lavished all that He was and had to feed the hunger of one solitary soul."¹⁸ Jesus saw the woman "standing on the brink of the greatest possibilities, but utterly unconscious of them."¹⁹

At this point in the discourse the phrase "living water" has an ambiguity to it and the next verses show that the woman understood Jesus to be referring to the flowing water of the well.

"Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep; where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, and his sons, and his cattle?" (vv. 11-12)

Thus, we see the woman's mind is still on the level of material things. In her answer is an implied rejection of Jesus' ability to fulfill His offer. Also, the woman does not realize that her question to Jesus can be answered in the affirmative. He is greater than the "father Jacob." We see a parallel to this verse in 8:33 and 8:53, where Jesus is compared to Abraham, as the people similarly evoke the security of their tradition to challenge His message.

¹⁸Calkins, op. cit., p. 58.

¹⁹C. K. Barrett, The Gospel According to St. John (London: S. P. C. K., 1955), p. 195.

Although Jesus' words to the woman allowed an ambiguous interpretation, we can see the wisdom in this method by the fact that the woman is stimulated in her interest to know more about the living water. Jesus, however, does not answer her question directly. A direct answer would not have focused her attention on the message which is evolving through Jesus' methodical restatement and clarification of her wrong perceptions, a method which is amply testified to by Bernard.²⁰ Jesus said to her,

Every one who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life. (vv. 13-15)

As Farrar correctly observes, "Our Lord is not deterred by the hard literalism of her reply. . . ." ²¹ Rather He continues to use the figure of water, as elsewhere He used bread (chap. 6) and light (chap. 8), the three most necessary things for life. ²² His method, as noted above, is to develop the metaphor by adding new elements to it. Jesus explains that He is not speaking of "this water," which must be drunk day by day. Thus, the Lord tries to divide

²⁰J. H. Bernard, Gospel According to St. John, edited by A. H. McNeile (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929), I, cxi. ff.

²¹Frederic W. Farrar, The Life of Christ (New York: Hurst and Company, 1875), p. 85.

²²A. Plummer, op. cit., p. 109.

clearly the thinking of the woman between the material, visible object to which she is referring, and the spiritual, dynamic "gift of God," which He offers. He meets the comments of the woman in two ways: (a) He shows that the effect of the physical water is impermanent, that its effect does not last; and (b) it must be drawn and carried from a distant place. In contrast to these inadequacies of "this water," the "living water" that Jesus offers would become as a fountain within the heart of a man, eternally refreshing to him. "Those who accept Him and His gifts are thereafter permanently supplied and their needs are inwardly met."²³

Whether the Samaritan woman understood His meaning, or whether she thought simply to evade an irksome task, at any rate, she replied.²⁴ She says, "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw" (v. 15). Lange, however, does feel that she has an idea now of what Jesus is speaking.

She can now no longer suppose that He is speaking of earthly water, though she has no clear perception of the heavenly water. At all events, the presentiment of a wonderful satisfying of her unsatisfied life is awakened in her.²⁵

While we have been pointing out the methods that Jesus has been using, it is perhaps necessary to mention a method

²³Barrett, op. cit., p. 196.

²⁴Daniel-Rops, op. cit., p. 215.

²⁵Lange, op. cit., p. 57.

that Jesus has not used up to this point. So far He has not used condemnation to awaken in her a sense of guilt or to bring about an appreciation of the promise of life which He is setting before her. So far, we think it is fair to say, Jesus' method has revolved around offering the gift which He desires to bestow and awakening in her the need to accept this gift.

But whether this observation of the absence of Law to bring a conviction of sin is one which we can continue to hold must come up for special consideration in the light of the section in verses 16-18. We read there:

Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and he whom you now have is not your husband; this you said truly."

The traditional interpretation of Jesus' request that the woman bring her husband is that this was Jesus' method of bringing the accusing and condemning function of the Law to play upon this woman's life. Thus, we see Hoskyns observe: "Since the water of salvation is for sin and for uncleanness (Zech. 13:1) it was necessary that Jesus should lay bare the woman's sin (cf. 7:7)."²⁶ Or we see views which hold that Jesus was giving the woman her first draught of the living water just as she asked for it. It is the divine

²⁶ Edwyn Clement Hoskyns, The Fourth Gospel, edited by Francis Noel Davey (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1947), p. 241.

condemnation of her sinful life. The sure method to awaken in her the thirst for the full measure of living water is to make her acknowledge herself a sinful woman.²⁷ While this interpretation seems to be the most obvious and most prevalent, it is interesting, as well as necessary, to note that it is contradicted by such writers as Edersheim and Lange.

Which way this question is solved has much meaning for our study of Christ's methods of bringing a conviction of sin and therefore we take the liberty of presenting the arguments of these men.

Thus, Edersheim says:

It is difficult to suppose, that Christ asked the woman to call her husband with the primary object of awakening in her a sense of sin. This might follow, but the text gives no hint of it. Nor does anything in the bearing of the woman indicate any such effect; indeed, her reply (v. 19) and her after-reference (v. 29) to it rather imply the contrary. We do not even know for certain, whether the five previous husbands had died or divorced her, and, if the latter, with whom the blame lay, although not only the peculiar mode in which our Lord refers to it, but the present condition of the woman, seems to point to a sinful life in the past.²⁸

In other words, Edersheim is not trying to exculpate the woman and pawn her off as pure and pristine. His contention is, though, that if a person holds that Christ used His request as a word of the Law to awaken in her a sense of

²⁷M. Dods, The Gospel According to John, in The Expositor's Greek Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1951), p. 727.

²⁸Edersheim, op. cit., pp. 413f.

sin and guilt as prerequisite to coming to faith in Him and to a true appreciation of His Person, it is not borne out by the text.²⁹

Lange is perhaps not as far from the traditional interpretation as Edersheim. Lange admits the possibility that Christ asked the woman to bring her husband for the purpose of awakening her to her guilt. But he sees another motive perhaps equally present in the request of Jesus. He claims that it was a Rabbinical rule that a woman was not to receive any religious instruction without the presence of her husband. While Jesus did not observe such an artificial and casuistical rule, the conversation did take a turn which made Jesus feel that the presence of the husband was imperative. Lange explains:

The conversation had been the free intercourse of persons brought transiently into each other's company and as such raised above the exactions of a punctilious casuistry or scrupulous conventionality. But, now, since the woman had shown herself disposed to become a disciple of Jesus, to enter into a nearer relation to Him, it was proper that her husband should now be present. According to Jewish regulations, a wife was

²⁹We are reminded here of a position taken by J. B. Phillips, whom we shall also consider in a later chapter. In his book, Making Men Whole, he contends: "To the religious people of His day it was a scandalous thing that Jesus, unlike the prophets of old, made no denunciation of those who were called sinners. . . . Jesus almost never called men sinners, except in the case of the entrenched self-righeous. . . . With the common run of ordinary sinners, Jesus appears to have used the method of simple love. The sense of guilt, it would appear, might well take care of itself; so far as we can judge He did not attempt to arouse it." J. B. Phillips, Making Men Whole (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1953), p. 29.

not permitted to receive special religious instruction from a Rabbi without the sanction of her husband; indeed, such a condition is involved in the very nature of the marriage relation. The Lord therefore at this moment required, according to the highest, most exact social rights, that the woman should call her husband.³⁰

This position of Lange is extremely close to the rule that the Apostle Paul posited for the early church (1 Cor. 14:34f.) and therefore has some merit, we feel.

For a person to resolve this problem presented by opposing views of Christ's method is difficult. Certainly the positions of Edersheim and Lange cannot be dismissed as lacking sufficient ground, nor can the traditional view of Christ's intent and method be cast aside. However, it seems fair to make these observations about Christ's approach. His method is not one which proclaims a fiery condemnation on her sin. Rather we are struck by the simple, declarative way in which Jesus reveals the woman's inmost heart. Also Christ's words contain an element of commendation for the answer which the woman gives. In other words, it would seem that Jesus' method is not dominated, obviously, by a spirit which delights in exposing a person's guilt and accountability before God, but rather by a love which looks at the sin and yet past the sin of the person to see the goal to which He wants to lead that person.

Because of what Jesus has told her, the woman says, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet" (v. 19). She may

³⁰Lange, op. cit., p. 58.

mean, as Barrett suggests, that she considers Jesus as "the prophet," giving a Messianic interpretation to Deuteronomy 18:5; or she may use a term that is more general in its meaning, as the Samaritans unlike the Jews did not accept the authority of "the prophets" in the Old Testament canon.³¹

The woman continues "in the earnest spirit of religious inquiry,"³² and brings forward the most decided point of controversy between the Jews and Samaritans, on which she wished to learn the "prophet's" judgment: "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain;³³ and you say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship" (v. 20).

Once more the Lord answers her question by leading her far beyond it--beyond all controversy--even on to the goal of all His teaching.³⁴ Jesus spoke:

Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on

³¹ Barrett, op. cit., p. 197.

³² Lange, op. cit., p. 59.

³³ A brief word on Mount Gerizim is necessary here. The woman pointed to the fact that this mountain was the holy mount for the Samaritans even as the Jews looked upon Jerusalem's Mount Zion as their chief shrine. The mountain had a commanding view of the surrounding land, and the woman probably could see the peak from the well where she spoke with Jesus. The woman brought up the old controversy between Jew and Samaritan and was, no doubt, pressing for a solution to the contemporary idea that according to the Samaritan tradition they alone remained true to God's chosen holy mountain (1 Sam. 1:3), while the Jews were "seduced" by Eli to construct the apostate shrine at Shiloh. M. S. Miller, op. cit., p. 639.

³⁴ Edersheim, op. cit., p. 417.

this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth. (vv. 21-24)

These words are yet a fuller revelation to the woman. Any racial prejudice and human traditions which isolated people from worship of God were swept aside with this fundamental truth. Neither the object of worship nor its mode would be found in a geographical location, either exclusively or preferentially.³⁵ God being absolutely "the Father," all men in all places shall have access to Him. Yet Jesus does point up the actual distinction between Jewish and Samaritan worship. The Samaritan worship was a mixture of true religion with idolatry. The obscurity of a Pentateuch with a garbled text, unenlightened by the clearer revelations in the prophets, left them with a mutilated religion.³⁶ Jesus rejected the Samaritan religion with the words, "You worship what you do not know," and asserted that the Jews were the ones who worshiped the true God, Who had made Himself known to them in their history by His gracious dealings with them.³⁷ They were the keepers of the promise of the coming Messiah. But although the Jews were the matrix from which salvation

³⁵Dods, op. cit., p. 728.

³⁶Plummer, op. cit., p. 112.

³⁷Barrett, op. cit., p. 199.

comes, Jesus points beyond them to an hour which is coming, and now is, "when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth. . . ."

It is beyond the scope of our topic to go into any exegetical detail on the meaning of words such as "spirit" and "truth." Once again, we repeat that we are interested in pointing up Jesus' method of bringing a conviction of sin. With the insights Jesus has given this woman we can see that He is eager to dispense to a listening heart the gifts which He came to give. Giving is His method. In the case of this sinful woman who yet was willing to question and to listen, His method is to restate and clarify those things which she did not fully understand at first.

As we shall show in the next two chapters, it was part of Jesus' method to reveal His Messiahship in its full offensiveness. It is remarkable to note that, although the claims of Jesus cancel her former beliefs, the woman is not "offended" by Him. In fact, this woman is led to remark, "I know that Messiah is coming . . . when he comes, he will show us all things" (v. 25). To this remark of continued interest, Jesus' method is to inform her completely as to the way in which God is working. His discourse has pointed to the fact that the new age of the Messiah is present. Now He says, "I who speak to you am he." Farrar observes:

To this poor, sinful, ignorant stranger had been uttered words of immortal significance, to which all future ages would listen, as it were, with hushed

breath and on their knees.³⁸

This was the climax of the scene. Jesus had said all. He had avowed something which He had never before categorically admitted.³⁹ His method was again to take the woman beyond her expectations. He removed all temporizing from her previous statement. He said in effect, "You do not need to wait. I that speak to you am the one who has revealed all things needful to you." All the previous message was preparatory to this final self-revelation. The conversation found its climax as Jesus revealed Himself as the answer to all the needs of this woman, the One Who had revealed her inner life, the actual source of "living water," and the bringer of a new concept of worship.

The remainder of the chapter adds little to our understanding of Jesus' methods in dealing with this woman. We may briefly summarize the conclusion: the woman became so excited at Jesus' announcement that He was the Messiah, that she "left the water jar" perhaps for Jesus to get His own drink, and running to the city told the people, "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" And we see in verses 40-42 that Jesus remained with the Samaritans for two days and spoke with them.

In the concluding portion of this chapter we wish to

³⁸Farrar, op. cit., p. 164.

³⁹Daniel-Rops, op. cit., p. 216.

summarize the methods we have seen Jesus using in bringing a conviction of sin. Admittedly, when we seek to isolate methods which are aimed at a conviction of sin, we are speaking about a part of the whole, since Jesus' ultimate purpose was always to bring a person to faith in Himself as God's Anointed. But if we admit to the fact that an ingredient and an inherent part of Jesus' plan was bringing a conviction of sin, we see the following methods in operation:

1. Although in the world, Jesus does not become part of the world by displaying and furthering its prejudices and basically hateful traditions. Rather He ignores social standards and conventions which are divisive and follows the nature of His Mission to reach all people.
2. Jesus uses a temporal interest such as the need for water to establish rapport and to begin the process of reaching into the inner life of an individual.
3. When there is a hint of defensiveness or insolence in the woman or a maladroit misunderstanding on her part, Jesus does not rebuke her attitude or position, but always seeks to lead her on to a new appreciation and recognition of Himself and His gift.
4. Jesus stimulates His hearer with a sudden turn of thought by shifting from a request to an offer and a promise. He also excites her continued interest by the use of a striking ambiguity.
5. In connection with His ambiguous use of the term water, we see a pattern throughout the discourse by which Jesus makes an assertion which is misunderstood or misinterpreted, and then proceeds to restate, clarify, and amplify it.
6. In the first part of the discourse, we see Jesus' approach to the woman is marked with a noticeable lack of any Law preachment; rather His words convey a reference to and proclamation of a promise which He can make to her as the Son of God.

7. When Jesus does speak to the woman about her personal life, which according to all interpretations was sinful, He uses no condemning expressions or phrases, but rather reveals her inner life in a simple, declarative, tactful manner. In this particular case, we are inclined to agree with Phillips' position that "the sense of guilt, it would appear, might well take care of itself. . . ." ⁴⁰
8. Jesus does not condone the Samaritan practice of worship, but asserts the genuineness of the Jewish form. Yet His purpose is not to bring the two views into conflict, but to direct the woman to a higher form of worship which He initiates on behalf of the Father.
9. In the face of the woman's reverent and continued interest, Jesus makes an unprecedented and rarely repeated revelation about His Mission and Person.

⁴⁰ Phillips, op. cit., p. 29.

CHAPTER III

JESUS' DISCOURSES WITH THE MULTITUDE AT CAPERNAUM

In the preceding chapter we discussed and delineated methods which we saw Jesus using in bringing a sense of need to the Samaritan woman. The reasons for which we chose that particular case study were the fact that the circumstances suggested rather plainly that the woman was living in sin, the fact that Jesus was addressing Himself to specific, individual needs, and the fact that Jesus' approach was not hindered by any repelling animosity on the part of the woman. We now turn to study Jesus' preaching discourses at Capernaum in the sixth chapter of John. In contrast to the foregoing chapter, we see Jesus dealing with a multitude instead of an individual, a fact which may have implications for His approach. Secondly, we realize that this incident took place in a transitional period of Jesus' ministry. We see here Jesus using methods of approach which effect a sifting and separation between true discipleship and the reverse.¹ Thirdly, we notice in this particular encounter of Jesus and people the beginning of open hostility in hearers to the message and claims of Jesus as the Messiah. As we see this animosity looming ever larger in the picture,

¹R. H. Lightfoot, St. John's Gospel, edited by C. F. Evans (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1956), p. 169.

we realize more clearly the persistence and patience in the method of Jesus.

Our approach in attempting to isolate Jesus' method of dealing with sin will be much the same as we used in the former chapter. We shall examine the context, giving special attention to the make-up of the crowd. After we have analyzed the discourses step by step, we shall conclude the chapter with a summary of the maladies which Jesus met in these people and the methods which He employed in dealing with them.

In our study of this sixth chapter of St. John's Gospel, we will be giving special attention to certain verses within the chapter, namely, verses 25-59. Some commentators feel that the words of Christ recorded in these verses make up one discourse, while others feel that there are three distinct parts of one discourse or even three discourses. For purposes of analysis we accept the division made by Westcott, i.e., that there are three groups of discourses, viz., (a) vv. 25-40, (b) vv. 41-51, and (c) vv. 52-58. "Each group," Westcott explains, "is introduced by some expression of feeling on the part of those to whom the words are addressed: (a) simple question, v. 25, (b) a murmuring, v. 41, and (c) a contention among themselves, v. 52."²

² Brooke Foss Westcott, The Gospel According to St. John (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1954), p. 221.

The immediate context is important for a consideration of the discourses themselves. At the outset of chapter six, the Lord, having left the western for the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee (v. 1), is followed by a great multitude impressed by His ability to cure the sick. He ascended the hill country where, in the company of His disciples, He carries out a miraculous feeding of 5,000 men (v. 10). As a consequence of such bounty, the people see in Jesus "the prophet who is to come into the world" (v. 14) and concert to thrust royalty upon Him in order to achieve their own purposes. The term "the prophet" is no doubt synonymous with "the Messiah."³ Thus, the multitude interpreted the sign at its own level and in the light of its supposed advantage (cf. v. 26). They see in Him one who,

if sufficient pressure is brought to bear upon Him, will, as their leader, solve its [Israel's] national and economic problems. Hence its perception has now⁴ become even more selfish and dull than it was at 6:2.

Already we can see the malady with which Jesus must deal.

Although the crowd attempted to make Jesus king after witnessing the miraculous feeding, Jesus perceived their designs and left the disciples and the multitude, withdrawing into the high ground alone. That evening, after the disciples had embarked again on the sea for Capernaum and when they met a fierce storm, Jesus walked to them across the

³Lightfoot, op. cit., p. 166.

⁴Ibid.

water and calmed not only their fears, but also the sea. The next day, we read (vv. 22-24), the multitude once more stood on the eastern shore of the lake and realized that Jesus was no longer in the vicinity. It was very obvious that He had not traversed the six miles to Capernaum by boat with the disciples on the previous evening, and so in search of Him they use boats which had arrived from Tiberias to go to Capernaum. The arrival of the multitude at Capernaum brings us to the beginning point of the Capernaum Discourses.

Before we consider the discourses in detail, however, we are interested in seeing whether we can estimate what the make-up of this multitude was, with a view toward bringing out Jesus' method of approach in clearer relief. There are varying opinions on what type of persons were in this crowd. Lange holds that since Jesus remained behind after the feeding of the 5,000 to dismiss them, it is right to assume that most of the people did leave, "at least the more intelligent and pious amongst them."⁵ Lange further claims that the crowd that followed Jesus across the lake is only a remnant of the former crowd, "and that, too, a crowd of the most exalted fanatics, a rabble of obtrusive Chiliasts, who believed that they had found in Him the bread-king that

⁵ John Peter Lange, The Life of the Lord Jesus Christ, edited with additional notes by Marcus Dods, translated by J. E. Ryland and M. G. Huxtable (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958), II, 244.

they wanted."⁶ We, however, feel that a fairer estimate is made of the people by most other commentators, like Bernard⁷ and Edersheim,⁸ who claim that the multitude in Capernaum consisted pretty much of the same type of honest and inquiring people as were present at the feeding.⁹

With the purpose of lifting out from the discourses Jesus' method of bringing a conviction of sin, we now turn to consider the first discourse, verses 25-40, in detail. The question of the multitude at verse 25, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" receives no direct reply. Instead the Lord

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ J. H. Bernard, Gospel According to St. John, edited by A. H. McNeile (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929), I, cxii.

⁸ Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1953), II, 27.

⁹ A similar and interesting question, although not as important to our topic, is the problem of the exact location of the discourses. We have observed that there are three groups to the Capernaum Discourses and, while some commentators feel that all parts were spoken in the synagogue, all that we can say for certain is that the last part was spoken there (v. 59). However, we feel that the suggestion made by Edersheim is quite in place: "Probably the succession of events may have been, that part of what is here recorded by St. John had taken place when those from across the Lake had first met Jesus; part on the way to, and entering, the Synagogue; and part as what He spoke in His Discourse. . . . But we can only suggest such an arrangement, since it would have been quite consistent with Jewish practice, that the greater part should have taken place in the Synagogue itself, the Jewish questions and objections representing either an irregular running commentary on His Words, or expressions during the breaks in, or at the conclusion of, His teaching." Edersheim, op. cit., pp. 26f.

directs their attention to something more important and warns His hearers that their interest in Him is now based on nothing better than hope of material benefit (v. 26). Lange quite aptly remarks at this point, "He [Jesus] knew that they had sought Him not because His feeding of them was a sign, but because that sign had been a feeding. . . ." ¹⁰

After the warning Jesus directs the thoughts of His hearers still higher and pleads, "Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of man will give to you; for on him has God the Father set his seal" (v. 27). Naturally, Christ's statement does not mean to imply that His hearers should neglect the physical provisions of the body, but tells them that their first aim should be to receive what He offers. ¹¹

Jesus' method of approach in these words is to dip into the Old Testament and Rabbinical teaching to bring knowledge which the people already possessed to bear upon their thinking.

Jesus' method of using an Old Testament concept is shown by the fact that He uses "Son of man" as a title for Himself, as the thought of the discourses develops and makes

¹⁰Lange, op. cit., p. 245.

¹¹The thought and style of St. John at this point are deeply Hebraic in character, and for the sake of emphasis the Hebrews often expressed a truth, or, as here, a precept in the form of two directly opposed propositions, where Western thought finds it more natural to use the language of comparison. Lightfoot, op. cit., p. 166.

plain later on (cf. v. 53). It is very possible that at this time the term had Messianic applications which meant that the term brought forth a kingly figure in the mind of the Jews. But on previous occasions (cf. 1:51; 3:13,14; 5:27) Jesus used the term to denote a person more closely connected with the suffering servant figure in Isaiah (cf. Is. 53).¹² The use of the term "Son of man," then, is a method on Jesus' part by which He continues to place before His hearers His true mission as forecast by the Old Testament.¹³

¹²Daniel-Rops, Jesus and His Times, translated from the French by Roby Millar (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1954), p. 328.

¹³A summary of the Old Testament background of the term "Son of man" as presented by Daniel-Rops may be desirable here. Daniel-Rops rightly maintains that the name is itself a part of the mystery of the Messianic revelation. Jesus' use of the term tends to emphasize the human side of His nature, to make His followers feel that He was a man as they were. But, at the same time, the term had another and weightier significance. It was charged with an esoteric sense because of its use by the prophets of Israel. In Ezekiel it is used no less than ninety-four times and it appears to denote the prophet as the representative of humanity, the human part of him contrasted with the majesty of God which is using this feeble creature as a mouthpiece. In Daniel 7:13,14 the sense of the term is more explicit: "I saw in the night visions and, behold, one like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven and came to the Ancient of Days. . . . And there was given him dominion and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations and languages should serve him: His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away." Thus, it is probable, that at the time of Christ the term had Messianic application. Daniel-Rops concludes: "The Son of Man is, in fact, another way of saying 'Messiah,' since it covers the double meaning--the glory and the suffering. Christ used it, and was increasingly to use it, in its most authentic interpretation; not that of the Glorious King, the Avenger and the Conqueror to whom the Pharisees addressed their famous prayer Alennu, but the suffering Messiah, the sacrificial victim who was to redeem the sins of the world." Daniel-Rops, op. cit., pp. 327f.

Jesus' method appealed again to something that His hearers already knew when He says, "for on him has God the Father set his seal" (v. 27). Jesus here was making use of a Rabbinic teaching. Although to our mind the words seem inexplicable in their use here, the words do become clear when we remember that this was a well-known Jewish expression.

Edersheim says:

According to the Rabbis, "the seal of God was Truth (AeMeTH)," the three letters of which this is composed in Hebrew (אמת) being, as was significantly pointed out, respectively the first, the middle, and the last letters of the alphabet. Thus the words of Christ would convey to His hearers that for the real meat, which would endure to eternal life--for the better banquet--they must come to Him, because God had impressed upon Him His own seal of Truth and so authenticated His Teaching and Mission.¹⁴

With this explanation we can clearly see the method by which Jesus appeals to the minds of His audience.¹⁵

Already in this saying of Jesus (v. 27) the contrast between "Do not labor" and "the Son of man will give" points the hearers to the fact that no one ever receives a recompense from God, but always secures a gift. It is this accent

¹⁴Edersheim, op. cit., p. 29.

¹⁵Westcott also offers an explanation of the term "seal," but finds it rather connected with Jewish ritual at the time of sacrifice. In Jewish ritual the victims were examined and sealed if perfect. Perhaps, he suggests, the thought of Christ as an accepted sacrifice is already indicated by the term. Westcott, op. cit., p. 224. While with hindsight we might come to the conclusion of Westcott, it seems that the explanation offered by Edersheim more correctly reveals, as nearly as we can tell, what may have been in the minds of the hearers when Jesus was speaking.

which the people did not catch, however, as we can see from their question in verse 28, "What must we do, to be doing the work of God?" Jesus, in return, as is consistent with His method, raises the conversation to a new level and says, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent" (v. 29). Because the rabbis who taught the people were accustomed to teach in metaphors,¹⁶ the people saw at once that Jesus from the beginning of this discourse was alluding to some religious duty. What it was, however, they did not understand, but fancied that He referred to some religious works appointed specially by God. Geikie states:

As Jews, they had been painfully keeping all the Rabbinical precepts, in the belief that their doing so gave them a claim above. Yet, if He [Jesus] had some additional injunctions, they were willing to add them to the rest, that they might legally qualify themselves for a share in the New Kingdom of God, as a right.¹⁷

But in contrast to their expectations, Jesus' method is to bid them to believe "in him whom he has sent."

At verse 30 we can see that the crowd is quite aware of the fact that Jesus sets forth the object of their belief as Himself and the conversation turns to the nature of His credentials. They ask, "Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave

¹⁶ Cunningham Geikie, The Life and Words of Christ (London: Strahan and Company Limited, 1880), II, 191.

¹⁷ Ibid.

them bread from heaven to eat." (vv. 30f.). Their question implies from Jewish history that Moses imposed upon the fathers the yoke of the Law, but he justified his authority indeed. What, then do you do?

Here again we may call attention to the "malady-characteristics" which manifest themselves in the crowd. To our mind it seems strange that the people should ask for a sign like manna coming from heaven when they had witnessed the miraculous feeding on the previous day. It may be that the resistance of Jesus to their abortive attempt to make Him a king weakened and neutralized the effect of the miracle that they had witnessed.¹⁸ Or it may be that we see here the outcropping of a type of "beggarly pride," as Lange suggests,

for they were intrusively offering themselves as His followers, who, under certain conditions--that, for example, of being daily fed with miraculous bread--were willing to believe and obey Him.¹⁹

This request of the people also gives us occasion for discussing the fact that most all Messianic prophecies had become exaggerated to the point of being perverted.²⁰ Every figure in which prophets clothed the brightness of the Messianic age was at first literalized, and then exaggerated, until the most glorious poetic descriptions became the most "repulsively incongruous caricatures of the spiritual

¹⁸Edersheim, op. cit., p. 25.

¹⁹Lange, op. cit., p. 247.

²⁰Edersheim, op. cit., p. 28.

Messianic expectancy."²¹

The manna which the people requested was one such example of an Old Testament type which became exaggerated.

Geikie states:

The miracle of the manna had become a subject of the proudest remembrances and fondest legends of the nation. "God," says the Talmud, "made manna to descend for them, in which were all manner of tastes. Every Israelite found in it what best pleased him. The young tasted bread, the old honey, and the children oil." It had even become a fixed belief that the Messiah, when He came, would signalize His advent by the repetition of this stupendous miracle. "As the first Saviour--the deliverer from Egyptian bondage," said the Rabbis, "caused manna to fall for Israel from heaven, so the second Saviour--the Messiah--will also cause manna to descend for them once more. . . ."²²

The figure of Moses was another thing from Old Testament history who received an improper slant and interpretation from the Jews at the time of these discourses. Thus, to understand the reasoning of the Jews, implied but not fully expressed, as also the answer of Jesus, it is necessary to bear in mind that it was the often and most anciently expressed opinion that, although God had given them this manna out of heaven, yet it was given through the merits of Moses and ceased with his death.²³ It was this teaching which the people probably had in mind when they asked, "What sign do you do?" and this was the meaning of Christ's emphatic assertion,

Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave

²²Geikie, op. cit., p. 192.

²³Edersheim, op. cit., p. 30.

you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven, and gives life to the world. (vv. 32f.)

Thus, Jesus' method here is to correct and direct them away from their misconceptions and at once to lead their thoughts to a higher plane than a mere literal repetition of the Moses miracle.

But with their minds still fastened to mere material images and their hopes still running on mere material benefits, they eagerly request, "Lord, give us this bread always" (v. 34). Yet in the face of this earthbound request for a perpetual bounty of bread, Jesus' approach is a persistent advance to loftier regions of revelation. He removes all possibility of understanding bread impersonally or materially, and rather directs the hearers to Himself and utters the first of His seven self-declarations of this Gospel:²⁴

I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me; and him who comes to me I will not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me; and this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up at the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that every one who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life;

²⁴The seven self-declarations of Christ are:

1. The Bread of Life, 6:41.
2. The Light of the world, 8:12, 9:5.
3. The Door, 10:7,9.
4. The Good Shepherd, 10:11,14.
5. The Resurrection and the Life, 11:25.
6. The Way, the Truth, and the Life, 14:6.
7. The True Vine, 15:1,5.

and I will raise him up at the last day. (vv. 35-40)

This longer and continuous section of Jesus' discourse evidences an intensification of Jesus' method of bringing a conviction of sin. It contains an indictment of the people's unbelief (v. 36) and continues to place Jesus before the people, not merely as the One Who imparts the gifts of God, but the One Who is the gift of God. And in emphasizing Himself as the gift of God, Jesus also makes plain the benefits accruing to the believer. In analyzing Jesus' method, it would seem that we should also take into consideration the relative balance between indictment and revelation of Himself as Messiah. We note, therefore, that Jesus uses relatively few words in judgment on the people's misunderstanding and consequent unbelief, but seems to spare no words in placing Himself before the people as the Messiah in all His offensiveness. In traditional Lutheran parlance, then, Gospel far outweighs Law.

We also note, as a matter of Jesus' method, that His "I am" declaration suggests His divinity because of the reminiscent allusions to the Old Testament style of God speaking (cf. 8:58; Gen. 17:1; Exod. 3:14; Ps. 35:3; Jer. 3:12; Is. 51:12).²⁵ More evident assertions of His divinity, of course, are His statements that He came down from heaven and that God is His Father Who also sent Him.

²⁵Bernard, op. cit., p. cxxi.

At verse 41 we enter into a new discourse, yet it is closely related to and develops the thought of the first discourse. For the first time we are introduced to questioners who are termed as "the Jews." Elsewhere in the Gospel of St. John the term "the Jews" is used for the most part of the dwellers in the south, and especially of the Jerusalem authorities, who are hostile to the Lord from the beginning.²⁶ But most commentators agree that new questioners have not appeared on the scene, but rather that John uses the term with reference to Galileans to show that they also stumbled at the Lord's teaching and ultimately were not different from those who opposed Him in the south.²⁷

The Jews at this point resent Jesus' assertion that He has come down from heaven. They resent it, because they feel that they are fully equipped with adequate knowledge about His physical parentage. Lange, however, sees much more present here than mere resentment. He says:

The exhortations with which Jesus rebukes these whispering murmurers--"Murmur not among yourselves!"--is not, we may imagine, merely a discussion from the act of murmuring, viewed in itself. Rather in their whisperings and murmuring amongst themselves was shown that narrow party spirit in which one strengthens the other in his bigotry, prejudice, and fanatical excitement. If they will let themselves be so schooled and influenced by party spirit, they cannot really come to Him.²⁸

²⁶Lightfoot, op. cit., p. 168.

²⁷Bernard, op. cit., p. 202.

²⁸Lange, op. cit., p. 247.

Jesus met these murmurers, as His method has already indicated, with a rebuke, but also, and more important, with a clearer, fuller, stronger declaration of the very truth which they rejected. We present this somewhat longer saying of Jesus in its entirety for its impact.

Do not murmur among yourselves. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, "And they shall all be taught by God." Every one who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. Not that any one has seen the Father except him who is from God; he has seen the Father. Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh. (vv. 42-51)

Right here we can call attention to a pattern which emerges in Jesus' method of approach, a pattern which we saw already in the case of the Samaritan woman. Jesus' method is to re-assert a truth which is misunderstood or rejected, clarify it, expand it, and intensify it. As we saw in the quotation above, Jesus repeats the assertions made in the first discourse, but in much more forceful language.²⁹

While Jesus was leading His hearers ever upward with His speech, He did not forget that He was talking to Jews. The allusion He makes in verse 44 to Jeremiah 31:34 and the quotation in verse 45 from Isaiah 54:13 was an appeal to

²⁹Frederic W. Farrar, The Life of Christ (New York: Hurst and Company, 1875), p. 313.

those prophets which the people would understand, since Jewish tradition also applied these two prophecies to the teaching of God in the Messianic age.³⁰ But the explanation of the manner and issue of God's teaching was new: "Every one who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me." As before, Jesus dispenses His high claims before these not too receptive listeners, claims of union with the Father (v. 46), claims of giving life and possessing it in Himself (vv. 48,51), claims of coming down from heaven (v. 51). Jesus reminds them that manna was no life-giving substance since their fathers had eaten of it and were dead (v. 49), and then directs them to the fact that He Himself is the bread of life, of which all who eat will live forever. Furthermore, in language more startling, He adds that the bread is His flesh which He will give for the life of the world (v. 51).

We may question Jesus' method of metaphorical teaching here as a device which was not fitted for teaching. Yet this type of teaching was familiar to His hearers, since the Rabbis often used this style. But more specifically yet, the idea of eating, as a metaphor for receiving spiritual benefit, was familiar to Christ's hearers and was as readily understood as our expression of "devouring a book."³¹ Thus, we

³⁰Edersheim, op. cit., p. 33.

³¹Geikie, op. cit., p. 195.

see that Jesus does use a metaphor common to Jewish thought to reveal Himself to them.

But instead of seeking the true significance of the deep metaphor, as we saw the Samaritan woman do, the Jews made it a matter of mere verbal criticism, and only wrangled together about the idle question, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" Upon this, Jesus saw fit to address to them words, the strongest and most difficult, introduced by those crucial words, ἀμήν, ἀμήν.

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me. This is the bread which came down from heaven, not such as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live forever. (vv. 53-58)

Here again we can see Jesus repeating the truths which He has placed before the Jews in the first and second discourses. But the persistence of His method brings Him to a point where He asserts these truths in their final and ultimate form. Even in the face of critical stubbornness, Christ brings no condemnation of the Law, but at the same time places a judgment on their heads by the very words of life which He speaks (cf. 12:47,48). We feel that Lange is worthy of quite extensive quoting here:

That proud spirit which thinks it understands everything whilst it will and can understand nothing, He confronts, in conformity with His pure nature, with the most mysterious utterances. It is a false principle of weak or

perverted philanthropy, that of desiring that matters of faith should be made acceptable to crooked, falsely critical minds, by every possible dilution and softening down of their meaning. To such dispositions, Truth, on the contrary, to bring the process of mutual influence, which tends to no good, to a prompt conclusion. Mystery veils itself before the scorner, by confronting him in the richest gorgeousness of its symbolism,³² of its symbolic expression, and departing from him.

This final discourse is important in its treatment of the "cultured despisers" (Schleiermacher) that stood before Jesus. Thus, perhaps it is important to state from a somewhat different angle that which Lange presented above. Certainly, the sin that Jesus confronted in the men before Him came under condemnation. Jesus never blinked at sin nor excused its ultimate expression of unbelief or rejection. But Jesus' method here of continuing to seek a conviction of sin is unique. The judgment which Jesus leaves with these people is not the condemnation of the Law, but a focused and intense confrontation of what we might call His full offensiveness. Those who had hoped to find a popular political leader in Him saw their dreams melt away. Those who had no true sympathy for His life and words had an excuse for leaving Him. None who were not bound to Him by sincere loyalty and devotion had any longer a motive for following Him. Fierce patriotism burning for insurrection, mean self-interest seeking worldly advantage, and common curiosity craving excitement were equally disappointed. Geikie's summarization

³²Lange, op. cit., p. 249.

of Jesus' approach continues to focus our attention on this facet of His method:

It was the first vivid instance of the "offence of the Cross"--henceforth to become the special stumbling block of the nation. The wishes and hopes of the crowds who had called themselves disciples had proved self-deceptions. They expected from the Messiah quite other favours than the identity of spiritual nature symbolized by the eating His flesh and drinking His blood. The bloody death implied in the metaphor was in direct contradiction to all their ideas. A lowly and suffering Messiah thus unmistakably set before them was revolting to their national pride and gross material tastes.³³

Ultimately, we may say, it was Jesus' method of convincing His hearers of their sin to place before them--always--His full offensiveness. There were no hearers that were not confronted with these facts of Jesus' mission and person. In the case of the Samaritan woman we witnessed a questioning attitude which finally led to belief, but here at Capernaum we see a questioning doubt which leads to its ultimate expression--unbelief and rejection.

In the concluding portion of this chapter we will seek to summarize the methods which we have seen Jesus using in these discourses at Capernaum. To bring about this focus on His methods we might very briefly repeat what type of sins Jesus was facing in these people.

It must be granted, we feel, that in trying to analyze the underlying motives, evil or good, that prompt this multitude at Capernaum to pursue Jesus on foot, by boat, and with

³³Geikie, op. cit., p. 197.

questions, there is always a certain amount of subjective exposition involved in a commentator's estimation. Often this subjectivity may lead them to give different opinions, although not altogether opposing each other, yet differing in matter of degree. A case in point is the fact that Lightfoot can say that the crowd is prompted by a type of selfish nationalism,³⁴ while Lange will differ by degree and say that the crowd is made up of "exalted fanatics" and a "rabble of obtrusive Chiliasts."³⁵ Admittedly, this same influence of subjectivity may cause this writer to give conclusions with which another person might differ by degree. Nevertheless, we shall try to base our estimate of the crowd and its sin from as an objective a viewpoint as possible.

We feel that Bernard is right in suggesting that at the beginning the multitude is made up of honest and inquiring people who are definitely interested in Jesus and in the works that He is doing.³⁶ While there is no evident animosity toward Jesus before the first discourse, yet behind the interests of this multitude there lies a selfish nationalism³⁷ which seeks a king to deliver them from the humiliation of being dominated by other world powers. While we do not

³⁴Lightfoot, op. cit., p. 166.

³⁵Lange, op. cit., p. 244.

³⁶Bernard, op. cit., p. cxii.

³⁷Lightfoot, op. cit., p. 166.

pretend that everyone in the crowd was a Jewish theologian, yet there was evident in the crowd theological misconceptions which led them to forsaking the ways of God. There was evident the idea that a person could gain heaven by legally claiming it through works,³⁸ the idea that Moses was a demigod who earned God's favor for the Israelites,³⁹ the idea that the Messianic kingdom would be a worldly paradise existing for the luxurious comfort of Israel.⁴⁰ All through the discourses we see the crowd manifesting an utter lack of spiritual understanding,⁴¹ which leads them to resentment, if not already hostility abetted by party spirit, with regard to Jesus' assertions concerning His own person.⁴²

While Jesus' ultimate purpose in His ministry was aimed toward calling forth faith in His hearers, if we grant that His purpose was also to convince men of their need and sin, we see these methods in operation:

1. He warns the people against that spirit which looks for material gain and national security and supremacy. He levels an indictment against the consequent and ultimate expression of such a spirit, namely, unbelief.
2. Even though He warns, Jesus does not dwell for long on any misconception or evil desire of the people,

³⁸Geikie, op. cit., p. 191.

³⁹Edersheim, op. cit., p. 30.

⁴⁰Geikie, op. cit., p. 192.

⁴¹Lightfoot, op. cit., p. 154.

⁴²Lange, op. cit., p. 247.

but almost immediately proceeds to speak of Himself as God's Gift to them and the response that should be theirs, namely, belief. Thus, we agree with a statement that Dobbins makes: "[Jesus] made His attack at the point of greatest vulnerability and deepest need. He came quickly, penetratingly, inescapably to the sin question, and then offered the answer in the forgiving love of God to be had only through Him and committal to His way of life."⁴³

3. Jesus appeals to Old Testament concepts and Rabbinical Messianic interpretations in order that the knowledge which the hearer already possesses may convince him of sin and lead him to belief.
4. The thrust of Jesus' discourses does not seem to ask: What do you people believe about yourselves? Do you believe that you are sinful and wicked? Rather Jesus' words always press forth to ask: What do you believe about me? Do you accept what I have told you about Myself? In a sense, Jesus was continually directing the people away from themselves to Himself.
5. In the face of resentment and hostile rejection, Jesus repeats in clearer and more forceful words the very truths which the hearers reject.
6. In the face of continued rejection, Jesus levels no condemnation of the Law upon His hearers, but rather reveals His full Messianic offensiveness with the result that the words of life which He speaks will ultimately be the words of judgment upon their heads, as He says, "If any one hears my sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. He who rejects me and does not receive my sayings has a judge; the word that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day" (12:47-48).

⁴³Gaines S. Dobbins, Evangelism According to Christ (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949), p. 203.

CHAPTER IV

JESUS' DISCOURSE WITH THE JERUSALEM LEADERS

So far we have examined Christ's method of dealing with sin in regard to the Samaritan woman and the multitude at Capernaum. In a further attempt to establish our Lord's approach we turn to consider a third case study, namely, His encounter with the Jerusalem authorities recorded in St. John 10:22-39. We feel this incident has features which distinguish it from our previous two studies. The first obvious difference is the fact that Jesus is dealing with the religious leaders in Jerusalem, here referred to as "the Jews," which is John's usual term for those who have been hostile to Christ from the beginning.¹ The presence of their open hostility will afford us opportunity to examine whether Christ's approach is different from that which He uses with persons who are not actively contradicting and opposing His message. Another difference which gives us a special reason for studying this incident is the fact that in this instance there is an urgency and compulsion in Christ's words. This is "Christ's final public testimony to Himself"² in the capital city of the Jews before that visit which culminates in

¹R. H. Lightfoot, St. John's Gospel, edited by C. F. Evans (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1956), p. 168.

²Brooke Foss Westcott, The Gospel According to St. John (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Company, 1954), p. 63.

His death. Does this urgency and finality of the discourse, then, affect the method of Christ's approach?

Our study of this discourse will reveal that there are similarities with the methods with which we are familiar already in our study. But there is also an approach which is unique in its appeal to believe. In the face of an opposition that is ready to stone Him, we see Jesus making His most simple, direct, and intense plea to them to turn from sin and antagonism to a well-founded belief in Himself.

Our approach in this discourse of Jesus will be the same as was used in chapters two and three. We shall describe the environment in which the discourse took place as far as it is possible and as far as it impinges upon our subject. Then we shall analyze the discourse step by step and the reactions and maladies which it calls forth in the Jews. Finally, we shall draw summary conclusions from the evidence which we have introduced and examined.

To establish the pertinent physical circumstances which surround Jesus' final discourse with the leaders in the Jewish capital city, we begin with John's introduction in verses 22-23: "It was the feast of the Dedication at Jerusalem; it was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon." The feast of Dedication was a festive occasion which made the Jewish heart palpitate with pulsating nationalistic ambition, since it commemorated the most

recent Jewish national deliverance.³ It was an observance of joyous character, a time when it was unlawful to weep or fast.⁴ The occasion of this feast with its remembrance of national deliverance no doubt provided the mental set which prompted the Jews to ask Jesus whether He was the Christ, which to the Jews meant a kingly figure who would give to the Jewish nation a favored place among the nations of the world.

This feast of the Dedication began on the 25th of Chislew, which is roughly equal to our November and early

³A word about the historical origin of the feast of Dedication. This festival, also known as Hanukkah and the Feast of Lights, was a festival which was celebrated by the Jews with great magnificence. It commemorated the purification and re-dedication of the temple by Judas Maccabaeus in 165 B.C., three years after its desecration by the Seleucid conqueror, Antiochus Epiphanes, who had erected within it an altar to Zeus. The defiling of the temple had also resulted in the contamination of the oil which was used in the lamps around the temple. When Judas Maccabaeus freed the temple from its desecration, only one single vial of oil was found which had been laid up under the seal of the chief priest and it was not enough to light the lamps for one day. However, as the story goes, there was a great miracle, because the priests used the one vial of oil to light the lamps for the space of eight days. Therefore, in the year following the re-dedication, the Jews instituted the custom of celebrating for eight days and the lighting of the lamps was very much a part of the commemoration. Thus, it was known as the Feast of Lights and was given a joyous character. This information was culled from the following sources: William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 214; Edwyn Clement Hoskyns, The Fourth Gospel, edited by Francis Noel Davey (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1947), p. 385; John Peter Lange, The Life of the Lord Jesus Christ, edited with additional notes by Marcus Dods, translated by J. E. Ryland and M. G. Huxtable (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958), II, 461.

⁴Lange, loc. cit.

December.⁵ Therefore, John informs us that it was winter. Most commentators feel that the mention of winter here is an indication of the inclement weather that prevailed, possibly rain, since Chislev was the cold month (cf. Ezra 10:9,13).⁶ These climatic conditions provide the reason for the fact that Jesus is in one of the oldest and most historic parts of the temple, a fragment of the first temple which survived the various destructions.⁷

Whatever the reason for Jesus being in the temple, suddenly, "as though by preconcerted movement,"⁸ the Pharasaic party and their leaders surrounded Him and began to question Him. "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ,⁹ tell us plainly" (v. 24). The occasion, as we

⁵Arndt, op. cit., p. 214.

⁶Westcott, op. cit., p. 64.

⁷A. Plummer, The Gospel According to St. John, in Cambridge Bible for Schools (Cambridge: University Press, 1912), p. 224.

⁸Frederic W. Farrar, The Life of Christ (New York: Hurst and Company, 1875), p. 463.

⁹Adolf Schlatter makes a significant comment on the pivotal place of the term "Christ" occupied in the Jewish mind. He says: "Keine noch so mächtige Verkündigung des göttlichen Wirkens und Herrschens, keine noch so inhaltsreiche Aussage über die Sendung Jesu konnte dem Juden das ersetzen, was die Formel „der Gesalbte“ für ihn bedeutet hat. Erst mit ihr war die prophetische Verheissung unzweideutig in die Gegenwart hineingestellt. Darum hing an diesem Namen die Entscheidung Sprach ihn Jesus aus, so stellte er damit an die Judenschaft und die ganze Menschheit die Forderung des unbegrenzten Gehorsams, mit dem alles in seine Hände gelegt war." D. Adolf Schlatter, Der Evangelist Johannes (Stuttgart: Calwer Vereinsbuchhandlung, 1930), p. 241.

noted, for this question was the Feast of Dedication. But the motivation that prompted the Jews to ask this question may have ranged from the desire of grounding on it an accusation¹⁰ to a motive of genuine inquiry.¹¹ Plummer, perhaps, offers the best summary and solution as to what prompted the Jews to confront Jesus with this question. He says:

Their motives for urging this were no doubt mixed, and the same motive was not predominant in each case. Some were hovering between faith and hostility and (forgetting viii. 13) fancied that an explicit declaration from Him might help them. Others asked mainly out of curiosity: He had interested them greatly, and they wanted His own account of Himself. The worst wished for a plain statement which might form material for an accusation: they wanted Him to commit Himself.¹²

Also manifested here, as Farrar notes, may be a secret wish that like Judas Maccabaeus, Jesus would turn from His lowly ways and become a national deliverer for them in opposition to the Romans. If so, "they would have instantly welcomed Him with tumultuous acclaim."¹³

As we realize that this Jewish crowd was characterized by curiosity, indecision, or hostility and as we know that Jesus' ultimate purpose is to help these persons see their need and sin, we can readily understand that Jesus' method of answering shows infinite patience and wisdom. He says:

¹⁰ Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1953), II, 229.

¹¹ Westcott, op. cit., p. 65.

¹² Plummer, op. cit., p. 225.

¹³ Farrar, op. cit., p. 464.

"I told you, and you do not believe" (v. 25). The answer was an exposal of their blindness, but at the same time a reassertion of His claims to be the Messiah. The question put to Christ by the Jews was a categorical and distinct one and as such Jesus could not refuse a distinct answer. He did not, however, reply in direct terms, "I am the Christ!" for that would have appeared as if He claimed to be the Christ in their sense of the term. Nowhere in this Gospel does Jesus tell the Jews openly that He is the Christ, but His whole teaching and action "presumed it, declared it, interpreted it, and demanded that they should accept and believe it."¹⁴ Therefore, Jesus' answer tells them that in reality He had long since set Himself forth as the Messiah, but as the Messiah in His sense of the term, that is, in a sense in which they would not be willing to receive Him.

If we put this answer into the context of the entire Gospel, we see that Jesus is repeating once again that teaching which they were rejecting. That He was their Messiah in a sense far loftier and more spiritual than they had ever dreamed, His language had again and again implied; but the Messiah in the sense which they required He was not and would not be. Thus, while at other times Jesus answered in a metaphor, such as in the Capernaum Discourses, here in answer to

¹⁴Edwyn Clement Hoskyns, The Fourth Gospel, edited by Francis Noel Davey (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1947), p. 387.

a direct question He does not use ambiguous language as an interest catcher, but repeats clearly in a sentence those claims which He had always been making.

Jesus' method of convincing these Jerusalem authorities of their malicious disbelief and misdirected conceptions switches, as if in infinite patience, from directing them to His words to pointing them to the "indisputable witness of deeds: the works which He wrought in His Father's Name."¹⁵

Jesus says:

The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness to me; but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one. (vv. 25b-30)

Before we analyze this section in somewhat more detail, we wish to comment on the basis of the above quotation that Jesus is constantly laying bare before His Jewish inquirers the theme of the Gospel, no matter how offensive it is to Jewish ears. Just as the cantus firmus of a Bach Cantata recurs ever and again for the purpose of a deeper appreciation, so Christ lays the continuing cantus firmus of His Messiahship, as we saw in the Capernaum Discourses, which shows Him to be the suffering Son of Man who will give His life for the world. Certainly, this fact is most important in coming

¹⁵Edersheim, op. cit., p. 229.

to a realization of Jesus' method of bringing a conviction of sin.

With that brief introduction, we turn to examine this part of Jesus' discourse in detail. In verses 25 and 26, Jesus shows that He cannot condone the attitude of these Jews and pronounces a judgment on their unbelief which displays itself in a twofold manner, i.e., (a) in spite of His words, and (b) in spite of His works. This judgment crescendoes to perhaps the most severe indictment in the Gospel of John, akin to the "Woes" of Matthew 23, "you do not belong to my sheep" (v. 26).¹⁶ And yet while Christ can fix on their heads such a crushing judgment, He immediately goes on to recount once again the characteristics of His sheep and His own person as the Shepherd.

The picture of the sheep and the Shepherd Jesus had put before them some two months previously at the Feast of the Tabernacles (cf. 10:1-18).¹⁷ On this occasion He had portrayed Himself as the Good Shepherd, One Who goes before His following sheep, One Who knows His sheep, and One Who even lays down His life for the sheep. Here, too, He pointed out to the Jews the same fundamental teaching. Speaking to the

¹⁶With Hoskyns, we dismiss any idea of a formal doctrine of predestination here. Rather it describes a general behavior with which the behavior of the true disciples of Jesus is contrasted. Hoskyns, op. cit., p. 387.

¹⁷Lange, op. cit., p. 463.

Jews in this particular situation, the impact of His saying would be, as Lange points out:

In effect, hereby must He know men for His sheep, that they do not seek by false appeals to entice Him to their false ways, but that they know His voice as their Shepherd, and as such acknowledge it and yield it obedience. Between Him and His sheep (He says) there exists the liveliest mutual relation from beginning to end.¹⁸

Perhaps less important to our study of Jesus' method of bringing a conviction of sin, and yet an interesting sidelight to the discussion, is a fact which Edersheim points out in reference to Jesus' sentence structure. He shows that Jesus' words concerning the sheep and the Shepherd are marked by a triplet of double parallelism in ascending climax as follows:

My sheep hear My Voice,	And I know them,
And they follow me:	And I give unto them
	eternal life:
And they shall never perish.	And no one shall snatch
	them out of My Hand. ¹⁹

As we indicated above, the words of the sheep and the Shepherd are closely related to the severe indictment which Christ made in verse 26. Yet Edersheim, perhaps more adequately than any other source, calls attention to the promise and comfort that these words contain. We feel that his rather lengthy commentary is worthy of quoting. He says:

Richer or more comforting assurance than that recorded above could not have been given. But something special has here to be marked. The two first parallelisms al-

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Edersheim, op. cit., p. 229.

ways link the promise of Christ to the attitude of the sheep; not, perhaps conditionally, for the relation is such as not to admit conditionalness, either in the form of "because--therefore," or even of "if--then," but as a matter of sequence and of fact. But in the third parallelism there is no reference to anything on the part of the sheep; it is all promise, and the second clause only explains and intensifies what is expressed in the first. If it indicates attack of the fiercest kind and by the strongest and most cunning of enemies, be they men or devils, it also marks the watchfulness and absolute superiority of Him Who hath them as it were, in His Hand--perhaps a Hebraism for "power"--and hence their absolute safety.²⁰

Christ, then, as if to show the guarantee behind His own words of guarantee, reminds His hearers in verse 29, that His own work is really the work of the Father and no one can snatch the sheep out of His Father's hand. Thus, we can see in the method of Jesus' words here not only the presence of an indictment, but always inserted conspicuously, as if to call attention to themselves, are words of promise, comfort, and life, which are a necessary concomitant of His claims of Messiahship.

Before we consider Jesus' concluding and climactic words to this first part of the discourse, we might review what methods we have seen Him using so far. His answer to the Jews has appealed both to His words and works which have always held out to the Jews His claims, promises, and authentication by the Father. Their rejection of the words and works, He tells His hearers, judges them to be guilty on two counts. As a continued plea He repeats the words of the sheep and the

²⁰Edersheim, op. cit., p. 230.

Shepherd which He had used in their presence two months previously. Thus, His method has incorporated repetition, intensification, and (as we shall see now) a climactic claim.

The closing statement of Christ in this part of the discourse, namely, "I and the Father are one" (v. 30), was an unavoidable conclusion. "Rightly understood, it is not only the last and highest announcement, but it contains and implies everything else."²¹ If the work of Christ is really that of the Father and His working also that of the Father, then He and the Father are one. This claim, as Westcott points out, was a claim of essential oneness.²² Because the Jews did not expect the Messiah to be a divine person,²³ this claim was an utterance of most audacious blasphemy in Jewish ears. Jesus' claim was an insult to God because it incorporated prerogatives which were only and singularly God's. Such blasphemy was considered a crime by the Jews and explains their excitable and fanatical nature which wanted to fell Jesus to the earth with stones.²⁴

²¹ Ibid.

²² Westcott says: "It seems clear that the unity here spoken of cannot fall short of a unity of essence. The thought springs from the equality of power (my hand, the Father's hand); but infinite power is an essential attribute of God; and it is impossible to suppose that two beings distinct in essence could be equal in power." Westcott, op. cit., p. 68.

²³ M. Dods, The Gospel According to John, in The Expositors Greek Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1951), p. 346.

²⁴ Dods, op. cit., p. 339.

Perhaps at this point we should renew our characterization of the crowd that faces Jesus in order to realize more fully the patience and persistence that marks our Lord's method in dealing with the Jerusalem Jews. We see that they are caught not only in a trap of theological misconceptions pertaining to the Messiah and in the claws of a selfish nationalism, but at this point we see them in the culminating throes of an outburst of temper and near violence. Their hostility is directed not only against Jesus' claims, but also against His very physical presence. In bold relief, then, we can see the persistence calmness which countenances our Lord's figure as He intensifies His appeal to the Jews in the second part of this discourse.

At verse 32, Christ endeavors to bring the Jews back to their self-recollection by addressing to them the inquiry, "I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of these do you stone me?" As Farrar comments, the undisturbed nature and calmness of this word could not fail in some degree to arrest the arm of His opposition.²⁵ We can see several intents to this question. First of all, it was designed to evidence the truth of His declaration that He was one with the Father, because His works had in their own character proved themselves to be purely operations of Heaven, proceeding from the Father.²⁶ Secondly, it was a rebuke

²⁵Farrar, op. cit., p. 465.

²⁶Plummer, op. cit., p. 227.

directed at the leaders of the Jews in front of Him. "They are marked out by it as being enemies of God."²⁷ However, a third intent of the statement was that it was designed to rescue them from their blind frenzy. The wisdom of Jesus' method is shown here by the fact that with one statement He rebukes, rescues, and authenticates Himself by the evidence of His works.

The Jews answer His question: "We stone you for no good work but for blasphemy; because you, being a man, make yourself God" (v. 33). Jesus' answer to this statement of accusation makes up the rest of the discourse and consists of two parts: (a) the defense of His claim from Scripture (vv. 34-36) and (b) His intensified appeal to believe and accept His works (vv. 37-38).

In the first part of these verses, which illustrates Jesus' method of appealing to Scripture, He says:

Is it not written in your law, "I said, you are gods"?
 If he called them gods to whom the word of God came
 (and scripture cannot be broken), do you say of him
 whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world,
 "You are blaspheming," because I said, "I am the Son of
 God"? (vv. 34-36)

Jesus, in defense of His claim, quotes from verse 6 of Psalm 82. In this particular psalm the titles "gods" (Elohim) and "sons of the Most High" are given to judges as the representatives of God and as those who were invested with

²⁷Lange, op. cit., p. 465.

authority to execute justice in God's name.²⁸ Their authority had come by a word of authorization (cf. Ex. 21:6; 22:9, 28), but in the case of Jesus, He received a direct and personal consecration to carry out a personal and direct mission of God. Edersheim says:

The comparison was not with the prophets, because they only told the word and message from God, but with judges, who as such, did the very act of God.²⁹

Therefore, Jesus is arguing, if those who, in so acting, had received an indirect commission by word were "gods," the very representatives of God, could it be blasphemy when He claimed to be the Son of God, Who had received authority, not through a word transmitted through long centuries, but through a direct, personal command to do the Father's work?³⁰

The method which Jesus uses in this part of the discourse is important. We see Him using the Old Testament Scriptures,

²⁸ J. H. Bernard, Gospel According to St. John, edited by A. H. McNeile (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929), II, 368.

²⁹ Edersheim, op. cit., p. 231.

³⁰ While to our modern mind this argument of Jesus seems to be insecure, Bernard testifies that to the Jewish mind it was not. He says: "On Jewish principles of exegesis it [i.e., the line of logic] was quite sound. Jesus never called Himself 'son of Yahweh'; such a phrase would be impossible to a Jew. But 'son of Elohim' occurs often in the O.T. (Gen. 6:2; Job 1:6; Ps. 29:1; 89:6; etc.). That Jesus should call Himself υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ could not be blasphemous, having regard to O.T. precedents, however, unwarranted His opponents might think the claim to be." Bernard, op. cit., p. 368.

which the Jews accepted as authoritative, as a basis for His claims.³¹ We see an attempt on the part of Jesus to establish common ground with the Jews in order that they might accept His claims and realize their own faulty misconceptions and their unfounded rejection.

Having met their technical charge in a technical manner, Jesus now makes an intensified appeal to His works.³² His works, He hopes again, will gain them over to acceptance of His claims as Messiah with the concomitant result that they will be brought to a conviction of their sins. Jesus says, as a conclusion to this discourse:

If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father. (vv. 37-38)

It would seem at this point that because the physical personage of Jesus had become so obnoxious to these Jews, it was the method of Jesus to direct the attention of the Jews away from Him personally. Plummer even sees here a literal command: "if His works are not those which His Father works, they ought not (not merely, have no need) even to believe what He says, much less believe on Him."³³ But let them

³¹For a more detailed study of Christ's use and view of the Old Testament than is possible within the scope of this paper, see: J. W. Wenham, Our Lord's View of the Old Testament (London: The Tyndale Press, 1953).

³²Plummer, op. cit., p. 228.

³³Ibid.

fasten their eyes upon His works, and confess that they are works which are from the Father, miracles of the supremest power and mercy. But if they cannot but confess that, then let them see clearly that they are bound to give the Father the glory, bound to believe on the works which are from the Father, however much they may feel inclined to refuse to Jesus personally. Lange's discussion on this point seems to be a quite penetrating analysis of Jesus' last plea for credence. We take the liberty of making the following lengthy quotation from Lange:

If they do not choose to take the road which leads from faith in Him personally to the acknowledging of His operations, He yet is at liberty to demand this of them, --that they go the way leading from the recognition of His operations to faith in Him personally. It is in this sense, no doubt, that He summons them to "believe His works, that they may know and believe that the Father is in Him." Let them learn first to honour in His working the presence of the Father; let them first cease to go on ever more and more denying the deeds of the Father which in His works stand before their eyes, and thus denying the Father Himself; and then they shall also learn, in the centre of this radiant operation of the Father, to estimate Him, the Son in His personality, --learn to believe that He is in the Father, and the Father in Him. If they only come to know that, then they must needs become aware, to their horror, that in His word they are not assaulting some dark, doubtful thesis of the schools, but the richest demonstration of the presence and activity of the heavenly Father Himself.³⁴

This last appeal of Jesus is important for our study. Negatively, we can say that in the face of threatened violence and bitter rejection, He is not tempted to compromise

³⁴Lange, op. cit., p. 466.

or to make His claims more palpable to disbelieving ears. His claim is as uncompromisingly straightforward as it had been all through His ministry. Yet we do see in this last appeal for the belief of the Jews a plea which outlines the precise and progressive steps by which the Jews can give Him their credence, namely, to believe the works in order to give glory, at least, to the Father and ultimately to fasten their rejection upon their own beliefs and to come to faith in the Person of Jesus. If we may risk a generalization at this point, while condemnation is present in the words of Jesus (vv. 34-38), His final word is not condemnation, but urgent invitation to believe in Him by way of His works.

The stones that had been taken up were not thrown, for the words of Christ rendered impossible the charge of explicit blasphemy which alone would, according to Rabbinic law,³⁵ have warranted such summary vengeance. The last words we read are "they tried to arrest him" (v. 39), so as to drag Him before their tribunal. His time, however, had not yet come, and so "he escaped from their hands" (v. 39).

The events, says Lightfoot, are "full of tragic paradox."³⁶ Jesus is the Messiah of the Jews. He has been sent to realize, at their capital Jerusalem, the age-long hopes of the people of Israel, which would appropriately be much in their minds at a festival commemorating a heroic national

³⁵Edersheim, op. cit., p. 232.

³⁶Lightfoot, op. cit., p. 212.

deliverance. And yet His own nation, as represented by its leaders, has already rejected and is now about to do away with Him, and in so doing will effect and seal its own destruction. "It is indeed winter, the season of death, without and within."³⁷

In concluding this portion of our study of Jesus' method of bringing a conviction of sin, we once again recount briefly the sins which Jesus met in the Jews who encountered Him. A word which might adequately describe them throughout is "hostility." They held hostility toward the idea that they could be wrong in their expectations of the Messiah, hostility to the claims of Jesus to be the expected Messiah, hostility to Jesus' assertion of essential oneness with the Father, and hostility, finally, toward the very physical presence of Jesus.

In confronting this type of hostility, we see these methods of Jesus as He attempts to lead the Jews to a conviction of sin:

1. Jesus initially and immediately confronts the Jews with His past teaching and brings it to bear fully on the present situation. This fact alone would mark the method of Jesus as being characterized by persistence and patience.
2. Throughout this discourse, especially in the face of continued rejection, Jesus uses the unique approach of appealing to His works as an able and final authentication of His person and claims.
3. Jesus' method, as we saw in the preceding two

³⁷ Ibid.

chapters, consists in constantly making His hearers aware of His offensiveness, that is, that He is Messiah in the sense of the term as He has revealed it: the suffering Son of Man who will give His life for the world.

4. Jesus in this instance makes use of the Old Testament Scriptures, both as an undeniable support for His claims to be the Son of God and as an attempt to establish a common ground of belief with the Jews.
5. Even in the face of hostility and near violence to His physical presence, there is no sign on the part of Jesus to make any compromise of claim, but His assertions to be the Messiah are adamantly stalwart.
6. There is prominent in this discourse Jesus' indictment, exposure, and condemnation of the obdurate rejection and unbelief on the part of the Jews. Yet more conspicuous is Jesus' intensified appeal to have them realize their sin and believe, an appeal which directs them to consider His works and attempts to lead them step by step from a reflection on His works to a recognition and an approving acceptance of His person and claims.

CHAPTER V

THREE CONTEMPORARY VIEWS OF JESUS DEALING WITH SIN

In the three preceding chapters we have taken a detailed look at Christ's method of dealing with sin and sinner as He encountered the Samaritan woman, the multitude at Capernaum, and the authorities in Jerusalem. It is the purpose of this chapter to sharpen our inquiry by presenting the observations of three contemporary authors with reference to the method of Christ. It is not our purpose in these few pages to present an exhaustive survey of what has been said about Christ dealing with sin,¹ but merely to point up these three views as representatives of varying types which are recognizable today. Thus, to repeat, the purpose of this chapter is a "sharpening process," that is, an opportunity to state criticisms on the basis of what we have examined. Also it serves as a transitional prelude to stating our own summary and conclusions in the succeeding chapter.

The three men whom we have chosen for representation in this chapter are Charles G. Trumbull, who wrote his material for use in the Young Men's Christian Association; Gaines S.

¹It is an observation of this writer as he culled through the books on evangelism that the methods of Christ are not normally considered as basic to an approach of people's sin today. Rather the writers set up their methods on principles effective within their own experience. Thus, the three men whom we consider in this chapter are among the comparative few who make an issue of Christ's methods.

Dobbins, professor of Religious Education at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky; and J. B. Phillips, well-known writer and clergyman of the Anglican Communion.

Charles G. Trumbull, in his book Taking Men Alive, holds that Christ's ministry was a "mission of winning, not opposing."² Jesus came not to tell chiefly about sin and death, but about salvation and life. Thus, to dwell on the dark side of man's life, he contends, drives men from us, but to dwell on the bright side draws them to us, if they can be won at all. This view of "winning, not opposing" is basic to the method which Jesus uses. His method really involved "two kinds of bait," namely, (a) giving men's present interests prominent place³ and (b) commending the good in men, rather than criticizing the evil.⁴ By the former, Trumbull means the fact that Jesus did not break in on a man's life and thought like a "bolt out of the blue," but always began with something that interested and occupied the man at the time. Thus, for instance, he notes that with the Samaritan woman Jesus began His discourse by referring to water which was a "present interest" of the woman. The second "bait" principle is the use of hearty commendation. On this point Trumbull

² Charles Gallaudet Trumbull, Taking Men Alive (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1938), p. 172.

³ Ibid., pp. 75, 173, passim.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 79, 173, passim.

says:

The surest way to drive men from us is to begin with condemnation or criticism. It is not reasonable to suppose that we can win men to ourselves or to Christ if we begin by telling them of their sins. Christ did not work that way. He never began his message to any individual or groups of persons by condemnation of sin. He did not hesitate to denounce sin and sinful persons under certain circumstances, as when his proffered salvation had been rejected or was being actively opposed; or when religious leaders who posed as God's representatives misrepresented God and attacked Jesus Christ as from the Devil; or when he was answering an attack of criticism by vigorous, unanswerable counter-criticism; or when he chided his disciples for certain failures after they had been won to him. But when Jesus set out to win a person to himself, it seemed to be his resolute purpose to find something in that one which he could commend, and then to commend it in all heartiness.⁵

The two principles outlined above are those which Trumbull finds prominent in the ministry of Jesus. The first one, that of finding a point of interest with the individual or group involved, is confirmed also by our investigation. In the case of the Samaritan woman Jesus began with her concern and purpose of coming out to the well for water. With the multitude at Capernaum Jesus began with their experience of and interest in the miraculous feeding of bread. The second principle, too, seems to come close to concurring with our findings, but we must point out that Trumbull has gone a step beyond the method of Christ. The case of the Samaritan woman would seem to support Trumbull's contention. However, in the incidents at Capernaum and Jerusalem, Jesus did begin by warning His hearers against certain materialistic ambitions

⁵ Ibid., p. 176.

although He quickly proceeded to set before them the gifts that could come to them because He was the Messiah. The point which we criticize in Trumbull's estimation of the Lord's method is that he infers that Jesus used the method of commendation. This "jump" which Trumbull makes to emphasize the principle of commendation smacks of the view that Christ came to develop some sort of latent, innate goodness in man.⁶ This view, we feel, comes too close to overlooking the basic need and sin of man, an attitude which is not at all present in the ministry of Jesus. While in the studies we made Jesus did not give a detailed accounting of each man's sin, the emphasis of Jesus' message was always to direct the hearer to Himself as the One whom the hearer sorely needed. Jesus directed the Samaritan woman to Himself as the One who could satisfy her need for "living water"; He directed the multitude at Capernaum to Himself as the One who could supply their need for the "bread of life"; Jesus directed the Jerusalem authorities to Himself as the Shepherd whom His sheep need. Thus, we cannot agree with the suppositions and implications which Trumbull makes, namely, that Jesus emphasized and commended some good thing in the hearer.

Gaines S. Dobbins, in his book Evangelism According to

⁶ For an extreme view of this kind, see Samuel Marinus Zwemer, Evangelism Today (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1954), pp. 65ff. Here, in a chapter entitled, "Faith in the Soil," Zwemer gives man so much credit that he is even active in producing his own faith.

Christ, has among his principles of evangelism taken from the example of Jesus, a method which he feels Christ used when dealing with sin. He calls it the "principle of strategic attack."⁷ In discussing this principle he makes a very astute observation about the method of Jesus. He says:

[Jesus] . . . made his attack at the point of greatest vulnerability and deepest need. He came quickly, penetratingly, inescapably to the sin question, and then offered the answer in the forgiving love of God to be had only through him and committal to his way of life.

In explaining how this method of Jesus applies to our approach today Dobbins says:

Every type of method, whether to bring people to hear the Gospel or to induce them to accept it, should be submitted to the test, Does it soberly confront sinners with the heinousness of sin?⁸

An example of Jesus' method he finds in the case of the woman of Samaria, where Jesus' command, "Go, call your husband," was a strategic attack on the ugliness of her sin.

We find much to commend this book as an honest appraisal of Christ's approach to people and its application to evangelism. His statements about Christ's methods of a "tactful approach," "a seized opportunity," and "self-revelation" are excellent.¹⁰ But, although it may be bordering on the picaresque, we feel that his advice to point up the "heinousness"

⁷ Gaines S. Dobbins, Evangelism According to Christ (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949), pp. 202ff.

⁸ Ibid., p. 203.

⁹ Ibid., p. 204.

¹⁰ Ibid., passim.

and ugliness of sin typifies a great segment of evangelistic effort which capitalizes on human emotions by the depth and extreme to which it goes in describing human sin. This method we point to as in marked contrast to Trumbull's method of commending something good in the person.

By way of example of this type of Law preaching, we point to Charles Spurgeon, also of the Baptist Confession, who gave this advice to his students with regard to preaching the Law:

Let him [i.e., the minister] show that sin is a breach of the law. . . . Let him never treat sin as though it were a trifle or a misfortune, but let him set it forth as exceedingly sinful. Let him go into particulars, not superficially glancing at evil in the gross, but mentioning various sins in detail, especially those most current at the time: such as that all-devouring hydra of drunkenness, which devastates our land; lying, which in the form of slander abounds on all sides; and licentiousness, which must be mentioned with holy delicacy, and yet needs to be denounced unsparingly.¹¹

A little later Spurgeon continues:

Aim at the heart. Probe the wound and touch the very quick of the soul. Spare not the sterner themes, for men must be wounded before they can be healed, and slain before they can be made alive. No man will ever put on the robe of Christ's righteousness till he is stripped of his fig leaves, nor will he wash in the fount of mercy till he perceives his filthiness. Therefore, my brethren, we must not cease to declare the law, its demands, its threatenings, and the sinner's multiplied breaches of it.¹²

It is our conclusion that this type of "evangelistic"

¹¹David Otis Fuller, Spurgeon's Lectures to His Students (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1945), p. 321.

¹²Ibid., p. 322.

or "revivalistic" preaching of Law is noticeably absent from the methods of Jesus. This contention is true in Christ's dealing with the Samaritan woman. We feel that He did not make a big issue out of "probing the wound" and showing the "heinousness" of sin. Of course, we are not implying that Christ was overlooking her sin. He was, in fact, dealing with her greatest need. On the other hand, our contention would seem to be contradicted by Christ's dealing with the Jerusalem authorities, with whom He did not "spare the sterner themes" of the Law. In John 10:26 Jesus made a most severe pronouncement upon the Jewish leaders when He told them that they did "not belong to" His sheep. But it is important to keep in mind the fact that these men were ones who had rejected any claims and promises that Christ had made previously. They dismissed as immoral any thought of Christ being able to give them a gift of God. Thus, on the basis of our study, we feel that Dobbins' assertion about confronting all people with the "heinousness" of sin is a bit too bold and superficial, an observation which directs us to the views of our next author.

J. B. Phillips is a writer who has dealt with Christ's method of approach to sinners in a number of books. His concern for emphasizing a study of Christ's approach is motivated by the fact that he is disturbed with the methods of high-pressure evangelism.¹³ A basic distinction which Phillips

¹³J. B. Phillips, Making Men Whole (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1953), p. 29.

immediately notes in the method of Christ is that it differed when dealing with those who were branded as sinners and when confronting those who self-righteously rejected His message. Phillips' most complete statement of Christ's approach when dealing with sinners is in his book Making Men Whole. He says:

To the religious people of His day it was a scandalous thing that Jesus, unlike the prophets of old, made no denunciation of those who were called sinners; and we too may find it, if not scandalous, at least surprising. Jesus almost never called men sinners, except in the case of the entrenched self-righteous. . . . Perhaps I make this point clearer, if, speaking for myself, I say that a high-pressure evangelist, whose technique depended on arousing and fostering a sense of guilt, would find himself woefully short of ammunition if he were only allowed to use as his texts the recorded words of Christ. With the common run of ordinary sinners, Jesus appears to have used the method of simple love. The sense of guilt, it would appear, might well take care of itself; so far as we can judge He did not attempt to arouse it.

Again, in his book New Testament Christianity Phillips points to the method of Christ in comparison with certain methods of evangelism in the present day:

I must say at this point that I am profoundly disturbed by the technique of several modern evangelists, though not, thank God, of all. This technique is to arouse feelings of guilt and fear, which is not too difficult in many sensitive, conscientious people, and, having got people thoroughly miserable about their sins, to point them to the Saviour. . . . If these men are right, then one is driven to the conclusion that both Jesus Himself and the Young Church were wrong in their methods. Jesus

¹⁴Ibid.

Himself called men by a positive and not a negative method. It was only the religious and the hypocritical who called forth His salvos of denunciation. . . . This is not to deny, of course, the reality of human sin or that it must be forgiven by God; but the technique of arousing fear and guilt, that is, the negative approach, is not the New Testament method.¹⁵

Later on, in the same book, in a rather polemical tone,

Phillips asserts:

I am quite certain that it is a profound mistake psychologically, spiritually, and in every sort of way to begin by telling people about their sins, and I would to God that modern evangelism would study the technique of Christ¹⁶ Himself in dealing with actual human personalities.

The position of Phillips, we feel, has much to commend it for thought-provoking study, especially for any preacher who has tended to absolutize the preaching of the Law in its condemning force as a sine qua non to an effective proclamation of the Gospel.¹⁷ We consider the view of Phillips as a median position between the commendation principle of Trumbull and the condemnation principle of Dobbins. While he falls into the camp of neither of the two preceding authors, yet we are inclined to think that Phillips has a tendency to make too flat a generalization by overlooking the element of warning that is present in Christ's approach, even when dealing with a "sinner" like the Samaritan woman.

¹⁵ J. B. Phillips, New Testament Christianity (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1956), pp. 63f.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 103.

¹⁷ For a discussion of a tendency of this kind within the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, see the Appendix, "An Unscientific Postscript."

The challenge that remains before us, then, after sharpening our mental teeth on a Trumbull, a Dobbins, and a Phillips, is to state on the basis of our examination what we consider to be the method of Christ when dealing with the sin of men. This is the challenge we take up in the concluding chapter.

Basic to the approach of Jesus was His unyielding love for people and His undying desire that people should recognize Him as God's Messiah and Savior of the world. It was this that He confronted the sinner. No prejudicial or cultural social conventions could keep Him from the Samaritan woman. No threat of danger could keep Him from His ministry to Jerusalem. But wherever Jesus encountered people, He found that toward His claim and person there was shown misunderstanding, misdirected love, hostility and finally violence. These were the symptoms of sin and separation from God.

The method with which Jesus approached the Samaritan woman shows plainly that He did not begin with words that probed and condemned her personal life. And when He did uncover the fact that she was living with a man who was not her

CHAPTER VI

A CONCLUSION: JESUS DEALING WITH SIN

The challenge that lay before us as we began this paper was to become more conscious of the methods which our Lord used when He confronted the sin of His hearers during His ministry. We suggested that the example of Jesus might very well serve as normative for the Christian pastor who carries on Christ's mission of giving the life of God to men. In this concluding chapter we propose by way of summary and synthesis to show on the basis of our study how Jesus dealt with the sinner.

Basic to the approach of Jesus was His concerned love for people and His undying desire that people should receive Him as God's Messiah and Savior of the world. To this end He confronted the sinner. No prejudicial or hateful social conventions could keep Him from the Samaritan woman. No threat of danger could keep him from His mission in Jerusalem. But wherever Jesus encountered people, He found that toward His claim and person there was shown misunderstanding, misdirected hope, hostility and finally violence. These were the symptoms of sin and separation from God.

The method with which Jesus approached the Samaritan woman shows plainly that He did not begin with words that probed and condemned her personal life. And when He did uncover the fact that she was living with a man who was not her

husband, He did so in a simple, declarative, tactful manner. Even though He was not using the condemning function of the Law to reveal her inner life to herself, Jesus was leading her through an awakening process by which she came to desire the gift that Jesus was offering her. As Jesus pointed out to her the inadequacies of "this water," He was certainly revealing to the woman her need for "living water." She was stirred to make the request, "give me this water. . . ." On the one hand, Jesus did not overlook or minimize human sin and need, as Trumbull's principle of commendation would imply; nor did Jesus set out to make known to this woman the "heinousness" of sin, as Dobbins' method would suggest.

Jesus' method here is important. If by preaching of the Law we refer to that method which blatantly condemns sin and seeks to arouse guilt and fear in the person, this method is noticeably absent in the approach of Jesus. In this sense, two emphases of Phillips are significant. He says, "I am quite certain that it is a profound mistake psychologically, spiritually, and in every sort of way to begin by telling people about their sins. . . ." ¹ This particular emphasis is borne out by the method of Christ just noted. Also, when Phillips says, "the sense of guilt, it would appear, might well take care of itself; so far as we can judge [Jesus] did not attempt to arouse it." ² This emphasis, too, has striking

¹ Supra, p. 76.

² Supra, p. 75.

support in the method of Jesus, if we consider the preaching of the Law as that activity which seeks to quicken men to anxiety and grief over their sins.

However, if we see the function of the Law in a wider sense as an awakening process by which men see their need and desire the help that Christ can give them,³ then we must point out that Christ preached the Law. It was the preaching process by which He led the Samaritan woman to yearn for and then accept the gift of "living water." It was the process by which He led a certain number of the Capernaum crowd to accept Him as Savior, even though He had startled them with the announcement that He would be giving His flesh for the life of the world. In this sense, Jesus' method did include the preaching of the Law. But it was always Law for the sake of the Gospel.

Jesus' method, then, very definitely suggests for the Christian pastor the manner in which he should stir his hearers to a sense of their sin and need. Caemmerer does an excellent job in summing up this use of the Law in reference to preaching:

As the preacher prepares to discuss sin, he must remind himself that he is talking about symptoms and demonstrations of death itself. It is easy to get into a carping and censorious tone, or to speak blatantly and critically, in preaching the Law. To overcome this, the preacher must in the initial stages of his reflection upon his text realize how God is giving him insights deep into

³Richard R. Caemmerer, Preaching to the Church (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary Mimeo Company, 1952), p. 30.

human nature, is uncovering recesses in his own soul likewise, and is putting him to work on a process which is to result in salvage and improvement of the hearer's heart and not merely in the pious exercise of listening to preaching. The theology of the Law makes clear that it has a purpose, namely to lead men to a sense of need for help and for the rescue of the Gospel. Hence the preacher must ever ponder the analysis of his hearer's shortcomings in terms of the question: How can I get my hearer to think about this so that he will be readied for my telling of the Way of life in Christ?⁴

The method of Jesus as He dealt with sin was always aimed at the fact that He was providing a remedy for it. His constant witness to Himself as the Living Water, the Bread of Life, and Shepherd of the sheep of necessity pointed to the fact that man was in need. But because His message emphasized His claim to be the Messiah and Savior, the basic thrust of His words was to direct men away from themselves to Himself. His message did not inquire: "Do you people believe yourselves to be sinners?" Rather it was always asking: "Do you accept and believe in Me as the Messiah and Savior of men?"

Jesus' method did include the use of condemnation, but it was always used against that spirit in man which led to rejection and unbelief. Unbelief was so damnable because of its inherent nature of separating the man from God. Nevertheless, it is significant that Christ's final word to disbelieving men is not the Law's condemnation. His final word is rather a full confrontation of that which is basic to the

⁴ Ibid.

message of the Good News. He reveals to men fully His Messianic offensiveness: for the Capernaum crowd it was the "hard saying" that He was the Bread of Life Who would give His flesh for the life of the world; for the leaders of Jewry in Jerusalem it was the blasphemy that He was one with the Father. To the Samaritan woman Jesus revealed Himself as the expected Messiah. But to her it was a most satisfying revelation; to the disbelieving it was a most immoral sound upon their ears.

Most significantly, in the incident with the Jerusalem authorities, Christ's last word in the face of their flagrant sin of violent rejection was an intensified appeal to them in which the fulness of His word and work was brought to bear upon them decisively. But, as always, it was the word which He spoke as Messiah and the work which He performed by the Father. Arching high and broadly over unbelieving man is this epitaph:

If any one hear my sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. He who rejects me and does not receive my sayings has a judge; the word that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day. (12:47-48)

These methods of Christ have definite application once more for the Christian pastor. When the pastor faces people who have openly rejected the call of Christ which has come through him, he is compelled to condemn that unbelief which will ultimately separate those people from God permanently. But even to them, his message emphasizes the urgent invitation to believe in Christ. His primary task as he seeks to carry on

the mission of Christ is to proclaim and give to men the life of God through Jesus Christ.

"AN INSCIENTIFIC POSTSCRIPT"

Inasmuch as this writer is a member of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, there remains as the result of this study a desire to call attention to several ways in which the proper preaching of the Law has been distorted. As we noted in our concluding chapter, the preaching of the Law has its purpose in awakening the hearer to the need of the Gospel.¹ For the sake of brevity in referring to this use of the Law, we may call it henceforth "Law for Gospel's sake." On the other hand, we noted that the Law can be used solely in its condemning function with the result that the hearer is awoken with guilt and fear.² Again, for the sake of brevity, we may refer to this use of the Law as "Law for Law's sake."

We noted that in Christ's method of dealing with sin He used the Law for Gospel's sake, but quite noticeably refrained from the use of Law for Law's sake.

The position of Luther³ and the traditional stand of the

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

² *Ibid.*, p. 77.

³ C. F. W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, reproduced from the German edition of 1897 by S. H. F. Lee (St. Louis Concordia Publishing House, n.d.), pp. 113-114.

APPENDIX

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Lutheran Church since the time of the Reformation has been that the Law must precede the preaching of the Gospel. As Walther's Law and Gospel, the classical work on this subject produced within the Missouri Synod, says:

The Law must precede the preaching of the Gospel, otherwise the latter will have no effect. First comes Moses, then Christ;⁴ or: First John the Baptist, the forerunner, then Christ.

If we stick closely to the manner in which Christ used the Law to awaken in His hearers a sense of need and a desire to receive the salvation of which the Gospel speaks, then this principle of Lutheran tradition and Walther's Law and Gospel is quite valid and entirely in keeping with Christ's method of approach. However, while the principle is correct when applying to Law for Gospel's sake, it creates a distortion in the Christian proclamation when it becomes the operating principle for the use of Law for Law's sake. It is in this latter manner that we feel a distortion has occupied many Lutheran pulpits today.⁵

In other words, when a preacher sees the nature of the

⁴ Ibid., p. 83.

⁵ We have called this chapter "An Unscientific Postscript," a title borrowed from H. Richard Niebuhr, because we have taken our cue for this criticism from material delivered from pulpits and consequently undocumentable. The same criticism, we feel, could arise from a careful perusal of printed sermonic material coming from Concordia Publishing House, the official center of publication for the Missouri Synod. This method of investigation, however, constitutes a study in itself and is beyond the scope of this paper. H. Richard Niebuhr, Christ and Culture (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1956), p. 230.

Law to be its crushing and condemning function, or, when he operates only with Law for Law's sake, he is led to practices in preaching which overbalance his total message with Law as he knows it. For instance, when he follows the principle that the preaching of the Law must precede the preaching of the Gospel in order for the latter to be effective, his proclamation becomes dependent on the result that Law for Law's sake is to produce. He must be sure that his people stand crushed before God and that they feel their wretched guilt before he feels justified in placing before them the healing balm of the Gospel. The total function of preaching he sees something like this: The Law casts a man down and tramples him under foot, and, after you are sure that he cannot get up, the Gospel comes to him like a gallant knight on a charging steed to sweep him away from ruin. This picture is an obvious caricature of what actually goes on in a preacher's mind which operates with the concept of Law for Law's sake. However, if this preacher whom we have in mind, is led to the feeling that his hearers are not convinced and convicted of their sin (and each surface symptom of sin will make him feel this way), he mistakenly withholds the voice of the Gospel in hopes of seeing his people more adequately prepared to receive the Gospel. Thus, he feels duty bound to give at least equal time to the preaching of the Law or, a worse conclusion, he may even feel quite justified in giving a considerably

larger proportion of his time to the preaching of the Law.

While this distortion is the fault of the individual preacher's mistaken concept of the function of the Law, we feel that added impetus may be given to this distortion by certain statements within Walther's Law and Gospel. For instance:

[a] perversion of the true sequence--first Law, then Gospel--occurs when faith is preached first and repentance next, as was done by the Antinomians and is still done in our time. Their current teaching is: "Faith is the primary affair; after that you must become contrite and repent." What a foolish direction! How can faith enter a heart that has not yet been crushed? How can a person feel hungry and thirsty while he loathes the food set before him? No, indeed; if you wish to believe in Christ, you must become sick. He came to seek and to save that which is lost; therefore you must first become a lost and condemned sinner. He is the Good Shepherd who goes in search of the lost sheep; therefore you must first realize that you are a lost sheep.⁶

Again, Walther mentions that we must point out

in our sermons the two great classes into which mankind is really divided, viz., believers and unbelievers, godly and ungodly, converted and unconverted, regenerate and unregenerate persons. . . . This thorough division, the aut--aut, either--or, must appear in every sermon of a sincere preacher. That is what your hearers must learn, viz., that they are either spiritually dead or spiritually alive, either converted or unconverted, either Christians or unchristians, either asleep in sin or quickened unto a new life, in God, subjects in either the devil's or God's kingdom.⁷

It is our contention that statements such as these with their emphases on crushing and dividing the hearers may create a

⁶Walther, op. cit., p. 92.

⁷Ibid., p. 319.

mistaken impression. They may lead a preacher to operate with the Law in the sense of "Law for Law's sake."

These practices resulting from using the Law solely in its condemning function are not at all in agreement with the methods we found operative in the ministry of Jesus. The most obvious conclusion of our study was that Christ gave His time predominantly to Gospel proclamations. We found that use of the Law for Law's sake was noticeably absent; rather He led His hearers, such as the Samaritan woman, through a process of awakening them to their needs with the result that they desired the gifts that He gave as Messiah. This method we defined as using the Law in the sense of "Law for Gospel's sake." There is real need to understand the use of Law as Christ used it in order that we "help the hearer to understand that [the preacher] is discussing the need for the sake of remedying it."⁸

In order that we do not leave a wrong impression by our criticism, we wish to make plain that we are not setting up Walther as the proponent and progenitor of an undue stress on Law for Law's sake within Missouri Synod preaching. There is much in Walther's Law and Gospel that is worthy of careful study. One such noteworthy emphasis appears at the end of his book in thesis XXV, which places before the reader the

⁸Richard R. Caemmerer, Preaching to the Church (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary Mimeo Company, 1952), p. 30.

fact that Gospel should predominate in preaching. In fact, in this same connection, Walther seems to have been conscious of distortions that could result from his discussion of the distinction of Law and Gospel. This quote from him provides a fitting conclusion to this chapter:

the Word of God is not rightly divided when the person teaching it does not allow the Gospel to have a general predominance in his teaching.

It is an exceedingly important subject that we are taking up in this our concluding study. For we are told in this thesis that Law and Gospel are confounded and perverted for the hearers of the Word, not only when the Law predominates in the preaching, but also when Law and Gospel, as a rule, are equally balanced and the Gospel is not predominant in the preaching. In view of the precious character of this subject I am seized with fear lest I spoil it by my manner of presentation. The longer I have meditated this subject, the more inadequate does the expression seem that I can give it; so precious is this matter.

⁹Walther, op. cit., p. 403.

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