

"To this end came I forth"- Mar 1:38

~Other Speakers M-R: G. Campbell Morgan:

Mar 1:35-45 - Mar 2:1-12.

THIS paragraph commences with the story of how the quietness of the morning watch of Jesus was broken in upon by the arrival of Simon and the rest of His disciples. The declaration made by the evangelist is really very striking; it means that they pursued Him, they hunted Him down. The word marks the anxiety and the eagerness of their search, and the almost terror that possessed them, when wakening in the morning, they found that Jesus was not in the house at Capernaum. Having found Him they said to Him, "All are seeking Thee," a declaration revealing the effect produced in Capernaum by that wonderful Sabbath with its teaching, its healing of the demoniac, its healing of Peter's wife's mother, and that most wonderful eventide when they brought to Him all that were sick, and possessed with demons, and with apparent ease He healed the sicknesses, and cast the demons out.

In this paragraph we have an account of our Lord's answer to the statement of His disciples, and the things that immediately followed. He was interrupted in His fellowship, but not disturbed by the interruption. Quietly He said to them, when they told Him that all in Capernaum were waiting for Him, "Let us go elsewhere into the next towns. . . for to this end came I forth." A great lesson lies within that fact, its ultimate value being that converse with God prepares us for converse with men, and that a true fellowship with God is never selfish; it is willing to be interrupted when men need help. In their eagerness, their intense anxiety lest somehow He had departed, they hunted Him down, pursued Him until they found Him, and then with eagerness they said to Him, "All are seeking Thee." He, with open ear was listening to God, and holding communion with Him in the secret place. With no perturbation of spirit, with no rebuke for these men, looking at them with great love and tenderness He said, Let us go elsewhere into the next towns, that I may preach there also; for to this end came I forth. The word "towns" is a singularly arresting one, occurring nowhere else in the New Testament, translated, "to the next village towns"; and perhaps more happily, "to the next country towns." The reference was to the smaller towns that were not walled around completely, the little centers of population unified by the presence of a synagogue. He told them that He must go to the other country towns. He had come to Capernaum, for Capernaum sat in the shadows of darkness and death; and He had opened His ministry there in the midst of night, but Capernaum must not detain Him. The other country towns needed His help; not the metropolis alone, but those other towns and cities scattered through Galilee; and not the towns only, but the unwalled villages. To this end came He forth.

The Sabbath in Capernaum had prepared the way for this wider ministry, for after the happenings in the synagogue, "the report of Him went out straightway everywhere into all the region of Galilee round about." Mark records the fact of that first itinerary of our Lord in the briefest words: "He went into their synagogues throughout all Galilee, preaching and casting out demons." No details are given. Then he gives two illustrative incidents, that of the cleansing of the leper; that of the forgiving of the sins, and the healing of the palsied man. These two incidents at the end of a general declaration, illuminate all that ministry.

The cleansing of the leper took place at the foot of the mountain after the giving of the Manifesto. Mark was not dealing with the King and the Lawgiver, but with the great Servant of God Who is Priest and Saviour; and so he did not record the Manifesto. Between the hour of His disturbance in worship, and the healing of the leper, there had been journeyings. The gap may be filled by turning to Matthew, and discovering from how far and wide an area the people had gathered to Him, flocked after Him. They had come from Judaea and Decapolis and from beyond Jordan. The crowds were flocking after Him everywhere; and there came a moment when, seeing the multitudes, He went into the mountain with His disciples, and sat and taught them, and gave them the Manifesto. Immediately; following, as Matthew records, this leper came to Him. The other incident occurred when, after a period of absence from Capernaum, made necessary by the disobedience of the cleansed leper who published Him, Jesus went back into the city, and there in the house the palsied man was brought to Him, and He forgave and healed him.

Again endeavouring to observe the Lord Himself rather than the people about Him, or the incidents themselves, let us consider the text we have chosen, as revealing the inspiration of His ministry; and in the light of the context, as revealing the nature and power thereof. With all the lights and shadows of these two incidents playing about the Person of the Lord, let us listen to Him as He said, "To this end came I forth." Let us attempt to discover the inspiration of Christ's service as it is marked in the words, "Came I forth"; and secondly, the nature and power of His service as it is revealed in the incidents, and appears in the phrase, "To this end came I forth."

The first meaning of the words of Jesus must detain us. There are two possible interpretations of His declaration, "Came I forth." He either meant, I came forth from Capernaum, or, I came forth from God. The declaration was either purely local and geographical; or it was essential and eternal. The first interpretation, although given by many expositors, seems to me impossible and almost grotesque. I am in agreement with Morison when he says that "Such an interpretation . . . involves a sudden, arbitrary, and almost unpleasant descent to bathos." Besides, it is not true to the simple story. Jesus did not leave Capernaum to preach, but to pray. He did not go out in the early morning hour to seek the crowds, but to be away from them. He had not gone out in the early morning hour to reach cities, but to escape a city. He had gone out to have communion with God.

The second interpretation, which I resolutely adopt, is that upon this occasion in the simplest words, as the Servant of God He revealed the fact that He recognized that His ministry here in the world was dependent upon the fact that He had come out from God. He had been in the place of communion with God, His ear had been wakened by God to listen to the secrets which God had to speak to Him as His Self-emptied Servant, and now He said, To this end came I forth.

That interpretation is in harmony with His claims on other occasions, as chronicled specially by John, and with the revelation of the Servant of God in this Gospel. Whereas our Lord is presented by Mark stripped of His dignities, devoid of the purple, girded as a slave, for evermore under the compulsion of His service; yet constantly there are gleams of glory flaming forth and reminding us that the Servant of God is also the Son of God. The key-note of the Gospel struck by the evangelist in that opening word, "The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God," finds its continuity in the harmonies as they run; for all the things of lowliness are combined with things of might; in the stories we see Him as the Self-emptied One, and yet as the One in Whom all the fullness of Deity dwells corporeally; the Kenosis of the Philippian letter, and the Pleroma of the Colossian letter are merged in this one Gospel.

We have already seen some of these gleams in the Divine attestation at His baptism; in the awful and agonized cry of the evil spirit in the synagogue, "I know Thee who Thou art, the Holy One of God"; in the wonderful power by which the demon was subdued; and in the power which had wrought so marvellously on that Sabbath evening. In all these there was a power and a dignity and a glory, which did not belong to man alone. Now in the chill dawn of the early morning, to those perturbed disciples He said in effect: I am not going back to Capernaum, though all men seek Me; because there are others waiting for Me. I must go and preach to them, because for that purpose came I forth. Whether they understood Him perfectly or not, the dignity of the assertion shows that He related His journeyings, His teaching, and the things He did by the way, to the eternal Purpose, to the Divine programme, to the Divine mission. "To this end came I forth."

John chronicles how that once in the midst of His critics He said, "I came forth and am come from God"; and again in the seclusion of the upper room He said to His disciples, covering the whole fact of His mission, "I came out from the Father, and am come into the world; again, I leave the world, and go unto the Father." In the light of these statements upon other occasions, we understand the text, "To this end came I forth." The Self-emptied One had come forth from God. God had not left Him, and He had not left God in certain senses, for there came a day when He said, "I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent Me." That was not the language of His Deity, but of His humanity. As a Man, God never left Him through all the years. He had all the privileges of fellowship with God during His human life as a Man that we have, and none other. He lived the life of relationship to God that every man may live. He had come forth from God, He had emptied Himself, He had left behind Him all the riches and glories and the mysteries of His essential and eternal relationship to God. Yet carefully observe Him;-and this, illustrates the whole profound and tremendous theme; again and again He exercised the powers of Deity, which are the powers of sovereign supremacy, but never on His own behalf, it was always on behalf of others. He had come forth from God. Therein we discover the strength of His purpose. The strength of His service lay in the complete abandonment of the Servant to the One Who commanded. He moved everywhere, not with the dignity of Deity, but with the dignity of the authority under which He served. He was in the world for a purpose. Jesus was never afraid of loneliness, never afraid of the desert places. He knew full well that naught could harm Him until His mission was accomplished, and His work was done. "Mine hour is not yet come," He said to His enemies. That was not the language of God. God has no "hours." His is the eternal "Now." It was the language of the Servant Who knew God, and Who moved forward with a great sense of the authority of His mission, knowing that He was in the world for a purpose. Very early in the morning He rose up, leaving the other sleepers undisturbed, and went out to prayer in the desert place. He prayed as a Man facing the task before Him, knowing that presently He must give His cheek to those that would pluck off the hair, and His back to the smiter. God communed with Him of the coming passion; and in resolute agreement, He set His face toward the goal. "To that end came I forth." In that sentence is the key-note of His confidence, the secret of His strength, the unveiling of the power that made Him the prevailing Servant of God.

The immediate application follows. He said He was going to preach, to herald the Gospel; to proclaim it, which includes talking and working. He was going to herald the Gospel both by word and work in the nearest towns, Bethsaida, Chorazin, Dalmanutha, Magdala. He was going to a ministry of power and blessing, statistically a failure, spiritually a triumph.

We turn therefore to consider the nature and power of His service as it was revealed in the journey through Galilee, and especially in the two incidents.

The end to which He referred was that of heralding or proclaiming, and that of casting out. This is a most suggestive statement, covering the story of that ministry: "He went into their synagogues throughout all Galilee, preaching and casting out demons." Mark shows what the Servant of God, when passing out of the place of communion with God, did in the presence of men, and in the presence of the underworld of evil. In fellowship with God in prayer He was interrupted but not disturbed. Then He went through all the towns and villages, "preaching and casting out demons." His relation to men is suggested by the word "preaching.

To come to the incidents, and to watch the Lord: we observe Him first with the leper. He acted in two realms, those of health and holiness, showing their interrelationship. First He cleansed the leper; then He sent him to the priest with a definite and specific command that he should take with him the sacrifice or offerings which Moses commanded. In the second incident, that of the palsied man, the same two realms are manifested; first holiness, "Thy sins are forgiven"; secondly health, "Take up thy bed and walk."

Surveying the incidents in their entirety, and observing, not so much the man, nor the crowds about the Lord, but the Lord Himself at His work as the Servant of God, we are brought on both occasions into the presence of health and holiness, and their inter-relationship is marked.

In the first case He healed a leper; and then sent him to the priest for the fulfillment of those ceremonial offerings, which had to do with holiness. In the second case He forgave sins, and restored holiness to a soul; and then gave him health in the presence of criticism, thereby showing the inter-relationship between health of soul and health of body. It is Mark alone who tells us that when the leper came to meet Him at the foot of the mountain, after He had uttered the great Manifesto, He was moved with compassion. In our familiarity with some of the New Testament phrases, we are in danger of losing the sense of their value. "He was moved with compassion." Let us try and see what He saw, when He looked at that leper, in order that we may the better understand His compassion. Observe the stage of leprosy that he had reached; that strange, awful stage of cleanness, due to hopeless corruption. The law of the leper is found in Leviticus (13 and 14); and to that law our Lord referred. All the instructions given to the priest were for distinguishing between false and true leprosy, and afterwards for dealing with a man in whose case the awful fact of leprosy was established He must be segregated in certain stages of the disease; but when at last the disease had become all whiteness, when the man was entirely a leper, then he was clean, so far as contagion was concerned, and need no longer be segregated. He might then mix again amongst men, for while the death sentence was on him, the period of contagion was over. This man was in that condition. Later on in our Lord's ministry ten lepers approached, but they did not come near Him. They stood at a distance and cried out. They were unclean lepers, in the early stages, of the disease when they must be segregated. This man was in the midst of a crowd, who undoubtedly loathed him, but who were in no danger from him. He came close to Christ, with all the whiteness of the ultimate corruption upon him; no hope for him in himself; no value in him to society. Jesus was moved with compassion, and the nature of His compassion was manifested in what followed. There is a very genuine compassion that recoils and shudders and passes on its way. It is compassion, but it is not the compassion of Christ, it is not the compassion of God! "He was moved with compassion"; but there was no contempt for the man; there was no recoil from him. There was a forward step, and the hand was laid upon him, on the whiteness of his complete corruption! Jesus was not breaking law; for the period of contagion was passed. Or even if He were so doing, He was breaking it because He was superior to law, in that within Him purity was not negative merely, but positive. There had come from that mass of corruption a plaintive, pitiful cry, "Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean." Immediately He advanced and touched him, and said, "I will,-do not question My willingness;-I will; be thou made clean." His leprosy was instantly cleansed; not healed. The New Testament never speaks of the healing of leprosy, always of cleansing, which is a profounder word.

He was then sent to the priest, sent back to the representative of that economy which was the Kingdom of God in foreshadowing, in order to obey the law of the leper. The moral and spiritual suggestiveness of that can only be discovered as the law of the leper is considered, in which in the ancient economy, if a man was cleansed of leprosy, there followed ceremonial functions that marked the necessity for sacrifice and cleansing from moral taint. Jesus said, "Go shew thyself to the priest"; thus linking the man's cleansing or health, with his spiritual

cleansing or holiness. Thus without argument or statement of philosophy, Christ revealed in a flash the fact that in all His ministry He recognized the union between material suffering and limitation, and spiritual disability and corruption.

Exactly the same things are found in the second of the pictures. The Revisers say, "They uncovered the roof." Such a rendering is entirely misleading. The force of the word is that they broke up the roof of the house, tearing up the fabric, in order to lower the man down on his pallet into the presence of Jesus.

Again most carefully observe what He did. He looked into the man's eyes, and said, "Son, thy sins are forgiven." This was a word of absolution, a word of God. The Scribes were quite right when they said: "Who can forgive sins but One, even God?" They were wrong when they said: "Why doth this Man thus speak? He blasphemeth." They did not know Him. He claimed that the authority which was that of God alone, was vested in Him as the Son of Man. At that point the title "Son of Man" emerges in this Gospel. That title linked Him to other men, yet marked His relationship to God as the Self-emptied One Who laid aside the powers and attributes of Divine Sonship, and limited Himself within humanity as a perfect vehicle for the doing of the work of God. When they questioned Him, He proceeded to that which was the material result of holiness; the restoration to health of the bodily powers. That was the demonstration of the fact of holiness, and so also that the authority to forgive sins was logically vested in, and made possible through, the Son of man. "To this end came I forth.

In all this is seen the value of the Kenosis, or Self-emptying of the Son of God as the condition for the redeeming activity of the fullness or Pleroma of Deity that operated through Him. He came forth emptying Himself, and now became the instrument through which power was proclaimed, and operated, on behalf of the Kingdom and the Gospel.

So far as we are permitted to speak or think of Him as the Pattern of our service for there are limitations in any such consideration—we may summarize the value of this paragraph by saying that it reveals the relation between prayer and power. He was praying in the early morning, and all the consequent influence followed upon that prayer. Prayer is listening for God, hearing what God has to say, consenting to what God does say, asking of God power to obey. To neglect these things is to be powerless when we meet the lepers, and the palsied men of the world. God, through the self-emptied, always pours out His fullness for the blessing of others; and prayer is the exercise finally of self-emptying that prepares the soul, that makes us channels through which the power of God may proceed to the accomplishment of His purposes in the world.