The Sick

The Saviour devoted the greater part of his time and effort to the sick. After all, he was the embodiment of brotherly love, and we are most receptive to that love which has compassion for our physical misery, for our pains and infirmities. All these unhappy ones, the lepers, the blind, the lame, the deaf – how blissfully they must have been sensible of the ***love*** of the living God which poured over them through Jesus. How ***they*** must have felt what a glorious time the kingdom of God was going to be, already sending out its radiance in the form of the aid given them. The great turnaround of things, the benevolence of God vouchsafed to us in the form of Jesus, withheld until now, was in nothing ***so*** eloquently manifest as in these miracles. This benevolence shone brightly through his words, but here, in rough, implacable, visible reality, it found its confirmation.

“Like as a father pitieth his children” (Psalm 103), we see the Saviour caring for the people as for a large family. What mother would not help her sick child if she were able? As simply and tenderly as a mother, the Saviour took all this sick misery to heart like a strong brother who is responsible for the well-being of the family. A familial feeling towards the Father in heaven pervaded the people particularly because of the visible help that God was sending them in ***this*** distress.

However, it was not the Saviour’s intention to immediately dispose of all sickness in the world. What is the good of a healthy but sinful world? What good is deferring punishment until after death if the guilt is not expunged? Sickness, after all, is connected to death, the ultimate enemy to be dealt with. Therefore he did not want to anticipate now, by means of force and without prospect of reasonable profit, that which would fall into his hand as a ripe fruit at the end of his struggle. But he did want to proclaim himself as conqueror in this field, in which the question of power was most apparent, as a conqueror who needs not wait but – although in the midst of battle – is already the lord of this field. In the field of ethics his power is limited by the freedom of mankind to choose, and he must rely on patience, on waiting, until the power of his words, his mercy and his spirit are victorious. Here, though, he is the lord and here it is proven that it is the Creator of heaven and of earth who has sent him; that he is the Son of God and that God – through him – will bring us a new kingdom, His kingdom.

This is why he never dismissed a sick person, however incapable or unworthy, without giving complete and absolute help. On the one hand, all would be unworthy and, on the other, faith in him has driven them all to seek him out. However, in the case of some, such as the nine lepers or the lame man (John 5:5) among others, one can hardly avoid a somewhat dubious impression. In such cases, Jesus does not deal only with the sick but also with his *honour*, for the sake of his name, in order to fully remove any question regarding his power to help.

One usually says, “Jesus worked miracles in order to authenticate his messianic dignity, his status as a son of God.” This is true in the greater sense mentioned above. He wanted to announce himself as the helper who had power – for all time. “You people have in me a saver and a helper who helps with deeds.” He had announced himself to the people as he who is, he who will be, and he who will remain; his deeds are pledges, promises: where he has helped ***once*** he will help ***again***. He certainly saw “a night” coming (John 9:4) where no man can work, but just for their sake he wanted, as long as it was still day, to realize his life image as that of the Saviour, so that we would know what he could provide for us to give us solace through him. He wanted, so to speak, to put the key into all the dungeon doors of human misery. This night fell on the eve of the time of the apostles. The Saviour as the victorious ruler, armed with all power of heaven and earth in order to bring about the kingdom of God.He was honoured as such but one no longer made demands upon him; as the head of the community, one did not really expect any more manifestations of power from him.

The erroneous translation “***the*** night” (Luther translated it as “the” also) gives the impression as if this night were something that had to come with the inevitability of natural law and further, as if it were almost the last one, as if it would have no end. However, it only falls together with the night that the Saviour had begun to lighten and will fade away together with this. The “morning star” that the Saviour promises to the victorious (Revelation 2:28), what is it but a sign that the night will have an end?

We see it in 2 Peter 1:19 also, where the words “in your hearts” should be pulled to the beginning of the next verse (“in your hearts knowing this first”). The prophetic words that have become firmer for the apostles Peter, John and James ever since they themselves heard the voice from the great glory, they are a light for the ***present time of night*** – until day dawns and the morning star rises.

We have a right to regard this night-time always as a disappearing one, as one that does not rightly exist. Yes, we have the duty. At any rate we must, if we want to honour Jesus’ work as it should be honoured, beware that we do not assign to him opinions that have emerged during this night-time. This is because during this night a different relationship from the one we find in the Bible prevails between us and God and therefore opinions develop that are only partially related to those in the Bible.

Israel as an entire people had help from God, at least in great moments; wonderful help. They also had, in their individually appointed servants, an immediate relationship with God, partly due to the light of revelation and partly due to miracles. They therefore felt themselves to be in a continual and living relationship to God. “The Lord is with him”, says the boy David in Bethlehem. “The Lord is not with us”, says Gideon. Expressions that today are scarcely used and scarcely understood. Thus Israel saw in all outward occurrences an act of God, an expression of His mood or His judgement over those affected by His actions; blessing and help as proof of His benevolence; punishment as proof of His anger. This is how great scourges were regarded, as well as individual misery such as sickness. And from this understanding from time immemorial when times were hard, the individual or the people sought – and found – forgiveness and help from God.

Now, through Jesus, this living interrelation between God and His people gained a wonderful intimacy, clarity and warm-heartedness and emerged as the sole, infallible one and, to some extent, as the obvious one; so that one had the impression it was supposed to be like this, and finally from this God’s full kingdom would develop. This impression came not only from the plenitude of power invested in Jesus, but also from his manner which differed markedly from that of the servants of God of the old covenant. These had, compelled by their inadequacy and their consciousness of this, something formal, measured and almost reserved in their manner as if, standing at God’s side, they must carefully uphold His dignity. The Saviour was not in need of this. The glory of the native “full of grace and truth” radiated from him. This is why he went his way like a simple and private man; human, friendly, brotherly, he welcomes every one. The petitioner feels, “He takes my concern as if it is now ours together”, and through such a communion with Jesus he, the petitioner, gains the innocent and clear impression of the fatherly proximity of God. Thus it was as if, through Jesus, the heavenly Father laid a mantle over the mood of the people and over their whole destiny. “You are mine”, this is what the words of God were announcing through the miracles of Jesus.

This living, profound interrelation, also manifested in deeds, between God and his people as told in the Old Testament and as it came to full life in Jesus and determined the time of the apostles – this is normal, this is right. We call that collection of such manuscripts, which were created in those times and under such direct prevalence of God, the Bible.Ittells us how close God once was to us so that we know how it could be, how it should be.

During that period of night we learned modesty. The highest good that Jesus gave to the apostles, motivation and strength towards a new life, we also received this from him and believe that we have it in the same strength and intensity as they once did: the hope of salvation has also remained in us, as well as the certainty that we have a benevolent God who has our best interests at heart. However, we lack the experiencing of the living God, the awareness of His living amongst us, as the Old and New Testaments in the Bible stated so simply as something that to a certain degree goes without saying. We also experience the answering of prayer, but the historical imprint of the time has become thus: Whereas in many instances in biblical times we could expect immediate help from heaven, we are now thrown back on our own resources. This is why our piety, yes, our faith, has a more modest task than was the case in biblical times: for example, accepting “all that comes to pass” as sent from God while ascribing to Him the most benevolent intentions and patiently hoping for and expecting, particularly insofar as natural laws allow, help. So that one would avail oneself of all possible means in order to divest oneself of suffering, but would not permit oneself to ask God to be made healthy as if this would indicate a lack of humility.

So piety and faith retreated from contact with coarse reality and withdrew into the quiet land of the invisible, for***this*** life to the realms of ***thought***, for***external*** destiny to the realms of hope of a pleasant ***beyond***. Humility, acceptance of suffering, patience, hope for a better future – which can escalate into a yearning for death – these are often the noble fruits that this piety yields.

What is very remarkable is the generally human character that everyone can understand. One can say: In all the crises of faith still drawing on Abraham’s inheritance, not only in the case of Christians but also of Jews and Mohammedans, this particular piety – even if polluted with errors in the most recent crises – constantly brings forth the strangest fruits throughout the world!

If, outside Christianity, it is only partly true and the hope of salvation is not entirely justified – in Jesus everything that this faith hopes is ***true***.Therefore, through God’s mercy there is always more than one expected, experienced, and lived through. We can sing of a God who will help and of a lord who saves us from death.

The Saviour also brings – at ***one*** place which we will speak of later – honour to this piety. Still, it is strange that almost ***nowhere*** do we find in his case those thoughts in which the aforesaid piety prefers to reside.***His*** deeds and works follow a quite different direction. From such piety, as an example, comes the following statement from a religious tract, “Christianity teaches us to regard sickness as a blessing.” If this were meant truly ***seriously***, then with these words Jesus’ work, his successful striving to deprive people of this “blessing”, would be downright condemned.

We possess ***one*** of Jesus’ talks in which this piety is commended to us in a moving way, but in a memorable place. It is the story of the rich man and the poor Lazarus (Luke 16:9ff.). In this case we want to at least partially consider this talk of Jesus, precious to us all and which in any case may not be ignored in a portrait of him, and include it in our observations.

Jesus’ words, namely verse 13, “Ye cannot serve God and mammon”, seemed ridiculous to the listening Pharisees – “they derided him” (Verse 14). It was just this that appeared to them to be the most profound wisdom of life: To neither neglect nor short-change the eternal for the temporal or the temporal for the eternal. This was because “they were covetous”; their endeavours were aimed at assuring their well-being ***here***. The Saviour juxtaposes the derision of their clever pride with the hapless folly of this supposed cleverness by, just for once, lifting the veil that hides the beyond from us, hides what befalls us after death. He describes two situations to us: that of a favourite of mammon, a so-called child of fortune; and that of an “unfortunate” of this world. Both situations are depicted first of all until death and then ***after*** death. He ***intentionally*** does not speak of ***attitudes,*** in order to allow the factual, the desirable, or the undesirable aspects of the ***circumstances*** to stand out all the more glaringly. One cannot, therefore, quite say that he holds up to us the pious attitude of Lazarus, his patience, his hopes for a beautiful destiny after death, as an ideal to follow. However, this entire account preaches all the more warmly to sufferers solace and courage for their faith in providence and hope for salvation. Only believe it entirely! That is what this story preaches to us, do not just have a belief like that of the Pharisees, which boils down to making an art of speech: no, it is true what you believe and hope.

From impartiality and in order to give things the strength of proof in their eyes, Jesus had already chosen an image of life for these Pharisees whichhad come to ***him*** without closer affiliation and had therefore found its earthly end without any connection to him. If ***he*** had found Lazarus before the rich man’s door, so ill and miserable, he would not have left him lying there; and after death his fate is depicted as that of a pious man straight out of the Old Testament. The opportunity to speak of ***that***which ***he***, Jesus, was bringing was ruled out.

Here, then, the Saviour – although for very special reasons – offered solace in the misery of illness with the prospect of divine providence and salvation after death. Otherwise we can find hardly another word from him pointing our thoughts in this direction. He counters our worries of being able to manage in daily life and our fear of persecution by other humans by pointing out the powerful love of the Father, who also cares for the sparrows, thereby placing us in a living relationship to God so that we, when it is necessary, can expect help. The cross (Matthew 16:24) that we should take up and follow him with has touchingly entered our language virtually describing all kinds of distress and tribulation. However, originally it was that wooden cross of torment by means of which the world killed Jesus and branded him as a criminal, and we should willingly be prepared for both – this is what the Saviour wants to tell us – on behalf of the world.

That we can welcome our death as an elevation to the level of salvation – this can be inferred from all his works and speeches, but he told it to only one other, to his comrade in dying, the malefactor on the cross.

Why is Jesus silent on this point?

Before we go into this, we would like to take a closer look at the danger threatening this piety.

When all the work of God is limited to the invisible, it runs the risk of losing all ***real*** connection with Jesus, all association with the living God; yes, all contact with reality because, provided that it deceives itself for the time being (before death), nothing can disturb this deception. We run the risk of overestimating the independence in which God placed nature and of accepting dependence on it, a state which we have brought upon ourselves through sin, seeing itin a false light, faithless and defenceless. We look down on the external events, that which we experience individually or in general on the part of so-called “nature”, as something that has nothing to do with religion and with genteel disdain more reminiscent of Greek philosophy than the Old Testament; for instance, of the patience of Job which actually seems quite like impatience, but still abstains from any embellishment of the circumstances.

Nature in our eyes possesses almost an omnipotence which God has, as it were, voluntarily refrained from influencing. We no longer have an understanding of the faith (1 John 5) that the world – meaning not merely humanity but the cosmos – has vanquished. This places us in a peculiar independency from God: He, His concept (the Bible says His “name”), yes, even his mood against us, is consigned without defences to our idea; that is, to our discretion. We decide to possess God’s benevolence and call that faith. How can God disabuse us of this error? If we are satisfied with our views and our entire virtuous condition, how can He teach us that His thoughts are not our thoughts and our ways are not His ways? We level everything to our taste and for what might be left over, for all the mysteries, we have hopes of salvation.

There is something touching in this hope and, where the piety is a true one, something of promise. But when, as in the case of the Pharisees, the whole degenerates into an art of language, expressing everything piously, then the delusion could be great; and Hell is quiet on this point, it does not tell us how many have been wrong.

Another inadequacy of this religious viewpoint that differentiates it from that of Jesus is that its central point is always the individual, which easily calls into question the connection of Jesus’ work as a whole with his struggle for the salvation of the world and the commencement of the kingdom of God and, therefore, almost the entire biblical justification for us to have such faith and hope. Some of our hymns, for instance, almost outdo the Bible in rejoicing in God’s love for “me” and in the joyful assurance that ultimately your or my well-being is certain. The whole truth inherent in these hymns is revealed as soon as we understand “I” to mean Jesus’ community and the “ultimately” as the coming of Jesus.

This brings us to the final divergence from Jesus’ idea to the one most significant for us, to the systematic one. Significant, not only for the individual but for the Jesus community, yes for mankind altogether. We have lost that simple feeling of whether the Lord is with us or not. With this type of idea we determine everything ourselves and are of the opinion that gratitude itself obliges us to see everything in an advantageous light.

This can lead us to finding that even this present world belongs to the system in which, according to our belief, everything that dies throughout the year is subject to decay except for a small particle, and this the Saviour in his coming would like to put an end to by bringing about wholly the kingdom of God, and the sooner the better.

Then Nature, administered by the providence of God, would be the solid frame into which Jesus would have the possibility of weaving a blessed destiny, with the result that the situation now would be so endurable that God’s and Jesus’ deeds of salvation for humanity must be considered, on the whole, as concluded.

This, then, would be the “true, manifested religion”, and to reveal this and bring it to humankind was the only reason for Jesus’ coming and mainly – ***yes, even only*** – in order to ***substantiate*** this, Jesus had worked miracles.

This way of looking at things, however, that Jesus had only worked his healing miracles for this reason, contradicts the historical picture of his life.

Christianity is neither a mere religion, nor a mere revelation as if it were only important that people ***knew*** what was right. Christianity, in the broadest sense, is a battle, a work of God – beginning with the Fall – to rectify everything, to precipitate His kingdom. One could almost say true Christianity is the kingdom of God, such as Jesuswill bring when he returns – until then, however, it is the battle for this kingdom.

And Jesus entered wholeheartedly upon this battle. If religion was the disposition that strove to see everything in the rosiest light possible, to interpret everything in favour of an undiluted benevolent mood of God – then such a disposition was far from his mind; he would not have understood it, he would not have felt bound by such a thing, not even authorized by it. For this he lacked – if one may put it like this – any awareness, any predisposition, as he was ***truth*** and had come to the world to bear witness to truth. This is why we find nothing in him of this theological art of systematically picturing all this to himself.

He was a man of ***deeds***. Here is the side of him which appeared more understandable to the tax collectors and Samaritans than to the Pharisees and Jews. Admittedly, these possessed without a doubt more religious knowledge than the former, but the former’s thinking was not yet spoiled by playing games with religion, they still had a natural cast of thought. Thus the Saviour, as a thoroughly simple man, faced the mysteries that evil in the world offers us; so critical, so sober, so true and so in need of truth as can be imagined. He took things as they ***are***, as they speak directly to us through their immediate impression. He was a ***man*** of a rather (as far as can be imagined within his love) ***warlike*** nature, as was David. A fighter spirit who says, “Things ***should not be*** as they are now and should not remain so – I will not ***allow*** it. I will not – as a ***man*** – put up with it!” Here also we see him as the son of man, crushing the serpent’s head with his foot. “Is not this the son of David?” say the people (Matthew 12:23) when he once again freed a person from an eerie and unnatural sickness – and they understood him better than we often do. “A hero, a fighter has arisen again in Israel in order to free us from our enemies. But he goes about things in a different way – these are not the enemies of flesh and blood but quite different ones, mightier ones of whom we have hardly an idea. He meets them in the dark and will conquer them.” This is how the people thought, understanding him perfectly. In his deeds they saw in him not only a connection to the prophets but also to their heroes.

Praise and thank the Lord that he was such a man, as otherwise all our – however beautiful – hopes of a blessed immortality would be ***lies***. His work was not to ***hope*** for, to ***speculate*** upon, a blessed immortality for mankind, but to ***create*** it. For such blessed hopes, the Old Testament – for sacred reasons – offered him only meagre points of contact. On the one hand, occasional, highly justified and exceptional cases of those who were permitted to circumvent death (Enoch, Elias); on the other, for what was great, only those hopes that could and should be fulfilled through ***him alone***.

Thus he was also filled with the faith in providence that gives us solace; but he did not employ it to soothe himself. In all these evil happenings that we call wickedness, he saw the judgement of God. He saw therein the effect of unforgiven sins, a situation which cannot be called the kingdom of God and which one day will have to give way to the kingdom of God.

What role this faith in providence played in his spiritual life is illuminated for us in those words of the Apostle Paul (Romans 8:19ff.) at the end of which he expresses this faith in an unforgettable pithy way and in which he surely took the words out of his master’s mouth.

With bleeding heart Paul writes of the misery running through all creation and of the yearning and sighing of all creatures to be delivered from this misery. This, then, is “nature”, whose momentary condition we hold to be eternally right; whose influence we almost equate as directly divine. It is itself sick and is counting on us – as the apostle says later –for its ultimate healing! The apostle imagines it to be pervaded by conscious beings who are capable of a yearning, by beings who count the days of their lament in centuries; and if we remember the dead who also belong to “all creation” too, then we are looking at an ocean of lamentation. The creature is counting on us, it is anticipating the day of freedom of the children of God. “Forwards!” we can hear it entreating.

Children of man, as they are, do not yearn; they are satisfied with the present and they do not guess at the lamentation they will be subject to. However, we, who have a foretaste of future glory in what we have already received in spirit – ***we*** also yearn. It, the creature, is driven to yearn by the misery of the present; we by the prospect of hope in future glory.

We yearn – for the day of victory. Not for our death but for the day where our body – whether living or dead – will be redeemed from death. Because “we might be saved, but – in ***hope***”. So strongly does everything hang together, and so strongly are we linked to the entire creation that our salvation will only be absolute together with that of the whole creature. We wait for this with patience and we pray towards this.

In the meantime, until what we yearn for finally comes to pass, we know that those who love God serve all things best in that we “become as one with the likeness of His son”.

In this greater connection, our faith in God’s providence is embedded. As the warrior hopes that until victory is won his strength will be employed in the right way and that his livelihood will be assured, so here the Christian can be ***certain*** of a similar provision.

In that lamentation in which the entire creation finds itself, we can presage an unfathomable justness of God. We assume this more than we can see it as it is manifested sublimely in holy secrecy. God is the cause of all that transpires; His justness the cause of all evil; but we do not see this directly. He, God, remains very much hidden. God allows all aberrances from Him to continue to work independently so that they reveal themselves as evil and become their own punishment.

Thus the Saviour regarded evil in its greater connection as a great whole and was determined to remedy it. This evil together with its cause – sin – showed him that someone other than God had influence on creation and had gained power over it.[[1]](#footnote-2) It has become a world in itself and he wants to conquer this world (John 16:33 “overcome”) and save it, wants to reclaim it for the Father.

With such a viewpoint, seeing these things as a whole, the contradiction between this world and the beyond receded into the background. He saw misery as a whole and wanted relief for it as a whole. The misery of the beyond is death, and sickness is the root which it sinks into this world. Thus he saw in his mind the sublime justness of God working in similar ways in both areas, in this world as well as in the beyond. We, lacking the audacity to change natural law, we allow ourselves all the greater freedom in the unseen, in the concept of the beyond, imagining randomly by which laws God reigns there. In this world we only see nature and its laws; in the beyond only the laws of justice. The Saviour saw this in a different light. Because he (in the sicknesses of humanity) wanted to gain influence over the occurrences of nature and its laws and in this sought and found the path to the Almighty, to God, he encountered there – in addition to the Almighty – ***justness***, justness as the highest, hidden source of events. The Almighty as the mute executor who conceals the rightful reasons of events under the mantle of unyielding and natural necessity. Thus he saw it in the beyond in a similar way to this world; how this is the only prospect that opens itself to us into the beyond and shows this to us in a surprising way, namely the description of conditions in the beyond in the story of the rich man and poor Lazarus. There we see in the hereafter everything that is similar to this world, as far as it is possible, taking the great differences in condition into account. Advantages that have accrued through the holy story, such as the lap of Abraham and the benevolent ministering of angels, and also the conditions of simple results as reward and punishment. The rich man sinks down to Hades because the angels do not recognize him, and there is fire there. We find difficulties of a local nature here – the chasm – God in unattainable distance and concealment, just as He is here. What is spatial and corporeal is to be understood, without any doubt, in a completely different sense from our conditions in this world but is not without sense. The overall impression is: facts, conditions – justice –crystallized out of sheer necessity.

“***It is so***!” says the jurisdiction of God, inscribed in iron letters on our being. With regard to the Why, it remains mute on this point and is even less accessible to instruction or negotiation.

In this jurisdiction of God which spoke to him from out of all the lamentation of wickedness, of misery, the Saviour most likely also perceived his own death sentence in a more innocent and grave manner than our teaching is able to couch in words. “Sin” is the deed of the world; “Death” God’s answer, but an answer that results of itself from such a deed. Death is the sole possible fruit of sin. Thus, if he wanted to grasp all evil at its root, the Saviour ultimately stood before this terrible fact of death, which looked as if it were to become the legacy of all life. If he would reverse this (καταργεϊν 1 Corinthians 15:26; 2 Timothy 1:10), and save the world victoriously, then he himself would have to endure the body, which belonged to the world as a whole, in order to remain unconquered, indeed, remain the conqueror as one who “is not of this world”.Thus, by bearing himself the punishment that God had imposed upon the world, he could transform it into a blessing. God’s punitive sentence remained. Or should he perhaps attempt to persuade the Father, for his sake, to simply lift it without further ado by changing the laws of His righteousness in favour of humankind? We, whose idea of God has often, through philosophical and dogmatic skill, sacrificed much of its simple awe of God and thereby also health and truth, we can perhaps think the Saviour capable of such a deed, but he himself, whose heart was filled with the eternal majesty of the laws of righteousness, he would not dare to think even remotely of such an attempt.

It is probably in such a sense that Matthew (8:17) connects the healings that Jesus carries out with his deathsufferings. For the price of ***his*** life he was permitted to remove the power of death from the sick.

In such a sense, with his powerful love[[2]](#footnote-3), he embraced the entire misery of humankind, engaging his whole heart each and every single time. In such a sense he also expects his followers to suffer for the greater victory. All the sufferings of the Christians that the apostles speak of serve ***this*** purpose – the ultimate victory of the kingdom of God. Certainly, today, sufferings can remain inflicted upon us for other, purely educative reasons, so that God forgives us but, for our own good, does not lift the punishment entirely. However, the fact that the Saviour never mentions once that a suffering is inflicted for the afflicted one’s ***sake*** has the intention of imprinting the basic concept upon us clearly and firmly.

Now, before we commence looking at individual images, let us briefly illuminate the one question: namely whether or not these miracles came easily to the Saviour? It does not appear so to me. In the case of the man born blind, it seems as though he felt very particular measures were called for, similar to the case of the man who was deaf and could not “speak plain”. The latter case leads us to the ***one*** clear condition for success – the faith of the person seeking help. When Jesus recounts the works of God that have just occurred through him to the two Baptist’s disciples (Mathew 11:5; Luke 7:22), he obviously classifies them according to the degree of their ***difficulty***, rating this difficulty according to the possibility of being responsive to the preaching of the gospel. Among those listed, the blind had the easiest time of it, the lame less so – they had to be carried there – and even less so the lepers; they were not permitted to mingle with the crowd. Those who had the most difficulty – naturally excepting the dead – were the deaf, as they of course could not hear.

The people did not always understand this,particularly in the case of the man who was deaf.[[3]](#footnote-4) (Mark 7:32) They brought him in the belief that Jesus would only have to lay his hand on the man for him to become healthy again. This shows how much they saw the cause of his miracles as an irresistible – fundamental – force of nature.

As we know, with the sick the Saviour often employed the laying on of hands. Blessed laying on of hands is recounted to us in the case of the dying Jacob, when he blessed the sons of Joseph, in such a way that lets us presume that he had also once been blessed in such a way by Isaac. We do not hear that Abraham blessed Isaac; it was the heirs of the blessing who felt the need to bequeath their inheritance to their issue. Perhaps this way of blessing was carried on freely as a custom. Jesus appropriated this manner of blessing either of his own accord or from fatherly custom or based on what the Scriptures told of Jacob. This action served him as an enhancement and reinforcement of the language in order to make known to the person seeking help, in a manner going straight to the heart, that he wanted to help them. This is why sometimes in the case of children he employed the laying on of hands, as children have a much greater understanding and receptivity for deeds than for words. How simply and benevolently such actions were meant we can see in Mark 10:16, “and he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them”. To include the child in the communionwith himself and to grant him a blessing from the Father, in whose lap he sat and with whom he stood in communion, was the content of this action. And so it was probably the case with the sick on whom he laid his hands. It was to help them understand, to give their faith support and impetus[[4]](#footnote-5).

However, our story of the man who was deaf shows us how far he was removed from desiring to practise a blindly effective power by means of this act. The healing of this deaf man was initially faced by a great obstacle; the deaf man***knew*** nothing, therefore for ***faith*** he was lacking in any point of reference, any context. It is strange how the Saviour would not declare himself vanquished by any difficulty: He did not say to himself, “I will not be able to do anything here anyway”, instead he promptly vanquished the obstacle. He informs the sufferer of what he going to do with him and where the help is coming from by simply expressing in such a way all that moves his heart in the face of such misery so that the sufferer can understand it and can participate. Here, the overwhelming impression that was helpful was what new spiritual insights can be brought forth in those that are deaf. How fervent must have been the deaf man’s mood as this wonderful person took him aside; how must it have poured through him, body and soul, as this man bathed his sick organs with something of his own loving life; how it must have moved him when he saw Jesus direct his gaze towards Heaven ***whence*** he expected help; coming to them from up above, from the highest of the high. His own sigh joined that of Jesus and – all preconditions had been met. The multitude had certainly been watching eagerly and with curiosity from afar at what was going on and were moved when they suddenly heard his loud cry, “E︣ph-pha︣-tha︣!” That is, “be opened”. “How well (καλϖς) he has done this!” they call, I think this time with admiration at his methods, his ingenious and inventive love. They recognized the difficulty of the case once it had been so cleverly overcome.

Let us now look at some larger pictures, and let us go in spirit with the sick to see Jesus! We are told of two men who approach Jesus for help directly after the Sermon on the Mount – they are the “leper” and the “centurion from Capernaum”. The supplicants are both, each in his own way, excluded from the Israelite community. The former externally as unclean, the latter spiritually as a heathen; both are the “poor in spirit” and glad that now the kingdom of heaven will come to such as them, and this has probably given them the courage to proffer their request. Thus they are kin to each other although in human society the one stands on the lowest step and the other on one of the highest.

We may, for those who ***enabled*** the Saviour’s great works, bind a wreath of honour. We speak so smoothly of this miracle or the other, but in the face of such spiritual work – to actively search in spirit, to soar aloft with supplication even unto the seat of the Almighty – we are probably all of us insignificant. This person dares to hope for help from the Creator for this defilement penetrating so deeply into flesh and blood – ***leprosy***! He obviously also “philosophizes”, but the fruits that he picks grow on the tree of ***life*** that is accessible to an innocent mind and not on the tree of ungodly knowledge. He has presumably already heard of the great miracles wrought by Jesus, but it is possible he gained the courage for this extraordinary act by listening to Jesus’ ***sermon***. From the kingdom of heaven, opening to the poor in spirit, now flow the forces of eternal life. Jesus has – this man thinks to himself – the key to the kingdom of heaven, the merciful powers of God are at his disposal; as ***he*** will dispose, so it will happen. “He can make me clean” – this is the result of his thinking. But will he? Here the boldness of his thinking veers into humility, into trepidation. Jesus’ ***skill*** is inherent in his person, but his ***will*** is determined by ***me***, through my virtuous character. This is the true unsuperstitiousnessof his faith: that he thinks Jesus’ capabilities are corporeally unlimited, but virtuously and spiritually bound to the laws of righteousness and sanctity.

We often think in a similar vein, but also sometimes quite the reverse. To believe that his will, that is, his intention towards us is benevolent appears to us as a duty; almost as if we would insult him with a (perhaps very justified) doubt; we do not realize that this is actually merely belief in ***ourselves***. If we want to believe in his ***ability***then all the elements of our intellect fail.

The leper approaches the Lord with the results of his thinking. He dare not express a request but he wants to tell him in deepest humility; Jesus will be able to recognize the desire from this. “If you do not help me, the help is not denied me because you ***cannot*** but because (and I understand this) because you do not ***will*** so. If you ***will*** so, then you ***can***.” With these words he approaches Jesus.

What does the Saviour do? Does he speak to this pitiful creature thus (this question is permitted this once for all following cases), “My son, this disease is, or will be from now on, a blessing to you!”? He ***lamented***, the sickness thrilled through him and he spoke, taking the man’s hand the while, as succinctly as he had been spoken to, “I ***will*** it, be ***clean***!”

And he was clean.

The Saviour did not permit him to declare himself to the people as healed or to behave as though he were healed until, as the law proscribed, the priests had examined him and declared him healed. Jesus was heartily in favour of this law, and he also liked it when the priests recognized how he honoured their lawful authority.

Let us now turn tohis intellectual comrade, the centurion from Capernaum.

The centurion is probably, as he is a heathen, initially a Roman officer in the service of Herod Antipas. The solicitous manner in which the elders approach Jesus at the centurion’s request, the deferential gratitude expressed in “for he loveth our nation”, (Luke 7:5) the wealth that allows him to build a synagogue – all this paints a picture of a great man. It needs, after all, the intellectual freedom of such a man to teach the “natives” of the country he has been sent to learn to love and honour him. The synagogue as the family centre of a whole population was something not found anywhere else, and he even appeared to bestow his whole attention on what he heard there as a guest. His decision to build a more worthy, and presumably also larger, building for these gatherings had almost something providential about it. The synagogue became, as did no other, the focus of the teachings of Jesus and greater honour would be accorded this building than the temple of Solomon. He was certainly a diligent guest in his house – how much he liked to come now that he could see ***for whom*** he should have built it!

This man, then, now has a request to ask of Jesus with regard to the sickness of his slave. What we notice first, as something that the Saviour does not encounter often, is the awed formality with which he proceeds; the way in which he honours Jesus’ dignity almost “officially”. The elders, similar to our aldermen or town council, will have been surprised and felt themselves honoured when he asked them to present his request to Jesus. And when they impress upon Jesus that “he was worthy for whom he should do this”, then we can sense ***which*** dignity makes the more profound impression on them; the ***worldly***, that of the centurion, or the ***spiritual*** dignity of the Saviour. Where does the centurion’s awe come from? It does not stem from his belief that Jesus is a higher, supernatural being. After all, he compares himself to him with the words, “For I also am a ***man*** set under authority”, and he actually ventures to instruct Jesus as to how a high official should behave. The latter is a touching feature. It can happen to someone who has climbed the professional ladder rapidly, that he is in danger of losing some of his dignity and intervening in tasks, although due to his status he should confine himself to giving orders. The Saviour in his servile guise and humility must have appeared to the centurion as one who did not know what he owed to his station. Perhaps this is why Jesus’ intention seemed to him more of a service, a sacrifice, as his house, that Jesus was to visit, was a ***heathen*** one, and when the Jew visited such a house he would be unclean until the evening. However, one does ***not*** feel these considerations in his speech. He is only filled with his personal unworthiness as compared to the high dignity of Jesus.

Where did this awe of the centurion come from? It stemmed from an attitude which the Saviour had heretofore not encountered in its clarity and childlike masculine strength. He beheld Jesus’ overall manifestation as something entire, unified and recognized this in all his deeds and words. “He is under the orders of God for the good of mankind and as a result he effectively commands God’s might and armies as I do my soldiers.” People certainly liked to ascribe Jesus’ miracles to some inexplicable talent, a power of more or less divine or unknown (or even, as the Pharisees calumniated, a sinister) origin. In order to keep the living God who worked through him at arm’s length, one even preferred to believe – in a thoughtless, superstitious-credulous manner – in an unknown “power”, thereby subverting his whole manifestation (words and deeds) into tattered constituents in order to behave towards the same as one desired and also to be able to deny the might of divine accreditation. We see the opposite in the case of the centurion. It is just this power and radiance of the words of Jesus and the “word from the kingdom” in its great context that makes the miracles appear to him as natural, as self-evident elements of the entire manifestation of this “messenger from God”. In all the bestowal of power, he sees the authority, the overlord, standing in the background. He sees Jesus as a servant, a representative of God, and this is why he turns to him with issues that – as experience has shown him – are among Jesus’ official duties and authorities.

Therefore he also understood the tidings of an approaching “kingdom of God”.

This is the “faith” that Jesus had “not even in Israel” found in such magnitude. A living idea of God, before God, about God; an impartiality in recognizing and comprehending God’s ***hand***, God himself, living and present ***today*** in the deeds of Jesus. This living perception of God, the Almighty, makes the centurion, as the leper, so humble that he is filled with dismay at the mere idea of Jesus wanting to enter his house.

This is the faith of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Abraham had to forget yesterday, what he had learned from parents and grandparents was no use to him, he had to move ***forward*** in his faith. The centurion was without religious title: no “Christian”, no “Jew”, no “Israelite” and also no “Heathen”[[5]](#footnote-6) simply a “Man”, but he had experience of the living God. Thus he was an original, his faith was something primordial. In his mind, Jesus sees such “originals” arising all over the world, those that allow themselves to be torn from their customary attitudes by the word of God. The centurion is a warranty of this, a promising emergence. “On people like this will rest the future of my work.” One day, such ones will rest in heaven with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob from the hot work of their faith – but what of the children of the kingdom?

“The children of the kingdom” were in danger, and remain so, believing in a living and interceding God in the past and in a far distant future but not in “today”. Both what God ***has*** done and what He ***will*** do are lifted from the normal human story up to a higher level, as it were, called “religion”; but the ***present*** obeys a different set of laws, according to one’s point of view. In the past, the centurion of Capernaum perhaps knew only little of the Holy Scriptures, but after he had experienced God’s help in the shape of Jesus, he will certainly have recognized everything he henceforward heard of God’s deeds in the past as something wonderfully related to this help and to be taken on faith. Our faith can nourish itself from God’s deeds in the past as told to us in the Holy Scriptures, and it is therefore exceedingly important to believe all that God ***has done*** and to guard it deep in our hearts. But what quite different powers of the mind are called for when, on the one hand, we are to believe with Joshua that the walls of Jericho ***will fall***, and, on the other, to believe today that they once ***did fall***.

Paul warns the Hebrews of this danger (Hebrews 11). They were also in danger of preferring the work of believing and hoping over the “edifying” resting upon the holy past. The apostle shows them how the fathers of each generation must always renew their faith, always steer – with ***belief*** – their little ship of life out into an uncertain future, and believe that things must progress in a ***holy***, a divine manner, and not merely in a badly human, worldly manner.

Thus, in the face of so much religious faith, the children of the kingdom were running the risk of never learning what “belief” meant. Their faith is a soliloquy which shows the inner world of ideas in the best possible light; but, due to the adroitness of their so-called faith, they will never come under the iron judgement of the living God, and they will not learn the leap of faith from the apparent fortress of visibility to the mercy of God ***alone***.

What is worth noting is that the Saviour knows of the place in the hereafter for people of this kind who are trapped in supposedly pious self-delusion; a place that he repeatedly assigns them to, “the outer darkness” (Mathew 8:12, 22:13, 25:30).

Chronologically, this story now seamlessly follows on from the raising of the son of the widow of Nain. However, we would rather juxtapose the image of the heathen centurion and that of the ***spiritual*** patron of Capernaum, Jairus, as these two images complement each other in a curious way.

As his name is mentioned, the man must have enjoyed a high level of respect on the shores of the lake due to his office and the manner in which he filled it. For Jesus he was also an important man as he was probably the superior head of the synagogue in Capernaum. As liberal as the Jewish synagogue already was in spreading the word of God to guests, as well as to those who were neither among the particular instructors nor among other members, the liberality of the synagogue in Capernaum towards Jesus was particularly extraordinary and one for which we have absolutely ***no*** possibility of parallel in our churches. Jesus had in great part Jairus to thank for this liberality. It was no small matter for Jairus to see how, when this “guest” spoke, the rooms were thronged much more densely and how Jesus counted for incomparably more in his community than he did himself. He will have been a “benevolent” listener when Jesus spoke, but in his house one will certainly have had to supress disgruntlement in the face of the “unreasonableness” of the audience or their “bad behaviour” in “worshipping this nice young man so fervently”. That his little daughter fell sick might even have been almost welcomed from one aspect; namely, as an opportunity to set a good example to his community. This manner, whereby everyone turned to Jesus with any sickness, had heretofore been unheard of in the Holy Scriptures. Jairus might have been tempted to find it unbiblical, pathological, reprehensible. He wanted to “pray himself”, to trust in God alone. His daughter might have concurred with him in this out of her ardour for her father’s honour and excellence.

But his prayers were in vain, the sickness became graver and graver, and a great confederation of nobility, innocence and clarity grew in him and ultimately determined that he seek Jesus out that he might “lay his hand on her”, in order that she might be well. Jesus had, after all, been given a gift “of power” of which one could avail oneself as of other means; this is what he might have thought to himself. But now, when he needs Jesus, Jesus is not there. He has gone across the lake for an unspecified period of time. A blazing furnace of gloom, tension, and anxiety followed that was quite capable of melting everything to nothing more than cinders of polite figures of speech. It moves us when we see the great commiseration of his community as they now heard, “Jairus is looking for Jesus for his little daughter”. Many will have quietly given thanks to God for answered prayers and many will have offered up new ones. Thus all stood at the shores of the lake and finally recognized Jesus and his throng of disciples in the ship coming across the water. That Jairus, as soon as Jesus disembarked, threw himself on his face before him probably shows that he realized he had much to ask of him and would have to do it publicly. It will not have been easy. If heretofore he had somehow stood alongside Jesus independently, this act was a noble and humble acknowledgement. Was his little daughter still alive at this point or had she already died? We do not know, and he did not know it himself. Probably she was still alive. Oh, if he had been able to say, as his military colleague, “Speak but a word, and my child will recover”, he would have saved his child from death. But he is still not capable of attaining such heights of faith, of such realization of the work entrusted to Jesus. “Laying on of hands”, that is what he is thinking of as the last lifeline. Therefore it was granted to him that his daughter died because if she had recovered when Jesus laid his hand on her, Jairus would have found ways of explaining Jesus’ “power” or “gift” in a manner that would again have obscured the ***significance*** of Jesus, would again have made the divine deed working through him on the daughter meaningless. Is this perhaps the reason that Jesus allowed the daughter to die? I do not believe so. Could the Saviour not have uttered unbeseeched the words, “Go, thy child lives!” No, he did not wish to, nor may he go further than what was occasioned by the faith of the supplicant. He put himself into the modest measure of faith of Jairus, in his mind comforting him, his daughter, and the whole house that everything would be well, but otherwise waiting to see how things progressed. A new sojourn – with the woman suffering from the issue of blood. How must Jairus have trembled! But, dear sir, as long as your daughter has enjoyed life, so long has this woman sunk step by step deeper into misery (rich and healthy, rich and sick, poor and sick). Should it not be her turn first?

This woman is the spiritual opposite of the centurion of Capernaum. She is also bold in thought, free and strong in her faith as is he, but in a feminine way. If men think in a more academic or businesslike way, if they come to conclusions based on generalities and laws manifested in the same, women think on a more personal level. The person, the individual personality, is more important to the mind of a woman, and the ***essence***, the significance of such a personality, she penetrates with sensitive perspicacity, as in the case of this woman. Perhaps she recognizes less of the elevation of Jesus’ ***calling*** than was the case with the centurion and much more the majesty and magnitude of his ***person***. In him she perceived a walking kingdom of heaven. The multitudes of angels that the centurion sees in his mind, serving God and waiting for His commands – she sees the same surrounding Jesus. Because shame forbade her declaring her distress to him, particularly in front of others, she dares to direct her supplication to Jesus’ kingdom of heaven. Those angels, the ones that made well the centurion’s servant at a word from Jesus, here help the woman on their own behalf, as it were, in accordance with the wishes of their lord.

The Saviour feels it. This type of help naturally and necessarily needs an endorsement – it must come into the ***light***, otherwise it could be misconstrued and seen as an example of dire misuse that would certainly, however, have soon become defunct due to complete failure. He demands most emphatically that she comes into the light so that her deed must have felt like a theft to her conscience. But he does ***not rebuke*** her act, and his words to her “thy ***faith*** hath made thee whole” might still comfort her today in response to the reproaches that she was somewhat superstitious. How important was faith to the Saviour!

Let us now return to Jairus. In the meantime his daughter has died. One could almost imagine a gloating satisfaction in the tone with which the father is apprised of the fact, as now this “honourable” house is spared the humiliation of this rabbi, Jesus, entering it as a helper in need.

“Too late!” It resounds in the poor father’s ear. But as a strong comrade’s hand reaches out to save you at the edge of the precipice when one is overcome with vertigo, the command of his new friend comes to his aid, “Fear not: believe only”. “Believe!” that was the catchword of his party, and one he assumed he had practised all his life, believing as he did every word that the Holy Scriptures had told of the past; and he also thought he had viewed the present and the future in “the light of belief”. But all his faith up to now was as nothing in his eyes, now, when he stood before faith such as the fathers had practised in their most fervent hours: Moses at the Red Sea, Elijah at Mount Carmel – yes, in the face of a faith that cast all former ones into the shade.

At this point some enthusiasts might have ordered (some manifestations in the present time make this seem likely) a solemn and general collective prayer in order to “besiege” God. Nothing was further from the Saviour’s mind. What he was hoping for was sacred, and he followed in the footsteps of Elijah and Elisha who in similar situations were zealously discrete and almost concealed their wishes and hopes under the cloak of secrecy. An attempt to coerce God would mean to “tempt God”. Thus the Saviour as a precaution throws the veil of secrecy over the miracle that he anticipates with the words, “The damsel is not dead, she sleepeth.” [[6]](#footnote-7) For those to whom they happen, the miracles are an honour. And how much craving for miracles is based on ecclesiastical ambition – he thought they are “not worth such great honour, Jairus and the others”. The dear Lord prefers, if possible, to work in silence.

This is why he cleared the space of all superfluous persons. Three disciples were to be present, they were to learn how to behave in future instances[[7]](#footnote-8), and the parents, of course, also belong here. There must have been something particularly affectionate and tender in the tone of Jesus’ voice when he said to the girl, “Talitha, cumi!” that the narrator (i.e. the eye witness) insisted on handing them down just ***as*** he heard them.

And the girl rose to her feet and walked. The miracle must be complete. It was a revival and a convalescence at the same time.

And they were immeasurably shocked. We can hardly imagine today what kind of experience such a demonstration of the immediate closeness of the being of the living God could be like.

It is clear witness to the Saviour’s lucid mind, always lovingly conscious, that he is immediately concerned for the poor hungry little girl that she not be forgotten in the general atmosphere of emotion. The food that she receives on his orders is preached to him by his love and has a more beneficial effect than a whole river of words would have had. How any resentment at the man who had attempted to reduce her father’s prestige melted away in the face of grateful emotions.

Now let us turn to the young man of Nain!

The Saviour is on his way to the city of Nain. He is followed by “many disciples and people”. “Now when he came nigh to the gates of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her.” (Luke 7:12)

This is the picturesque description of the surprise when the Saviour is placed between two multitudes of people – and facing a dead man; one who glaringly illustrated the entire lament of death, the cruel wounds that death tears in our communal life.

If the funeral procession had left the city somewhat earlier then Jesus would have beheld it from afar, and it would have been up to him to turn away with his multitude of disciples and so avoid it. However, this encounter left him little choice and so we are spared answering the question of what he would have done in the other case.

What should the Saviour do now? He certainly knew that the kingdom of God, when it came, would vanquish the reign of death. But he also knew this: God does everything in his own time, and death was at the bottom of the list of things contrary to God’s will in this present world order. To put a stop to the dying of human beings at this stage would have been without rhyme or reason.

What should he do now? Should he offer the widow solace with hopes of the kingdom to come, of the renascence (John 5:29), of the resurrection of the dead? This could have been expected. Such words of comfort were already in common practice in Judaism at that time. The Pharisees hoped for the resurrection of the dead; the Saviour might have already listened to such sermons of hope and thought, “Oh beloved people, this is easy to say. But if you knew how difficult it will be for it to become ***true***! Without me, this would be an empty dream.” It was, in the main, an ***opinion***, and opinions are not measured according to their ***beauty*** but to their ***truth***.

But should he not now emphasize ***his*** gospel, proclaiming and holding out the prospect of ***hopes,*** which he is ***justified*** and ***empowered*** in doing?

If he had done this and nothing else, one would be justified – even obliged – to answer him. These are opinions. People had been talking like this for a long time. Anyone can speak in blandishments.

And had the Saviour spoken oh so beautifully, the impression would have remained: He has met his match in death, he holds no sway over it. He would not have stood there as the Son of the Almighty. We generally think stupidly and dimly that God is bound to the natural law of death – this cruel manifestation. That is the way it is and cannot be changed. The Saviour would have been deposed as the great victor and saviour, would have been a hero in words and theories but not in deed.

Thus the Saviour was in a certain quandary. It was not only a quandary, however. Luke emphasizes that the ***Lord*** bewailed himself. It had something of that which we call the pugnacious thinking of the Lord: the only comfort of the widow was to be torn from her – that must not be allowed to happen before my very eyes. I, the “Lord” will not permit it. He touched the coffin. The soul must be called back from whence it had gone before he could speak with it, and he brought this to pass by requisitioning the insignia of the office of death. Then he spoke, “Young man, I say unto ***thee***, arise.” The words sound as if they presupposed it could possibly be unbelievable to the young man that he was being spoken to like this and receiving such an order, such permission. Yes, as if he were being encouraged to take such a decision, as it were. And the dead man sat up and began to speak!

We can understand the ***dread*** that befell the people. In what a different light does our whole existence suddenly appear when God Himself speaks to our life in such a way from his concealment! “God has visited his people.” With these Israelite, innocent and childlike words, the people justified to themselves what they had witnessed that day.

The manner in which Jesus arranges this waking from the dead through divine dispensation, almost coerced, reminds us of his words (John 5:20) when he is rebuked by the Jews because he healed the lame on the Sabbath, “And he will shew him greater works than these, ***that ye may marvel***”, namely raising the dead. In the verses this is taken from (5:17-30), Jesus speaks so extensively and profoundly of the essence of his miracles that we ought to take a closer look at them.

Jesus justifies himself with the words, “My Father (no longer ***creating***, no longer saying “let there be!”) ***worketh*** hitherto, and I work.” This was spoken in all innocence but discloses, almost involuntarily, the great secret that the Jews so fatally hated him for – that he is the Son of God. Herewith he is compelled to elucidate further on his miracles. What he now says commences as an outpouring of humility so that they will not ascribe to him an even greater participation in the miracles than is due to him, although he does wish to make clear to them that their complaints of his “miracles” are directed not at him but at the Father. “Verily, verily, I say unto you, the Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.” (John 5:19) With what wonderful strength the Saviour here repudiates any “higher, superhuman talent” that has been misunderstood in the wrong sense. Only God can work miracles. It is ***only*** due to his inner relationship with God, so exalted and tender, that God works these miracles through him, with him. But now the Saviour expatiates further on the great connection that these miracles have with the entire work of salvation that God has conferred upon him, until the final end.

In order to illuminate the healing of the lame, he looked directly over the whole domain into which he had intervened with this healing; the domain of ***death*** in its entire breadth and deepest depths, as well as ***his imminentvictory*** over the same – step by step in all his domains until destruction was complete. For the Saviour, such more or less coincidental individual assistances would have been meaningless if he had not seen in them a pledge of something greater. In them he saw a sign of what the situation was in the enemy’s camp (Luke 11:20), but even more it gave an indication of ***what the Father had in mind***. Altogether it threw light on the whole context of ***evil***, on its organism, so to speak.

It is impossible for the Saviour to reassure himself with the mere natural context of evil, its so-called natural causes as he – if he must do this – would not want to ascribe help to himself, as if he harboured within himself a direct power over nature. First and foremost, he sees evil as a whole, as an entirety (or aggregate), in death; and, secondly, he sees death in the light of the Father as a ***judgement***. He would hardly regard each individual case as a special judgement as we are only too obviously subject to natural laws. But that we humans, in spite of the divine spark within us, are subject to the same, that life does not pulse more strongly within us – in this the Saviour sees a plenary court. The Saviour regards us as not quite completely alive but as though we dwelled in the realms of death (John 5:24). At least he saw ***much*** special judgement, as in the case of the lame man (cf. 5:14 “Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee”). Thus now every healing that is an act of God is a ***court order***, an ***absolution***, even if frequently only partially (forgiveness can have different levels, after all). The great and whole absolution is the deliverance from death, suspension of the court ruling, “Thou shalt die”.

We encounter such thoughts when we continue with the sermon where we left off (5:20), “For the Father ***loveth*** the Son and sheweth him all things that himself doeth.” Thus, for the time being, ***he*** explains his “miraculous talent” as the simple consequence of a more intimate and trusting attitude towards the Father. “And greater works than these shall ***He*** show him, so that you (‘you’ is accentuated, it is meant to mean ‘for ***your*** sakes’) will marvel.”[[8]](#footnote-9) For your sakes, in order to wake you from sleep so that your hearts can become a little aware of the living God and the mercy he bestows on you: this is why he will do this. “As the Father wakes the dead and breathes life into them, the son will also make those whom he wills live again.” Here he is thinking primarily of future awakenings such as the youth of Nain, but furthermore of all that he still has to say of the victory over death, as the term “bringing to life” means to him more than merely a further postponement of death. In order to justify this “those whom he wills”, he continues, “For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son” (John 5:22). Bringing to life is the revokement of a court order. “He has placed this under my, the son’s, disposition.” Thus the son stands among us as a fellow human being, brother, and our judge. This is why he can ***save*** the world, although it is ripe for ***judgement:*** he has free jurisdiction over our fate. The Father can hand over the court without any qualms as Jesus ***loves*** his Father; he is fully aware how badly we have behaved towards the Father. The court can now take a fortuitous direction for us, a turn towards redemption, if we voluntarily hand ourselves over to the son’s court and humble ourselves before the son, the visible son. After all, He has handed everything over to him “That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father.” (John 5:23) Today, because the son is as invisible to us as is the Father, we are in danger of understanding these words in a different way from the way they were meant at that time. The meaning is that the son is the visible one and stands before you as a simple person. The Father is the unseen one, to appear to honour Him is no trouble, one has one’s own idea of Him and His state of mind so that everything can happily remain as it was. This is why He places the visible one before us, the son, in the midst of human history, of human life and bestows His own honour upon him so that His pre-eminence is recognised again on earth, has a history on earth, becomes a factor, something that is honoured and acknowledged. This is to be proved by means of the visible, the son, whether or not the honour shown to the Father is merely illusion and empty phrases or if it is composed of an overwhelming power. It was not very easy in those times to honour Jesus the Son in the man. “Who does not honour the son, the visible one, does not honour the invisible, the Father.”

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.” (v.24) Thus he addresses his audience with heartfelt assurance, “Take hold, you can be sure that this is true.” The words were probably received as coolly as they were spoken warmly. ***Perhaps*** this cool reception is in connection with what he now says, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and ***now*** is, when the dead shall hear the voice (the sound, the note) of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.”(v.25)

Which dead is the Saviour referring to here? Obviously ***not*** those that he – as in the case of the youth at Nain – has recalled to life on this earth as he has already spoken of these (v.12) and with “verily, verily” he is evidently introducing something completely new and surprising. Also, the following words about judgement would not make appropriate sense. Or does he mean “spiritually dead”? Godet[[9]](#footnote-10) assumes the Saviour is speaking of the whole class of spiritually dead who “have ears to hear with”. Are these the “spiritually dead”? However, the Saviour does not count those who have “an ear to hear with” among the spiritually dead. His concepts are all so simple, clear and firm – almost tangible – that one would not connect him with such an over-refined, convoluted, actually contradictory concept. Apart from this, he has just spoken of these, of the living listeners (v.24), so that with his “verily etc.” he can hardly be referring to ***only these again.*** Godet’s explanation has only ***one*** reason for elucidation – the difficulty of the passage.[[10]](#footnote-11)

In the face of the cool reception accorded his sermon, the Saviour is hoping confidently for a time when he will have another, more grateful audience. While he is speaking he feels – and ***now*** the listeners are there. They are the unseen, the dead. Among the voices of the living they discern ***one*** as that of the ***Son of God***. What ***we do not*** feel, ***they*** sense immediately – that is the voice of the Son of God.

We display an inexplicable reluctance to thinking of the dead. So much so that we even disregard it in science, science that supposedly wants to know everything; and we assume the Saviour must have the same attitude. For us generally, this great multitude – in contrast to which all the people living at the moment are a miniscule minority – is taken as little into account as it is by those who deny all immortality. We imagine them very far away, a small minority in Heaven and the others – billions of them – in Hell. May we do this? Do we have the right namely for the latter? Regrettably yes, but only when we think of “Hell” in a biblical way. Luther has described two different “abodes” or perhaps better: “forms of being”, “situations” as spoken of in the Bible, as “Hell”: one, Gehenna, the actual abode of the ***damned*** about which the Bible leaves us in the dark as to who is ***already*** there – this situation does not enter upon its whole significance until the last trump is blown; and second, Hades, the realm of the dead, of the (unholy) deceased. There, for instance, (and not Gehenna) is where the rich man came (Luke 16:23). There are also the billions of heathen dead. This is not actually a concept of revelation but a concept that Israel has in common with all peoples of antiquity and all primitive peoples (only expressed more soberly, more circumspectly) and probably because – it is true. From Hades, from the realm of the dead, Jesus fears hostile influences against the members of his community (Matthew 16:18). How can he fear this? Because the names for concepts of the hereafter are not to be understood as merely ***spatial*** or ***geographic*** but ***spiritual***. “And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell.” (Matthew 11:23) This Capernaum remained both times at the Lake of Galilee. When it accepted Jesus it teemed with the dwellers of Heaven, with angels – later with the dwellers of Hades.

Certainly Jesus, who has a heart for all and his sights constantly fixed on the greater and general whole, is thinking of those who have died already. He is thinking of this multitude when he speaks of the dead. These are the ones hearing the voice of the Son of God. People hear physically, the voice of Jesus does not differ substantially from that of other people. The others, though, hear spiritually according to the nature and weight of their thoughts – they hear the voice of the Son of God. “And they that hear shall ***live***.” (v.25) How can they if they have been robbed of their body? Here, the Saviour can help. It is a higher, nobler reason that he gives, “For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself.” (v.26) He has the power of life.[[11]](#footnote-12) “And hath given him authority to execute judgement also, because he is the son of man.” Not absolutely “the judgement”, we have already discussed that above, but to practise judgement there, where actually there is no room for judgement. The realm of the dead is legally without history. There are no grounds for alterations in the prevailing laws of the dead, no history of salvation or any other thing. They wait for the ultimate decision which, on the other hand, is presumably nothing but an investigation into the facts including the resulting legal consequences; and without holding out any expectation of being able to influence the proceedings of the court to their advantage by any ***behaviour*** of theirs. The basis of the history of salvation, of redemption and of penitence and forgiveness of sins is the living race, “the land of the living”.

Jesus has been given the “authority to execute judgement” because he is the ***Son of God***. But the authority to also execute judgement over the dead, to transfer to them the ***ability to transform*** the ***situation***, which is our prerogative as human beings – he has received this authority because he is a ***man***.

There are only two awkward points in this explanation: firstly, the declaration as detailed here stands somewhat alone in the New Testament (which is very ***understandable*** considering the subject); and, secondly, it is a blow in the face to all our modern points of view (not the biblical ones). Otherwise it accords in detail with Jesus’ words and yields fluid continuity and lucid coherence. Only the living (v.24) who hear “his word” and the dead (v.25) who hear “the voice of the Son of God” can escape the judgement; both are wrested likewise from the realm of death and brought to life; and finally – after everything possible has been done for the purpose of possible salvation – the great and final victory over death, the resurrection of all and judgement over all.

A special light is shed on the ideas that Jesus propounds on sickness and death and their association with divine judgement in the negotiations with the man who was blind from birth. That is, in the last of the three healing stories that John narrates to us (the first was the nobleman’s son, the second the aforementioned man who was lame).

Jesus did not unfold those ideas as a dry and impersonal doctrinal system, but in terrible earnest and great joy of victory (John 5). We are witness to his mood and that of his disciples also in John 9:1-5. An inexpressible melancholy permeates this conversation in which we can observe the conduct of the disciples as well as that of their master; how they lovingly track the cause of the evil, always coming back to the dark background, that of sin, as the inexhaustible fountain of all evil. As the doctor, for the purposes of healing a sickness, first of all researches into what might have caused it, so light is shed on the cause. This is the first gift from the Almighty when we supplicate Him for the redress of an evil; namely such a one – as that we have mentioned here – that falls like a scourge, a baleful enigma, on humankind. Such a light is the first guarantee that atonement in the individual case and ultimately in the case of the entirety of humankind is envisaged by God and that according to His will it can be envisaged in the name of Jesus. The disciples have already learned to deal with everyday cases in accordance with the wishes of the master and without his support. However, in the case here, they are at their wits’ end. This impression is obtained from the text. We have the expectation perhaps that Jesus will answer first of all, “One should not ask ***like that***, it is unseemly to always immediately assume that sin is at the root.” On the contrary, however, in his answer there is an implicit approbation of their conduct in seeing ordinary cases in this way. In such explanations (through sin) we find almost an insult to God, but this is an illusion – only a ***human*** would be insulted, that is, feel treated with impertinence. It is easy for us; we explain much with a simple “it is a mistake of nature”, a purely “physical” deformity. The Saviour could not accept this as a ***cause*** but only as the ***consequence*** of a ***higher*** cause. Of course, such deformities from birth are today still gravest with regard to the ***consequences*** and the most obscure with regard to the causes; and one must almost be blind oneself in order not to gaze here into blood-curdling associations of perdition.

“Who has sinned?” Did the poor soul at the commencement of his being follow such an evil path that he had forfeited the right to vision? This seems hardly possible. Or is this misfortune punishment for the sins of the parents? Oh, how some lingering illnesses of their children indicate the sins of the parents! But still – being robbed of eyesight from birth, that is, robbed of any idea of light – can such an impoverishment be visited upon me for someone else’s sins?

There is something peculiar about the urgency of this “why?” and about the urgency of having to think about it. Luther also suffered, thanks be to God, from this sickness. We others suffer less from this questioning; yes, we almost think it a sin. But the Saviour did not mind his disciples worrying about this. He lent them a hand instead with his guidance and clarification, but surely, for his part, also regarded thinking (searching) as one of his main works. Just do not think along unholy paths, do not think impertinently, but sacredly! Think while praying! But then take heart and ***think***!

The clarification that the Saviour gives is infinitely melancholy. Behind sin he sees a further power of doom, one that apparently mocks any attacks – he sees the darkness, which lies on the people as a thoughtlessness, an enthusiastic blindness. He can cope with the sin, salvation is there, but this salvation – it can find no access to mankind, they are walled-up. The Saviour sees the Father’s longing that mankind will notice him as the living and the merciful. But it is so difficult to teach them, they know everything already and everyone is of the opinion that he is aware of what “God” means. God promises Himself the most success from “His acts”, that is, from the miracles. With an act of God like this, your eyes will be opened to the fact that God ***is***, not only as a product of your thoughts or the culmination of your system but real, alive. And not only will your eyes be opened but also your heart in the face of the overwhelming benevolence and majesty of God. This is what God hopes for from the miracles. The urgency of the blindness and obduracy of the people seemed so terrible to Him that in order to shine a light into their darkness with a bright deed, He let this innocent man spend half his life in darkness. This is how much He longs to become visible to humankind and to enter their hearts.

Now – says the Saviour – acts of God such as this are also a possibility. “We (not “I”) are bound to do the work of Him who sends it.” (Thus speaks Jesus in a brotherly tone to the apostles.) “A ***night*** will come when no one will be able to work”; that is, one where the opportunity for such speech from God is cut off. All the more important then were the miracles ***now***, namely ***these miracles***, from which God promised Himself so much.

Did it work? Apparently not at all. John describes to us poignantly how this plan of divine love shattered on the stone walls of human obduracy. He tells the story calmly, soberly and without permitting any judgement to surface, but one can feel how his heart bleeds. The Pharisees appear here as firmly determined not to ascribe to the Saviour any authority as God’s messenger. As loud as these miracles speak, they must be brushed aside as something which preferably should not have happened and from which, at all costs, no consequences advantageous to Jesus may be construed. With the sorrowful valour of their self-assurance, they turn to the other business of the day.

Nevertheless, the miracle has had an important influence: that this resolve of others “not to see” has been pilloried in scathing clarity as a warning for all time. “For judgement I am come into this world”, says Jesus – surely with profound pain – in contrast to his words, “For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.” (John 3:17) How it must have hurt him to see this reversal from salvation to condemnation! The words, “that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind” (John 9:39) go with other words that we will encounter later and which threw a bright and benevolent light on these oppressive experiences: the words, “You, Father, have hidden it from the wise and the prudent and shown it to the innocents.”

With the words “that they which see might be made blind”, Jesus gave a terrible description of the light-shunning acts of the Pharisees, and he does not leave it at that. He also tears to pieces the last remnants of justification for such acts and presents them mercilessly in their entire reprehensibility. Whoever feels bound at all costs to close his eyes to such a glorious act of God while at the same time wishing to work in the name of God for the people – what does he resemble but a man wanting to enter a house, but who may not enter by the door, i.e. a thief or a robber? Thus the Saviour continues speaking to the Pharisees. The coherence of this is later interrupted by being arranged into chapters, which is helpful for public edification, but does not serve to make the speech coherent. It is just through these miracles that for mankind, Israel to begin with, a door long shut is opened through which God’s mercy, his living acts, can flow through. Whoever comes through this door – how much good can he and will he bring? Israel so far had been in a “fold”, which, as long as there is lack of a shepherd, can be seen as a shelter but also as a prison from which the sheep would like very much to escape outside to the pasture. Who goes through this door is a shepherd, he comes in the name of the living God; deeds take the place of words, the artificial bars of the fold can now fall and a personal link will take their place; “he calleth his own sheep ***by name***, and leadeth them out”. (John 10:3)

So, in a rapid change of tone, tender and clear, the Saviour has painted the beauty of that which he brings into that punishing image of the “door” which the deeds of the Pharisees had involuntarily evoked in him. He could not remain in the shadow, he felt compelled to describe the light. This partly resulted in the Pharisees not understanding him, “Does he mean ***us*** when he says thief or robber? Have we then ever walked past such a door?”

Jesus helped them along with terrible clarity. Not every miracle of itself was actually the door, but he, Jesus, himself was – he had been revealed to us anew as the path opened between heaven and earth, as our door to God and God’s door to us. It was ***he*** whom the Pharisees avoided; in order to not have to recognize him they had closed their eyes to the miracles. Thus he interprets the image to them himself with the words, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me (among the living) are ***thieves*** and ***robbers***: but the sheep did not hear them” (John 10:7-8), which means that all those before me who wished, in a particular way, to exert a religious influence on the people were doing this on their own account without a mandate from God and even sometimes from dishonest motives; from hunger for power or honour; satisfaction of lust for revenge; or other passions. They cannot want or accomplish anything else but stealing, slaughtering and bringing ruin; as they ***cannot*** give anything, they can only ***take***. This is why Jesus takes the people warmly under his protection here (v. 8), as before (v. 5) as in spite of all the timid awe they have of the Pharisees, they have remained cool towards their expectations. They should not and did not want to be mere booty.

Indeed, when we, as humans, want to exert influence on others what can we actually do to one another except plague each other with rebukes, punishment and warnings? In short, with all manner of mental pressure with which we, at heart, are not giving but only taking; not bestowing life but only death. We can sense the Saviour rejoicing for our sakes when he continues, “I am come that they may have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.” He continues, “I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.”(John 10:10-11)

Therefore, as in the case where he healed the lame (John 5), we see the Saviour, compelled by the Pharisees, to draw conclusions from the miracle that the Father had bestowed upon him. The miracle preaches anew of the magnitude of what God has given to mankind in the form of Jesus, but the unfavourable reception of the same conceals the strength, yes, the secret roots of resistance within mankind which resist the acts of God – and will continue to do so. In this resistance, the Saviour sees in his mind’s eye the wolf already at the door and sees that this wolf will be the apparent victor for the time being and that the struggle against the same is going to cost him his life.

The bright light shed on this speech of Jesus because of its association with the miracle may justify our having discussed this at some length – although it does take us somewhat further afield than the life of Jesus, which we are concerned with here.

Our chapter “The sick” has its necessary culmination in the last and greatest act of Jesus in this direction: the raising of Lazarus. Here once again, we have before our eyes in full clarity and depth the great struggle that these acts of Jesus turned into. More clearly than ever before, the great enemy that must be vanquished becomes visible. The task is to overcome a Goliath, whose conquerability mankind has completely lost all idea of. He is to be vanquished with faith in God. The Saviour is not spared any of the profound pain and distress that a struggle, namely ***this*** struggle, brings with it – yes, the inevitable ***vicissitudes***, the ***danger*** of a temporary defeat in the struggle for the inadequate faith of mankind.

In the environs of orthodox Jerusalem with its chilly behaviour towards Jesus, there resides a small colony of sisters, deployed like a small scout post in enemy country. Beset by great distress, Martha and Maria call to Jesus for help, “Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest (Lazarus) is sick” (John 11:3). Perhaps they thought (erroneously) that for the “beloved’s” sake Jesus would be all the more sure to come and all the more surely to petition the Father. This might have been partially true, but, on the other hand, was probably the reverse. Also the Saviour does not “judge after the flesh”, and also may not. His hesitation is a self-abnegation which at this time is probably associated with the particular ties of love connecting him to Lazarus. His hesitation is similar to that towards his mother once before at the wedding in Cana. It is the gravity and magnitude of the struggle that demand an uneasy setting-aside of all personal considerations. Certainly he commits Lazarus consistently to God, but – he ***stays***. His disciples allegedly understood his staying, but for a misguided reason; they seem to have thought that he was afraid of the Jews. However, he had higher reasons than this. To hasten across the country to help a friend – he may not accord this honour to his opponent, the “last enemy that shall be destroyed”, death (1 Corinthians 15:26). He has received immediate assurance from God and communicates this to his disciples, “This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby” (John 11:4). But behold, on the third day when he is on the way to Lazarus, he suddenly knows that “Lazarus is dead”. This was a humiliation the likes of which he had probably never experienced; and the careful and gentle way in which he imparted this knowledge to his disciples lets us feel what a blow this was for the group. The Saviour had said, “The sickness is not unto death”, and now he has to proclaim, “Lazarus is dead!” It will have been a painful surprise for him also. Perhaps in Bethany the true religious struggle had been lacking. The determination with which they clung to the thought, “If only he were here” (instead of ***believing*** as the centurion of Capernaum did) and maybe the opinion they held that they had a personal right to his coming (at least, as compared to the centurion) might have been the causes that things came to pass as they did, and the ruler of this world was ***successful*** in this stroke against Jesus, in this seeming and temporary triumph. This is what the struggle was like. Victory was certain, but it had to be actually fought for and not merely in mock battle like the peacetime manoeuvres of our armies where the victory of one side has been discussed and determined beforehand.

“Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep.” With these words, Jesus prepares his disciples to accept the tidings of sorrow. The word έγείηειν is not written here, which would offer a welcome double meaning (to awaken and to raise – from the dead), but instead έξυπνίζειν (to wake from sleep) which precludes the thought of “raising”. This is how important it is for the Saviour to let his disciples realize the whole gravity of the situation only gradually. His words, however, also stemmed from a robust and effective protest of his spirit against this dying. The robbery, perpetrated by death on Lazarus’ life, was, should he rise again, no more serious than if he had merely slept during the time he was dead. With those words, the Saviour had made it possible to impart to his disciples his intention of ***raising*** Lazarus ***before*** they received the tidings of his ***death***. “If he sleep, he shall do well”, the disciples answer him, obviously relieved of a heavy anxiety for they had taken part in the struggle in spirit. They did not think, “Naturally! We did not doubt for one minute, everything was settled, you said – after all – that the sickness is not unto death.” Thoughts like these were manifestly far from their minds.

Now Jesus says to them plainly (παρρησία “saying all”), “Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe (πιστεύσητε)” (John 11:14-15). However, that the sickness is not unto death, that in this fateful struggle not death but the glorification of the Son of God will be the last word: this is his unwavering belief. The serious turn things have taken will result in an even greater victory, a cause for greater strengthening of his disciples’ faith.

The words, “I am glad that I was not there”, let us look deeply into the Saviour’s heart and show us what was taking place in his soul during such hours of struggle. I am glad that things have turned out that Lazarus must be raised, as this will result in a much greater strengthening of belief for my disciples than if he had merely become well again. This is obviously the meaning behind his words. He is saying to himself, “If I had been there, then Lazarus would ***not*** have died.” His joy is like an answer he is giving himself to the question, “Why did I not go there?” In obedience to the Father he had refrained from going there, but the results of his refraining were a surprise: he sought to shed light on this and did so. His obedience will bring victory. Here we see him, wonderfully alive amid human distress, amid the misery of free choice, which often asks itself bitterly, only after the deed, “Should I have done this or the other, or refrained from it?”

Some have the need, or presume it their duty, to assume that the Saviour had known the whole course of events in advance. If this had been so, would the Saviour then have said, “The sickness is not unto death”, and not, “Lazarus will die, but I will raise him again from the dead”? If we were to imagine he had said the latter and picture to ourselves the further course events would take, then we would see immediately how unnatural this dying and raising from the dead would be, as if it were from a preconceived plan. We would see how much we are blind to the sense of the whole of Jesus’ struggle and how his honour in particular is negated if we do not accept the full significance of his incarnation as a human.

Resolute and assured of victory, but humble as probably never before, the Saviour came to Bethany. A greater number of women had joined the group already gathered around Martha and Maria, (BITTE GRIECHISCH EINFÜGEN, HABE DIESE ZEICHEN NICHT) and there were also male visitors from Jerusalem come to comfort them for their brother’s fate. It was a true victory celebration for all those who were of the opinion that too much fuss was being made of Jesus and it would not be prudent to become too involved with his high-flown, “exaggerated” ideas. One could allow oneself free reign; and what an eloquent text for all kinds of well-intentioned hints was – the buried Lazarus! The sisters had the appearance of prisoners of war among a crowd of comforting victors. Passions are inflamed in everyone and even the Saviour is deeply moved. His speech is almost military, that of a field marshal: brief, assertive, commanding and censorious.

Martha hurries to the Lord in order to speak to him alone. In her words, “Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died”, there lies both a reproach to Jesus and a firm line against the attacks of the people of Jerusalem who would have her retreat from her faith. “We know this: it was lacking only that he was ***here***.”

In her heart of hearts, Martha still holds a bold hope; but hardly has she shyly conveyed this to Jesus, she is immediately frightened and withdraws to the safe ground of doctrine – as Jesus takes her words literally and promises her what she hopes for. “Thy brother shall rise again” (BITTE GRIECHISCH EINFÜGEN), the Saviour has said to her, and she rejoinders placatingly, “I know that he shall rise again – on the last day.” Yes, what is humankind not capable of believing and hoping for when doctrine presents it thus and removes it to an incalculable distance! As if this hope were more than one of the many dreams with which one loves to entitle religion – as if there were no ***Saviour***! And as if the Saviour would be able to lead ***his*** work, i.e. the raising of the dead, to victory if he now – as in this individual case which calls the honour of victory so pertinently into question – would lay down his arms before the enemy as the more powerful ! “What are you waiting for? I am the resurrection and the life.” Certainly the Saviour, ever since he realized that Lazarus was dead, has again brought this misery of death before God and into relation with himself; and, as if from a profound need to herald it, that which fills his heart pours forth afresh from him. “I am not only the life, I am also the resurrection. Within me, what is dead must live again.” “He that believeth in me,” he continues, “though he were dead, yet shall he live” (John 11:25). According to this, then, Lazarus’ resurrection would have been superfluous if he had indeed believed in Jesus like ***this***. But not for Jesus. He ascribes to himself such a decisive meaning for our destiny in the hereafter and promises to him who believes in it such a certain victory over death, that he must show himself as ruler and victor and substantiate his right to speak, must attest and prove it; otherwise we are not only justified but also ***duty-bound*** to be as distrustful towards his assurances as towards all similar ones that other ingenious people have devised.

This was the reason that the death of Lazarus was permitted, in order that because of him Jesus would become manifest not only as the life but as the resurrection; and this was perhaps a benefit important to the Saviour himself.

“Believest thou this?” Like a wrathful command in the heat of battle, this question resounds, and Martha, startled, gives him her avowal and retreats. “The Master is come and calleth for thee,” she whispers to Maria – probably in the sense of, “I am not strong enough alone to answer the way the Master’s mood is just now and how he speaks. Maria must come.”

If Martha had come composedly to Jesus, Maria comes in desperation. She uses the same words but falls so downcast at his feet that they can mean nothing less than, “Why did you not come?” It is as though she had contracted her mood from her surroundings. The enemy has been at work, has taken advantage of his supposed victory and the poetry of discouragement, of pain, almost of complaint rules their minds. The Saviour does ***not*** answer her. When he saw her weeping, and with her also the weeping Jews (in whom a half-gloating feeling of triumph had subconsciously increased their emotion), he was incensed and shocked at himself. First of all he was indignant at this storm of weeping as if it were a sacrifice of honour to his opponent, death; this lust of mankind to wallow in their wounds; this quiet adulation of the omnipotence of death that, without admitting it to itself, turns its point against God. Here, before ***him***, he should not have encountered Maria. In her case, it hurt him more than in the case of the Jews from whom he expected nothing better; but his wrath rose above them and against his enemy, the prince of this world, because he had succeeded in dominating and enslaving those who are called to crush his head. He was wrathful that he himself had failed to win more of a domain in the hearts of mankind, especially just now when the days of his deeds on earth were numbered.

“Where have ye laid him?”

“Lord, come and see.” Here, these words, which also waft around the sunrise of “life that was the light of men” at the beginning of the Gospel of St. John (John 1:4), sound in Jesus’ ears as a mocking memory.

Jesus wept, “ἐδάκρυσεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς”. It is impossible to express the emotion of the narrator in German.

There was something of the inner collapse under the burden of pain in the face of the whole misery of death and the somnolence in mankind, this effect of “the other death” in us.

There lies a victory in the tears, in the acknowledgement of weakness expressed therein. I believe that by ***weeping*** Jesus reconciled all hearts and dissolved all enmity – at least for the moment – in compassion. “He is the one who suffers most!” This compassion goes so far that in their hearts they ask “Could he not have prevented this? He opened the eyes of the blind!”

This was the nadir of Jesus’ humiliation. It appeared as though he himself was moved by the general mood of mourning; as if he were lowering his banner and knew not what to do but weep. At the root of this dissolution of the soul, in this wallowing in grief, there often lies something deeply bad, terribly grave, this “poetry of pain”; namely a half-conscious complaining against God. This complaint has taken the place of faith. This is the breath that blows to us from Hell with its hatred towards God. It whispers to us maliciously, “Now you finally see who and how God is”. A false mood of devoutness can overcome us, an enthusiasm for the magnitude of our misfortune. Thus it might have been so here, where everyone with one accord and increasing enthusiasm dissolved into tears.

And Jesus was wrathful again. We understand.

“Take ye away the stone”, he commands. Martha attempts to dissuade him with the words, “By this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days”. Four days old – thus the corpse has his birthday and now his ages also, and what sad ones! Martha has already learned to regard what lies in the grave as an object of horror. She fears that when the stone is raised this horrid stench will billow out of the grave and spoil her last fond memories.[[12]](#footnote-13) “Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?” is Jesus’ rebuke (John 11:40). When did he speak to her thus? It was in the way he said, “Thy brother shall rise again” (John 11:23) and “I am the resurrection” (John 11:25). Such assurances that Jesus gives are commands to ***have faith***. What he is revealing to us is a pledge entrusted to us that will remain useless if we do not transmute it into faith. Now they lift the stone; and Jesus lifts his eyes to heaven and addresses – just this once in loud words – the Father, just thanking Him for His response and then calls (actually “cried”) with a loud voice, “Lazarus! Come forth (BITTE GRIECHISCH EINFÜGEN)!”

It is strange how, even in the most prodigious of his deeds, we never see the Lord losing touch with the ground of simple human work. Even miracles such as this do not simply flow from him as easily as fairy tales would have us believe. Here, too, he wanted and needed to make use of all the strength of the participants (as previously with Martha). As, in spite of all holy particulars, Elisha’s efforts to raise the Shunammite’s dead son have a certain natural kinship with our resuscitation efforts in the case of those seemingly dead; it appears to me as though here the Saviour had found it necessary to exert a type of moral forceon the soul of Lazarus, a sort of powerful command to bestir himself.

“And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin.” Jesus says to them, “Loose him, and let him go.” Not a word of greeting to Lazarus! Not a word of triumph addressed to those present, a wonderful self-limitation – herein lies the honour he accords to his Father.

Many of the Jews present now believed in him, but others informed the Pharisees of the “fatal case”, thereby sealing his death warrant.

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**The Demonic**

A middle field between physical illness and moral turpitude is represented by the disorder of the soul. This the Saviour confronted, as we know, in a marked manner, seeing the sick as influenced internally by another, alien “I”, by “unclean spirits” or “demons”. [[13]](#footnote-14) It was a grave discovery although one promising victory for him. It was as if this horde of confused moods and thoughts did not actually belong to the sufferer, but to a spirit that he could banish with a word – how quickly was help at hand to heal a distress before which the most serious illness paled and seemed bearable.

We enter this field because to ignore it would be to leave a gap in this portrait of Jesus’ works, which would be all the more awkward as the Saviour himself obviously imbued this part of his task with great value. But I enter upon this only timidly and with the intention of limiting myself to helping us find the historical state of affairs as handed down to us.

But let us spare a brief comment on the comparison of those wretched conditions with the disorders of the soul proliferating increasingly in our time. Generally, we are afraid to accept that similar conditions, such as those of this type described in the gospels, are still prevalent today. That is, that wretchedness such as this – even if only in exceptional cases – could be attributed to the same causes.

On the one hand, this fear is quite justified. If the delusions of the disturbed that they are possessed play a large and ominous role, and if we understand the stories of the New Testament with regard to this correctly, then these imaginings must generally be pure delusion. The influence of demons is never shown to us so matter-of-factly in the gospels, sothat the person concerned had no idea of the true nature of his condition. Therefore to believe the delusion of such a sick person is hardly justified, let alone to encourage them in the same. Where, however, it is not the sick person but we ourselves who assume this to be the cause of the affliction, the gospels offer us no sign that it would be beneficial to communicate our assumption to the sufferer; particularly as with Jesus light being shed on the cause and immediate ***help*** always go hand in hand. However, the above-mentioned reluctance to assume such causes for emotional disorders is now effective protection against such mistakes.

On the other hand, with Jesus’ great willingness to help as it still exists today, we would wilfully be closing the path to great and benevolent aid at the expense of some unhappy souls.

The gospels tell us repeatedly how very active Jesus was in this field (Mark 3:11; Luke 4:41 etc.) and how much his mind was occupied with this. This is proven by those peculiar words about the spirit that, driven out by humans, “. . . walketh through dry places, seeking rest;” and then with seven other spirits returns to his former house now “swept and garnished” (Luke 11:24ff.) Individual examples of his work in this field, however, are given more seldom than examples of sickness. This is perhaps partly due to the fact that they appeared but rarely, mainly for another, sacred reason: namely that the narrators were inwardly bound to be sparing in the telling of such thrilling stories in order not to stimulate and satisfy our morbid preference for the dark side of life.

The best-known experience from this field was the one with (or, according to Matthew that ***of***) the Gergesenes. The abrupt series of exciting scenes and tasks demanding rapid solution offered by this episode is echoed in the disjointed depiction of the narration (Matthew 8:28ff, Mark 5:1ff, and Luke 8:26ff.) The Saviour, after he had spoken to the hordes in parables, appears to have boarded the ship in a state of complete exhaustion in order to sleep. The ship was caught in the wild storm that compelled the disciples to waken him. With his words he rebuked the storm, the winds ceased, and they continued to the other shore and landed near Gadara, a city inhabited mainly by heathens.

A naked man in great excitement jumped out at them from the graves – it was not clear whether driven by anger or fear – and then behold: when he reached Jesus he fell to his knees before him and cried in the voice known to us from the experiences in the synagogue in Capernaum, “Jesus, Son of God, I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not.” Did the man leap at the throng who disembarked in order to cool the anger of his hate towards mankind, and did then the sight of the majesty of Jesus throw him to his knees; or did the bright light of intuition that Jesus might help him shine through him – did he ultimately notice the sudden calming of the storm that seemed so connected to the storm in his own heart? Did he hasten towards Jesus in order to beseech his help, and did he lose the power over himself as he knelt before him so that some other called from within him, completely distorting the wish of his soul before Jesus? We do not know. Who was this man anyway? What was his past, in what state was he now? Of all this, Jesus only knew in this moment what he could deduce from the man’s behaviour. What we now know about him, he only discovered later from the convalescent and his friends. Possibly also in the heat of the moment from that other sufferer that Matthew mentions, a friend who – less sick – was only affected by the wild man. Who had, says Luke (8:26ff.), “. . . devils long time, and ware no clothes, neither abode in any house, but in the tombs”, and (29) the unclean spirit “oftentimes had caught him: and he was kept bound with chains and in fetters; and he brake the bands, and was driven of the devil into the wilderness.” What a state! If in such a person, as we probably had here, a remnant of consciousness of self remained, how ashamed he must feel and how alarmed, on the one hand, at himself and his actions, and, on the other, how wounding and outrageous it must feel to him to be bound like a wild animal by his family, perhaps even by his own children; and what incredible anger it reveals, knowing oneself unhappy, to stay in the tombs day and night. If he drives away those who approach with stones, we can understand this not only from the condition prevailing within him but also from the treatment he has experienced at the hands of others. There is no clear sign of anxiety that Jesus will treat him as he is used to being treated by others; otherwise he would have fled. But this fear of Jesus felt by another “I” in him is reflected in the bad conscience he has towards people and in his bitter experience of mistreatment, which he himself feels is partly merited; and probably in an obscure fear that here he might receive his just deserts. So the man kneels before the Saviour; his entire state cried for help but his words said, “Let me go!” “What is thy name?” Jesus asks him. In order to understand this question we must abandon the idea that the Savour immediately knew everything and had immediately begun to treat the soul of the sick man with psychological calculation. How suddenly the man had appeared at his feet! As yet he knew no more than his eyes and ears told him. One thing must certainly have appeared suspicious to him though: the people never addressed him as the Son of God, but demons almost regularly did so. First of all, the Saviour wants light. He sees a game of hide-and-seek; he sees that another is masquerading as this sick man and is speaking in his name; and he wants to know with whom he is dealing. Some believe the Saviour asked the man for his name in order to induce him to bethink himself and to free himself somewhat from the delusion of being possessed. However, there is nothing of this in the narrative. Besides, such a procedure, provided that the idea was not based on error and was madness, would obviously not have been of any use. He must free the madman, and here the man himself can contribute nothing. The Saviour, therefore, immediately addresses the seat of the trouble, and that with the plenitude of power of the Son of God that he knew was well-known in this region. After all, Jesus’ question “What is thy name?” has something striking about it as he is prompting a class of being, whom he normally forbids speech, to speak. The actual inducement must lie in the request made to him: Do not torment me before it is time! Was it not perhaps pity that moved him to this question? With the idea: in order to make a decision, I must know with whom I am dealing. If the origin of the spirit was human[[14]](#footnote-15) then his name would speak of his former life history and would, therefore, be a confession of sin. If it originated in another region then one could not imagine anything in the name, but a word that expressed his whole essence, his moral significance; again, a type of confession of sin. The answer he received was surprising. We can imagine that in those regions mendacity was the norm, but the possibility of it here was ruled out by the majesty of the Son of God. To speak the whole truth, however, was more than that being could manage. The answer was an evasive “Legion”, as “we are many”. The answer to the Saviour’s question was thus timidly refused. Instead, these spirits renew their plea and express it, now that they have been exposed, more clearly ***thus***: that he not send them away from this place and ***more*** clearly, “that he would not command them to go out into the deep”.

We can revel in such narratives now, be it from love of excitement, be it from our critical artistry, but of the anguish of the soul which the Saviour experienced in such moments we have no idea. He, who was once not a man and from pity for these reprobate beings became a man, should he not have a heart for ***other*** beings? Into what ineffable misery of being was the Saviour gazing? He is the son of man, and mankind is to be helped first and foremost, this is how he wills it. But what severity must he use towards the other side in order to stand the victor in this struggle? We do not hear an answer, an account, from the Saviour; those petitioning him have left him no time for this. They probably sensed the exceptionality of their plea as well as realizing that they could no longer remain in their present place of abode. They fall back, then, on a suggestion of being permitted to house in the animal kingdom. How far must a thinking spirit have fallen if it sees a benefit in being allowed to live as a swine! But they prefer this to the other fate, of being forced out into the deep – of course, without realizing that this will not spare them the immediate banishment to the deep. It was a herd of two thousand swine that they requested as a dwelling, and the Saviour permitted them this.

It is only now that we gain a complete understanding of what the poor Gergesene had had to put up with. Yes, we must almost admire the strength of soul inherent in a human being in coping with such inner tempests when we see what happened to the pigs whose resistance was of course non-existent; ***with one accord*** they jumped into the lake and drowned.

How the Gergesene felt when these inner tempests suddenly lifted from him, we can hardly imagine today. Immediately, apparently, he desired and received clothing, and we understand that he did not want to leave his saviour but wanted to follow him on his future path. However, the Saviour demanded a bond from him. He was not in the Saviour’s debt but in his people’s debt, as the economic damage to them was not a small one. He was to pay this debt in the Saviour’s stead.

It makes one wistful to observe the impression that this act had on the people of this land. It was a healing, a wonderful, unimaginable one, but – so expensive! They were used to seeing the madman from day to day, like a peculiar but natural occurrence; and this is maybe why they found the price of his healing so high. When they heard what had happened to their pigs, they came to Jesus. Then they saw the other side of the misfortune; the poor fellow, now dressed and sensible, sitting at the feet of Jesus. And they were more afraid. We involuntarily have a sense of a heavy cloud of darkness hanging over these people. Fright at the closeness of God befell them and full of fear, certain that only pleas would be effective, they beseech the Saviour most humbly to depart their land again. This was the third sorrow to move the Saviour’s heart. The first was because of the sick man; then the glimpse into the deplorable darkness of the beyond; and now the glimpse into the still comfortable feeling of darkness in this life. Against this latter, he now employs the healed man to preach the great grace of God that he has experienced himself.

If this story from the gospels is perhaps told because of its extraordinary glimpse into the misery of the here and now; then they tell another one with a similar concord due to the peculiar difficulties confronting the healing.

The Saviour went to a mountain with three of his preferred disciples, probably without telling them, or those who remained behind, what was in store for him there. It was transfiguration that he found there. As he was often in the habit of going to the mountain at night, it was probably such a time, and he did not come home with his companions until the next day. From afar they could see a large and excited crowd surrounding his other disciples. People came running to expedite his arrival and immediately he, who had just tasted the glory of Heaven on the mountain, was plunged back into the misery of life on earth (Matthew 17:14ff; Mark 9:14ff; Luke 9:37ff.)

A man had wanted to bring to Jesus his child who was stricken by an ailment which was surprisingly similar to today’s epilepsy. This, of course, does not give us the right to compare this ailment, so often deeply rooted in physical life, with the one we encounter here in the boy. In Jesus’ absence, and petitioned by this man, the nine disciples had been suddenly confronted by a question of faith, that regrettably they could not cope with. They were supposed to believe firstly: that the Saviour was the lord and victor and, secondly: that in his absence the same power would devolve on them in his name. Today, it is easy for us to understand how difficult this task was for them, as we constantly find ourselves in this situation: having to act in the name of Jesus in his absence. The question of faith was made even more difficult for them because their little faith could clothe itself in seeming humility; the three main disciples were also absent and only the “lesser” ones present. But the task, this they knew, waited inexorably for them. What embarrassing scenes must have been played out when first one disciple and then another attempted to control this dark power! An attempt that was all too obviously disheartened and therefore doomed to failure! It warns us of attempts by others today, without a mandate such as the disciples held, who have the audacity to proceed against such powers in the name of Jesus. We can imagine the derision of the dark power and the increasing agitation within the boy; and when scribes, as we are told, began to intervene with their suggestions, perhaps also with reproaches, and accuse them, “There you have it, this is what your presumptuous hopes have led to!” How embarrassing the situation must have become! The boy’s father was obviously not uplifted by these failed attempts. He began to mistrust and doubt the power of Jesus and when at Jesus’ request he began to explain the sickness clumsily and at length, he concluded with a request for help but not without adding the rider, “If you can do anything”. He was obviously in the depths of despondency, almost under the impression that here was a power that nobody on earth was equal to. It is almost as if he wanted to excuse Jesus in advance, to signify that he was perfectly convinced of his good intentions even if he were unable to help. Here we have almost the opposite of the audacious words of the leper, “Lord if you ***will***, you ***can***”.

Our minds boggle at the difficulty of the situation confronting the Saviour here. If the supplicant does not believe then the Saviour can do nothing; he will not, he may not. We would like to say to the man, “Poor man, if you cannot believe then you must dispense with help”, and if this had been said to him then his last remnants of faith would have died. But the Saviour never speaks like this – he never extinguishes the last glimmer of the candlewick; but he flings the whole weight of the task onto the supplicant, one would almost like to say with some humility. “If you could believe! All things are possible for those who believe”. Thus he stimulates faith, as it were, and evokes the famous cry of the man, “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief!” (Mark 9:24) During this conversation the spirit in the boy had attempted to celebrate its greatest triumph, but now, after the words of faith from the father, Jesus orders the spirit, “I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him.” And the spirit rent him; the boy fell as one dead so that many, perhaps not without some malice, said, “He is dead”. But the Saviour raised him and he was alive and well.

Those nine disciples had to listen to a grave sermon on the subject of their little faith or lack of it. Faith, said the Saviour, had alone been lacking, as, “If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place, and it would obey you.” When they petitioned him further, he let fall another strange assertion, “This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.” All petitioning, be it addressed to God or to mankind, is an imposition upon the one petitioned that something be done, and the one addressed also expects some kind of service from the petitioner that proves their goodwill and the intention on their part to do what is possible. For us humans, work in this area is not possible, but we are capable of ***one*** service, one proof, that is up to us: namely, that for the sake of the misery we wish to be freed from we renounce, not necessary nourishment, but at least sensual pleasures that are normally accepted. There is a majesty in misery that is diminished in the face of mere gluttony. If they had remained in constant and quiet prayer before God until victory was theirs, these prayers would have had quite a different credence than when it was seen, “… they can’t be that inconsolable, they are eating again”. This helps make the words of the Saviour more understandable to us. At least, with this assertion we see how seriously this field of misery had moved the heart of the Saviour and how sharply he differentiated various degrees in the powers of darkness. Perhaps he was, according to his spiritual concept of fasting which does not preclude the ingesting of necessary nourishment, always fasting.

A third experience is instructive today ***because*** it shows us how the Saviour recognized the scope of such dark influences, even in their more physical aspect.

That this appears strange to us is possibly due to the ambiguity or uncertainty in our conception of what is told us of these things in the gospels. It is almost as though we laid the main emphasis of such demonically caused misery on the idea which the sufferer hasof it. Does this not perhaps happen in the half-subconscious striving to find the cause of sorrow more within than without the “I” of the sufferer? However, as soon as we – with the gospels – recognize the root of evil as being ***outside*** this “I”, that is, in the region of the unconscious, then the difference between “emotional” and “physical” with regard to this evil loses much of its significance. After all, it is actually a wonderful and beautiful secret how, from our first beginnings, the vital activity in us constructs the instruments of our mind by means of the limbs of our body – a secret in which the borders between mind and matter, the unconscious and the purposeful also disappear. Some disorders give us the impression that a recusant special principle has established itself in an organ, making a sect or state within a state as it were, following its own specific interests. There could perhaps be mechanical reasons for this, but it is questionable if this is always the case. The experience we are thinking of here is that of the crooked woman (Luke 13:10).

The Saviour is standing at the pulpit in the synagogue looking over his people. His gaze falls on a woman sitting at the back who is bent double and cannot sit or stand up straight. There is something incredibly edifying and comforting in the paternal way the Saviour examines the spiritual household to see if something is wrong and in the sovereign way in which he feels that any disharmony, any discrepancy, in one of his people is something that should not be. Such a discrepancy contravenes his tranquillity, his bright and clear blessed relation to the Creator of Heaven and Earth, and it is part of his glory as a son of his Father that his people should experience themselves the creative and liberating power of the rays of such glory. And this crooked woman was probably specially deserving of this. This affliction had been growing upon her, with slow success, for eighteen years. “She had a spirit of infirmity.” This tells us, in the main, that it was not a disease of her bone structure, but something unknown to her, something influencing her spirit which gradually brought her to this pass. It is of the essence of a woman and her status among us that the importance of her appearance is regarded with less indifference than that of the appearance of a man. How difficult it must have been for such a one to see how people’s judgement of her changed over time! “I am just as clever as before, just as good – why I am therefore neglected now?” This can embitter a heart and make it timid. In such a case, the result can become the cause and the cause the result – and a reciprocity arise. The discouragement at this neglect promotes the disease and also fosters the need to hide as much as possible from others. The woman obviously does not dare to complain of her illness to the Saviour, possibly because she does not believe he can help her anyway; possibly from the shame of presenting her suffering so publicly. She was determined to bear it; perhaps not without a feeling of bitterness that everyone except ***her*** was being helped; not without a feeling of reproach that was not directed towards anything in particular; and not without that certain peculiar pleasure, which often comes over such unhappy ones, of feeling very miserable.

It might have been something like this which moved the Saviour to a procedure that we have not seen before. It was not normally his practice to ***offer*** himself; but in this case his almost motherly perspicacity saw a condition in which the obsessive repudiating of aid was a symptom of the disease. How must the woman have felt as she suddenly heard herself called by name and ordered to “come out!” For the last time, almost solemnly and ashamed of her affliction, she must push through the crowd with her pitiful figure to stand before the Saviour. He laid his hands on her. In the case of this woman, as she had not petitioned him, this offered the necessary augmented effect upon her mind as well as the comforting promise, “Thou art my child.” And he spoke, “Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity.” (Luke 13:12) Immediately she stood straight and praised the Lord. We cannot imagine what friendly feelings for God must have flowed through her at that moment, suddenly freed from her long affliction. We would like to have stood amongst the gathering and heard her praise straight from her fresh and warm response!

One man remained unmoved; he was the superior, or ruler, of the synagogue. He was vexed, allegedly at this unedifying disturbance during prayers and perhaps, in his heart, at this new glorification of Jesus and of He who had sent him. “There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed,” thus his shrill jarring note interrupts the praising of the Lord. It is probably actually thanks to this reproach that Luke has handed this tale down to us. However, with this complaint, the leader of the synagogue had forfeited any consideration on the part of the Saviour of his dignity as the superior in the synagogue. With his rebuke he had actually laid ***his*** honour in one of the scales and that of God in the other so the judgement must be made ruthlessly without considering the status of the person. “Thou hypocrite”, Jesus says to him, “doth not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering? And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?” And the clarity and simplicity of these words, combined with the magnitude and simplicity of the divine deed resulted in a memorable victory. Even all who had opposed him were ashamed, and the whole gathering rejoiced at the glorious things that he brought to pass. “Satan had bound her”, he said. Perhaps he was not thinking just then that the illness arose from an influence of the mind but ascribed all deformities in God’s creation to Satan. He is the sum and root of all abomination and misguidance and all the causes of the same. That all this could not occur without the authority of God was not concealed from him, but that did not stop him; it even drove him all the more to petition: ***Your*** kingdom come!

One more example is told us, in which in a similar way physical evils are revealed as the effect of a demonic influence. It is that of the man who, although possessed of healthy sensory organs, was blind and dumb (Matthew 12:22). His healing made such a tremendous and shocking impression on the people that the Pharisees determined on the most extreme act of violent suspicion thereby forcing the Saviour to make a fundamental statement regarding his work in this area. This latter circumstance paints a fitting picture to the ending of this passage. “Is not this the son of David?” the people ask themselves. In Jesus, something heroic began to emerge – he alone can bring true liberation because he is able to conquer enemies against whom mankind has no power. They are enemies who rule without opposition because one has no idea of their presence. The Saviour was working in this field in which heretofore only superstitious adventurers had ventured; he was working differently and truly victoriously in the name of God and with the power of light – the Pharisees wanted none of this, perhaps because they themselves were not free of such superstitions.[[15]](#footnote-16) They obviously believed they possessed precise knowledge which had its source in the Bible, no less. They knew, so they thought, of the most senior of the demons whose name “Beelzebub” is reminiscent of Baal, the main god of the Phoenicians; and they ascribed to Jesus a direct connection with him, even an absolute disposition over him: “He hath Beelzebub” (Mark 3:22). The Pharisees, therefore, were following the path of the superstitions of their time without a single scruple of conscience. The work of the Saviour must have been an old, long-known craft, the old conjuring of devils, merely brought to a certain mastery. This wounded the Saviour in the deepest roots of his being and in a way that our imagination cannot grasp. His innermost association with his Father was regarded as work of the devil; the trust of the people towards him as a sin against the first commandment; his victories over darkness, accomplished with the power of God, as new triumphs of the same darkness. He defended himself against all of this as firmly and clearly as he was humble before his human judges. He elucidated warmly and with the joy of victory the spiritual significance of his successes, and – moving from defence to attack – revealed to his opponents the terrible danger they were exposing themselves to with suspicions such as this. His whole speech expressed that his work in this field had resulted in indisputable beautiful successes, and in such number that he could refer to them as incontestable facts.

Two points become apparent to us from the thoughts expressed in this speech: that of ***morality*** (the ***divine***) and that of ***power***. The Saviour ignores the superstitious term “Beelzebub” and immediately names Satan – the root of evil, the centre of all enmity towards God – as the originator of all these phenomena whereby moral and divine significance is immediately ascribed to real victory in this area. Does Satan really desire ***this***? With this ***single*** question he refutes the suspicion. As his ***objectives*** differ from superstition, so also do the ***means*** with which he works. He drives out the demons with the spirit of God (Matthew 12:28). How often the rule of an unclean spirit is strengthened by the agreeable contentment of the sufferer with the corrupt influences we have had occasion to consider in the first of these phenomena in the synagogue at Capernaum. With the spirit of God, the Saviour freed the sufferers themselves from the ignominious fetters of their own complacence by helping them to a victory over evil. Now, in this connection, he describes in a memorable way the innermost, deepest moral roots of all his victories. He emphasizes the ***magnitude*** of these victories of his in order to stimulate inquiry into the ***causes*** of them. He calls to mind the words of God in the book of the prophet Isaiah (49:24-25). There, God describes His people as the prey of a mighty one and as the prisoners of a rightful creditor. With the words, “Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive delivered?” he describes the difficulty of freeing his people – with regard to the mighty and to the law – from the plight they have brought upon themselves while promising them, against all appearances of its impossibility, a liberation from the same. “Do you not see,” says the Saviour, “how true this is today; how I rob the strongest of the strong among God’s enemies of his prey by my acts, without his contradiction? Do you think he would allow this to happen if he were not conquered and bound in a stern struggle?” The Saviour is obviously referring to that tremendous struggle when driven by the spirit of God into the desert, he, through his true love of the Father and the clarity of his trust in Him in the name of all mankind, was the stronger; thus employing the love of God with all the sovereignty due to it. That absolute power over spirits, ascribed by them to his status as the Son of God, Jesus therefore ascribes to his moral victories. We see the utter purity of his relation to God, tested in the strongest fire of temptation, and it is before this victorious splendour that all unpure spirits genuflect. His victory is, therefore, one more deservedly before God who does not judge a person’s standing, and which he owes not to his status but to his attitude as the Son of God. Thus it is the spirit of God, the Holy Ghost, who confronts victoriously the protrusion of a dark power into the world of mankind and who will rule in its place over the people, as the actual blessing of Abraham.

The Saviour had in this way shed a bright light on the spiritual and divine character of his victories according to the goals for which they strove as well as to the means with which he had fought for them, so now their blessed significance from the point of view of ***power*** becomes all the more important to us. Of course, we often feel strangely comforted as soon as one no longer speaks of “power”, as soon as this has dissolved into (alleged) “spirituality”. Jesus thinks differently. He rejoices in his victories. When he speaks of how he has bound the strong one, do we not see here the son of David, the defiant warrior-stance of a hero who wants to, and will, fight the last battle – actually the only one worth fighting for – to victory. It is just because of this that the underestimation, yes, the failure to recognize his victories on the part of the Pharisees hurt him so much. It was this embarrassing situation into which they had put him that moved him to speak of the powerful value of his victories. Their scribal skills enabled him to illustrate with a single phrase the ugliness of the attitude which they had assumed as well as the gravity of the power against which they fought. It is the phrase “the finger of God” (Exodus 8:19), with which the Egyptian magicians declared themselves conquered by Moses.

In what an awkward situation Moses found himself then! God gave signs through him and the more clearly he knew that he himself could not work wonders, the more confidently he hoped that here everyone would recognize immediately God’s hand – and behold, men came declaring their “prowess”! By their mysterious means they copied, at least apparently, what God had done through them while simply admiring Moses as one who had taken their art one step further. Moses saw himself, owing to the miracles that God had wrought expressly in order to authorize him, admired as a magician.[[16]](#footnote-17)

How similar to the plight of Jesus! For the sake of the victory for which he fights against the darkness, he is now suspected as the one most enmeshed in the service of this same dark power. However, it was the magicians who, as the miracles of Moses reached a certain zenith, were so understanding and so honest that they conceded to themselves and to others that this could no longer be regarded as conjuring. Alarmed and humbled they said, “That is the finger of God”. Reflected in the word “finger” is the tremendous impression they received from God when the idea of His being suddenly flashed upon them. A being that merely needs to lift a finger in order to accomplish the greatest feats. If they now bowed before an act of God that was set punitively against them, against the people – how much more easily should the Pharisees acknowledge an act of God that breathed benevolence in abundance.

“But if I”, said the Saviour, “cast out devils with the finger of God, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you.” He readily adopted the phrase “finger of God” for ***his*** victories also; it held a blessed and hopeful significance. “What we are experiencing now, that is only the beginning, the first stirrings of His finger. He will manifest His hand, His arm will rule, His kingdom will come.” We must, as it were, look with Jesus at the whole terrible fact of the separation from God and the supremacy of the darkness in order to empathize with his rejoicing at this reversal in the balance of power.

In his closing words, Jesus drives home to the Pharisees the danger of the situation into which they have brought themselves by their attitude to the acts of God. He tears apart their self-delusion as if they felt “neutrally” towards him, neither for nor against him, and warns them against allowing their blasphemies against the son of man to reach the boundaries where they will be blaspheming the Holy Ghost. However, as these deliberations will shed no further light on the subject which has occupied us in this section, we will not concern ourselves with them.

**Sinners**

Now we come to the area towards which the Saviour’s heart was wholeheartedly turned. To find and to save that which was lost, this – as he repeatedly tells us – is why he came; everything else is only of value to him with regard to this. However, from his works in this area, insofar as they do not deal with great acts but of small, individual ones, conspicuously little is told us as compared to his work with the sick.

There are two reasons for this. For one, he encountered less need, less yearning for help for this. Of course, when a person has gained insight into his or her sin and guilt then their desire for help in this regard is much more urgent and fervent than with regard to a physical malady. But insight such as this is not easily attained. Physical affliction is heralded immediately as pain, but the ethical kind almost as apparent well-being and complacency.

And it was also based on Jesus’ behaviour. It was due to the effect that ***he*** had on those concerned that few stories of conversion were told or in circulation. “Guard your pearls!” he says. The quiet paths taken by the Holy Ghost to enter your soul should not be made public. And neither the sins. It hurts God when the sins (one’s own or others) that He has forgiven are told of again and again. If He no longer remembers them, then they should no longer be mentioned. Also, in eloquent descriptions of former sins, an unholy glorification can easily and unobtrusively insinuate itself, and one is no longer actually ashamed.

Thus the gospels offer us only those stories of conversion that, by their nature, took place publicly and in connection with events of general significance.

What did Jesus do against this misery: the sin and the wages of sin? I do not dare to penetrate unauthorized into this holy place in order to illuminate this doing with some thoroughness and will, therefore, merely mention what directly obtrudes upon our notice.

The first was and is his personal power; yes, his personal accomplishment – of ***forgiveness***. Forgiveness is the most beautiful, greatest and the most ***difficult*** deed of which a person is capable. Forgiveness was for one facet of the Saviour more difficult than for us; he saw much more profoundly what havoc sin could perpetrate in the Father’s creation and in His children and felt much more painfully the insult thus paid to the Father. But he was and is pure forgiveness. This is why he is the saviour of the world; on earth a spiritual power was within him so that against the nightmarish deeds of sin he constantly shouldered the tremendous work of forgiveness, forgiveness there, where it was ***solicited***. This is not the cold work of a principle; this is each and every time an act of his soul, his mind – as a counterweight to our acts. And by forgiving a sinner, he became himself this sinner before God when he wanted – and this was his heartfelt need – to justify before the Father, the Divine, that he had forgiven the sinner. As we have seen in the case of illness, how his battle against the same holds out the prospect of accepting death, then here in the case of sin we see it even more clearly. Burdened with all sin, he stands before the Father. He himself does not want it; it is contrary to his heartfelt need that this great grievance of sin – in the face of all the otherwise so strict and consistent behaviour of the Father – should be removed simply by an arbitrary act, an unjustified ***favour***. He may not and does not want this. Whatever the consequences, dire or no, all, all must come to light and be dealt with sacredly and consistently, rationally and according to law. Thus he stands as a sinner before the Father asking for forgiveness, but not ***impunity***. In punishment, the forgiveness will be consummated. Thus he himself later bore our sins on the (cross) tree (1 Peter 2:24) so that he bore what they had earned.

In the fact that his forgiveness never took place independently of (emancipated from) the Father – as if he were asking nothing of Him here, but rather approaching Him bound by faithful and divine love – lay the great and ultimate power of his forgiveness. Herein was primarily the basis of his power to forgive sins on earth.

In addition to these acts of forgiveness, we will just mention one more thing closely connected to this – the wonderful perspicacity of his love. He was able to discover the good in a person (insofar as it existed) hidden behind all the detritus of their wickedness and disorder, the point ***where***, and the advantageous moment ***when,*** he could connect with them. “Judge not!” This edict permeated his whole soul. Not construing as vicious or interpreting as evil, but honouring the fundamental goodwill insofar as it was there. This was his skill, no, his heart’s joy. Thus he was a wonderful “power of God” for his surroundings that elevated, liberated and shone through all.

Jesus tells us of his mood and his behaviour towards the sinners in the three parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin and the prodigal son (Luke 15). We have these to thank for the Pharisees’ reproaches that he “receiveth sinners and eateth with them”. While the Pharisees and their followers withdrew even more from Jesus, one sees him increasingly sought out and surrounded by all kinds of other people; often those of questionable past (“Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners”) which shed an even more false light on the Saviour. The conversion undergone by these people was not always apparent and was also often lacking the signs by which the Pharisees calculated piety. This gave rise to the appearance that the Saviour was not only keeping company with repentant sinners, but also with those who would continue to abjure piety. But how sweet was the manner of such people towards Jesus! They had a fine eye for the tremendous blessed transformation undergone by one or the other of them due to their contact with Jesus, and this drew more and more people to him: penitent, they approached him, willing to let themselves be transformed.

In the eyes of the Pharisees this class of person was already lost. The Saviour did not regard their ruin as less serious than did the Pharisees, but even greater, and in the picture that he painted with the parables, he does not spare or whitewash them. In the eyes of the Pharisees they ***alone*** were the lost ones, withdrawn from the community of the righteous; but not in the eyes of the Saviour. However, the Saviour is careful to avoid touching on this difference of viewpoints, otherwise he would have to confront the Pharisees explicitly with their own sinful behaviour, and this he does not want to do. The Saviour can make the sinfulness of an act conscious, but the ***general*** feeling “I am a sinner”; this he does not want to teach by argument at all, it must awaken in the depths of the heart by itself. The Saviour also never wanted to denigrate or disparage good impulses or deeds that could be found in a person’s life. He also wanted to avoid even the ***appearance*** of any disparagement of moral deeds. As opposed to the heathen world which is left to its own devices, Israel is God’s people, God’s flock that He pastures partly himself and partly by means of shepherds. His reproaches against those shepherds who do not care for those sheep that stray and are lost ring out loud and terribly sternly (Ezekiel 34). The Saviour draws on this approach, well-known to the Pharisees. Mankind is intended to love God and to be loved by God and to flourish under God’s loving care, and to be assimilated into His flock. The sinner is torn from this association, confused, lost; perhaps just as much through foolishness as through evil intent; perhaps as the coin was lost through the fault of those who should have guarded it, yes – as, for instance, the heathens – through the fault of earlier peoples. God still loves the sinner as a sheep in His flock, yes, as a legitimate component of His wealth. The Saviour, however, does not speak from the point of view of the lost one, but from that of the one seeking, the owner. What an abundance of concern, love and tenderness he reveals to us in his and his Father’s name! A love that speaks to us all the more forcefully the more it, when considered closely, shiningly manifests itself as ***to be taken for granted***.

We can sense the heart of the ***owner*** in these words: it is ***his*** sheep, ***his*** coin, ***his*** child – his heart reveals this. Thus these parables grow far beyond the humble framework calculated for the understanding of the Pharisees. God has not only lost a sheep, but all mankind; not only lost one coin, but his whole wealth on earth – that is, his human children; and, faithful to His promise, “***Even I*** will both search my sheep, and seek them out” (Ezekiel 34:11), He sent the son with the task of searching for and saving that which is lost.

It could come to our attention how seldom the Saviour speaks the words so familiar to us, that all mankind is lost without him. In our parables, he speaks of a hundredth or a tenth, and also in the following examples of his behaviour towards the sinners, the aberration of the individual is treated almost as an isolated case. The Saviour, namely, takes great care not to blunt even more our already dulled sense of the irresponsibility of our mistakes by declaring our sinfulness as being intentional. That he was still painfully convinced of the generality of ruin and the numerical proportions of the parable can only be explained by the above; this is proven to us, among other things, by the answer he gave to the disciples when they asked who could become holy. These words encompass the ending of his story of the rich youth, known to us as the one who addressed him as “Good Master” (Matthew 19:16; Mark 10:17; Luke 18:18).

The entire story is all the more instructive because it reveals the whole breadth of Jesus’ heart; how, even gazing clearly into the depths of ruin, he still honours and values highly any trace of good in a human being.

It is a well-brought-up youth, favoured by fortune and already a Rabbi, desirous of doing good, who hopes to find out from Jesus, the master of goodness, how he can crown his noble strivings. “Good Master” – for so he addresses him – “what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?” The Saviour is startled at this form of address. For so long he has been used to being thought of by almost everyone as a normal person, although on a somewhat higher plane than others, and is happy with this as long as he does not feel the need to prove his dignity; all the more so, as under the pressure of the omnipresence of sin, he must stand covered with shame before the Father petitioning for humankind. “Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God”, he answers, because here he sees no reason to advertise his special status. With regard to the question he merely directs the youth to keep the Ten Commandments in which God Himself has already answered this question. In the main, these are ***prohibitions***; they list the things by which one ***forfeits*** life, becoming one worthy of death. This is namely true of the second tablet to which Jesus directs him specifically and in the sequence appropriate to the youth’s situation and its particular temptations. He is less likely to be tempted to steal which is why Jesus heads the list with “Thou shalt not commit adultery”. God’s great warnings to the world, “Do not kill! Do not commit adultery! Do not steal! Do not lie!” – a person should take these to heart, if not, then that person is lost. The youth answers, “All these things I have kept from my youth up; what lack I yet?” And the Saviour? He looked at him and loved him (Mark 10:21). Even these little flowers of piety refreshed him; in his mind’s eye he looked over a beautiful field of righteous struggle and blessed victory and true to his words, “Whosoever shall do the will of my Father … the same is my mother and sister”, he loved this man. However, in his eyes the youth was still a lost sheep. How high and great the heart of the Saviour appears to us! He held thoughts in his mind that in our short-sighted eyes must appear almost contradictory. How can I – he asked himself – reach out to this youth so that his striving for eternal life shall be successful?

He is lost. He may have a good part of that “piety” that God saw as righteousness before the coming of Jesus; he behaves, as it were, as well as possible on the basis of the generality of sin, similar in the way to which Cornelius the centurion (Acts 10:35) received the testimonial from Peter, “You are pleasing to God because you fear him and are righteous”. The situation for this youth is similar to the way God proved his blessings on Cornelius by giving him the opportunity to receive forgiveness of his sins, thereby being saved. Would he have complacently given himself such a good testimonial if he had heard from Jesus himself at the Sermon on the Mount what God’s commandments meant? The Saviour, as the Son of God, is inspired by the same thing that gave rise to the law and ***thereby***he draws us into the community of this; in his status as a son, he will fulfil the law on earth (Matthew 5:17). Of course, the youth has no idea that the Saviour is our only and entire need, seeing in him only a master. Should the Saviour now say to him, “All your good behaviour up to now is imperfect and worthless; believe in me! That is the only thing that will help you.”? But the Saviour never speaks like this. He soes not extinguish the glowing wick in order to relight it. He knows how difficult this is; and with speech such as this, he would have extinguished the tiniest spark of faith the youth had in him instead of fanning it. He enters quite into the spirit of the youth’s way of thought, who, in his endeavour to be good, is still dissatisfied and strives into the unknown for something higher. Keeping company with Jesus would be essential for the youth; indeed, Jesus could only attain this redemptive communion with him to some extent within the close circle of his disciples whom he “keeps in the name of the Father” through his continual presence (John 17:12). This, the blessing of his direct influence, Jesus offers to the youth – and not without making a sacrifice, as the small circle of his closest disciples should not be enlarged without dire need. “If thou wilt be perfect … come and follow me” (Matthew 19:21). Here, “perfect” is not meant as lifeless exemplariness; “to be perfect” means to him merely “to be a whole”, one who does not want two different things but only one: to enter the Kingdom of God. But of course, the Saviour does not need such a rich lord, wealthy in land and slaves as was usual at that time, among his disciples: “ ... sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.” This is how we understand Jesus’ injunction, and hardly as merely a calculated test, almost a trap, in order to reveal the youth’s supposed righteousness – which the Saviour after all did not see as only supposed – in all its blatancy. The Saviour meant his invitation quite sincerely; he was not looking to evoke a denial on the part of the youth, but his affirmation; regrettably it was a denial. His righteousness proved itself to be hollow after all, and the consciousness of it was an obstacle in grasping the magnitude of Jesus’ gift. The youth considers and considers. The call tempts him, but, as he might have said to himself – “to have nothing any more, nothing at all? Who would I be then?” Thus are some partially noble people interwoven with their wealth. Dumbly he listens to the Saviour, dumbly he considers, dumbly he turns and slinks away. We can hardly imagine what the Saviour felt in his heart then.

In the youth’s heart, the whole radiance of the Son of God and the abundance of Jesus’ love does not measure up to the power of wealth! An unspeakable gravity of melancholy lies over the conversation taking place between Jesus and the youth. As the youth moves away, Jesus turns to his disciples (Mark 10:23ff.) and says, “How hardly shall they that have riches (actually “those that have ***things[[17]](#footnote-18)***”) enter into the kingdom of God!” The disciples were startled at his words, but Jesus continued and said, “Children, how hard is it … to enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.” With this he had exonerated the youth somewhat but at the same time declared the whole gravity of our situation. Here, two apparently equally inexorable laws come into conflict. On the one hand, the abundance of things grows together to become a whole with the one who owns them – or who is ***owned*** by them. On the other hand, this abundance of things cannot enter the kingdom of God. The disciples were even more upset, though, and asked among themselves, “And who can be saved?” Thereby unleashing in Jesus the deepest sorrow of his heart; which is the reason we began to discuss this story. “In the case of human beings – impossible.” Who does not own ***things***? Here, the Saviour not only presupposes that the generality of ruin is to be taken for granted, but he also denies us any possibility of being able to save ourselves from it. “But” – he continues triumphantly – “not in the case of God, because for God, ***everything*** is possible.” God, therefore, would be able – if it were necessary – not only to bring a live camel through the eye of a needle, but He accomplishes that ***even greater*** miracle: to bring ***even*** a rich man into the kingdom of God. Thus He presents our becoming blessed as a continual miracle.

This story illuminates for us in many ways how the Saviour regarded the moral condition of mankind and serves, therefore, as an introduction to the following section where we will examine his behaviour towards sinners in a narrower sense, namely towards those who saw themselves as such in their own eyes as well as in the eyes of others. Both in this story and in the following one, we can observe that the unambiguous nature of the sins did not derogate from Jesus’ successes but rather abetted them.

Now let us look at some individual pictures!

Unique of its kind with regard to Jesus’ behaviour towards sinners is the story of the sinful woman who anointed him. She shows us, in the brightest light of the Saviour’s heart, his attitude towards sinners.

A Pharisee had invited Jesus to come and eat with him. These Pharisees were odd people – one almost has to like them a little. Where Jesus is, we see them too; their thoughts constantly running on him – they can’t get him out of their heads. They are still “not clear” about him so they invite him to their houses in order to finally come to a conclusion about him; they also love the intellectual stimulation that he gives to any society in which he finds himself.

The Saviour never refuses. He most likely went to this meal with a constricted heart and would have preferred to remain with his innocents. He went not without cares, but comforted by the thought that something of victory, something for the good of the souls would arise from the occasion.

His reception is uncomfortable. He comes with love, warm and wholeheartedly, and not without the quiet consciousness that he and his love are of value – but he is greeted by a cold blast of wind. He could expect a kiss from his host as a greeting into his home, but the nicely calculated attitude indicates that he will have to do without. Water for the feet, oil for the head, all the signs that the guest is regarded as at least of the same status as the host – they are all missing. “One shouldn’t spoil people such as this”, Simon is probably thinking, “it is good for them if they don’t forget who one is and what they are; they are, after all, always in danger of misconstruing the differences in status, position, and education.” The Saviour is quick to forgive, but – wise as the serpent[[18]](#footnote-19) - he recognizes the advantage that he has thereby gained over this man and bides his time in order to use it for his salvation at the right time.

Now they are sitting at the meal, arranged like a star with their feet turned outwards. Now the main protagonist in our story enters, the “sinful woman”. A woman – and, judging by her exquisite ointment, not from the common people – whose wicked imprudence was spoken of by all so that here she must accept this name given her. Oh, this kind of sin, it is of a kind that she must appear, as scarcely another, to all eyes so despicable and reprehensible – and in ***my own*** eyes too! This woman yearns to cast off her inner misery; she has heard of Jesus and his mercy. She will, she must go to him; but how to go about it? She has always been inventive in such things. She wants to begin with an ingenious homage, an acclaim; she wants to ***anoint*** him (her original plan was most likely to anoint his head), probably with the secondary object of expressing her assumption that he was the Christ in a nice and symbolic way. We would like to say that one can see that in this aesthete a righteous heart slumbers which has now awoken and is searching, with great inner remorse, for its soul’s well-being at any price. However, when she enters the room and sees the solemn faces, the reproachful glances, the displeasure (she cannot see Jesus’ face as she is standing behind him, he seems to have been sitting at the ***foot*** of the table!), she is moved. She bends down, and she is at his feet. This is when her worldly understanding and her social *sangfroid* desert her. Here at the goal of her most sacred yearning, at the feet of he who comes from God to search for sinners in order to save them and who has received the power to forgive sins on earth, here she feels only eternity; she weeps. Oh dear, the tears have fallen on Jesus’ feet! How to repair this calamity? The first thing she has to hand with which to dry his feet is her hair. She dries his feet but without success as her tears fall more copiously and in this wondrous alternation of drying and wetting, she feels that the Saviour is not angry with her, that he understands her innermost feelings. However, due to the rules of the society and good manners, this is to her misfortune because – the greatest mishap occurs now – she kisses his feet! She still has something in reserve in order to smooth things over – the ointment – and she applies it generously.

Here, in a moving way we see how the love of Jesus indeed (Ephesians 3:19) overwhelms all thought. Let us admit it: all of us would have been more or less on Simon’s side. In Jesus’ place, we would have felt duty-bound to repel the woman sternly and roughly, perhaps with the comment that she had mistaken the person and the company and would do well to learn propriety. We would heartily have deemed it her deserts to be finally treated by a male person as she deserved, that is, be severely repulsed. Yes, we might – in Simon’s place and with a view to her past – have simply shown her the door.

The Saviour’s soul-searching love, however, had a wonderfully wide heart and great perspicacity. In spite of all her mishaps, he senses that she is serious; it is all honest contrition, pure feeling. Oh, we need not worry about our contrition when finally the bright light of forgiveness shines upon us. But the human spirit does not only need the punishing whip, more than that it needs nourishment, refreshment, satisfaction. The woman felt his forgiveness, his mercy, his holy love. All her sinful misery was rooted in the fact that the gifts of love and acceptance of love that God has laid in our hearts ***for Himself*** she had wasted on dirt and dust. Now she senses something from her homeland, ***fatherly love***, and in her heart a ***childlike love***. What a wondrous feeling this must have been for her! Certainly she had been prepared for serious penance, but here – at the feet of Jesus – suddenly, as if by the Father’s hand itself, all misery of guilt and shame were removed before God, and she was accepted and received as a child.

All the shame of her sin now rested on Jesus. The particular type of sin staining the reputation of this woman could be seen in an unpleasant connection with her actions now. For this reason, an approving acceptance of them could be strongly misinterpreted. In the manner in which he acquiesced to her love, he had drawn the entire shame of her sin onto himself.

He can dare to do this. Even Simon realizes that his purity and holiness are beyond all doubt, but Jesus still falls in his estimation. The question of whether Jesus was a prophet or not had still been an open one – now no longer. “If he knew who and what type of woman this is, he would treat her ‘as she deserves’, i.e., with rude dismissal: so much virtue I would ascribe to him. But he apparently has no idea. So he is no prophet.” “Simon!” With this cry Jesus wakes him from such musings; it is Simon’s turn for his redemptive charity. He gives him a problem to solve, something quite in keeping with normal Oriental puzzles and riddles, only, certainly in Simon’s view “disconcertingly” easy for a man like him. He solves it quickly and confidently, still without any idea how closely this, in his opinion, “not really intelligently selected” question will touch ***him***. Now is the moment for that loving wisdom, which we have mentioned above, to send its redemptive arrow successfully. With the words, “Seest thou this woman?” Jesus makes Simon look at the woman whom up to now, probably partly from embarrassment and partly out of consideration for Jesus, he has striven “not to see”. Now follows a comparison in which Jesus, in a friendly manner but in calm clarity and without concession, narrates his behaviour towards himself, his guest, piece by piece – with not a trace of criticism or reproach – only bringing everything out of the dark into the light of reality. The man must certainly have stood inwardly before himself absolutely devastated, and all the more so, the friendlier and more forgivingly Jesus spoke to him. It had been only small things – no trace of viciousness at all – but how much these little things betrayed of the inner life, or, rather, the lack of the same! And at the same time, in what light now stood this woman with her peculiar actions, frowned upon by the rules of morality? He saw that a person has something more, something that he had lost in the face of so much artificial and supposed virtue; namely – a ***heart***. “A man of understanding” is what people like Simon are called, but the word “understanding” is a very unfortunate choice. “Death” would be more correct. Now he has a faint glimmering that God ***also*** has, in some measure, a heart, which receives nothing from dead beings, and that through His forgiveness our relationship to God can become an effusively warm and cordial one. In short – he saw: here is death, but with Jesus here is life. Perhaps he did not sleep well this night and often in his mind’s eye saw the scales in which the two debtors in Jesus’ parable were weighed, before finally happily and gratefully remembering the words of Jesus, “And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them ***both***.”

More seemingly than actually is this story related to the story of the adulteress (John 8:2-11). In this story, Jesus again influences a sinful woman on the one hand and the Pharisees on the other. But this time his sights are focussed more on the Pharisees, particularly as the woman is brought before him unwillingly and might therefore be of questionable receptivity.

It was deeply distressing for Jesus as the Pharisees led the woman before him “taken in the very act of adultery”. When a doctor, enthusiastic about his pet subject, can scarcely hide his joy at an “interesting” case when a severely ill patient is brought to him, we can understand this and know that this does not in any wise preclude heartfelt compassion. Even better can we understand the joy of an insect or mineral collector or similar when a beautiful specimen is seen or even obtained. But in this case, the obvious joy of these men at obtaining such an example for their questions of law is painful to us. The sin in question is of such a type that shame inhibits us from treating it in a public way, but this they forget in their zeal for theory. “Taken in the act”, they parade her triumphantly before Jesus, as they are overjoyed to confront him with this question. “Finally we have a case where we can either put an end to his ‘vague principles’ and his ‘excessive good nature’ or even attest publicly to their inaccuracy and the threat they pose and can therefore stigmatize them.”

The dearth of any sense of shame and delicacy of feeling which they almost flaunt, unaware, tells Jesus abundantly and clearly what dark passages they must have traversed in their lives to bring them to such state. They – guardians of virtue – stand before him – the absolver of sin – or so they think. This pains him deeply, particularly for their sakes. Should he, can he, somehow take this woman under his protection? He cannot do it for the woman’s sake as he does not yet know whether she seeks forgiveness from God or merely wishes to avoid punishment at the hands of men: she came unwillingly, after all. But it is even more impossible for the sake of the accusers, because, especially now, he must not appear to regard sin as less of an abomination than they do. Once again, he sees into the abyss of darkness that benights his opponents. Their minds are full of morals – they appear to think of nothing else – and yet they appear completely unknowable to him. He determines on an attempt to force a breach in these fortresses of darkness. But how? If he were to pose a question immediately in the sense of an eye for an eye, they would be unable to submit to such a humiliation. “In the interests of right”, they would prefer to lie. In order to make it easier for them, he devises a formal plan of campaign. He stoops over and, as a boy would do to pass the time or to gain time to think, starts to draw in the sand with a twig, certainly praying fervently that in the meantime the Father will appease the heated tempers somewhat. It looks as though he is discomfited as if losing already and unsure what to do next. They pressure him even more vehemently. He straightens up and says to them, “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her” and stoops down again to continue his activity. If he had stooped only now – for the first time – they would have guessed his intention of leaving them ***unobserved***. However, as he is merely continuing with what he was doing ***before*** he spoke, they do not perceive this. Thus Jesus, with the extreme perspicacity of love, has alleviated their self-humiliation, and – at the same time – made it possible.

There they stand in the face of these words of Jesus which, at a blow, brings them from the misty heights of theory down to the hard ground of reality. Theology has disappeared and the “I” with its debts stands alone before the soul. “Who are you?” This terrible and practical question now rules undisputed over the battlefield. There was strife in their souls! But Jesus was victor.

The youngest among them now looked confidently to the most venerable of their company, assuming – as they did themselves – that they should take action in some way. However, “one” found some reason or other to leave. This “one” had no idea that the others were as bad as himself. Taking advantage of Jesus’ apparent abstraction, he edges away to the perturbation of the second. “Oh? He is leaving? Then I will follow him.” This example is carried forward until they have all left.

The Saviour must have waited with bated breath! It had not escaped his notice that his words had had an effect this time, and behold: When he finally straightens up again there is only the woman left. What fears this woman must have undergone! The challenge to the Pharisees – it sounded to her like a sentence of imminent death. We must almost begrudge her the small satisfaction supplied by the decampment of her accusers, after all, they had treated her roughly but, on the other hand, she was greatly fearful of what Jesus had in mind as he had not expressed his intention yet.

In his final words to her, he does not use a pontifical or priestly tone but limits himself to the question of the accusation brought before him. “Neither do I condemn thee”, he says, but with the addendum, “Go, and sin no more”. He did not speak of ***forgiveness*** of sins before God as there was no inducement from her for this.

In the meantime, the Pharisees had returned. Each had departed “only for a moment” and therefore had to reappear soon in order for this to be convincing. Now, however, their respective relations had changed. On their part, a subtle confession of sin had taken place. It was a public secret between him and them that each carried his own secret guilt, towards which – to put it mildly – the Saviour had not yet taken a clear stand. But now he could harbour the hope that they understood the pity he had for them and greeted them with the memorable words, “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” (John 8:12) It is almost as if he had again just understood that there is no light in the world apart from that in him, with him, and through him.

He must have hoped that these words would find an opening, but in vain. The men had completely recovered their composure; the teachings, the system, the theory – all had regained the upper hand.

I owe it to my theological readers to justify presenting this story as almost authenticated. This whole narrative (John 7:53; 8:11) is missing from the oldest ***manuscripts*** but appears early on in serious, but admittedly much younger, manuscripts and translations. It must, therefore, if indeed real, have been deleted in very early times by a very influential hand. Some also find that the style deviates from that of John’s usual manner of speaking. This is why most scholars today do not ascribe it to John and see it as a later inclusion. I venture to suggest, however, without insisting on a decisive judgement, that the passage is authentic, i.e., handed down by John, and that it was removed because one no longer understood Jesus’ drawing in the sand and would have received the impression of a rather unsuitable and secret, almost superstitious, act that would have been completely unworthy of Jesus. After all, some have put forward the most wondrous speculations as to what Jesus must have been writing! He most certainly wrote something.[[19]](#footnote-20) It is easier for me to imagine how the passage was deleted than how it could have been later inserted. The various spellings in the passage can be partly explained by its having been scorned originally. The confusions in case (accusative with nominative and also with dative) could be a result of reverse translations from a Semitic translation.

One of the reasons put forward against its authenticity appears to be quite unfounded. Namely, the passage interrupts the context! Such expounders appear to be unaware that the moral of the tale is not aimed at the adulteress but at the Pharisees – and it is not the casuistry that is targeted but the ***conscience***.

A portrait of Jesus would be lacking something if we did not have another example of his treatment of individuals with regard to sin, in this case referring to a ***man***. We have seen the divine and loving tenderness with which he helped the feminine soul; how will he go about winning a rough ***masculine*** heart?

We illustrate this with two examples: that of Zacchaeus and that of the thief. The one is welcome to us as a representative of the tax collectors; the caste that Jesus had so much to do with – the details we hope to see presently. Even if tax collectors were the most disreputable class in Hebrew society, the thief is a level below them – he is below all levels of society, a criminal, and therefore his conversion makes a worthy finale to this chapter as did the raising of Lazarus to the preceding one.

Zacchaeus held the post of chief tax collector, a post that is not mentioned anywhere else in annals of the times and which Jericho probably owed partly to its border location but in the main to its famous and profitable production of balsam. Zacchaeus was rich and certainly held great power by virtue of his office. Neither honoured nor despised, but feared, he possessed a certain status in society. He hears that Jesus will be passing through and determines to see him. He would like to observe him first, he is after all a businessman and therefore mistrustful, but something tells him that this man is real; he is all the greatness that he declares he is. Zacchaeus has business associates whose spiritual life has undergone a whole new direction through Jesus. He feels he needs this too, and if his observations are favourable, then he is determined to approach Jesus. But how to manage to encounter Jesus, and what will Jesus say to him, think of him? These are unanswerable questions at the moment. The first obstacle is that the street is full and he is a small man. The trees are already occupied by youngsters; he joins them in the top of a tree, certainly a daring act as this “money person” perched there waiting for Jesus will have been the butt of all kinds of disparaging comments.

His beady eyes shine through the foliage as Jesus approaches. Both their gazes meet. Jesus had presumably often heard of him. In the miseries narrated to him when ministering, questions of money certainly played an important role and if the lamenter was from Jericho, perhaps the dark pictures of misery and care had a background depicting Zacchaeus as the evil fate. Maybe just for this reason, the Saviour had often and earnestly sighed and prayed for him. And behold! Now the eyes of this man are staring at him from a tree; tense, anxious, and embarrassed by Jesus’ gaze. The state this man is in is immediately clear to Jesus; his observation post says it all.

What would we have thought in Jesus’ place at this moment? Perhaps, “It is about time that you examine your conscience, but you will have to wait for my promise of peace! I have a bone to pick with you before I will extend the hand of friendship.” Not the Saviour. He recognizes the entire gravity of this act of Zacchaeus which tells him that his hour has struck, and he forgives him in advance, as much as he is able. “I will not let him go,” he thinks. Oh, how vain would our strivings towards him be if he did not always come ten steps ***towardsus***! “Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for today I must abide at thy house.” (Luke 19:5) Thus he calls out: he has made a sacrifice, seemingly also a daring one. The people, whose admiration for Jesus was no longer at its spiritual peak at that time[[20]](#footnote-21), were certainly quite amazed, thinking, “He will suffer shipwreck there with his immoderately bold good nature. The tax collector will tell him whom he will receive as a guest and whom not; he has made a mistake there.” They were justified in thinking this of Zacchaeus because it was well-known that whenever someone opened his house to Jesus, for the length of his stay, the house would become a haven for everyone; namely for all the miserable, the sick, the insane and so on. But Zacchaeus did not react in this way. How did he feel as he heard the call of the good shepherd to his lost sheep,heard his name called, sounding in his heart, and Jesus offering his friendship to him, to him! The heavenly kingdom had opened for him. Not our conversion, no, the kingdom of heaven. Jesus will be the victor, this he experienced now. Immediately he was on the ground, offering his “guest” a welcome – how amazing this picture must have been as the little man greeted Jesus; delighted, embarrassed, courteous but inwardly exultant with joy. The angels in heaven sang of the sinner repentant of his sins, but on earth the great conversion to eternal salvation had taken place in the simplest form of social intercourse – someone boldly inviting himself and the grateful acceptance by the host.

Now, however, the grumbling grew louder. Several inhabitants of Jericho had often visited Jesus in distant Galilee and had been nursing new hopes to have him at their houses, introducing him to their families, their children, and now – who had drawn the winning number? This moneyed person! The fact that Zacchaeus was rich made it even worse. A rich man, they told themselves, can make his guest very comfortable.

Thus the entire sin and guilt of Zacchaeus lay on Jesus’ shoulders as a result of his trusting and forgiving act. Zacchaeus had the honour and the peace; Jesus the disgrace and the reproach.

Nobody felt this more keenly than Zacchaeus himself. “Because Jesus offered me his friendship”, as Zacchaeus might say in today’s parlance, “he is compromised and seems to have shown weakness. Actually, this is not so, the people are wrong but are within their rights to think this way. I wouldn’t believe myself that I am a new person, if I were not – to my own amazement – truly ***just that***.” He feels it is his turn to do something; it is his task to save Jesus’ honour. Words, assurances, protestations, that he is now a new person are in this case repugnant even to himself. For this he is too much a man of business and averse to all “sentimentality”. Something has to be done. He stands before Jesus and says to him, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.”(Luke 19:8) The latter necessitates some sour humbling as the confession “I cheated you in the past” is difficult to bring forth and often, in spite of the nicest reimbursement, received with great indignation. But his heart drove him to make amends for his sins.

Everyone would have been amazed at this turnaround and happy at the courage with which Zacchaeus attacked the idols he had served heretofore. Some, who had participated in the people’s court verbally accusing the “sinner”, would even have realized to their chagrin that they could not remember being cheated by Zacchaeus at all.

Jesus himself had anticipated an action by Zacchaeus and obviously saved further consolation for him in case of such an act. Now, however, he said, “This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham.” Behind his words lay, “It is not right for we children of Abraham to entirely condemn another child of Abraham, as you do with the tax collectors.” These words were also a call to every child of Abraham: “Take heart and come to me!” He added, “For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.” (Luke 19:10) The fact that we are lost is enough and sufficient reason for him to seek us.

The last image that we will see is heart-rending: the dying Saviour reaching out his hand in his mind’s eye (as physically he cannot) to the dying thief (Luke 23:39-43). At the same time, this is rich in fruitful insights. In the thieves’ plight, the two evils that we have observed, sin and death, reach out their hands to each other. A death from which the Saviour cannot or ***will not*** save them as he succumbs himself. The help that he promises the thief lies in the beyond. This thief is the only single individual to whom Jesus promised help in the afterlife, and the manner in which he did so is therefore all the more important to us.

We do not hear words of encouragement from the Saviour. He waits for an orderly, legitimate reason. It was never his custom to speak unbidden. However, his situation preaches to us. Jesus himself is a man given up, who no longer has anything left to do on earth except to taste the torments of the crucifixion. To suffer, to suffer, that is his terrible task. But we notice with what wonderful simplicity and humility he submits to the same. The words of his two co-sufferers also prove what trust he has imbued them with by the fact that their fate is as important to him as his own. “We people” as he was used to think and feel his whole life long, and “we three” he thinks and feels now. Could one find more humble words in this situation than his, “For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?” (Luke 23:31)

His arms are stretched towards them, the pull of his heart also, and they can sense this. “If thou be Christ, save thyself and us”, begins the one. A trusting and sensible suggestion. Perhaps it was said with a breath of doubt or even mockery. The mockery of some embarrassment and cowardice so that in the case of his not being Christ after all, he would immediately be on the side of the mocker. Nevertheless, a little faith and trust lay in the words; and even we rarely manage more than the request, “If you are Christ, please help me in my plight!” He remained, however, trapped in his mortal rationality. He would have been only too happy to have been freed from the fatal necessity of dying by the happy circumstance that it was just ***this*** man who was being crucified together with him. That was all, and we do not really expect much more from such a man, and it was more than could be expected anyway to imagine that the Jesus nailed to the cross might be Christ, the victor.

But now we hear ***our*** thief: “Dost thou not ***fear*** God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss.” This man is touched by a breath of eternity.

He also is possessed by the same hope as his companion, “Jesus could save me”. In his case, though, it takes a different form. It is almost as if in his mind he is already in the school of his wonderful neighbour and under the tranquil blessing of his influence. Immediately he is having quite different thoughts about ***salvation***. He has learned to desist from the pressing desire to be saved from death by crucifixion – he wants to “suffer as due reward for his deeds” and sees how his divine fellow sufferer ***voluntarily*** endures an undeserved death. He begins to think about possible help from Jesus ***beyond*** death. In another way also, his thoughts deviate from those of his former comrade. As the latter had doubts as to Jesus’ ability, he has doubts – as did the leper – only as to his willingness. The extent of Jesus’ patient suffering has touched him, and he comes – in spite of inauspicious appearances – to the firm conclusion that Jesus ***is*** the Christ, is the victor, and he ***will*** be victorious (his later words tell us this). He sees, he feels the benevolence of Jesus towards him, and it becomes so overwhelming that he must seize the opportunity to say, “You are wrong about me, I am not – as you are – innocent. My deeds were such that crucifixion is the just reward”. It was easier for him to throw this at the other – disguised in rough reproach – than to say it to Jesus directly. How tensely he may have looked over at Jesus in order to judge the effect this confession would have had on him; if a sudden change of expression might alter his features to dismay, revulsion, disgust! When he sees nothing of the kind and instead only increased benevolence, he dares to make his memorable request, “Lord, remember me when thou comest ***into thy kingship***”. It is a pity that some translations in an attempt at elucidation use kingdom instead of kingship. An improvement that was undertaken in antiquity also. However, the thief certainly did not imagine a kingdom of Jesus in the beyond, nor did anyone else (at least before the resurrection) at that time. No, the thief was simply thinking, “This Jesus will be the victor and return as a victorious ruler and – this is the great thing – as a ruler over those who have died as well as over the living. I must die now and endure in who knows what dungeons; but when you have once been victorious, remember your old crucifixion comrade!”

The Saviour had obviously been waiting for such a request or had been longing for it. In his answer one hears the joy at a soul saved, “Verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in paradise.”

This answer is very curious and very instructive. It shows how soberly and humbly the Saviour bases his hopes for the time being on the prospects to which the Bible (Old Testament) entitles him. Heaven is the house of God. That it is also the dwelling of the dead is not mentioned in the Old Testament – and for a good reason, how could it have become such? The ascension of Elijah was a very promising fact, but based in the divine ambiguity of the mystery. Also, he was raised up to heaven as a living man. There was no evidence anywhere, however, that the dead would arrive there too. This is why the Saviour does not think of arriving in heaven (“ascending to his Father”) with his death and before his resurrection, but he does hold on to one thing: the original home of mankind, paradise, once ***Earth***, but an enlightened, spiritual earth. It had become hidden from sight, but its inner being, its righteous significance as the home of the sinless, those who are not subject to the death sentence, still continued to exist. “We were expelled from paradise for our sins. I want to return there and now I may, and I will take you there with me.” Later – at his resurrection – much more will be bestowed upon him, as his Father had already promised him. But now, in the hope he is giving the thief, he limits himself to the immediate result of his imminent death which ceremoniously finalizes a cycle of human history from paradise to paradise.

So, now we have observed the Savour’s behaviour towards those of other opinions, his teachings, his healing of the sick, his liberating of the captive, his saving of the sinners. We saw the connection with death and with the beyond in the three areas of sickness, demonic influences, and sin: insofar as they called for the redemptive acts of Jesus (and in the case of sin, insofar as it is the root of forlornness). An evaluation of the actual state of affairs in the relationship of mankind to death and the beyond, as Jesus found and entered upon, can, therefore, throw light on all three areas and Jesus’ work in them and may thus comprise the summary of these three sections.

We would like to follow up on the thoughts of the dying thief. His dying represents a turnaround from an old covenant to a new one as he is the last one to die of the old and at the same time the first one to die under the new covenant. His opinions are firmly rooted in those of Hebrew history. These were not only mere opinions with regard to the beyond but in fact prospects; as these opinions were not arbitrary ones but simply corresponded to the circumstances.

God’s judgement on all children of Adam, “Thou shalt die” gave the children of Israel, even the pious ones, no other option at their deaths for the time being than that fate or the realms of the dead awaited them. In the Bible it was Hell, named Hades. Thus the sick David (Psalm 6:5) justifies his plea to be saved from mortal danger with the words, “For in death there is no remembrance of thee: in the grave who shall give thee thanks?”

Enthroned above this dire fate, however, was the promise that woman would crush the seed of the serpent below her heel; a victory that would benefit all those who stood together in faith and hope. When the living in the land have won through to victory, then this will also benefit those who have already passed away. Lamech had already comforted himself with this (1 Moses 5:29) when his son Noah was born as he hopes for general comfort and thus comfort that will come to him in the future; a comfort that he will not encounter while still among the living. The addendum “on earth” is understandable with regard to these men; they are all anticipating a victory ***from*** heaven but ***on*** earth. Of a heaven as the second dwelling of mankind they knew nothing; and Enoch, when “he was seen no longer”, they do not think of him as being in heaven but in paradise, and his disappearance probably – as it has not been handed down to us – coming at the same time as the flood. In those victorious times God (Isaiah 65:17) will create new heavens and a new earth; he will (Isaiah 25:8) swallow up death forever, and then the pious of Israel, over whom death held only temporary sway, will become free under the sceptre of an eternal Prince of Peace promised to us as “our child” by God (Isaiah 9:6) and live in the city which, according to Hebrews 11:16, the patriarchs had been waiting for.

This firm decree of God was only revealed gradually, its contours slowly becoming clearer. In the meantime, only a few were granted a more distinct insight. The forty-ninth psalm speaks significantly of the meaning (v. 1-5). It portrays mankind, enjoying their earthly life to the full, then being claimed irredeemably (v. 8-10) by hell. “The upright (v. 14) shall have dominion over them in the morning … yes (v. 15) God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave; for he shall receive me.” As sombre as these words describing the nature of the situation are, they express the hope of the poet to be delivered from the clutch of hell – and presumably on “that morning”, which is here brought somehow into a covenant with a victory over the netherworld.

The dawn and the rising of the morning star spoken of in 2 Peter 1:19 portend this morning, the beginning of that day of freedom or the revelation of the children of God (Romans 8:19,21) for which all creation is yearning. The hope spoken of in psalm 17:15 also refers to this time, “I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.” In ***general***, the fulfilment of what Ezekiel (16:53) has been promised, can, for example, also be placed during this time. That is, that God will reverse the captivity of (fallen) Sodom.

Thus the pious Israelite did not die without hope although depending in the main on hoping and waiting, just as our thief was thinking, provided that Jesus would answer him.

This hope shines particularly brightly, however, in those carriers of God’s work on earth whose lives served the purpose of promoting this ultimate goal of hope. In the love of the almighty God, that they experience continually, a long life has of course been guaranteed them, “God is not ashamed to be called their God,” (Hebrews 11:16) and is not a God of the dead but of the living. He, their God, is ***lived*** by all. With these words, Jesus proves to us that for the sake of their connection to God and before God, they will remain living until the great victory and also after their decease. This has all the more significance when we remember God’s absolute freedom in accepting his saints also in the interim.

Such consciousness of being an immortal could determine only someone like Abraham to renounce the riches of earthly happiness offered him by his homeland for the sake of a reward sometime in the distant future and to enter upon an uncertain pilgrimage. He was to become a great blessing for all people – he, the living – but of course only after his death. Esau, on the other hand, scorns his right to be the inheritor of the promise of blessing because he lacks a sense of eternity. How alive Abraham has remained, although dead and sojourning in the land of the dead, as we are told in the sweet story of the rich man and poor Lazarus where we see his lap as an island of life in the midst of the ocean of death; as a refuge for the pious of Israel and with which he – we can safely assume – is awaiting the recovery of full human life, the resurrection. That in individual cases according to God’s free guidance this waiting could be set as an objective even before the general resurrection is indicated in Jesus’ death and resurrection (Matthew 27:52,53).

The dying Jacob also illustrates a high sense of superiority over death; for one, commanding death to stand until he has finished calmly and deliberately blessing all his sons; and also when he, thinking to live on independently, forbids the oldest ones to approach him in future because of their misdeeds with the words, “My soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united . . .” (Matthew 49:6)

That the rule of death is not an absolute, this is shown wonderfully well in the ascension of Elias which marks a hidden turn in the holy story from the earthly kingdomof Israel to the kingdom of God and heaven.

Into this situation, where death rules and there is hope of a future victory over it, Jesus was born and placed. However, with the difference that in his case the task and duty to be victorioustook the place of hoping for victory. How he followed this goal we will now look at in the further development of his life.

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**The Apostles**

The works of the Saviour began to increase continually and he was called upon day and night. Distress upon distress petitioned him, requesting help and receiving it. When he thought about how to continue, grave cares and questions must have moved him. Questions that arose from the same concern as that of the Baptist’s question, “Art thou he that should come?” (Matthew 11:3). What was going to happen now? How high do we see the distress piling up in all three areas of human misery and mostly in the most terrible one, that of sin! All the instances of succour that he gave and that we have seen were exceptions, benefiting a happy few, but otherwise everything else remained the same. On one small spot on earth, a blissful and exceptional state of affairs existed, but misery was spread over all mankind. How to distribute the help so that it would reach everyone? For those who could not discern the Saviour’s significance, if nothing new or great were to happen, his whole manifestation could take on the character of something temporary, almost coincidental, without anyone of these knowing how long it would last. Of all incarnations that had trod the stage of Earth, he was the most significant, extraordinary and appealing one – but ***not*** more. His life will leave some ripples in the ocean of world history as a stone will do, but the mirror surface will become smooth once again over this remembrance. This is what it looked like! The Saviour knew this must not happen, but he was certainly not spared grave care and worry about this.

Mainly it was the surfeit of human misery pouring over him that made clear to him the inadequacy of his situation. When he went around the land himself, (Matthew 9:35ff.) proclaiming the glad tidings of the kingdom (there is no talk of “preaching” in the original text) and “healing every sickness and every disease among the people”, he “was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd”. The Saviour sees, as the parable teaches us, that the ideal of human happiness lies not in that man is his own master but in that he is loved and cared for by God; in the same way that human wisdom rules with love and care over sheep, so the heavenly Father rules over mankind. But he does not think of this care as invisible and addressing each individual singly – this is not his way of thinking. He wants to see everything in life; he sees the care as something through his agency – through the servant of God. There should be a structure within mankind, and the cycle of divine blessing should progress within this structure. In Israel this significance was held by the ***anointed*** ones (priests, kings, prophets). What God gives to Israel, He gives through the anointed; and what He gives to the anointed, He gives it for Israel – those were the ***shepherds***, provided that they truly received a gift of God to be given to Israel. The Saviour could no longer see any such shepherds anywhere. Israel in his eyes had become an inorganic, rotting mass with each part left to fend for itself. No shepherds ***at all***? Yes, they had ***one***, ***himself***. But it is in the nature of shepherds that to fulfil their duty, there must be enough of them to do the job. Therefore his soleness was a burden to him. At the moment, he is not thinking of his greatest task, which will always be mainly his alone to shoulder, but of the misery before his eyes, all the scattered, disordered, desolate human state that could and should be different. Therefore, he sees the misery before his eyes as another picture. It depicts a field ripened for the harvest. What is ripe? Is mankind ripe for repentance and salvation? He could not say just then, his experiences were not really in accordance with this. But something is ripe after all: that here is a need for help in all kinds of misery is very familiar to him; help that is to be accepted gratefully with full consciousness of whence it comes and is therefore not without repentance and not without spiritual blessing and the grace of God. It flows from his hands, the healing and ordering shepherd’s care that he can offer them in God’s name and in His power.

Here we stand before the wonderful humility and innocence of the Saviour as he considers the situation: “Why am I alone?” It is as if he could almost no longer understand the Father here, although he, of course, understood the obstacles which confronted the will of the Father. Here we have a billowing harvest, ripe for mowing, and the owner – sends ***one*** labourer! Where will be the answer! “Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest”. (Matthew 9:38) The injunction to his disciples, that they should help ***him*** in his request, stands alone. It is as if the answer to his petition were, “It is good that you wish it, but as long as none of those ***for whom*** you wish it desire it, then we will not speak of it.” And indeed, the wish was great, and it is witness not only to the great humility of Jesus but also witness to an immeasurable trust in humankind that they could be considered important before God. After all, the request is only that which God has given ***him*** for mankind, as He has also given to others for mankind. “Send forth” does not mean “to awaken the decision in this one or that one”, otherwise the Saviour could merely have said, “Help me to mow!” But they would have been ruinous mowers! “Send forth” means “make into instruments of God, equip with the power and the authority of God.” This is why they may not even say, “send us” but only “send labourers!”

God should designate apostles in whom the power of Jesus, whom they were living with, would also be effective. We have lost the sense of how great, how extraordinary, this is, and what dignity God is therefore bestowing upon mankind. In our thoughtlessness we have become accustomed to take it for granted that during the life of Jesus – as if in a prehistoric handbook of his life story – there were apostles.

What Jesus encouraged his disciples to do, he did himself. In Luke 6:12, we are told that he spent the whole night on the mountain in prayer. It is the second such night we are told of here. There was no lack of material for prayer and supplication. Questions and answers regarding each individual who was to be “sent forth” probably flew backwards and forwards with much misgiving on the part of heaven and much intercession on the Saviour’s part. But this was not the only issue. With this sending-forth, Jesus’ work was ***organized***. It raised it above the level of a local and temporal solitary manifestation to the level of an institution contemplating all lands and times and with an eye to commandeering them. It gained a firm, historical foundation and a clear prospect towards the future with all its hopes and all its risks. There was a lot to pray for.

What must have been the feelings of the disciples next morning who were gathered among the untold numbers around Jesus as he, like a field marshal, called them from the crowd – twelve all told. “Simon!” he began. With what tension they must have waited for the next name, and with what emotion they must have heard their own!

The historical events were not quite as simple as I have narrated them here. The calling and empowering of the apostles is described in Matthew (10:1 ff.) once and in Luke twice, namely thus: According to Luke, Jesus first ***appointed*** them (Luke 6:13 ff.), presumably to be his particular pupils, thereby enabling them to receive empowerment in the future. It was not until later (Luke 9:1 ff.) that he empowers them and ***gives*** them authority. This is probably what happened according to the exact description. Matthew combines both acts of Jesus together as ***one***. This is due to his wonderful way of placing emphasis on instructive and edifying elements while treating historical details as merely marginal.

As I have also not undertaken to write a story following a strict chronology but would rather illuminate only the larger developments, I have taken the liberty of copying Matthew in this case and will treat this double deed as a unified, simple one.

Each of the twelve had been, among others, his student, his disciple. Now he appoints them as those to be “sent forth”. He “gives them power (Matthew 10:1) against unclean spirits to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease.” What he gave them was power over the unclean spirits; anything else is the effect inherent in this power (according to the Greek version).

This solved one difficulty pertaining to the sending forth of labourers. The Father could have answered, “There is no one but yourself that I can send or wish to send, each and all are inept.” But what was not permitted to take place directly could now take place indirectly. “You may give them of your power and send them forth.” Thus what they have is the name of Jesus, whose simple tool they have now become; there is now something of Jesus within them.

Jesus thus has a horde of helpers for the spiritual and corporeal realm. He, the wonderful source of the powerful mercy of God has increased twelvefold. For the time being, the twelve do not receive authority nor commission for the actual spiritual work, as in verse 7 (of the original text) it does not say “preach” but simply “proclaim!” but they are to bear witness with their whole being that something new, the kingdom of heaven, is approaching. To bring conviction of this is the main reward for all the divine help that they give. The light of heaven will shine in all the misery that they discover and rectify along the way. On one hand, the special spiritual deeds of the Saviour always had the character of being free and spontaneous so that he will not have wanted to give the impression of being “officially” bound, as it were, to administer to souls; and on the other hand, the content of his work had not flourished so far that he may equate himself with it. The power that he had received from the Father “to forgive sins on earth”, the most decisive factor, he could not yet give to them. This he was able to give only after his resurrection. He did not regard this power as merely pastoral, as we do, but as royal. It is the deed of a judge or a king; a deed which only became possible after his complete triumph of reconciliation.

The Saviour obviously extended the commission even further in that it would heal also purely physical damage.

How are we to understand these gifts? Let us beware of regarding them with superstition as a natural poweractingblindly. What Jesus says of himself (John 5:19, 20) is now transferred to them. “The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever He doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that Himself doeth:” Therefore, they are not the lords of this gift but servants of God.

Among these twelve, the Lord bestowed particular attention on three. It was the two pairs of brothers that we saw with him earlier. The exclusion of Andrew from this close-knit group of four brings the honouring of the three into even stronger focus. He did not encourage the equality of all, almost opposing it instead. They were to be “brothers” among themselves, but God had arranged brotherly relations so that in a house they were not on an equal footing, but were on a higher or lower footing according to age. He expected them to behave independently of one another, but not to be equal. He had no objection to them wanting to be great, merely giving advice to those aspiring to be great on how to achieve the goal.

First and foremost it was John, Jesus’ “friend” (“whom Jesus loved”) who stood out from the rest. He is again close to us in his stories of Jesus and the sermons of Jesus that he repeats to us. With what divine and innocent brightness and sovereignty he understands Jesus in his innermost heart! Nobody saw with such clarity as he did the divinity in Jesus, and, likewise, nobody saw the divine humanness. We rarely hear him speak, not even on the last evening where everyone took the floor. Only once, in conversation with his brother James, does a word escape his lips, a word of resentment (Luke 9:54) as how Jesus was treated. It was the wish that fire come down from heaven to consume the Samaritans who denied Jesus shelter because he wanted to go to Jerusalem. In his letters, there is, in spite of all tenderness and breath of glory, a cutting sharpness aimed at the phrase, at the mere consciousness of knowledge, at merely “saying” if it lacked that which filled his heart, lacked active brotherly love. “Lies, liars” we hear repeatedly. He was filled with fear that it could all turn out to be the simple art of making allegations. Jesus had given him and his brother an appellation that surprises us – not only in the way he used it but that he actually used it at all – “sons of thunder”. We would have thought he would have searched the Bible for names for his disciples, but he took them from ***nature***, which once again, from a new aspect, reminds us of his freshness, originality and humanness. Thunder is the noble voice that, invisible in its source, rolls high above the earth commanding and awakening awe. A reverent openness of these quiet brothers to the sublime and the celestial is what he is calling attention to. James might have been even quieter than John.

During the time when regard for Jesus’ work was going downhill at an alarming rate, the two brothers requested, using their mother as an intermediary, that in Jesus’ kingdom they be allowed to sit at his side (Matthew 20:21) – this was certainly nothing less than empty, cold ambition. John was only concerned that in his triumph, Jesus, “who loved him”, would be elevated so far above him that he would therefore forfeit the high pleasure – if only there were a better word for this! – during these days of lesser thingsof being the one “sitting at the side of Jesus”. Jesus did ***notreproach*** them, instead he honoured them by countering with the grave question, “Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” (Matthew 20:22). Their heroic affirmation of this shames us all.

From the beginning, John was probably a noble character and had grown up in purity. He immediately accepted the Lord completely and let himself be accepted and, thenceforward, underwent a steady growth in high and spiritual development that surpasses our powers of comprehension today. I understand the reformers for whom the blessed spiritual climate of the heavenly kingdom at that time is unknown; I understand them when they do not grasp that the plethora of far-flung ideas ascribed to him are contained within one and the same person, one and the same life story; yes, I understand them more than others do, to whom this is actually already very comprehensible.

Why did Jesus not set his friend at the head of the apostles, but Simon Peter instead? I think this was an act of self-abnegation which also surprised the twelve. I think in some purely human way, he found Peter unpleasant and irksome; a continual test. While John was completely absorbed in understanding Jesus, in comprehending him, in absorbing him, Peter kept ***his own*** spiritual counsel. He also drew his spiritual nourishment from Jesus but processed it in his own way, in an independence that was not meant badly but which occasionally exposed him to risk and was a burden, a temptation, to the Saviour. As Jesus said to him, “thou art a danger to me”, or, “thou art an offence unto me” (Matthew 16:23), or “thou art one of my dangers, temptations”, or, in essence, “I have to beware of you at all times”. In addition to the high honour as witnessed in the words “flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee”, is the brusque comment “Your kind does not see this straightaway”. We actually have Peter to thank for a number of Jesus’ important sayings as a result of his words or deeds. It was a habit of Peter’s to draw quick conclusions from Jesus’ sermons or the situation of the moment; usually of a practical kind and also to put them immediately into practice. However, he was precipitate, changeable, almost inconsistent and quick to retract and also in danger of falling into the opposite extreme. It needed the wonderful perspicacity of Jesus to discover in the depths of ***this*** character something ***steadfast***. Because the climate in his heart was so stormy – a reflection of the wider world – the thoughts and concepts that grew in this heart sent down strong roots, capable and willing to outbrave the storms of the outside world.

This was also proved in the solution to the task which lay at the centre of the meaning of his life and his entire divine calling and the reason for his being given the name Peter – namely in his sermon at Pentecost. The task was not easy. Jerusalem had already come to the conclusion that Jesus was wrong. “Our leaders were too hard on him, but now it is clear that there was nothing in it anyway, we must admit them to have been in the right.” This was probably the prevailing opinion, and they looked with pity at the “peculiar” and solemnly joyous faces of the Galileans who, they could not understand why, were constantly to be seen in Jerusalem. These of course knew why they felt joyous; they had seen the Savour rise again and also saw him from time to time, an immeasurably glorious fact. But how to tell others this? Let us imagine this, in order to understand Peter’s bravery. If something like this happened to us today, in a smaller circle – would we dare to say it? Would that not mean the end of our reputation for good sense? Peter did it – loudly and, as it were, “from the rooftops”. He made the secret public to everyone and proclaimed at the same time that “God made that same Jesus, whom you have crucified, both prince in heaven (Lord) and prince on earth (Christ, Messiah).” In the prophecy and in the view of Israel, the Messiah was always a figure – the last one – of the history of the ***earth***. This was the steadfastness of Peter, that he heralded the beginning of the rule of him who was crucified and resurrected.

Peter, covered with patches and with numerous spiritual scars, was more suited to such belligerent defiance than bright, idealistic John who was exalted above the worldly and mundane. This one was more experienced and also far more suited to leading the community, for dealing with the “key”, and for all spiritual battles. He was more comprehensible to us and we more comprehensible to him than would have been the case with John.

If we want to gain a correct idea of the apostles, we should be prepared to imagine unsophisticated and very simple farming men. However, should those lacking any spiritual education at all point to the apostles – who were also “unschooled” people – to justify their own unauthorized teaching then they would be forgetting not only the extraordinary educational materials in the Synagogue, thanks to which they certainly knew the Hebrew Old Testament by heart, but in particular the spiritual education, which they received in a measure transcending all our knowledge, from their association with Jesus.

Their education was composed to a great degree of instruction. This instruction was not petty-minded, it was broad-minded. He punished them once when they thought he would merely quietly reproach them because they had forgotten to bring bread with them. It was ***strict***, yes, rough. All the inconsiderate demands that he made upon himself, he also made upon them, his “***servants***”. He called them “his servants”, not only “his pupils”, and reminded them forcefully and repeatedly of their servanthood. “The servant is not above his lord”, “when you have done everything, so say: we are useless servants”. From the lips of Jesus and in the ears of his disciples, this word would have sounded less disconcerting than it does to us today. The Saviour sees the relationship between servant and master as a comfortable one. “The servant” he assumes “loves his master” and likens himself to a master who one day will entrust his entire fortune to his servant to administer independently. However, in our relationship with God and also with Jesus, the order is reversed. The servant acts more independently than a slave, the slave only carries out the wishes of the master so that he is the master acting through him. The servant serves, but at the same time has his own concerns and interests; the slave is only an instrument, an extension of the master. Today we often hear the words of Jesus, “For one is your master” almost as if there was a “no” before “one”. It lies in the being of the divinity of Jesus that he and his work can only be served with the strictest, most selfless obedience that express ***his*** thoughts ***purely*** and ***completely*** and not with that freedom of the servant who chooses independently and makes changes, thereby muddying his divinity with humanness. Instruments as obedient and dutiful as this had to be trained by him, namely with a view towards the time when he would be taken from them and they, in his place and in his name and under his invisible leadership, would be carrying on his work. Before this time he had worried if he would be able to find people who would carry on his work with complete selflessness and according to his wishes.

The Saviour was rough with himself, living only for his beloved lost sheep, and also somewhat rough with his servants or slaves. The Gospels tell us of a series of occurrences (Mark 4:35 to 5:43) which illustrate how rich his life was in effort and experiences of all kinds. It was on the day that he spoke of the parable of the sower and the different grounds where seeds might fall that, obviously completely exhausted, he went to sleep on a ship. Where else could he go if he wanted to sleep? Wherever he went, someone was certain to follow him in order to take advantage of speaking to him alone. But behold, just as he was about to embark a scribe seized the moment and offered him his company (Matthew 8:19). Naturally! How pleasant it would be to share a ship with Jesus. The Saviour now breaks into that famous lament in which childlike self-pity with this poor “son of man” also reflects a certain humour: “The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests: but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.” (Matthew 8:20) He is speaking from the heart and in the midst of the momentary situation. Often must his poverty have been a burden to him and how often – very often – he must have been denied the comfort of a bed, especially as he liked to gather his disciples around him day and night in order to “be with them and to keep them safe in the name of the Father”. Sometimes he might[[21]](#footnote-22) have caught a chill, but instead of in a warm bed, he laid himself down on the cool grass. But at these moments, it might not have been ***this*** that awoke his pity with this “son of man”, but something else that was due to his homelessness but even more linked with his popularity with the needy of all kinds – the impossibility of being alone, finding peace or even a quiet place to lay his head. It appears as if the scribe allowed himself to be softened and Jesus was permitted to sleep. However, before too long he is roused again for the sake of a treacherous storm which threatens to spell doom to him and his companions. He calms the storm and soon they have reached the other shore. And behold! The terrible scene with the Gadarenes! He helps – and shortly thereafter is asked to depart again by the inhabitants. So he must return (dawn has broken in the meantime). From afar he can already see the agitated multitude awaiting him. He must go to Jairus!

As we can see, being part of such a changeable, work-filled life was truly no sinecure. They were in the school of he who had power; and for the sake of whose power, misery of all kinds made ever new and ever more surprising demands. We can probably not imagine such a mutual effort in supplicating, searching, and petitioning in any degree that would correspond to the reality. Out of life and for life; in a constant struggle with faith, they learned, through research and experience, of the kingdom of heaven in an increasingly brighter light as well as its relationship to earth and the means and ways of its coming. The Saviour was in the Father and the Father in him – this took on a richer content through the increasing number of tasks, and in these tasks flowed the continual life from the Father, through him, to the others. The words, “I kept them in thy name” tell us a ***lot***. (John 17:12) Thus he trained them so that in the future they would be able to carry on his work “in his name” and also to ask of the Father; i.e., that one day they would ***completely*** live his goals, carry out his work according to his views and wishes and in his interests. Even a merchant does not hand over to an employee his “signature”, that is, legal authority to act “in his name” before he has not made sure that it will be used only in the interests and sense of the master and with a complete understanding of what is involved. I find that we are often in danger of understanding Jesus’ great words to his disciples, “If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it”, in a too petty, almost too trifling way. In order to receive such promises they had to have been ***trained*** so that he could be sure that what they asked for in his name would indeed have to be truly connected with his own great goals and the kingdom of God.

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**What fruit was brought forth?**

As we know, John the Baptist was so concerned, almost distressed, about all these workings of Jesus that he sent to ask if Jesus was truly the one who was to come. On the one hand, Jesus ***shared*** this concern. He was able to send the Baptist the comforting confirmation, as what his disciples saw of God’s deeds was lavish in amount: “The blind can see and the lame can walk; lepers become clean and the deaf hear; also the dead rise again and the poor are given glad tidings.” On the other hand, however, looking at the actual ***effect*** that all this had on people, the situation was deplorable enough. People had ***become used*** to the works. Jesus’ great call “Repent ye, and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15) had largely died away fruitlessly: a reversal of ways of thought, a heartfelt return to the Father, to full readiness for His kingdom had not taken place. Occasionally the Saviour will have had one of those beautiful experiences vouchsafed to the pastor, and that he tells us of in his parables, that some will have given up everything for the treasure (the kingdom of heaven) in the field or for the precious pearl – but these were isolated incidents.

For the people on the banks of Lake Galilee he was probably an esteemed, honoured and beloved man, known to every child, their last resort in many difficulties; a man about whose possible great significance one “was not yet quite clear”. One liked to listen to his edifying sermons but gradually one had “formed an opinion” of this great temporary phenomenon. One could and would take note of and use much of what the nice man said with such sincerity but he probably – ran the excuse – also had his “human” side with, for instance, his “fanciful” views regarding the kingdom of God, which it would be best to ignore. One preferred to remain with the good old, inherited points of view. They sometimes found him “fanciful”. According to Mark 3:21, his people even once wanted to restrain him because they thought he was “beside himself”. Well, this was easy for the hot-blooded and belligerent Galileans and the Jewish businessmen to believe after hearing things like, “Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also”, or “If any man … take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also” (Matthew 5:39-40), or “Take therefore no thought for the morrow” (Matthew 6:34). In short, one found ways to orient oneself and allowed that he was something great, but within the framework of the old and habitual. To begin with, one probably wanted to remember the moral value ***completely***, but in its great dimensions it was only suitable for the “kingdom”, and not for everyday life.

This process of withering that followed after the first spring season of joyous attention is described poignantly by the Saviour in the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:3-23), where in the first three images he tells how the word “kingdom” that was initially accepted joyfully gradually became forgotten in the hearts.

But “they repented not” (Matthew 11:20), i.e., they did not undertake that great upheaval of mind necessary to believe in the Gospel of the kingdom.

This was not easy for Jesus and he could not accept it as easily as is generally regarded. It pained him profoundly. Namely, it pained him for his Father’s sake that they set so little store by his ***miracles*** that these gradually began to be quite taken for granted, like a “specialty” or a “particular talent”, which was definitely beneficial for Israel. He was concerned the most for the sake of ***this*** sin, and his lament was aimed at this. If it were only pity with the inappropriate ***situation*** that was to be discerned in his “woe unto you that are rich” then the “woes!” that Jesus cried at their ***attitudes*** are also based on pity but not solely. They are radiations from God’s anger which, if there is no repentance, will blanket the person concerned in profound woe; but his pity keeps within the limits of being in accord with his Father and where He is angry.

He saw the cause but no reason for lessening the people’s guilt but rather for increasing it, as in the spiritual inheritance of their fathers.

Their inheritance of truth of faith, of the revelation of God, seems to have dulled them to the miracles; ***they*** were not interested in the acts of God that resulted in Tyre and Sidon repenting in sackcloth and ashes. As great an obstacle for them appeared to be the remnants of righteousness that they seemed to think made repentance superfluous. Sodom, obviously godless, would have converted in the face of such miracles, they would have put the fear of God into them, but the people did not fear.

The main reason for this sad turn of events was a countercurrent, cloaked increasingly in darkness and with chilling effect, towards the Saviour on the part of the “experts”, the “builders” (Matthew 21:42), the scribes and the Pharisees. Here it was not that apparently harmless thoughtlessness as evinced by the people but an increasingly conscious resentment towards this uncomfortable and rule-breaking temporary phenomenon. That not a single one of them, even in spite of all his humbleness, was of any worth was “unforgiveable”; all the more as it was obvious that nobody was of worth except himself. They most probably realized that he did not manifest this from presumption, but merely because it was true; but that was the most wounding of all. They had a more difficult time with the Saviour than we imagine today. They were living quite immersed in what had been told them from earlier, holy times of revelations and acts of God but that such acts should have taken place in such a natural and simple way as they saw now in Jesus, this they could not understand. For a prophet, Jesus appeared to them to have too much of the common touch, to be too simple. Added to this, he really did differ conspicuously from the old prophets in some respects. These had often had, for instance, specific and extraordinary revelations – he never maintained that he had these himself. He merely explained simply and innocently that everything he said he had received from his Father. Further, the prophets took a great interest in the public conditions, in the situation in the fatherland – this all seemed of no interest to Jesus. His heart beat only for ***people*** as ***such***; and for the larger picture he knew of no salvation other than the kingdom of God. In his eyes, any other goals were not worth the expenditure of strength, heart and time.

From the outset, his detractors certainly dismissed the great thoughts of Jesus, basing this upon their “more thorough learning”. Perhaps they also thought he just did not understand the prophets. ***They*** read into these many judgements against the heathens while Jesus, unmistakeably and to their chagrin, finally said in ever more marked tones that he had great hopes of them, actually counted on them.

From this great pool of resentment flowed a continual quiet counter effect against Jesus. The Pharisees did say publicly that they were neither for nor against him but the counter effect was enough to cause them to take the lofty “stance of observers”. How little this was meant honestly is revealed by their suspicion that when Jesus helped to exorcise demons, this was based on magical and devilish spells.

So they stood, apparently waiting, prophesying that things would soon come to an ignominious demise. It was all very well for them to prophesy, they were quietly working towards bringing this prophecy to its terrible fulfilment.

One can imagine what kind of effect all this had.

Thus the Saviour saw himself, together with his reality, being increasingly brushed aside – the whole reason for the life of his heart and the reason for his being. Thrust out from the life of the people; rejected, excommunicated and excluded by the society of the authorities, the educated, the urbanites who led the mood of the times. He was understood only by the inferior and the poor, by those from whom one would normally expect the least piety.

This was difficult for the Saviour, all the more so because he certainly knew that by and large spiritual history, so-called world history, was generally made by the class of people who were now ***spurning*** him. “My work as work for Israel, yes as work for the world, is beginning to ***fail***”, he might – must – have said to himself in a human way. And there was truth in this. For Israel, for the world, it was, in the main, a failure. The world in its most beautiful, hopeful form, as the inheritor of biblical faith, was rejecting him; was therefore rejecting a great salvation that came so close and that could have been so glorious. For the world itself this means: ***Judgement***. Ruin. But the Saviour does not give up that easily, he is there for the world and, in order to save it, he is willing to fall in its stead. Thus here he perhaps catches a glimpse of the first harbinger of his approaching death.

1. Peter describes the works of Jesus with the sick with the words, “He healed all those who were overcome, violated (Καταδυναστευομένους) by the devil.” [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. When Paul (Ephesians 2:4,19) speaks of the love of ***Christ*** surpassing all imagination he is not thinking of a tenderness facing the individual soul in its reverence, but of the enormous power of the love of Christ which surpasses by far everything in strength, warmth, endurance and ***triumph*** and will not rest until it has vanquished all. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. The word in Greek can also mean “a deaf man who talks with difficulty or scarcely at all”, which is probably the sense meant here as the success of the healing is not described as “***he spake***” but instead “***he spake plain***”. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Laying on of hands in later times. In accordance with their calling the apostles, as the New Testament tells us, also adopted ***this*** act of the Saviour, the laying on of hands. Further, we find it practised by the representatives of the community (Acts 13:3) as well as handed down by the servants of Christ summoned by the apostles (1 Timothy 5:22). Thus we servants of the Gospel are surely acting in accordance with the wishes of Jesus when we, as necessary, while ***speaking*** our blessing give it a special dedicatory expression by laying on of hands. The more we disregard our own person and innocently and sincerely act as the servants of Jesus, the sooner Jesus will bless through us. But the ***word of blessing*** is always the main thing! Mute blessing is unworthy before God and can be mistaken by the people. It awakens the appearance of a secret natural law or even of something magical; that is, a deed that would carry an impression far removed from the bright and radiant nature of Jesus’ deeds. At the very least, the laying on of hands could diminish into a healing cure that is supposed to work in and of itself. It is not outside the realms of natural law that in this way a strong nervous life could have an effect on a weaker one: even such an effect stands beyond Christendom and could hardly be beneficial as Paul (Romans 7:18) says “in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing”. It is just for this reason that it is significant that in the New Testament the practice of this act appeared to be limited to appointed servants of the Gospels. This supplies the explanation of why there is never a mention of a blessing or laying on of hands on the part of females; this is obviously in connection with the fact that women were fundamentally excluded as public servants of the Word. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Strangely, the Bible is ***not*** acquainted with the word “heathen”in the singular. It knows only the “people of God” who are the only correctly structured people, administered by God’s order, called the “people” and the “nations” (Goyim). In the singular, the Old Testament merely says, for instance, “uncircumcised”, the New Testament can only say “man” (e.g. Colossians 2:8). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. These words were most certainly literally true. The Saviour had already taken the soul and the life of the girl so much under his protection that this soul, instead of having to leave the body due to utter death, arrived at a situation which would – without this miracle – have resulted in utter death; that is, would have been indistinguishable from death. It is something different when Jesus says, “The maiden is ***not*** dead, she ***sleeps***”, than if he says, “Lazarus ***sleeps***, and he has died”. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Cf. the later works of Peter, Acts 9:40. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. This **BITTE GRIECHISCH EINFÜGEN (Seite 277 unten)** reminds one of the words handed down (from Clementof Alexandria?) as Jesus‘ dictum,**BITTE GRIECHISCH EINFÜGEN** “who wonders”, i.e. “who has woken once from the sleep of the habitual, he will rule, i.e. have part in the kingdom”. It also reminds one of Plato’s declarations that wonder is the beginning of philosophy. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Zündel is referring to Frédéric Godet: Commentar zu dem Evangelium Johannnis, vol. 2, Meyer, Hannover 1876-1877. *The Ed*. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Here we take the liberty of pointing out that the Saviour was ***never*** addressed as the“Son of God” by the people, but encounters it almost ***regularly*** in the hereafter (Luke 4:41). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. ***Perhaps*** one could say: those in the beyond can live from his life in this world, in the way that we, on this side, now live from his life in the beyond. (But only ***perhaps***. The connection does not ***necessitate*** this.) [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. Martha has spoken these words as mere ***conjecture***, not from experience. This can be assumed from the way she bases her remark on the age of the corpse, which would be completely irrelevant if one had already smelled such a stench. For her, the absence of smell is due to the stone sealing the grave and with her caveat wants to prevent this beneficial seal being broken. It is possible that Jesus, after learning of the death of Lazarus and for the purpose of his resurrection, had appealed to the Father that this decay be opposed.

This assumption appears to me to justify interpreting the words of Martha as conjecture. Blumhardt, on the contrary, was of the opinion that Martha actually had experienced such a terrible smell, a point of view that some might find more appropriate to the text. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. Luther translates the latter with “devils”; the original text never uses this name in the plural, applying it solely to Satan. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. This is what Blumhardt believed. The Bible is obscure about from which region these demons originate: and Jesus ascribes them to the inhabitants of Hades, the realm of the dead (Matthew 16:18). Josephus’ assumption that they are “ghosts of evil people” has, naturally, no objective value. However, the allegation that he learned this from heathen sources can hardly be proven as Philostratus the Elder, the only other person to mention this (in the Indian Travels of Apollonius) came after Josephus. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. Superstition. This word is actually not to be found in the Bible but can be used for a school of thought once frowned upon by the Bible. It does not disapprove of every idea of the presence of a dark side of being, even less so as it makes no secret of the presence of such a thing; but all the more seriously does it condemn any preoccupation with the same without God, namely for the purpose of profit, be it for healing or for allegedly higher knowledge or suchlike. Insofar it naturally rejects any supposed knowledge in this field that does not directly stand in relation to divine revelation. God actually forbids all this in the first commandment: „Thou shalt have no other gods before me“, which, applied to this field, could mean: Do not give yourself to other inexplicable or wonderful influences, namely alleged or real influences from the invisible world – but only to that of your clear and direct connection with God. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. A repetition of this situation, although of a much more spiritual kind, is feared by Paul for the last days (2 Timothy 3:1ff. particularly v 8). Rivals of Christ’s servants will emerge who, like the Egyptian magicians to Moses, demand that their acts and the acts of those servants be ascribed to the same source – with the difference that the acts of the servants of Christ not be ascribed to unholy sources, but that the source of their own acts be regarded as divine. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. Today, ***money*** is available for the abundance of things in all shops, inns and so on which is why today riches are represented by possession of money. This was not actually so in ancient times. Wealth was represented by an assortment of things. However, the ***poor*** man took this even more seriously. One may think, although he owns various things, he is poor because he has no money; but the ***poorest*** does not even have ***things***. Thus, for me, these words in the mouth of the Saviour have something touching. Those things that we see as being absolutely indispensable – a bed for instance – ***he*** did ***not*** have. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. “Be ye therefore wise as serpents and harmless as doves.” (Matthew 10:16) The Saviour gives this advice to his disciples when he sends them out. There is no lack of voices in our hearts which would presumably agree with the sense of the first part of this advice by according themselves permission for all kinds of falsity although the second part forbids this expressly. In the face of such an attitude, we can only shudder and assume that the Saviour is following the same serpentine wisdom that he is suggesting to ***us***. But would he suggest to ***us*** something that he would not practise himself? As long as our wisdom is mixed with sinfulness, that is, serves only self-interest, we regard true piety as a little bit simple-minded. But how wrong is this train of thought! How wise is God (Ephesians 1:8), how wise the Saviour, how foolish, ultimately all the wisdom of the darkness! Wisdom is the wakeful, energetic use of all intellectual power for the task at hand, as it is a moral duty. In what did Jesus discern the wisdom of the serpent? Obviously not in its falsity, of which we know absolutely nothing. The serpent, lacking any limbs at all, is completely dependent on its wisdom and agility to obtain its nourishment. And this nourishment is alive; it can fly and leap! The serpent’s wisdom lies primarily in this: to catch its prey, it first of all ***waits*** for the right moment and secondly takes immediate ***advantage*** of this moment. If, however, Jesus represents himself as a shepherd seeking his lost sheep, what wisdom, what cunning, is necessary for the shepherd to find the sheep again? And when he promises his disciples that he will make them fishermen of souls – how similar is the fisher’s attitude towards a fish as the serpent’s towards its prey? Thus, indeed, we see the Saviour in his striving to seek and to save what is lost employing all the power of his wisdom. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. One could, however, speculate that Jesus was silently listing the sins of the Pharisees in the dust without voicing them out loud in public – one was in a temple, after all! [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. This is proven by a disparaging retort to the blind man,“Jesus of Nazareth” (as usually only the Pharisees called him) “has passed by”, as well as by the fact that they wanted to prevent the blind man from asking Jesus for help. They were fed up with his miracles and they would have preferred Jesus to have renounced these “specialties” and occupied himself more with general ecclesiastic and civic matters (as the “Messiah”) than he had done so far. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. “***Might*** have caught a chill”. How did Jesus stand physically with regard to sickness? With regard to sin, we know he “was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). This “in all points tempted like as we are” could almost be called into question if his body had been immune to sickness. Perhaps he stood in a similar relation to sickness as to sin: It approached him but was always immediately and successfully overcome in faith. When Matthew sees Jesus healing the sick, he is reminded of Isaiah 53:4, “He hath born our griefs, and carried our sorrows”. With these words, Isaiah gives the reason why the servant of the Lord (v. 3) was himself so full of pain and sickness. Do we hear perhaps a remembrance of Jesus’ attitude to sickness, similar to what we have seen above? We have the choice of two conjectures here: one, that he never had an impulse towards sickness or ***pain*** of sickness from a distance; and two, the one above. ***Either*** of these can be regarded as ***daring***. Which is the right one will be difficult to decide. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)