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# AN EXPOSITORY STUDY OF ST. JOHN'S GOSPEL\*

PROF. F. F. BRUCE, D.D.

## II. Jesus Reveals Himself to the World (John 1:19—12:50)

### (d) MINISTRY OF JESUS IN JERUSALEM (John 7:1-10:39)

#### (i) *The Feast of Tabernacles (John 7:1-52) continued*

Ch. 7, v. 40—*Some of the multitude therefore, when they heard these words, said, This is of a truth the prophet.*—Just as His feeding the multitude in the wilderness suggested to the people that Jesus was the second Moses, the coming prophet of Deut. 18 (cf. John 6:14), so now His offer of living water suggested the same identification afresh, for many remembered how Moses had brought water out of the rock for their forefathers to drink (Ex. 17:6; Num. 20:11).

v. 41—*Others said, This is the Christ.*—As appears in the attempts made to identify John the Baptist with some figure of eschatological expectation (John 1:20 f.), so here the Christ is evidently distinguished in the popular mind from the prophet like Moses. We may compare the way in which the Qumran community looked forward to the rise of 'a prophet, and the Messiahs of Aaron and Israel', where the coming prophet, unlike the great priest and the great king of the new age, is not given the designation 'Messiah' (cf. Bruce, *Second Thoughts on the Dead Sea Scrolls*, pp. 77 ff.). Those who on this occasion identified Jesus with the Messiah—i.e., the Davidic Messiah—were different from those who identified Him with the expected prophet.

*But some said, What, doth the Christ come out of Galilee?—*The idea that a Galilaean could be the Messiah was so revolutionary, so contrary to all that they had been brought up to believe, that they could not entertain it.

v. 42—*Hath not the scripture said that the Christ cometh of the seed of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David*

\* This article continues from the October 1959 issue of the Magazine, page 180.

*was?*—For everyone knew that the Messianic King for whose advent they longed would be the Son of David; this was implied in the promise of God communicated to David by Nathan in 2 Sam. 7:12-16, and was confirmed in such prophetic oracles as Isa. 9:7. The 'sure mercies of David' (Isa. 55:3) could not be realized except in a prince of the house of David. More over, there was the express declaration in Micah 5:2 that Bethlehem in Judah would be the birthplace of the coming 'ruler in Israel'; it was appropriate that great David's greater Son should be born in David's own native town. This is an excellent instance of 'Johannine irony'. John knew well enough, that Jesus was indeed 'born of the seed of David according to the flesh' (Rom. 1:3), and that Judæan Bethlehem, not Galilaean Nazareth, was His birthplace. The fallacy inherent in the objection to the possibility of His being the Messiah was plain to writer and readers alike; no need to point it out in so many words. Those commentators who infer from this passage that the Fourth Evangelist was ignorant of Jesus' Davidic descent or nativity in Bethlehem expose their own failure to appreciate the Evangelist's delicate handling of the situation.

v. 43—*So there arose a division in the multitude because of him.*—This becomes from now on a recurring note in the Gospel (cf. John 9:16; 10:19); men range themselves inevitably on this side or that according to their estimate of Jesus.

v. 44—*And some of them would have taken him; but no man laid hands on him.*—Once again, as in verse 30, an attempt is made to arrest Him or lynch Him, but it comes to nothing.

v. 45—*The Officers therefore came to the chief priests and Pharisees; and they said unto them, Why did ye not bring him?*—The attempt to lay hands on Jesus, mentioned in verse 44, reminds the reader that a detachment of temple police had already been sent by the Sanhedrin to put Him under constraint (verse 32). John can use the device of suspense effectively; he now returns to these members of the police and tells how they went back to the authorities empty-handed. The authorities naturally demand an explanation.

v. 46—*The Officers answered, Never man so spake.*—Although the actual terminology of witness is not used here, these officers

(Gk. *hypēretai*) add their contribution to the cumulative witness borne to Jesus and recorded in this Gospel. The words which they had heard Him speak made such an impression on them that they could not bring themselves to execute their commission and arrest Him. 'Never man so spake'; such authority (Matt. 7:29), such grace (Luke 4:22), they had never known in any speaker. Their testimony was expressed in few and simple words, but it has stood the test of nineteen centuries.

v. 47—*The Pharisees therefore answered them, Are ye also led astray?*—The rank and file of the populace might be carried away by His persuasive speech, the Pharisees implied, but it was surprising that disciplined police officers, whose role was simply to carry out their orders, should also succumb to the charm of His words.

v. 48—*Hath any of the rulers believed on him, or of the Pharisees?*—This was intended to be a telling argument; as with the previous question (v. 47), so with this, the form in which it is cast implies that the only reasonable answer is 'No'. Surely if Jesus were indeed the Messiah, or even a genuine prophet of God, some of the rulers of the people would have acknowledged His claims, some of the religious experts would have recognized His true character. As it was, the argument suggested, only ignorant people could suppose that His claims had any substance. The argument was not so sound as they imagined: for one thing, Nicodemus was there to testify that at least one of the rulers, one of the Pharisees, was well-disposed to Jesus; and for another thing, Jesus Himself declared that the truth about His person and mission had been concealed from the wise and understanding and revealed to babes (Matt. 11:25; Luke 10:21). God has often chosen the weak and foolish to confound the wise and mighty.

v. 49—*But this multitude which knoweth not the law are accursed.*—It is no accident that these words are said to have been spoken by Pharisees; they express a characteristic Pharisaic attitude towards the common people. The common people—'the people of the land', as they called them—simply could not be expected to master the details of the oral law, the tradition of the elders, and

therefore they were always liable to infringe it. Even the mild Rabbi Hillel, of the generation before Christ, summed up this attitude in the words, 'No member of the common people is pious'. From the Pharisees' point of view, the common people could easily be misled by any plausible teacher, because of their shocking ignorance of the true interpretation of the law.

v. 50—*Nicodemus saith unto them (he that came to him before, being one of them).*—Nicodemus, introduced in John 3:1 (on the occasion when he came to Jesus by night) as 'a man of the Pharisees . . . a ruler of the Jews' now speaks up and protests against this condemnation of Jesus in His absence. Whatever his colleagues might say of the ignorance of the common people, here was a man who knew the law and could cite it authoritatively, as befitted 'the teacher of Israel'.

v. 51—*Doth our law judge a man, except it first hear from himself and know what he doeth?*—The principle is formulated thus in rabbinical literature: 'Flesh and blood may pass judgment on a man if it hears his words; if it does not hear, it cannot establish its judgment'. That Roman law agreed with Jewish law on this point is evident from the words of Festus in Acts 25:16. In both codes, the accused must have opportunity to speak in his own defence before the verdict of the court is reached.

v. 52—*They answered and said unto Him, Art thou also of Galilee?*—But even Nicodemus's protest could only call forth from the angry majority the contemptuous suggestion that he too had become a Galilaean.

*Search, and see that out of Galilee ariseth no prophet.*—No prophet could be expected from Galilee, because none had ever come from there. Even if they were historically right, this might prove the exception to the rule. But there had been exceptions to the rule before: Elijah came from Gilead (Galilee beyond Jordan), and Elisha, Hosea, Jonah and Nahum appear to have been Galilaeans. But it was generally felt in the south that only in Judaea could pure religion be looked for—a heritage from the days immediately following the return from the Babylonian exile. The fact that Jesus was actually born in Judaea may not have been

known to them (cf. vv. 41, 42). The oldest authority for the text (the Bodmer papyrus of John, c. A.D. 200) reads: 'out of Galilee the prophet does not arise'—that is to say, it was not from Galilee that the prophet foretold by Moses in Deut. 18:15 would come. Not that there was any definite indication where he would come from, but they felt they could be sure that whatever region produced him, it would not be Galilee.

(To be continued)

## 'IN LOVE'

W. WILCOX

Much is said and written on the subject of love. In theory, its importance as an element in Christian character is held to be supreme. But do we find it manifested in the practical life as much as might be expected from the position we assign to it in theory? The Scriptures ever keep the right balance showing that deep, strong love of God for man, and of man to man, and also emphasizing its practical outflow in act and deed. We may note some striking references to such in the Scriptures:

1. *Be Rooted and Grounded in Love.* Eph. 3:17. Paul is praying for the Ephesian saints and expresses their need to be strengthened with power, rooted in love and strong to apprehend. It is with the latter two items that we are specially concerned here.

(a) *The Inward Cause.* Their great need, as also ours, is to realize the indwelling of the Christ in the heart, and that not as a passing thing, but as an abiding reality. For Paul uses a word which means 'to settle down and make a home' in the heart. If Christ has come into the life and made His home there, then our life will become characterized by Christ-like qualities. As He loved, being rooted and grounded in that deep, eternal love which existed in all His relationships in the heavenlies, so we shall be, because of His indwelling, rooted and grounded in love, and this will manifest itself in all our relations with God and man.