

Lesson Seventy-two

THE ISSUE RESPECTING JESUS
OF NAZARETH

Scripture Reading: Matt. 22: 41-46, 1 John 2: 18-29.

Scriptures to Memorize: "Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, saying, What think ye of the Christ? whose son is he?" (Matt. 22:41-42). "Now when Jesus came into the parts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Who do men say that the Son of man is?" (Matt. 16:13). "Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit that confesseth not Jesus is not of God: and this is the spirit of the anti-christ" (1 John 4:2-3).

39. Q. How shall we continue our study of Jesus of Nazareth from this point?

A. We shall continue our study of Jesus of Nazareth from this point by now proceeding to investigate His teaching, His character, and His claims.

In other words, in the *first* phase of our investigation, we studied the *genuineness of the Christian Documents* in which the testimony respecting Jesus is recorded. In the *second* phase, we studied the *credibility of the testimony respecting Jesus* as recorded in the Christian Documents. In the *third* phase, we studied the *historicity* of Jesus. Now we shall advance to the *fourth* phase, in which we shall study the *Jesus of history*: the One who lived on earth, who died on the Cross, and who, according to the representations made in the apostolic writings, was raised up from the dead.

40. Q. What is the great Question of all questions for human consideration?

A. The great Question of all questions for human consideration is: Who is the Person known in history as Jesus of Nazareth?

Or, as Jesus Himself put it: "What think ye of the Christ? whose son is he?" (Matt. 22:42). Cf. Matt. 16:13, 15—"Who do men say that the Son of man is? . . . Who say ye that I am?"

41. Q. Why is this the most important question for human consideration?

A. It is the most important question for human consideration because one's eternal salvation depends upon one's answer to it.

(1) Note, first, that it is a question about a *Person*; and not about an opinion, theory, dogma, etc. (2) Note, in the second place, that it is distinctly a *personal* question, in the sense that it is addressed to men as individuals, to you, to me, to every human being. (3) Note, in the third place, that it is a most *direct* question, put in the second person: "What think ye of the Christ?" "Who say ye that I am?" (4) Note, in the fourth place, that it is an *unavoidable* question, especially in a land where the Gospel is known and preached. Even though thousands of people of our day and age try to go through life ignoring the issue involved in this question, yet in effect their very disregard or neglect is their answer to it, so far as their own lives are concerned. This is what is rightly called a *forced option*: indifference is rejection. Cf. the words of Jesus, in John 5:40—"Ye will not come to me, that ye may have life."

42. Q. What is the answer given by unbelievers to this question?

A. The answer usually given by unbelievers to this question is, that the Person known in history as Jesus of Nazareth was a great ethical teacher, but withal only a man.

43. Q. What are the proponents of this view of Jesus commonly called in our day and age?

A. They are commonly called "Modernists."

Modernism is the name currently given to this view of Jesus. Modernists are, however, divided into two schools,

generally speaking, viz., those known as *Radical Modernists*, and those known as *Liberal Modernists*. (1) The *Radical Modernists* are, in the words of Dr. S. Parkes Cadman, those "intellectual eccentrics" who deny the historicity of Jesus; who hold, in other words, that the Jesus presented in the New Testament writings is an Ideal rather than an actual historical person. *E.g.*, according to G. Stanley Hall, "historic Christianity" made its Christ out of "mind-stuff"; in other words, its Jesus is a purely imaginary creation. "Not the historical Jesus," says Drews, "but Christ as an idea, as an ideal for divine humanity, must henceforth be the ground for religion." Many of these books read in certain paragraphs like quotations from Mrs. Eddy's *Science and Health*, and remind us of her "non-sense" world. This "Mythomania," says Merejkowski, "is a pseudo-scientific form of religious hatred of Christ and Christianity. . . . It is only too clear that wherever there was a desire to put an end to Christianity, the 'scientific discovery' that Christ was a mere myth was rapturously received as though that was the one thing needed" (*Jesus the Unknown*, pp. 27-28). We have already given sufficient attention to this view in our preceding lesson. Suffice it to say here, that it must be apparent to all honest and intelligent persons *that no mere human genius could have invented the matchless personality, the stainless character, and the faultless teaching presented in the Gospel Narratives*. Again quoting Rousseau: "Had Jesus never lived, the writers of the Gospels would themselves have been as great as he." (2) The *Liberal Modernists* hold the view, generally speaking, that Jesus was a great teacher and moral philosopher, perhaps more "divinely illumined" than others of His kind, but *withal only a man*. According to this view, His Messianic claims were of purely human origin and impulse, originating in His own mind probably about the time He was baptized; and that in offering Himself to His people as their long-anticipated Messiah, He was moti-

vated by an intense patriotic desire to render His nation a great unselfish service; consequently, His death was merely that of a martyr who rendered "the last full measure of devotion." For example, Dr. Charles Francis Potter, the foremost protagonist of "Humanism," writes: "As Jesus read these books [the Jewish Scriptures] and pondered their meaning, he became more than ever convinced that God was his Father. He found many references to the coming of the Messiah who should usher in a new day, the day of God's reign upon the earth, the coming of the kingdom" (*Story of Religion*, p. 220). The inference is, of course, that Jesus decided within Himself to be that Messiah for whom His people were looking. In similar vein, another current writer, Lewis Browne, a one-time Jewish rabbi, says: "Whether Jesus himself was convinced he was the Messiah is a problem still unsolved . . . but it is certain that many of those who followed Jesus believed him to be the Messiah" (*This Believing World*, p. 267). Again: "He was a great man, truly wonderful, but only a man; a bright and shining light, like John the Baptist; a sensitive, tender-hearted patriot and martyr like Jeremiah; an intrepid messenger from the courts of heaven, like Elijah; a Palestinian Confucius or Buddha, very great, very wonderful, but still a man" (Jefferson, *The Fundamentals*). Another recent treatment of Jesus of this type is Emil Ludwig's *Son of Man*, in which the author professes to "rationalize" the Character presented in the Gospel records; to present, as he says in substance, a perfectly human man called Jesus and to avoid the technical word "Christ." Similarly Bruce Barton, in his book, *The Man Nobody Knows*, presents Jesus as "a Fine Advertiser." "It is true," writes A. S. Baillie, "that nobody else has ever found the kind of Christ Bruce Barton has discovered in the Gospels. He is a jolly, hail well-met fellow. Mr. Sinclair Lewis after reading such a book might conclude that Christ was the original Babbitt. A great booster, a fine advertiser, a member of the Kiwanis and

Rotarians, a real manly man from top to bottom." *These are fair samples of the trash with which the book markets of the world have been deluged in the last two decades.*

(3) Several years ago a debate was held between Dr. Charles Francis Potter, mentioned above, and Dr. John Roach Straton, now deceased, then Minister of Calvary Baptist Church, New York City. The proposition debated was this: "Resolved that Jesus Christ was Entirely Man instead of Incarnate Deity." The affirmative was taken by Potter, the negative by Straton. Dr. Potter said: "It is understood between my opponent and myself that the issue of this debate is the deity of Jesus Christ. It is admitted by both sides that he was a truly great man, but my worthy opponent takes the position that he was more than man—that he was also incarnate deity. This I deny, and this is the issue of this debate." May we be permitted to call attention to the fact that *this has always been the issue between unbelief and true Christianity.* Cf. 1 John 4:2, 3—"Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God; and every spirit that confesseth not Jesus is not of God; and this is the spirit of the antichrist." 1 John 2:22, 23—"Who is the liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, even he that denieth the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father; and he that confesseth the Son hath the Father also." 2 John 7-11, "For many deceivers are gone forth into the world, even they that confess not that Jesus Christ cometh in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist. . . . Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God: he that abideth in the teaching, the same hath both the Father and the Son. If any cometh unto you, and bringeth not this teaching, receive him not into your house, and give him no greeting: for he that giveth him greeting partaketh in his evil works." *The Christian Confession of*

Faith is: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16).

REVIEW EXAMINATION OVER LESSON
SEVENTY-TWO

39. How shall we continue our study of Jesus of Nazareth from this point?
40. What is the great Question of all questions for human consideration?
41. Why is this the most important question for human consideration?
42. What is the answer given by unbelievers to this question?
43. What are the proponents of this view of Jesus commonly called in our day and age?

Lesson Seventy-three

THE ISSUE RESPECTING JESUS
OF NAZARETH (Concluded)

Scripture Reading: 1 John 2:19-29, 4:1-6; 2 John 4-11.

Scriptures to Memorize: "Who is the liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, even he that denieth the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father; he that confesseth the Son hath the Father also" (1 John 2:22-23). "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6).

44. Q. What is the orthodox Jewish view of Jesus?

A. The orthodox Jewish view of Jesus is the same as that of the so-called "Modernists."

That is, that Jesus was a great teacher and moral philosopher, a divinely-illuminated man, but withal *entirely man*. (1) Despite God's numberless efforts in his behalf and