

THE UNACCOUNTABLE MAN

"And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas?" Matthew 13:54-55.

Christ Jesus had lived in Nazareth nearly thirty years. Since it was a small place every one knew Him. Meanwhile, He made a tour of the countryside of Galilee. He did some very wonderful things in the town of Capernaum. During His absence from Nazareth He had become quite famous. But now He had come back home.

On the first Sabbath morning after His return, He was invited to address the worshipers in the local synagogue. To those who had known Him since His boyhood He read the glowing words of Isaiah with a new intonation and a new emphasis. Then He explained to them the meaning of the prophecy. In His first public address in His home town He declared the purpose of His mission in life and also taught some wonderful truths about God the Father.

When the address ended, there was a buzz of conversation in the Nazareth synagogue. And it was not the murmur of assent. All the littleness and all the envy of the human heart came to the surface that morning. His fellow townsmen refused to believe that Christ Jesus had any message for them. They indignantly repudiated His claim to Messiahship.

All of those who listened to Him were astonished to hear the "gracious words which He spake." The power and vigor of His teaching stunned them. They were dumfounded. They prided themselves upon being able to take the measurement of most men and things. But this time they were completely baffled; they had come across a phenomenon which seemed to defy explanation. They were at their wits' end. They did not know what to think. Their mental state was one of utter and hopeless bewilderment.

Christ's sermon to which they had listened intently was one the like of which they had never heard before. It was separated by a whole universe from the dry, dead discourses they were accustomed to hearing. This sermon went direct to the heart. It soared the heights; it plumbed the depths. It pulsed with life; it throbbed with power. It was filled with self-evident truth, and it left the hearers in a state of bewildered amazement. They said one to another, "Whence hath this Man this wisdom, and these mighty works?"

They had begun by wondering at the sermon; they ended by wondering at the preacher. "Whence hath this Man this wisdom?" "This Man" was the cause of their wonder and the source of their astonishment. Had the sermon come from the lips of the greatest rabbi in the land, it would have been a marvel, but coming from the lips of "this Man" it was more than a marvel, it was a miracle.

This Preacher was no stranger to them. He had lived in their midst as a boy and as a Man. They knew His home; they knew His people. For thirty years He had been one of them. For fifteen years of that time He had been a carpenter, perhaps helping to build the houses of some of them; making the furniture of others, etc. It was only a short while since He had left the carpenter's shop and taken to preaching. This was His first visit to Nazareth after the beginning of His public career, and this was the first sermon preached in the hearing of His fellow townsmen, and it left them in a state of astonishment verging upon stupefaction. So, they said, "Whence hath this Man this wisdom?"

The astonishment of the Nazarenes, among whom Jesus had been reared, was the greater because they knew all about the Preacher's home and upbringing. When we see a man endowed with special and unique qualities, we always try to account for them. We look for the secret of these extraordinary qualities chiefly in two things—a man's parentage and his education. Again and again you may read in the biographies of great men sentences like these: "He

inherited his strength of will from his father. He derived his gentleness of disposition from his mother." Mental as well as physical characteristics descend from parents to children, and heredity supplies the key to a man's character.

Education is also very important in the formation of a man's character. In this connection, education is used in a broad sense, including not only the means at his disposal for the training of his mind, but also the influences--social, intellectual and religious--that have played upon him in the formative years of his life. The age in which one lives, the ideals and aspirations of his time, the teachers under whom he studies--all these things go a long way towards the make-up of his character. And the Nazarenes thought of these things as they listened to the Preacher that day.

But the more they thought about His family and upbringing the more astonished they became. There was nothing in His family history to account for His marvelous wisdom and power. The members of His family were plain Galilean peasants. They were known to His audience. They did not possess any shining or extraordinary qualities.

Nor was there anything in His education to account for it. He had received the education within reach of a peasant woman's son. He had never gone to Jerusalem--like Saul of Tarsus--to sit at the feet of Gamaliel or some other learned teacher. As we would say, He had never gone to college or university. Yet, here He was pouring out words of heavenly grace and wisdom such as they had never listened to before. So, the Nazarenes did not know what to make of it all. To them "this Man" was a mystery, an enigma. He was an unaccountable Man.

The impression produced by Christ upon the Nazarenes was the same as that made by Him wherever He went. He impressed every one as an extraordinary, unique, unaccountable Man. The general effect of the appearance of Christ was the creation of wonder and astonishment in the minds of those who saw and heard Him. Over and over in the gospels we are told that the people "marvelled" or "wondered" or "were astonished" at something which He said or did. And this "wonder" was not confined to any class. Roman officials and great rabbis were every whit as much "astonished" as the simple and credulous peasants of Galilee.

When He was twelve years old, Jesus went with Joseph and Mary to Jerusalem to the feast, and this is what we read about the impression produced by Him upon the great doctors of the law even at that early age: "And all that heard Him were amazed at His understanding and answers." When He preached the Sermon on the Mount, "The multitudes were astonished at His teaching; for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes." Concerning His Jerusalem ministry we read, "The Jews therefore marvelled, saying, How knoweth this Man letters, having never learned?"

All classes shared in this "astonishment." Friend and foe alike experienced it. Pharisees and Herodians came one day in order to catch Him in His words, and this was the result of the interview: "They marvelled, and left Him, and went their way."

A palsied man was once carried into His presence, but walked away with his bed upon his back, insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, "We never saw it on this fashion." He was in the way going up to Jerusalem one day, and His disciples were amazed, and as they followed they were afraid. He stood, a friendless and lonely prisoner, before Pontius Pilate, but such was the effect of His demeanor upon that hard and cynical officer that we are told "the governor marvelled."

Among all classes of people Christ created a feeling of wonder. The doctors were "amazed"; the multitudes were "astonished"; the disciples "wondered"; the governor "marvelled." Everywhere Christ created the impression that He was unique. Men could not explain Him. He suggested questions which none could answer. He was a mystery, a puzzle, an enigma to them. From the human standpoint, He was the unaccountable Man. Still today Christ is the wonder and amazement of the world. Christ casts His spell over succeeding generations

of scholars, and one after the other undertakes the task of accounting for Him, but no account has yet been given which has satisfied the human heart. One after the other they are weighed in the balances and found wanting. To this day Christ remains the unaccountable Man. This is true when one considers:

I. The Wisdom Of Christ.

"Whence hath this Man this wisdom?" The Jews had their great rabbis, like Shammai and Hillel, but their wisdom was as dust and dross compared to the wisdom that fell from the lips of Jesus. How was it that a village Carpenter was able to surpass the wisest of the ancients? How came it that their most learned doctors were mere children in their knowledge of divine things compared to this peasant Preacher? The same question ever confronts us, for the years have not lessened the wonder of the wisdom of Christ. Confessedly He was the wisest Teacher Who ever lived on earth. To this day His words embody the highest wisdom. To them men turn as the one and only rule of conduct. Not one jot or tittle of them has grown obsolete or out of date. There they stand, so charged with Divine wisdom, that even a skeptic like John Stuart Mill admitted that he knew no better way of attaining to a noble character than by so living that Jesus would approve the life. And, how do you account for it all? "Whence hath this Man this wisdom?" If you start from the human basis, that will be a puzzle you will never solve, and Christ will remain an unaccountable Man.

II. The Authority Of Christ.

"They were astonished at His teaching for He taught them as one having authority." Yes, that is a mark of the teaching of Christ--He speaks with authority. Others argued to their conclusions--He issued laws. Others suggested--He commanded. He spoke about the deepest things in the unfaltering, unhesitating tone of One who had perfect knowledge. We feel towards Him as we do toward no other teacher in the world. We discuss the conclusions of other teachers; we submit to His. Whence came this authority? If you think of Him from the human basis, He will ever remain the unaccountable Man.

III. The Works Of Christ.

The Nazarenes, in their bewilderment, said, "Whence hath this Man this wisdom and these mighty works?" The works of Christ astonished them as much or even more than His words. He not only spoke wonderful words, but He also wrought the most wonderful deeds. His works created astonishment and wonder wherever He went. The like had never been seen by men before.

After the healing of the palsied man, we read, "They were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion." After an exercise of His power over nature, the disciples said one to another, "What manner of Man is this, that even the winds and the waves obey Him?" So startling were these mighty works of Christ, that even His foes felt compelled to account for them, and they resorted to the desperate expedient of accounting for them by saying that it was by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils, that He cast out demons.

Christ still confronts the world and challenges it to account for Him. He healed the sick; He cleansed the leper; He cast out demons; He gave speech to the dumb; He gave sight to the blind; He gave life to the dead. How came Christ by this wondrous power? Whence hath this Man these mighty works? He continues to do even greater things. He redeems, saves, emancipates, delivers, sustains and empowers people.

There is but one way of accounting for Jesus Christ, for His wisdom, His authority and His mighty works, and that is by accepting the verdict that He is the only begotten Son of God. That explains everything.