

THE FAITH OF JESUS

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The Faith of Jesus

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THIS is a matter that I have often wished to see discussed more fully than has so far come under my notice. A year or two ago I remember searching such writers as I could reach who might be expected to handle the point, but without success. My greatest disappointment was my failure to find any allusion to it even in a book so thorough and so fertile as Schlatter's *Der Glaube*. And yet it lies very near the centre of things for us. If faith be the central exercise of religion, and Jesus be its central figure, a discussion seems imperative of the relation between faith in our case and whatever takes its place in the case of Jesus as His relation to God. At the present moment, when the nature of Christ's person is again in the forefront of Christian concern, and when the burning question is whether the religious problem was for Him just what it is for us,—at such a time it is singular that it should be so hard to find my theme discussed by first-rate authorities. At the same time my reading is so far

short of the encyclopaedic range of a Sanday or a Moffatt that I speak with great misgiving.

I have, however, come upon one reference to the subject which seems to me suggestive, and which has set me on the writing of these lines. It is in Schlatter's new volume of *New Testament Theology*, p. 316.¹

Christ's love to the Father is a love of infinite *trust*—not to be mastered or lost even in death. And by death, of course, is not meant death in the egoist sense of individual arrest with its terror and gloom, but such death as alone could

¹ I remark in passing how I am struck with the moral and historic insight of this book in contrast with the intellectual acumen and fertility of combination of Holtzmann. It is all the difference between sympathetic interpretation and analytic construction. The one seems written from within, the other from without; the one with radiance, the other with brilliance; the one so steady, the other so illuminating; the one so grave, the other so keen; the one so full of grace, the other of truth.

make an agony for one like Jesus—the death of all His hope and passion for the Kingdom of God through its one organ on earth—Israel. It was His agony for Israel in its great refusal of the Kingdom in Himself—that Israel, who seemed God's Viceroy, should foil and murder even God's Son. Christ's love of His people came into violent collision with His love of God. And His victory was this, that the trust He lost in Israel (and therefore in history), He never lost in God, even when everything seemed to fall to pieces that had hitherto promised to secure the glory and sovereignty of His holiness among men. When every human, historic, and rational ground for trust had gone, His trust in God and His victory and reign still held. He could trust God even when He ceased to be able to trust His experience of God and every historic sign of God. He knew that His life and all it stood for was secured by God even in the hour of collapse and death. Nothing could prevent God's reign—not the death of His Son at the hands of His people. If that death did no more it would at least do the terrible service of precipitating the judgment without which now the Kingship of God could not be.

Yet for all His trust in God, we hear nothing of the *faith* of Jesus. The N.T. writers seem almost deliberately to avoid applying to His relation with God the distinctive word which expresses ours both to God and Him. He required from men a faith He never exercised. He sees God, knows God, hears Him, and so forth, but He never *believes* in God as He taught and enabled men to do. He never says, 'Believe in me as I believe in the Father.' The religion of Jesus was a very different thing, for the N.T. writers, from the best of ours. Faith is the creation of God in us, but the trust of Jesus is never spoken or thought of in that way.

And Schlatter's suggestion seems sound. In our faith we have to make our way over a kind of moral difficulty which for Jesus did not exist. We have a gulf to cross that He had not. His darkness had a different source from ours. The experience of God in His case rested on a spiritual continuity with Him which for us does not exist—whether by our nature or by our fault. For Him neither did thought create the difficulty nor will

the distance that we find between us and God. He felt otherwise than we before the Holiness which He yet saw as we never can. He never quailed before that which humbles us to the dust. Not such was His humility. For us there is now no condemnation, because for Him there never was. From Him the confession of sin and of faith are alike absent. Where we believe, He knew. Ours is the confidence of faith, His of vision. Where we believe with effort and godly fear, He knew and rejoiced in spirit (Mt 11²⁵⁻²⁷). For us faith is much more dependent on fear than with Him. With us it dies as it casts out fear; for Him the Lordship of the Father had another effect, and He was at home with His holy majesty. There was no repentance in His faith; but ours is not faith without it. Revelation was one process for Him, it is another for us. He needed none of the grace which is its one form for us. Our love of God grows out of faith, His trust grew out of love. We find God *in* our experience, but God *was* His. For us God emerges in our self-consciousness, for Him God was His self-consciousness. There was nothing mediatorial in His religion, ours is essentially so. He was His own Christ—as some now hold Humanity to be.

So that, as Schlatter says, faith is associated with such visitations of God as reach men from without—even if they come with that inward outwardness which they have in coming through Christ the Spirit. Christ used the word for the attitude of those who sought God's help through Him; but it was an attitude which He occupied towards none, towards no phase of nature and no soul of man.

It is little we are given to know of the religion of Jesus as His personal experience. But we know enough to know how essentially different it is from ours. And when one hears, for instance, that a particular community has been congratulated as being so Christian because of the ardency of its imitation of Christ, without any reference to its faith in a Redeemer whom to imitate is to deny—one wonders if all the Churches of the Reformation are due to end thus, and, having received the Spirit by the hearing of faith, are to sink to the perfection of the works of a subtle law. The faith of Christ is beyond us, and anything in its nature can only come by faith *in* Christ.