

Chapter One

“BEHOLD THE MAN!”

Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, Behold the Man!” John 19:5.

We cannot know the Roman governor’s real estimate of Jesus further than that he believed Him to be innocent of all charges brought against Him by the Jews and that He was the victim of a cruel conspiracy. Pilate was doubtless well impressed with the Man of Galilee because of His noble conduct and godly bearing during the long trial that was now coming to a tragic end. When, a little later, the Jews demanded the death of Jesus because He claimed to be the Son of God, Pilate was frightened, and was more determined than ever to release Him. It is evident that the governor regarded Jesus as no ordinary man, and his final appeal was to the sympathy of the mob as he set Jesus forth before them and cried out, “Behold the Man!”

The history of mankind is chiefly the record of the character and exploits of the men and women who exerted the greatest influence upon their generation and nation. A nation’s history is inseparably connected with the careers of the leading characters of its national life. They are the makers of history, the beacons of civilization. We cannot think of the empire of Babylon apart from Nebuchadnezzar, its greatest ruler and builder, and Daniel, its greatest statesman and prime minister. Cyrus, Darius Hystaspes, and Xerxes were the makers of Persian history; and Greece revolved around a small galaxy of her mighty men, including Socrates, Plato, and Alexander. Roman history was made by a few generals, scholars, and Caesars; and the modern nations owe their existence and glory to a small group of their national heroes. The careers and influence of earth’s mighty men, however, have been short-lived. Like shooting meteors they blazed amid the darkness for a few brief moments, and then burned out and disappeared in virtual oblivion.

The Man of Men

Just as national history and national heroes are inseparable, so world history can be rightly understood and appreciated only in the light of the deeds, character, and influence of Jesus Christ. He is the

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man of men, the hero of heroes, the beacon of all history, the great I AM of all time. He is the “Son of man,” indicating that He belongs to all mankind in every age. He is the arbiter of individual and world destiny. True history is really “His story.” Jesus Christ is the creator, preserver, benefactor, and redeemer of all mankind. He is “the first and the last” in all that is worthwhile; He is the “Alpha and Omega” of all that is to be desired. He is the author of all light and truth, and the finisher of all righteousness.

Though written by more than forty men, covering a period of fifteen centuries, the Bible is the only history that gives the proper place in its records to the Creator and Ruler who presides “over the kings of the earth;” who “ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will.” Revelation 17:18; Daniel 4:32. One of the greatest of earthly rulers, after a humiliating experience in which he learned the true principles of sovereignty, said: “At the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes to heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the Most High, and I praised and honored Him that liveth forever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation: and all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou?” Daniel 4:34, 35.

The Scriptures were written, not so much to record the history of the past, or to forecast the events of the future, or to enunciate a system of theology, although they do all this, but to reveal to the human family a Person. The Bible is not so much a book of theology as it is a biography of its author and chief subject, Jesus Christ. The Bible deals with the various sciences, so that scientists, while searching for light in their particular fields, might discover the science of salvation. It deals briefly with geology, that men interested in that subject may be led to discover the Rock of Ages. The Scriptures contain a great deal of invaluable information regarding medical science, so that men who devote their lives to the science of healing might become acquainted with the Great Physician, who alone can heal the malady of sin and give eternal life. Astronomers may find much to inspire them in the Bible; but, best of all, it will lead to the discovery of “the Bright and Morning Star” and “the Sun of Righteousness.” In the Holy Word botanists may find “the Lily of the valley” and “the Rose of Sharon,” and zoologists will have revealed to them “the Lamb of God” and “the

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Lion of the tribe of Judah.” The principal purpose of the Scriptures is to make known to man “the One altogether lovely,” “the Chiefest among ten thousand.”

From the viewpoint of His humanity alone, Jesus is the incomparable. “Jesus of Nazareth, our divinest symbol! Higher has the human thought not yet reached,” said Thomas Carlyle; and Johann Herder declared that “Jesus Christ is in the noblest, and most perfect sense, the realized ideal of humanity.” Ernest Renan testifies that “the Christ of the Gospels is the most beautiful incarnation of God in the most beautiful of forms. His beauty is eternal; His reign will never end;” and Goethe said: “I esteem the Gospels to be thoroughly genuine, for there shines forth from them the reflected splendor of a sublimity, proceeding from the person of Jesus Christ, of so divine a kind as only the divine could ever have manifested upon earth.”

“Will Jesus ever be surpassed?” asked the editor of the Los Angeles Times. He then answers: “Nineteen hundred years have passed, and His equal has not risen. This is not true of the world’s other great ones. Every generation produces geniuses worthy to be compared with those who have gone before. It can be said of no one man, ‘He stands alone; he has no rival; no equal; no superior.’ But this is true of Jesus. Nineteen hundred years, instead of diminishing His greatness, has accentuated it. Today, more than ever before, the limelight is on the Nazarene.”

One day as Napoleon Bonaparte was talking to his attendant in the place of his banishment on the island of St. Helena regarding the heroes of history, he suddenly turned and asked the question, “Can you tell me who Jesus Christ was?” As the officer hesitated, Napoleon said: “Well, then, I will tell you. I think I understand somewhat of human nature, and I tell you all these were men, and I am a man, but not one is like Him; Jesus Christ was more than man. Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and myself founded great empires; but upon what did the creations of our genius depend? Upon force. Jesus alone founded His empire upon love, and to this very day millions would die for Him.... He asks for the human heart; He demands it unconditionally, and forthwith His demand is granted. Wonderful! All who sincerely believe in Him experience that remarkable supernatural love towards Him. Time, the great destroyer, is powerless to extinguish this sacred flame.”

“‘The gospel is no mere book,’ said he [Napoleon] at another time, ‘but a living creature, with a vigor, a power, which conquers all that

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opposes it. Here lies the Book of books upon the table [touching it reverently]; I do not tire of reading it, and do so daily with equal pleasure. The soul, charmed with the beauty of the gospel, is no longer its own: God possesses it entirely: He directs its thoughts and faculties; it is His. What a proof of the divinity of Jesus Christ! Yet in this absolute sovereignty He has but one aim - the spiritual perfection of the individual, the purification of his conscience, his union with what is true, the salvation of his soul. Men wonder at the conquests of Alexander, but here is a conqueror who draws men to Himself for their highest good; who unites to Himself, incorporates into Himself, not a nation, but the whole human race!” - “Scripture of Truth,” Sidney Collett; “The Life and Words of Christ,” Cunningham Geikie, pages 2,3.

We shall close these testimonies of men regarding the character and mission of Christ with a statement made by William Jennings Bryan: “Reared in a carpenter shop, with no knowledge of literature save Bible literature, with no acquaintance with philosophers living or with the writings of sages dead, when only about thirty years old He gathered disciples about Him, promulgated a higher code of morals than the world had ever known before, and proclaimed Himself the Messiah. He taught and performed miracles for a few brief months and then was crucified; His disciples were scattered and many of them put to death; His claims were disputed, His resurrection denied, and His followers persecuted; and yet from this beginning His religion spread until hundreds of millions have taken His name with reverence upon their lips, and millions have been willing to die rather than surrender the faith which He put into their hearts. How shall we account for Him? Here is the greatest fact of history; here is One who has with increasing power, for nineteen hundred years, molded the hearts, the thoughts, and the lives of men, and He exerts more influence today than ever before.”

The men quoted above are only a few of the many who today join in the exclamation, “Behold the Man!”