

THE MAN WHO WAS GOD

When Jesus left John the Baptist beside Bethabara he moved quickly through the crowd and turned westwards towards the Judean desert. Before he had arrived at Bethabara he had already known by the Spirit within him what his subsequent activities would be. From now until his death and later resurrection, each day had been decided by his Father and agreed by himself before his earthly incarnation. The first act of his earthly mission was his baptism, and next he had to face his great angelic adversary, Lucifer, the fallen primary angel and "*prince of the world.*" From the beginning of earth's history, since Adam and Eve had forfeited their inheritance, it had been decreed that the redemption of creatures and creation required his personal incarnation and eventual confrontation with Lucifer in his own territory. "*Lucifer*" was his given name, and "*Satan*" was his attributed designation as the implacable "adversary" of God.

It was the converse of that day in the beginning of Creation when Satan had entered God's new bridgehead of the Garden of Eden on the planet Earth to contest the authority of God's first *homo sapiens*

creation, Adam and Eve. From now until the day of Jesus' resurrection from death there would be unsleeping opposition from Satan who had been deprived of his exalted position because of his overweening pride, and was no longer privy to divine knowledge. Prior to that fall he had been a "*perfect angelic creation*" in God's heavenly administration whose awesome powers exceeded those of the Angels Gabriel and Michael.

In that purpose of looming confrontation with a personal Lucifer Jesus was different altogether from John the Baptist, who had sought to purge himself from all satanic thoughts and motivations by Scriptural application and physical discipline. In his incarnation by the Spirit of God Jesus had an unblemished association with his heavenly Father without the human limitations which led to base motivations and restricted understandings endemic in the human John and angelic Satan. It was not that he, Jesus, was not tempted like all others; it was just that in the temptations his instinctive response was godliness and resistance, whereas all others gave the temptations values and influences which ultimately overwhelmed them into sinful submission and defeat.

The primary task of Jesus in the world was to redeem the human race from its subjection to the former primary angel, Lucifer/Satan, the great adversary of all God's purposes. Since Satan's seduction of Eve and Adam into rebellion against God he had consistently sought to thwart God's purpose of redeeming humankind from its inherited and practiced disobedience of God, and to subvert all God's attempts to make His chosen people, Israel, a holy nation to enlighten the world. Jesus had been sent by God to re-establish God's rule on earth, to initiate the kingdom of God on earth as it was in heaven; to be what the *Book of Daniel* had described as "*the stone cut out of the mountain without hands*" which would supercede all other earthly kingdoms—most of all, the demonic kingdom of Satan. In this earthly body which God had prepared for him he was the prophesied "*seed of Adam . . . seed of Abraham . . . seed of David,*" in order to fulfill all the purposes of God. As that "*seed*" God had said he would "*bruise the head of Satan.*" His first task was to confront Satan in the solitude of the desert before he launched his public

ministry; because he knew that once he was committed to declare the good news of the kingdom of God every known—and even hitherto unknown—evil would be thrown against him by Satan and earthly authorities desperate to perpetuate their own powers.

What he had to say to men and women would come out of the crucible of his own experience, above and beyond the noisy confusion of philosophies and politics, and the corrupting demands of daily physical and material temptations, because it would have an even greater impact than that of John's message, for it encompassed so much more. John had prepared the way with his message of repentance and judgment and mercy; but he, Jesus, would reveal God as a loving Father, establish God's kingdom, demonstrate his divine credentials as the true Messiah, be a vicarious sacrifice for human sin—and do all this within the space of the next three years. His greatest difficulty in the years ahead would be to get his followers to understand that his human experience was the same as theirs, in that he had to find his way through the demanding pressures of everyday life, and the machinations of Satan, in order to know, understand and accomplish actions flowing from the mind and will of God.

So Jesus left the main highways, and branch roads, and passed through the scattered, suspicious Judean desert communities of peasants and nomads, scrabbling for a living for themselves and their scrawny sheep and nibbling goats. He went beyond them into the barren wilderness where only the wild animals survived. With the minimum of food and water he pushed his body and mind to the limits of their endurance, beyond the demands of every physical sense and mental distraction, to the point where, eventually without food or water, he was face to face with Lucifer/Satan himself grappling in the realm of the spirit for dominance in temporal and cosmic creation.

God had revealed through Abraham, Jacob, Daniel and others that there was a divinely-appointed council of angels in His heavenly administration, reaching from the Throne of God downward and outward, to carry out the divine purposes on earth. This had a clearly delineated nine-fold ranking function throughout

the cosmos in three ranks of spirit-beings: first, seraphim, cherubim, and thrones; then dominions, powers, and authorities; lastly, principalities, archangels, angels; all occupied in the cosmic administration of God's creation. Jesus was about to confront Satan as God's personal representative in the sight of this heavenly administration so that all created beings in heaven and earth would know the inviolability of God's purpose and a redeemed humanity could share in this heavenly splendor in a renewed creation.

Eight hundred feet higher than the distant tropical abundance of Bethabara Jesus reached an exposed and scorched limestone ledge, with a wide, sweeping view of the heat-hazed desert. Beyond the shimmering heat waves of this empty-desolate wasteland there were ten thousand square miles of God's "*Promised Land*" holding a few million men and women comprising the chosen people of God, who had almost all forgotten or ignored their glorious destiny to be God's holy nation in the world, a model of God's kingdom of love and joy, peace and prosperity. Only thirty miles away from where he sat in isolated desolation the city of God, Jerusalem, was a maelstrom of political intrigues, dominated by a Roman tyranny, exacerbated by the excesses of the new procurator Pontius Pilate. It was a cultural cesspool corrupted by Greek hedonistic indulgences, a religious bazaar where every kind of superstitious idea got a hearing and following, while the true spiritual values of their divine inheritance were ignored or mocked. In the heat of the day, and in the silence of the night, Jesus grappled with the demonstrable powers of Satan evident everywhere in Judea and the world. There was no doubt Satan had made the world into his personal kingdom, and not just his divinely-bestowed but corrupted angelic inheritance. Here the battle between him and Satan had to be fought—and won.

After forty days in the desert, when he was feeling the physical and mentally debilitating effects of his long physical fast and spiritual battle, Jesus was approached finally in person by his great adversary, Lucifer/Satan, as he had approached to corrupt Eve and Adam in the Garden of Eden at the most advantageous time for his purpose. Just as there existed in Eden God's powerful angelic kingdom, with judicial powers vested in a court of judgment in heaven,

so there was the opposing mighty “kingdom of Satan”, modeled on the divine pattern, but ruled over by Satan and his demonic fallen angels, evident in the lifeless destruction of every planet in the universe. In his angelic hubris and subsequent punishment Lucifer had created his own malevolent kingdom from those rebellious angels who had followed him when they chose to reign in their self-created hell rather than serve in a God-created universe.

Initiatory creative power was not Satan’s to exercise, because of the limitations imposed on even his highest angelic status, but he still wielded immense power under the sovereign will of God. The *Psalmist* had described how these demonic fallen angels operated through their human minions on earth:

*“God presides in the great assembly;
He gives judgment among the ‘gods.’
‘How long will you defend the unjust and show
partiality to the wicked?
Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless;
maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed.
Rescue the weak and needy; deliver them from the
hand of the wicked.
They know nothing, they understand nothing.
They walk about in darkness; all the foundations
of the earth are shaken.’
I said, ‘You are ‘gods’; you are all sons of the
Most High.’
But you will die like mere men; you will fall like
every other ruler.”*

These were the Satanic malevolent powers manipulating emperors and kings, statesmen and generals, politicians and priests, to serve Satan’s ends and to frustrate God’s benevolent purposes for His creation. Rulers and philosophers and priests had created gods and demi-gods to explain the spirit-phenomena which they would not receive from God, and ended up worshiping gold and silver, bronze and wooden representations of their self-conceived mythical creatures.

It was the task of Jesus to make the kingdom of God real in the world, to reveal the true nature and person of God, to restore God's redemptive purposes in creation, to deliver all men and women from the bondage to Satan into which they had fallen, and to lead them into the glorious inheritance prepared for them by God. Deliverance of the nations—whether Israel or the Gentiles—from the secular kings of political empires would have to mean deliverance of minds and spirits from the bondage of the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God, from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. He must stand alone against the full power of the secular world, must pass sentence on all its accepted religious posturing, and must create a new world of spiritual values.

Jesus had not only divested himself of all divine majesty he had deliberately forsworn all human trappings and apparent necessities, even the commonly accepted "*rule of threes*" necessary for survival: "*three minutes without air; three days without water; three weeks without food*". With forty days of fasting he made himself more vulnerable than Adam and Eve for his imminent encounter with Satan. Satan's greatest weakness was his *hubris*, his insolent pride, which had led him as Primary Angel to think that it was only a short step to be as God, not comprehending the immensity of the gulf between uncreated Spirit and created spirit. He knew the gulf between created spirit and created flesh in humans, and how easy it was for him to tempt them to sin, and this hubris would ensure his defeat.

Jesus was not surprised, therefore, when Satan himself appeared to challenge him on the level of fleshly indulgence when he was weakened by forty days of fasting. "If you are the Son of God," Satan said challengingly, "tell these stones to become bread."

"It is written", Jesus replied firmly, "*Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.*"

Satan dismissed the reply sneeringly and a wave of his hand, then challenged Jesus on the issue of supernatural powers: "If you are the Son of God throw yourself off the roof of the Temple, for it is also written, '*He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands.*'"

Jesus knew Satan's tactics were to enter into a conflict of

supernatural powers in which it was implicit that both of them were equal, the other significance of which was that Jesus was only supported from personal harm by angels and not inherent divinity.

He replied, "It is also written: *'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'*"

Then Satan as angelic prince of the world evoked before Jesus a glittering panorama of his earthly power in the kingdoms of the world in all their material splendors. "All of this", he said to Jesus, "I will give you if you will kneel and worship me."

Jesus did not contest Satan's authority to dispose of his powers, but he summarily dismissed the implied claim to superiority over him. "Depart from me," he said authoritatively, and for the third time he added God's own words to oppose Satan. "It is written, *'Worship the Lord your God, and obey him only.'*"

The three temptations just presented to him by Satan were the three fundamental causes of the world's unrest in Satan's relentless campaign to thwart God's purposes for men and women—whether political, social, economic or religious. First, there was "*the lust of the flesh*": to turn stones into bread to alleviate hunger pangs, or to enjoy personal pleasure without responsibility. Second, "*the lust of the eyes*": to perform a miracle for selfish reasons, to demonstrate personal prestige without responsibility. Thirdly, "*the pride of life*": to acquire personal possessions for enjoyment of power without responsibility. These were three of the most corrupting and destructive temptations of humankind: the three basic drives of debased desires of will-to-pleasure, will-to-power and will-to-meaning. Jesus had demonstrated in his responses to Satan that it was possible to overcome them, whatever the circumstances, by calling on the words and promises of God.

His own personal encounter with Satan had been a temptation to be a "*Provider-Messiah*"—giving food to the poor, health to the sick, comfort to the sorrowing, regardless of the individual consequences. Or to be tempted to be a "*Miracle-Messiah*", manipulator and purveyor of strange powers, the powers of the supernatural, the unveiling of the world's mysteries by demonstrated familiarity with its spirit mechanisms, like the occultic Egyptian, Babylonian and

Greek philosophers. Or, finally, most seductive of all temptations, to be a “*Caesar-Messiah*”, such as expected by all Jews, seeking to overcome the kingdoms of the world as a greater than Julius Caesar. All of these options were legitimate in their way, and all of them were aspects of the Messiahship. But all of them on their own had failed as human elements, and would continue to fall short of God’s declared purpose to redeem the world from the consequences of its rebellion and disobedience.

That was the fundamental issue—not status, or power, or possessions, or even life itself,—but obedience to God and his written and spoken commands. Power willingly subordinated to love, which itself was a primary characteristic of God and was the first law in the kingdom of God. A man could die for a cause; he could die for a friend; but to die because of love for an enemy, in order to save him, using divine power in the service of love, was the primary task of a God-sent Messiah—to be a “*Redeemer-Messiah*” through love. God’s purpose through him was to establish a spiritual kingdom on earth as it was in heaven, a kingly rule based on love in which service to others rather than dominion over them would be the pre-eminent feature. The goal of that purpose was to enable all men and women everywhere to have an unclouded relationship with their Holy Creator—“*to be holy as He is holy*”—at all times and in all circumstances. This was the destined task given to Israel, which they had forfeited through disobedience. First, Israel would be given an opportunity to repent and return to God for forgiveness—as John had begun to preach—and then if the nation of Israel neglected or refused the offer other nations would be challenged to respond.

To accomplish this he must choose and train a small group of dedicated men and women who would be prepared to die for this cause; then, later, a larger group to cover the whole of the country with the good news of God’s kingdom to the people of Israel. When a sufficient number of Jews had been discipled as a nucleus of that kingdom it would be their responsibility to carry the good news of God’s kingdom to all other nations of the world.



Jesus left Satan and the desert and returned to Bethabara to meet with John the Baptist once again. It took him three days to reach there from the desert, sometimes walking along the busy highways, and sometimes tramping across the hill-paths to avoid the crowds of travellers making their way to Jerusalem for the coming Feasts. He was acutely conscious that this was the last time he would be alone, an anonymous figure in the crowds. When he began his public preaching the crowds would exceed those of John, and they would never leave him until he died. Now he was an anonymous figure until he arrived beside the crowded ford at Bethabara. Then John saw him, and, pointing to him, used the same expression as before: "Behold the Lamb of God!"

Two of John's disciples, who had been standing beside the Jordan ford a short distance from Jesus, turned towards him in dawning recognition. One of them was John - Johanan ben Zebedee—who was actually a closer relative than John the Baptist for, while John the Baptist was really a second cousin to Jesus, John, the son of Zebedee, was his first cousin; his mother, Salome, being Mary's sister. Because of the Roman census thirty years previously Salome had also been present in Bethlehem as mid-wife to Mary when Jesus was born, and had been present when the shepherds and three Persian scholars had visited them. Andrew was a relative also, but from Joseph's side of the family before he married Mary. They had been close companions of Jesus as children and youths.

They stood aside quietly while John the Baptist and Jesus talked together apart from the crowds; but when Jesus turned to move away they caught up with him. Jesus turned to look as they approached. "What is it you are looking for?" he asked, smiling in recognition and leaving them to make their decisions regarding their relationship. They hesitated, uncertain whether he had recognized them or not, or whether the question related to their motivation in being with John the Baptist. Eventually, one of them stammered, "Rabbi, where are you staying?"

They knew he no longer lived in Nazareth and had not for some time. They knew from the earlier stories about him in their childhood that Jesus was foretold as the Messiah, and that John had

just prophetically affirmed this in a revelation from God. They knew he was a recognized rabbi, and that all rabbis had disciples, and instead of claiming relationship through family connections they had phrased their question as any potential disciple would to a rabbi. If Jesus was indeed the Messiah, they reasoned, to be with him would be their life. It was for this—or at least for the promise of it in John the Baptist’s preaching—that they had left their fishing to follow John in the first place. Jesus acknowledged their reticence and approach by giving a rabbi’s standard reply to potential disciples: “Come and you will see.” It was an implicit challenge to belief and commitment.

It was already the tenth hour of the day, late afternoon, and dusk was approaching, but they followed him unquestioningly, waiting for him to talk when he was ready. If John the Baptist’s prophetic words regarding Jesus meant a clean break with the past for them, a call to a new life, a commitment to a new destiny, they wished to know about it. So they spent that night with him in a nearby traveler’s inn. There Jesus told them something of himself, of the Scriptures, and of his heavenly Father. As he explained to them the significance of his birth and life on earth, and a vision of the kingdom he had come to inaugurate for God, they wanted that more than they wanted family and possessions. Jesus made it clear that he was calling them to leave everything they owned, as he had, and they made their choice to follow him gladly.

It was decided, however, that Andrew would go to tell his brother Simon of his decision, and that John would go to inform his family and fetch James, his brother. They went ahead of Jesus, who said that he would travel more slowly northwards and meet them in Bethsaida, where they had lived and fished. Some members of their family lived in Capernaum, around the Lake, or Sea of Galilee, from Bethsaida. As a rabbi Jesus could move freely among the people and places of the country, for rabbis were provided with hospitality, even from the poorest households, wherever they went. But on this occasion Jesus did not delay to teach, or answer questions, for he was now ready to move into a public rather than a personal ministry. His time as “*Son of Man*”, God manifest in the flesh, had

arrived. His *"hour"* of revelation as the *"Son of God"* would happen in Jerusalem later. Jerusalem was the central focus of God's purpose for the world.

The cultivated, terraced foothills of Galilee were green and fruitful with early crops and olive groves and vineyards; in the fields herds of black goats and white sheep spread over the slopes, herded by youthful shepherds. It was a heart-stirring combination of beauty and peace, but overshadowed by the hovering nemesis of Roman and Jewish oppression and extortion and exploitation prevalent across the nation. Coming over the hills, looking toward the distant Plain of Esdraelon, the Lake of Galilee lay like a gleaming jewel, sparkling in the warm sun. The Lake was shaped like an inverted pear, with the northern width at the broadest part about seven miles, and a narrowing length of over twelve miles in the south, encircled by nine towns and many villages. On its western side, where the River Jordan left the Lake, the hills came right down to the water's edge. On the eastern side the land stretched in an eye-caressing carpet of green, except for the houses of residents. On the Lake, even from the distance, could be seen scores of fishermen's boats seeking fish or recreation. To the north, Mount Hermon rose above the foothills, like a great snowy cloud flecked with and furrowed by shades of light reflected by the snow from a thousand projections and hollows.

As Jesus drew nearer the Lake he could see the women washing their clothes, others carrying away the famous sweet water to their homes. He noted the kingfisher on a post, watching for a small fish; a gull overhead; the wild ducks riding on the sparkling wavelets running on to the shingle of the lake-shore. Breathing deeply, he walked slowly through the palm-groves, with the fig-trees and intertwining vines, the soft murmuring brooks. He stopped often to smell the fragrance of the lilies, and countless flowers of other kinds, as he approached the town of Bethsaida, now growing into a small city.

It had only been a village beside the Lake until very recently, but now it was being built up by Herod Philip into a fashionable watering-place for the wealthy, and dignified with the added name

of “*Julias*” in honor of the daughter of Caesar Augustus. No strict Jew would live there because of the hedonistic lifestyle of its rich citizens and foreign visitors, although it did not have the stigma of Herod Antipas’s city of Tiberias, built on an ancient burial site. Fishermen used it to load and unload their boats from their fishing, but were either too poor or devout to live there.

It did not take Jesus long to find Andrew at the harbour. When his brother Simon arrived at Andrew’s call he looked at Jesus with interest. He, too, was aware of the prophecies, stories and events surrounding Jesus’ early life, but when nothing of note happened he, with everyone else, ceased to be curious, and his youthful dreams and hopes had been buried under the demands of work and marriage.

Jesus remembered Simon as a delightful if impetuous youthful companion. He and Andrew were now reasonably prosperous fishermen, like the family of John and James, working hard at building up their small fishing fleets under the extortionate taxes of the time. Jesus had often gone fishing with them in the past, and they had swum together in the lakes and rivers. He knew Simon to be daring and fearless, a born leader whose enthusiasms invariably got him into trouble first among the group of companions. He was loyal and decisive, skilled and committed, with a shrewd appreciation of others, and it was no surprise for Jesus to hear from Andrew that he was the leader of the fishermen’s guild in the Galilee region.

Simon waited for Jesus to speak first, which was unusual, for he was always the one to approach with smiling enthusiastic greetings, and Jesus was aware that this reticence was because of what Andrew had told him. In addition, Jesus knew Simon was probably keeping in mind Andrew’s enthusiasm in leaving fishing and family to follow John the Baptist as a disciple—with Simon left behind to look after everything!

Jesus chose his words with care. “You are Simon ben Johanan. Come, follow me and I will make you fishers of men. You will be called Cephas “(the local Aramaic form of the popular Greek name “Peter”, both meaning “a stone”). To the Jews a name was very significant, often being given before birth, and sometimes even

bestowed by supernatural means—like Abraham, Isaac and Solomon, as well as Jesus and John the Baptist, among others. It was always associated with personal character and family ties in some way. For Jesus to tell a grown man, a companion of many years in his youth, that he was now arbitrarily changing his name from Simon to Peter was tantamount to claiming a unique authority. Simon knew that to receive a new name in this fashion was to be challenged to respond in a new way to Jesus—as God’s Messiah rather than youthful friend. Looking at Jesus intently, he weighed the consequences of what he was being asked to consider: to leave his family, his work, and his home, to follow this man as the promised Messiah. His face lit up with his reckless smile Jesus knew so well, and he nodded his approval and acceptance. “I, too, will follow you, Lord”, he said, the first use of the title acknowledging the Messiahship of Jesus.

They went on to where James and John moored their boat after a night’s fishing, and found them preparing the nets, with their father Zebedee. When James and John joined them, Jesus asked James if he was prepared to leave his fishing and follow him as a fisher of men for the kingdom of God he was about to establish and James agreed enthusiastically. They informed Zebedee of their decision, and he confirmed his willingness to let them go. He and Salome had often discussed such a possibility with Mary and Joseph, and when the young men had gone he rolled up the nets and went to tell his wife: the Messiah had come to claim his kingdom.

Jesus, and his four new companions of the kingdom gospel, went to find a friend of Andrew called Philip, who had expressed an interest in joining them. He was a scholar, who had also been a follower of John the Baptist and, when Jesus told him that the time had come to launch the good news of God’s kingdom, he gladly joined them. When Philip heard that Jesus intended making for Nazareth next, he suggested that they go by Cana, a village only a few miles from Nazareth, where he had a good friend, Nathaniel, sometimes called Bartholomew, whom he would like to introduce to Jesus as a possible follower.

On reaching Cana, Philip went to look for Nathaniel while the

others ate and rested. He found his friend Nathaniel sitting in the shade of a fig-tree reading, praying and meditating. With the approach of the Passover he was reading the month of Nisan passage for meditation: "*Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help*". He was reflecting on the experience of Jacob's "*Ladder Dream*" and its relevance in the light of John the Baptist's call for personal and national repentance. He was startled, therefore, when Philip's first words, after his greeting, were, "We have found the one of whom Moses wrote about in the *Law*, and about whom the prophets also wrote - Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

Nathaniel gazed at Philip in frank disbelief: "Nazareth!" he exclaimed skeptically. "Can anything good come from there?"

There was only one way to convince him, Philip decided, the same way as the others. "Come and see for yourself," he said.

On the way they met Jesus coming towards them. Before Philip could say anything Jesus addressed Nathaniel: "Here is a true Israelite in whom there is no pretence."

"How do you know me," Nathaniel asked, puzzled.

"I saw you, while you were still under the fig-tree, before Philip invited you," Jesus replied, smiling.

It was a thought-provoking answer for Nathaniel, and he looked at Jesus intently. There was no way this man could have seen him in a normal way, so he must be talking about seeing him with inner spiritual vision, something like Jacob being confronted by God at the brook Jabbok. In which case—"Rabbi," he said humbly, "you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel."

But once again Jesus surprised him. Instead of approving Nathaniel's perceptiveness he tempered his enthusiasm. "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig-tree," he said, then added: "You will see greater things than that. You will see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

Nathaniel's conversion was complete. This man from Nazareth—who had emphasized his humanity rather than his divinity in "Son of Man" rather than "Son of God"—did indeed know one's inmost thoughts in some remarkable way. How otherwise was he to know

that under the fig-tree he was considering Jacob's experience, and even meditating on this exact passage of Jacob's vision of "*angels ascending and descending*"—the opposite from what might be expected: angels descend first, and then ascend back to heaven. But what if they were already on earth to accomplish the purpose of God in Jacob, and now to do the same for God's Messiah?

Using Nathaniel's declaration of him as "Son of God . . . King of Israel" Jesus proceeded to enlighten the group regarding the true nature of his Messiahship. That was why he had emphasized the title "Son of Man," he explained, rather than "Son of God" in his response to Nathaniel. In his incarnation he had become God's representative "Son of Man," in his anticipated resurrection and ascension to heaven he would be humankind's representative "Son of God."

He had to get them to realize the voluntary humiliation of his humanity as being the necessary basis of his task on earth; otherwise the concept of his deity would become an empty, speculative abstraction, and his Lordship in the kingdom of God a Jewish secular fantasy. He also had to raise their ideals to encompass a much more difficult concept of the exaltation of his humanity in partaking of all that it meant for God to be human, with the implication of his own and their divine destiny of reflecting the image of God at all times. It would take time and patience, familiarity and experience and teaching, despite being Jews familiar with the Scriptures, for them to grasp the redemptive significance of all this.

As a campaigning group they would be different from all the other rabbis and their personal followers, with their differing religious schools of interpretation—including that of John the Baptist. John had his own distinctive ministry from God to fulfill, which was compatible but different in emphasis from his own. John was the last of the old line of prophets; he, Jesus, was the first of the new messengers of God. The old prophets, including John, were servants of God; he was the Son of God. John was the shadow of things to come; he was the substance in reality. John was a warning voice from the wilderness; he was the living Word from God. He

was the Anointed of God, the Messiah, sent from God with a spiritual mission to Israel, and with a national and world vision to fulfill. As Son of God it was true he had come to save the world; but it was also true that as Son of Man he brought a message of judgment which would separate the true from the false, children from parents, brother against brothers, family against family, household against household.

While both he and John would stress this judgmental aspect of God's message to the world through them, his own distinctive contribution would also be to reveal God as a loving, long-suffering Father as well as a majestic, demanding and very jealous God. His message would be an "*evangel*", a call to God's people to remember their divine purpose as a holy nation, as sanctified priests of God—no longer serving the altar and Temple, but all serving the living God. He would reveal his Father, God, as He had always meant to be seen: a spiritual sovereign reigning over a spiritual people practicing spiritual laws. This was the true realm, and rule, of God. David, as king of Israel, had initiated and unified the nation-state of Israel, from being a scattered Twelve Tribes, into being a microcosm of the theocratic rule of God on earth as in heaven. He, Jesus, as son of David, would initiate and unify a world kingdom that would be greater in every way than David's Israel, reflecting the sovereign rule of God on earth. God, as the true Lord of history, through his followers would present salvation, reconciliation, and redemption, to all humankind as a free gift of divine grace and love.

As Jesus outlined the scope of their divine mission the small group of his disciples passed from stunned amazement through intellectual confusion to mercenary consternation. Like all their people they had been brought up with knowledge and understanding of the Scriptures, so they understood what Jesus was saying. What bewildered and even frightened them was the sweeping manner in which he took the Scriptures and moulded them into a vision such as they had never heard or dreamed. No rabbi had ever spoken with such authority, not even John the Baptist. The way Jesus spoke, and his version of the meanings, made them seem to come from God himself. Had Jesus just been teaching them,

they would have been thrilled—and then gone home to tell their families and friends of the experience. But Jesus was doing more than just teaching them; he was indoctrinating them so that they would be able to disciple others with the same vision. He was assuming that they were part of this vision to dramatically change the nation of Israel, and then to change the whole world. He expected them to stand forth and do what he was doing now—and with the same authority and confidence.

Jesus was gentle with their torrent of questions, but inflexible in his demands and challenge to their faith:

“Don’t accumulate wealth for yourselves on earth, where it could disappear at any moment. Invest it in heaven, where nothing destroys. For where your wealth is, there is your heart also . . . No-one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

“Don’t worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Isn’t life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they don’t sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? . . . Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Don’t worry about tomorrow; let tomorrow worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

Who could resist such a challenge at such a time? Not the idealist Andrew or John, not the skeptical Nathaniel, not the intellectual Philip, not the pragmatic James, not even the tempestuous Simon Peter. It was a cause worthy of a man’s life—and death, if need be. On that Sabbath, in late 27 A.D., they committed themselves to follow Jesus, as God’s Anointed Messiah, and with him to change the world; to be fishers of men, for a new spiritual kingdom such as the world had never seen.

Chapter 6

will be available on this site on the 1st December 2009