

"WHO ART THOU, LORD?" *

Nineteen hundred years ago there came into this world a Man whose Life of thirty-three years is the chief event in the world's history, and—whether we think of it or not—the chief event in the history here and hereafter of every one of us.

He was promised four thousand years before He came. The race, the tribe, the family, the time of His coming, the chief events of His Life were known. So that in the reign of the Roman Emperor, Augustus Caesar, when the time foretold by the prophets had come, there was a widespread expectation of a great Deliverer, and many eyes were turned to the little country of Palestine where He was to appear. And there, in Bethlehem, in a stable, on a winter's night, He came. Angels sang in the heavens and sent shepherds to His crib. A star shining out in the eastern sky brought wise men to His feet. Then the marvels around Him ceased, and whilst men were still expecting, and wondering why the promised One delayed so long, He was growing up from youth to manhood, and working at a carpenter's trade in the despised village of Nazareth.

At the age of thirty He left His cottage home and began to show Himself to men. The majesty and grace of His Person, His winning ways, the power and the sweetness of His words, and His marvellous works, (*Acts ix. 5.) soon carried His fame far beyond the limits of His own land. His feet trod the stormy waves. His voice stilled the tempests, cast out devils, and brought peace to the souls of men. The touch of His hand gave sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, speech to the dumb, life to the dead.

Multitudes followed wherever He went, through the crowded streets, up the hillsides, into the desert. When He preached on the seashore, the people so thronged Him that He had to step into a boat and push off from the land, His eager hearers pressing down to the water's edge to catch His every word. No man had ever spoken like this Man. His words not only fell upon their ears, but sank into their souls, stirring them to higher thoughts and desires, to a sorrow for their sins which brought them peace, to a love of Him which drew them near to God. Wounds of body and of soul too sore for other handling His light touch healed. The poor, the ignorant, those of whom the world makes little account, went after Him in thousands, heedless of food and shelter, of everything—save the Face and the Voice of Jesus of Nazareth.

Multitudes flocked after Him. But there was no multitude to Him. Each soul stood out before Him clear and distinct, with its needs, its troubles, its sins, its desires for better things. The little child, the widow, the eager youth, the trembling sinner, felt that He read them through and through, understood them, loved them, cared for their love, wanted to help them, to make them happy—and could do it.

Gradually there gathered round Him a band of disciples. From among these He chose twelve men to be His intimate companions and friends. He kept them constantly with Him, He carefully taught and trained them, He let them into His secrets, He shared with them His miraculous powers, so that like Him they cast out devils, and cured the sick. He called them Apostles, that is, messengers sent, because they were to take His place and carry on His work when He should leave the earth. They were fishermen, most of them, rough and ignorant,

but with simple, devoted hearts. Father, mother, home, everything they had in this world, they left for their Master's sake, ready to follow Him everywhere, even to prison and to death.

For not all men revered Him for His holiness and wonderful works, and loved Him for His goodness. He had fierce enemies, men who were jealous of Him and hated Him for His teaching, His warnings, His miracles. During three years they slandered and persecuted Him. And at last they laid hands on Him, scourged Him as a slave, crowned Him with thorns as a mock king, nailed Him to a cross between thieves, and watched Him die in lingering agony. He was buried. His grave was sealed, and guards were set to watch.

Then His enemies thought the world was rid of Him, and that they would hear His Name no more. But three days after His Crucifixion He rose from the tomb as He had foretold, and showed Himself to His friends. For forty days He went in and out among them, eating with them, letting them touch His wounded hands and feet, giving them His last instructions. On the fortieth day after His Resurrection, He led His disciples to the top of Mount Olivet, and having blessed them, slowly rose above their heads into the heavens till a cloud received Him out of their sight. As they remained looking up into the sky, two Angels in white garments stood by them and said : " Ye men of Galilee, why stand you looking up to Heaven? This Jesus who is taken up from you into Heaven shall so come as you have seen Him going into Heaven."

"This Jesus." Who was this wonderful Man ? Was He a true Man, and if so, was He more than Man? Pilate, the Roman Governor who condemned Him to death, was so struck by His calm majesty, His silence, and His patience in the midst of cruel injustice and pain, that he asked Him: "Whence art Thou?" He wanted to know if He was a mere man, or if there was any truth in the belief of many, that He was more than Man, that He was the Son of God.

Pilate's Prisoner made him no answer, because none was needed. He had been three and thirty years in the world, and the question : "Whence art Thou?" had been answered so plainly by the wonderful works He had done, that those only who were wilfully blind could help knowing who He was and whence He came.

About five years after the Ascension of Christ into Heaven, a young man was hastening to Damascus to seize and punish all he could find, men and women who believed in Jesus of Nazareth. Suddenly, a light from Heaven shone round about him, and, falling on the ground, he heard a Voice saying to him: "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" And he said: "Who art Thou, Lord?" And the Voice made answer: "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest."* That question and its answer changed the persecutor Saul into the great St. Paul. He came to know and love our Blessed Lord so well, that neither tribulation, nor danger, nor the sword, nor death, nor any creature, he said, could separate him from Him. Now the question of Pilate and of Saul was of immense importance, not to themselves alone, but to everyone of us. A more important question has never been asked; for, to know the truth about Jesus Christ, and to guide our lives by what we know, is the end for which we were sent into this world.

We did not see what the people of His own land saw every day; but we have the story of His Life written by those who knew Him intimately, and it ought to be familiar to us all. Every man and woman, every boy and girl should know it well. It is of more importance to us by far than anything else we have to learn. It was written,

not for mankind in general, but for each of us, one by one, that we might study it and copy its lessons into our own lives.

These are days in which our belief in Jesus Christ must be firmly rooted if it is to be unshaken by the unbelief and indifference around us. We should try, then, to bring home to ourselves in every possible way the truth about Him—Who He is; what He came into this world to do; what we must do that He may not have come for us in vain. Let us ask, then, humbly and earnestly with St. Paul: "Who art Thou, Lord?"

*Acts ix. 5.