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PREDESTINATION IV

"Come unto me"

by D.B. Knox

The Protestant Faith

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Matthew 11:28: "Come unto me all you who labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest."

These beautiful words were spoken by Jesus in a context which might seem a strange one. The passage opens with a denunciation and lament. "Woe to you Bethsaida, if the mighty words done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they could have repented long ago. It will be more tolerable for them in the day of judgement than for you." It was because of the refusal to believe in Him that Jesus' contemporaries expressed of his fellow citizens in the town in which He lived "Capernaum you shall go down into Hades ... It will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom on the day of judgement than for you". By these solemn words we are reminded that God who created the world and who is sovereign in the world will bring all the world to His judgement. Our life has purpose, it is not haphazard and the present moment is significant, we will have to give an account of how we spend it and what our reactions are to the truth. The opportunity to repent, to do God's Will, to put our faith in Jesus as Lord is now and if we ignore that opportunity as the citizens of Palestine did we will be inevitably judged and condemned.

When you come to think of it, it is a terrible indictment of human nature that Jesus' fellow citizens should have rejected Him. He was the supreme teacher, His life was loving and gracious and free from any self-centredness or blame. His words were winsome, His discourse and parables interesting, and He accompanied His teaching with remarkable miracles and signs. Yet what little effect it had, how few were those who responded, but the great majority of his hearers, then as now, rejected the truth. It poses a problem to the modern minister. Jesus' answer to this problem is very instructive, He goes on immediately to say "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yes Father, for so it was well pleasing in your sight". There is a natural disappointment in apparent failure, but our Lord overcame such a temptation because His faith in God's sovereignty and God's wisdom was complete. Indeed He could rise to words of thanksgiving "I thank thee Father, Lord of heaven and earth".

God's wisdom is perfect and God's purposes will be completed in His own time. Predestination is the term to describe God's sovereignty in salvation, which Jesus here affirmed, "You have hidden these things from the wise and revealed them to babes because this was your gracious will". We need constantly to remind ourselves that all that happens to us is under the care of our loving Father the sovereign God Who made heaven and earth. He has given us life and He loves us with such a love that He Himself has redeemed us. His wisdom is perfect and we may trust Him with thankfulness in every event of life, saying, with Jesus, "Yes Father, for so it was well pleasing in your sight".

The fact was that Jesus' fellow citizens had rejected the only way there is to God. They had rejected Jesus, who was the embodiment of God and who reflected perfectly God's perfections. In rejecting Jesus, they were rejecting God, though they would not have said so. But it was not the true God. Is the God you believe in the true God? Is he the God of Jesus, the God of the Bible? If we are to come to God it must be through Jesus alone. In the face of this rejection Jesus reaffirmed this truth "no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him." If we worship God apart from Jesus, we are rejecting Jesus. This was the sin of Capernaum; they were not irreligious but it was their own idea of God that they were determined to have, not the truth that God was making known to them when He was present in Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us.

What about the present day? There are suggestions that we should join in a worship service for the Opera House which deliberately rejects Jesus in order to accommodate all shades of opinion. But can we join in a service for the worship of God which rejects Jesus who is Emmanuel, God with us, the only way to God as the true embodiment of God's character? The great sin of mankind is disbelief in Jesus; as our Lord said later "the world will be convicted of sin because they believed not on Him". Let us make sure for ourselves that our faith in God is faith in Jesus as Lord. His contemporaries were rejecting Him, if this rejection were persisted in it would

involve them in judgement. This was clear to our Lord's mind. It was also clear that there was no other way to God except through Him and so He concludes with these beautiful words of my text: "Come unto me all you who labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest". The rejected way remains the only alternative, so that Jesus in His graciousness repeats the rejected invitation and we should respond once again in our hearts to the graciousness of God who invites us into His own presence through the Lord Jesus Christ.

The graciousness of God is seen in renewal of the invitation, even though it was being rejected. To respond means to enter into fellowship with Jesus, to be united to Him just like two animals are united together with a common yoke, to walk together, to share life's load together, to learn from Him, as the younger animal learns from the older more experienced yoke-fellow.

Jesus invites us to come to Him; He takes from us the load of guilt and failure and restores us to God's presence.

There is no other way but Jesus.

"Come unto me," He invites, "and I will give you rest."

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