

THE SINLESSNESS OF JESUS

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The Sinlessness of Jesus by Max Meyer

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"For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." Heb. 4. 15.

This cardinal passage which asserts the sinlessness of Jesus, affirms not merely the testimony of the Scripture that Jesus was without sin (Heb. 4. 15), it leads further; it leads into the mysterious realm of the temptations of Jesus and his struggles with sin, and puts us thereby before the deepest and most tender problems in the question as to the sinlessness of Jesus.

Hebrews 4. 15 will give us the direction toward which we shall make our inquiry. Let us begin first with an examination of the passages on the sinlessness of Jesus.

I. JESUS WITHOUT SIN ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURES

Without sin; this is the shining inscription under the life of Jesus. If the Lord had possessed only one dark spot, how spite-

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fully and maliciously his enemies would have attacked him! But defiantly he can challenge them: "which of you convinceth me of sin?" (John 8. 46.)

With this judgment agree the sentiments of those who knew the Lord, such testimonies as we may particularly trust.

Judas, the child of perdition, after he committed the deed, how may he have tried to allay his conscience by remonstrating with himself that in the end Jesus may have deserved punishment. In the torment of his remorse, how may he have considered in his mind the years of intercourse with the Lord, wishing to find even a shadow of guilt in the Lord! But lamenting and accusing, he must exclaim: "I have sinned in that I have betrayed innocent blood" (Matt. 27. 4).

Pilate; how much would he have given had he been able to discover even the slightest wrong in the Lord in order to be able to vindicate the condemnation of Jesus and at the same time extricate himself; but before his soul Jesus stands spotless, and in spite of the most thorough examination, he is obliged to confess: "I find no fault in him" (John 19. 4; Luke 43. 4, 14, 15, 22).

Even his wife is so certain of the integrity of Jesus that she warns her husband not to taint himself with the blood of the righteous (Matt. 27. 19).

The Roman centurion under the cross, while gazing on the person and death of Jesus, is obliged to confess: "Certainly this was a righteous man" (Matt. 27. 54; Mark 15. 39; Luke 23. 47).

The penitent thief who, like all criminals, has a clear eye for the innocency and purity of Jesus says: "This man hath done nothing amiss" (Luke 23. 41).

Still more abundant are the voices of those who daily associated with him, who not only heard his words and saw his deeds, but who could also look most deeply into his heart; to them he is "he who knew no sin," "who did no sin," "the just and holy" (Acts 3. 14; 8. 26; 2 Cor. 5. 21; 1 John 2. 1, 29, 37; 1 Peter 1. 19; 2. 21, 22; 3. 18; Heb. 7. 26, 27).

One cannot invalidate these testimonies of the disciples and friends of Jesus by saying that these men could not have applied the notion of sinlessness in absolute strictness to Jesus; they could only judge of the outer legality of Jesus, but could not see into his

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heart; and besides, the moral estimate of actions is essentially dependent on the determining motives. What had been going on in the heart of Jesus, of this they had no knowledge.

But in analogy of the word (Matt. 7. 17 seq.), we may be allowed to reason at once from the goodness of life to the purity of motive, and to this responds the self-testimony of Jesus (John 8. 46). By no means did Jesus intend to say: "You can show me no sin." This were unworthy of him who well knew what is in man, and who in ethical matters felt so unspeakably fine and tender. And words like those of John 4. 34; 5. 17; 8. 29; 15. 10, assert Jesus's most rigid concentration upon God. He who asserts oneness with God (John 10. 30), as an expression of the divine nature; he who can designate himself as the spiritual image of the Father (John 14. 9), from him sin must be absolutely precluded.

Still another observation leads to this result. It cannot be denied that Jesus lifted the Jewish religion of the law, of the letter which opposes man from the outside, to the religion of freedom and of the Spirit. Only

that is truly good which is done from the whole heart and free love. Jesus thus transfers the pith of all religion to the disposition. How could the idea of such a religion have been born in the heart which yet somehow had the law beside or against itself, and which had caused displeasure to the will of God in any single point? The fostering soil of such an ethically perfect religion can only be a heart in which the free, moral impulse to every good has the exclusive dominion and becomes an act in every moment.

Nevertheless, some thought to find in certain deeds of Jesus, something morally offensive. Thus, for example, in the arbitrariness of the boy who remained in the temple. But no word indicates that the tarrying of the boy was wrong. The very words of the twelve-year-old boy show that the consciousness of his perfect fellowship with God and the rule of this consciousness over his entire thought and life was then already the leading principle, over against which consideration for men had to recede.

We need only to mention the large-heartedness of Jesus in his intercourse with publicans and sinners; his supposed encroachment