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## “ONE JESUS.”

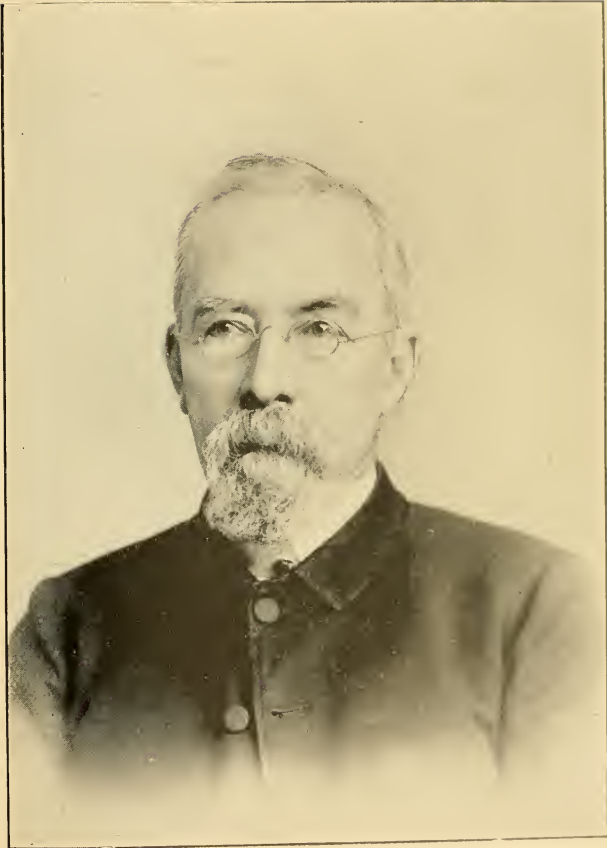
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“Against whom when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed: but had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.”—Acts xxv. 18, 19.

THE text occurs in that part of the Acts where St. Luke is recording the statement which the Roman governor, Festus, made of Paul's case to the Jewish prince, Agrippa. Agrippa and Bernice, his sister, had come to Cæsarea, where the Roman governor resided, to salute Festus, the recently appointed successor to Felix. This Agrippa was the son of the Herod whose miserable death is recorded in the twelfth chapter. He was a young man of only sixteen years of age at the time of his father's death, and was living, or going to school, as we would say, in the city of Rome, and enjoying there the friendship and patronage of the emperor Claudius, who was a sort of guardian of the young Jewish prince. In the course of the next ten or fifteen years, by successive grants from the Emperor Claudius and afterwards from Nero, Agrippa had obtained a large portion of his father's kingdom, though not the province of Judea. He was familiar with the Jewish laws from his youth, and had adopted the tenets of the Pharisaic sect. Josephus says, “He was a zealous Jew, at least externally, but not very popular on account of his heathen education and residence in Rome, and his equi-



vocal and somewhat neutral position between Jews and Gentiles.’

At the time of Agrippa’s visit to Cesarea, sixteen years had passed away since his father’s awful death there, and he was now thirty-two years of age. Festus, the new Roman governor, took advantage of this visit of Agrippa to consult him as one likely to feel more interest, and to be much better informed than himself on the points in question in the case of the man left in bonds by Felix. He recited, therefore, to Agrippa what had taken place, and remarked that nothing of the kind that he had been led to expect had appeared at the trial, that is, they brought no charge of legal or moral wrong as distinguished from mere error of opinion, but, said Festus, they differ with the prisoner on certain questions of Jewish theology or worship, and especially about *one Jesus*, now dead, whom Paul, the prisoner, however, affirms to be alive.

These two words of Festus, “one Jesus,” I select as the text, or rather as suggesting the theme of my sermon.

As it regards this Roman official, I infer from the language of Jewish and other historians, that Festus was an upright as well as an active magistrate, and in personal character he was a very much better man than his predecessor, Felix. But we have here to do with his language respecting Jesus Christ. “One Jesus.” How strangely now sound these words of Festus as we read or repeat them in the light of this age and in this period of the world and of the Christian church! “Certain questions of one Jesus.”

Festus, probably, was unable to understand why a difference of opinion about this Jew, Jesus, dead or alive, could be so important and so enlist their feelings. But this much is apparent and indisputable, that though

Festus did not see from his Roman and heathen standpoint why such a question or such a difference of opinion between Paul and the Jewish elders and priests should be of such importance, yet both Paul and the Jews did manifestly so regard it. Festus saw clearly that the whole exciting controversy and the main topics of controversy were questions about "one Jesus"—who he was and what had become of him. This question, which both Paul and the Jews considered a question of vast and vital importance, Festus, just because he was an unenlightened heathen, thought very trivial and insignificant. To him it was passing strange, utterly unaccountable, that Paul, an eminent and educated Jew, and a Roman citizen, too, by birth, should be willing to risk everything and life itself to maintain his views of Jesus, and that the Jews of the highest position in church and state be equally ready and anxious to assassinate him because of these opinions and his conduct in avowing and maintaining them. But the Roman and heathen magistrate was ignorant and mistaken. Neither Paul nor the Jewish officials exaggerated or over-estimated the importance and far-reaching influence of these questions. It is utterly impossible to exaggerate their importance. The question about this Jesus is a great one—important now as ever—the greatest ever discussed on earth by mortal man. And the reason why it is so great a question is that the person about whom the question is raised is great, and the issue or effect of this question upon one's eternal destiny is great—great beyond the power of human thought or language adequately to conceive or to express.

It is worthy of special note that for ages upon ages this question has grown in interest and felt importance as the years have rolled by. In the present age the un-

believing mind has been looking upon and studying this very question, and with nothing at all of the careless indifference that characterized these Roman officials. This question now agitates the mind of the civilized world more than any other.

It is strange and interesting, too, to look through the book of Acts and see how carelessly, if not contemptuously, all these men, Roman officials of high position and influence, wave away, as beneath their notice, so trifling a matter as these questions in dispute between Paul and his fellow-religionists as to this Jesus whenever the subject is brought before them. How differently the matter looked to a spectator in the middle or latter half of the first century and in the middle or latter half of the present nineteenth century! Yes, at that day and, alas, often still, worldly politicians, statesmen, so-called, high in office, clothed with great pomp and power, think or speak and write very lightly of events into which angels desire to look—events which fill heaven with rapture, and which will be the theme of grateful and adoring praises from multitudes which no man can number forever and forever. Well, just as with the rest, so it was with Festus. Says he to Agrippa, “When this man’s accusers stood up, they brought no accusation of such things as I supposed: but had certain questions against him about their own Jewish religion and worship, and about *one Jesus*.” And now I repeat with all possible emphasis, is this question as to who and what Jesus is a small or trivial matter? Let us consider it as the later Scriptures and human history illustrate the person and work and dignity of Jesus Christ.

I say, then, (1), *That merely as a human personage in this world’s history, Jesus is great—great as a man, great as a teacher of men, great as a reformer of morals, reli-*



gion and civilization. I cannot, of course, enlarge upon this as I would wish, for the three-fold view which I merely indicate would afford rich material for more than an entire discourse.

But let us look at it a while. I deliberately affirm that the life and teachings of Christ divide the morals, the religion, the sentiments and the civilization of the world, and have been doing it ever since his public teaching in Galilee and Judea. Who is Jesus? Thirty years he spent in Nazareth, a poor village not once mentioned in the Old Testament or in Josephus. The New Testament makes no secret of the place which Jesus occupied in the social scale. He was of humble birth and connections, working at the trade of a carpenter, in a private and obscure life. For three years he ministered and taught publicly in Jerusalem, but chiefly in the rural settlements and in several of the obscurer towns and villages of Galilee, and then he suffered death by crucifixion. And yet his thoughts and words have been the inspiration and incentive that has educated and developed men and nations, and produced whatever of real culture and civilization the past ages and the present possess and enjoy, enkindling hopes of still better in the wider spread and heartier reception and influence of his teachings. As a reformer of faith, of morals, of religion, of life, of men, of society and of nations, what name and character has been and is to-day so influential and mighty as the name of Jesus? He left behind him a few spoken words; he never wrote a line. And if all the repetitions, or records of the same events and discourses, in the four Gospels were omitted, the entire and continuous record that would remain would be but a few pages. And while the heroes, statesmen, poets and philosophers of Athens or of Rome, her emperors and



soldiers, or this man Festus, his predecessors and successors are dead—yes, doubly dead and gone, so far as present and living power and influence and love and veneration are concerned, Jesus Christ is to-day exalted in the very loftiest niche of admiration and veneration by millions upon millions to whom he is dearer than life. Of all lives ever lived, the most influential confessedly as a man, as a teacher, as a reformer, was the life of this Jesus. Such is the testimony of the centuries. There is absolutely nothing like it in the whole history of the world. The uninspired pages of history attest it.

(2), But further, this Jesus is great because *he is the central subject of the entire Bible*. The Jewish nation, its purpose, its history, its guidance and its Bible, was to prepare the way of “one Jesus.” The whole of it—the nation’s history and the nation’s Bible—like John the Baptist, was the voice of one crying in a wilderness world, “Prepare ye the way of the Lord!” His person, his character, his mission, his life and death, is the theme that explains all. Narrative, history, genealogy, prophecy, sacrifices, ablutions, parables, miracles—all point to and illustrate the name and work of Jesus. The light of truth and mercy and hope, the light of grace and salvation, the light of the Old Testament, the light of the New Testament, the light of all their teachings to guide, to console, to cheer, to sanctify and to save, the light of all hope for man’s future here and forever, all comes from this Jesus, well called in prophecy and by himself, “the Light of the world,” “the Sun of righteousness.” The natural sunlight and color, the variegated and radiant beauty that glows all over the face of the earth, that glitters from the rippling water, that paints the leaves and foliage and flowers of spring-time and summer, that sparkles on the dew drops, that

colors the evening sky with entrancing beauty and splendor, is not more dependent upon the sun in the heavens than is the light and beauty and blessedness of the Bible, its histories, teachings and prophecies dependent upon Jesus. The prime, main object of the Scriptures is to describe and set forth the Mediator, Jesus Christ, and his work and kingdom of grace and glory here and hereafter. "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy;" that is, the grand end and scope of all revelation is to bear witness concerning "one Jesus."

(3), But further, this Jesus is great *because of his great, his transcendent work of atonement and redemption.* By the atonement we mean Christ's satisfying divine justice by his suffering and death in the place of sinners. The direct and central design and effect of Christ's death was to propitiate the principle of justice in the divine nature. He has satisfied all the demands of law upon which the favor and fellowship of God were suspended. This he did by his perfect obedience and sacrifice of himself which he offered up unto God. How clearly is this stated and reiterated by St. Paul and by all the New Testament writers. "Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins; that he (God) might be just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus." Contemplate for a while *the priesthood of Christ—himself as priest offering himself as a sacrifice* to satisfy divine justice and reconcile us to God. It is the grandest thought and the most vital and precious truth of revealed religion! It is, without doubt, the sublimest event in the annals of time or the records of eternity. The death of Jesus Christ was peculiar. It was not a providential event to which he was sub-

jected as you or I are subjected. It was a priestly act which he achieved. He died as a triumphant agent or actor; he prevailed against death to live until he himself said, "It is finished," and then bowed his head in assent and died—died not merely voluntarily, but by positive priestly action giving himself to God. The cross is itself and justly styled a "chariot of triumph."

Looked at from another point of view, what a spirit of sublime devotion to God and of self-sacrifice for man does the cross and death of Jesus display! The position of Jesus was unparalleled, exceptional and transcendently sublime. Standing before the altar, he confesses the guilt of his brethren, glorifies the divine justice, honors and magnifies the law of God (the very law that dooms them to woe and requires him to suffer), assumes the sinner's place, acknowledges the demands of truth and righteousness, adores the divine character and lays down his life—body and soul—as a ransom and atonement for theirs upon the altar; freely and voluntarily "does and suffers all this, rather than that guilty and miserable man should perish, or that the divine government should be insulted with impunity."

Festus never heard, never uttered a name so significant, so rich, so suggestive of goodness and greatness, as the name of "*one Jesus*." Why, at the time he carelessly repeated this name, and for ages upon ages since, and in all the ages forever to come,

' Floods of everlasting light  
 Freely flash before him;  
 Myriads, with supreme delight,  
 Instantly adore him;  
 Angelic trumps resound his fame,  
 Lutes of lucid gold proclaim  
 All the music of his name;  
 Heaven echoing the theme.

Sweetest sound in seraph's song,  
 Sweetest note on mortal's tongue,  
 Sweetest carol ever sung,  
 Jesus,—Jesus,—Jesus!"

(4), But, again, this Jesus is *great in his person and nature as the incarnate Son of God*. For this Jesus was Immanuel, God incarnate, God with us. St. John terms him as he announces him as the subject of his Gospel, "The Word of God"—God's *utterance* to man. God speaks to the world through Jesus over and above what he speaks in nature. I readily admit and maintain that God speaks in nature. In its scenery, processes, productions; in its very silence God speaks to his rational offspring, and speaks intelligently and impressively. God speaks in providence, in its operations, ordinary and extraordinary—in its history and its laws. God speaks in the very nature and constitution of man; in the products of his intellect, his imagination and his tastes, in the achievements of science and art, in the creations of human genius, and in all the utterances of human wisdom and piety, God speaks. But once, only once, in all time, the Godhead tabernacled in flesh.

"One night while lowly shepherd swains  
 Their fleecy charge attended,  
 A light burst o'er Judea's plains  
 Unutterably splendid.

'Far in the dusky Orient  
 A star, unknown in story,  
 Arose to flood the firmament  
 With more than morning glory.

"For heaven drew nearer earth that night—  
 Flung wide its pearly portals—  
 Sent forth from all its realms of light  
 Its radiant immortals.

“They hovered in the golden air,  
 Their golden censers swinging,  
 And woke the drowsy shepherds there  
 With their seraphic singing.”

The word was made flesh, dwelt in our nature, and from within this marvellous veil gave forth its holy and grand announcements. In the person of Jesus God speaks; through his life and in his life as he speaks nowhere else. The first, the lowest, but yet also the last and highest duty of the world is to listen and believe. The command to all ages and to all men is to listen and believe. That command was given of old in Palestine from the open sky beneath which “one Jesus” was standing, and the words are echoing to-day, “This is my beloved Son; hear ye him.” And adds St. Peter in the second recorded sermon in the Acts: “Hear him in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you, for every soul that will not hear him shall be destroyed.”

(5), But further, this Jesus, of whom the heathen Festus spoke so carelessly, is great *because at that very moment he was and is now* “*Head over all things for his body the church.*” He was at that moment in which Festus uttered the flippant words, “one Jesus,” at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, “angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him”—aye, more, “Far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world but also in that which is to come.” Every event that was then occurring, or that is now occurring, great or small, until his second coming, did occur, is occurring, and will occur only by, with and under the consent or direction or control of the mediatorial providence of this same Jesus.

“Rejoice, the Saviour reigns,  
 The God of truth and love ;  
 When he had purged our stains,  
 He took his seat above.  
 Lift up the heart, lift up the voice ;  
 Rejoice aloud, ye saints, rejoice.

“His kingdom cannot fail ;  
 He rules o'er earth and heaven.  
 The keys of death and hell  
 Are to our Jesus given.  
 Lift up the heart, lift up the voice ;  
 Rejoice aloud, ye saints, rejoice.”

(6), But further, this Jesus about whom this Roman official spoke so slightingly, if not contemptuously, is great *because he is to be the supreme and final judge and awarder of the everlasting destinies of men and angels.* Festus himself, and every human being is to stand at the judgment seat of one Jesus and receive from his lips his everlasting and irrevocable doom. “The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son, that all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father.” “He hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance (*i. e.*, indubitable evidence) unto all men by having raised him from the dead.” Yes, my hearers, a day of searching and righteous investigation and judgment is coming, when each and all must stand before an omniscient and almighty judge, “one Jesus,” who will “render to all according to their works.” Oh! how terribly the tables will be turned, as

“On that day, that dreadful day  
 When man to judgment wakes from clay,”

Festus himself will recognize upon the throne in glorious and judicial majesty, that same Jesus, about whom,



thirty years after his resurrection, the Jews and St. Paul, in his presence and before his Roman judgment seat, had disputed. Yes, he had heard them dispute the question (which he thought trivial and superstitious), whether one Jesus was dead or alive; and there he beholds him on the throne, as supreme judge, assigning the destinies of the race.

(7), But further and lastly: this Jesus is great *because such is his connection with the laws and government and throne of God, that every human being in the world (Festus, Agrippa, Bernice, and you and I) must, of necessity, sustain a personal relation to him.* We must be found “*in him*” partaking of his redemption and salvation, or “*out of (and apart from) him,*” and under the bondage and curse of sin, and hopelessly and forever lost. No question is more personal, individual, important and momentous than the question, “What think ye of Christ?”

This matter cannot be avoided or evaded. We must consider and settle it. It is like the question which Pilate, in his confusion, embarrassment and difficulty (how to dispose of Jesus), asked the Jews: “What shall I do with Jesus?” Yes, this awful and mighty question, with all its issues for eternal life or for eternal death, each of us has to settle. How will you decide it? Sooner or later, and often frequently, to every one comes the question which Pilate asked of the Jews, “What, then, shall I do with Jesus who is called the Christ?” If a man cares nothing for the principles of science or art, or takes no interest in politics, he simply lets the subject alone. But this is a matter and a question which you cannot let alone, and which will not let you alone. It will be answered; it must be answered, and it can be answered but in one of two ways.



And no man can settle the matter for you. Each soul must make its own reply. Careless, indifferent hearer, do you think to evade replying to this all-important question while, and as long as, you live? I tell you, if you pass your life thus, you have already answered it unconsciously to yourself, it may be, but it has had your reply in the rejection of him.

But when at the judgment you stand before him, the question then will not be, "What shall I do with Jesus?" The one thought will be "Oh! what will he do with me?"