

## All That Is Written

What happens in the life of Jesus is something more than remarkable or impressive. There are lots of people in history whose lives made humanity different, or changed the experience of other people. But Jesus is not one more member of the Great and the Good. He claims for himself a dominant significance in the life of every other human being, and places himself apart from all others in his meaning. He claims to define humanity and to judge humanity.

### Fulfilment

Jesus doesn't think of himself as one of the prophets, but as the one the prophets were struggling to predict. He doesn't claim to have some good religious ideas, but that he is the very heart of divine truth. In the fourth Gospel he is preaching *himself*. His favourite words for beginning to teach are *I Am*. But what lends this behaviour its curious power is the way this conviction about himself takes him to the crucifixion. Why would someone who claims to embody the meaning of the Cosmos allow himself to be nailed to a cross and publicly executed? Although he doesn't *make* this happen, we've got to admit that he *allows* it to happen, and rejects every offer to *stop* it from happening. He clearly sees that his task in life is only to be fulfilled by the acceptance of this fearsome death. He insists on its vital necessity, even though he can't make his best friends understand why.

### Mystery!

This is no megalomania. His willingness to help, his selflessness, his preference for outcasts and the insignificant, and the chosen poverty of his life all speak of a distaste for earthly power or influence that rules out any lust for dominance over others. The acceptance of condemnation and execution is not compatible with monomania either. His life is not a trip into self-aggrandisement. Why, then, does his perception of people's hatred and rejection only make him determined to persevere, even at the cost of his life? This mystery does not easily yield to any psychological explanation I've heard; our

tendency to explain it in religious terms therefore looks more and more the right way. He died because his religious faith did not allow him to evade death, and furthermore because his faith never conceived of death as the ultimate evil. The only absolute evil *we* can think of is the loss of God; but for Jesus Christ that was not a possibility. Once, therefore, he had seen where his obedience to the Father was leading him, he never questioned its rightness, even though his humanity was appalled at the Way of the Cross. The act of *giving everything to his Father* came as naturally to him as breathing does to us. It was not something questionable or new. The experience of being nailed to a Cross was appalling; but his divine nature prevailed in all things, and his humanity "learned obedience" because of it.

### It Was Written

His understanding of Scripture was the ready handmaid of this obedience in his personal life. He expected Scripture to speak to him with perfect clarity, and to fit him like a glove, and it did. He spent his life reading it. He wanted, with his whole heart, to do no other. He accepted the Divine Law as the word of his Father, and could say at the end, *I have kept your word*. He could have said with the prophets *When your Word came I devoured it*. So when he told the crowds *I am the true bread that gives life to the world* he was asking them to accept him as he had accepted Scripture, to be their bread, their staff of life. This is the fact that lies behind the earliest and most intensive programme of the first Christian Church: a dogged, fiercely attentive re-reading of the whole of Scripture in the light of the dawning realisation that the whole divine text had been quite simply *fulfilled* in the life of this one, this utterly unique man. So the journey to Emmaus and the sequel to it in Jerusalem is spent on exactly that: the astonishing, totally new understanding of the Scripture, and the characteristic burning of the hearts that hear it, as He opens their minds to understand it

for the first time.  
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