

VIII. - The Curse on Capernaum.

And Jesus, coming to them, spake unto them, saying: To me is given all power in heaven and in earth. MATTH. 28:18.

Christ, then, is the King of his own people, the Head of the congregation, which is his body, expressed in figurative speech by himself thus: "I am the Vine, and ye are the branches," or also represented by the image of the Shepherd with the sheep of his flock. In this bond of King and people, of Head and body, of body, of vine and branches, of shepherd and sheep, lies at the center of Jesus' high dignity. Because, however, this bond begins with being purely spiritual, it has happened to more than one that he understood all this in a merely metaphorical sense, as if it did not mean anything else than that the Christ, through his Spirit, exercises a certain influence on the hearts of those who acknowledge him as their Savior. There are even a few who make the meaning of this connection so ordinary that Jesus' influence on the hearts of his own is taken to be almost identical to the influence that one person can exert on another, only slightly higher in degree. The influence of Jesus' Spirit on the spirits of His own is then used to confirm their faith, to brighten their hopes, and to keep the glow of love burning in them. And this spiritual and moral effect, one imagines, is then called "Jesus' Kingship over our hearts," and the richer atmosphere that arises from this is metaphorically presented as "the Kingdom of Heaven. It follows that, from the point of view of those who judge in this way, it is safe to let slip all these transferable titles of King and Head. Seen in this light, they are nothing but meaningless names. They are of no use to the congregation. Why then not abolish these dead-end names and speak clearly, briefly and simply of Jesus' influence, i.e., Jesus' spiritual influence on the hearts of those who profess Him? Then all mysticism falls away. Then you speak of the influence of Jesus' example, of the influence of his word, and of the influence exerted by the organization called the Church, created by him, on the world, and especially on his confessors. But then, you see, the kingship of Jesus has also been fraudulently nullified, and it is precisely against this that our protest stands. That is going against Scripture, that is going against Jesus himself, it is the melting down of the highly sacred in the crucible of the vulgar moral concepts of the rationalizing world.

Not our modern moral teachers, but Jesus himself and his apostles must teach us what understanding we have to form of his Kingship, so that it may correspond to reality; and if we go to school with them, it immediately becomes clear and crystal-clear that in Jesus' Kingship there is something quite different from moral-spiritual

influence, that there is power, authority and supremacy, and that this power even exists to an almost unlimited degree. This first came to light in Jesus' doom judgment on Capernaum. That sentence of doom read: "You Capernaum, who were exalted to heaven, you will be cast down to hell. This is twofold: 1°. that Jesus' three-year stay in Capernaum is indicated by Himself as being "exalted to heaven', and 2°. that Jesus had the authority to pronounce such an irrevocable sentence on this city. A judgment which has already been fulfilled in Capernaum, because it has completely disappeared from the face of the earth. It no longer exists. Such a dreadful statement goes far beyond the scope of what a spiritual leader, moral teacher and religious founder could say. Whoever, as a spiritual leader or moral teacher or religious founder, put himself in the foreground in such a way that he called his residence in this or that city an honor for that place, by which it was "higher to heaven', would show by that very statement that he had lowered himself in moral pride. And he who, because such a city would not acknowledge its highness, pronounced the sentence that it should be cast down to hell because of it, would be considered insane. Therefore, never read over such strong statements of Jesus. They are statements that no one would ever have put on his lips. They are statements which carry the mark of authenticity in their complete deviation from the ordinary. And they are statements in which the self-consciousness of Jesus comes to the fore, as of One clothed with a power and dignity that far surpasses all the highness and majesty of earthly princes. But it did not stop there; Jesus wanted to add: "I say to you that in the day of judgment it will be more tolerable for the country of Sodom than for you inhabitants of Capernaum. Now the sin of Sodom stands throughout the

Scripture as the greatest abomination, and fortunately it may be added that moral public opinion still points back to Sodom as the city where human self-degradation had gone furthest. But, my dear, what do you want to preach to us about Jesus' royal power as a purely spiritual and moral supremacy? Or what do you think would await the moralist among us, who thirsts to exalt himself so high that his lips would say: Falling into the sin of Sodom is less terrible than daring to reject me. And yet, that, and nothing less, is what Jesus, your holy Jesus, said.

Jesus himself must have been impressed for a moment by the reversal of all proportions that his bold statement about Capernaum had to make on the public among whom he found himself. So strong was the sharp contradiction between the common moral view of those in Israel who set the tone, and between the position taken by him with his statements about Capernaum, forced itself upon him, that,

according to the story, Jesus sought salvation for the distressing, that lay in this, by lifting up his soul to his Father, saying: "I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to the little children, to the simple ones that follow me." Soulfully, the connection of this prayer with His doom sentence on Capernaum explains itself. What Jesus had said about Capernaum was in direct opposition to the accepted moral concepts. It was spoken from a higher order, from that order which does not take earthly life for granted, but embraces earth and heaven, and counts them according to a higher, holier order. The teachings and moral exhortations of the wise and intelligent of this world were diametrically opposed to that order, and it was only the children, i.e., the simple people who adhered to him, who could empathize with these higher orders without being irritated. That's why Jesus here calls his Father "Lord of heaven and earth", which points to this higher order, and then sharply contrasts the moral and spiritual leaders in ordinary life, "the changed and wise", and the bared and therefore open minds that opened up to him, here referred to as "children". In order to make it even clearer that we are talking about higher ordinances here, Jesus even adds: Yes, Father, for so it has been our good pleasure to do.

This exaltation of soul to his Father was evidently not whispered quietly or in secret, but spoken in spiritual ecstasy before the ears of his disciples. How else could it have been reported to us in the Gospel? And now Jesus does not leave it at that, but turning to his disciples, he now comes to this all-embracing statement: "All things have been handed over to me from my Father." His sentence of doom upon Capernaum, because its inhabitants had rejected him, was thus not merely an expectation that it would come to this; not merely a prophecy that it would come to this; but a judicial sentence, spoken by one who had power to judge in this way; for to him was that power, to him all things were given by the Father. And as if to further illustrate the surprise that lay in this for his young people, Jesus now points out his completely unique position. "No one knows the Son except the Father, nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and whomever the Son wishes to reveal." This is the declaration not of the Divine mystery, but of His power, by which He was entitled to pronounce such a sentence of doom. This the people in Capernaum could not understand, not even his disciples. His wonderful power is of such a nature that only the Father knows it, because among men no one understands who the Son is. Not one single creature, only the Father knows the

Son. And it is related that no one knows the Father except the Son, and that only he who has received the Son knows the Father.

That only he who wishes to learn from the Son what the Father and His ordinances are, can be introduced to the mystery of heaven and earth. Jesus returns to this mystery of the ordinances of the higher order, which encompasses heaven and earth, in the conclusion. There are two spiritual yokes. That of the wise and prudent world, which imposes a yoke upon men, which presses them down and under which they bow; and on the other hand, the yoke of the higher ordinances, which brings rest and revives the soul. Hence, right next to the judgment of Capernaum, which rejected him, is to be read this appeal: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest, for my yoke is soft, and my burden is light."

This statement about Capernaum, taken in its context, is therefore one of the most important statements, which the Gospel offers us, for Jesus' Kingship. It does not mention the name or the title of King. One must therefore not take the words: "All things have been handed over to me," in isolation, as is so easily the case when texts are merely learned from outside. This all-decisive statement, that all things have been given to him, must be taken in connection with what precedes and immediately follows about Capernaum and the two yokes. It contains a revelation of royal authority and royal power, which directly binds both the authority and that power to his person in a way that cuts off any comparison of Jesus with other moral teachers, spiritual educators and religious founders. It reveals another world, another and higher order. It is the outline of another kingdom that is entirely different from the kingdom of the world. The door is opened here, which grants you a far-off insight into a kingdom of heaven that stands in opposition to the kingdom of earth, and yet is coming to rule that earth as well, and that kingdom is "the kingdom of heaven", in which, by virtue of what Jesus himself declares here, no one but he is conceivable as the King.

This declaration by Jesus, that all things have been given to him by the Father, does not stand alone. It occurs repeatedly, in modified form and in other contexts. John the Baptist had already declared: "The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand" (John 3:35); and Jesus himself repeated what he said on the occasion of the judgment of doom on Capernaum three more times. The first time at Bethesda, when he said: "The Father has given me power to judge also," and this not because he was the Son of God, no, it is expressly stated: "Because he is the

Son of Man. This whole appointment of Jesus as Judge, to judge one day all those who are in the graves, coincides with what he said at Capernaum, that all things have been given over to him. From that given supremacy over all things, flows his judicial power, and it is that judicial power that is most strongly expressed here. Here the power of Jesus' Kingship is extended immediately out of the circle of his own people over all souls. Now we are accustomed to a judicial power that occupies a certain independent place next to the kingship. Unthinking professors of constitutional law have even proclaimed the doctrine that sovereignty is not one but that it falls into three parts, and that one of these three parts is the judiciary. This counter-intuitive doctrine has also penetrated the minds of many Christians, and this means that they no longer see in Jesus the direct connection between his Judicial Power and his Kingship. In the days in which Jesus spoke, and especially in Israel, this was unthinkable. The kings themselves had the judicial power in their hands. Solomon's first judgement gives a hint of this. He who exercised the supreme judicial power was naturally the King, as also among us the better teachers of constitutional law still teach that the judicial power flows from the Crown, and that therefore justice is still administered in the name of the King. It is thus contradictory to recognize Jesus' judicial power, but to see in it something else than an attribute of his Kingship. On the contrary, wherever Jesus is indicated as the Judge who passes sentence without appeal, that judicial power contains the strongest and clearest indication of His Royal Sovereignty.

Jesus Himself is the unvouchable witness here. Nowhere in Scripture is Jesus' majesty, as Judge, more decisively pronounced, than in Matt. 25:31, and, what do we read there? Again that it does not speak of the Son of God, but of the Son of Man. When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory, and all the nations will be gathered before him. And when the verdict, the judgment, comes, it says with so many words: "Then the King will say to those who are at his right hand" and so again in vs. 40: "And the King will answer them and say. Both thus summarized here as well: 1°. Judicial power not only over the professed, but over all the earth, over all peoples; and 2°. expressing His Kingship in that judicial power. King and Judge is one. The King himself is the Judge. The Judge without appeal, and without the right of pardon above him, cannot but be King. This preaching of Jesus' rightful and therefore royal-judicial dignity runs through the entire apocalyptic literature. We must all be revealed before the Judgment Seat of Christ," is the keynote of everything the Apostles reveal to us about the end of days, and in the Revelation to

John at Pathmos it is the same theme over and over again. "I saw heaven opened, so he tells us, and behold a white horse, and he who sat on it was called Faithful and True, and he judges."

Just before Gethsemane, Jesus more solemnly sealed his supremacy over all things, when he said in the supreme prayer, this time not to people, but to the Father: "Father, the time has come, glorify now your Son, as you have given him power over all flesh. This puts an even holier seal on this piece of our confession. Sometimes a superficial reader will imagine that what Jesus said earlier about "his power over all things' and about his judicial authority should not be understood so literally. It should be understood more in the sense that, after all, spirit rules over matter, and that therefore Jesus' spirit, as the richest and purest spirit, intimately and automatically decides on judgment for all spiritual life. It hardly needs saying that a serious study of the context in which Jesus made such statements, and the form in which he framed them, would cut off all such interpretations. With Jesus, grandiloquence, even in form, is out of the question. But precisely in order to cut off such claims, it is worth so much to us that Jesus, just before his journey to Gethsemane and Golgotha, in that holy moment when he dedicated his Apostles and his Church to his Father in the High Priestly Prayer, not only retained that same consciousness of power that had been given to him over all flesh, but even placed it in the foreground at the beginning of his prayer as the ground on which his prayer rested.

And even here Jesus does not stop.

In his last word, which he spoke to his disciples on the Mount of Olives before his ascension, he repeated: "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. A statement so bold, so revealing, and so strongly telling, that the unbelieving critics were bound to declare this word simply false. The method that is always used. If Jesus speaks about the ordinary spiritual and moral life, then one can rely on what is written. Then what one reads in the Gospels is real. After all, all this is convenient for those who deny Jesus' kingship, and it fits in with their image that Jesus shines as a spiritual leader, moral teacher and founder of religion. Everything, on the other hand, that in Jesus' statements reveals a much higher, an elevated, a much more majestic self-confidence, contradicts the image that they paint of Jesus, and is therefore first weakened by false interpretations, then stripped of its real meaning by over-conceived interpretations, and finally placed under suspicion and declared to be false; and not a few members of the congregation,

who are not in the know, allow themselves to be taken in by that. However, it is precisely this attempt by the critics to ignore and nullify all such statements by Jesus that increases their significance for us. The last word of Jesus, before he ascended into heaven, had of course to be a word of great and far-reaching significance. It was his testament to his disciples. Those young people were still trapped by the idea that Jesus would indeed be King, but only of Israel, and so we read that even in that last moment they were still asking him: "Here, will you in this time re-establish the Kingdom of Israel? In contrast to this limitation, Jesus immediately gives the commandment to preach His name to the uttermost parts of the earth. In a similar vein to what He had said on the mountain in Galilee: All power in heaven and earth has been given to Me, from which He derives this commandment: Go ye therefore, and teach all nations. That all this should now serve to extend His Kingdom spiritually, was self-evident, for only where His Kingdom is extended spiritually can it come to the recognition of its Kingship. Thus Jesus had also said in the High Priestly Prayer: "You have given me power over all flesh, that to whomsoever you have given me I may give them eternal life. And so now also here: I have been given all power in heaven and on earth; go therefore and make disciples of all nations, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you, and sealing them with my baptism."

But even though the aim must always be to preserve souls, the world, humanity, our human race, and thus to bring about the triumph of the spiritual Kingdom, the expressions that indicate Jesus' royal power are of such far-reaching significance that they imply the right to decide about everything that will decide about the fate of the peoples and humanity. In not one of these statements do we find the slightest limitation. Nowhere do we find a limitation of his power to the spiritual domain. From the beginning to the end, the words are always all-encompassing, all-inclusive. And since it is now certain that the whole course of things, the whole course of history, the whole destiny of peoples in every field, influences their suitability or unsuitability to open their hearts to Jesus; And it is equally certain that the fate of the Church on this earth is continually determined by all kinds of external events, so that there are entire regions, for example in Asia Minor and on the north coast of Africa, where the Church once flourished and later collapsed under the course of events, So it could not be otherwise, that the future of the Church, and also of the Kingdom of Heaven, could only be guaranteed by a King who had power not only in the spiritual sphere, but also over all these events that decided the fate of the nations. To isolate the course of spiritual things from the

course of earthly events is false spiritualism, which is contradicted by the whole course of history. And now, with this undeniable fact of the relationship between spiritual and earthly things in mind, read and reread Jesus' definite statements: "All things have been given to me by the Father. "Thou have given me power over all flesh," and: Then you will have put to rest any interpretation which would make the slightest exception to this, and you will have decided that Jesus presents himself as a Shepherd of the sheep, as the Head of the congregation, but also as the King in his Majesty, who did not receive only a nominal sovereignty, but who is vested with all authority and all power necessary for the preservation and completion of his Kingdom.