

Perhaps in no case, has an error been originated by the perusal of the Scriptures. The error has sprung up first, and then, the prejudices of its supporters having been enlisted in its favor, they come to the Scriptures not to ascertain what they say, but to discover passages which, where isolated, and interpreted, not by the aid of scripture in general, but by the colored light of a foregone conclusion, appear to yield a meaning favorable to that conclusion. The true way to ascertain what a controverted passage means, is, to keep in remembrance the circumstances in which, the person by whom, and the persons to whom it was spoken; and by placing ourselves in the position of the latter, to estimate in what sense we would understand the words, had they been originally addressed to ourselves.

If we take up point by point, in this passage, in the order of the conversation as held by Christ with his Apostles, and thus follow the thought through all its windings, we may succeed in arriving at some definite understanding of its real purport. The first point is our Saviour's question, with the disciple's reply. Next his inquiry as to the Apostle's own idea, with the reply of Simon Peter as their representative. Third, the consequent blessing. And fourth, the two promises.

I. "Whom do men say that I, the Son of Man am?" "What now do the people think, say, believe of me, after all that I have hitherto done and taught?" Why was this question asked at all? Not certainly out of ignorance on the part of him who, knowing what was in man, knew, therefore, the opinion generally prevalent regarding him among the people. Neither, therefore, was curiosity the motive. If the succeeding part of the sacred narrative be examined, it will be found that about this time, the public labors of our Lord were brought, to a great extent, to a close; that thenceforth he performed but few miracles; and, though accompanied still, occasionally, by great multitudes, that his teachings began gradually to be more confined to his immediate followers. The next chapter begins with a most significant event—the transfiguration—which was undoubtedly a turning point in the life of our Saviour. To the transfiguration, the discourse before us is preliminary and indispensable.—Indispensable, because, unless the disciples were, some of them, prepared to acknowledge Jesus to be the Christ, unless they comprehended with some degree of fullness, the peculiarity of his character, they could not be taken to witness so remarkable a circumstance; for they would, in no sense, have understood its meaning and intention. In going in and out among the people, the disciples could not fail frequently to hear their observation upon the character of Jesus. Mingled with the voices of some were the more reverent conjectures of others; and as we learn from the reply of the disciples, not one of those con-

jectures reached the truth. It was important, therefore, for the sake of the disciples themselves, to ascertain, by their own acknowledgment, what opinion they had been induced to form, and how far, if at all, that opinion had been modified by the observations of the people.

Further; Jesus was now about to prepare them, in plain terms, for his death,—that event which formed the subject of the remarkable conversation upon the Mount, where he was transfigured. We know, from the after history, that the death of Jesus took the disciples by surprise, notwithstanding the frequency of its announcement. It was requisite, therefore, that their faith should be strengthened in every way, to prepare them at all for that blow, seemingly so fatal to their hopes,—that they should be satisfied, that, however unlooked for, all these things were in reality parts of one great plan, of which he, whom they followed was the centre and sum. The confession to which Jesus gradually led them, was intended in a manner to pledge them to the conviction that, however mysterious and inexplicable any occurrences of his future life might be, they could not be more mysterious than the fact which they were now about to confess,—that he, who stood in humble guise before them, was yet the "Christ the Son of the living God."

Keeping in view, then, that this was a turning point in the life of Jesus, that a clear and decided conception of his character was indispensable to prepare the disciples for his transfiguration, and equally indispensable to qualify them for familiarity with the forthcoming announcements of his death, so that, although they steadily disbelieved these until fulfilled, they should nevertheless hold fast to that confidence in his Messiahship, to which they now pledged themselves, we may understand why this question was put. "What do men think of me—this man whom they see and hear, with all his works and words?—of me, this Jesus?" For all his past teaching and acting had, as their principal aim, to manifest who he was,—to awaken and establish faith in his person.

*The Reply.*—From the replies of the disciples, it appears that while all viewed Jesus as some great one, and placed him at least in close connection, according to their several prevalent ideas, with the coming Messiah, no one anywhere said of him that he himself was the Messiah; all held him in too slight estimation for that. The Jews, however, were of opinion that the first resurrection was connected with the appearance of the Messiah, and the setting up of his kingdom; and so the idea readily suggested itself that forerunners of the resurrection would precede that mighty period. Among these forerunners they expected the prophets. John the Baptist has just been slain. But we find before this, that his slayer, and doubtless many