JESUS AND HIS BIBLE—

In studying the teaching of Jesus it is vastly interesting to know his attitude to the Bible. Of course we realize that he only had the Old Testament. This Book as he knew it had three divisions—the Law, The Prophets, and The Writings. The first was looked upon as of greatest importance, the latter as the least. Naturally this would not be our view today, nor was it necessarily the view of Jesus. We look upon the Law as least important. The Prophets, and the devotional books, or the Writings, especially the Book of Psalms, as exceedingly modern and up-to-date.

It is evident that Jesus regarded the Bible with great reverence and respect. He was trained in the faith that the Book was inspired. For him it contained the word of God. There were those of his day that looked upon every part of the Bible as equally inspired. There are those who regard the Bible in that fashion in our day. These maintain with almost fanatical devotion that it is all equally true from cover to cover. They declare further that if they were convinced that one part was the least in error they would straightway throw aside all parts. Some holding this view are very earnest and devout people, while others treat the Bible as a kind of good luck piece. They have a superstitious reverence for it but do not read it.

It is easy to see that Jesus had no such superstitious view. In quoting the 110th Psalm, he declares that David spoke in the Holy Spirit. By this he means that David was inspired. But Jesus had no mechanical view of inspiration. He did not believe that God dictated his message to men as one might dictate to a
stenographer. He believed that men's minds were illuminated by a light of God, that some thus illuminated saw more clearly than others. He believed that while God was constantly broadcasting some had better receiving sets than others. Naturally, therefore, he did not have the same regard for every passage of scripture. There was some that he either amended or pushed aside, some that he wove into his teaching, some upon which he fed his soul.

I.

Look first at some of the passages that Jesus felt it necessary to enlarge or clear. During the Sermon on the Mount, he declared his position in the following language, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law and the prophets. I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill." His hearers were naturally eager to know how he stood. Whether he intended to throw the Bible aside or to be its loyal defender. He made his position plain. "He was not come to destroy. He was come to fulfill, to bring to completion, to change the half truth into a whole truth." If the Old Testament had been perfect, the New would not have been written.

Look how Jesus went about bringing the law to fulfillment. "Ye have heard," he declared, "that it was said of them of old time, but I say unto you." Who said these things of old time? They were the words of the great saints of Hebrew history. They were the messages of the great poets and prophets. But great as they were, they were not perfect. Ingersol startled the Christian world years ago by speaking on the Mistakes of Moses. How silly to get alarmed over the fact that Moses made mistakes. Every man that ever lived made mistakes. so Jesus had to clear certain teachings.

1. Take the teaching on marriage for instance. We have mentioned that before. When Jesus came, a man might put away his wife for any cause. His authority for doing so was to be found in the Book of Deuteronomy. It was a law that bore the
sanction of Moses. I think this Book was perhaps a favorite with Jesus. But when the Pharisee quoted it in defense of their position, Jesus brushed it aside and said, "Moses permitted such practice because it was the best that he could do with a bunch of barbarians. But such a practice is not in conformity with the law of God. Here is his plan. "For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they twain shall be one flesh. What God hath joined together let no man put asunder."

2. The Sabbath. At the time of Jesus the Sabbath had ceased to be a day of privilege and had become in a measure a day of terror. There were so many things that one could not do on the Sabbath that it took a wise man to know them all. Yet, the slightest violations brought a terrible penalty. A man might be put to death for violations of the Sabbath. The Pharisees acted on the principle that man was made just to keep the Sabbath. Jesus brushed such foolish and false teaching aside declaring that the purpose of the Sabbath was humanitarian. "Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."

3. Jesus deepened the meaning of the law against adultery. In his day a woman was guilty of adultery if she were unfaithful to a marriage relation regardless of who was partner in her sin. A man was guilty only when he took another man's wife. But Jesus passed behind the guilty act to the guilty thought, the unholy desire. "Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery in his heart."

4. In the same fashion he deepened the meaning of the law against killing. All the Old Testament forbade was the striking of the deadly blow. It was not wrong to desire to kill, it was only wrong actually to kill. But Jesus forbade the motive. He said, "Whosoever is angry at his brother is in danger of the judgement."

5. Jesus found the law against false swearing needed amending. "Ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself,
but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths. But Jesus amended this law by saying, "Swear not at all, but let your communication be yes and no." Jesus is not here forbidding the taking of a legal oath. He himself accepted a legal oath when he stood in judgement before the high priests. He is forbidding what this form of swearing is constantly leading to, and that is lying.

It is easy to see how this habit began. When a man made a statement that was not believed he took an oath. If he did not take an oath he did not feel bound to tell the truth. Little by little he had to take a stronger and stronger oath. There were a great many oaths that ceased to be binding. If he swore by the altar he was not bound, but if he swore upon the gift of the altar he was. This, of course, led to widespread and habitual lying. Jesus said, "If you are honest you will tell the truth. If you are dishonest you will still go on lying no matter how many oaths you take. Therefore, he said, "Simplify your speech, confine yourself to a yes and no. Tell the simple truth."

6. Then he gives some simple corrections to the laws regulating our conduct one toward another. His Old Testament gave a man right to take revenge on one who had injured him. It permitted an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. If I knocked your tooth out, you had a right to knock mine out. If I blinded you in one eye, you had a right to blind me in one. You may think it was not much of a law, but it was better than nothing. Without that law, if you knocked one of my teeth out, I might knock all of yours out. Or, if I knocked one eye out, you might blind me altogether.

But Jesus amended this law. He forbade the taking of any kind of vengeance. He rather said, "If a man smite you on one cheek turn the other to him also." This, of course, is not to be taken in a literal sense. What he is urging is that we act always not in a spirit of hate and anger, but in a spirit of love.

The Old Testament gave a man a right to hate. "You have heard that it was said of them of old time that you must love your friends and hate your enemies."
Bless them that curse you, pray for them that despitely use you and persecute you." We are to do this because that is the way God does. Therefore, it is fundamentally right.

II.

But while Jesus amended the Scriptures in some particulars it is evident that he had a deep reverence for these sacred writings, that he read them, that he opened all the windows of his soul to them. His mind was so saturated with his Old Testament Scriptures that its language was constantly coming out in his conversation. When men brought questions to him it was amazing how often he answered those questions, not in language of his own, but in the language of the Bible. Look at a few instances of this.

1. One day they came telling of a woman who had married seven different men. This is a rather comical story, smacking more of Hollywood than of Israel. "In the resurrection," they ask, "whose wife shall she be?" The purpose of this question was not to gain information. These men did not believe in a future life. They were, therefore, trying to confuse Jesus. But he broke their tricky talk, brushed it aside as so many cobwebs, told them frankly that one thing from which they were suffering was plain ignorance. Then he added "in the after life there will not be any marriage or giving in marriage." But that fact does not prevent our living again. The dead do going on living. In proof of that statement he quoted a threadbare passage of the Old Testament, "I am the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob." Since God is the God of these three, these three are still alive.

2. When a promising young aristocrat ran after him one day and kneeled to him with this question, "What good thing shall I do to inherit eternal life," Jesus, instead of giving him a direct answer referred him to the scripture, "Thou knowest the commandments, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false
witness, defraud not, honor thy father and mother." When the Rich Man lifted up his eyes in hell and asked for some man to be sent from the dead to warn his brothers lest they blunder into the night as he had, Jesus answered, "They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them." And when he presses the matter he continues, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither would they be persuaded by one who would rise from the dead." When Jesus was asked for the way of life he referred his questioners to the Old Testament.

Luke tells us that a certain lawyer asked Jesus the same question, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus gave practically the same answer. "What is written in the law? How readest thou?" Then this lawyer trying to adjust himself said, "But who is my neighbor?" Then Jesus told him the story of the Good Samaritan. He told him that his neighbor was anybody who needed him. The Jew's idea of neighborhood was small. Jesus enlarged that conception. But he summed up the meaning of religion in two words, "love to God and love to man." Both these he found in the Old Testament.

4. It was in this same Bible that Jesus found teaching about himself. "Ye searched the scriptures," he said on one occasion, "for in them ye think you have eternal life. But these are they that testify of men." The Scriptures are not merely to be looked at, but to be looked through. They are not an end in themselves, they are a means to an end. They are fingers pointing to me. Just after the resurrection when he walked with the two disciples from Jerusalem to Emmaus the story said that he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." Three divisions of scriptures are specifically mentioned. A little later these two friends thinking over the amazing adventure that had been theirs said, "Did not our hearts burn within us as he opened unto us the scriptures." Jesus loved for the scriptures then to be seen in the fact that they were the source of so much of his teaching.
III.

Not only did Jesus love the Bible well enough to read it, not only did he read it with discrimination, and amend it where it needed amending, not only did he make it the foundation of his teaching, but it was one of the sustainers of his own religious life. Out at Mount Vernon I looked with interest at the sword that Washington carried during the Revolution. If you desire to see the sword with which Jesus girded himself during the days of his pilgrimage you will find it in the Old Testament. Here is one of the sources from which he derived his amazing strength and power.

It is always interesting to see where a great man turns in times of stress. It is always helpful to find the support upon which a great heart has leaned in times of conflict. Certainly one of the most trying experiences through which Jesus passed was at the beginning of his ministry, his temptation in the wilderness. Here with the consciousness of his great destiny breaking upon him he had to decide what kind of messiah he was going to be. He had to decide, even as you and I how he was going to use his life. There came to him here a three fold temptation.

First, there was the temptation to make stones into bread. That is, there was a temptation to use his power for himself. The tempter said, "If thou be the son of God." This "if" does not mean that he questioned the deity of Jesus, he accepted that. He could have said, "Inasmuch as thou art the son of God command these stones to be bread. God has forgotten you. If you do not look out for number one you are going to die here in the wilderness." And Jesus met the onslaught with a thrust of the sword of the spirit. He quoted from the Book of Deuteronomy. "It is written that man shall not live by bread alone."

In the second temptation the devil comes over to the side of Jesus. "You are right in trusting God to take care of you, even where there is no bread. He will not only take care of you when you are in his will, but when you are dis-
obedient to him. You may presume on him. Put him to the test, therefore, by doing something foolish." Then taking Jesus and setting him on the pinnacle of the temple he said, "Jump down, he shall give his angels charge over you that you shall not dash thy foot against a stone." Again Jesus met the onslaught from the scriptures. "Thou shall not put the Lord thy God to the test."

The final temptation is to gain a good, and by a bad method, to win through compromise. Jesus was certainly eager to win the kingdoms of the world. That was the very purpose of his coming. Here Satan promises an easy way. "If you will just compromise the slightest bit, it will all be yours." But again Jesus relies on the sword of the spirit. He said, "I will win the world, but not by compromising with you, but by driving you out of it. Get thee behind me Satan. It is written thou shall worship the Lord thy God and him only shall thou serve."

As it was at the beginning of the life so it was at his close. When Jesus had been crucified, when the blackest hour of that black night of tragedy broke upon him he expressed the anguish of his heart, not in the words of his own, but in the words of the scripture. He fell back on the Hymn Book of his people. He sobbed out a bit from one of the Psalms, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Later still when that black hour had passed and the light of the eternal morning was beginning to break, after he had said, "It was finished," by which he had meant that he had completed the task that God had committed to him, he uttered a prayer that was still not his own. This prayer also was found in the Hymn Book of his people. It was in a sense the "Now I Lay Me" that Jewish boys and girls were accustomed to say at their mother's knee. When the day was over and they were preparing for bed they prayed this prayer, "And now that the earthly day of Jesus is over, and he is falling asleep to wake in his Father's presence," he breaths this prayer of confidence, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." Jesus had profound reverence and love for the Bible. So much was this the case
that he read it. So much was this the case that he fed his soul upon it, he made it his constant companion. It is our privilege to have in addition to his Bible the fuller revelation of the New Testament. We cheat ourselves unspeakably if we do not make this sacred deposit of truth our constant source of help and strength.

"Holy Bible, Book divine,
Precious truth, thou art mine."