

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

tain that, as has been shewn, there is every reason to conclude, from a general survey of the New Testament, that Greek was generally known and used in Palestine at the time of Christ; that *that* accordingly was the language which He usually employed; and that, while He sometimes made use in public of the Aramaic dialect, such an occurrence was quite exceptional to his ordinary practice, and is on that account distinguished by particular notice in the Evangelic history.

A. ROBERTS.

THE GOSPEL IN THE EPISTLES.

I believe that Jesus Christ suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; that he descended into hell, and the third day rose again from the dead.

WHEN we begin to institute a comparison between the Gospels and Epistles on the above-quoted articles, we are struck at once with the different way in which the meaning of these sublime events of the Saviour's life was understood before and after the gift of the Holy Ghost. The Evangelists make conspicuous everywhere how little even the chosen Twelve understood concerning the events which were to befall their Master. When Jesus (Luke xviii. 31-34) said plainly to them that, in their approaching visit to Jerusalem, He should be delivered to the Gentiles, be mocked, scourged, and put to death, and the third day should rise again; we are told, "They understood none of these things, and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken." And if this were so with the plain details of what was about to come to

pass before their eyes, how much less were they likely to understand the great purpose for which these events were permitted to occur! Christ, as we shall presently see, had given to his disciples, before the Resurrection, some few intimations of the great end for which He had come into the world; and when the Holy Ghost came upon them, these things were, without doubt, brought vividly to their remembrance, and the full meaning then made plain to them of what before had been obscure, or rather incomprehensible.

But in the Epistles the historic details of Christ's passion form a very trifling portion of the Apostle's matter. He deals almost wholly with the end for which these events were wrought. It is not that Christ died, but that He died for the sins of men, which St. Paul is anxious to proclaim: it is not the resurrection of Jesus only which he preaches, but that Christ is the first-fruits of them that sleep, and that we too shall be raised, yea, all in Christ shall be made alive: it is not a mere historic fact that Jesus was taken up into heaven, and that a cloud received Him out of the sight of the disciples, of which St. Paul has to tell, but that the followers of Christ should seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God.

Of all this teaching the Gospels which have been preserved for us say but very little. Till Christ's resurrection was accomplished, and the fact thereof fully received, no such lessons could have place; of which lessons, however, the Epistles are full, and the narrative which we derive from the Gospels can only be traced by allusions made here and there by

St. Paul, and is to be gathered perhaps rather by inferences than from direct statements. Yet this feature in the character of our Gospels, that they are wanting in all teaching about the doctrines connected with Christ's death and resurrection, and only give us the very baldest statements of facts, is of the utmost importance. It shews us that we have in the narratives of the Evangelists a truthful record of these great events, and that no attempt has been made by them to alter the story from its most primitive form. We know that the Gospels were all written many years after the publication of some of the Epistles, a long time after the full significance of Christ's death had been proclaimed through the known world. But at first, when the apostles began to preach, they must have narrated in its simplest form the mere story of the life of Jesus, as it had presented itself to each of them. Wherever they founded a new Church, this would be their opening teaching, and the Churches founded by St. John, St. Peter, or St. Matthew, would have each heard, over and over, from the lips of these apostles, the simple story of their three years' life with Christ, and of all He taught, and of all their astonishment, and how, at the last, they were still without understanding, till the Holy Ghost came upon them. These early histories would be held precious by the converts, and would be widely remembered, and parts of them, no doubt, reduced to a permanent form by those who heard them. But before our present Gospels were put forth, Christian teaching, founded on these simple histories of Jesus, had developed and become the life of scores of congre-

gations. Yet without any attempts at digression, without the slightest endeavour to wed the spiritual teaching, which was so well known when they were put forth, to the recital of Christ's life-history, without any wish to supply the deficiency of comprehension on the part of the disciples, the compiler of each Gospel has given his life of Christ in its plainest and earliest form. As we read, we can fancy the apostles themselves relating their story, just as, at the first, they set before their hearers that of which they had been eye-witnesses and ministers, and told how at the time they had failed to see the object of that life on which they had attended. Set forth with all their variations and in all their plainness, the Gospels bear thus a most powerful testimony to their own truthful character. Written at a time when the whole teaching of Christ's life could have been expounded, they are content to say that the disciples at Christ's death did not know what his life had meant; written at a time when it would have been easy to produce more complete and connected histories, the reverence which these writers had for the very words of the apostolic narrators has been shewn most convincingly; for they have faithfully recorded for us what can only have been the very earliest form of Christ's history, and have confined themselves strictly to an account of "what Jesus *began* to do and to teach," given as four of the apostles had published it from the first. Such a simplicity carries us back, for the date of our Gospel story, as far as the time of St. Peter's first sermon.

With the phenomena of the Gospels, which contain a simple repetition of the teachings of Jesus as they

were remembered by those who heard them, and the Epistles, written before the Gospels, and exhibiting developments and applications of the Gospel teaching, we may compare the two forms in which has been preserved for us the account of the teaching of Socrates. Xenophon and Plato were both pupils of that philosopher. The former devoted the early part of his life, after the termination of his studies, to the profession of a soldier, with the glories of which his name will be for ever remembered. The latter carried on the teaching of his master, and is looked upon as his direct successor. Plato's dialectic method is a development of what he had learnt from Socrates, but tinged in many places with his own cast of mind, which we cannot but see was much more poetical than that of his master. Socrates was put to death B.C. 399, and Plato's teaching, of which we possess the matured results, was continued till B.C. 347. From his writings we can gather an account of Socrates, but it is rather the philosophic than the historic Socrates which we find there. The man is in the background, and the prominent place is given to his teachings. On the contrary, in the *Memorabilia* of Xenophon we have recorded in the blunt and unadorned way which we should expect from a soldier the simple discourses, dialogues, and actions of the man Socrates, whom his pupil undertook to defend from the aspersions which, after his death, were cast by his enemies upon his memory, which he does by a plain account of such things as Socrates did and taught. Xenophon lived nearly as long as Plato, dying about B.C. 354, but he was not, after B.C. 403, mixed up with Athenian life or the events

connected with Socrates or his teaching. The course of Xenophon's life makes it almost certain that it was not till long after the death of his master that he undertook to put together and give to the world the discourses which by memory or in notes he had preserved since the days when they fell from the lips of Socrates; for he went away with the famous expedition of Cyrus, and seems to have been in Asia at the time when his master was put to death. He continued there, and engaged in other warlike labours till after B.C. 394, when he fought against his own countrymen at the battle of Coronea. He was banished from Athens, and so was not in the way of hearing directly all that was said there concerning Socrates; and it is believed, although his sentence of banishment was revoked, that he never returned to his native city. So that we have from him, without any attempt at development, a genuine picture of Socrates and his philosophy, the existence of which, side by side with the more elaborated works of his fellow-pupil, shews us that there is no improbability in the supposition that earnest listeners to the first teachings of Jesus, or to the narratives which the apostles gave of such teachings, would be able to put down and would desire to preserve a very faithful record of the precise language in which the Gospel story was first told, although there existed letters, like those of St. Paul, which contained the working out of the simple principles of the Gospel and the application of these principles in the development of Christian societies.

In the Epistles we find the doctrinal lessons which the Church is meant to learn from the life of Jesus,

and of these very little is said in the Gospels; but that we may see how true the teaching of the Epistles is to the tone which pervades the histories, it may be well to point out a few of the most noteworthy passages in which Christ made known some of the great purposes of his manifestation in the flesh. In general terms He proclaimed (Matt. xviii. 11) that his mission was "to save that which was lost." Then (Mark x. 45) connecting this work of salvation more directly with his death, He says that He came "to give his life a ransom for many." In the Fourth Gospel (Chap. iii. 14) we find Him teaching, though in language which could hardly be fully comprehended till after his Passion: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." And again, under the likeness of the good Shepherd, Jesus had spoken (John x. 15) of Himself, and said, "I lay down my life for the sheep;" and soon afterwards, "I lay down my life that I might take it again." It could only be after the resurrection had given the key to words like these that the disciples would see their full drift, any more than of that subsequent saying (John xii. 32), "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me." Much light was shed on all these words during the converse of the forty days, wherein we are told (Luke xxiv. 45), "He opened their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, and said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among

all nations." When, therefore, we read in the Epistles (as Rom. iii. 24) that men are justified freely by God's grace "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus;" or (2 Cor. v. 15) that Christ "died for all, that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him who died for them, and rose again;" or (Gal. iii. 13), "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us;" and presently afterwards (Chap. iii. 22) of "the promise by faith of Jesus Christ, given to them that believe," we feel that we have before us only the natural offgrowth of the less distinct teachings in the Gospels, and that these first lessons given in the Gospels were not of themselves vague and uncertain, but needed only that the resurrection of Christ should be accomplished, and then their language would receive its due significance.

But although there is of necessity this advance in the teaching which the Epistles give us concerning the purpose of Christ's sacrifice, there is yet no difficulty in shewing that it was the simple narrative of the Gospels which formed the basis on which all the rest of the teaching was founded. Christ's agony in the garden, and the struggle of his humanity, followed by his self-surrender to do the will of the Father, must have been told as we know it before the Apostle could write of Jesus Christ (Gal. i. 4), that He "*gave himself* for our sins." We have already noticed how certainly the Corinthians must have heard the Gospel narrative of the betrayal before such a short sentence as "The Lord Jesus in the same night in which he was betrayed took bread" could have been intelligible in the position in which St. Paul

introduces it. But the readers of St. Paul's letters were also fully aware that the proceedings by which Christ was doomed to death were of a judicial character. The Apostle (Rom. iv. 25) says, "He was *delivered* (*παρεδόθη*) for our offences." The verb here used is the strictly forensic term for bringing a person to a legal trial or handing him over to be punished after a trial. It is employed in the Gospels (Matt. xxvii. 2; Mark xv. i.) of the *delivery* of Jesus into the hands of Pilate; and again (Luke xxiii. 25; John xix. 16), of the *re-delivery* of Jesus by the Roman governor to the will of the Jews; and in speaking of his coming sufferings (Mark x. 33), Christ had used the same word of Himself: "The Son of man shall be *delivered* unto the chief priests and unto the scribes." The word had become familiar to the ears of the Roman Christians in the earliest Gospel story, and St. Paul's employment of it shews that the whole context of the Gospel where it is used was presumed to be well known, and that no explanation was needed concerning the nature of this *delivery* to which Christ was subjected.

There is another incidental expression (1 Cor. ii. 6-8) which gives evidence of the same kind, shewing how completely it was known that Christ's death had been brought about by authority. The Apostle is speaking of his own preaching, which he designates "the wisdom of God in a mystery; which," he continues, "none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it they would not have sacrificed the Lord of glory." The Apostle no doubt embraces in the term "princes of this world" both the Jewish rulers and the Roman authorities, and implies by this

expression that the former had so far fallen from their high calling that they could only be classed with those heathen powers whose aid they had invoked to carry out their sentence. But before it was possible for St. Paul to have used such a phrase, we can see that the whole history must have been understood by the Corinthians. In no sense could the Jewish authorities be spoken of by themselves as princes of this world, but when their solicitation of the Roman authority to aid in putting Christ to death was known, then the whole array of Jewish and Roman power might well be styled by this designation.

And truly the use of the word *cross* with regard to Christ's execution implies of itself that all this explanation of the crucifixion history had been made known in all the Churches. For Jesus was a Jew, and had been accused by his countrymen of impiety. But for that offence the penalty by the Jewish law was stoning, and although the power of life and death had been taken out of the hands of the Jewish authorities, we see from the case of Stephen that a sudden outburst of popular rage might culminate in the infliction of this kind of death. But crucifixion was a Roman punishment, and cannot have been inflicted for the charge of impiety, for to that a Roman governor would have paid no heed. Every time, then, when St. Paul speaks of the manner of Christ's death, he shews us that all the story of those means whereby Roman law had been called into action to gratify Jewish rage was completely known to those for whom he wrote — how to the charge of impiety had been added that of conspiracy against the Roman

rule, and how Pilate had been constrained to give up Christ to crucifixion by the cry, "If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend."

We can see from many passages in the Epistles how the events of Christ's Passion had become summarized, and were quoted in that brief manner which indicates a thorough acquaintance with the whole subject on the part of those who are addressed. Thus (Rom. viii. 34) St. Paul, in the close of that wondrous Chapter on the ground and assurance of the Christian's hope, asks, "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us"—a passage wherein we have a notice of the Passion of Christ and its results, given with all the brevity of a creed. Almost in a similar manner are the same events condensed in a later Chapter (Rom. xiv. 9), "To this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living." But the most remarkable passage of this character is the Apostle's statement of the evidence of Christ's resurrection before he proceeds (1 Cor. xv. 3-7) to deduce therefrom the certainty of the resurrection of all men. "I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received." In these opening words we have another testimony that the simple facts of Gospel history formed the first lessons for converts. But he continues: "How that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: and that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: after that, he was seen of above

five hundred brethren at once ; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James ; then of all the apostles." Here we have an epitome of the whole of the concluding history of Christ's life on earth, and it is given in such wise as to prove that no circumstance had been left untold by the teachers who first imparted it: the burial, the three days lying in the grave, the resurrection, and the numerous appearances just touched upon, but no more, exactly as such matters can be alluded to in addressing those, and those only, to whom a whole history is perfectly familiar.

There is another passage where a note of the time at which Christ's death took place is preserved in this same undesigned manner, which shews that the whole history had pervaded the thoughts and language of the Christian community. "Christ our *passover* is sacrificed for us," writes the Apostle to the Corinthians (1 Cor. v. 7). Only to those who had been made fully aware that it was at the great feast of the Jews that Christ's betrayal and crucifixion took place, could words like these come with their full meaning. And can we for a moment fancy that this had been told them, and that they were not likewise told how the circumstances of the Lord's death corresponded to those under which the passover lamb was offered?—that the injunction that no bone of that victim was to be broken had been marvellously kept when Jesus was slain? How otherwise could Christ be thus briefly spoken of as "our passover"? Must they not have heard, too, how from the first it had been pointed out by the Baptist, that to be thus

offered was the end for which Christ came down from heaven; that He was, as John had declared, "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."

Concerning the descent into hell there can of course be no direct mention in the Gospels. That the soul of Christ remained three days in the region assigned to the spirits of the dead, is to be inferred from the fact that his body was buried for that space, and his soul separated from it, as the souls of all men are after death. But whatever communication was made to the apostolic band concerning the state in which the soul of Jesus existed for those three days could only be among the things expounded in the forty days after the Resurrection. Yet it may well be that Christ intended to declare in a parable something concerning this, his brief sojourn in the unseen world, when He says (John xvi. 16), "A little while and ye see me not, and again a little while and ye shall see me." No doubt the last clause of this sentence received its first fulfilment on the morning of the Resurrection, and therefore the former part must in that view refer to Christ's abode in the world of spirits. And though by the gift of the Holy Ghost the spiritual presence of Christ with all believers fulfils the statement of the Lord in another sense through all time, yet in the sentence as at first spoken there may perhaps be gathered an intimation which, under the Spirit's illumination, might afterwards be known to be a foretelling of the descent of Christ's soul into the abyss. That in the early teachings of the apostles such a sojourn was spoken of and understood, we may see from the way in which

St. Paul writes to the Romans (Chap. x. 7), "Who shall descend into the deep? (*εἰς τὴν ἄβυσσον*) that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead." In the word "abyss," here employed, we have the term which corresponds to "hades," the unseen world, the abode of the dead, which is so often translated by the "hell" of our creeds. But though we can see that the apostles had been taught, and had taught their hearers, concerning the state of Christ's spirit as it existed in the separation caused by death, yet it was not deemed necessary to make this an article of any orthodox creed till nearly four centuries after Christ. No doubt from such a doctrine the Christian believer drew much comfort, for it spake to him of Christ made, in all things but sin, like unto mankind; descending into the world of disembodied spirits, and abiding there, and yet by his return giving proof that as He has been raised so they may hope to rise. But the history of its introduction into a creed is interesting, for it seems to have been put forward first of all by the opponents of the Divinity of Jesus. The Arians first inserted this article in the confession which, in A.D. 359, they presented to the Council of Ariminum. Their words were, "He went down into the lower world" (*εἰς τὰ κατὰχθόνια κατελθόντα*). Now they most probably dwelt on this special feature wherein Christ shared the portion of all humanity as being helpful to their views; but the orthodox Christians thereupon included the like words in their confessions, and they are to be found in the creed published by Rufinus, A.D. 390.¹ Thus they claimed this as a true teach-

¹ See "Lumby on the Creeds," pp. 62, 184.

ing from the earliest times, but not one which told only of the humanity of Jesus, but which spake most hopefully to all men of their own future resurrection. On the fact of the Resurrection each of the Gospels gives us abundant testimony, and the verity thereof is asserted in the teaching of the Epistles over and over again. But here also we can see that all the teaching flowing from the Resurrection history is only a strict development of what the Gospels had set forth in brief, yet unmistakable, characters. These teachings of the Epistles may be summed up under two heads. First, that because Christ is risen we too shall be raised; or, as St. Paul has expressed it (1 Cor. vi. 14), "God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise us up by his own power;" or again (1 Cor. xv. 20), "Christ is risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept;" or still more closely connecting our resurrection with the power of Christ (2 Cor. iv. 14), "He which raised up the Lord Jesus, shall raise up us also by Jesus." But these same lessons had been given by Christ in the Gospel, though as the Resurrection was then to come, the allusions to that event are less clear. Yet all that comforting speech of Christ with his disciples on the hope of heaven (John xiv. 2-6), is in exact harmony with the words of St. Paul. Jesus says, "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." Is not this Jesus becoming the firstfruits from the

dead? But He continues in language which tells us, as clearly as St. Paul's, that it is by his power that our rising again will be achieved. "I," He says, in answer to the doubtful question of St. Thomas, "am the way, the truth, and the *life*." I go before you, both into the unseen world, and after that into heaven; my words cannot fail, and my power, whereby I have first overcome death in my own person, shall prevail to give you a like victory. I am your life. Or, as He had before said to Martha (John xi. 25), "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die."

And this brings out for us the second point of the accord between the Gospels and the Epistles on this solemn subject. It was a belief in the resurrection of Jesus which was especially demanded of Christian converts. On this point to accumulate testimony is needless. In Romans x. 9 St. Paul writes, as a description of all his own preaching, the very word of faith: "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." In full accord with such teaching as this is the lesson of our Lord's interview with Thomas (John xx. 26-29). Of the truth of the Resurrection this Apostle doubted, but when he had seen that Jesus truly was alive again, his confession of the Divinity of his Master was most full. "My Lord and my God," is his earnest exclamation. Then follows the teaching of Jesus, which is the counterpart of that

which St. Paul had put forth long before the Gospel of St. John appeared. "Thomas, because thou hast seen me thou hast believed : blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed." For they shall reap the blessing which the Apostle describes, by this belief they shall be saved.

But there is another aspect of the Resurrection which deserves very great notice. I mean when it is viewed as the great miracle of the life of Christ, the miracle of miracles. And in the consideration thereof we cannot but be led to observe how in the Epistles it is almost the only miracle of which any mention is made. At the same time we shall be constrained to examine into the sort of importance which the first preachers of Christianity attached to the miraculous portion of our Lord's history, and to the powers which by the Holy Spirit were bestowed upon some of themselves. We cannot, however, include so important an inquiry in the present article, but must rest content with having shewn that, in the Gospels, we have the history of Christ in its very earliest form, without comments or elucidations, exactly as it was heard from the lips of the apostles: that in these histories we can therefore expect little of the doctrinal teaching which circles round the death and resurrection of Jesus, and is so largely dwelt on in the Epistles ; but yet that here too the developments of the Epistles have their basis in the Gospels, and that the chief facts of the history may be clearly inferred from the allusions which St. Paul supplies, while that Apostle himself is a witness that the early Gospel history, in its simplicity, formed the first lessons which he alike, with all other converts,

heard from the lips of the apostles and their companions. Thus he himself testifies that in the Epistles we may trace out the Gospel story, and that in his Letters he has no new teaching to give, but is only delivering that which he had received from others.

J. RAWSON LUMBY.

IV.

THE LIMITS OF PRAYER.

THE leading modern objection to Prayer is based, as we have seen, on two assumptions, neither of which has been nor can be proved. The first assumption is that our lives must be ruled by laws which are invariable in their action and to which no exceptions can be allowed, or by a blind unintelligent Caprice on the action of which no man can securely calculate; that, in fact, we are shut up to this sole alternative, Law or Caprice. The answer to this assumption we found to be that, as there is much in *human* action and motive which is neither a mere observance of law nor a mere indulgence of caprice, so we may well believe that there is much in God which cannot be classed under either of these terms. A judge departs at times from the letter, and even from the clear intention of the law, not that he may follow the impulses of caprice, but that he may render a more exact justice. At times, when there is occasion and need, a master deviates from the rules he has laid down for the conduct of his business; but he may deviate from them only to shew a more considerate kindness for those whom he employs, or even to secure the very ends for which the rules were made. At times, too,