

St. Mark xiv. 14, 15; St. Luke xlii. 11, 12.

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"The Master saith, Where is [my] guest chamber, where I shall eat the passover with my disciples? And he, will [himself] shew you a large upper room furnished [and ready: and] there make ready [for us]."¹

THESE words form part of that common tradition, of which all three Evangelists manifestly make use. As usual, St. Mark gives us most of it: his reproduction of it contains a few words which are not in St. Luke's account. And both of them give us a great deal more than is contained in the parallel passage in St. Matthew's Gospel. It is comparatively recently that we have been able to arrive at a sure conclusion on this interesting question, and to regard it as certain that the three first Evangelists do make use of some previously existing material, from which all three of them quote largely. At first sight this seems to be a serious loss. Where we formerly thought that we had three writers,—each of them giving independent testimony to the same facts, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word was established,—now we find that we have only one witness, for all three are drawing from one and the same source. But the Lord gives as well as takes away; and what we have lost on the one hand we have gained on the other.² It is quite obvious that if, in all three Gospels, there is material which comes from one and the same source, this source must be *earlier* than any of the three Gospels, and therefore more nearly contemporary with the gracious facts which all three report for the comfort and healing of mankind. And the report of one witness, who puts his testimony into shape soon after the events which he records occurred, is worth much more than the report of three witnesses who do not begin to arrange their material until twenty or thirty years later. We may be thankful that this fact about there being a carefully drawn up record (whether in writing or in men's memories matters very little) long before even the earliest of our Gospels was written, has now been satisfactorily established. It is a very strong guarantee for the truth of the Gospel narrative, and we are able to "know the certainty concerning the things wherein we have been instructed."

It is a matter of very little moment whether, in the passage before us, we regard the whole of what Christ says to Peter and John as due to His supernatural knowledge or as the result of pre-arrangement with the man who was to lend the

room, or as partly the one and partly the other. That our Lord possessed the power of knowing what was taking place at a distance, or of knowing beforehand what would take place at some future hour, we know well from a variety of occasions—Nathanael, the nobleman's son, the centurion's servant, Lazarus, etc. etc. We also know that He did not always make use of this miraculous power, but acquired knowledge just as we do, viz., by asking questions or by experience. He asked where they had buried Lazarus, and not until He had tasted the wine mingled with myrrh did He refuse to drink it. In a case like the present, where it is not quite evident which of the two is correct, we must be content to remain in uncertainty. And whichever view we may prefer ourselves, we ought not to condemn others for adopting the other one. One thing seems clear, that the man who is to lend the room knows Jesus, and is in some measure a disciple. All three narratives have the remarkable words, "The *Master* saith," as if the man himself recognised Jesus as his Master. Moreover, St. Luke's "Where is the guest-chamber?" and still more St. Mark's "Where is *My* guest-chamber?" seem to imply that the man had already been told by some one that such a room would be required. But this some one need not have been the Master Himself. Jerusalem, at the time of the Passover, was so crowded with Jews from all parts of the world, amounting to hundreds of thousands, that the difficulty of finding a room, and especially a quiet room, was very great indeed. But another interesting question remains. Was "the guest-chamber," for which the Master asked, the same as "the upper room" which He knew beforehand would be assigned to Him? There is reason for believing that it was not. One has no right to be very positive about it, but the Greek word which is used for "guest-chamber,"³ does not so easily become equivalent to the Greek word which is used for "upper room,"⁴ as the two English words become equivalent to one another. For "guest-chamber" the same word is used as we have at the beginning of St. Luke's Gospel for the "inn," in which Mary and Joseph could find no room when they arrived at Bethlehem for the enrolment or census (ch. ii. 7). It indicates a place

¹ The words in brackets are wanting in St. Luke.

² See Dr. Sanday's *Oracles of God*, Lecture III.

³ κατάλυμα.

⁴ ἀνάγειον or ἀνάγειον.

where travellers and their beasts are freed from their burdens. In an ordinary house, which was not a house of public entertainment, this place for unloosing burdens would be the ground floor. In dwellings in the East, at the present time, it is a very common thing for the space at the basement to be a room which the family share with outsiders and even with animals, if they possess any, and which may contain vehicles as well as household furniture. When they want more privacy they go into the room above this, or else on to the flat roof, on which there is often a tent or a summer-house. So that it is quite possible that Christ asked for the lower room or common hall, and that the man gave him, not this, but the best room that he had, viz., the upper one reserved for special purposes.

If this is so, then we have an example for our imitation, that, when Christ makes any claim upon us for service, we should endeavour to give Him, not just what the letter of His request demands of us, but the best that we can supply. Too often our first thought is, if not a flat refusal, a determination to give the very least that is consistent with compliance at all.

But leaving this point uncertain, there is the very definite description of the room which Christ did receive, whether it is precisely what He asked for or not.

It is an *upper* room; it is *furnished* and *ready*; and it is a *large* room.

1. The meaning of *upper* room has been already explained. It was not the hall or general gathering-place, which, if employed for the Passover meal, would very likely be used by two or three parties at once, but the private room above, where Christ could be alone with His disciples. This last point He seems to indicate in the question, "Where is *My* guest-chamber?" Whatever room is granted to Him, He wishes to have it all to Himself, that He may speak face to face with His friends and without reserve or danger of interruption.

2. By *furnished* and *ready* is no doubt meant supplied with the tables and couches necessary for the Paschal Supper, and perhaps also with the cups and dishes that would be required. Although at first the Passover was eaten standing, in memory of the haste in which the Israelites had fled from Egypt, yet, for many years before our Lord's time, it had become customary to recline during the meal, to indicate that Israel was no longer in fear and in bondage, but in safety, peace, and freedom.

3. By a *large* room we are probably to understand that it was unusually large, or at any rate affording ample accommodation for the party of thirteen for whom it was required.

It is not only at the Paschal season, nor only

when He visits us in the Holy Communion of His body and blood, that we, like the unknown disciple in the Gospel narrative, may have Jesus Christ as our Guest. At all seasons of the year, and on festivals and ordinary days alike, the question, which is at once a warning and an invitation, is addressed to each one of us, "Where is My guest-chamber?" And we, far more than the owner of that honoured house in Jerusalem, have had opportunities of knowing all that that question means. It is no guest-chamber built with hands that He needs, but the temple built without hands, which temple we are. In each one of us He desires to have, not merely a guest-chamber for a single night, but an abode and a home.

That which was provided for Him on that awful evening before the Passion is a guide to us in making preparation for Him. If that hospitable disciple would do so much for His entertainment during a few hours, surely we may do as much when we aim at having Him for our Guest for ever,—throughout life and in eternity.

It must be an *upper* room, in the highest part of our being, the best that we have to offer to any one. It must be in our heart of hearts, where we can love Him, not in word and tongue, but in deed and truth, with all our soul and all our strength. There are those who think that they have done much if they have given Him a welcome in some transitory emotion of religious excitement. But these heated feelings are not the upper room, which is ever calm and quiet; they are more akin to the common hall, where noise and excitement are frequent. It is the upper room that we must prepare for Him, that He may have it for Himself.

And it must be a *furnished* room and *ready*—furnished with those things which He loves, and which will enable Him to rest and abide,—prayers and hymns, thanksgivings and intercessions, holy thoughts, kind words, and good deeds.

"Alms all around and hymns within"—that is the atmosphere in which Christ can abide; and the heart that is furnished with these can offer Him a home in which He may bestow His goods. For Christ is no man's debtor. If He comes as a Guest He comes open-handed, and bestows blessings without measure or stint.

And therefore we must prepare a *large* room. As we are niggardly in what we offer to Him, so also we are half-hearted and little-minded in what we ask from Him. We do not desire His graces enough, and we do not desire enough of them. We must open our hearts freely to receive the good measure, pressed down and shaken together, which He yearns to bestow. It is His own command, His own promise which says, "Open thy mouth *wide*, and I will *fill* it."