

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

THE TEACHING OF CHRIST.

II.

WHEN we proceed to examine our Lord's teaching in detail, it becomes evident that there is more than one way by which the subject may be approached. The Gospels may be taken in the common order, and the testimony of each discussed in turn, as was done by Rudolf Stier sixty years ago. Or we may follow Wendt in his endeavour to reconstruct the teaching on a basis which will represent it in the light of an organic unity. In the present sketches we propose to employ a method which is perhaps better adapted to a brief treatment. We shall interrogate each of the chief sources used by the Evangelists, and when this has been done we shall endeavour to compare and co-ordinate the results.

We begin with the tradition which forms the substance of our earliest Gospel and the basis of a large portion of the other Synoptic narratives.

The Marcan tradition has preserved no great discourse and few important parables. Frequent reference is made to the preaching and teaching of Jesus,¹ but His recorded sayings are chiefly incidental remarks or short instructions; the only considerable fragments are the parables of the Sower (iv. 3-9), and the Husbandmen (xii. 1-11), and the apocalypse in chapter xiii. This comparative scarcity of recollections of the Lord's teaching is consistent with the statement of Irenaeus that St. Mark reproduced the preaching of St. Peter.² The primitive preacher would doubtless relate anecdotes and brief sayings, but he would leave to the catechist the transmission of the Master's discourses.

¹ Mark i. 14, 21 f., 38; ii. 13; iv. 1, 33; vi. 2, 6; vii. 14; xi. 18; xii. 1, 35, 38.

² Iren. iii. 1, Μάρκος . . τὰ ὑπὸ Πέτρου κηρυσσόμενα ἐγγράφως ἡμῖν παραδεδωκε.

But the records of Christ's teaching which are to be found in the "memoirs of Peter" are not the less valuable because they are scanty and short. Doubtless the Apostle selected for preaching the sayings which had made the deepest impression upon his memory, or which he judged to be the most characteristic or important. It may prove that the Marcan tradition is thoroughly representative of the teaching as a whole, so that if we have grasped its significance, we possess a key to the understanding of the fuller reports preserved in the other sources.

1. This view is confirmed by the first words attributed to Jesus in the Second Gospel.¹ They are evidently the text, so to speak, of His Galilean preaching; they recite in the most compressed form both its message and its call. "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand," is the substance of the Gospel which Christ preached; "repent ye, and believe in the Gospel," is the twofold call which He based upon His message. Both message and call were heard during the ministry not once or twice only, but again and again; though clothed in many different forms and presented in varying degrees of completeness, these topics were never far from the Master's thoughts, and appear in the background if not in the forefront of all His utterances.²

2. When the Kingdom of God, the Divine sovereignty over the whole life of man upon earth, presented itself in the person and ministry of Christ, it was confronted by tremendous obstacles. The first and chief of these was human sin, and it is to this that our Lord addresses Himself in the next word which the Marcan tradition ascribes to Him.³ His remark to the scribes at Capernaum, "The Son of

¹ Mark i. 15.

² When e.g. St. Luke adds *eis μετάνοιαν* to the saying of Mark ii. 17, he merely brings out what was latent in *καλέσαι ἁμαρτωλοῦς*.

³ ii. 14.

Man hath authority to forgive sins upon the earth," revealed at the very outset of His work the power by which He intended to fight this enemy. He would do it by proclaiming an *ἀφεσις*,¹ a full discharge of the sins contracted by men in the past, a discharge which would leave them free to begin their lives afresh. Even the scribes recognized that God could forgive sins, but the difference is immense between a forgiveness locked up in the treasures of the Divine clemency and a forgiveness committed to man on earth for the benefit of men. The charter of the Kingdom of God opens with the gospel of a present forgiveness. The scribes rightly judged this claim to be of the first magnitude,² nor was it made by Jesus in any spirit of light-hearted optimism, but with a full sense of its significance. That He realized the deep-seated strength of the disease which He undertook to heal is evident from His later saying, "From within, out of the heart of men, evil thoughts proceed."³ Sin is not, according to Christ, a superficial evil, but one which is both immanent and inveterate; yet, knowing this, He claims the power to set the sinner free from it. Miracles of physical healing were indeed easy when compared with the moral force exerted in an act of absolution; when He said, "Thy sins be forgiven thee," He uttered a harder word than when He bade Lazarus "come forth." But He was conscious of the right to say this harder word, and He said it at the earliest opportunity; that such a power should be possessed and exerted on earth was the first condition of the Divine Kingdom being set up among men.

3. Other hindrances stood in the way of the Kingdom of God, and they were met with equal determination. Foremost among these was Pharisaic Judaism, with its insistence on external duties and its neglect of "the weightier

¹ Cf. Luke iv. 18 (Isa. lxi. 1).

² Mark ii. 7. ³ vii. 21 ff.

matters of the Law." The resistance offered to the gospel by this system is seen in the Marcan tradition in connexion with three questions: the question of weekly fasting,¹ the question of the Sabbath,² and the question of ceremonial purification.³ The first and the third of these observances rested simply upon the tradition of the Rabbis, and our Lord declined to be bound by them in any way; the second, which was required by the Torah, He accepted, but lifted it up to a level high above that which it occupied in the teaching of the scribes. "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath,"⁴ asserts a principle which places that institution in the light of a Divine gift, whereas to the scribes it wore the aspect of an arbitrary law. But in proclaiming the Sabbath a gift of the Divine love, Christ left no opening for licence; the inference⁵ which He drew was not that every Israelite was free to observe or to neglect it as he pleased, but that the Son of Man had power to regulate its use.⁶ With the weekly fasts and "the Jews' manner of purifying"⁷ He dealt in a different way. Fasting was not prescribed by the law except on the Day of Atonement, and the fasts observed on Mondays and Thursdays⁸ were mischievous if they ministered to ostentation⁹ or were imposed on men's consciences as a religious duty. Moreover, to the disciples of Jesus, who were now rejoicing in the light of the Bridegroom's presence, they would have been a burdensome unreality. He had not come to patch up the thread-bare cloak of Judaism, or to pour a new spirit into its obsolete practices.¹⁰ Of the ceremonial of purification prescribed by the Rabbis Jesus was even less tolerant. Not only was it

¹ Mark ii. 19 f. ² ii. 27 f., iii. 4. ³ vii. 6 ff.

⁴ ii. 27. ⁵ ii. 28 (*ὥστε*).

⁶ Compare the anecdote preserved in Cod. D at Luke vi. 5: τῇ αὐτῇ ἡμέρᾳ θεασάμενός τινα ἐργαζόμενον τῷ σαββάτῳ εἶπεν αὐτῷ, "Ἄνθρωπε, εἰ μὲν οἶδας τί ποιεῖς μακάριος εἶ· εἰ δὲ μὴ οἶδας, ἐπικατάρατος καὶ παραβάτης εἶ τοῦ νόμου.

⁷ John ii. 6, ⁸ *Didache*, 8. ⁹ Luke xviii. 12. ¹⁰ Mark ii. 21 f.

purely traditional, as the scribes confessed,¹ but it encouraged an externalism which was fatal to any sense of the inwardness of the religious life, and opposed to the first principles of the Kingdom of God. Nor was the danger limited or likely to yield to better teaching. The system worked like leaven,² spreading through Jewish society, and it could only be checked by the most rigorous condemnation.

The Gospel of the Kingdom encountered another and more mysterious obstacle. Whatever view may be taken of "possession," it is clear that our Lord is represented in the Marcan tradition as recognizing and withstanding an evil power which was more than human. The reality of this power seems to be assumed in His reply to the scribes from Jerusalem who charged Him with collusion with "Beelzebub." He gave them to understand that He had forced His way into the house of "the Strong," and intended to bind him and spoil his house.³ In other words, the casting out of the *δαιμόνια*, however we may interpret this class of miracles, was a symbol of our Lord's purpose to conquer the hostile power which had asserted its claim over human nature, but was in fact foreign to it and could therefore be dispossessed.

4. So far the teaching has been limited to the forces which obstruct or resist the progress of the Kingdom; it now passes to the contents of the conception itself. At this point the Parable comes into use, for the "mystery of the Kingdom,"⁴ the secret of its strength and manner of working, could not be imparted to the uninitiated multitude. The Marcan tradition has but three parables at this stage,⁵ and they are all based upon the analogy of vegetable growth, which lends itself in an especial manner to the description of spiritual processes. The first parable insists on the

¹ vii. 5.² viii. 15 ff.³ iii. 27.⁴ iv. 11⁵ iv. 3 ff., 26 ff., 31 f.

importance of character as determining the degree of influence exerted by the Kingdom of God over the individual ; the second points out the spontaneity and the mystery of spiritual growth ; the third foretells the expansion of the small beginnings of the Church into the greatness of a catholic mission. The conversion of the Empire and of the world itself is shadowed forth in the lodging of the birds of heaven under the branches of the tree which had grown from the least of all seeds. Taken together the three parables cover the whole work of the Christian society in the present world. We see before us in these familiar pictures the entire history of the *Regnum Dei*—its struggle with human indifference, shallowness, and sin ; its sure but unobserved assimilation by all who receive it in sincerity ; the final triumph of its cause. Every stage in the long record passes under review, from the uncertain start when the birds of the air are ready to devour the seed to the day when they are glad to seek shelter under the cover of the universal Church.

5. A new stage in the teaching is reached when the Galilean ministry is drawing to an end. By this time the Twelve had been brought into the closest association with the Master. Intimacy had been fostered by two long journeys which they took in His company, the first leading them through Phoenicia to the Decapolis, the second to the sources of the Jordan and the foot of Hermon.¹ These were not preaching-tours, but though they may have been undertaken partly to secure retirement and rest or even personal safety, they were doubtless used as opportunities for the instruction and training of the Apostles. It was at the end of the second of these journeys that our Lord revealed His glory to the innermost circle of the Apostolate in the vision of the Transfiguration. But before He did this, He called forth from Peter a con-

¹ vii, 24-31, viii, 27, ix, 30.

fession of His Messiahship, and then at once proceeded to foretell the Passion. Henceforth the Cross was the keynote of His teaching; He seemed to have found a new text, and how it was to be reconciled with the earlier preaching of the Kingdom passed the comprehension of the Twelve. That the "Christ should suffer"¹ was a doctrine altogether foreign to the Messianic Hope as they had received and entertained it. Repeated predictions, in which the details of the Crucifixion were distinctly foreshadowed,² failed to impress them with the certainty of the coming Passion; it loomed before their minds as a disquieting but unimaginable fear.³ But prediction did not exhaust Christ's teaching of the Cross. The crucifixion of the Master involved the con-crucifixion⁴ of the disciples, and for this He began at once to prepare them. The first lesson of this kind was shared by the crowd which followed Him through the villages of Cæsarea Philippi; immediately after his rebuke of Peter "He called unto Him the multitude with His disciples and said unto them, "If any man is minded (*θέλει*) to come after Me, let him disown himself (*ἀπαρνησάσθω ἑαυτόν*), and let him take up his cross and follow me."⁵ "Self-denial," "bearing the cross," have passed amongst Christians into household words, but their true meaning eludes many who use them glibly. The disciple who "denies himself," in the sense intended by Christ, loses himself in the Master, so that, as St. Paul has it, it is no longer he who lives, but Christ who lives in him.⁶ The man who takes up his cross not only bears a burden laid upon him, but goes to his death, is prepared to die with Christ, i.e. to pass out of his life of sin into a life unto God.⁷

¹ Acts xxvi. 23, *εἰ παθητὸς ὁ Χριστός.*

² Mark viii. 34, ix. 31, x. 33 f. ³ ix. 32, *ἠγνόουν τὸ ῥήμα.*

⁴ Rom. vi. 6, *ὁ παλαιὸς ἡμῶν ἄνθρωπος συνεσταυρώθη.* Gal. ii. 19, *Χριστῷ συνεσταυρωμαι.*

⁵ viii. 34.

⁶ Gal. ii. 20, *ζῶ δὲ οὐκέτι ἐγώ, ζῆ δὲ ἐν ἐμοὶ Χριστός.*

⁷ Rom. vi. 6 ff.; Col. iii. 3.

To the crowd the words could have served only as a deterrent, warning off any who took discipleship too lightly ; to the Apostles they revealed the true nature of the calling which they had embraced. Henceforth it was the chief concern of the Master to form in these twelve men the type of character which would fit them to deny themselves and take up the cross. We see this in the stern rebuke of personal ambition which followed their return to Capernaum ;¹ in the warning that he who would " enter into life " or even escape the " Gehenna of fire " must sacrifice hand or foot or eye when it becomes a stumbling-block ;² in the intimation that places of honour in the Messianic Kingdom are to be won only by sharing Christ's cup and baptism.³ The same great lesson is taught when the Master makes childhood the symbol of fitness for the Kingdom,⁴ and represents material wealth as a bar to admission which it needs omnipotence to surmount.⁵

6. Besides self-abnegation Christ impressed upon His followers the necessity of faith. Faith was joined with repentance, as we have seen, in the original call (i. 15), and it was made the condition of the exercise of our Lord's miraculous powers in the case of rational beings (ii. 5 ; v. 34, 36 ; vi. 5 f. ; ix. 23 ; x. 52). On the Twelve it was urged with special earnestness. They had " believed in the Gospel " from the first, but there were moments when their faith seemed to vanish, and the Lord called them back to this primary condition of the Christian life.⁶ But it was especially in connexion with prayer that He enforced the need of faith. The failure of the disciples to cast out an unclean spirit was attributed to the want of prayer,⁷ or rather, as St. Matthew states, to the *ὀλιγοπιστία* which made prayer of no effect. A few days before the end the Lord returned to this matter,

¹ Mark ix. 33 ff.² ix. 43 ff.³ x. 38 f.⁴ x. 14 f., cf. ix. 36 f.⁵ x. 23 ff.⁶ iv. 40, *ὁπω ἔχετε πίστιν.*]⁷ ix. 29, cf. Matt. xvii. 20.

ascribing almost boundless powers to prayer inspired by faith: "have faith in God . . . all things whatsoever ye pray and ask for, believe that ye receive them (when ye asked), and they shall be yours."¹ He added that mountains might be moved out of their places at the call of an adequate faith. By these words He planted at the centre of man's spiritual life a force of incalculable power; while He took away from His Church the incentive of a self-seeking ambition, He revealed the secret of a strength which could overcome the world.

7. When the scene is shifted from Galilee and Peræa to Jerusalem, we find ourselves in quite another atmosphere, and the teaching accordingly is of another character. The audience was differently constituted from that which gathered round our Lord in Galilee. In the Temple-courts, as on the shores of the Lake, a crowd speedily assembled whenever the Master was to be seen and heard, but it contained elements which were not present in Galilee—townsfolk from the Tyropœon, and pilgrims from the Dispersion in many lands, as well as peasants from the rural parts of Palestine. And on the fringe of the crowd, now and again coming to the front with simulated homage² or captious questions, were members of the Sanhedrin, not scribes only or elected counsellors, but the heads of the Priesthood, who, Sadducees as they were, now joined hands with the Pharisees in a determined effort to entrap the great Teacher. Our Lord's answers are preserved, together with a few fragments of His teaching addressed to the multitude, and they form a series of judgments which exhibit His attitude toward a variety of subjects debated in His own generation. We learn in this way His view of certain uses to which the Temple-courts were put; of the claim of the Roman government upon the allegiance of Jews who were under it; of the rejection by the Sadducees of the Pharisaic

¹ xi. 23 ff.

² Luke xx. 20, *ἰποκρινόμενος ἑαυτοῦς δικαίους εἶναι.*

doctrine of the Resurrection; of the relative importance of the duties prescribed by the Law.¹ His answers not only silenced His adversaries at the time, but asserted certain broad principles which still illuminate life and thought. But even more important are the few final words which He said about Himself. He implies that the authority which He exercised was from above;² He refers to Himself as the only and beloved Son of the Owner of the Vineyard,³ and as the Stone which was declared to be the "Head of the Corner";⁴ He calls attention to the paradox that the Christ, though the Son of David, is also his Lord;⁵ and at length, when interrogated by the High Priest, He explicitly confesses Himself to be "the Son of the Blessed," and the ultimate fulfiller of Daniel's vision of the Son of Man who comes with the clouds of heaven.⁶

8. The great eschatological discourse which ends the "day of questions" (Mark xiii.) is unique in more than one respect. It is the only prolonged utterance in the Marcan tradition, and almost the only utterance which deals with the Last Things. Elsewhere the teaching of Christ is singularly free from apocalyptic; it has to do with present duties, with things upon earth and things close at hand.⁷ No such reticence is practised here. The Apostles had, according to St. Mark, limited their inquiry to the fall of the City and Temple,⁸ but Christ of His own motion went further afield. It has indeed been maintained by recent scholars that certain portions of the discourse

¹ Mark xi. 17, xii. 15-17, 24-27, 29-31.

² xi. 29 ff. ³ xii. 6. ⁴ xii. 10. ⁵ xii. 35-37.

⁶ xiv. 62. Mark's *ἐγώ εἰμι* is perhaps not so near to the original as the more characteristic *Σὺ εἶπας* of Matt., or *Σὺ λέγεις* of Luke, but it is doubtless a true interpretation of the Lord's answer.

⁷ There is a momentary unveiling of the future in viii. 38, but when James and John ask for places of honour in the Messiah's Kingdom, their thoughts are recalled to the Messiah's sufferings (x. 37 f.).

⁸ The word *καὶ συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος* added by St. Matthew have probably arisen from that Evangelist's interpretation of St. Mark's *συντελεῖσθαι* seen in the light of the discourse itself.

(viz. Mark xiii. 7 f., 14–20, 24–27, 30 f.) are fragments of a primitive Christian Apocalypse which have been worked into the original tradition. In favour of this view it is urged that they “stand in no inward relation to the rest of the discourse”;¹ but, granting this statement, it proves no more than that the discourse has not been preserved in its original order, or was not all delivered at the same time. Even if these passages are removed, there remains in this remarkable chapter a revelation of certain features in the history of the future Church, ending with final *parousia*; and this alone places chapter xiii. on a different level from the sayings of chapters i.–xii. But was there not a cause for a new departure of this kind? The end of the Ministry and of the Master’s earthly life was at hand; within two months the new society of Christ’s disciples would have started on its mission, and “the last hour”² have begun. Now, if ever, there was a fitting opportunity for foreshadowing the course of future events, and inspiring hope. Yet apart from the use of certain metaphors borrowed from the Old Testament—the “abomination of desolation,” the darkening of sun and moon, the falling of stars from heaven, the coming of the Son of Man in the clouds³—the whole story of the great future is told with a reserve which is in marked contrast with the extravagance of other apocalyptic descriptions. The Master is not led by the curiosity of His disciples to fix a time either for the destruction of the City or for the end of the age; His words give no support to the belief that He would return in the lifetime of the first generation; they mention no symbolical numbers which might give ground for idle guesses; they refer to no mystical periods such as those which appear in the Apoca-

¹ Wendt, *Teaching of Jesus*, E. Tr., ii. p. 366 n.

² 1 John ii. 18.

³ All these occur in the passages which have been regarded as interpolated.

lypse of St. John; indeed, Jesus disclaims all knowledge of "that day or hour."¹ Such disclosures as He makes are made with a practical purpose. "Take heed that no man lead you astray . . . when ye hear of wars and tumults, be not troubled . . . take heed to yourselves . . . watch and pray . . . what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch."² These are the notes which are heard throughout the discourse, and they reveal the Master's aim. On this one occasion, just before the end of His course, He desired to illuminate the future for the guidance of His disciples in the coming years. So far as we can judge, His teaching would have been wanting in an important particular if it had contained no such limited apocalypse. Moreover, that the eschatology should come just where it does in His teaching is surely in accordance with the general plan of our Lord's ministry. Each group of utterances is seen to arise naturally out of the circumstances in which it occurs. What could be more natural than that the one eschatological discourse should be reserved to the end?

10. The last charge of the risen Lord to the eleven and the future Church is preserved by St. Matthew only,³ but it may have stood in the original ending of St. Mark, and it forms an apt conclusion to the teaching of the second Gospel. Once again, as in the first days of the Galilean ministry, Jesus strikes the note of "authority"; but the authority which He now claims is universal, embracing things in Heaven as well as things on earth.⁴ As He had Himself in those days made disciples and taught them, so He now commits to the Apostles and the Church the task of "discipling" and teaching the nations. But the disciples they made were to be His and not theirs,

¹ xiii. 32. ² xiii. 5, 7, 9, 23, 33, 35, 37.

³ Matt. xxviii. 18-20. The words have been handled by the present writer in a recent number of the EXPOSITOR.

⁴ ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς. Contrast Mark ii. 10.

and their teaching was to be but an enforcing of precepts which they had received from His lips. The mission of the Church was to find its inspiration in the words of the Master, and its strength in His invisible presence, which He pledged Himself to continue until the end of the age.

It is improbable that the sayings in the Marcan tradition were selected or arranged with the definite intention of representing the teaching of Christ as an ordered whole. Yet we have found in them an order, a purpose, and a relative completeness which suggest that they are in fact fairly representative of the great lines of our Lord's teaching in Galilee and during the last week at Jerusalem. And they exhibit certain characteristics which stand out in clear relief, and which it may be worth while here briefly to note.

(a) We are struck by the *inwardness* of the teaching. The heart, the centre of the moral life in man, is the field in which Jesus sets Himself to work. Repentance and faith, renunciation of self-love, obedience, sacrifice, are the conditions of life under the Kingdom of God. The seed of the Kingdom lives and grows and yields fruit only when it is lodged in good ground. External things, whether ceremonial acts or natural powers or wealth and place, may be stumbling-blocks in the soul's way to God. All sins come from within, and it is within that the work of purification must begin. The value of a gift is independent of its money-worth, and proportionate to the spiritual effort which it represents.

(b) But with this inwardness there is joined in the teaching of Christ an intensely *practical direction*. It is wholly free from the error of regarding external things as indifferent because they are valueless apart from the Spirit. Jesus was precise in His directions with regard to marriage and divorce; He cleansed the Temple from a traffic which was the symbol and occasion of a selfish greed, and refused to allow the house of prayer to be made a thoroughfare;

He instituted sacramental actions for perpetual observance in His Church. While His teaching rested on the broad principles of moral and spiritual truth, it could descend to small matters when a principle was even remotely involved. One of His sayings "made all meats clean";¹ another has blessed infancy and childhood for all time. His charge to the Twelve enters into trifles connected with food and clothing; when the child of Jairus awoke from her death-sleep, He "commanded that something should be given her to eat." Nothing was overlooked because it was in itself trivial or external, if it could be made to serve the good of man or the Kingdom of God.

(c) Although delivered under conditions which limited its immediate scope, the teaching possesses an *universality* which strikes even the casual reader. The Master is the Son of Man, and His words are for all men. Quite early in the ministry such sayings as "The Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins," "The Sabbath was made for man," "Out of the heart of man evil thoughts proceed," look far beyond the narrow limits of Galilee and of Judaism. The parable of the Sower was addressed to simple people amongst agricultural surroundings, and, as many a country clergyman knows, it appeals to the farmer and the ploughman of rural England to-day: yet the picture which it draws of the various fortunes experienced by the word of God in human hearts is a heritage for all mankind. There is scarcely a saying in the Marcan teaching which is not of far-reaching significance, charged with a lesson for one or more of those types of human character which are always with us.

(d) Simple and unpretending as the sayings are, they possess a tone of authority which is without parallel in literature. If the Lord does not often in the second Gospel

¹ Mark vii. 19 (reading *καθαρίτων* with **NABLA**).

preface His teaching by the solemn ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν,¹ throughout the book His words carry conviction or at least command attention. Not a hesitating note is struck from the day when he begins, "The Kingdom of God is at hand" to the last scene when He proclaims, "All power hath been given unto Me in heaven and on earth"; He speaks at all times with the same absolute conviction and consciousness of His Divine right. There is majesty in His least utterance, and it is nowhere more easily recognized than in the unvarnished record of the Gospel according to St. Mark.

H. B. SWETE.

THE PARABLE OF THE "UNJUST" STEWARD.

(ST. LUKE XVI.)

THERE are two things which are especially essential in seeking to understand the parables of our Lord:

- (i.) A careful examination of the context, particularly when that context contains explanatory comments.
- (ii.) A realization of the fact that they were spoken by One who was a Jew, to Jews, in the Jewish language; and also that the method of expression, as well as the *underlying* thoughts, are Jewish.

The former of these axioms is universally acknowledged to be correct, though whether it is always sufficiently acted upon is another question; but with regard to the second, it must be confessed that it is rarely taken into consideration. The Greek of the New Testament (including the Gospels) is so often illustrated by references to classical writers, both as regards expression and thought; but very rarely do commentators refer to Jewish literature for explaining New Testament forms and methods of thought.²

¹ It occurs only twice in the Galilean teaching (Mark iii. 28, viii. 12), and eleven times in the rest of the Gospel.

² There are, of course, some notable exceptions; e.g. Edersheim.