

Passiontide Sermons
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SERMON III.

THE PERSON OF THE CRUCIFIED.

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I Cor. i. 13.

Was Paul crucified for you?

WHEN a question is asked which can only be answered in one way, it is asked, not in order to extract information, but to set people thinking. And this is plainly the object of the question which the Apostle puts to the Corinthians. The Apostle knew, and the Corinthians knew, Who really had been crucified for them. Why then does the Apostle ask the question, to which one answer only was possible? Why does he ask them, "Was Paul crucified for you?" If they reflected, the Corinthians must have felt that they—or some of them—were acting as if Paul had been crucified for them. For what were they doing? They were breaking up the church of Christ at Corinth into divisions, which they named in three cases after human teachers; in one (but from a motive which was at least as bad as that of the rest) after our Lord Jesus Christ. One saith, I am of Paul; and another, I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ. This was natural enough in the Greek schools of philosophy, where every teacher had his private speculation, and where nothing more solid and helpful than a speculation was, in the last resort, to be had at all. And the Corinthians, who had all their lives been accustomed to the ways of the philosophers, were now bringing their old Pagan habits inside the Church. They could only be brought to reason by a question which should place the real import of their act in a startling light, by showing them that, in thus ranging themselves under a human teacher, they were forgetting what was due to the Author and Finisher of their faith. And such a question was this: "Was Paul crucified for you?" Let us pause to observe that there is courage, and courage of a rare quality, in this question of the Apostle's. Many a man is physically courageous who is wholly lacking in moral courage; and many a man who has moral courage is incapable of that high exercise of it which is before us in the text. The Apostle does not begin by addressing himself to those who used in different senses the names of other teachers in rivalry to his own. He does not ask, Was Apollos, was Cephas crucified for you? No, his question is addressed to the very persons with whom an ordinary leader or teacher of men finds it most difficult to be perfectly frank and honest. It is addressed to his especial friends at Corinth, to those who generously took his part, who, with sincerity and enthusiasm made much of his name and his authority, and on whose sympathy and co-operation, humanly speaking, he had largely to rely.

My brethren, it is not difficult to find fault with those; who oppose us: they are reputed fair game for criticism. Our self-love whispers to us that if they were not wrong they could not be our opponents; and our best and most serious convictions often reinforce what is thus whispered by our self-love. So they are told the hard truth, or what

we take to be the hard truth, with an unshrinking frankness; and the operation costs us little effort, and it causes them no great surprise, since it is only what they have to expect at our hands. So it is with human parties: we see it every day in this or that department of national and public life. But what we do not witness often is the spectacle of a leader of men who dares to tell the truth to his own friends. He may feel that there are truths which they ought to be told; that his silence may be misconstrued into an approval which he does not mean; that a true disinterestedness would risk much rather than be so misconstrued. But, notwithstanding, he reflects that he depends on them; he apprehends that plain speaking would breed divisions; that at least it would hinder hearty co-operation, and would tend to break up the party with which he acts. So he is silent, stifling regrets at that which he does not venture to criticise, and thus letting his friends take their erring or mischievous course, without interference or warning. So it was with Eli: he could not bear to be true with his own family, and thus, while his sons discredited the priesthood of Israel, he was silent. So it was with some early Christian bishops, and more than one early Christian Emperor; the Emperor's assistance was too valuable to be endangered by plain speaking; it was not every bishop who, like St. Ambrose, would rebuke a Theodosius after the slaughter of Thessalonica. So it was with Luther. He could not afford to break with the Elector Frederick, and so he invented a sanction for bigamy which no man would have condemned more fiercely than, he in a theological opponent. This is human weakness.

St. Paul was—God's grace had made him—strong and tender enough to begin his task of telling unwelcome truth, by telling it to his own devoted friends; to ask the men who showed such affection for him, but so mistakenly, "Was Paul crucified for you?" What, then, is the import of the question?

I.

It might seem to appeal, first of all, and on the surface of the words, to the sense of historic absurdity: "Was Paul crucified for you?"

Was not this Paul the very writer of the letter which asks the question? How, then, could he have died upon a cross for the benefit of those who were quietly reading his words at Corinth? The question is not whether what might have happened but did not happen, had happened. It is whether that which could not have happened, which could not be seriously thought of as having happened, had happened. Such a question was, of course, in a high degree provocative; it was deliberately calculated, as we have seen, to provoke self-questioning, self-distrust, self-reproach, self-correction, by asking that which could only be answered in one way, and impatiently, and which never would have been asked at all unless things had been very much amiss with those to whom it was addressed.

But this was not all. The question whether Paul was crucified suggests the thought, Who then was crucified? It suggests, first of all, the separateness, the deep impassable chasm, which yawns between any two personal existences. No one of us can possibly be another. Each personal being, whether created or Divine, whether man or angel, has his own niche to fill, his own work to do, his own particular destiny to accomplish. Other beings may nearly resemble,—they cannot be and do what he is and does. In the world of fact, and before the Divine Eye, each, of us differs from all besides.

The starting-point, the outset, the career, the characteristic acts, the efforts, the sufferings, the time and manner of the end, all are different. "Was Paul crucified for you?" Without for the moment going further, the question suggests, on the very threshold of the subject, the difference which parted the career of the Apostle from that of his Master. And in doing this it also pointed to a truth beyond: our Divine Master's isolation,—His awful, unapproachable isolation on the Cross. My brethren, we can understand something of the secret of this from what is passing just now before our eyes. At this moment the shadow of a great sorrow rests upon the Throne of this Empire. A life, still young, with energy and capacity and disposition such as would in any station have been held to promise a future of usefulness and success, and with opportunities such as can fall to a very few men in a century, has been suddenly cut short.¹ A widow with her orphan child—a mother mourning the loss of her youngest son: these are the figures on which the country is bending its profoundly sympathising gaze with a genuineness of anxious interest which provokes the wonder of foreigners. And it may here perhaps be asked whether such spectacles of human bereavement are not to be found by hundreds every day, in the streets of this Metropolis, and whether there is not something morbid in this lavish bestowal of consideration and sympathy on the sorrows of Royalty? Certainly, trouble is no monopoly of the great; the human heart is as tender and as exacting in the poorest hovels of the labouring man as in the palaces of kings. And yet it is a true human instinct which draws us with affectionate sympathy to the foot of the Throne at times like this, since we are really influenced, perhaps only half-consciously, by a sense of the isolation of the pathetic sufferer. Yes, that is one of the heaviest demands that are made upon earthly greatness: its owners inevitably live apart; they are denied all that human consolation and support which perfect reciprocity of thought and feeling ensures in the humbler walks of life, and which is ill replaced by the fixed proprieties of courtly deference: they are like those loftiest peaks in a chain of mountains, which earn their elevation at the cost of solitary exposure to the icy blasts, which no rival summit intercepts, that it may rob them of some elements of their pitiless severity. The isolation of the Throne! Yes, that is one special reason why its occupant has, at all times, but especially at times like this, an especial claim on the prayers of the Church of Christ—a claim which, it may be feared, we Christians too often fall adequately to recognise. But we may not dwell longer on any merely human sorrow, however august the scene, on the Sunday in the year which, of all Sundays, is closest to the Passion of the Son of God,—to an anguish besides which any earthly anguish is but a passing sense of discomfort. In His case, the isolation of Gethsemane was only outdone by the isolation of Calvary: He too was the occupant of a throne, but His throne was a scaffold. He was alone with His load of sin and suffering at every step of the Passion, though He moved forward to His death amid the ostentatious noise and bustle of a multitude; "I have trodden the winepress alone, and of the people there was none beside Me," was the predestined and the actual language of His Soul: and with his eye upon this awful solitariness of his suffering Master, the Apostle asks the Corinthians, "Was Paul crucified for you?"

II.

"Was Paul crucified for you?"

¹ His Royal Highness the Duke of Albany died March 28, 1884.

The question implies, secondly, the unique efficacy of the Death of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us note that in this question the Apostle fixes on our Lord's Death in shame and torture as the most characteristic feature of His earthly career. Many a Christian, ancient or modern, having the Apostle's object in view, would have asked a different question. Of old, men would perhaps have asked, Was Paul transfigured on the mount? Did Paul raise Lazarus from the dead? Did Paul rise from the dead the third day? And in modern times, too, many would have asked, Did Paul preach the Sermon on the Mount? In the Apostle's eyes our Lord's Teaching was of less account than His Death: nay, the glory with which His Manhood was invested, His power to raise the dead, and to rise from death, counted for less than the fact that He was crucified. Not in this passage only are these points thrust by comparison into the background, while His Death is treated as the prominent feature in His manifestation to the world. "O foolish Galatians," the Apostle cries, "before whose eyes Jesus Christ has been evidently set forth crucified." "I determined not to know anything among you," he tells the Corinthians, "save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." "God forbid that I should glory," he writes again to the Galatians, "save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." St. Paul plainly feels that the full meaning of Christ's work emerges in His Death; that His Death, and not His Teaching, is the climax of His self-manifestation to mankind; that the gift of Inspiration might conceivably have enabled an Apostle to teach side by side with the Master—that Divine Power might robe a purely human form with glory, might enable a mere man to raise the dead, or might Itself raise another Lazarus from death; but that no being of whom we know, no being, whether in earth or heaven, could possibly have taken the Redeemer's place upon the Cross of Calvary. For, indeed, the Corinthian Christians had been taught that when Jesus Christ was crucified, His Death had a virtue, was followed by results, which no other death had ever had since the world began. Christians were then taught that this Death was, first of all, a Propitiation for sin, a Propitiation, real and literal, offered on earth, accepted in heaven—a Propitiation of which the offerings on the Day of Atonement in the ancient Tabernacle were but a faint shadow and presentiment. Thus St. Paul says that Jesus Christ was set forth as a Propitiation, where the word means a propitiating victim, through faith in His Blood: that is, He becomes this to us when we believe in the efficacy of this sacrifice of His Life; and St. John twice calls our Lord Jesus Christ a Propitiation, using a word which means practically one who effects a propitiation for our sins, "and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." Again, Christians were taught that the Death of our Lord was a redemption from the guilt and penalty of sin; that it was an enfranchisement, purchased at a costly price, and that this price was none other than the Blood, that is, the symbol and also the essential element of the Life of Jesus Christ. Thus the Apostle tells the Ephesians that when members of Christ "we have redemption through His Blood, even the forgiveness of sins;" and the Colossians, that in the Son of God's love we have our redemption, which is again explained to mean the forgiveness of our sins. To this our Lord Himself referred when, on the occasion of the demand of the sons of Zebedee to sit on His right Hand and on His left in His kingdom, He told His disciples that the Son of Man had come not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His Life a ransom, or price paid down, for many.⁶ Once more, Christians were taught that the Death of our Lord, having this propitiatory and redemptive virtue, was thus a Reconciliation or Atonement between God

and man. "We rejoice in God," he tells the Romans, "through our Lord Jesus Christ, through Whom we have now received the reconciliation." God, he tells the Corinthians, "has reconciled us to Himself through Christ. God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them;" and this reconciliation was effected in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the Cross, when "Him Who knew no sin, He made to be sin on our behalf, that we might be made the Righteousness of God in Him."

Thus the Death of our Lord is stated in the New Testament to be a Propitiation for sin, a Price paid to buy our freedom from sin's penalty, and an Act which reconciled sinful but penitent man with a holy God. It is open to people to say that they do not believe the Apostle's teaching; but what is hardly open to them, consistently with honest dealing with language, is to suggest that on so serious a subject the Apostle did not mean what he says, and was only using the phrases of poetry and metaphor. At this rate language ceases to be an instrument for the transmission of thought; if it has not become, as Talleyrand cynically put it, a means for concealing thought. The Death of our Lord is in the New Testament plainly credited with effects which are attributed to no other death in human history; and it is to this solitary efficacy of Christ's Death that St. Paul tacitly refers in the question, "Was Paul crucified for you?"

No doubt, already the Apostle himself had undergone much for the sake of that Faith by which he hoped to promote the highest happiness of mankind, and, in this sense, he too suffered for his converts. Not long after he could write: "Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils from mine own countrymen, in perils from the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness." And although in the end he was not crucified, yet the day came when, in his own words, he was ready to be offered, and the time of his departure was at hand, and he was led out beyond the Ostian gate at Rome to die by the hand of the executioner.

And yet, what was the effect of the prolonged sufferings and final martyrdom of St. Paul? They were a proof of his devoted love of his Crucified Lord; they were a witness to his profound belief in the truth of Christianity, as a creed worth living for, worth dying for. They thus enriched the Church of his generation, the Church of all succeeding ages, with an example which goes on, even now, drawing, kindling, invigorating souls in the service of their Redeemer. But did St. Paul's death act as a propitiation before God? Did it buy men back from the guilt and penalties of sin? Did it reconcile God and man? Did it, in fact, establish new relations between earth and heaven? No I the Death of our Lord Jesus Christ was followed by consequences which differ, not in degree merely, but in kind, from those which have followed the death of any of His servants; and St. Paul suggests this to the Corinthians by asking them, "Was Paul crucified for you?"

III.

If it be asked, why this should be so, we have only to shift the accent, as we ask the question, and it will answer itself. "Was Paul crucified for you?"

For it suggests, this question, thirdly, the unique dignity of the Divine Redeemer. It is because He is what He is, that His Redemptive Death has this efficacy that is all its own. Observe here, that even our Lord's Nature as Man was in two respects unique.

First of all, it was Sinless. That taint of evil, which we all of us inherit from our first parent, and which, though its stain and degradation is removed in Baptism, yet hangs about our life, like an atmosphere charged with the possibilities of moral mischief, had no place in Him. Alone of the children of Eve, His was truly an Immaculate-Conception, cutting off the entail of inherited corruption, and making Him all that the first father of the race had been before his fall. Still more certainly was He preserved from actual sin: although the darts of the tempter lighted again and again on the surface of His Human Soul, on His life of thought and feeling, and, we may dare say, of passion, yet in Him they found no response, however faint; they glanced off as from a polished surface which afforded them no lodgment. Thus He could address to His contemporaries a challenge which no other in human form ever could utter with impunity: "Which of you convinceth Me of sin?" And His Apostle could proclaim "that He was made to be sin for us, Who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." It was this Sinless Nature which, representing a world of sinners, hung in death upon the Cross; and the Apostle's consciousness that he himself had been "sold under sin," and that he was parted by an immeasurable interval from the Sinless Redeemer, Who had bought him with the price of His Blood—this consciousness underlies his question, "Was Paul crucified for you?"

Next, our Lord's Human Nature, being thus Sinless, was also representative of the race. It has been said, with truth, that when the Eternal Word, or Son of God, was made flesh, He united Himself, not to a human person, but to human nature. His Humanity had nothing about it that was local, particular, appropriate only to a single historical epoch, to a country, to a race. He was born in Palestine, and of a Jewish mother, yet He was without the narrowing characteristics of the Jew; He was born a member of a down-trodden and conquered race, when the Roman empire had reached the zenith of its fortunes, yet in Mind and Character He might have belonged as well to the race of the conquerors, or to any other epoch in the history of mankind. All races, all countries, all ages had a share in Him, yet He could be claimed as an exclusive possession by none.

This representative character of our Lord's Manhood is insisted on by St. Paul, when he calls Jesus Christ the Second Adam. As the first Adam represented the whole human family by being the common ancestor, from whom all human beings derived the gift of physical life, so that his blood flowed in their veins, and their several lives, whatever their individual characteristics may be, are traceable to and meet in him; so the Second Adam was to represent the human family, not as the common source of bodily life, but as the parent of a moral and spiritual existence, which those children of the first Adam who would, might receive from Him. The Second Adam was, says the Apostle, a Quickening Spirit: He held towards the spiritual and higher life of mankind a relation as intimate, and, in its purpose, as universal as the first Adam had held to man's natural life.

Now, in this representative character of our Lord's Human Nature we see the explanation of that which often embarrasses thoughtful readers of the Bible and the early Christian writers. Why, they ask, should the great men of the old Jewish history be constantly represented as types of Christ? Why should there be any traceable correspondence between Abraham, or Joseph, or Moses, or Joshua, or David, or

Solomon, and the Lord Jesus? The whole idea seems at first sight arbitrary; as though anybody might be a type, in the hands of a fanciful writer, of anybody else. Yet, brethren, it is not so in reality. Because Christ's Manhood is representative of all that is excellent in man, therefore each excellence of the ancient saints foreshadowed something that was to have a place in Him: therefore Abraham, and Joseph, and Moses, and Joshua, and David, and Solomon, reappeared, all of them, but without their attendant weakness, in the Son of Mary. Nay, it well may be that whatever was pure, and lofty, and noble in the human family beyond the favoured families of the chosen race, in Greece or India—mere natural excellencies, imperfect, but struggling,—was a true anticipation of the Perfect and Representative Man. He belonged to each, He infinitely transcended each, He summarised and recapitulated in Himself all that was true and great in all that had preceded Him; and as His Nature was thus comprehensively representative, His Acts and Sufferings were representative too. If He died, human nature at its best died in Him; and those who have, by gifts from Him, and by the voluntary and moral association of faith, a share in this typically Perfect Nature are vitally associated with His Death, and, by no arbitrary fiction, but as a matter of justice, share in its deserts and in its vast and beneficial consequences. Thus "if any man be in Christ, he is the new creation: old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new." Thus Christians are "accepted in the Beloved," by actually sharing that new and representative Nature which the Son of God made His own, that it might be "obedient unto death." But what of the Apostle? Paul was by the grace of God an Apostle and a Saint; but he had no pretensions to represent the Jewish people, much less the human family. He was a man of his time, deeply indented with strong individual traits, a man of whom few would have said, "Here is a representative nature, in which I trace, along with much besides, the lineaments of my own being and character." No! One only has ever represented the race at large by the very constitution of His Nature; and, conscious of this, the Apostle asks the Corinthians, "Was Paul crucified for you?"

But our Lord, although His Manhood was thus Sinless and Representative, was much more than man in truth, His Manhood was but a robe which He had folded around His Person when He condescended to come among us; in the true seat of His Being He was much more than man: He was, as His Apostle says, "God over all, Blessed for ever." When His Passion was approaching, and the first drops of the great storm that broke upon Him had begun to fall, He partly lifted the veil, as, in the tremendous words of last Sunday's Gospel, "Before Abraham was, I am." When they were nailing Him to the Cross, He hinted at the solemn truth in the prayer, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." When the poor thief turned to Him in the penitence and faith of his dying agonies, He replied, in words which would have been absurd or blasphemous had He not been the true Lord of souls, and Lord of the abode of souls in the land beyond the veil, "To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise." When He gave up the ghost, nature around was visibly troubled; the earth did quake, and the rocks were rent, and many bodies of holy Jews which slept arose, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many. When all was over, the centurion, Pagan as he was, could not but feel the radiation of the great truth which gives the Passion its most solemn meaning, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

Yes, this is the point which we Christians must never for a moment lose sight of as year by year we traverse the history of the Sufferings which our Redeemer underwent

on our behalf. The solemn truth which gives each separate event its astonishing elevation is the truth that the Sufferer is God, Who, that He might suffer, has taken a nature in which suffering becomes possible. The flesh which is scourged is the Flesh of God; the hands which are pierced are the Hands of God; the brow which is crowned with thorns, the face which is buffeted and spat upon,—these are the Brow and the Face of God. The Blood which flows from His Five Wounds is rightly credited with Its cleansing power; It is no mere physical humour that is draining away the life of a human body; as the Apostle told the presbyters of Ephesus on the beach at Miletus,—it is the Blood of God.

Who could have said beforehand what the Death of such a Being would or would not effect? In such a sphere human reason is altogether at fault; it can neither anticipate nor can it criticise the truth. It can but listen for what Revelation may say; and when Revelation tells us that this tremendous event has been a Propitiation for human sin, and has brought men out of captivity to sin's penalties, into freedom and peace, and has reconciled a Holy God and His erring creatures, we can only listen and believe. Certainly this was the Crucifixion as St. Paul thought of it; He thought of it as the decisive moment of the world's Redemption, because the Redeemer was indisputably Divine.

What then must have been the feeling of the adoring Apostle, when his mind rested for an instant on the idea, that human souls had thrust him unwittingly on the throne of the Uncreated, when he asked the question, "Was Paul crucified for you?"

One point in conclusion. Surely our Crucified Saviour should have a first place in the thought and heart of the Church at large, and of each of His redeemed servants. No other, be he man or angel, has remotely comparable claims. No religious teacher, in past ages or in recent times, has been crucified for us; no friend, or parent, or wife, or child, has or can for us overcome the sharpness of death, with the effect of opening the kingdom of heaven to our faith and love. Only when we gaze upon the Crucified do we behold the fullest unveiling of the Heart of God, face to face with the sin and suffering of human life. Only when we gaze upon the Crucified do we behold the Fountain and Source from Which flow all the streams that refresh and invigorate the great garden of souls—the Christian Church. Only when we gaze upon the Crucified do we behold the Source of pardon for sinners—for each one of ourselves,—and the standard of obedience and love for saints. Here is the true article of a standing or falling Church,—not how much we make of the poor thin emotions of the sinful soul, but how much, forgetting ourselves, we can prize the transcendent Sufferings of the Divine Redeemer. Be this our work, during the coming Week of penitence and grace, to erect in each heart a throne for the Crucified, to expel all rival affections that would usurp what should belong only to Him, and thus by His Cross and Passion as our Hope and Refuge, to be brought to the Glory of His Resurrection.

"O let my heart no further roam,
'Tis Thine by vows, and hopes, and fears,
Long since;
O call Thy wanderer home
To that dear home, safe in Thy wounded Side,
Where only broken hearts their sin and shame may hide."²

² *The Christian Year*. Hymn for Good Friday.