

Expository Tracts, No. 10.

CHRIST'S TRANSFIGURATION.

BEING

THOUGHTS ON MATT. XVII. 1-9.

BY THE

RIGHT REV. BISHOP RYLE, D.D.

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CHRIST'S TRANSFIGURATION.

MATTHEW XVII. 1-9.

- 1 And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart,
- 2 And was transfigured before them: and His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was white as the light.
- 3 And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with Him.
- 4 Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if Thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles: one for Thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.
- 5 While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him.
- 6 And when the disciples heard *it*, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid.
- 7 And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid.
- 8 And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only.
- 9 And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead.

READER,

The verses before you describe one of the most remarkable events in our Lord's earthly ministry,—the event commonly called the transfiguration. It is a mysterious event, no doubt; and the passage contains things hard to be understood. But it is an event full of practical lessons of deep importance to all Christians. These lessons I will now point out.

1. In the first place, you have in these verses *a striking pattern of the glory in which Christ and His people will appear, when He comes the second time.*

There can be little question that this was one main object of this wonderful vision. It was meant to encourage the disciples, by giving them a glimpse of good things yet to come. That "face shining as the sun," and that "raiment white as the light," were intended to give the disciples some idea of the majesty in which Jesus will appear to the world, when He comes the second time. The corner of the veil was lifted up, to show them their Master's true dignity. They were taught that, if He did not yet appear to the world as a king, it was only because the time for putting on His royal apparel was not yet come.

Reader, it is good to have the coming glory of Christ and His people deeply impressed on your mind. Christians are very apt to forget it; there are few visible indications of it in the world: we see not yet all things put under our Lord's feet. Sin, unbelief, and superstition abound: thousands are practically saying, "We will not have this man to reign over us."—It doth not yet appear what Christ's people shall be: their crosses, their tribula-

tions, their weaknesses, their conflicts, are all manifest enough; but there are few signs of their future reward. Beware of giving way to doubts in this matter: silence such doubts by reading over the history of the transfiguration. There is laid up for Jesus, and all that believe on Him, such glory as the heart of man never conceived: it is not only promised, but part of it has actually been seen by three competent witnesses. One of them says, "We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father." (John i. 14.) Surely that which has been seen may well be believed.

2. In the second place, you have in these verses *an unanswerable proof of the resurrection of the body, and the life after death*. You are told that Moses and Elijah appeared visibly in glory with Christ: they were seen in a bodily form; they were heard talking with our Lord. Fourteen hundred and eighty years had rolled round since Moses died and was buried; more than nine hundred years had passed away since Elijah "went up by a whirlwind into heaven:" yet here they were seen alive, by Peter, James, and John!

Reader, lay firm hold on this part of the vision: it deserves close attention. All men must feel, if they ever think at all, that the state of the dead is a wonderful and mysterious subject. One after another we bury them out of our sight; we lay them in their narrow beds, and see them no more, and their bodies become dust. But will they really live again? Shall we really see them any more? Will the grave really give back the dead at the last day? These are questions that will occasionally come across the minds of some, in spite of the plainest statements in the Word of God.

Now you have, in the transfiguration, the clearest evidence that the dead will rise again. You find two men appearing on earth, in their bodies, who had long been separate from the land of the living,—and in them you have a pledge of the resurrection of all. All that have ever lived upon earth will again be called to life, and render up their account: not one will be found missing. There is no such thing as annihilation, or ceasing to exist. All that have ever fallen asleep in Christ will be found in safe keeping,—patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs,—down to the humblest servant of God in our own day. Though unseen to us, they all live to God: "He is not a God of the dead, but of the living." (Luke xx. 20.) Their spirits live, as surely as we live ourselves, and will appear hereafter in glorified bodies, as surely as Moses and Elijah in the Mount. These are indeed solemn thoughts! There is a resurrection, and men like Felix may well tremble: there is a resurrection, and men like Paul may well rejoice.

3. In the last place, you have in these verses *a remarkable testimony to Christ's infinite superiority over all that are born of woman*.

This is a point which is brought out strongly by the voice from heaven, which the disciples heard. Peter, bewildered by the heavenly vision, and not knowing what to say, proposed to build "three tabernacles," one for Christ,

one for Moses, and one for Elijah. He seemed, in fact, to place the law-giver and the prophet side by side with His Divine Master, as if all three were equal. At once, you are told, the proposal was rebuked in a marked manner: a cloud covered Moses and Elijah, and they were no more seen. A voice at the same time came forth from the cloud, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye Him." That voice was meant to teach Peter that there was One there far greater than Moses or Elijah. Moses was a faithful servant of God; Elijah was a bold witness for the truth: but Christ was far above either one or the other. He was the Saviour to whom law and prophets were continually pointing; He was the true Prophet, whom all were commanded to hear. Moses and Elijah were great men in their day; but Peter and his companions were to remember, that in nature, dignity, and office, they were far below Christ.—Christ was the true sun: they were the stars depending daily on His light. Christ was the root: they were the branches. Christ was the Master; they were the servants.—Let them honour Moses and the prophets, as holy men; but if they would be saved, they must take Christ alone for their Master, and glory only in Him. "Hear ye Him."

Reader, you have in these words a striking lesson to the whole Church of Christ. There is a constant tendency in human nature to "hear man." Bishops, priests, deacons, popes, cardinals, councils, presbyterian and independent ministers, are continually exalted to a place which God never intended them to fill, and made practically to usurp the honour of Christ. Against this tendency watch, and be on your guard. Let these solemn words of the vision ever ring in your ears: "Hear ye Christ."

The best of men are only men at their very best. Patriarchs, prophets, and apostles,—martyrs, fathers, reformers, puritans,—all, all are sinners, who need a Saviour; holy, useful, honourable in their place,—but sinners after all. They must never be allowed to stand between you and Christ. He alone is "the Son, in whom the Father is well pleased;" He alone is sealed and appointed to give the bread of life; He alone has the keys in His hands: "God over all, blessed for ever." Take heed that you ever hear His voice, and follow Him. Value all religious teaching just in proportion as it leads you to Jesus. The sum and substance of saving religion is to "hear Christ."