

THE UPPER ROOM,
AND OTHER SERMONS DELIVERED
ON IMPORTANT PUBLIC OCCASIONS

BEING A FEW TRUTHS FOR THE TIMES.

BY THE RIGHT REV.
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"If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself
to the battle?"—1 Cor. xiv. 8.

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FOUNDATION TRUTHS.

"I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, 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."—
1 COR. XV. 3, 4.

THE text which heads this paper is taken from a passage of Scripture with which most Englishmen are only too well acquainted. It is the chapter from which the lesson has been selected, which forms part of the matchless Burial Service of the Church of England. Of all the occasional services of the Prayer Book, none, in my humble judgment, is more beautiful than this. The good old "Book of Common Prayer," we all know, has no form or comeliness in the eyes of some. We have seen the burial laws of this realm altered, and other "uses" sanctioned, and introduced into our churchyards at funerals. But of one thing I am very certain. We shall never see the bodies of professing Christians committed to the ground with a wiser and better service than that of the Anglican Liturgy.

The starting-point of the whole argument of this chapter will be found in the two verses which form the text. The Apostle opens by reminding the Corinthians that "among the first things" which he delivered to them, when he commenced his teaching, were two great facts about Christ: one was His *death*, the other was His *resurrection*. The passage seems to me to open up two subjects of deep interest, and to them I invite the attention of all into whose hands this paper may fall.

I. For one thing, *let us mark well the primary truths which St. Paul delivered to the Corinthians.*

II. For another thing, *let us try to grasp the reasons why St. Paul assigns to these truths such a singularly prominent position.*

I. What, then, were the things which the Apostle preached "first of all," that is, among the first things, at Corinth?

Before I answer that question, I ask my readers to pause awhile and realize the whole position which St. Paul occupied when he left Athens and entered Corinth.

Here is a solitary Jew visiting a great heathen city for the first time, to preach an entirely new religion, to begin an aggressive Evangelistic mission. He is a member of a despised people, sneered at alike by Greeks and Romans, isolated and cut off from other nations, in their own little corner of the earth, by their peculiar laws and habits, and unknown to Gentiles either for literature, arms, arts, or science. The "bodily presence" of this bold Jew is "weak," and his "speech," compared to that of Greek rhetoricians, "contemptible" (2 Cor. x. 10).

He stands almost alone in a city, famous all over the world, even in the estimate of the heathen, for luxury, immorality, and idolatry. Such was the place, and such was the man! A more remarkable position it is hard to conceive. And what did this solitary Jew tell the Corinthians? What did he say about the great Head and Founder of the new faith which he wanted them to receive in place of their ancient religion? Did he begin by cautiously telling them how Christ lived, and taught, and worked miracles, and spake “as no man ever spake”? Did he tell them that He had been rich as Solomon, victorious as Joshua, or learned as Moses? Nothing of the kind! The very first fact he proclaimed about Christ was that He died, and died the most ignominious death—the death of a malefactor, the death of the cross.

And why did St. Paul lay so much stress upon Christ’s death rather than His life? Because, he tells the Corinthians, “He died for our sins.” A deep and wonderful truth that, a truth which lay at the very foundation of the whole religion which the Apostle came to preach! For that death of Christ was not the involuntary death of a martyr, or a mere example of self-sacrifice. It was the voluntary death of a Divine Substitute for the guilty children of Adam, by which He made atonement for “the sin of the world.” It was a death of such mighty influence on the position of sinful man before God, that it provided complete redemption from the consequences of the fall. In a word, St. Paul told the Corinthians that when Christ died, He died as the Representative of guilty man, to make expiation for us by the sacrifice of Himself, and to endure the penalty which we deserved. “He bore our sins in His own body on the tree.” “He suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.” “He was made sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him” (1 Pet. ii 24, iii. 18; 2 Cor. v. 21). A great and stupendous mystery, no doubt! But it was a mystery to which every sacrifice from the time of Abel had been continually pointing for 4000 years. Christ died “according to the Scriptures.”

The other great fact about Christ which St. Paul placed in the front part of his teaching was His resurrection from the dead. He boldly told the Corinthians that the same Jesus who died, and was buried, came forth alive from the grave on the third day after His death, and was seen, touched, handled, and talked to, in the body, by many competent witnesses. By this amazing miracle He proved, as He had frequently said He would, that He was the promised and long-expected Saviour foretold in prophecy, that the satisfaction for sin He had made by His death was accepted by God the Father, that the work of our redemption was completed, and that death, as well as sin, was a conquered enemy. In short, the Apostle taught that the greatest of miracles had been wrought, and that with such a Founder of the new faith which he came to proclaim, first dying for our sins, and then rising again for our justification, nothing was impossible, and nothing wanting for the salvation of man’s soul.

Such were the two great truths to which St. Paul assigned the first place, when he began his campaign as a Christian teacher at Corinth,—Christ’s

vicarious death for our sins,—Christ’s rising again from the grave. Nothing seems to have preceded them: nothing to have been placed on a level with them. No doubt it was a sore trial of faith and courage to a learned and highly-educated man like St. Paul to take up such a line. Flesh and blood might well shrink from it. He says himself, “I was with you in weakness and fear, and in much trembling” (1 Cor. ii. 2, 3). But by the grace of God he did not flinch. He says, “I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”

Nor did the case of Corinth stand alone. Wherever the great Apostle of the Gentiles went, he preached the same doctrine, and put it in the forefront of his preaching. He addressed very different hearers, and people of very different minds. But he always used the same spiritual medicine, whether at Jerusalem, or Antioch in Pisidia, or Iconium, or Lystra, or Philippi, or Thessalonica, or Berea, or Athens, or Ephesus, or Borne. That medicine was the story of the cross and the resurrection. They crop up in all his sermons and Epistles. You never go far without coming across them. Even Festus, the Roman governor, when he tells Agrippa of Paul’s case, describes it as hingeing on “One Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive “(Acts xxv. 19).

(a) Now let us learn for one thing what were the *leading principles* of that religion, which eighteen centuries ago came forth from Palestine, and turned the world upside down. The veriest infidel cannot deny the effect that it produced on mankind. The world before and the world after the introduction of Christianity were as different worlds as light and darkness, night and day. It was Christianity that starved idolatry, and emptied the heathen temples,—that stopped gladiatorial combats, elevated the position of women, raised the whole tone of morality, and improved the condition of children and the poor. These are facts which we may safely challenge all the enemies of revealed religion to gainsay. They are facts which form one of the gravest difficulties of infidelity. And what did it all? Not, as some dare to say, the mere publication of a higher code of duty, a sort of improved Platonic philosophy, without root or motive. No! it was the simple story of the cross of Calvary, and the empty sepulchre in the garden, the marvellous death of One “numbered with transgressors,” and the astounding miracle of His resurrection (Isa. liii. 12). It was by telling how the Son of God died for our sins, and rose again for our justification, that Apostles and apostolic men changed the face of the world, gathered mighty churches, and turned countless sinners into saints.

(b) Let us learn, for another thing, what the *foundation of our own personal religion* must be, if we really want inward, spiritual comfort. That the early Christians possessed such comfort is as plain as the sun at noonday. We read repeatedly in the New Testament of their joy, and peace, and hope, and patience, and cheerfulness, and contentment. We read in ecclesiastical history of their courage and firmness under the fiercest persecution, of their uncomplaining endurance of sufferings, and their triumphant deaths. And what was the mainspring of their peculiar characters,—characters which excited the

admiration even of their bitterest enemies, and puzzled philosophers like Pliny? There can only be one reply. These men had a firm grasp of the two great facts which St. Paul proclaimed “first “and foremost to the Corinthians, the death and resurrection of their great Head, Jesus Christ the Lord. Let us never be ashamed of walking in their steps. It is cheap and easy work to sneer at “dogmatic theology” and old-fashioned creeds and modes of faith, as if they were effete and worn-out things, unfit for this enlightened nineteenth century. But after all, what are the fruits of modern philosophy, and the teaching of cold abstractions, compared to the fruits of the despised dogmas of distinctive Christianity? If you want to see peace in life, and hope in death, and consolation felt in sorrow, you will never find such things except among those who rest on the two great facts of our text, and can say, “I live by faith in the Son of God,” who died for my sins, and was raised again for my justification (Gal. ii. 20).

II. Let me turn now to another view of the subject before us. We have seen what the truths were which St. Paul proclaimed “first of all “to the Corinthians, and what were the effects which they produced. Let us now try to grasp and examine *the reasons why* he was led to assign them such a prominent position.

The inquiry is a very interesting one. I cannot hold, with some, that St. Paul adopted this course only because he was commissioned and commanded to do so. I think the reasons lie far deeper than this. Those reasons are to be sought in the necessities and condition of fallen human nature. I believe that man’s wants could never have been met and satisfied by any other message than that which St. Paul brought to Corinth; and if he had not brought it, he would have come thither in vain.

For there are three things about man in every part of the world which force themselves on our notice, whenever we sit down to examine his nature, position, and constitution. He is a creature with a sense of sin and accountableness at the bottom of his heart—a creature continually liable to sorrow and trouble from his cradle to his grave—and a creature who has before him the certainty of death, and a future state at last. These are three great facts which stare us in the face everywhere, in Europe, Asia, Africa, and America. Travel all over the world, and they meet you, both among the most highly educated Christians and the most untutored savages. Go about our own country, and study the family life of the most learned philosophers and the most ignorant peasants. Everywhere, and in every rank and class, you will have to make the same report. Everywhere you will find these three things, sorrow, death, and the sense of sin. And the position I boldly take up is this,—that nothing can be imagined or conceived more admirably suited to meet the wants of human nature than the very doctrine which St. Paul began with at Corinth—the doctrine of Christ dying for our sins and rising again for us from the grave. It fits the needs of man, just as the right key fits the lock.

Let me glance for a few minutes at the three things which I have just named, and try to show the strong light which they throw on St. Paul’s choice of subjects

when he began his ministry at Corinth.

(a) Consider first and foremost, *the inward sense of sin and imperfection* which exists in every member of the human family, more or less. I grant freely that it differs widely in different persons. In thousands of people it seems completely gone, effaced, and dead. Early want of education, customary sin, constant neglect of all religion, habitual indulgence in fleshly lusts,—all these things have a wonderful power to blind the eye and sear the conscience. But where will you ever find a man, except among high-caste Brahmins, or half-crazy Christian fanatics, who will boldly tell you that he is perfect and faultless, and who will not confess, if you drive him into a corner, that he is not exactly what he ought to be, and that he knows better than he does? Oh, no! The vast majority of mankind have a conscience of sin, which every now and then makes them miserable. The self-imposed austerities of Hindus, the trembling of rulers like Herod and Felix, are proofs of what I mean. Wherever there is a child of Adam, there is a creature that has in his heart of hearts a consciousness of guilt, defectiveness, and need.

And when this sense of sin is really awakened, and stirs within us, what can cure it? That is the grand question. Some talk vaguely of God's "mercy" and "goodness," though utterly unable to explain their meaning, and to show what title man has to them. Others flatter themselves that their own repentance, and tears, and prayers, and active and diligent use of the ceremonials of religion, will bring them peace. But what child of Adam ever found relief in this way? What more certain than the recorded experience of thousands, that medicines like these never healed inward misgivings and mental fears? Nothing has ever been found to do good to a sin-stricken soul but the sight of a Divine Mediator between God and man, a real living Person of almighty power and almighty mercy, bearing our sins, suffering in our stead, and taking on Himself the whole burden of our redemption. So long as man only looks within, and thinks to efface the sense of sin by vain attempts to scour and purify his own character, so long he only feels more wretched every day. Once let him look without for peace, to "the Man Christ Jesus" dying for his sins, and rest his soul on Him, and he will find, as millions have found in the last eighteen centuries, that he has got the very thing that a wounded conscience needs. In short, a believing view of Christ dying for our sins is God's appointed remedy for man's spiritual need. It is the Divine specific for that deadly plague which infects the whole family of Adam, and once seen and felt makes men and women miserable. If Paul had not proclaimed this grand specific at Corinth, he would have shown great ignorance of human nature, and been a physician of no value. And if we ministers do not proclaim it, it is because our eyes are dim, and there is little light in us.

(b) Let us consider, in the next place, the universal *liability of man to sorrow*. The testimony of Scripture, "that man is born to trouble," is continually echoed by thousands who know nothing of the Scriptures, but simply speak the language of their own experience. The world, nearly all men agree, is full of trouble. It is a true saying, that we come into life crying, and pass through it

complaining, and leave it disappointed. Of all God's creatures, none is so vulnerable as man. Body, and mind, and affections, and family, and property, are all liable in their turn to become sources and avenues of sorrow. And from this no rank or class possesses any immunity. There are sorrows for the rich as well as the poor, for the learned as well as the unlearned, for the young as well as the old, for the castle as well as the cottage; and neither wealth, nor science, nor high position can prevent their forcing their way into our homes, and breaking in upon us sometimes like an armed man. These are ancient things, I know; the poets and philosophers of old Greece and Rome knew them as well as we do. But it is well to be put in remembrance.

For what shall best help man to meet and bear sorrow? That is the question. If our condition is such, since the Fall, that we cannot escape sorrow, what is the surest receipt for making it tolerable? The cold lessons of Stoicism have no power in them. Resignation and submission to the will of God are excellent things to talk about in fine weather. But when the storm strikes us, and hearts ache, and tears flow, and gaps are made in our family circle, and friends fail us, and money makes itself wings, and sickness lays us low, we want something more than abstract principles and general lessons. We want a living, personal Friend, a Friend to whom we can turn with firm confidence that he can help and feel.

Now it is just here, I maintain, that St. Paul's doctrine of a risen Christ comes in with a marvellous power, and exactly meets our necessities. We have One sitting at the right hand of God, as our sympathizing Friend, who has all power to help us, and can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, even Jesus the Son of God. He knows the heart of a man and all his condition, for He Himself was born of a woman, and took part of flesh and blood. He knows what sorrow is, for He Himself in the days of His flesh wept, and groaned, and grieved. He has proved His love towards us by "bearing our manners" for thirty-three years in this world, by a thousand acts of kindness, and ten thousand words of consolation, and by finally dying for us on the cross. And He took care before He left the world to say such golden sayings as these, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in Me." "I will not leave you comfortless, I will come to you." "Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full" (John xiv. 1, 18, xvi. 24). I can imagine no truth more suited to man's wants than this. Rules, and principles, and prescriptions, and instructions in times of sorrow are all very well in their way; but what the human heart craves is a personal friend to go to, to talk to, to lean back upon, and commune with. The risen Christ, living and interceding for us at God's right hand, is precisely the Person that we need. If St. Paul had not proclaimed Him to the Corinthians, he would have left one of man's greatest wants unsatisfied. No religion will ever satisfy man which does not meet the legitimate wants of his nature. Teachers who give no place to a living risen Christ in their system, must never be surprised if their weary hearers seek rest at the feet of human priests in the Romish Confessional.

(c) Let us consider, lastly, the *certainty of death and its consequences*, which every child of Adam must make up his mind to face one day.

To say that death is a serious thing, is to utter a very bald and commonplace truism. Yet it is a strange fact that the familiarity of 6000 years does not abate one jot of its seriousness. The end of each individual is still a very momentous circumstance in his history, and most men honestly confess it. To leave the world and shut our eyes on all among whom we have played our part,—to surrender our bodies, whether we like it or not, to the humiliation of disease, decay, and the grave,—to be obliged to drop all our schemes and plans and intentions,—all this is serious enough. But when to this you add the overwhelming thought that there is something beyond the grave,—an undiscovered and unknown world, and an account of some sort to be rendered of our life on earth, the death of any man or woman becomes a tremendously serious event. Well may our great poet Shakespeare speak of “the dread of something after death.” It is a dread which many feel far more than they would like to confess. Few are ever satisfied with Mahomedan fatalism. Not one in a thousand will ever be found to believe the doctrine of annihilation.

Now at no point do the uninspired religions of the ancients, or the systems of modern philosophy, break down so completely as in the article of death. To dwell for ever in Elysian fields, amidst shadowy, immaterial ghosts, was a consummation little valued even by Homeric heroes. The vague, rootless theory of some undefined state of rest after death, where, somehow and in some way, the souls of the good and the just, separate from their bodies, are to spend an objectless, endless existence is a miserable comforter. Homer, and Plato, and Bolingbroke, and Voltaire, and Paine are all alike cheerless and silent when they look down into an open grave.

But just at the point where all man-made systems are weakest, and fail to satisfy the wants of human nature, there the gospel which St. Paul proclaimed at Corinth is strongest. For it shows us an Almighty Saviour who not only died for our sins, and went down to the grave, but also rose again from the grave with His body, and proved that He had gained a victory over death. “Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept.”—“He has abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light.”—“Through death He has destroyed death, and delivered them that through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.” (1 Cor. xv. 20; 2 Tim. i. 10; Heb. ii. 15.)

And thanks be to God, this blessed victory over death and the grave has not been won by Christ for Himself alone. For eighteen centuries He has enabled thousands of Christian men and women, believing and trusting themselves to Him, to face the king of terrors without fear, and to go down the valley of the shadow of death in the sure and certain hope that they will yet come forth victorious, and in the flesh see God. Read the story of the deaths of the early Christians under heathen persecutions. Mark the dying experience of those who suffered at Oxford and Smithfield, under Queen Mary, for Protestantism. Find, if you can, in the whole range of biography any death-beds of non-Christians

which will bear comparison with the death-beds of Christians in the matter of peace, and hope, and strong consolation. You may search for ever and not find them. You will find yourself shut up to the conclusion that the old Scriptural truth of Christ dying and rising again is exactly the truth that fits human nature, and must have come down from God. This, and this only, will enable natural man to meet the last enemy without fear, and to say, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" (1 Cor. xv. 55.)

What shall we say to these things? I know well that the human heart and its necessities are a deep and intricate subject. But, after studying men's hearts attentively for many years, I have come to one decided conviction. That conviction is, that the true reason why St. Paul preached first and foremost what he preached at Corinth, is to be found in his right knowledge of the nature, moral condition, and position of man. He was taught of God the Holy Ghost that it was the only medicine that was suited to the disease. What human nature requires is a religion for dying sinners, a mighty remedial system and a personal Redeemer; and the work of Christ is marvellously fitted to meet its requirements. We are sick of a deadly sickness, and our first want is a living physician.

It would have been worse than useless if St. Paul had begun his work at Corinth by telling men to be virtuous and moral, while he kept back Christ. It is just as useless now. It even does positive harm. To awaken human nature, and then not show it God's spiritual prescription, may lead to most mischievous consequences. I know no case so pitiable as that of the man who sees clearly sin, sorrow, and death on one side, and does not see clearly Christ dying for sins, and rising again for sinners, on the other. Such a man is just the person to sink into flat despair, or to take refuge in the delusive theology of the Church of Rome. No doubt we may sleep the sleep of unconversion for many years, and feel nothing of spiritual doubts and fears. But once let a man's conscience become uneasy, and crave peace, and I know no medicine which can cure him, and keep him from soul-ruining error, except the "first things" which St. Paul delivered at Corinth,—I mean the two doctrines of Christ's atoning death and resurrection.

And now let me wind up this paper with some words of advice to all who read it. It is advice which the times appear to me to demand. Who can tell but to someone it may be a word in season?

(a) Let me, then, advise you most strongly not to be ashamed of holding decided views about the first things, the *foundation truths of religion*. Your lot is cast in a day of free thought, free handling, and free inquiry. There is a widespread dislike to doctrinal decision and what is called dogmatism, and none perhaps are so exposed to its influence as the young. The natural generosity, unsuspectingness, and love of fair play, of a young man's heart, make him shrink from taking up very positive theological views, and holding opinions which may even seem to be narrow, party-spirited, or illiberal. The temptation of the present day is to be content with a vague *earnestness*, to abstain from all sharply cut and distinct views, to be an honorary member of all schools of

thought, and to maintain that no man can be unsound in the faith if he exhibits zeal and works hard.

(b) But, after all, your religion *must have roots*, if it is to live and bear fruit in this cold world. “Earnestness,” and “zeal,” and “work” are brave words; but, like cut flowers stuck in a garden, they have no power of continuance, if they have no hidden roots below. Admitting to the full that there are secondary things in religion, about which those who are young may fairly suspend their judgment and wait for light, I charge you to remember that there are first things about which you must be decided and make up your minds. You must, I say, if you want peace within, and desire to be useful. And among these first things stand forth like mountains in a plain, the two great truths which are laid down in the text which heads this paper, Christ’s death for our sins, and Christ’s miraculous resurrection. Grasp tightly these two great truths. Plant your feet firmly on them. Feed your own soul on them. Live on them. Die on them. Never let them go. Strive to be able to say, “I know whom I believe,”—not *what*, but *whom*. I live by faith in One who died for me, and rose again. Be decided about this at any cost, and in due time all other truths shall be added to you.

(c) Some, it may be, into whose hands this paper may have fallen are going forth from the quiet haven of a happy home into the battle and conflict of busy life. But wherever your lot may be cast, whether in town or in country, whether among rich or poor, I hope you will *try to do good*. And remember one chief problem you will have to be continually solving is how to help souls who are labouring under the burden of sin, crushed down with sorrow, or oppressed with the fear of death. And when that time comes, remember the word that I speak to you this day.—The only way to do good is to walk in St. Paul’s steps, and to tell men first, foremost, continually, repeatedly, publicly, and from house to house, that Jesus Christ died for their sins, rose again for their justification, lives at the right hand of God to receive, to pardon, and to preserve, and will soon come again to give them a glorious resurrection. These are the truths which the Holy Ghost has always blessed, is blessing, and will bless until the Lord comes. These were St. Paul’s “first things.” Resolve and determine that by God’s grace they shall be yours.