

SHORT
EXPOSITORY READINGS
ON THE
GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN.

A SELECTION DESIGNED FOR
Family Reading, Mothers' Meetings, and
District Visitors.

BY THE
RIGHT REV. JOHN CHARLES RYLE, D.D.,
LORD BISHOP OF LIVERPOOL.
Author of "Expository Thoughts on the Gospels" etc.

LONDON: WILLIAM HUNT AND COMPANY,
12, PATERNOSTER ROW.
IPSWICH : WILLIAM HUNT, TAVERN STREET.

1882.

XLIV.

THE BEST FRIEND IN SICKNESS.

JOHN XI. 1-6.

“Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha.

“(It was that Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.)

“Therefore his sisters sent unto Him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick.

“When Jesus heard that, He said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.

“Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus.

“When He had heard therefore that he was sick, He abode two days still in the same place where He was”

THIS incident teaches us that *true Christians may be sick and ill as well as others.* We read that Lazarus of Bethany was one “whom Jesus loved,” and a brother of two well-known holy women. Yet Lazarus was sick, even unto death! The Lord Jesus, who had power over all diseases, could, no doubt, have prevented this illness, if He had thought fit. But He did not do so. He allowed Lazarus to be sick, and in pain, and weary, and to languish, and suffer, like any other man.

The lesson is one which ought to be deeply graven in our memories. Living in a world full of disease and death, we are sure to need it some day. Sickness, in the very nature of things, can never be anything but trying to flesh and blood. Our bodies and souls are strangely linked together, and that which vexes and weakens the body can hardly fail to vex the mind and soul. But sickness, we must always remember, is no sign that God is displeased with us: nay, more, it is generally sent for the good of our souls. It tends to draw our affections away from this world, and to direct them to things above. It sends us to our Bibles, and teaches us to pray better. It helps to prove our faith and patience, and shows us the real value of our hope in Christ. It reminds us betimes that we are not to live always, and tunes and trains our hearts for our great change. Then let us be patient and cheerful when we are laid aside by illness. Let us believe that the Lord Jesus loves us when we are sick no less than when we are well.

We are taught, secondly, that *Jesus Christ is the Christian's best Friend in the time of need*. We read that when Lazarus was sick, his sisters at once sent to Jesus, and laid the matter before Him. Beautiful, touching, and simple was the message they sent. They did not ask Him to come at once, or to work a miracle, and command the disease to depart. They only said, "Lord, he whom Thou lovest is sick," and left the matter there, in the full belief that He would do what was best. Here was the true faith and humility of saints! Here was gracious submission of will!

The servants of Christ, in every age and climate, will do well to follow this excellent example. No doubt when those whom we love are sick, we are to use diligently every reasonable means for their recovery. We must spare no pains to obtain the best medical advice. We must assist nature in every possible manner to fight a good fight against its enemy. But in all our doing, we must never forget that the best and ablest and wisest Helper is in heaven, at God's right hand. Like afflicted Job, our first action must be to fall on our knees and worship. Like Hezekiah, we must spread our matters before the Lord. Like the holy sisters at Bethany, we must send up a prayer to Christ. Let us not forget, in the hurry and excitement of our feelings, that none can help like Him, and that He is merciful, loving, and gracious.

Again, these verses teach us that *Christ knows best at what time to do anything for His people*. We read that "when He had heard that Lazarus was sick, He abode two days still in the same place where He was." In fact, He purposely delayed His journey, and did not come to Bethany till Lazarus had been four days in the grave. No doubt He knew well what was going on: but He never moved till the time came which He saw was best. For the sake of the Church and the world, for the good of friends and enemies, He kept away.

The children of God must constantly school their minds to learn the great lesson now before us. Nothing so helps us to bear patiently the trials of life as an abiding

conviction of the perfect wisdom by which everything around us is managed. Let us try to believe not only that all that happens to us is well done, but that it is done in the best manner, by the right instrument, and at the right time. We are all naturally impatient in the day of trial. We are apt to say, like Moses, when beloved ones are sick, "Heal her *now*, Lord, we beseech Thee." (Num. xii. 13.) We forget that Christ is too wise a Physician to make any mistakes. It is the duty of faith to say, "My times are in Thy hand. Do with me as Thou wilt, how Thou wilt, what Thou wilt, and when Thou wilt. Not my will, but Thine be done." The highest degree of faith is to be able to wait, sit still, and not complain.

Let us turn from the passage with a settled determination to trust Christ entirely with all the concerns of this world, both public and private. Let us believe that He by whom all things were made at first is He who is managing all with perfect wisdom. The affairs of kingdoms, families, and private individuals, are all alike overruled by Him. He chooses all the portions of His people. When we are sick, it is because He knows it to be for our good: when He delays coming to help us, it is for some wise reason. The hand that was nailed to the cross is too wise and loving to smite without a needs-be, or to keep us waiting for relief without a cause.

XLV.

THE DEATH OF BELIEVERS.

JOHN XI. 7–15.

“Then after that saith He to His disciples, Let us go into Judæa again.

“His disciples say unto Him, Master, the Jews of late sought to stone Thee; and goest Thou thither again?

“Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world.

“But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him.

“These things said He: and after that He saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep.

“Then said His disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well.

“Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that He had spoken of taking of rest in sleep.

“Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead.

“And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him.”

WE should notice, in this passage, *how tenderly Christ speaks of the death of believers.* He announces the fact of

Lazarus being dead in language of singular beauty and gentleness: “Our friend Lazarus sleepeth.”

Every true Christian has a Friend in heaven, of almighty power and boundless love. He is thought of, cared for, provided for, defended by God’s eternal Son. He has an unfailing Protector, who never slumbers or sleeps, and watches continually over his interests. The world may despise him, but he has no cause to be ashamed. Father and mother even may cast him out, but Christ having once taken him up will never let him go. He is the “friend of Christ” even after he is dead! The friendships of this world are often fair-weather friendships, and fail us like summer-dried fountains, when our need is the sorest; but the friendship of the Son of God is stronger than death, and goes beyond the grave. The Friend of sinners is a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother.

The death of true Christians is “sleep,” and not annihilation. It is a solemn and miraculous change, no doubt, but not a change to be regarded with alarm. They have nothing to fear for their souls in the change, for their sins are washed away in Christ’s blood. The sharpest sting of death is the sense of unpardoned sin. Christians have nothing to fear for their bodies in the change: they will rise again by and by, refreshed and renewed, after the image of the Lord. The grave itself is a conquered enemy. It must render back its tenants safe and sound, the very moment that Christ calls for them at the last day.

Let us remember these things when those whom we love fall asleep in Christ, or when we ourselves receive our notice to quit this world. Let us call to mind in such an hour, that our great Friend takes thought for our bodies as well as for our souls, and that He will not allow one hair of our heads to perish. Let us never forget that the grave is the place where the Lord Himself lay, and that as He rose again triumphant from that cold bed, so also shall all His people. To a mere worldly man death must needs be a terrible thing; but he that has Christian faith, may boldly say, as he lays down life, “I will lay me down in peace, and take my rest: for it is Thou, Lord, that makest me dwell in safety.”

Let us take heed that we really belong to Christ. This is the one thing needful. If this is made sure, we shall be led by the right way, and end well at last. We may not have the cheerfulness of one brother, or the fiery zeal of another, or the gentleness of another. But if grace reigns within us, and we know what repentance and faith are by experience, we shall stand on the right hand in the great day. Happy is the man of whom, with all his defects, Christ says to saints and angels, “This is our friend.”

XLVI.

CHRIST'S SYMPATHY.

JOHN XI. 30–37.

“Now Jesus was not yet come into the town, but was in that place where Martha met Him,

“The Jews then which were with her in the house, and comforted her, when they saw Mary, that she rose up hastily and went and followed her, saying, She goeth unto the grave to weep there,

“Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying unto Him, Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died,

“When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, He groaned in the spirit, and was troubled,

“And said, Where have ye laid him? They said unto Him, Lord, come and see,

“Jesus wept.

“Then said the Jews, Behold how He loved him!

“And some of them said, Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?”

NOT many passages in the new Testament are more wonderful than the simple narrative contained in these eight verses. It brings out, in a most beautiful light, the

sympathizing character of our Lord Jesus Christ. It shows us Him who is “able to save to the uttermost all who come to God by Him,” as able to feel as He is to save. It shows us Him who is one with the Father, and the Maker of all things, entering into human sorrows, and shedding human tears.

What a depth of tender sympathy there is in Christ's heart towards His people. We read that when our Lord saw Mary weeping, and the Jews also weeping with her, “He groaned in the spirit and was troubled.” We read even more than this. He gave outward expression to His feelings: He “wept.” He knew perfectly well that the sorrow of the family of Bethany would soon be turned into joy, and that Lazarus in a few minutes would be restored to his sisters. But though He knew all this, He “wept.”

This weeping of Christ is deeply instructive. It shows us that it is not sinful to sorrow. Weeping and mourning are sadly trying to flesh and blood, and make us feel the weakness of our mortal nature. But they are not in themselves wrong. Even the Son of God wept.—It shows us that deep feeling is not a thing of which we need be ashamed. To be cold and stoical and unmoved in the sight of sorrow is no sign of grace. There is nothing unworthy of a child of God in tears. Even the Son of God could weep.—It shows us, above all, that the Saviour in whom believers trust is a most tender and feeling Saviour. He is one who can be touched with sympathy for our infirmities. When we turn to Him in the hour of trouble, and pour out

our hearts before Him, He knows what we go through, and can pity. And He is One who never changes. Though He now sits at God's right hand in heaven, His heart is still the same that it was upon earth. We have an Advocate with the Father, who, when He was upon earth, could weep.

Let us remember these things in daily life, and never be ashamed of walking in our Master's footsteps. Let us strive to be men and women of a tender heart and a sympathizing spirit. Let us never be ashamed to weep with them that weep, and rejoice with them that rejoice. Well would it be for the Church and the world if there were more Christians of this stamp and character! The Church would be far more beautiful, and the world would be far more happy.

XLVII.

LAZARUS RAISED FROM THE DEAD.

JOHN XI. 38–46.

“Jesus therefore again groaning in Himself cometh to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it.

“Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto Him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days,

“Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?

“Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up His eyes, and said, Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard Me.

“And I knew that Thou hearest Me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that Thou hast sent Me.

“And when He had thus spoken, He cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth.

“And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go,

“Then many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on Him.

“But some of them went their ways to the Pharisees, and told them what things Jesus had done.”

THESE verses record one of the greatest miracles the Lord Jesus Christ ever worked, and supply an unanswerable proof of His divinity. He whose voice could bring back from the grave one that had been four days dead, must indeed have been very God!

We should mark *the words which our Lord addressed to God the Father, when the stone was taken from the grave.* We read that He said, "Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard Me. And I knew that Thou hearest Me always: but because of the people which stand by, I said it, that they may believe that Thou hast sent Me."

This wonderful language is totally unlike anything said by Prophets or Apostles, when they worked miracles. In fact, it is not prayer, but praise. It evidently implies a constant mysterious communion going on between Jesus and His Father in heaven, which it is past the power of man either to explain or conceive. We need not doubt that here, as elsewhere in St. John, our Lord meant to teach the Jews the entire and complete unity there was between Him and His Father, in all that He did, as well as in all that He taught. Once more He would remind them that He did not come among them as a mere Prophet, but as the Messiah, who was sent by the Father, and who was one with the Father. Once more He would have them know that as the words which He spake were the very words which the Father gave Him to speak, so the works which He wrought were the very works which the Father gave Him to do. In

short, He was the promised Messiah, whom the Father always hears, because He and the Father are one.

Deep and high as this truth is, it is for the peace of our souls to believe it thoroughly, and to grasp it tightly. Let it be a settled principle of our religion, that the Saviour in whom we trust is nothing less than eternal God, One whom the Father hears always, One who in very deed is God's Fellow. A clear view of the dignity of our Mediator's Person, is one secret of inward comfort. Happy is he who can say, "I know whom I have believed, and that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him." (2 Tim. i. 12.)

We should mark, also, *the words which our Lord addressed to Lazarus when He raised him from the grave.* We read that "He cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth." At the sound of that voice, the king of terrors at once yielded up his lawful captive, and the insatiable grave gave up its prey. At once, "he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes."

The greatness of this miracle cannot possibly be exaggerated. The mind of man can scarcely take in the vastness of the work that was done. Here, in open day, and before many hostile witnesses, a man, four days dead, was restored to life in a moment. Here was public proof that our Lord had absolute power over the material world! A corpse, already corrupt, was made alive!—Here was public proof that our Lord had absolute power over the world of spirits! A soul that had left its earthly tenement was

called back from Paradise, and joined once more to its owner's body. Well may the Church of Christ maintain that He who could work such works was "over all, God blessed for ever." (Rom. ix. 5.)

Let us turn from the whole passage with thoughts of comfort and consolation. Comfortable is the thought that the loving Saviour of sinners, on whose mercy our souls entirely depend, is one who has all power in heaven and earth, and is mighty to save.—Comfortable is the thought that there is no sinner too far gone in sin for Christ to raise and convert. He that stood by the grave of Lazarus can say to the vilest of men, "Come forth: loose him, and let him go."—Comfortable, not least, is the thought that when we ourselves lie down in the grave, we may lie down in the full assurance that we shall rise again. The voice that called Lazarus forth will one day pierce our tombs, and bid soul and body come together. "The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." (1 Cor. xv. 52.)