

SHORT  
EXPOSITORY READINGS  
ON THE  
GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN.

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

BY THE  
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XLVIII.

MARY ANOINTING CHRIST.

JOHN XII. 1-9.

*“Then Jesus six days before the passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom He raised from the dead.*

*“There they made Him a supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with Him.*

*“Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment.*

*“Then saith one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, which should betray Him,*

*“Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?*

*“This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein.*

*“Then said Jesus, Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this.*

*“For the poor always ye have with you; but Me ye have not always.*

*“Much people of the Jews therefore knew that He was there: and they came not for Jesus<sup>l</sup> sake only, but that they*

*might see Lazarus also, whom He had raised from the dead.”*

WE see, in this passage, *what unkindness and discouragement Christ’s friends sometimes meet with from man.*

We read that at the Supper in Bethany, Mary the sister of Lazarus, anointed the feet of Jesus with precious ointment, and wiped them with the hair of her head. Nor was this ointment poured on with a niggardly hand. She did it so liberally and profusely that “the house was filled with the odour of the ointment.” She did it under the influence of a heart full of love and gratitude. She thought nothing too great and good to bestow on such a Saviour. Sitting at His feet in days gone by, and hearing His words, she had found peace for her conscience, and pardon for her sins. At this very moment she saw Lazarus alive and well, sitting by her Master’s side,—her own brother Lazarus, whom He had brought back to her from the grave. Greatly loved, she thought she could not show too much love in return. Having freely received, she freely gave.

But there were some present who found fault with Mary’s conduct, and blamed her as guilty of wasteful extravagance. One especially, an apostle, a man of whom better things might have been expected, declared openly that the ointment would have been better employed if it had been sold, and the price “given to the poor.” The heart which could conceive such thoughts must have had low views of the dignity of Christ’s person, and still lower

views of our obligations to Him. A cold heart and a stingy hand will generally go together.

There are only too many professing Christians of a like spirit in the present day. Myriads of baptized people cannot understand zeal of any sort for the honour of Christ. Tell them of any vast outlay of money to push trade or to advance the cause of science, and they approve of it as right and wise. Tell them of any expense incurred for the preaching of the Gospel at home or abroad, for spreading God's Word, for extending the knowledge of Christ on earth, and they tell you plainly that they think it waste. They never give a farthing to such objects as these, and count those people fools who do. Worst of all, they often cover over their own backwardness to help purely Christian objects, by a pretended concern for the poor at home. Yet they find it convenient to forget the notorious fact that those who do most for the cause of Christ are precisely those who do most for the poor.

We must never allow ourselves to be moved from "patient continuance in well doing," by the unkind remarks of such persons. It is vain to expect a man to do much for Christ, when he has no sense of debt to Christ. We must pity the blindness of our unkind critics, and work on. He who pleaded the cause of loving Mary, and said, "Let her alone," is sitting at the right hand of God, and keeps a book of remembrance. A day is soon coming when a wondering world will see that every cup of cold water given for Christ's sake, as well as every box of precious

ointment, was recorded in heaven, and has its reward. In that great day those who thought that any one could give too much to Christ will find they had better never have been born.

XLIX.

CHRIST'S VOLUNTARY SACRIFICE.

JOHN XII. 12–19.

*“On the next day much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem,*

*“Took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet Him, and cried, Hosanna: blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord.*

*“And Jesus, when He had found a young ass, sat thereon; as it is written,*

*“Fear not, daughter of Zion: behold, thy King cometh, sitting on an ass's colt.*

*“These things understood not His disciples at the first: but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of Him, and that they had done these things unto Him.*

*“The people therefore that was with Him when He called Lazarus out of his grave, and raised him from the dead, bare record.*

*“For this cause the people also met Him, for that they heard that He had done this miracle.*

*“The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? behold, the world is gone after Him.”*

A CAREFUL reader of the Gospels can hardly fail to observe that our Lord Jesus Christ's conduct, at this stage of His earthly ministry, is very peculiar. It is unlike anything else recorded of Him in the New Testament. Hitherto we have seen Him withdrawing as much as possible from public notice, retiring into the wilderness, and checking those who would have brought Him forward, and made Him a king. As a rule, He did not court popular attention. He did not "cry or strive, or cause His voice to be heard in the streets." (Matt. xii. 19.) Here, on the contrary, we see Him making a public entry into Jerusalem, attended by an immense crowd of people, and causing even the Pharisees to say, "Behold, the world is gone after Him."

The explanation of this apparent inconsistency is not hard to find out. The time had come at last when Christ was to die for the sins of the world. The time had come when the true passover Lamb was to be slain, when the true blood of atonement was to be shed, when Messiah was to be "cut off" according to prophecy (Dan. ix. 26), when the way into the holiest was to be opened by the true High Priest to all mankind. Knowing all this, our Lord purposely drew attention to Himself. Knowing this, He placed Himself prominently under the notice of the whole Jewish nation. It was only meet and right that this thing should not be "done in a corner." (Acts xxvi. 26.) If ever there was a transaction in our Lord's earthly ministry which was public, it was the sacrifice which He offered up on the cross of Calvary. He died at the time of year

when all the tribes were assembled at Jerusalem for the passover feast. Nor was this all. He died in a week when by His remarkable public entry into Jerusalem He had caused the eyes of all Israel to be specially fixed upon Himself.

We learn, in these verses, *how entirely voluntary the sufferings of Christ were.*

It is impossible not to see in the history before us that our Lord had a mysterious influence over the minds and wills of all around Him, whenever He thought fit to use it. Nothing else can account for the effect which His approach to Jerusalem had on the multitudes which accompanied Him. They seem to have been carried forward by a secret constraining power, which they were obliged to obey, in spite of the disapproval of the leaders of the nation. In short, just as our Lord was able to make winds, and waves, and diseases, and devils obey Him, so was He able, when it pleased Him, to turn the minds of men according to His will.

For the case before us does not stand alone. The men of Nazareth could not hold Him when He chose to “pass through the midst of them and go His way.” (Luke iv. 30.) The angry Jews of Jerusalem could not detain Him when they would have laid violent hands on Him in the temple; but, “going through the midst of them, He passed by.” (John viii. 59.) Above all, the very soldiers who apprehended Him in the garden, at first “went backward and fell to the ground.” (John xviii. 6.) In each of these instances



there is but one explanation. A Divine influence was put forth.

There was about our Lord during His whole earthly ministry a mysterious “hiding of His power.” (Hab. iii. 4.) But He had almighty power when He was pleased to use it.

Why then did He not resist His enemies at last? Why did He not scatter the band of soldiers who came to seize Him, like chaff before the wind? There is but one answer. He was a willing Sufferer in order to procure redemption for a lost and ruined soul. He had undertaken to give his own life as a ransom, that we might live for ever, and He laid it down on the cross with all the desire of His heart. He did not bleed, and suffer, and die because He was vanquished by superior force, and could not help Himself, but because He loved us, and rejoiced to give Himself for us as our Substitute. He did not die because He could not avoid death, but because He was willing with all His heart to make His soul an offering for sin.

For ever let us rest our hearts on this most comfortable thought. We have a most willing and loving Saviour. It was His delight to do His Father’s will; and to make a way for lost and guilty man to draw near to God in peace. He loved the work He had taken in hand, and the poor sinful world which He came to save. Never, then, let us give way to the unworthy thought that our Saviour does not love to see sinners coming to Him, and does not rejoice to save them. He who was a most willing Sacrifice on the cross,

is also a most willing Saviour at the right hand of God. He is just as willing to receive sinners who come to Him now for peace, as He was to die for sinners, when He held back His power and willingly suffered on Calvary.

L.

DEATH THE ENTRANCE TO LIFE.

JOHN XII. 20–26.

*“And there were certain Greeks among them that came up to worship at the feast:*

*The same came therefore to Philip, which was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and desired him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus.*

*“Philip cometh and telleth Andrew: and again Andrew and Philip tell Jesus.*

*“And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified.*

*“Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.*

*“He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.*

*“If any man serve Me, let him follow Me; and where I am. there shall also my servant be: if any man serve Me, him will my Father honour.”*

WE learn from our Lord’s words in this passage, that *death is the way to spiritual life and glory*. “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.”

This sentence was primarily meant to teach the wondering Greeks the true nature of Messiah's kingdom. If they thought to see a King like the kings of this world, they were greatly mistaken. Our Lord would have them know that He came to carry a cross, and not to wear a crown. He came not to live a life of honour, ease, and magnificence, but to die a shameful and dishonoured death. The kingdom He came to set up was to begin with a crucifixion, and not with a coronation. Its glory was to take its rise not from victories won by the sword, and from accumulated treasures of gold and silver, but from the death of its King.

But this sentence was also meant to teach a wider and broader lesson still. It revealed, under a striking figure, the mighty foundation-truth, that Christ's death was to be the source of spiritual life to the world. From His cross and passion was to spring up a mighty harvest of benefit to all mankind. His death, like a grain of seed-corn, was to be the root of blessings and mercies to countless millions of immortal souls. In short, the great principle of the Gospel was once more exhibited,—that Christ's vicarious death (not His life, or miracles, or teaching, but His *death*) was to bring forth fruit to the praise of God, and to provide redemption for a lost world.

This deep and mighty sentence was followed by a practical application, which closely concerns ourselves. "He that hateth his life shall keep it." He that would be saved must be ready to give up life itself, if necessary, in

order to obtain salvation. He must bury his love of the world, with its riches, honours, pleasures, and rewards, with a full belief that in so doing he will reap a better harvest, both here and hereafter. He who loves the life that now is so much that he cannot deny himself anything for the sake of his soul, will find at length that he has lost everything. He, on the contrary, who is ready to cast away everything most dear to him in this life, if it stands in the way of his soul, and to crucify the flesh with its affections, and lusts, will find at length that he is no loser. In a word, his losses will prove nothing in comparison to his gains.

Truths such as these should sink deeply into our hearts, and stir up self-inquiry. It is as true of Christians as it is of Christ,—there can be no life without death, there can be no sweet without bitter, there can be no crown without a cross. Without Christ's death there would have been no life for the world. Unless we are willing to die to sin, and crucify all that is most dear to flesh and blood, we cannot expect any benefit from Christ's death. Let us remember these things, and take up our cross daily, like men. Let us for the joy set before us endure the cross and despise the shame, and in the end we shall sit down with our Master at God's right hand. The way of self-crucifixion and sanctification may seem foolishness and waste to the world, just as burying good seed-corn seems waste to the child and the fool. But there never lived the man who did not find that by sowing to the Spirit, he reaped life everlasting.

LI.

CHRIST OUR SUBSTITUTE.

JOHN XII. 27–33.

*“Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save Me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour.*

*“Father, glorify Thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.*

*“The people therefore, that stood by, and heard it, said that it thundered: others said, An angel spake to Him.*

*“Jesus answered and said, This voice came not because of Me, but for your sakes.*

*“Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out.*

*“And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men . unto Me.*

*“This He said, signifying what death He should die.”*

WE have, in these words, *a great doctrine indirectly proved.* That doctrine is the imputation of man’s sin to Christ.

We see the Saviour of the world, the eternal Son of God troubled and disturbed in mind: “Now is my soul troubled.” We see Him who could heal diseases with a touch, cast out devils with a word, and command the

waves and winds to obey Him, in great agony and conflict of spirit. Now how can this be explained?

To say, as some do, that the only cause of our Lord's trouble was the prospect of His own painful death on the cross, is a very unsatisfactory explanation. At this rate it might justly be said that many a martyr has shown more calmness and courage than the Son of God. Such a conclusion is, to say the least, most revolting. Yet this is the conclusion to which men are driven if they adopt the modern notion, that Christ's death was only a great example of self-sacrifice.

Nothing can ever explain our Lord's trouble of soul, both here and in Gethsemane, except the old doctrine, that He felt the burden of man's sin pressing Him down. It was the mighty weight of a world's guilt imputed to Him and meeting on His head, which made Him groan and agonise, and cry, "Now is my soul troubled." For ever let us cling to that doctrine, not only as untying the knot of the passage before us, but as the only ground of solid comfort for the heart of a Christian. That our sins have been really laid on our divine Substitute, and borne by Him, and that His righteousness is really imputed to us and accounted ours,—this is the real warrant for Christian peace. And if any man asks how we know that our sins were laid on Christ, we bid him read such passages as that which is before us, and explain them on any other principle, if he can. Christ has borne our sins, carried our sins, groaned under the burden of our sins, been troubled in soul by the weight

of our sins, and really taken away our sins. This, we may rest assured, is sound doctrine: this is Scriptural theology.



LII.

JUDGMENT TO COME.

JOHN XII. 44–50.

*“Jesus cried and said, He that believeth on Me, believeth not on Me, but on Him that sent Me,*

*“And he that seeth Me seeth Him that sent Me,*

*“I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on Me should not abide in darkness.*

*“And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world.*

*“He that rejecteth Me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.*

*“For I have not spoken of myself: but the Father which sent Me, He gave Me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak,*

*“And I know that His commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto Me, so I speak.”*

WE see here *the certainty of a judgment to come*, We find our Lord saying, “He that rejecteth Me, and receiveth not my words, hath One that judgeth Him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.”

There is a last day! The world shall not always go on as it does now. Buying and selling, sowing and reaping, planting and building, marrying and giving in marriage,—all this shall come to an end at last. There is a time appointed by the Father when the whole machinery of creation shall stop, and the present dispensation shall be changed for another. It had a beginning, and it shall also have an end. Banks shall at length close their doors for ever. Stock exchanges shall be shut. Parliaments shall be dissolved. The very sun, which since Noah's flood has done his daily work so faithfully, shall rise and set no more. Well would it be if we thought more of this day? Rent days, birth days, wedding days, are often regarded as days of absorbing interest. But they are nothing compared to the last day.

There is a judgment coming! Men have their reckoning days, and God will at last have His. The trumpet shall sound. The dead shall be raised incorruptible. The living shall be changed. All, of every name and nation, and people and tongue, shall stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. The books shall be opened, and the evidence brought forth. Our true character will come out before the world. There will be no concealment, no evasion, no false colouring. Every one shall give account of Himself to God, and all shall be judged according to their works. The wicked shall go away into everlasting fire, and the righteous into life eternal.

These are awful truths! But they are truths, and ought to be told. No wonder that the Roman governor Felix trembled when Paul the prisoner discoursed about “righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come.” (Acts xxiv. 25.) Yet the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ has no cause to be afraid. For him, at any rate, there is no condemnation, and the last assize need have no terrors. The bias of his life shall witness for him; while the shortcomings of his life shall not condemn him. It is the man who rejects Christ, and will not hear His call to repentance,—he is the man who in the judgment day will have reason to be cast down and afraid.

Let the thought of judgment to come have a practical effect on our religion. Let us daily judge ourselves with righteous judgment, that we may not be judged and condemned of the Lord. Let us so speak and so act as men who will be judged by the law of liberty. Let us make conscience of all our hourly conduct, and never forget that for every idle word we must give account at the last day. In a word, let us live like those who believe in the truth of judgment, heaven, and hell. So living, we shall be Christians indeed and in truth, and have boldness in the day of Christ’s appearing.

Let the judgment day be the Christian’s answer and apology when men ridicule him as too strict, too precise, and too particular in his religion. Irreligion may do tolerably well for a season, so long as a man is in health and prosperous, and looks at nothing but this world. But he

who believes that he must give account to the Judge of quick and dead, at His appearing and kingdom, will never be content with an ungodly life. He will say, “There is a judgment. I can never serve God too much. Christ died for me. I can never do too much for Him.”