

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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LXVIII.

THE PROMISE OF THE COMFORTER.

JOHN XVI. 1-7.

“These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended.

“They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.

“And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor Me.

“But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them. And these things I said not unto you at the beginning, because I was with you.

“But now I go my way to Him that sent Me; and none of you asketh Me, Whither goest Thou?

“But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart.

“Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you.”

WE find our Lord, in this passage, giving a special reason why it was expedient for Him to go away from His

disciples. “If I go not away,” He says, “the Comforter will not come unto you.”

We can well suppose that our gracious Lord saw the minds of His disciples crushed at the idea of His leaving them. Little as they realized His full meaning, on this, as well as on other occasions, they evidently had a vague notion that they were about to be left, like orphans, in a cold and unkind world, by their Almighty Friend. Their hearts quailed and shrunk back at the thought. Most graciously does our Lord cheer them by words of deep and mysterious meaning. He tells them that His departure, however painful it might seem, was not an evil, but a good. They would actually find it was not a loss, but a gain. His bodily absence would be more useful than His presence.

It is vain to deny that this is a somewhat dark saying. It seems at first sight hard to understand how in any sense it could be good that Christ should go away from His disciples. Yet a little reflection may show us that, like all our Lord’s sayings, this remarkable utterance was wise, and right, and true. The following points, at any rate, deserve attentive consideration.

If Christ had not died, risen again, and ascended up into heaven, it is plain that the Holy Ghost could not have come down with special power on the day of Pentecost, and bestowed His manifold gifts on the Church. Mysterious as it may be, there was a connection, in the eternal counsels of God, between the ascension of Christ and the outpouring of the Spirit.

If Christ had remained bodily with the disciples, He could not have been in more places than one at the same time. The presence of the Spirit whom He sent down would fill every place where believers were assembled in His name, in every part of the world.

If Christ had remained upon earth, and not gone up into heaven, He could not have become a High Priest for His people in the same full and perfect manner that He became after His ascension. He went away to sit down at the right hand of God, and to appear for us, in our human nature glorified, as our Advocate with the Father.

Finally, if Christ had always remained bodily with His disciples, there would have been far less room for the exercise of their faith, and hope, and trust, than there was when He went away. Their graces would not have been called into such active exercise, and they would have had less opportunity of glorifying God, and exhibiting His power in the world.

After all, there remains the broad fact that after the Lord Jesus went away, and the Comforter came down on the day of Pentecost, the religion of the disciples became a new thing altogether. The growth of their knowledge, and faith, and hope, and zeal, and courage, was so remarkable, that they were twice the men they were before. They did far more for Christ when He was absent, than they had ever done when He was present. What stronger proof can we require that it was expedient for them that their Master should go away?

Let us leave the whole subject with a deep conviction that it is not the carnal *presence* of Christ in the midst of us, so much as the presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, that is essential to a high standard of Christianity. What we should all desire and long for is not Christ's body literally touched with our hands and received into our mouths, but Christ dwelling spiritually in our hearts by the grace of the Holy Ghost.

LXIX.

THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

JOHN XVI. 8–15.

“And when He is come. He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:

“Of sin, because they believe not on Me;

“Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see Me no more;

“Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.

“I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now,

“Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth: for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak: and He will shew you things to come,

“He shall glorify Me: for He shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you,

“All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that He shall take of mine, and shall show it unto you,”

WHEN our Lord in this passage speaks of the Holy Spirit “coming,” we must take care that we do not misunderstand His meaning. On the one hand, we must remember that the Holy Ghost was in all believers in the Old

Testament days, from the very beginning. No man was ever saved from the power of sin, and made a saint, except by the renewing of the Holy Ghost. Abraham, and Isaac, and Samuel, and David, and the Prophets, were made what they were by the operation of the Holy Ghost. On the other hand, we must never forget that after Christ's ascension the Holy Ghost was poured down on men, as individuals, with far greater energy, and on the nations of the world at large, with far wider influence than He was ever poured out before. It is this increased energy and influence that our Lord has in view in the verses before us. He meant that after His own ascension the Holy Ghost would "come" down into the world with such a vastly increased power, that it would seem as if He had "come" for the first time, and had never been in the world before.

For one thing, our Lord probably meant to show us *what the Holy Ghost would do to the world of unbelieving Jews*. He would convince them "of sin, and righteousness, and judgment."

He would convince the Jews "of sin." He would compel them to feel and acknowledge in their own minds, that in rejecting Jesus of Nazareth they had committed a great sin, and were guilty of gross unbelief.

He would convince the Jews of "righteousness." He would press home on their consciences that Jesus of Nazareth was not an impostor and a deceiver, as they had said, but a holy, just, and blameless Person, whom God had owned by receiving up into heaven.

He would convince the Jews of “judgment.” He would oblige them to see that Jesus of Nazareth had conquered, overcome, and judged the devil and all his host, and was exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour at the right hand of God.

That the Holy Ghost did actually so convince the Jewish nation after the day of Pentecost, is clearly shown by the Acts of the Apostles. It was He who gave the humble fishermen of Galilee such grace and might in testifying of Christ, that their adversaries were put to silence. It was His reproving and convincing power which enabled them to “fill Jerusalem with their doctrine.” (Acts v. 28.) Not a few of the nation, we know, were savingly convinced, like St. Paul, and “a great company of priests were obedient to the faith.” (Acts vi. 7.) Myriads more, we have every reason to believe, were mentally convinced, if they had not courage to come out and take up the cross. The whole tone of the Jewish people towards the end of the Acts of the Apostles is unlike what it is at the beginning. A vast reproving and convincing influence, even where not saving, seems to have gone over their minds. Surely this was partly what our Lord had in view in these verses when He said, “The Holy Ghost shall reprove and convince.”

For another thing, our Lord probably meant to foretell *what the Holy Ghost would do for the whole of mankind, both Gentiles as well as Jews.*

He would reprove in every part of the earth the current ideas of men about sin, righteousness, and judgment, and

convince people of some far higher ideas on these points than they had before acknowledged. He would make men see more clearly the nature of sin, the need of righteousness, the certainty of judgment. In a word, He would insensibly be an Advocate and convincing Pleader for God throughout the whole world, and raise up a standard of morality, purity and knowledge, of which formerly men had no conception.

That the Holy Ghost actually did so in every part of the earth, after the day of Pentecost, is a simple matter of fact. The unlearned and lowly Jews, whom He sent forth and strengthened to preach the Gospel after our Lord's ascension, "turned the world upside down" (Acts xvii. 6), and in two or three centuries altered the habits, tastes, and practices of the whole civilized world. The power of the devil received a decided check. Even infidels dare not deny that the doctrines of Christianity had an enormous effect on men's ways, lives, and opinions, when they were first preached, and that there were no special graces of eloquence in the preachers that can account for it. In truth, the world was "reproved and convinced," in spite of itself; and even those who did not become believers became better men. Surely this also was partly what our Lord had in view when He said to His disciples, "When the Holy Ghost comes, He shall convince the world of sin, and righteousness, and judgment."

Let us leave the whole passage, deep and difficult as it is, with a thankful remembrance of one comfortable

promise which it contains. “The Spirit of truth,” says our Lord to His weak and half-informed followers, “shall guide you into all truth.” That promise was for our sakes, no doubt, as well as for theirs. Whatever we need to know for our present peace and sanctification, the Holy Ghost is ready to teach us. All truth in science, nature, and philosophy of course is not included in this promise. But into all spiritual truth that is really profitable, and that our minds can comprehend and bear, the Holy Spirit is ready and willing to guide us. Then let us never forget, in reading the Bible, to pray for the teaching of the Holy Ghost. We must not wonder if we find the Bible a dark and difficult book, if we do not regularly seek light from Him by whom it was first inspired. In this, as in many other things, “we have not because we ask not.” (James iv. 2.)

LXX.

SORROW TURNED INTO JOY.

JOHN XVI. 16–22.

“A little while, and ye shall not see Me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see Me, because I go to the Father.

“Then said some of His disciples among themselves, What is this that He saith unto us, A little while, and ye shall not see Me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see Me: and, Because I go to the Father?

“They said therefore, What is this that He saith, A little while? we cannot tell what He saith.

“Now Jesus knew that they were desirous to ask Him, and said unto them, Do you enquire among yourselves of that I said, A little while, and ye shall not see Me; and again, a little while, and ye shall see Me?

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice; and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy.

“A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world.

“And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you”

WE learn, for one thing, in these words, that *Christ’s absence from the earth will be a time of sorrow to believers, but of joy to the world.* It is written, “Ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice.” To confine these words to the single point of Christ’s approaching death and burial, appears a narrow view of their meaning. Like many of our Lord’s sayings on the last evening of His earthly ministry, they seem to extend over the whole period of time between His first and second advents.

Christ’s personal absence must needs be a sorrow to all true-hearted believers. “The children of the bridechamber cannot but mourn when the bridegroom is taken from them.” (Matt. ix. 15.) Faith is not sight. Hope is not certainty. Reading and hearing are not the same as beholding: praying is not the same as speaking face to face. There is something, even in the hearts of the most eminent saints, that will never be fully satisfied so long as they are on earth and Christ is in heaven. So long as they dwell in a body of corruption, and see through a glass darkly,—so long as they behold creation groaning under the power of sin, and all things not put under Christ,—so long their happiness and peace must needs be incomplete. This is what St. Paul meant when he said, “We ourselves, which have the first-fruits of the Spirit, groan within ourselves,

waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.” (Rom. viii. 23.)

Yet this same personal absence of Christ is no cause of sorrow to the children of this world. It was not to the unbelieving Jews, we may be sure. When Christ was condemned and crucified, they rejoiced and were glad. They thought that the hated reprover of their sins and false teaching was silenced for ever.—It is not to the careless and the wicked of our day, we may be sure. The longer Christ keeps away from this earth, and lets them alone, the better will they be pleased. “We do not want this Christ to reign over us,” is the feeling of the world. His absence causes them no pain. Their so-called happiness is complete without Him. All this may sound very painful and startling. But where is the thinking reader of the Bible who can deny that it is true? The world does not want Christ back again, and thinks that it does very well without Him. What a fearful waking up there will be by-and-by.

We learn, for another thing, that *Christ’s personal return shall be a source of boundless joy to His believing people*. It is written, “I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.” Once more we must take care that we do not narrow the meaning of these words by tying them down to our Lord’s resurrection. They surely reach much further than this. The joy of the disciples when they saw Christ risen from the dead, was a joy soon obscured by His ascension and withdrawal into heaven. The true joy, the perfect joy, the joy

that can never be taken away, will be the joy which Christ's people will feel when Christ returns the second time, at the end of this world.

The second personal advent of Christ, to speak plainly, is the one grand object on which our Lord, both here and elsewhere, teaches all believers to fix their eyes. We ought to be always looking for and "loving His appearing," as the perfection of our happiness, and the consummation of all our hopes. (2 Peter iii. 12; 2 Tim. iv. 8.) That same Jesus who was taken up visibly into heaven, shall also come again visibly, even as He went. Let the eyes of our faith be always fixed on this coming. It is not enough that we look *backward* to the cross, and rejoice in Christ dying for our sins, and *upward* to the right hand of God, and rejoice in Christ interceding for every believer. We must do more than this. We must look *forward* to Christ's return from heaven to bless His people, and to wind up the work of redemption. Then, and then only, will the prayer of eighteen centuries receive its complete answer,—“Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Well may our Lord say that in that day of resurrection and reunion our “hearts shall rejoice.”—”When we awake up after His likeness we shall be satisfied.” (Psalm xvii. 15.)

THE LOVE OF GOD OUR FATHER.

JOHN XVI. 25–28.

“These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs: but the time cometh, when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall shew you plainly of the Father.

“At that day ye shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you:

“For the Father Himself loveth you, because ye have loved Me, and have believed that I came out from God.

“I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father.”

WE learn here that *clear knowledge of God the Father is one of the foundations of the Christian religion.* Our Lord says to His disciples, “The time cometh when I shall show you plainly of the Father.” He does not say, we should mark, “I will show you plainly about myself.” It is the Father whom He promises to show.

The wisdom of this remarkable saying is very deep. There are few subjects of which men know so little in reality as the character and attributes of God the Father. It is not for nothing that it is written, “No man knoweth the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son shall reveal Him.” (Matt. xi. 27.) “The only begotten Son,

which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.” (John i. 18.) Thousands fancy they know the Father because they think of Him as great, and Almighty, and all-hearing, and wise, and eternal, but they think no further. To think of Him as just and yet the justifier of the sinner who believes in Jesus,—as the God who sent His Son to suffer and die,—as God in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself,—as God specially well-pleased with the atoning sacrifice of His Son, whereby His law is honoured;—to think of God the Father in this way is not given to most men. No wonder that our Master says, “I will show you plainly of the Father.”

Let it be part of our daily prayers, that we may know more of “the only true God,” as well as of Jesus Christ whom He hath sent. Let us beware alike of the mistake which some make, who speak of God as if there was no Christ; and of the mistake which others make, who speak of Christ as if there was no God. Let us seek to know all three Persons in the blessed Trinity, and give to each one the honour due to Him. Let us lay hold firmly of the great truth, that the Gospel of our salvation is the result of the eternal counsels of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; and that we are as thoroughly debtors to the love of the Father, as to the love of the Spirit, or the love of the Son. No one has learned of Christ so deeply as the man who is ever drawing nearer to the Father through the Son,—ever feeling more childlike confidence in Him,—and ever

understanding more thoroughly that in Christ God is not an angry judge, but a loving Father and Friend.

We learn, also, that *our Lord Jesus Christ makes much of a little grace, and speaks kindly of those who have it.* We see Him saying to the disciples, “The Father Himself loveth you, because ye have loved Me, and have believed that I came out from God.”

How weak was the faith and love of the Apostles! How soon, in a very few hours, they were buried under a cloud of unbelief and cowardice! These very men whom Jesus commends for loving and believing, before the morning sun arose, forsook Him and fled. Yet, weak as their graces were, they were real and true and genuine. They were graces which hundreds of learned priests and scribes and Pharisees never attained, and, not attaining, died miserably in their sins.

Let us take great comfort in this blessed truth. The Saviour of sinners will not cast off them that believe in Him, because they are babes in faith and knowledge. He will not break the bruised reed, or quench the smoking flax. He can see reality under much infirmity, and where He sees it He is graciously pleased. The followers of such a Saviour may well be bold and confident. They have a Friend who despises not the least member of His flock, and casts out none who come to Him, however weak and feeble, if they are only true.