

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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LXXII.

THE LORD JESUS CHRIST'S OFFICE AND
DIGNITY.

JOHN XVII. 1–8.

“These words spake Jesus, and lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify Thy Son, that Thy Son also may glorify Thee:

“As Thou hast given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him.

“And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent.

“I have glorified Thee on the earth: I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do.

“And now, O Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine own self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was.

“I have manifested Thy name unto the men which Thou gavest Me out of the world: Thine they were, and Thou gavest them Me; and they have kept Thy word.

“Now they have known that all things whatsoever Thou hast given Me are of Thee.

“For I have given unto them the words which Thou gavest Me; and they have received them, and have known

surely that I came out from Thee, and they have believed that Thou didst send Me.”

WE should notice, in these verses, *what a glorious account they contain of our Lord Jesus Christ’s office and dignity.* We read that the Father has “given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life.” The keys of heaven are in Christ’s hands. The salvation of every soul of mankind is at His disposal.—We read, furthermore, that “it is life eternal to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom He has sent.” The mere knowledge of God is not sufficient, and saves none. We must know the Son as well as the Father. God known without Christ is a Being whom we can only fear, and dare not approach. It is “God in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself” (2 Cor. v. 19), who alone can give to the soul life and peace.—We read, furthermore, that Christ “has finished the work which the Father gave Him to do.” He has finished the work of redemption, and wrought out a perfect righteousness for His people. Unlike the first Adam, who failed to do God’s will and brought sin into the world, the second Adam has done all, and left nothing undone that He came to do.—Finally, we read that Christ “had glory with the Father before the world was.” Unlike Moses and David, He existed from all eternity, long before He came into the world; and He shared glory with the Father, before He was made flesh and born of the Virgin Mary.

Each of these marvellous sayings contains matter which our weak minds have not power to comprehend fully. We must be content to admire and reverence what we cannot thoroughly grasp and explain. But one thing is abundantly clear: sayings like these can only be used of one who is very God. To no patriarch, or prophet, or king, or apostle, is any such language ever applied in the Bible. It belongs to none but God!

For ever let us thank God that the hope of a Christian rests on such a solid foundation as a Divine Saviour. He to whom we are commanded to flee for pardon, and in whom we are bid to rest for peace, is God as well as man. To all who really think about their souls, and are not careless and worldly, the thought is full of comfort. Such people know and feel that great sinners need a great Saviour, and that no mere human redeemer would meet their wants. Then let them rejoice in Christ, and lean back confidently on Him. Christ has all power, and is able to save to the uttermost, because Christ is Divine. Office, power, and pre-existence, all combine to prove that He is God.

LXXIII.

CHRIST'S INTERCESSION FOR HIS PEOPLE.

JOHN XVII. 9–16.

“I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which Thou hast given Me: for they are Thine.

“And all mine are Thine, and Thine are mine: and I am glorified in them.

“And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to Thee. Holy Father, keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given Me, that they maybe one, as we are.

“While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Thy name: those that Thou gavest Me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the Scripture might be fulfilled.

“And now come I to Thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves.

“I have given them Thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

“I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil.

“They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.”

WE learn here, that *the Lord Jesus does things for His believing people which He does not do for the wicked and unbelieving*. He helps their souls by special intercession. He says, "I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which Thou hast given Me."

The doctrine before us is one which is specially hated by the world. Nothing gives such offence, and stirs up such bitter feeling among the wicked, as the idea of God making any distinction between man and man, and loving one person more than another. Yet the world's objections to the doctrine are, as usual, weak and unreasonable. Surely a little reflection might show us that a God who regarded good and bad, holy and unholy, righteous and unrighteous, with equal complacency and favour, would be a very strange kind of God! The special intercession of Christ for His saints is agreeable to reason and to common sense.

Of course, like every other Gospel truth, the doctrine before us needs careful statement and Scriptural guarding. On the one hand, we must not narrow the love of Christ to sinners, and on the other we must not make it too broad. It is true that Christ loves all sinners, and invites all to be saved; but it is also true that He specially loves the "blessed company of all faithful people," whom He sanctifies and glorifies. It is true that He has wrought out a redemption *sufficient* for all mankind, and offers it freely to all; but it is also true that His redemption is *effectual*

only to them that believe. Just so it is true that He is the Mediator between God and man; but it is also true that He intercedes actively for none but those that come unto God by Him. Hence it is written, “I pray for them: I pray not for the world.”

The special intercession of the Lord Jesus is one grand secret of the believer’s safety. He is daily watched, and thought for, and provided for with unfailing care, by one whose eye never slumbers and never sleeps. Jesus is “able to save them to the uttermost who come unto God by Him, because He ever liveth to make intercession for them.” (Heb. vii. 25.) They never perish, because He never ceases to pray for them, and His prayer must prevail. They stand and persevere to the end, not because of their own strength and goodness, but because Jesus intercedes for them. When Judas fell never to rise again, while Peter fell, but repented, and was restored, the reason of the difference lay under those words of Christ to Peter, “I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not” (Luke xxii. 32.)

The true servant of Christ ought to lean back his soul on the truth before us, and take comfort in it. It is one of the peculiar privileges and treasures of a believer, and ought to be well known. However much it may be wrested and abused by false professors and hypocrites, it is one which those who really feel in themselves the workings of the Spirit should hold firmly, and never let go. Well says the judicious Hooker,—“No man’s condition so safe as ours: the prayer of Christ is more than sufficient both to

strengthen us, be we never so weak; and to overthrow all adversary power, be it never so strong and potent.”

If we have any hope that we are Christ’s true disciples, let us be satisfied that Christ knows better than we do what is for our good. Let us leave “our times in His hand,” and be content to abide here patiently as long as He pleases, however hard our position, so long as He keeps us from evil. That He will so keep us we need not doubt, if we ask Him, because He prays that we may be “kept.” Nothing, we may be sure, glorifies grace so much as to live like Daniel in Babylon, and the saints in Nero’s household,—in the world, and yet not of the world,—tempted on every side and yet conquerors of temptation, not taken out of the reach of evil and yet kept and preserved from its power.

LXXIV.

SANCTIFICATION THROUGH THE WORD.

JOHN XVII. 17–19.

“Sanctify them through Thy truth; Thy word is truth.

“As Thou hast sent life into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world.

“And for their sakes I sanctify myself that they also might be sanctified through the truth.”

WE should mark, in this passage, *how Jesus prays that His people may be sanctified.* “Sanctify them,” He says,” through Thy truth: Thy word is truth.”

We need not doubt that, in this place at any rate, the word “sanctify” means “make holy.” It is a prayer that the Father would make His people more holy, more spiritual, more pure, more saintly in thought and word and deed, in life and character. Grace had done something for the disciples already,—called, converted, renewed, and changed them? The great Head of the Church prays that the work of grace may be carried higher and further, and that His people may be more thoroughly sanctified and made holy in body, soul, and spirit,—in fact, more like Himself.

Surely we need not say much to show the matchless wisdom of this prayer. More holiness is the very thing to be desired for all servants of Christ. Holy living is the

great proof of the reality of Christianity. Men may refuse to see the truth of our arguments, but they cannot evade the evidence of a godly life. Such a life adorns religion and makes it beautiful, and sometimes wins those who are not “won by the Word.” (1 Peter iii. 1.) Holy living trains Christians for heaven. The nearer we live to God while we live, the more ready shall we be to dwell for ever in His presence when we die. Our entrance into heaven will be entirely by grace, and not of works; but heaven itself would be no heaven to us if we entered it with an unsanctified character. Our hearts must be in tune for heaven if we are to enjoy it. There must be a moral “meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light,” as well as a title. (Col. i. 12.) Christ’s blood alone can give us a title to enter the inheritance. Sanctification must give us a capacity to enjoy it.

Who, in the face of such facts as these, need wonder that increased sanctification should be the first thing that Jesus asks for His people? Who that is really taught of God can fail to know that holiness is happiness, and that those who walk with God most closely, are always those who walk with Him most comfortably? Let no man deceive us with vain words in this matter. He who despises holiness, and neglects good works, under the vain pretence of giving honour to justification by faith, shows plainly that he has not the mind of Christ.

THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST IN GLORY.

JOHN XVII. 24-26.

“Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which Thou hast given Me: for Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world.

“O righteous Father, the world hath not known Thee: but I have known Thee, and these have known that Thou hast sent Me.

“And I have declared unto them Thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them, and I in them.”

WE should mark, in these verses, *how Jesus prays that His people may at last be with Him and behold His glory.* “I will,” He says, “that those whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am: that they may behold my glory.”

This is a singularly beautiful and touching conclusion to our Lord’s remarkable prayer. We may well believe that it was meant to cheer and comfort those who heard it, and to strengthen them for the parting scene which was fast drawing near. But for all who read it even now, this part of His prayer is full of sweet and unspeakable comfort.

We do not see Christ now. We read of Him, hear of Him, believe in Him, and rest our souls in His finished work. But even the best of us, at our best, walk by faith and not by sight, and our poor, halting faith often makes us walk very feebly in the way to heaven. There shall be an end of all this state of things one day. We shall at length see Christ as He is, and know as we have been known. We shall behold Him face to face, and not through a glass darkly. We shall actually be in His presence and company, and go out no more. If faith has been pleasant, much more will sight be; and if hope has been sweet, much more will certainty be. No wonder that when St. Paul has written, "We shall ever be with the Lord," he adds, "Comfort one another with these words." (1 Thess. iv. 17, 18.)

We know little of heaven now. Our thoughts are all confounded, when we try to form an idea of a future state in which pardoned sinners shall be perfectly happy. "It does not yet appear what we shall be." (I John iii. 2.) But we may rest ourselves on the blessed thought, that after death we shall be "with Christ." Whether before the resurrection in paradise, or after the resurrection in final glory, the prospect is still the same. True Christians shall be "with Christ." We need no more information. Where that blessed Person is who was born for us, died for us, and rose again, there can be no lack of anything. David might well say, "In Thy presence is fulness of joy, and at Thy right hand are pleasures for evermore." (Ps. xvi. 11.)

Let us leave this wonderful prayer with a solemn recollection of the three great petitions which it contains. Let holiness and unity by the way, and Christ's company in the end, be subjects never long out of our thoughts or distant from our minds. Happy is that Christian who cares for nothing so much as to be holy and loving like his Master while he lives, and a companion of his Master when he dies.