

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.

LXXXVII.

MARY MAGDALENE.

JOHN XX. 1, 2.

*“The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre.*

*“Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid Him.”*

WE are taught, in the passage before us, *that those who love Christ most are those who have received most benefit from Him.*

The first whom St. John names among those who came to Christ's sepulchre, is Mary Magdalene. The history of this faithful woman, no doubt, is hidden in much obscurity. A vast amount of needless obloquy has been heaped upon her memory, as if she was once an habitual sinner against the seventh commandment. Yet there is literally no evidence whatever that she was anything of the kind! But we are distinctly told that she was one out of whom the Lord had cast “seven devils” (Mark xvi. 9; Luke viii. 2),—one who had been subjected in a peculiar way to Satan's possession,—and one whose gratitude to our Lord

for deliverance was a gratitude that knew no bounds. In short, of all our Lord's followers on earth, none seem to have loved Him so much as Mary Magdalene. None felt that they owed so much to Christ. None felt so strongly that there was nothing too great to do for Christ. Hence, as Bishop Andrews beautifully puts it,—“She was last at His cross, and first at His grave. She staid longest *there*, and was soonest *here*. She could not rest till she was up to seek Him. She sought Him while it was yet dark, even before she had light to seek Him by.” In a word, having received much, she loved much; and loving much, she did much, in order to prove the reality of her love.

The case before us throws broad and clear light on a question which ought to be deeply interesting to every true-hearted servant of Christ. How is it that many who profess and call themselves Christians, do so little for the Saviour whose name they bear? How is it that many, whose faith and grace it would be uncharitable to deny, work so little, give so little, say so little, take so little pains, to promote Christ's cause, and bring glory to Christ in the world?—These questions admit of only one answer. It is a low sense of debt and obligation to Christ, which is the amount of the whole matter. Where sin is not felt at all, nothing is done; and where sin is little felt, little is done. The man who is deeply conscious of his own guilt and corruption, and deeply convinced that without the blood and intercession of Christ, he would sink deservedly into the lowest hell, this is the man who will spend

and be spent for Jesus, and think that he can never do enough to show forth His praise. Let us daily pray that we may see the sinfulness of sin, and the amazing grace of Christ, more clearly and distinctly. Then, and then only, shall we cease to be cool, and luke-warm, and slovenly in our work for Jesus. Then, and then only, shall we understand such burning zeal as that of Mary; and comprehend what Paul meant when he said, "The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge that if One died for all, then were all dead: and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again." (2 Cor. v. 14, 15.)

It is a touching fact, and one to be carefully noted, that Mary Magdalene would not leave the sepulchre when Peter and John went away to their own home. Love to her gracious Master would not let her leave the place where He had been laid. Where He was now she could not tell. What had become of Him she did not know. But love made her linger about the empty tomb, where Joseph and Nicodemus had lately laid Him. Love made her honour the last place where His precious body had been seen by mortal eyes. And her love reaped a rich reward. She saw the angels whom Peter and John had never observed. She actually heard them speak, and had soothing words addressed to her. She was the first to see our Lord after He rose from the dead, the first to hear His voice, the first to hold conversation with Him. Can any one doubt that this

was written for our learning? Wherever the Gospel is preached throughout the world, this little incident testifies that those who honour Christ will be honoured by Christ.

As it was in the morning of the first Easter day so will it be as long as the Church stands. The great principle contained in the passage before us, will hold good until the Lord comes again. All believers have not the same degree of faith, or hope, or knowledge, or courage, or wisdom; and it is vain to expect it. But it is a certain fact that those who love Christ most fervently, and cleave to Him most closely, will always enjoy most communion with Him, and feel most of the witness of the Spirit in their hearts. It is precisely those who wait on the Lord, in the temper of Mary Magdalene, to whom the Lord will reveal Himself most fully, and make them know and feel more than others. To know Christ is good; but to “know that we know Him” is far better. (1 John ii. 3.)

LXXXVIII.

NEEDLESS ANXIETY.

JOHN XX. 11–16.

*“But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping; and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre,*

*“And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.*

*“And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him.*

*“And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus.*

*“Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing Him to be the gardener, saith unto Him, Sir, if thou have borne Him hence, tell me where thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away.*

*“Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto Him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master.”*

WE may learn from these verses *that the fears and sorrows of believers are often quite needless.* We are told that Mary stood at the sepulchre weeping, and wept as if

nothing could comfort her. She wept when the angels spoke to her: “Woman,” they said, “why weepest thou?”—She was weeping still when our Lord spoke to her: “Woman,” He also said, “why weepest thou?”—And the burden of her complaint was always the same: “They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him.”—Yet all this time her risen Master was close to her, with “body, flesh, and bones, and all things pertaining to the perfection of man’s nature.” (Article IV.) Her tears were needless. Her anxiety was unnecessary. Like Hagar in the wilderness, she had a well of water by her side, but she had not eyes to see it.

What thoughtful Christian can fail to see that we have here a faithful picture of many a believer’s experience? How often we are anxious when there is no just cause for anxiety! How often we mourn over the absence of things which in reality are within our grasp, and even at our right hand! Two-thirds of the things we fear in life never happen at all, and two-thirds of the tears we shed are thrown away, and shed in vain. Let us pray for more faith and patience, and allow more time for the full development of God’s purposes. Let us believe that things are often working together for our peace and joy, which seem at one time to contain nothing but bitterness and sorrow. Old Jacob said at one time of his life, when he thought Joseph was dead, “All these things are against me” (Gen. xlii. 36); yet he lived to see Joseph again, rich and prosperous, and to thank God for all that had happened. If Mary had found

the seal of the tomb unbroken, and her Master's body lying cold within, she might well have wept! The very absence of the body which made her weep, was a token for good, and a cause of joy for herself and all mankind.

We see, also, in these verses, *how kindly and graciously our Lord speaks of His disciples*. He bids Mary Magdalene carry a message to them, as "His brethren." He bids her tell them that His Father was their Father, and His God their God. It was but three days before that they had all forsaken Him shamefully, and fled. Yet this merciful Master speaks as if all was forgiven and forgotten. His first thought is to bring back the wanderers, to bind up the wounds of their consciences, to reanimate their courage, to restore them to their former place. This was indeed a love that passeth knowledge. To trust deserters, and to show confidence in backsliders, was a compassion which man can hardly understand. So true is that word of David: "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him. For He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust." (Psalm ciii. 13, 14.)

Let us leave the passage with the comfortable reflection that Jesus Christ never changes. He is the same yesterday, today, and for ever. As He dealt with His erring disciples in the morning of His resurrection, so will He deal with all who believe and love Him, until He comes again. When we wander out of the way He will bring us back. When we fall He will raise us again. But He will never break His royal word: "Him that cometh to Me I



will in no wise cast out.” (John vi. 37.) The saints in glory will have one anthem in which every voice and heart will join: “He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.” (Psalm ciii. 10.)

LXXXIX.

EARTHLY THOUGHTS OF SPIRITUAL  
THINGS.

JOHN XX. 17, 18.

*“Jesus saith unto her, Touch Me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father, but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.*

*“Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that He had spoken these things unto her.”*

WE see from this passage *what low and earthly thoughts of Christ may creep into the mind of a true believer*. It seems impossible to gather any other lesson from the solemn words which our Lord addressed to Mary Magdalene, when He said, “Touch Me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father.”—No doubt the language is somewhat mysterious, and ought to be delicately and reverently handled. Yet it is only reasonable to suppose that the first surprise, and the reaction from great sorrow to great joy, was more than the mind of Mary could bear. She was only a woman, though a holy and faithful woman. It is highly probable that, in the first excess of her joy she threw herself at our Lord’s feet, and made greater demonstrations

of feeling than were seemly or becoming. Very likely she behaved too much like one who thought all must be right if she had her Lord's bodily presence, and all must be wrong in His bodily absence. This was not the highest style of faith. She acted, in short, like one who forgot that her Master was God as well as man. She made too little of His divinity, and too much of His humanity. And hence she called forth our Lord's gentle rebuke, "Touch Me not." There is no need of this excessive demonstration of feeling. I am not yet ascending to my Father for forty days: your present duty is not to linger at my feet, but to go and tell my brethren that I have risen. Think of the feelings of others as well as of your own."

After all, we must confess that the fault of this holy woman was one into which Christians have always been too ready to fall. In every age there has been a tendency in the minds of many to make too much of Christ's bodily presence, and to forget that He is not a mere earthly friend, but one who is "God over all, blessed for ever," as well as man. (Rom. ix. 5.) The pertinacity with which Romanists and their allies cling to the doctrine of Christ's real corporal presence in the Lord's Supper, is only another exhibition of Mary's feeling when she wanted Christ's *body*, or no Christ at all! Let us pray for a right judgment in this matter, as in all other things concerning our Lord's person. Let us be content to have Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith, and present when two or three are met in His name, and to wait for the *real presence* of Christ's body till He

comes again. What we really need is not His literal flesh, but His Spirit. It is not for nothing that it is written, “It is the Spirit that quickeneth: the flesh profiteth nothing.” “If we have known Christ after the flesh, yet henceforth know we Him no more.” (John vi. 63; 2 Cor. v. 16.)

XC.

CHRIST'S KIND GREETING.

JOHN XX. 19, 20.

*“Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you,*

*“And when He had so said, He showed unto them His hands and His side, Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord?”*

WE should observe the *remarkable language with which our Lord greeted the apostles, when He first met them after His resurrection.* Twice over He addresses them with the kindly words, “Peace be unto you.” We may dismiss as untenable, in all probability, the cold and cautious suggestion, that this was nothing better than an unmeaning phrase of courtesy. He who “spake as man never spake,” said nothing without meaning. He spoke, we may be sure, with special reference to the state of mind of the eleven apostles, with special reference to the events of the last few days, and with special reference to their future ministry. “Peace,” and not blame,—“peace,” and not fault-finding,—“peace,” and not rebuke,—was the first word which this little company heard from their Master’s lips, after He

left the tomb.

It was meet, and right, and fitting, that it should be so, and in full harmony with things that had gone before. "Peace on earth" was the song of the heavenly host, when Christ was born. Peace and rest of soul, was the general subject that Christ continually preached for three years. Peace, and not riches, had been the great legacy which He had left with the eleven the night before His crucifixion. Surely it was in full keeping with all the tenor of our Lord's dealings, that, when He revisited His little company of disciples after His resurrection, His first word should be "Peace." It was a word that would sooth and calm their minds.

Peace, we may safely conclude, was intended by our Lord to be the key-note to the Christian ministry. That same peace which was so continually on the lips of the Master, was to be the grand subject of the teaching of His disciples. Peace between God and man through the precious blood of atonement,—peace between man and man through the infusion of grace and charity,—to spread such peace as this was to be the work of the Church. Any religion, like that of Mahomet, who made converts with the sword, is not from above, but from beneath. Any form of Christianity which burns men at the stake, in order to promote its own success, carries about with it the stamp of an apostacy. That is the truest and best religion which does most to spread real, true peace.

XCI.

CHRIST'S INTERVIEW WITH THOMAS.

JOHN XX. 24–31.

*“But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.*

*“The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe.*

*“And after eight days again His disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you.*

*“Then saith He to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.*

*“And Thomas answered and said unto Him, My Lord and my God.*

*“Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.*

*“And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book:*

*“But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might*

*have life through His name.”*

WE should mark, for one thing, in these verses, *how much Christians may lose by not regularly attending the assemblies of God's people.* Thomas was absent the first time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after His resurrection, and consequently Thomas missed a blessing. Of course we have no certain proof that the absence of the apostle could not admit of explanation. Yet, at such a crisis in the lives of the eleven, it seems highly improbable that he had any good reason for not being with his brethren, and it is far more likely that in some way he was to blame. One thing, at any rate, is clear and plain. By being absent he was kept in suspense and unbelief a whole week, while all around him were rejoicing in the thought of a risen Lord. It is difficult to suppose that this would have been the case if there had not been a fault somewhere. It is hard to avoid the suspicion that Thomas was absent when he might have been present.

We shall all do well to remember the charge of the Apostle St. Paul: “Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is.” (Heb. x. 25.) Never to be absent from God's house on Sundays, without good reason,—never to miss the Lord's Supper when administered in our own congregation,—never to let our place be empty when means of grace are going on,—this is one way to be a growing and prosperous Christian. The very sermon that we needlessly miss, may contain a



precious word in season for our souls. The very assembly for prayer and praise from which we stay away, may be the very gathering that would have cheered, and stablished, and quickened our hearts. We little know how dependent our spiritual health is on little, regular, habitual helps, and how much we suffer if we miss our medicine. The wretched argument that many attend means of grace and are no better for them, should be no argument to a Christian. It may satisfy those who are blind to their own state, and destitute of grace, but it should never satisfy a real servant of Christ. Such an one should remember the words of Solomon: "Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors." (Prov. viii. 34.) Above all, he should bind around his heart the Master's promise: "Wheresoever two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." (Matt, xviii. 20.) Such a man will rarely be left like Thomas, shut out in the cold chill of unbelief, while others are warmed and filled.

We should mark for another thing in this verse, *how kind and merciful Christ is to dull and slow believers*. Nowhere, perhaps, in all the four Gospels, do we find this part of our Lord's character so beautifully illustrated as in the story before our eyes. It is hard to imagine anything more tiresome and provoking than the conduct of Thomas, when even the testimony of ten faithful brethren had no effect on him, and he doggedly declared, "Except I see with my own eyes and touch with my own hands, I

will not believe.” But it is impossible to imagine anything more patient and compassionate, than our Lord’s treatment of this weak disciple. He does not reject him, or dismiss him, or excommunicate him. He comes again at the end of a week, and apparently for the special benefit of Thomas. He deals with him according to his weakness, like a gentle nurse dealing with a froward child:—“Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side.” If nothing but the grossest, coarsest, most material evidence could satisfy him, even that evidence was supplied. Surely this was a love that passeth knowledge, and a patience that passeth understanding.

A passage of Scripture like this, we need not doubt, was written for the special comfort of all true believers. The Holy Ghost knew well that the dull, and the slow, and the stupid, and the doubting, are by far the commonest type of disciples in this evil world. The Holy Ghost has taken care to supply abundant evidence that Jesus is rich in patience as well as compassion, and that He bears with the infirmities of all His people. Let us take care that we drink into our Lord’s spirit, and copy His example. Let us never set down men in a low place, as graceless and godless, because their faith is feeble and their love is cold. Let us remember the case of Thomas, and be very pitiful and of tender mercy. Our Lord has many weak children in His family, many dull pupils in His school, many raw soldiers in His army, many lame sheep in His flock. Yet He bears

with them all and casts none away. Happy is that Christian who has learned to deal likewise with his brethren. There are many in the Church, who, like Thomas, are dull and slow, but for all that, like Thomas, are real and true believers.

We should mark, lastly, in these verses, *how Christ was addressed by a disciple as "God" without prohibition or rebuke on His part.* The noble exclamation which burst from the lips of Thomas, when convinced that his Lord had risen indeed,—the noble exclamation, "My Lord and my God,"—admits of only one meaning. It was a distinct testimony to our blessed Lord's divinity. It was a clear unmistakable declaration that Thomas believed Him, whom he saw and touched that day, to be not only man, but God. Above all, it was a testimony which our Lord received and did not prohibit, and a declaration which He did not say one word to rebuke. When Cornelius fell down at the feet of Peter and would have worshipped him, the Apostle refused such honour at once: "Stand up: I myself also am a man." (Acts x. 26.) When the people of Lystra would have done sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas, "they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you." (Acts xiv. 14, 15.) But when Thomas says to Jesus, "My Lord and my God," the words do not elicit a syllable of reproof from our holy and truth loving Master. Can we doubt that these things were written for our learning?

Let us settle it firmly in our minds that the divinity of Christ is one of the grand foundation truths of Christianity, and let us be willing to go to the stake rather than let it go. Unless our Lord Jesus is very God of very God, there is an end of His mediation, His atonement, His advocacy, His priesthood, His whole work of redemption. These glorious doctrines are useless blasphemies, unless Christ is divine. For ever let us bless God that the divinity of our Lord is taught everywhere in the Scriptures, and stands on evidence that can never be overthrown. Above all, let us daily repose our sinful souls on Christ, with undoubting confidence, as one who is perfect God as well as perfect man. He is man, and therefore can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. He is God, and therefore is "able to save them to the uttermost who come unto God by Him." (Heb. vii. 25.) That Christian has no cause to fear who can look to Jesus by faith, and say with Thomas, "My Lord and my God." With such a Saviour we need not be afraid to begin the life of real religion, and with such a Saviour we may boldly go on.