

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.

XCII.

DIFFERENCE OF CHARACTER IN BELIEVERS.

JOHN XXI. 1–8.

“After these things Jesus shewed Himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias; and on this wise shewed He Himself.

“There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two other of His disciples.

“Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee. They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing.

“But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus.

“Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat? They answered Him, No.

“And He said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes.

“Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher’s coat unto Him (for He was naked), and did cast himself into the sea.

“And the other disciples came in a little ship (for they

were not far from land, but as it were two hundred cubits); dragging the net with fishes.”

WE may observe, in these verses, *the different characters of different disciples of Christ*. Once more, on this deeply interesting occasion, we see Peter and John side by side in the same boat, and once more, as at the sepulchre, we see these two good men behaving in different ways. When Jesus stood on the shore, in the dim twilight of the morning, John was the first to perceive who it was, and to say, “It is the Lord;” but Peter was the first to spring into the water, and to struggle to get close to his Master. In a word, John was the first to see; but Peter was the first to act. John’s gentle loving spirit was quickest to discern; but Peter’s fiery, impulsive nature, was quickest to stir and move. And yet both were believers, both were true-hearted disciples, both loved the Lord in life, and were faithful to Him unto death. But their natural temperaments were not the same.

Let us never forget the practical lesson before us. As long as we live, let us diligently use it in forming our estimate of believers. Let us not condemn others as graceless and unconverted, because they do not see the path of duty from our stand-point, or feel things exactly as we feel them. “There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.” (1 Cor. xii. 4.) The gifts of God’s children are not bestowed precisely in the same measure and degree. Some have more of one gift, and some have more

of another. Some have gifts which shine more in public, and others have gifts which shine more in private. Some are more bright in a passive life, and some are more bright in an active one. Yet each and all the members of God's family, in their own way and in their own season, bring glory to God. Martha was "careful and troubled about much serving," when Mary "sat at the feet of Jesus and heard His word." Yet there came a day, at Bethany, when Mary was crushed and prostrated by over-much sorrow, and Martha's faith shone more brightly than her sister's. (Luke x. 39, 40; John xi. 20–28.) Nevertheless both were loved by our Lord. The one thing needful is to have the grace of the Holy Spirit, and to love Christ. Let us love all of whom this can be said, though they may not see with our eyes in everything. The Church of Christ needs servants of all kinds, and instruments of every sort; penknives as well as swords, axes as well as hammers, chisels as well as saws, Marthas as well as Marys, Peters as well as Johns. Let our ruling maxim be this, "Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." (Eph. vi. 24.)

XCIII.

EVIDENCES OF THE RESURRECTION OF
CHRIST.

JOHN XXI. 9–14.

“As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread.

“Jesus saith unto them, Bring of the fish which ye have now caught.

“Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three: and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken.

“Jesus saith unto them, Come and dine. And none of the disciples durst ask Him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord.

“Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise.

“This is now the third time that Jesus shewed Himself to His disciples, after that He was risen from the dead.”

THE appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ after His resurrection, described in these verses, is a deeply interesting portion of the Gospel history.

We should learn from it *the abundant evidence which Scripture supplies of our Lord Jesus Christ's resurrection.* Here, as in other places, we find an

unanswerable proof that our Lord rose again with a real material body, and a proof seen by seven grown-up men with their own eyes, at one and the same time. We see Him sitting, talking, eating, drinking, on the shore of the lake of Galilee, and to all appearance for a considerable time. The morning sun of spring shines down on the little party. They are alone by the well-known Galilean lake, far away from the crowd and noise of Jerusalem. In the midst sits the Master, with the nail-prints in His hands,—the very Master whom they had all followed for three years, and one of them, at least, had seen hanging on the cross. They could not be deceived. Will any one pretend to say that stronger proof could be given that Jesus rose from the dead? Can any one imagine better evidence of a fact? That Peter was convinced and satisfied we know. He says himself to Cornelius, We did “eat and drink with Him after He rose from the dead.” (Acts x. 41.) Those who in modern times say they are not convinced, may as well say that they are determined not to believe any evidence at all.

Let us all thank God that we have such a cloud of witnesses to prove that our Lord rose again. The resurrection of Christ is the grand proof of Christ’s divine mission. He told the Jews they need not believe He was the Messiah, if He did not rise again the third day.—The resurrection of Christ is the topstone of the work of redemption. It proved that He finished the work He came to do, and, as our substitute, had overcome the grave.—The resurrection of Christ is a miracle that no infidel can

explain away. Men may carp and cavil at Balaam's ass, and Jonah in the whale's belly, if they please, but till they can prove that Christ did not rise again we need not be moved.—Above all, the resurrection of Christ is the pledge of our own. As the grave could not detain the Head, so it shall not detain the members. Well may we say with Peter, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." (1 Peter i. 3.)

XCIV.

CHRIST'S COMMISSION TO SIMON PETER.

JOHN XXI. 15–17.

“So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me more than these? He saith unto Him, Yea, Lord; Thou knowest that I love Thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs.

“He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me? He saith unto Him, Yea, Lord; Thou knowest that I love Thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

“He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me? Peter was grieved because He said unto him the third time, Lovest thou Me? And he said unto Him, Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.”

THESE verses describe a remarkable conversation between our Lord Jesus Christ and the Apostle Peter.

We should notice first, in these verses, *Christ's question to Peter*; “Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?”—Three times we find the same inquiry made. It seems most probable that this three-fold repetition was meant to remind the Apostle of his own thrice-repeated denial. Once we find a remarkable addition to the enquiry:

“Lovest thou Me more than these?” It is a reasonable supposition that those three words “more than these,” were meant to remind Peter of his over-confident assertion: “Though all men deny Thee, yet will not I.”— It is just as if our Lord would say, “Wilt thou now exalt thyself above others? Hast thou yet learned thine own weakness?”

“Lovest thou Me” may seem at first sight a simple question. In one sense it is so. Even a child can understand love, and can say whether he loves another or not. Yet “Lovest thou Me” is, in reality, a very searching question. We may know much, and do much, and profess much, and talk much, and work much, and give much, and go through much, and make much show in our religion, and yet be dead before God, from want of love, and at last go down to the pit. Do we love Christ? That is the great question. Without this there is no vitality about our Christianity. We are no better than painted wax figures, lifeless stuffed beasts in a museum, sounding brass and tinkling cymbals. There is no life where there is no love.

Let us take heed that there is some feeling in our religion. Knowledge, orthodoxy, correct views, regular use of forms, a respectable moral life,—all these do not make up a true Christian. There must be some personal feeling towards Christ. Feeling alone, no doubt, is a poor useless thing, and may be here today and gone tomorrow. But the entire absence of feeling is a very bad symptom, and speaks ill for the state of a man’s soul. The men and

women to whom St. Paul wrote his Epistles had feelings, and were not ashamed of them. There was One in heaven whom they loved, and that One was Jesus the Son of God. Let us strive to be like them, and to have some real feeling in our Christianity, if we hope to share their reward.

We should notice, secondly, in these verses, *Peter's answer to Christ's question*. Three times we find the Apostle saying, "Thou knowest that I love Thee." Once we are told that he said, "Thou knowest all things." Once we have the touching remark made, that he was "grieved to be asked the third time." We need not doubt that our Lord, like a skilful physician, stirred up this grief intentionally. He intended to prick the Apostle's conscience, and to teach him a solemn lesson. If it was grievous to the disciple to be questioned, how much more grievous must it have been to the Master to be denied!

The answer that the humbled Apostle gave, is the one account that the true servant of Christ in every age can give of his religion. Such a one may be weak, and fearful, and ignorant, and unstable, and failing in many things, but at any rate he is real and sincere. Ask him whether he is converted, whether he is a believer, whether he has grace, whether he is justified, whether he is sanctified, whether he is elect, whether he is a child of God,—ask him any one of these questions, and he may perhaps reply that he really does not know!—But ask him whether he loves Christ, and he will reply, "I do." He may add that he does not love Him as much as he ought to do; but he will not

say that he does not love Him at all. The rule will be found true with very few exceptions. Wherever there is true grace, there will be a consciousness of love towards Christ.

What, after all, is the great secret of loving Christ? It is an inward sense of having received from Him pardon and forgiveness of sins. Those love much who feel much forgiven. He that has come to Christ by faith with his sins, and tasted the blessedness of free and full absolution, he is the man whose heart will be full of love towards his Saviour. The more we realize that Christ has suffered for us, and paid our debt to God, and that we are washed and justified through His blood, the more we shall love Him for having loved us, and given Himself for us. Our knowledge of doctrines may be defective. Our ability to defend our views in argument may be small. But we cannot be prevented feeling. And our feeling will be like that of the Apostle Peter: "Thou, Lord, who knowest all things, Thou knowest my heart; and Thou knowest that I love Thee."

We should notice, lastly, in these verses, *Christ's command to Peter*. Three times we find Him saying, "Feed" my flock: once, "Feed my lambs;" and twice my "sheep." Can we doubt for a moment that this thrice-repeated charge was full of deep meaning? It was meant to commission Peter once more to do the work of an Apostle, notwithstanding his recent fall. But this was only a small part of the meaning. It was meant to teach Peter

and the whole Church the mighty lesson, that usefulness to others is the grand test of love, and working for Christ the great proof of really loving Christ. It is not loud talk and high profession; it is not even impetuous, spasmodic zeal, and readiness to draw the sword and fight,—it is steady, patient, laborious effort to do good to Christ's sheep scattered throughout this sinful world, which is the best evidence of being a true-hearted disciple. This is the real secret of Christian greatness. It is written in another place, "Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister." (Matt. xx. 26–28.)

For ever let the parting charge of our blessed Master abide in our consciences, and come up in the practice of our daily lives. It is not for nothing, we may be sure, that we find these things recorded for our learning just before He left the world. Let us aim at a loving, doing, useful, hard-working, unselfish, kind, unpretentious religion. Let it be our daily desire to think of others, care for others, do good to others, and to lessen the sorrow, and increase the joy of this sinful world. This is to realize the great principle which our Lord's command to Peter was intended to teach. So living, and so labouring to order our ways, we shall find it abundantly true, that "it is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts xx. 35.)

XCIV.

THE FUTURE OF EACH BELIEVER KNOWN
TO CHRIST.

JOHN XXI. 18.

“Verity, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldst: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldst not.”

WE learn, from these verses, *that the future history of Christians, both in life and death, is foreknown by Christ*, The Lord tells Simon Peter, “When thou art old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldst not.” These words, without controversy, were a prediction of the manner of the Apostle’s death. They were fulfilled in after days, it is commonly supposed, when Peter was crucified as a martyr for Christ’s sake. The time, the place, the manner, the painfulness to flesh and blood of the disciple’s death, were all matters foreseen by the Master.

The truth before us is eminently full of comfort to a true believer. To obtain foreknowledge of things to come would, in most cases, be a sorrowful possession. To know what was going to befall us, and yet not to be able to

prevent it, would make us simply miserable. But it is an unspeakable consolation to remember, that our whole future is known and forearranged by Christ. There is no such thing as luck, chance, or accident, in the journey of our life. Everything from beginning to end is foreseen,—arranged by One who is too wise to err, and too loving to do us harm.

Let us store up this truth in our minds, and use it diligently in all the days of darkness through which we may yet have to pass. In such days we should lean back on the thought, “Christ knows this, and knew it when He called me to be His disciple.” It is foolish to repine and murmur over the troubles of those whom we love. We should rather fall back on the thought that all is well done. It is useless to fret and be rebellious when we ourselves have bitter cups to drink. We should rather say, “This also is from the Lord: He foresaw it, and would have prevented it, if it had not been for my good.” Happy are those who can enter into the spirit of that old saint, who said, “I have made a covenant with my Lord, that I will never take amiss anything that He does to me.” We may have to walk sometimes through rough places on our way to heaven. But surely it is a resting, soothing reflection, “Every step of my journey was foreknown by Christ.”

XCVI.

THE BELIEVER'S DEATH GLORIFIES GOD.

JOHN XXI. 19–25.

“This spake He, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He saith unto him, Follow Me.

“Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following; which also leaned on His breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth Thee?

“Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do?

“Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou Me.

“Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?

“This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true.

“And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen.”

WE learn, from this passage, *that a believer's death is intended to glorify God.* The Holy Ghost tells us this truth in plain language. He graciously interprets the dark saying, which fell from our Lord's lips about Peter's end. He tells us that Jesus spake this, "signifying by what death he should glorify God."

The thing before us is probably not considered as much as it ought to be. We are so apt to regard life as the only season for honouring Christ, and action as the only mode of showing our religion, that we overlook death, except as a painful termination of usefulness. Yet surely this ought not so to be. We may die to the Lord as well as live to the Lord; we may be patient sufferers as well as active workers. Like Samson, we may do more for God in our death, than ever we did in our lives. It is probable that the patient deaths of our martyred Reformers had more effect on the minds of Englishmen, than all the sermons they preached, and all the books they wrote. One thing, at all events, is certain,—the blood of the English martyrs was the seed of the English Church.

We may glorify God in death, by being ready for it whenever it comes. The Christian who is found like a sentinel at his post, like a servant with his loins girded and his lamp burning, with a heart packed up and ready to go,—the man to whom sudden death, by the common consent of all who knew him, is sudden glory,—this, this is a man whose end brings glory to God.—We may glorify God in death, by patiently enduring its pains. The

Christian whose spirit has complete victory over the flesh, who quietly feels the pins of his earthly tabernacle plucked up with great bodily agonies, and yet never murmurs or complains, but silently enjoys inward peace,—this, this again, is a man whose end brings glory to God.—We may glorify God in death, by testifying to others the comfort and support that we find in the grace of Christ. It is a great thing when a mortal man can say with David, “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.” (Psalm xxiii. 4.) The Christian who, like Standfast in “Pilgrim’s Progress,” can stand for a while in the river, and talk calmly to his companions, saying, “My foot is fixed sure: my toilsome days are ended,”—this, this is a man whose end brings glory to God. Deaths like these leave a mark on the living, and are not soon forgotten.

Let us pray, while we live in health, that we may glorify God in our end. Let us leave it to God to choose the where, and when, and how, and all the manner of our departing. Let us only ask that it may “glorify God.” He is a wise man who takes John Bunyan’s advice, and keep his last hour continually in mind, and makes it his company-keeper. It was a weighty saying of John Wesley, when one found fault with the doctrines and practices of the Methodists,— “At any rate, our people die well.”