

SHORT
EXPOSITORY READINGS
ON THE
GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN.

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

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XXX.

THE HARDNESS OF THE HUMAN HEART.

JOHN VII. 1–13.

“After these things Jesus walked in Galilee; for He would not walk in Jewry, because the Jews sought to kill Him.

“Now the Jews’ feast of tabernacles was at hand.

“His brethren therefore said unto Him, Depart hence, and go into Judæa, that Thy disciples also may see the works that Thou doest.

“For there is no man that doeth any thing in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If Thou do these things, shew Thyself to the world.

“For neither did His brethren believe in Him.

“Then Jesus said unto them, My time is not yet come: but your time is always ready.

“The world cannot hate you: but Me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil.

“Go ye up unto this feast: I go not up yet unto this feast; for my time is not yet full come.

“When He had said these words unto them, He abode still in Galilee.

“But when His brethren were gone up, then went He also up unto the feast, not openly, but as it were in secret.

“Then the Jews sought Him at the feast, and said, Where is He?”

“And there was much murmuring among the people concerning Him: for some said, He is a good man: others said, Nay; but He deceiveth the people.

“Howbeit no man spake openly of Him for fear of the Jews.”

WE should observe, in this passage, *the desperate hardness and unbelief of human nature*. We are told that even our Lord’s “brethren did not believe in Him.” Holy and harmless and blameless as He was in life, some of His nearest relatives, according to the flesh, did not receive Him as the Messiah. It was bad enough that His own people, “the Jews, sought to kill Him.” But it was even worse that “His brethren did not believe.”

That great Scriptural doctrine, man’s need of preventing and converting grace, stands out here, as if written with a sunbeam. It becomes all who question that doctrine to look at this passage and consider. Let them observe that seeing Christ’s miracles, hearing Christ’s teaching, living in Christ’s own company, were not enough to make men believers. The mere possession of spiritual privileges never yet made any one a Christian. All is useless without the effectual and applying work of God the Holy Ghost. No wonder that our Lord said in another place, “No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me, draw him.” (John vi. 44.)

The true servants of Christ in every age will do well to remember this. They are often surprised and troubled to find that in religion they stand alone. They are apt to fancy that it must be their own fault that all around them are not converted like themselves. They are ready to blame themselves because their families remain worldly and unbelieving. But let them look at the verse before us. In our Lord Jesus Christ there was no fault either in temper, word, or deed. Yet even Christ's own brethren "did not believe in Him."

Our blessed Master has truly learned by experience how to sympathize with all His people who stand alone. This is a thought "full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort." He knows the heart of every isolated believer, and can be touched with the feeling of his trials. He has drunk this bitter cup. He has passed through this fire. Let all who are fainting and cast down, because brothers and sisters despise their religion, turn to Christ for comfort, and pour out their hearts before Him. He "Himself hath suffered being tempted" in this way, and He can help as well as feel. (Heb. ii. 18.)

We should observe, for another thing, in this passage, *one principal reason why many hate Christ*. We are told that our Lord said to His unbelieving brethren, "The world cannot hate you; but Me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil.

These words reveal one of those secret principles which influence men in their treatment of religion. They

help to explain that deadly enmity with which many during our Lord's earthly ministry regarded Him and His Gospel. It was not so much the high doctrines which He preached, as the high standard of practice which He proclaimed, which gave offence. It was not even His claim to be received as the Messiah which men disliked so much, as His witness against the wickedness of their lives. In short, they could have tolerated His opinions if He would only have spared their sins.

The principle, we may be sure, is one of universal application. It is at work now just as much as it was eighteen hundred years ago. The real cause of many people's dislike to the Gospel is the holiness of living which it demands. Teach abstract doctrines only, and few will find any fault. Denounce the fashionable sins of the day, and call on men to repent and walk consistently with God, and thousands at once will be offended. The true reason why many profess to be infidels and abuse Christianity, is the witness that Christianity bears against their own bad lives.—Like Ahab, they hate it, "because it does not prophesy good concerning them, but evil." (1 Kings xxii. 8.)

What think we of Christ ourselves? This is the one question with which we have to do. Let us never be ashamed to be of that little number who believe on Him, hear His voice, follow Him, and confess Him before men. While others waste their time in vain jangling and unprofitable controversy, let us take up the cross and give all

diligence to make our calling and election sure. The children of this world may hate us, as it hated our Master, because our religion is a standing witness against them. But the last day will show that we chose wisely, lost nothing, and gained a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

XXXI.

THE WAY TO OBTAIN KNOWLEDGE.

JOHN VII. 14–18.

“Now about the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and taught.

“And the Jews marvelled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?”

“Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but His that sent Me.

“If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.

“He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory: but he that seeketh His glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him.”

WE learn in this passage that *honest obedience to God’s will is one way to obtain clear spiritual knowledge*. Our Lord says, “If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.”

The difficulty of finding out “what is truth” in religion is a common subject of complaint among men. They point to the many differences which prevail among Christians on matters of doctrine, and profess to be unable to decide who is right. In thousands of cases this professed inability

to find out truth becomes an excuse for living without any religion at all.

The saying of our Lord before us is one that demands the serious attention of persons in this state of mind. It supplies an argument whose edge and point they will find it hard to evade. It teaches that one secret of getting the key of knowledge is to practise honestly what we know, and that if we conscientiously use the light that we now have, we shall soon find more light coming down into our minds. In short, there is a sense in which it is true, that by *doing* we shall come to *knowing*.

There is a mine of truth in this principle. Well would it be for men if they would act upon it. Instead of saying, as some do, "I must first know everything clearly, and then I will act,"—we should say, "I will diligently use such knowledge as I possess, and believe that in the using fresh knowledge will be given to me." How many mysteries this simple plan would solve! How many hard things would soon become plain if men would honestly live up to their light, and "follow on to know the Lord!" (Hosea vi. 3.)

It should never be forgotten that God deals with us as moral beings, and not as beasts or stones. He loves to encourage us to self-exertion and diligent use of such means as we have in our hands. The plain things in religion are undeniably very many. Let a man honestly attend to them, and he shall be taught the deep things of God. Whatever some may say about their inability to find out truth, you

will rarely find one of them who does not know better than he practises. Then if he is sincere, let him begin here at once. Let him humbly use what little knowledge he has got, and God will soon give him more.—“If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.” (Matt. vi. 22.)

XXXII.

THE END OF UNBELIEF.

JOHN VII. 32–36.

“The Pharisees heard that the people murmured such things concerning Him; and the Pharisees and the chief priests sent officers to take Him.

“Then said Jesus unto them, Yet a little while am I with you, and then I go unto Him that sent Me.

“Ye shall seek Me, and shall not find Me: and where I am, thither ye cannot come.

“Then said the Jews among themselves, Whither will He go, that we shall not find Him? will He go unto the dispersed among the Gentiles, and teach the Gentiles?

“What manner of saying is this that He said, Ye shall seek Me, and shall not find Me: and where I am, thither ye cannot come?”

WE see, in these verses, the *miserable end to which unbelievers may one day come*. We find our Lord saying to His enemies, “Ye shall seek Me, and shall not find Me; and where I am thither ye cannot come.”

We can hardly doubt that these words were meant to have a prophetic sense. Whether our Lord had in view individual cases of unbelief among His hearers, or whether He looked forward to the national remorse which many would feel too late in the final siege of Jerusalem,

are points which we cannot perhaps decide. But that many Jews did remember Christ's sayings long after He had ascended up into heaven, and did in a way seek Him and wish for Him when it was too late, we may be very sure.

It is far too much forgotten that there is such a thing as finding out truth too late. There may be convictions of sin, discoveries of our own folly, desires after peace, anxieties about heaven, fears of hell,—but all too late. The teaching of Scripture on this point is clear and express. It is written in Proverbs, “Then shall they call upon Me, but I will not answer; they shall seek Me early, but they shall not find Me.” (Prov. i. 28.) It is written of the foolish virgins in the parable, that when they found the door shut, they knocked in vain, saying, “Lord, Lord, open to us.” (Matt. xxv. 11.) Awful as it may seem, it is possible, by continually resisting light and warnings, to sin away our own souls. It sounds terrible, but it is true.

Let us take heed to ourselves lest we sin after the example of the unbelieving Jews, and never seek the Lord Jesus as a Saviour till it is too late. The door of mercy is still open. The throne of grace is still waiting for us. Let us give diligence to make sure our interest in Christ, while it is called today. Better never have been born than hear the Son of God say at last, “Where I am, thither ye cannot come.”

XXXIII.

SPIRITUAL THIRST.

JOHN VII. 37–39.

“In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink,

“He that believeth on Me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water,

“(But this spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified,)”

WE have, first, in these verses, *a case supposed*. The Lord Jesus says, “If any man thirst.” These words, no doubt, were meant to have a spiritual meaning. The thirst before us is of a purely spiritual kind. It means anxiety of soul,—conviction of sin,—desire of pardon,—longing after peace of conscience. When a man feels his sins, and wants forgiveness—is deeply sensible of his soul’s need, and earnestly desires help and relief—then he is in that state of mind which our Lord had in view, when He said, “If any man thirst.” The Jews who heard Peter preach on the day of Pentecost, and were “pricked in their hearts,”—the Philippian jailer who cried to Paul and Silas, “What must I do to be saved?” are both examples of what the expression means. In both cases there was “thirst.”

Such thirst as this, unhappily, is known by few. All ought to feel it, and all would feel it if they were wise. Sinful, mortal, dying creatures as we all are, with souls that will one day be judged and spend eternity in heaven or hell, there lives not the man or woman on earth who ought not to “thirst” after salvation. And yet the many thirst after everything almost except salvation. Money, pleasure, honour, rank, self-indulgence,—these are the things which they desire. There is no clearer proof of the fall of man, and the utter corruption of human nature, than the careless indifference of most people about their souls. No wonder the Bible calls the natural man “blind” and “asleep” and “dead,” when so few can be found who are awake, alive, and athirst about salvation.

Happy are those who know something by experience of spiritual “thirst.” The beginning of all true Christianity is to discover that we are guilty, empty, needy sinners. Till we know that we are lost, we are not in the way to be saved. The very first step toward heaven is to be thoroughly convinced that we deserve hell. That sense of sin which sometimes alarms a man and makes him think his own case desperate, is a good sign. It is, in fact, a symptom of spiritual life. “Blessed indeed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.” (Matt v. 6.)

We have, secondly, in these verses, *a remedy proposed*. The Lord Jesus says, “If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink.” He declares that He is the true

fountain of life, the supplier of all spiritual necessities, the reliever of all spiritual wants. He invites all who feel the burden of sin heavy, to apply to Him, and proclaims Himself their helper.

Those words, “Let him come unto Me,” are few and very simple. But they settle a mighty question which all the wisdom of Greek and Roman philosophers could never settle: they show how man can have peace with God; they show that peace is to be had in Christ by trusting in Him as our mediator and substitute,—in one word, by believing. To “come” to Christ is to believe on Him, and to “believe” on Him is to come. The remedy may seem a very simple one, too simple to be true. But there is no other remedy than this; and all the wisdom of the world can never find a flaw in it, or devise a better.

To use this grand prescription of Christ is the secret of all saving Christianity. The saints of God in every age have been men and women who drank of this fountain by faith and were relieved. They felt their guilt and emptiness, and thirsted for deliverance. They heard of a full supply of pardon, mercy, and grace in Christ crucified for all penitent believers. They believed the good news and acted upon it. They cast aside all confidence in their own goodness and worthiness, and came to Christ by faith as sinners. So coming they found relief. So coming daily they lived. So coming they died. Really to feel the sinfulness of sin and to thirst, and really to come to Christ and believe, are the two steps which lead to heaven. But they

are mighty steps. Thousands are too proud and careless to take them. Few, alas, think; and still fewer believe!

Do we ourselves know anything of “coming to Christ”? This is the question that should arise in our hearts as we leave this passage. The worst of all states of soul is to be without feeling or concern about eternity,—to be without “thirst.” The greatest of all mistakes is to try to find relief in any other way than the one before us,—the way of simply “coming to Christ.” It is one thing to come to Christ’s Church, Christ’s ministers, and Christ’s ordinances. It is quite another thing to come to Christ Himself. Happy is he who not only knows these things, but acts upon them.

XXXIV.

LITTLE GRACE BETTER THAN NO GRACE.

JOHN VII. 43-53.

“So there was a division among the people because of Him,

“And some of them would have taken Him; but no man laid hands on Him.

“Then came the officers to the chief priests and Pharisees; and they said unto them, Why have ye not brought Him?

“The officers answered, Never man spake like this man.

“Then answered them the Pharisees, Are ye also deceived?

“Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on Him?

“But this people who knoweth not the law are cursed.

“Nicodemus saith unto them (he that came to Jesus by night, being one of them),

“Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth?

“They answered and said unto him, Art thou also of Galilee? Search, and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet.

“And every man went unto his own house”

THESE verses show us how slowly and gradually the work of grace goes on in some hearts. We are told that Nicodemus stood up in the council of our Lord's enemies and mildly pleaded that He deserved fair dealing. "Doth our law judge any man," he asked, "before it hear him, and know what he doeth? "

This very Nicodemus, we must remember, is the man who, eighteen months before, had come to our Lord by night, as an ignorant inquirer. He evidently knew little then, and dared not come to Christ in open day. But now, after eighteen months, he has got on so far that he dares to say something on our Lord's side. It was but little that he said, no doubt, but it was better than nothing at all.

And yet a day was to come, when he would go further still. He was to help Joseph of Arimathæa in doing honour to our Lord's dead body, when even His chosen Apostles had forsaken Him and fled.

The case of Nicodemus is full of useful instruction. It teaches us that there are diversities in the operation of the Holy Spirit. All are undoubtedly led to the same Saviour, but all are not led precisely in the same way. It teaches us that the work of the Spirit does not always go forward with the same speed in the hearts of men. In some cases it may go forward very slowly indeed, and yet may be real and true.

We shall do well to remember these things in forming our opinion of other Christians. We are often ready to condemn some as graceless, because their experience does

not exactly tally with our own, or to set them down as not in the narrow way at all, because they cannot run as fast as ourselves. We must beware of hasty judgments. It is not always the fastest runner that wins the race. It is not always those who begin suddenly in religion, and profess themselves rejoicing Christians, who continue steadfast to the end. Slow work is sometimes the surest and most enduring. Nicodemus stood firm, when Judas Iscariot fell away and went to his own place. No doubt it would be a pleasant thing, if everybody who was converted came out boldly, took up the cross, and confessed Christ in the day of his conversion. But it is not always given to God's children to do so.

Have we any grace in our hearts at all? This, after all, is the grand question that concerns us. It may be small,—but have we any? It may grow slowly, as in the case of Nicodemus,—but does it grow at all? Better a little grace than none! Better move slowly than stand still in sin and the world!