

SHORT
EXPOSITORY READINGS
ON THE
GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN.

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

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XXXV.

CHRIST AND A SINNER.

JOHN VIII. 1–11.

“Jesus went unto the Mount of Olives,

“And early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came unto Him; and He sat down and taught them.

“And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto Him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst,

“They say unto Him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act.

“Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest Thou?

“This they said, tempting Him, that they might have to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down, and with His finger wrote on the ground, as though He heard them not.

“So when they continued asking Him, He lifted up Himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.

“And again He stooped down, and wrote on the ground.

“And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst.

“When Jesus had lifted up Himself, and saw none but the woman, He said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee?”

“She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.”

WHATEVER difficulties the passage before us may present, these two lessons, at any rate, are clear, plain, and unmistakable.

We learn, for one thing, *the power of conscience*. We read of the woman’s accusers, that when they heard our Lord’s appeal, “being convicted by their own conscience, they went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last.” Wicked and hardened as they were, they felt something within which made them cowards. Fallen as human nature is, God has taken care to leave within every man a witness that will be heard.

Conscience is a most important part of our inward man, and plays a most prominent part in our spiritual history. It cannot save us. It never yet led any one to Christ. It is blind, and liable to be misled. It is lame and powerless, and cannot guide us to heaven. Yet conscience is not to be despised. It is the minister’s best friend, when he stands up to rebuke sin from the pulpit. It is the mother’s best friend, when she tries to restrain her children from evil and quicken them to good. It is the teacher’s best friend, when he presses home on boys and girls their moral duties. Happy is he who never stifles his

conscience, but strives to keep it tender! Still happier is he who prays to have it enlightened by the Holy Ghost, and sprinkled with Christ's blood.

We learn, for another thing, *the nature of true repentance*. When our Lord had said to the sinful woman, "Neither do I condemn thee," He dismissed her with the solemn words, "Go, and sin no more." He did not merely say, "Go home and repent." He pointed out the chief thing which her case required,—the necessity of immediate breaking off from her sin.

Let us never forget this lesson. It is the very essence of genuine repentance, as the Church catechism well teaches, to "forsake sin." That repentance which consists in nothing more than feeling, talking, professing, wishing, meaning, hoping, and resolving, is worthless in God's sight. Action is the very life of "repentance unto salvation not to be repented of." Till a man ceases to do evil and turns from his sins, he does not really repent.—Would we know whether we are truly converted to God, and know anything of godly sorrow for sin, and repentance such as causes "joy in heaven"? Let us search and see whether we forsake sin. Let us not rest till we can say, as in God's sight, "I hate all sin, and desire to sin no more."

XXXVI.

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.

JOHN VIII. 12.

“Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”

LET US notice now *what the Lord Jesus says of Himself*. He proclaims, “I am the light of the world.”

These words imply that the world needs light, and is naturally in a dark condition. It is so in a moral and spiritual point of view: and it has been so for nearly 6,000 years. In ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome, in modern England, France, and Germany, the same report is true. The vast majority of men neither see nor understand the value of their souls, the true nature of God, nor the reality of a world to come! Notwithstanding all the discoveries of art and science, “darkness still covers the earth, and gross darkness the people.” (Isa. lx. 2.)

For this state of things the Lord Jesus Christ declares Himself to be the only remedy. He has risen, like the sun, to diffuse light, and life, and peace, and salvation, in the midst of a dark world. He invites all who want spiritual help and guidance to turn to Him, and take Him for their leader. What the sun is to the whole solar system,—the

centre of light, and heat, and life, and fertility,—that He has come into the world to be to sinners.

Let this saying sink down into our hearts. It is weighty, and full of meaning. False lights on every side invite man's attention in the present day. Reason, philosophy, earnestness, liberalism, conscience, and the voice of the Church, are all, in their various ways, crying loudly that they have got "the light" to show us. Their advocates know not what they say. Wretched are those who believe their high professions! He only is the true light who came into the world to save sinners, who died as our substitute on the cross, and sits at God's right hand to be our Friend. "In His light we shall see light." (Psalm xxxvi. 9.)

Let us notice also *what the Lord Jesus says of those that follow Him*. He promises, "He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

To follow Christ is to commit ourselves wholly and entirely to Him as our only leader and Saviour, and to submit ourselves to Him in every matter both of doctrine and practice. "Following" is only another word for "believing." It is the same act of soul, only seen from a different point of view. As Israel followed the pillar of cloud and fire in all their journeyings,—moving whenever it moved, stopping whenever it tarried, asking no questions, marching on in faith,—so must a man deal with Christ. He must "follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth." (Rev. xiv. 4.)

He that so follows Christ shall “not walk in darkness.” He shall not be left in ignorance, like the many around him. He shall not grope in doubt and uncertainty, but shall see the way to heaven, and know where he is going.—He “shall have the light of life.” He shall feel within him the light of God’s countenance shining on him. He shall find in his conscience and understanding a living light, which nothing can altogether quench. The lights with which many please themselves shall go out in the valley of the shadow of death, and prove worse than useless. But the light that Christ gives to every one that follows Him shall never fail.

And now, where are we ourselves? Do we know? Many are living and dying in a kind of fog.—Where are we going? Can we give a satisfactory answer? Hundreds go out of existence in utter uncertainty.—Let us leave nothing uncertain that concerns our everlasting salvation. Christ, the light of the world, is for us as well as for others, if we humbly follow Him, cast our souls on Him, and become His disciples.—Let us not, like thousands, waste our lives in doubting and arguing and reasoning, but simply *follow*. The child that says, “I will not learn anything till I know something,” will never learn at all. The man that says, “I must first understand everything before I become a Christian,” will die in his sins. Let us begin by “following,” and then we shall find light.

XXXVII.

THE PORTION OF THE UNGODLY.

JOHN VIII. 21–24.

“Then said Jesus again unto them, I go my way, and ye shall seek Me, and shall die in your sins: whither I go, ye cannot come,

“Then said the Jews, Will He kill Himself ? because He saith, Whither I go, ye cannot come.

“And He said unto them, Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world.

“I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins.”

WE learn, from these verses, how *awful is the end to which unbelief can bring man*. Our Lord says to His enemies, “If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins.”

These solemn words are invested with peculiar solemnity when we consider from whose lips they came. Who is this that speaks of men dying “in their sins,” unpardoned, unforgiven, unfit to meet God,—of men going into another world with all their sins upon them? He that says this is no other than the Saviour of mankind, who laid down His life for His sheep,—the loving, gracious, merciful, compassionate Friend of sinners. It is Christ Himself! Let this simple fact not be overlooked.

They are greatly mistaken who suppose that it is harsh and unkind to speak of hell and future punishment. How can such persons get over such language as that which is before us? How can they account for many a like expression which our Lord used, and specially for such passages as those in which He speaks of the “worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched”? (Mark ix. 46.) They cannot answer these questions. Misled by a false charity and a morbid amiability, they are condemning the plain teaching of Scripture, and are wise above that which is written.

Let us settle it in our minds, as one of the great foundation truths of our faith, that there is a hell. Just as we believe firmly that there is an eternal heaven for the godly, so let us believe firmly that there is an eternal hell for the wicked. Let us never suppose that there is any want of charity in speaking of hell. Let us rather maintain that it is the highest love to warn men plainly of danger, and to beseech them to “flee from the wrath to come.” It was Satan, the deceiver, murderer, and liar, who said to Eve in the beginning, “Ye shall not surely die.” (Gen. iii. 4.) To shrink from telling men that except they believe they will “die in their sins,” may please the devil, but surely it cannot please God.

Finally, let us never forget that unbelief is the special sin that ruins men’s souls. Had the Jews believed on our Lord, all manner of sin and blasphemy might have been forgiven them. But unbelief bars the door in mercy’s face,

and cuts off hope. Let us watch and pray hard against it. Immorality slays its thousands, but unbelief its tens of thousands. One of the strongest sayings ever used by our Lord was this,—“He that believeth not shall be damned.” (Mark xvi. 16.)

XXXVIII.

LIBERTY AND SLAVERY.

JOHN VIII. 31–36.

“Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on Him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed;

“And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

“They answered Him, We be Abraham’s seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest Thou, Ye shall be made free?”

“Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.

“And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever.

“If the Son, therefore, shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.”

THESE verses show us *the nature of true slavery*. The Jews were fond of boasting, though without any just cause, that they were politically free, and were not in bondage to any foreign power. Our Lord reminds them that there was another bondage to which they were giving no heed, although enslaved by it.—“He that committeth sin is the servant of sin.”

How true that is! How many on every side are thorough slaves, although they do not acknowledge it.

They are led captive by their besetting corruptions and infirmities, and seem to have no power to get free. Ambition, the love of money, the passion for drink, the craving for pleasure and excitement, gambling, gluttony, illicit connections,—all these are so many tyrants among men. Each and all have crowds of unhappy prisoners bound hand and foot in their chains. The wretched prisoners will not allow their bondage. They will even boast sometimes that they are eminently *free*. But many of them know better. There are times when the iron enters into their souls, and they feel bitterly that they are slaves.

There is no slavery like this. Sin is indeed the hardest of all task masters. Misery and disappointment by the way, despair and hell in the end,—these are the only wages that sin pays to its servants. To deliver men from this bondage is the grand object of the Gospel. To awaken people to a sense of their degradation, to show them their chains, to make them arise and struggle to be free,—this is the great end for which Christ sent forth His ministers. Happy is he who has opened his eyes and found out his danger. To know that we are being led captive, is the very first step toward deliverance.

These verses show us, also, *the nature of true liberty*. Our Lord declares this to the Jews in one comprehensive sentence. He says, “If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.”

Liberty, most Englishmen know, is rightly esteemed one of the highest temporal blessings. Freedom from

foreign dominion, a free constitution, free trade, a free press, civil and religious liberty,—what a world of meaning lies beneath these phrases! How many would sacrifice life and fortune to maintain the things which they represent! Yet, after all our boasting, there are many so-called freemen who are nothing better than slaves. There are many who are totally ignorant of the highest, purest form of liberty. The noblest liberty is that which is the property of a true Christian. Those only are perfectly free people whom the Son of God “makes free.” All else will sooner or later be found slaves.

Wherein does the liberty of true Christians consist? Of what is their freedom made up?—They are freed from the guilt and consequences of sin by the blood of Christ. Justified, pardoned, forgiven, they can look forward boldly to the day of judgment, and cry, “Who shall lay anything to our charge? Who is he that condemneth?”—They are freed from the power of sin by the grace of Christ’s Spirit. Sin has no longer dominion over them. Renewed, converted, sanctified, they mortify and tread down sin, and are no longer led captive by it.—Liberty, like this, is the portion of all true Christians in the day that they flee to Christ by faith, and commit their souls to Him. That day they become free men. Liberty, like this, is their portion for evermore. Death cannot stop it. The grave cannot even hold their bodies for more than a little season. Those whom Christ makes free are free to all eternity.

Let us never rest till we have some personal experience of this freedom ourselves. Without it all other freedom is a worthless privilege. Free speech, free laws, political freedom, commercial freedom, national freedom,—all these cannot smooth down a dying pillow, or disarm death of his sting, or fill our consciences with peace. Nothing can do that but the freedom which Christ alone bestows. He gives it freely to all who seek it humbly. Then let us never rest till it is our own.

XXXIX.

THE PERSONALITY OF THE DEVIL.

JOHN VIII. 37–47.

“I know that ye are Abraham’s seed; but ye seek to kill Me, because my word hath no place in you.

“I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and ye do that which ye have seen with your father.

“They answered and said unto Him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham.

“But now ye seek to kill Me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham.

“Ye do the deeds of your father. Then said they to Him, We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God.

“Jesus said unto them, If God were your father, ye would love Me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but He sent Me.

“Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word.

“Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.

“And because I tell you the truth, ye believe Me not.

“Which of you convinceth Me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe Me?”

“He that is of God heareth God’s words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God.”

WE are taught here *the reality and character of the devil*. Our Lord speaks of him as one whose personality and existence are beyond dispute. In solemn words of stern rebuke He says to His unbelieving enemies, “Ye are of your father the devil,”—led by him, doing his will, and showing unhappily that you are like him. And then He paints his picture in dark colours, describing him as a “murderer” from the beginning, as a “liar,” and the father of lies.

There is a devil! We have a mighty invisible enemy always near us,—one who never slumbers and never sleeps,—one who is about our path and about our bed, and spies out all our ways, and will never leave us till we die.—He is a murderer! His great aim and object is to ruin us for ever and kill our souls. To destroy, to rob us of eternal life, to bring us down to the second death in hell, are the things for which he is unceasingly working. He is ever going about, seeking whom he may devour.—He is a liar! He is continually trying to deceive us by false representations, just as he deceived Eve at the beginning. He is always telling us that good is evil and evil good,—truth is falsehood and falsehood truth,—the broad way good and the narrow way bad. Millions are led captive by

his deceit, and follow him, both rich and poor, both high and low, both learned and unlearned. Lies are his chosen weapons. By lies he slays many.

These are awful things; but they are true. Let us live as if we believed them. Let us not be like many who mock, and sneer, and scoff, and deny the existence of the very Being who is invisibly leading them to hell. Let us believe there is a devil, and watch, and pray, and fight hard against his temptations. Strong as he is, there is One stronger than he, who said to Peter, "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not," and who still intercedes at God's right hand. Let us commit our souls to Him. (Luke xxii. 32.) With such a being as the devil going to and fro in the world, we never need wonder to see evil abounding. But with Christ on our side, we need not be afraid. Greater is He that is for us, than he that is against us. It is written, "Resist the devil, and he shall flee from you." —"The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly." (James iv. 7; Rom. xvi. 20.)