

THE CHRISTIAN RACE

AND OTHER SERMONS

BY THE RIGHT REVEREND

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PREFATORY NOTE

ALTHOUGH the Bishop of Liverpool has published many books—Commentaries, Biographies, and Theological Dissertations—he has never published a volume of sermons.

When his many friends heard that he was about to resign the See of Liverpool, they urged him to publish a volume of his sermons as a “memorial” of his *sixty years*’ ministry. The Bishop kindly consented to do so, and invited me to make a selection from his MSS. and to prepare the sermons for the press. I need hardly say that I willingly undertook the task as a “labour of love” for my aged Bishop. The selection I have made for publication sets forth the great doctrines of our Faith—Sin, Redemption, Regeneration, and Sanctification. I have also added sermons which call attention to the *Practical* side of Christianity, and which especially emphasise the “DUTIES” of the Christian life. The closing sermons proclaim the coming of our Lord; the Reward of His Saints; and the Rest of Heaven.

Friends, who knew of the preparation of these sermons for the press, have been praying that the “message of God” which they contain may bring blessing to many thousands. In the sure and certain hope that His Word will not return unto Him void I have prepared this volume of sermons by the first Bishop of Liverpool—and in this hope it is sent forth.

T. J. MADDEN,

Archdeacon of Warrington.

LIVERPOOL, *March 1st*, 1900.

The Bishopric of Liverpool was declared vacant on March 3rd, 1900.
[Bishop Ryle died a few months later.]

XXI

KNOCKING! KNOCKING!

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me.”—REV. iii. 20.

IT is one of the marks of an unconverted man that he does not like the plain doctrines of Scripture—if we offer to him salvation by free grace, tell him he is a miserable sinner and can do nothing for himself, and must be saved only by the blood of Christ together with the publicans and harlots,—immediately he is offended: “No, no,” he says, “this is all cant and enthusiasm: I am not quite so bad as all that; I am not perhaps what I ought to be, but I can do something, I am sure, whenever I think seriously.” If we preach the necessity of holiness, show him what a true believer really is, and how much purity and spiritual-mindedness the law of Christ requires, again he is offended—he cannot receive it. “No, no,” he says, “you are wrong now the other way: you are righteous overmuch, you are too strict; there would be no living in the world on your plan. I wish to do my duty, I do not wish to be a saint.” It is in vain we reply, “But will you not just look at your Bible, and see whether a faithful minister can teach you any other doctrine; is it not all written there, as clear as the sun at noonday?” No! he has not time, or he will not take the trouble to do that; but it matters not, our preaching displeases him, and he is satisfied in his own mind we must be wrong.

Now, I always wonder what such persons can make of the text you have heard read, if ever it falls in their way. To me it does appear the most extraordinary verse in the whole Bible. Consider who is the Speaker. It is the Lord Jesus Christ, the King of kings, the Light of the world, the Lord of all, the mighty God, the Prince of peace, the Sun of righteousness, the Resurrection and the Life, of whom St. John says, “I fell at His feet as dead; and He laid His right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am He that liveth, and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore: Amen, and have the keys of hell and of death.” Consider also the tone of His speech. You have heard sometimes His gracious invitations, such as, “Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden;” “Whosoever will let him take the water of life freely,” and pointed out how inexcusable are those who will refuse them; but here, behold, the scene changes: we read, “I stand at the door and knock,” we see Jesus coming Himself to the heart of every unconverted man in person, we find the Creator entreating the creature! God beseeching man! the Saviour supplicating the sinner; and all for what? simply that you will accept the friendship of your Creator, that you will consent to admit God into your hearts, that you will welcome your Saviour as your guide, your companion, and your

familiar friend. "If any man hear My voice," says Jesus, "and open the door, I will come in to him and sup with him and he with Me."

Truly this is wonderful language! God has set before us many figures in the Bible to convince us of His tender love, but none that can be compared with this, none which seems so unanswerable, none which seems so well calculated to make a careless, thoughtless, cold-hearted member of a church consider his ways, and bring him to his senses, and show him the full value of that soul which he is neglecting. Jesus appeared on earth, suffered and died for a wicked world; and was not this enough? Does not this leave all without excuse who are so ungrateful as to forget Him? No doubt it does; and yet behold grace still abounds: here is the Son of God Himself again descending from above, and trying to prevail on unbelieving man to forsake destruction, and become an heir of everlasting life. What think you, beloved? How can anyone dare to neglect this verse? How can anyone shut his eyes against its meaning? Indeed, I know not any stronger proof that God is most willing and anxious to save men, and that men are naturally unwilling to be saved, than you will find contained in these words.

Let us then consider them, remembering that our Lord is not speaking to heathens, but to the church of Laodicea, to men who were called Christians, to baptised persons who were not walking worthy of their high calling. God grant that this address may awaken some sleeping one among yourselves; may the startling earnestness of the language rouse some of you to think of your own state, that you may not in the last day open your eyes too late, and find that you have got your portion with the unbelievers.

I. Let us in the first place examine our Lord's declaration: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." What is this door? It is the entrance into the heart of man, it is the way into that house of which the strong man Satan loves to keep possession, and which he often finds swept and garnished for his abode. And Jesus stands waiting at this door, and asking every unconverted man to let Him in. It shall not profit you, O man, to say the door has never yet been opened, and I do not know how to do it, for I shall show you this is not the case, I shall prove that you have always admitted other guests most readily. Have not your own relations knocked? parents, wife, and children; yes, and the door was at once opened, and they entered in and took up a large place in your affections. Has not the world knocked? Yes, and the door was at once opened, and in there came cares about the things of this life, and anxieties about earthly matters, and love of money, and excessive attention to business, and desire to have treasure here below, and hopes built on temporal foundations, and a great love for the good opinion of men, and a long train of lying vanities and cheating promises and unsatisfying pleasures, and they have dwelt there, and taken up another large portion of your heart. Has not sin knocked? Yes, long ago; and the door was at once opened, and there entered evil tempers, and polluted thoughts, and

abominable lusts, and all those fleshly dispositions which make men drunkards and revellers and noisy rioters and unclean livers, and they have dwelt there, and filled up many chambers in your imagination. And lastly, Satan knocked, and told you it was a mistake to think sin so very sinful: God would not be so very strict, ministers were far too particular, it was not so very necessary to think of Christ, and be watchful, and attend church regularly, and search the Scriptures, and pray without ceasing; only let him in and he would show you a more excellent way. And at once the door was opened, and he entered in and dwelt there, and took possession of your goods; and then your house was filled, and you have dared to be at peace.

But all this time, while these things have been taking place, Jesus has been standing, knocking, waiting, asking to be admitted, and so far it has been all in vain. Think what an insufferable insult! The Lord Jesus Christ comes offering freely righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, and the door is not opened; he brings white raiment to cover your uncleanness, and the water of life, which He purchased with His own blood, and the door is not opened; day after day He stands there patiently waiting and knocking; He sees every other guest from earth or hell admitted, but to Him the door is never opened, and He is left there standing and knocking in vain. Truly, beloved, it has been well said that the heart of the natural man is like the inn of Bethlehem, where Jesus was born, in which every guest could find room and every guest was welcome except the Saviour of mankind. To think that men can be grateful to each other, but feel no gratitude to Jesus; can love frail changeable creatures like themselves, but will not love Jesus; can be warm in their affections towards their brethren according to the flesh, but cold as death towards Christ; can be anxious to obtain the favour of the great of this world, but indifferent about their Redeemer; can delight in the company of the children of Satan himself, but reject Him who died for our sins! Surely, I say, there is in this so much of corruption and iniquity that it is impossible to understand how anyone can doubt that the “heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.”

But we must not pass over the other expression—“I knock.” Perhaps someone may say: “I never heard this knocking. Jesus has never knocked at my heart, as far as I can recollect, or doubtless I would have let him in. I may have been careless, but I never willingly insulted God.” O unconverted man or woman, this cannot avail you; I must try to convince you, you are wrong, Look back, I pray you, for an instant, on the life you have spent, and sift and examine the days that are past. Cannot you remember some occasion when a minister of the Gospel has said something which startled you more than usual, when he has so preached about man’s wickedness, and God’s love, or death, or judgment, or eternity that you have felt very uncomfortable and rather alarmed? Heard you then no knocking at the door of your heart? Was there not a voice within speaking to you of your folly and ingratitude in slighting Christ and putting off

the one thing needful? Cannot you call to mind some verse in the Bible which has struck you on hearing it read, and made you think, "If this be true I am neglecting the care of my soul"? Has not the thought, "I am not living as the Bible commands, though I profess to believe it," come across your mind at some worldly feast or dwelling, and made you grave in the midst of your festivity, like the handwriting on the wall of which Daniel speaks? Have you not ever in the middle of the night, when all around were sleeping, and you alone lay awake, felt as if there was an eye looking down upon you which pierced your inmost thoughts? Know for a certainty your Saviour was then knocking at the door of your heart. Or have you been graciously placed in the furnace of affliction? has it pleased God to take away your worldly goods and blight your earthly expectations? has He thought fit to send upon you sickness and disease, to chasten you by nights of weariness, and days of pain? Surely you must have heard sometimes at such seasons: "I stand at the door and knock; I have sent these trials in mercy to your soul; they are My remembrancers and messengers to prepare My way; they are to remind you man is of few days, and full of misery; they are to teach you things you are too ready to forget: will you not now admit me?"

Or have you sat beside the bed of one who was the desire of your eyes, whom you loved as your own soul, and watched that daily change of countenance which speaks of dissolution, and traced the footsteps of him whom Job calls the king of terrors drawing nearer and nearer, and observed those many different feelings which come uppermost in last hours, till the last struggle was over, and all was silent, still—very still? Or have you ever gone as a mourner to accompany someone you knew in life to his long home, and stood beside the grave, and looked into that narrow bed, where "the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest," and seen the chilling preparations for burying the dead out of sight, and heard that cold, hard sound, which announces the return of earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust. I never can believe you felt no voice within on such occasions. I never can believe you did not find the questions rising in your mind: "Where am I now? What am I doing? Whither am I going? Where shall I be found on the morning of the resurrection?" Be sure it was your Saviour himself, saying, "I stand at the door and knock: open to Me now, and I am ready to come in." Alas! that anyone should harden his heart, while Christ himself is speaking. Think on these things, beloved, before it be too late, or else you will not die the death of the righteous, and your last end will not be like his.

II. Let us, in the second place, look shortly at the *manner* of the invitation and request: "If any man hear My voice and open the door." See now how wide and general is the form of this address. There is no limit, no reserve, no condition here; it is not confined to particular classes; it is not for the rich more than the poor, for the learned more than the unlearned; for the moral Pharisee rather than

the despised publican: it is for all without exception. “If *any* man hear;” however sinful, however unworthy, however abominable he may have been it matters not, anyone may become a partaker of the privileges of the gospel, and have right to that tree of life which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.

Let us, however, go on to the contents and substance of the invitation. Jesus calls on you “to hear His voice and open the door.” Truly this is a simple demand, it is a small condition, a moderate requirement, and one entirely in keeping with the whole tone of the gospel. He does not say, “Go make yourselves fit for my presence by acting up to what you know; become holy, become perfect, fulfil every duty without a single failing, and then I will become your Saviour”; but He brings to our door pardon, grace and merit; sufficient to put away every sin, and present us faultless in the sight of God; and then He invites us to listen to His counsel, to believe, to throw open our hearts and affections to Him, and so He declares we shall live; we shall be saved. “Hear my voice,” says Jesus, “and open the door.” There is little consolation here for those who are content with hearing only, and never seem to go beyond that point. No doubt it is the first duty of every man to hear the gospel; but woe to him whose notions of religion go no further! he has forgotten the exhortation of St. James, “Be ye doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves”; and he has yet to learn that we must believe and love as well as hear. Our lives must show that Christ has really entered in our hearts by faith. “Hear my voice,” says Jesus, “and open the door.” How truly this describes the experience of true believers in every age! There was a time, probably, when, like Gallio, they cared for none of these things; they lived as others did, laying up treasure on the earth, and little heeding Jesus and the resurrection. At last there came a day, a season when their hearts were touched. They heard a knocking, and a voice to which they felt obliged to listen. Perhaps it was a voice of terror which drove them to their knees in fear and trembling and brought their sins to remembrance, and made them, like the jailer of Philippi, cry out, “What must I do to be saved?” Perhaps it was a still small voice, which gently spoke of peace, and rest, and goodwill, and drew them by the cords of love, until they felt they could deny nothing to Him who promised such comfort to their souls. At any rate, they would tell us, it was a voice of power, a voice which humbled all their pride, and made them willing and obedient,—a voice which turned their inclinations like the waters of the south, until they said, “Come in, Lord Jesus, come quickly: blessed Lord, why standest Thou without, let my beloved come into His garden and eat His pleasant fruits.” Happy indeed are all who hear His voice and know the joyful sound, and open to Him quickly.

III. Let us, in the third place, consider the *privileges* which are here held out and promised—“I will come in to Him,” says our Lord, “and will sup with him and he with Me.” By this you are to understand that perfect and close union which exists between Christ and a true believer. The Lord Jesus enters into the

heart of every converted man, and makes it His dwelling-place, as a king to rule and govern it; as a teacher to guide and instruct, saying, This is the good way, walk in it; as a friend to comfort and encourage, who can feel for all our infirmities, in that He has been tempted Himself. This is that thing of which our Lord spoke in the Gospel of St. John, "If a man love Me, he will keep My words, and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him." This is that of which St. Paul spoke, when he told the Ephesians, "Ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." This is that which St. John has in view when he says in his first Epistle, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." This is that thing of which our Church speaks in her Communion Service, saying, "The benefit is great, if with a true penitent heart and lively faith we receive the Holy Sacrament, for then we spiritually eat the flesh of Christ, and drink His blood; then we dwell in Christ and Christ in us, we are one with Christ and Christ with us."

Mark here how great, how astonishing, how incomprehensible is our Redeemer's love towards men. "Lord, what is man," says David, "that Thou art mindful of him, or the son of man that Thou visitest him!" Too many of you are disposed to look on God as a hard master, as one whom it is their duty to serve, and that is all; they seem to live in fear of His displeasure, and to have no feeling towards Him excepting as a taskmaster, whose demands must be satisfied. But how unworthy such a feeling is you may learn from these words: "I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me."

If there be any tenderness in earthly unions, if there be any love, if there be any affection, if there be any sympathy, if there be any oneness of spirit, all is contained in this connection between Jesus and the souls of His believing people; and every support and comfort, and consolation and assistance and counsel that we expect from earthly friends we are fully warranted in expecting from our Redeemer, and if we trust Him we shall surely find it, in life and in death, in sorrow and in joy, in sickness and in health. He that loved us and gave Himself for us is not ashamed to be called our God and to look upon us as dear brethren. We read that it was often said of Him during His ministry, "He is gone to be a guest with a man that is a sinner"; let us remember He is still the same; He never changes, there is not one amongst you Jesus would not visit if you would only unbar those hard hearts and willingly receive Him.

Mark now how well this proves who are God's children and who are not; how plain is the evidence it furnishes, for which we are to look, if we would discover who are the pilgrims of the narrow way. It is not simply hearing the gospel preached, it is not only talking much about religion, it is not merely the outward attendance upon services—it is the indwelling of Christ in the heart, it is the constant presence of your Saviour within, showing itself by tempers and words and behaviour like His own. If you are really on the road towards Zion,

if Jesus be within you, your life will show it, it will speak for itself; as a member of His body, you will daily study more and more to resemble Him, you will purify yourself even as He is pure.

Remember, in the last place, if you desire to have your Saviour as your guest, you must give Him undivided possession of your house—you must renounce and cast forth those old inhabitants, the world, the lust of the flesh and the devil. Jesus must reign alone; He has stooped low for your sakes, He has endured shame and contempt and death for an ungrateful world; He has stood long knocking at your door, but He can stoop no farther. He will not have less than your whole heart. Think you, He will consent to dwell in a heart divided between Himself and the world? think you He will bear the insult of sitting down as a guest at your table together with unclean spirits, corrupt affections, evil passions, earthly desires? Will you ask Him to come in and take a portion of your goods together with them? He will not do it: He loves you much, but He will not be mocked. They are His enemies—either He or they must depart—you must either drive them out with His assistance, praying much that He will help you, or else He will withdraw. He will never share the throne of your heart with Satan, or hold fellowship with one who takes pleasure in the fellowship of sin.

And now, beloved, it remains for me, in conclusion, to apply this text to your souls. We are the ministers of peace, and happy should we be if we could always speak to you smooth things; but we should not be charitable if we forgot the truth, if we did not reprove and rebuke as well as exhort, if we did not endeavour to give every man his portion in due season. I say, then, that our text contains a word for three classes of hearers: for the really *unconverted*, for the *inquirer*, and for the true *Christian*. God grant that each of you may have the eyes of his understanding opened, and not take anything to himself which is not his own.

1. First, then, I speak to those whose hearts have never yet been changed by the Holy Ghost, whatever their lives may have been, whether they have made any profession hitherto or not. Beloved, I beseech you by the mercies of God, consider what you are doing. Jesus says to you, “I stand at the door and knock.” How long do you intend to keep Him waiting? How long will you insult Him by allowing everything else to go out and come in freely, while to Him, the only lawful owner, your heart is barred and bolted? How can you defend the course you are now pursuing? Have you found a new Bible? Can you show us that the doctrine we preach is not true? Can you prove that this text does not mean everything I have said?

You will not tell us that Christ is now within you; your life, your conversation, your habits all deny that. And if He is not within you at this minute, you actually are keeping Him standing without. Laugh if you choose, despise the doctrine if you please; it is written, and therefore true; you cannot overthrow it or blot it out.

Listen! Harken! What is Jesus saying now to each of you? “I stand these many years knocking at thy door: why is it not opened to me? Why am I thus shut out from your affections? What have I done to deserve such scorn and ingratitude? For your sake I left my Father’s bosom and endured hardships in the form of a servant. For your sake I was numbered among the transgressors and shed My blood upon the cross. I came to offer you abundance of happiness and life and peace: why is your heart continually closed against me? Why am I counted unworthy of a place in your thoughts? Why is a traitor and a rebel, the prince of this world, preferred before Me? ”

O unconverted man, your Lord and Master is saying this, and what can you plead by way of excuse? Perhaps you tell us it is all true,—you mean some time or other to turn to God and repent, you hope to have a more convenient season. A more convenient season!

Jesus, remember, is waiting for an answer; He does not look to what you say; your life speaks more plainly than your lips, and let me tell you what the answer of your life is: “I know,” you say, “I am insulting God, but I am willing to go on doing so for the present; I love my sins more than Him at present; I love my business more than His favour; I love my fleshly pleasure more than His blessing; I love this earth more than heaven. When I have had enough of enjoyment here, and am tired of it, I shall think of listening to Christ,—when my bodily strength and the power of my mind is wasted, I may perhaps become the servant of God; but at present the Lord Jesus may wait; let the Lord Jesus wait my convenience.” Think not I mean you dare say this with your lips, but I do mean you are plainly saying it by your actions as long as you put off repentance and calling upon God; and I would simply ask you, Is it wise? is it reasonable? is it prudent? is it safe? Hath not God written in the book of Proverbs, “Because I called and ye refused, I stretched out my hands and no man regarded, I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek Me early, but they shall not find Me”? Oh, fearful words and fearful thought! A time is coming, and may be very near, when the Lord Jesus will laugh, when the Lord Jesus will mock,—when you shall call on the Lord Jesus and He will not answer, when you shall seek the Lord Jesus early and shall not find Him. Tremble sinner, and repent; awake while it is called today, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall yet give thee light.

2. Secondly, I speak to those who are inclined to inquire about the things they hear, but have not yet decidedly made up their minds to follow the Lord fully. You are beginning to think there is some truth in the gospel, and to see some necessity for being in earnest; but you are doubting whether you will be able to act up to your profession; and you see so many careless about their souls, that you are holding back, you do not feel quite certain what to do. To all such Jesus says, “Hear My voice, and open the door.” Go forward; do not hesitate;

be not faithless, but believing; think not of others; look to your own salvation; do not resist the leadings of your conscience, quench not the Spirit; follow the Lamb of God whithersoever He goes, and trust Him with the consequences. Open wide the door of your heart; let Jesus enter in, and make Him Lord of all. Do not reject His counsel. He will say, "I want to enrich thee": do not answer, "I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." He will say, "I want to purify thee": do not answer, "I have a few failings, but I can soon get rid of them; I do not want so much cleansing." He will say, "I come to clothe thee": do not answer, "I have no need of raiment, I am not naked." But if you are at present ignorant of everything else, do this at least: hear the voice of Him who calls; open to Him the door of your heart; let His kingdom be set up within you; and be sure you will never repent, though all things seem against you.

3. Lastly, I have a word for those who have admitted Christ into their hearts by faith. Let your light so shine before men, that all may take knowledge Jesus is within you, when they find you daily striving to please Him who has become your guest. See that you do not grieve Him by any inconsistent habits in your lives. Do not be ashamed of your guest: you must confess Christ before the world, or He will not confess you before His Father and the angels. Fear not that anything shall separate you from the love of God; take heed that you despise not any of the means of grace; live fully up to the privilege to which you have been called; walk by faith, and remember your exceeding great and precious promises; be humble, be watchful, be diligent to cleanse out the old leaven; be much in prayer and self-examination; for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour. Your union with Christ on earth shall only be a foretaste of good things to come, for all with whom He has supped on earth shall sit down with Him at the marriage supper of the Lamb; "and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away." "He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of water, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes" (Rev. vii. 15-17).