

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

And Many Explanatory Notes.

BY THE REV. J. C. RYLE, B. A.,

CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD,

VICAR OF STRADBROOKE, SUFFOLK;

Author of "Home Truths," etc.

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LUXE V. 1–11.

1 And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret,	closed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake.
2 And saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing <i>their</i> nets.	7 And they beckoned unto <i>their</i> partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink.
3 And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship.	8 When Simon Peter saw <i>it</i> , he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.
4 Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught.	9 For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken:
5 And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.	10 And so <i>was</i> also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men.
6 And when they had this done, they in-	11 And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him.

WE have, in these verses, the history of what is commonly called the miraculous draught of fishes. It is a remarkable miracle on two accounts.—For one thing, it shows us our Lord's complete dominion over the animal creation. The fish of the sea are as much obedient to His will, as the frogs, and flies, and lice, and locusts, in the plagues of Egypt. All are His servants, and all obey His commands.—For another thing, there is a singular similarity between this miracle, worked at the beginning of our Lord's ministry, and another which we find Him working after His resurrection, at the end of His ministry, recorded by St. John. (John xxi. 1, etc.) In both we read of a miraculous draught of fishes. In both the Apostle Peter has a prominent place in the story. And in both there is, probably, a deep spiritual lesson, lying below the outward surface of the facts described.

We should observe, in this passage, *our Lord Jesus Christ's unwearied readiness for every good work*. Once more we find Him preaching to a people who "pressed upon Him to hear the word of God." And where does He preach? Not in any consecrated building, or place set apart for public worship, but in the open air;—not in a pulpit constructed for a preacher's use, but in a fisherman's boat. Souls were waiting to be fed. Personal inconvenience was allowed no place in His consideration. God's work must not stand still.

The servants of Christ should learn a lesson from their Master's conduct on this occasion. We are not to wait till every little difficulty or obstacle is removed, before we put our hand to the plough, or go forth to sow the seed of the Word. Convenient buildings may often be wanting for assembling a company of hearers. Convenient rooms may often not be found for gather-

ing children to school. What, then, are we to do? Shall we sit still and do nothing? God forbid! If we cannot do all we want, let us do what we can. Let us work with such tools as we have. While we are lingering and delaying, souls are perishing. It is the slothful heart that is always looking at the hedge of thorns and the lion in the way. (Prov. xv. 19; xxii. 13.) Where we are and as we are, in season or out of season, by one means or by another, by tongue or by pen, by speaking or by writing, let us strive to be ever working for God. But let us never stand still.

We should observe, secondly, in this passage, *what encouragement our Lord gives to unquestioning obedience*. We are told, that after preaching he bade Simon “launch out into the deep, and let down his net for a draught.” He receives an answer which exhibits in a striking manner the mind of a good servant. “Master,” says Simon, “we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless, at Thy word I will let down the net.” And what was the reward of this ready compliance with the Lord’s commands? At once, we are told, “they enclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake.”

We need not doubt that a practical lesson for all Christians is contained under these simple circumstances. We are meant to learn the lesson of ready unhesitating obedience to every plain command of Christ. The path of duty may sometimes be hard and disagreeable. The wisdom of the course we propose to follow may not be apparent to the world. But none of these things must move us. We are not to confer with flesh and blood. We are to go straight forward when Jesus says, “Go;” and do a thing boldly, unflinchingly, and decidedly, when Jesus says, “Do it.” We are to walk by faith and not by sight, and believe that what we see not now to be right and reasonable, we shall see hereafter. So acting, we shall never find in the long run that we are losers. So acting, we shall find, sooner or later, that we reap a great reward.

We should observe, thirdly, in this passage, *how much a sense of God’s presence abases man and makes him feel his sinfulness*. We see this strikingly illustrated by Peter’s words, when the miraculous draught convinced him that One greater than man was in his boat. We read that “he fell down at Jesus’ knees saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man O Lord.”

In measuring these words of Peter, we must of course remember the time at which they were spoken. He was, at best, but a babe in grace, weak in faith, weak in experience, and weak in knowledge. At a later period in his life he would, doubtless, have said, “Abide with me,” and not, “Depart.” But still, after every deduction of this kind, the words of Peter exactly express the first feelings of man when he is brought into anything like close contact with God. The sight of divine greatness and holiness makes him feel strongly his own littleness and sinfulness. Like Adam after the fall, his first

thought is to hide himself. Like Israel under Sinai, the language of his heart is, "Let not God speak with us lest we die." (Exod. xx. 19.)

Let us strive to know more and more, every year we live, our need of a mediator between ourselves and God. Let us seek more and more to realize that without a mediator our thoughts of God can never be comfortable, and the more clearly we see God the more uncomfortable we must feel. Above all, let us be thankful that we have in Jesus the very Mediator whose help our souls require, and that through Him we may draw near to God with boldness, and cast fear away. Out of Christ God is a consuming fire. In Christ He is a reconciled Father. Without Christ the strictest moralist may well tremble, as he looks forward to his end. Through Christ the chief of sinners may approach God with confidence, and feel perfect peace.

We should observe, lastly, in this passage, *the mighty promise which Jesus holds out to Peter*: "Fear not," He says, "from henceforth thou shalt catch men."

That promise, we may well believe, was not intended for Peter only, but for all the Apostles,—and not for all the Apostles only, but for all faithful ministers of the Gospel who walk in the Apostles' steps. It was spoken for their encouragement and consolation. It was intended to support them under that sense of weakness and unprofitableness by which they are sometimes almost overwhelmed. They certainly have a treasure in earthen vessels. (2 Cor. iv. 7.) They are men of like passions with others. They find their own hearts weak and frail, like the hearts of any of their hearers. They are often tempted to give up in despair, and to leave off preaching. But here stands a promise, on which the great Head of the Church would have them daily lean: "Fear not, thou shalt catch men."

Let us pray daily for all ministers that they may be true successors of Peter and his brethren, that they may preach the same full and free Gospel which they preached, and live the same holy lives which they lived. These are the only ministers who will ever prove successful fishermen. To some of them God may give more honour, and to others less. But all true and faithful preachers of the Gospel have a right to believe that their labour shall not prove in vain. They may often preach the Word with many tears, and see no result of their labour. But God's word shall not return void. (Isai. lv. 11.) The last day shall show that no work for God was ever thrown away. Every faithful fisherman shall find his Master's words made good: "Thou shalt catch men."

NOTES. LUKE V. 1–11.

4.—[*Launch out into the deep.*] Let us note that this command must have been peculiarly trying to a fisherman's faith. The deep waters are not generally the waters in which fish are taken in lakes.

6.—[*Their net brake.*] The word rendered “brake” would have been better translated, “began to brake,” just as a similar word in the next verse is translated, “began to sink.” That the net did not actually break, is clear from the context. It “was breaking,” or “on the point of breaking.”

10.—[*Thou shalt catch men.*] It has been often remarked, and with much justice, that the Greek word translated “catch,” means literally “take alive.” It is only used here and in one other place, 2 Tim. ii. 26: a passage which is often much misinterpreted, but rightly understood is a remarkable parallel to our Lord’s words in this place.

Let us not forget, in reading this miracle, that holy and good men in every age have seen in it a remarkable type and emblem of the history of Christ’s Church in the world. They have regarded the ships as emblems of the Churches,—the fishers, of Ministers,—the net, of the Gospel,—the sea, of the world,—the shore, of eternity,—and the miraculous draught, of the success attending work done in strict compliance with Christ’s word. There may be truth in all this. But it needs to be cautiously and delicately used. The habit of allegorizing and seeing hidden meanings in plain language of Scripture has often done great harm.