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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LUKE VIII. 1–3.

1 And it came to pass afterward, that he went throughout every city and village, preaching and shewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God: and the twelve *were* with him,

2 And certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils,

3 And Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod’s steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto him of their substance.

LET us mark, in these verses, *our Lord Jesus Christ’s unwearied diligence in doing good.* We read that “He went throughout every city and village, preaching and showing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God.” We know the reception that He met with in many places. We know that while some believed, many believed not. But man’s unbelief did not move our Lord, or hinder His working. He was always “about His Father’s business.” Short as His earthly ministry was in point of duration, it was long when we consider the work that it comprised.

Let the diligence of Christ be an example to all Chris­tians. Let us follow in His steps, however far we may come short of His perfection. Like Him, let us labour to do good in our day and generation, and to leave the world a better world than we found it. It is not for nothing that the Scripture says expressly: “He that abideth in him ought himself also so to walk even as he walked.” (1 John ii. 6.)

Time is undoubtedly short. But much is to be done with time, if it is well economised and properly arranged. Few have an idea how much can be done in twelve hours, if men will stick to their business and avoid idleness and frivolity. Then let us, like our Lord, be diligent, and “redeem the time.”

Time is undoubtedly short. But it is the only season in which Christians can do any active work of mercy. In the world to come there will be no ignorant to instruct, no mourners to comfort, no spiritual darkness to enlighten, no distress to relieve, no sorrow to make less. Whatever work we do of this kind must be done on this side of the grave. Let us awake to a sense of our individual responsibility. Souls are perishing, and time is flying. Let us resolve, by God’s grace, to do something for God’s glory before we die. Once more let us remember our Lord’s example, and, like Him, be dili­gent, and “redeem the time.”

Let us mark, secondly, in these verses, *the power of the grace of God, and the constraining influence of the love of Christ.* We read that among those who fol­lowed our Lord in His journeyings, were “certain women which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities.”

We can well imagine that the difficulties these holy women had to face in becoming Christ’s disciples were neither few nor small. They had their full share of the contempt and scorn which was poured on all fol­lowers of Jesus by the Scribes and Pharisees. They had, besides, many a trial from the hard speeches and hard usage which any Jewish woman who thought for herself about religion would probably have to under­go. But none of these things moved them. Grateful for mercies received at our Lord’s hands, they were will­ing to endure much for His sake. Strengthened inwardly by the renewing power of the Holy Ghost, they were enabled to cleave to Jesus and not give way.—And nobly they did cleave to Him to the very end! It was *not* a woman who sold the Lord for thirty pieces of silver. They were *not* women who forsook the Lord in the garden and fled. It was *not* a woman who denied Him three times in the high priest’s house.—But they *were* women who wailed and lamented when Jesus was led forth to be crucified. They *were* women who stood to the last by the cross. And they *were* women who were first to visit the grave “where the Lord lay.” Great indeed is the power of the grace of God!

Let the recollection of these women encourage all the daughters of Adam who read of them, to take up the cross and to follow Christ. Let no sense of weakness, or fear of falling away, keep them back from a decided profession of religion. The mother of a large family, with limited means, may tell us that she has no time for religion.—The wife of an ungodly husband may tell us that she dares not take up religion.—The young daughter of worldly parents may tell us that it is impossible for her to have any religion.—The maid-servant in the midst of unconverted companions, may tell us that in her place a person cannot follow religion.—But they are all wrong, quite wrong. With Christ nothing is impossible. Let them think again, and change their minds. Let them begin boldly in the strength of Christ, and trust Him for the consequences. The Lord Jesus never changes. He who enabled “many women” to serve Him faithfully while He was on earth, can enable women to serve Him, glorify Him, and be His disciples at the present day.

Let us mark lastly, in these verses, the *peculiar privilege which our Lord grants to His faithful followers.* We read that those who accompanied Him in His journeyings, “ministered to him of their substance.” Of course *He* needed not their help. “All the beasts of the forest were his, and the cattle upon a thousand hills.” (Psalm 1. 10.) That mighty Saviour who could multiply a few loaves and fishes into food for thousands, could have called forth food from the earth for His own sustenance, if he had thought fit. But He did not do so, for two reasons.—One reason was, that He would show us that He was man like ourselves in all things, sin only excepted, and that He lived the life of faith in His Father’s providence.—The other reason was, that by allowing His followers to min­ister to Him, He might prove their love, and test their regard for Himself. True love will count it a pleasure to give anything to the object loved. False love will often talk and profess much, but do and give nothing at all.

This matter of “ministering to Christ” opens up a most important train of thought, and one which we shall do well to consider. The Lord Jesus Christ is continually proving His Church at the present day. No doubt it would be easy for Him to convert the Chinese or Hindoos in a moment, and to call grace into being with a word, as He created light on the first day of this world’s exis­tence.—But He does not do so. He is pleased to work by means. He condescends to use the agency of mis­sionaries, and the foolishness of man’s preaching, in order to spread His Gospel. And by so doing, He is continually proving the faith and zeal of the churches. He lets Christians be fellow workers with Him, that He may prove who has a will to “minister” and who has none. He lets the spread of the Gospel be carried on by sub­scriptions, contributions, and religious Societies, that He may prove who are the covetous and unbelieving, and who are the truly “rich towards God.” In short, the visible Church of Christ may be divided into two great parties, those who “minister” to Christ, and those who do not.

May we all remember this great truth and prove our own selves! While we live we are all upon our trial. Our lives are continually showing whose we are and whom we serve, whether we love Christ or whether we love the world. Happy are they who know something of “minis­tering to Christ of their substance!” It is a thing which can still be done, though we do not see Him with our eyes. Those words which describe the proceedings of the judgment day are very solemn, “I was an hungered and ye gave me no meat, I was thirsty and ye gave me no drink.” (Matt. xxv. 42.)

NOTES. LUXE VIII. 1–3.

1.— [He went throughout.] The word so translated is only used in one other place in the New Testament: Acts xvii. 1. It is there rendered “passed through.” The full idea is that of one going on a journey through a place or country.

2*.—*[*Mary called Magdalene.*]The origin of this name is differently explained by commentators. Some think that she was so called from a Hebrew word signifying “a plaiter of hair.” Some think that she was so called from the town of “Magdala,” in Galilee. Talmudic authority favours the first explanation, but the second seems more probable. The question will be found fully dis­cussed in Lightfoot’s Horæ Hebraicæ on St. Matthew xxvii. 50.

There is no Scriptural authority for the common opinion that Mary Magdalene was ever a notorious sinner against the seventh commandment. That she had been a sufferer from an extraor­dinary possession of the devil is plain, from this verse, and Mark xvi. 9., the number “seven devils” being specified in each place with peculiar emphasis. But there is not a whit of satisfactory evidence that she was ever a harlot. Chemnitius considers Gregory the Great to have been the author of the common opinion about Mary Magdalene.

3*.—*[*Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod’s steward.*]This person is only mentioned here in the New Testament, and we know nothing more of her. Her case reminds us of Obadiah in Ahab’s house, and “the saints in Nero’s household.”—It also teaches us that not all our Lord’s followers were poor. Some rich, though not many, were called.—It also throws light on Herod’s anxiety to see our Lord, when He was sent to him by Pilate. He had probably heard of Him through his steward’s family.—It also suggests the pleasant idea, that John the Baptist’s imprisonment by Herod was a cause of conversion to some of Herod’s retainers. Who can tell but Joanna first heard of our Lord through John the Baptist?

[*Chuza, Herod’s steward.*]The word translated “steward” is only found here and in two other places: Matt. xx. 8. and Gal. iv. 2. In the latter text it is translated “tutors.” Whether Chuza was Herod’s treasurer or only the head of his household, we can­not certainly pronounce. The word admits of either sense. At any rate he was a person holding a high and responsible office.

[*Susanna.*]This is the only place in which we find this woman mentioned. Of her past or subsequent history we know nothing.

[*Many others.*]Who these were we do not know. The names of most of them probably are in the book of life, and “the day will declare” them.

[*Ministered to him of their substance.*]Maldonatus in comment­ing on this expression quotes a passage from Jerome, which throws some light on it. He says, “It was a Jewish custom, and from the ancient habit of the nation it was thought a blameless custom, for women to supply to their instructors food and clothing from their substance.”

Hammond, in commenting on this place, thinks that Phœbe, mentioned by St. Paul to the Romans, (Rom. xvi. 1.) was a woman who had travelled with the apostles, and ministered to their wants.