

# 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.*

ST. LUKE. VOL. I.

LONDON:

WILLIAM HUNT AND COMPANY, 23, HOLLES STREET.  
CAVENDISH SQUARE

IPSWICH: WILLIAM HUNT, TAVERN STREET.

MDCCCLVIII.

LUKE IX. 18-22.

18 And it came to pass, as he was alone praying, his disciples were with him: and he asked them, saying, Whom say the people that I am?

19 They answering said, John the Baptist; but some say, Elias; and others say, that one of the old prophets is risen again.

20 He said unto them, But whom say ye

that I am? Peter answering said, The Christ of God.

21 And he straitly charged them, and commanded *them* to tell no man that thing;

22 Saying, The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and Chief Priests and Scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day.

LET us notice in this passage, *the variety of opinions about our Lord Jesus Christ, which prevailed during His earthly ministry.* We are told that some said that He was John the Baptist;—some that He was Elias;—and some that one of the old prophets was risen again. One common remark applies to all these opinions. All were agreed that our Lord's doctrine was not like that of the Scribes and Pharisees. All saw in Him a bold witness against the evil that was in the world.

Let it never surprise us, to find the same variety of opinions about Christ and His Gospel in our own times. God's truth disturbs the spiritual laziness of men. It obliges them to think. It makes them begin to talk, and reason, and speculate, and invent theories to account for its spread in some quarters, and its rejection in others. Thousands in every age of the Church spend their lives in this way, and never come to the point of drawing near to God. They satisfy themselves with a miserable round of gossip about this preacher's sermons, or that writer's opinions. They think "this man goes too far," and "that man does not go far enough." Some doctrines they approve, and others they disapprove. Some teachers they call "sound," and others they call "unsound." They cannot quite make up their own minds what is true, or what is right. Year rolls on after year, and finds them in the same state,—talking, criticising, fault-finding, speculating, but never getting any further,—hovering like the moth round religion, but never settling down like the bee, to feed on its treasures. They never boldly lay hold of Christ. They never set themselves heartily to the great business of serving God. They never take up the cross, and become thorough Christians. And at last, after all their talking, they die in their sins, unprepared to meet God.

Let us not be content with a religion of this kind. It will not save us to talk and speculate, and bandy opinions about the Gospel. The Christianity that saves, is a thing personally grasped, personally experienced, personally felt, and personally possessed. There is not the slightest excuse for stopping short in talk, opinion, and speculation. The Jews of our Lord's time might have found out, if they had been honest inquirers, that Jesus of Nazareth was neither John the Baptist, nor Elias, nor an old prophet, but the Christ of God. The speculative Christian of our own day, might easily satisfy himself on every point which is needful to salvation, if he would really, candidly, and

humbly seek the teaching of the Spirit. The words of our Lord are weighty and solemn, "If any man will do God's will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God." (John vii. 17.) Honest, practical obedience, is one of the keys of the gate of knowledge.

Let us notice, secondly, in this passage, *the singular knowledge and faith displayed by the Apostle Peter*. We read, that when our Lord said to His disciples, "Whom say ye that I am? Peter answering, said, the Christ of God."

This was a noble confession, and one of which, in these days, we can hardly realize the full value. To estimate it aright we should place ourselves in the position of our Lord's disciples. We should call to mind that the great, and wise, and learned of their own nation, saw no beauty in their Master, and would not receive Him as the Messiah. We should recollect that they saw no royal dignity about our Lord,—no crown,—no army,—no earthly dominion. They saw nothing but a poor man, who often had no place in which to lay his head. And yet it was at this time, and under these circumstances, that Peter boldly declares his belief that Jesus is the Christ of God. Truly, this was a great faith! It was mingled, no doubt, with much of ignorance and imperfection. But such as it was, it was a faith that stood alone. He that had it was a remarkable man, and far in advance of the age in which he lived.

We should pray frequently that God would raise up more Christians of the stamp of the apostle Peter. Erring, and unstable, and ignorant of his own heart as he sometimes proved, that blessed apostle was in some respects one in ten thousand. He had faith, and zeal, and love to Christ's cause, when almost all Israel was unbelieving and cold. We want more men of this sort. We want men who are not afraid to stand alone, and to cleave to Christ when the many are against Him. Such men, like Peter, may err sadly at times, but in the long run of life will do more good than any. Knowledge, no doubt, is an excellent thing; but knowledge without zeal and warmth will never do much for the world.

Let us notice, thirdly, in this passage, *our Lord's prediction of His own coming death*. We read that He said, "The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day." These words, as we read them now, sound simple and plain; but there lie beneath the surface of them two truths which ought to be carefully remembered.

For one thing our Lord's prediction shows us, that His death upon the cross was the voluntary act of His own free will. He was not delivered up to Pilate and crucified because He could not help it, and had no power to crush His enemies. His death was the result of the eternal counsels of the blessed Trinity. He had undertaken to suffer for man's sin, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God. He had engaged to bear our sins, as our Sub-

stitute and Surety, and He bore them willingly in His own person on the tree. He saw Calvary and the cross before Him all the days of His ministry. He went up to them willingly, knowingly, and with full consent, that He might pay our debts in His own blood. His death was not the death of a mere weak son of man, who could not escape; but the death of One who was very God of very God, and had undertaken to be punished in our stead.

For another thing, our Lord's prediction shows us the blinding effect of prejudice on men's minds. Clear and plain as His words now seem to us, His disciples did not understand them. They heard as though they heard not. They could not understand that Messiah was to be "cut off." They could not receive the doctrine that their own Master must needs die. And hence, when His death really took place, they were amazed and confounded. Often as He had told them of it, they had never realized it as a fact.

Let us watch and pray against prejudice. Many a zealous man has been grievously misled by it, and has pierced himself through with many sorrows. Let us beware of allowing traditions, old preconceived notions, unsound interpretations, baseless theories in religion, to find root in our hearts. There is but one test of truth—"What saith the Scripture?" Before this let every prejudice go down.

#### NOTES. LUKE IX. 18-22.

- 18.—[*He was alone praying.*] Let us not forget to notice how frequently our Lord's habit of private prayer is mentioned in the Gospels. He sets an example to all who work for God. Much private prayer is one secret of success.
- 19.—[*John the Baptist . . . Elias . . . one of the old prophets.*] Let it be remembered, that talk and speculation about Christ and His Gospel, are one of Satan's great traps for ruining souls. Many a man cloaks his indolence and laziness about religion, under a pretence of the variety of opinions, and the difficulty of knowing who is right.
- 20.—[*The Christ of God.*] This expression, it should be noted, is tantamount to saying the Messiah of God, the predicted Saviour of whom Daniel spoke. (Dan. ix. 21.)
- 21.—[*Tell no man.*] There is a time to be silent as well as to speak. Our Lord knew that the public proclamation of His being Messiah, would cause Him to be cut off before His time.
- 22.—[*Must suffer.*] The Greek word translated "must" in this place, does not quite bear the sense of force and necessity, which our English word "must" conveys. It rather means, "it is becoming, it is suitable, it is necessary for certain great ends and purposes." In Luke xxiv. 26., the same expression is rendered, "*ought not Christ to have suffered.*"