

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS
ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

And many Explanatory Notes.

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MDCCCLIX.

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS

ON THE GOSPELS.

MARK I. 1-8.

1 THE beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God;

2 As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.

3 The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

4 John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.

5 And there went out unto him all the land of Judæa, and they of Jerusalem, and

were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins.

6 And John was clothed with camel's hair, and with a girdle of a skin about his loins; and he did eat locusts and wild honey;

7 And preached, saying, There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose.

8 I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost.

THE Gospel of St. Mark, which we now begin, is in some respects unlike the other three Gospels. It tells us nothing about the birth and early life of our Lord Jesus Christ. It contains comparatively few of His sayings and discourses. Of all the four inspired histories of our Lord's earthly ministry, this is by far the shortest.

But we must not allow these peculiarities to make us undervalue St. Mark's Gospel. It is a Gospel singularly full of precious facts about the Lord Jesus, narrated in a simple, terse, pithy, and condensed style. If it tells us few of our Lord's sayings, it is eminently rich in its catalogue of His doings. It often contains minute historical details of deep interest, which are wholly omitted in Matthew, Luke, and John. In short, it is no mere abridged copy of St. Matthew, as some have rashly asserted, but the independent narrative of an independent witness, who was inspired to write a history of our Lord's *works*, rather than of His *words*. Let us read it with holy reverence. Like all the rest of Scripture, every word of St. Mark is "given by inspiration of God," and every word is "profitable."¹

Let us observe, in these verses, *what a full declaration we have of the dignity of our Lord Jesus Christ's person*. The very first sentence speaks

¹ "St. Mark has the special gift of terse brevity, and of graphic painting in wonderful combination. While on every occasion he compresses the discourses, works, and history into the simplest possible kernel, he on the other hand, unfolds the scenes more clearly than St. Matthew does, who excels in the discourses. Not only do single incidents become in his hands complete pictures, but even when he is very brief, he often gives, with one pencil stroke, something new and peculiarly his own."—*Stier's Words of the Lord Jesus*.

of Him as “the Son of God.”

These words, “the Son of God,” conveyed far more to Jewish minds than they do to ours. They were nothing less than an assertion of our Lord’s divinity. They were a declaration that Jesus was Himself very God, and “equal with God.” (John v. 18.)

There is a beautiful fitness in placing this truth in the very beginning of a Gospel. The divinity of Christ is the citadel and keep of Christianity. Here lies the infinite value of the satisfaction He made upon the cross. Here lies the peculiar merit of His atoning death for sinners. That death was not the death of a mere man, like ourselves, but of one who is “over all, God blessed for ever.” (Rom. ix. 3.) We need not wonder that the sufferings of one person were a sufficient propitiation for the sin of a world, when we remember that He who suffered was “the Son of God.”

Let believers cling to this doctrine with jealous watchfulness. With it, they stand upon a rock. Without it, they have nothing solid beneath their feet. Our hearts are weak. Our sins are many. We need a Redeemer who is able to save to the uttermost, and deliver from the wrath to come. We have such a Redeemer in Jesus Christ. He is “the mighty God.” (Isaiah ix. 6.)

Let us observe, in the second place, *how the beginning of the Gospel was a fulfilment of Scripture*. John the Baptist began his ministry, “as it is written in the prophets.”

There was nothing unforeseen and suddenly contrived in the coming of Jesus Christ into the world. In the very beginning of Genesis we find it predicted that “the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent’s head.” (Gen. iii. 15.) All through the Old Testament we find the same event foretold with constantly increasing clearness. It was a promise often renewed to patriarchs, and repeated by prophets, that a Deliverer and Redeemer should one day come. His birth, His character, His life, His death, His resurrection, His forerunner, were all prophesied of, long before He came. Redemption was worked out and accomplished in every step, just “as it was written.”

We should always read the Old Testament with a desire to find something in it about Jesus Christ. We study this portion of the Bible with little profit, if we can see in it nothing but Moses, and David, and Samuel, and the prophets. Let us search the books of the Old Testament more closely. It was said by Him whose words can never pass away, “these are they which testify of me.” (John v. 40.)

Let us observe, in the third place, *how great were the effects which the ministry of John the Baptist produced for a time on the Jewish nation*. We are told that “there went out to him all the land of Judæa, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan.”

The fact here recorded is one that is much overlooked. We are apt to lose sight of him who went before the face of our Lord, and to see nothing but the Lord Himself. We forget the morning star in the full blaze of the Sun. And yet it is clear that John's preaching arrested the attention of the whole Jewish people, and created an excitement all over Palestine. It aroused the nation from its slumbers, and prepared it for the ministry of our Lord, when He appeared. Jesus Himself says, "He was a burning and a shining light:—ye were willing to rejoice for a season in his light." (John v. 35.)

We ought to remark here how little dependence is to be placed on what is called "popularity." If ever there was one who was a popular minister for a season, John the Baptist was that man. Yet of all the crowds who came to his baptism, and heard his preaching, how few, it may be feared, were converted! Some, we may hope, like Andrew, were guided by John to Christ. But the vast majority, in all probability, died in their sins. Let us remember this whenever we see a crowded church.

A great congregation no doubt is a pleasing sight. But the thought should often come across our minds, "How many of these people will reach heaven at last?" It is not enough to hear and admire popular preachers. It is no proof of our conversion that we always worship in a place where there is a crowd. Let us take care that we hear the voice of Christ Himself, and follow Him.

Let us observe, in the last place, *what clear doctrine characterized John the Baptist's preaching.* He exalted Christ: "There cometh one mightier than I after me." He spoke plainly of the Holy Ghost: "He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost."

These truths had never been so plainly proclaimed before by mortal man. More important truths than these are not to be found in the whole system of Christianity at this day. The principal work of every faithful minister of the Gospel, is to set the Lord Jesus fully before His people, and to show them His fulness and His power to save.—The next great work he has to do, is to set before them the work of the Holy Ghost, and the need of being born again, and inwardly baptized by His grace.—These two mighty truths appear to have been frequently on the lips of John the Baptist. It would be well for the church and the world, if there were more ministers like him.

Let us ask ourselves, as we leave the passage, "How much we know by practical experience of the truths which John preached?" What think we of Christ? Have we felt our need of Him, and fled to Him for peace? Is He king over our hearts, and all things to our souls?—What think we of the Holy Ghost? Has He wrought any work in our hearts? Has He renewed, and changed them? Has He made us partakers of the divine na-

ture? Life or death depend on our answer to these questions. “If any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his.” (Rom. viii. 9.)

MARK I. 9–20.

9 And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan.

10 And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him:

11 And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

12 And immediately the spirit driveth him into the wilderness.

13 And he was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan; and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered unto him.

14 Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the Gospel of the kingdom of God,

15 And saying, The time is fulfilled, and

the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the Gospel.

16 Now as he walked by the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers.

17 And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men.

18 And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him.

19 And when he had gone a little farther thence, he saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the ship mending their nets.

20 And straightway he called them: and they left their father Zebedee in the ship with the hired servants, and went after him.

THIS passage is singularly full of matter. It is a striking instance of that brevity of style, which is the peculiar characteristic of St. Mark's Gospel. The baptism of our Lord, His temptation in the wilderness, the commencement of His preaching, and the calling of His first disciples, are all related here in eleven verses.

Let us notice, in the first place, *the voice from heaven which was heard at our Lord's baptism*. We read, "There came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

That voice was the voice of God the Father. It declared the wondrous and ineffable love which has existed between the Father and the Son from all eternity. "The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into His hand." (John iii. 35.) It proclaimed the Father's full and complete approbation of Christ's mission to seek and save the lost. It announced the Father's acceptance of the Son as the Mediator, Substitute, and Surety of the new covenant.

There is a rich mine of comfort in these words, for all Christ's believing members. In themselves, and in their own doings, they see nothing to please God. They are daily sensible of weakness, shortcoming, and imperfection in all their ways. But let them recollect that the Father regards them as members of His beloved Son Jesus Christ. He sees no spot in them. (Cant. iv. 7.) He beholds them as "in Christ," clothed in His righteousness, and invested with His merit. They are "accepted in the Beloved," and when the holy eye of God looks at them, He is "well pleased."

Let us notice, in the second place, *the nature of Christ's preaching*.

We read that He came saying, “Repent ye, and believe the Gospel.”

This is that old sermon which all the faithful witnesses of God have continually preached, from the very beginning of the world. From Noah down to the present day the burden of their address has been always the same,—“Repent and believe.”

The apostle Paul told the Ephesian elders, when he left them for the last time, that the substance of his teaching among them had been “repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Acts xx. 21.) He had the best of precedents for such teaching. The Great Head of the Church had given him a pattern. Repentance and faith were the foundation stones of Christ’s ministry.—Repentance and faith must always be the main subjects of every faithful minister’s instruction.

We need not wonder at this, if we consider the necessities of human nature. All of us are by nature born in sin and children of wrath, and all need to repent, be converted, and born again, if we would see the kingdom of God.—All of us are by nature guilty and condemned before God, and all must flee to the hope set before us in the Gospel, and believe in it, if we would be saved. All of us, once penitent, need daily stirring up to deeper repentance. All of us, though believing, need constant exhortation to increased faith.

Let us ask ourselves what we know of this repentance and faith. Have we felt our sins, and forsaken them? Have we laid hold on Christ, and believed? We may reach heaven without learning, or riches, or health, or worldly greatness. But we shall never reach heaven, if we die impenitent and unbelieving. A new heart, and a lively faith in a Redeemer are absolutely needful to salvation. May we never rest till we know them by experience, and can call them our own! With them all true Christianity begins in the soul. In the exercise of them consists the life of religion. It is only through the possession of them, that men have peace at the last. Church membership and priestly absolution alone save no one. They only die in the Lord who “repent and believe.”

Let us notice, in the third place, *the occupation of those who were first called to be Christ’s disciples*. We read that our Lord called Simon and Andrew, when they were “casting a net into the sea,” and James and John while they were “mending their nets.”

It is clear from these words, that the first followers of our Lord were not the great of this world. They were men who had neither riches, nor rank, nor power. But the kingdom of Christ is not dependent on such things as these. His cause advances in the world, “not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.” (Zech. iv. 6.) The words of St. Paul will always be found true: “Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called. But God hath

chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty." (1 Cor. i. 26, 27.) The church which began with a few fishermen, and yet overspread half the world, must have been founded by God.

We must beware of giving way to the common notion, that there is anything disgraceful in being poor, and in working with our own hands. The Bible contains many instances of special privileges conferred on working men. Moses was keeping sheep, when God appeared to him in the burning bush. Gideon was thrashing wheat, when the angel brought him a message from heaven. Elisha was ploughing, when Elijah called him to be prophet in his stead. The apostles were fishing, when Jesus called them to follow Him. It is disgraceful to be covetous, or proud, or a cheat, or a gambler, or a drunkard, or a glutton, or unclean. But it is no disgrace to be poor. The labourer who serves Christ faithfully is far more honourable in God's eyes, than the nobleman who serves sin.

Let us notice, in the last place, *the office to which our Lord called his first disciples*. We read that He said, "Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men."

The meaning of this expression is clear and unmistakeable. The disciples were to become fishers for souls. They were to labour to draw men out of darkness into light, and from the power of Satan to God. They were to strive to bring men into the net of Christ's church, that so they might be saved alive, and not perish everlastingly.

We ought to mark this expression well. It is full of instruction. It is the oldest name by which the ministerial office is described in the New Testament. It lies deeper down than the name of bishop, elder, or deacon. It is the first idea which should be before a minister's mind. He is not to be a mere reader of forms, or administrator of ordinances. He is to be a "fisher" of souls. The minister who does not strive to live up to this name, has mistaken his calling.

Does the fisherman strive to catch fish? Does he use all means, and grieve if unsuccessful? The minister ought to do the same.—Does the fisherman have patience? Does he toil on day after day, and wait, and work on in hope? Let the minister do the same.—Happy is that man, in whom the fisher's skill, and diligence, and patience, are all combined!

Let us resolve to pray much for ministers. Their office is no light one, if they do their duty. They need the help of many intercessions from all praying people. They have not only their own souls to care for, but the souls of others. No wonder that St. Paul cries, "Who is sufficient for these things?" (2 Cor. ii. 16.) If we never prayed for ministers before, let us begin to do it this day.

MARK I. 21–34.

21 And they went into Capernaum; and straightway on the sabbath day he entered into the synagogue, and taught.

22 And they were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the Scribes.

23 And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out,

24 Saying, Let *us* alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God.

25 And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him.

26 And when the unclean spirit had torn him, and cried with a loud voice, he came out of him.

27 And they were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What thing is this? what new doctrine is this? for with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him.

28 And immediately his fame spread abroad throughout all the region round about Galilee.

29 And forthwith, when they were come out of the synagogue, they entered into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.

30 But Simon's wife's mother lay sick of a fever, and anon they tell him of her.

31 And he came and took her by the hand, and lifted her up; and immediately the fever left her, and she ministered unto them.

32 And at even, when the sun did set, they brought unto him all that were diseased, and them that were possessed with devils.

33 And all the city was gathered together at the door.

34 And he healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils; and suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew him.

THESE verses begin the long list of miracles which St. Mark's Gospel contains. They tell us how our Lord cast out devils in Capernaum, and healed Peter's wife's mother of a fever.

We learn, in the first place, from these verses, the *uselessness of a mere intellectual knowledge of religion*. Twice we are specially told that the unclean spirits knew our Lord. In one place it says, "they knew Him." In another, the devil cries out, "I know thee who thou art, the Holy one of God." They knew Christ, when Scribes were ignorant of Him, and Pharisees would not acknowledge Him. And yet their knowledge was not unto salvation!

The mere belief of the facts and doctrines of Christianity will never save our souls. Such belief is no better than the belief of devils. They all believe and know that Jesus is the Christ. They believe that He will one day judge the world, and cast them down to endless torment in hell. It is a solemn and sorrowful thought, that on these points some professing Christians have even less faith than the devil. There are some who doubt the reality of hell and the eternity of punishment. Such doubts as these find no place except in the hearts of self-willed men and women. There is no infidelity among devils. "They believe and tremble." (James ii. 19.)

Let us take heed that our faith be a faith of the heart as well as of the head. Let us see that our knowledge has a sanctifying influence on our affections and our lives. Let us not only know Christ but love Him, from

a sense of actual benefit received from Him. Let us not only believe that He is the Son of God and the Saviour of the world, but rejoice in Him, and cleave to Him with purpose of heart. Let us not only be acquainted with Him by the hearing of the ear, but by daily personal application to Him for mercy and grace. “The life of Christianity,” says Luther, “consists in possessive pronouns.” It is one thing to say “Christ is a Saviour.” It is quite another to say He is my Saviour and my Lord.” The devil can say the first. The true Christian alone can say the second.²

We learn, in the second place, *to what remedy a Christian ought to resort first, in time of trouble*. He ought to follow the example of the friends of Simon’s wife’s mother. We read that when she “lay sick of a fever,” they “told Jesus of her.”

There is no remedy like this. Means are to be used diligently, without question, in any time of need. Doctors are to be sent for, in sickness. Lawyers are to be consulted, when property or character needs defence. The help of friends is to be sought. But still after all, the first thing to be done, is to cry to the Lord Jesus Christ for help. None can relieve us so effectually as He can. None is so compassionate, and so willing to relieve. When Jacob was in trouble he turned to his God first—; “Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of Esau.” (Gen. xxxii. 11.) When Hezekiah was in trouble, he first spread Sennacherib’s letter before the Lord, I beseech thee, save thou us out of his hand.” (2 Kings xix. 19.) When Lazarus fell sick, his sisters sent immediately to Jesus; “Lord,” they said, “he whom thou lovest is sick.” (John xi. 2.) Now let us do likewise. “Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee.” “Casting all your care upon Him.” “In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.” (Psa. lv. 22; 1 Pet. v. 7; Phil. iv. 6.)

Let us not only remember this rule, but practise it too. We live in a world of sin and sorrow. The days of darkness in a man’s life are many. It needs no prophet’s eye to foresee that we shall all shed many a tear, and feel many a heart-wrench, before we die. Let us be armed with a receipt against despair, before our troubles come. Let us know what to do, when sickness, or bereavement, or cross, or loss, or disappointment breaks in upon us like an armed man. Let us do as they did in Simon’s house at Capernaum. Let us at once “tell Jesus.”

We learn, in the last place, from these verses, *what a complete and per-*

² “Rest not in an historical knowledge or faith. If thou do, it will not save thee; for if it would it would save the devils: for they have their literal knowledge and general belief of the word. Dost thou think it enough to know and believe that Christ lived and died for sinners? The devil and his angels know and believe as much. Labour then to outstrip them, and to get a better faith than is in them.”—*Petter on Mark*. 1661.

fect cure the Lord Jesus makes, when He heals. He takes the sick woman by the hand, and lifts her up, and “immediately the fever left her.” But this was not all. A greater miracle remained behind. At once we are told “she ministered unto them.” That weakness and prostration of strength which, as a general rule, a fever leaves behind it, in her case was entirely removed. The fevered woman was not only made well in a moment, but in the same moment made strong and able to work.³

We may see in this case a lively emblem of Christ’s dealing with sin-sick souls. That blessed Saviour not only gives mercy and forgiveness;—He gives renewing grace besides. To as many as receive Him as their Physician, He gives power to become the sons of God. He cleanses them by His Spirit, when He washes them in His precious blood. Those whom He justifies, He also sanctifies. When He bestows an absolution, He also bestows a new heart. When He grants free forgiveness for the past, He also grants strength to “minister” to Him for the time to come. The sin-sick soul is not merely cured, and then left to itself. It is also supplied with a new heart and a right spirit, and enabled so to live as to please God.

There is comfort in this thought for all who feel a desire to serve Christ, but at present are afraid to begin. There are many in this state of mind. They fear that if they come forward boldly, and take up the cross, they shall by and bye fall away. They fear that they shall not be able to persevere, and shall bring discredit on their profession. Let them fear no longer. Let them know that Jesus is an Almighty Saviour, who never forsakes those who once commit themselves to Him. Once raised by His mighty hand from the death of sin, and washed in His precious blood, they shall go on “ministering to Him” to their life’s end. They shall have power to overcome the world, and crucify the flesh, and resist the devil. Only let them begin, and they shall go on. Jesus knows nothing of half-cured cases and half-finished work. Let them trust in Jesus and go forward. The pardoned soul shall always be enabled to serve Christ.

There is comfort here for all who are really serving Christ, and are yet cast down by a sense of their own infirmity. There are many in such

³ Let us not fail to observe here, that Peter, one of our Lord’s principal apostles had a wife. Yet he was called to be a disciple, and afterwards chosen to be an apostle. More than this, we find St. Paul speaking of him as a married man, in his Epistle to the Corinthians, many years after this. (1 Cor. ix. 5.)

How this fact can be reconciled with the compulsory celibacy of the clergy, which the Church of Rome enforces and requires, it is for the friends and advocates of the Roman Catholic Church to explain. To a plain reader, it seems a plain proof that it is not wrong for ministers to be married men. And when we add to this striking fact, that St. Paul, when writing to Timothy, says, that “a bishop should be the husband of one wife,” (1 Tim. iii. 2,) it is clear that the whole Romish doctrine of clerical celibacy is utterly opposed to holy Scripture.

case. They are oppressed by doubts and anxieties. They sometimes think they shall never reach heaven after all, but be cast away in the wilderness. Let them fear no longer. Their strength shall be according to their day. The difficulties they now fear shall vanish out of their path. The lion in the way which they now dread, shall prove to be chained. The same gracious hand which first touched and healed, shall uphold, strengthen, and lead them to the last. The Lord Jesus will never lose one of His sheep. Those whom He loves and pardons, He loves unto the end. Though sometimes cast down, they shall never be cast away. The healed soul shall always go on “ministering to the Lord.” Grace shall always lead to glory.

MARK I. 35–39.

35 And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.	said unto him, All <i>men</i> seek for thee.
36 And Simon and they that were with him followed after him.	38 And he said unto them, Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth.
37 And when they had found him, they	39 And he preached in their synagogues throughout all Galilee, and cast out devils.

EVERY fact in our Lord's life on earth, and every word which fell from His lips, ought to be deeply interesting to a true Christian. We see a fact and a saying in the passage we have just read, which deserve close attention.

We see, for one thing, *an example of our Lord Jesus Christ's habits about private prayer*. We are told, that in the morning, rising up a great while before day, He went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed."

We shall find the same thing often recorded of our Lord in the Gospel history. When He was baptized, we are told that He was "praying." (Luke iii. 21.) When he was transfigured, we are told, that "as He prayed, the fashion of His face was altered." (Luke ix. 29.) Before He chose the twelve apostles, we are told that "He continued all night in prayer to God." (Luke vi. 12.) When all men spoke well of Him, and would fain have made Him a King, we are told that "He went up into a mountain apart to pray." (Mark xiv. 23.) When tempted in the garden of Gethsemane, He said, "Sit ye here, while I shall pray." (Mark xiv. 34.) In short, our Lord prayed always, and did not faint. Sinless as He was, He set us an example of diligent communion with His Father. His Godhead did not render Him independent of the use of all means as a man. His very perfection was a perfection kept up through the exercise of prayer.

We ought to see in all this the immense importance of private devotion. If He who was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners," thus prayed continually, how much more ought we who are compassed with infirmity? If He found it needful to offer up supplications with strong crying and tears, how much more needful is it for us, who in many things offend daily?

What shall we say to those who never pray at all, in the face of such a passage as this? There are many such, it may be feared, in the list of baptized people,—many who rise up in the morning without prayer, and without prayer lie down at night,—many who never speak one word to God. Are they Christians? It is impossible to say so. A praying Master, like Jesus, can have no prayerless servants. The Spirit of adoption will

always make a man call upon God. To be prayerless is to be Christless, Godless, and in the high road to destruction.

What shall we say to those who pray, yet give but little time to their prayers? We are obliged to say that they show at present very little of the mind of Christ. Asking little, they must expect to have little. Seeking little, they cannot be surprised if they possess little. It will always be found that when prayers are few, grace, strength, peace, and hope are small.⁴

We shall do well to watch our habits of prayer with a holy watchfulness. Here is the pulse of our Christianity. Here is the true test of our state before God. Here true religion begins in the soul, when it does begin. Here it decays and goes backward, when a man backslides from God. Let us walk in the steps of our blessed Master in this respect as well as in every other. Like Him, let us be diligent in our private devotion. Let us know what it is to “depart into solitary places and pray.”

We see, for another thing, in this passage, *a remarkable saying of our Lord as to the purpose for which He came into the world*. We find Him saying, “let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth.”

The meaning of these words is plain and unmistakeable. Our Lord declares that He came on earth to be a preacher and a teacher. He came to fulfil the prophetic office, to be the “prophet greater than Moses,” who had been so long foretold. (Deut. xviii. 15.) He left the glory which He had from all eternity with the Father, to do the work of an evangelist. He came down to earth to show to man the way of peace, to proclaim deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind. One principal part of his work on earth, was to go up and down and publish glad tidings, to offer healing to the broken-hearted, light to them that sat in darkness, and pardon to the chief of sinners, “Therefore,” He says, “came I forth.”

We ought to observe here, what infinite honour the Lord Jesus puts on the office of the preacher. It is an office which the eternal Son of God Himself undertook. He might have spent His earthly ministry in instituting and keeping up ceremonies, like Aaron. He might have ruled and reigned as a king, like David. But He chose a different calling. Until the time when He died as a sacrifice for our sins, His daily, and almost hourly work was to preach. “Therefore,” He says, “came I forth.”

⁴ “Ministers must pray much, if they would be successful. The apostles spent their time this way. (Acts vi. 3.) Yea, our Lord Jesus preached all day, and continued all night alone in prayer to God. Ministers should be much in prayer. They use to reckon how many hours they spend in reading and study. It were far better both for ourselves and the Church of God, if more time was spent in prayer. Luther’s spending three hours daily in secret prayer, and Bradford’s studying on his knees, and other instances of men in our time, are talked of rather than imitated.”—*Traill*.1696.

Let us never be moved by those who cry down the preacher's office, and tell us that sacraments and other ordinances are of more importance than sermons. Let us give to every part of God's public worship its proper place and honour, but let us beware of placing any part of it above preaching. By preaching, the Church of Christ was first gathered together and founded, and by preaching, it has ever been maintained in health and prosperity. By preaching, sinners are awakened. By preaching, inquirers are led on. By preaching, saints are built up. By preaching, Christianity is being carried to the heathen world.—There are many now who sneer at missionaries, and mock at those who go out into the high-ways of our own land, to preach to crowds in the open air. But such persons would do well to pause, and consider calmly what they are doing. The very work which they ridicule is the work which turned the world upside down, and cast heathenism to the ground. Above all, it is the very work which Christ Himself undertook. The King of kings and Lord of lords Himself was once a preacher. For three long years He went to and fro proclaiming the Gospel. Sometimes we see Him in a house, sometimes on the mountain side, sometimes in a Jewish synagogue, sometimes in a boat on the sea. But the great work He took up was always one and the same. He came always preaching and teaching. "Therefore," He says, "came I forth."

Let us leave the passage with a solemn resolution never to "despise prophesying." (1 Thess. v. 20.) The minister we hear may not be highly gifted. The sermons that we listen to may be weak and poor. But after all, preaching is God's grand ordinance for converting and saving souls. The faithful preacher of the Gospel is handling the very weapon which the Son of God was not ashamed to employ. This is the work of which Christ has said, "Therefore came I forth."

MARK. I. 40–45.

40 And there came a leper to him, beseeching him, and kneeling down to him, and saying unto him, If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.

41 And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth *his* hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean.

42 And as soon as he had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed.

43 And he straitly charged him, and forthwith sent him away;

44 And he saith unto him, See thou say nothing to any man: but go thy way, shew thyself to the Priest, and offer for thy cleansing those things which Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.

45 But he went out, and began to publish *it* much, and to blaze abroad the matter, insomuch that Jesus could no more openly enter into the city, but was without in desert places: and they came to him from every quarter.

WE read in these verses, how our Lord Jesus Christ healed a leper. Of all our Lord's miracles of healing none were probably more marvellous than those performed on leprous people. Two cases only have been fully described in the gospel history. Of these two, the case before us is one.

Let us try to realize, in the first place, *the dreadful nature of the disease which Jesus cured.*

Leprosy is a complaint of which we know little or nothing in our northern climate. In Bible lands it is far more common. It is a disease which is utterly incurable. It is no mere skin affection, as some ignorantly suppose. It is a radical disease of the whole man. It attacks, not merely the skin, but the blood, the flesh, and the bones, until the unhappy patient begins to lose his extremities, and to rot by inches.—Let us remember beside this, that, amongst the Jews, the leper was reckoned unclean, and was cut off from the congregation of Israel and the ordinances of religion. He was obliged to dwell in a separate house. None might touch him or minister to him. Let us remember all this, and then we may have some idea of the remarkable wretchedness of a leprous person. To use the words of Aaron, when he interceded for Miriam, he was “as one dead, of whom the flesh is half consumed.” (Numbers xii. 12.)

But is there nothing like leprosy among ourselves? Yes! indeed there is. There is a foul soul-disease which is engrained into our very nature, and cleaves to our bones and marrow with deadly force. That disease is the plague of sin. Like leprosy, it is a deep-seated disease, infecting every part of our nature, heart, will, conscience, understanding, memory, and affections. Like leprosy, it makes us loathsome and abominable, unfit for the company of God, and unmeet for the glory of heaven. Like leprosy, it is incurable by any earthly physician, and is slowly but surely dragging us down to the second death. And worst of all, far worse than leprosy, it is a disease from which no mortal man is exempt. “We are all,” in God's sight, “as an unclean thing.” (Isaiah. lxiv. 6.)

Do we know these things? Have we found them out? Have we discov-

ered our own sinfulness, guilt, and corruption? Happy indeed is that person who has been really taught to feel that he is a “miserable sinner,” and that there is “no health in him!” Blessed indeed is he who has learned that he is a spiritual leper, and a bad, wicked, sinful creature! To know our disease is one step towards a cure. It is the misery and the ruin of many souls that they never yet saw their sins and their need.

Let us learn, in the second place, from these verses, *the wondrous and almighty power of the Lord Jesus Christ.*

We are told that the unhappy leper came to our Lord, “beseeching Him, and kneeling down,” and saying, “If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.” We are told that Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand and touched him, and said to him, “I will, be thou clean.” At once the cure was effected. That very instant the deadly plague departed from the poor sufferer, and he was healed. It is but a word, and a touch, and there stands before our Lord, not a leper, but a sound and healthy man.

Who can conceive the greatness of the change in the feelings of this leper, when he found himself healed? The morning sun rose upon him, a miserable being, more dead than alive, his whole frame a mass of sores and corruption, his very existence a burden. The evening sun saw him full of hope and joy, free from pain, and fit for the society of his fellow-men. Surely the change must have been like life from the dead.

Let us bless God that the Saviour with whom we have to do is almighty. It is a cheering and comfortable thought that with Christ nothing is impossible. No heart-disease is so deep-seated but He is able to cure it. No plague of soul is so virulent but our Great Physician can heal it. Let us never despair of any one’s salvation, so long as he lives. The worst of spiritual lepers may yet be cleansed. No cases of spiritual leprosy could be worse than those of Manasseh, Saul, and Zacchæus, yet they were all cured;—Jesus Christ made them whole. The chief of sinners may yet be brought nigh to God by the blood and Spirit of Christ. Men are not lost, because they are too bad to be saved, but because they will not come to Christ that He may save them.

Let us learn, in the last place, from these verses, that *there is a time to be silent about the work of Christ, as well as a time to speak.*

This is a truth which is taught us in a remarkable way. We find our Lord strictly charging this man to tell no one of his cure, to “say nothing to any man.” We find this man in the warmth of his zeal disobeying this injunction, and publishing and “blazing abroad” his cure in every quarter. And we are told that the result was that Jesus “could no more enter into the city, but was without in desert places.”

There is a lesson in all this of deep importance, however difficult it may be to use it rightly. It is clear that there are times when our Lord

would have us work for Him quietly and silently, rather than attract public attention by a noisy zeal. There is a zeal which is “not according to knowledge,” as well as a zeal which is righteous and praiseworthy. Everything is beautiful in its season. Our Master’s cause may on some occasions be more advanced by quietness and patience, than in any other way. We are not to “give that which is holy to dogs,” nor “cast pearls before swine.” By forgetfulness of this we may even do more harm than good, and retard the very cause we want to assist.

The subject is a delicate and difficult one, without doubt. Unquestionably the majority of Christians are far more inclined to be silent about their glorious Master than to confess Him before men,—and do not need the bridle so much as the spur. But still it is undeniable that there is a time for all things; and to know the time should be one great aim of a Christian. There are good men who have more zeal than discretion, and even help the enemy of truth by unseasonable acts and words.⁵

Let us all pray for the Spirit of wisdom and of a sound mind. Let us seek daily to know the path of duty, and ask daily for discretion and good sense. Let us be bold as a lion in confessing Christ, and not be afraid to “speak of Him before princes,” if need be. But let us never forget that “Wisdom is profitable to direct,” (Eccles. x. 11.) and let us beware of doing harm by an ill-directed zeal.

⁵ It would not be wise for a speaker at an English public meeting to proclaim the names of the families in Italy where the Bible is read, and to point out the streets and houses where these families resided. Such a speaker might be well-meaning, and full of zeal. He might really desire to glorify Christ, and publish the triumphs of His grace. But he would be guilty of a sad indiscretion, and show great ignorance of the very lesson which the verses before us contain. The words of an old commentator on this subject deserve notice:

“In that our Saviour forbids this leper to publish this miracle at this unseasonable time, we learn that all truths are not fit to be professed or uttered at all times. Though we must never deny any truth, being demanded of it, or lawfully enjoined to profess it, yet there is a wise concealment of the truth, which is sometimes to be used. (Eccles. iii. 7.)

When are we to conceal the truth? 1. When the case stands so, that the uttering of it may bring hurt to the truth itself, as here, the publishing of this miracle was like to stop Christ’s ministry. 2. When we are in the company of such persons as are more likely to cavil and scoff at the truth, than to make any good use of it. 3. When we are in the company of malicious enemies of the truth.” (Matt. vii. 6.)—*Petter on Mark*. 1661.