

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS  
ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

*And many Explanatory Notes.*

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MDCCCLIX.

MARK XVI. 1-8.

1 And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene and Mary the <i>mother</i> of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him.	clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted.
2 And very early in the morning the first <i>day</i> of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun.	6 And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him.
3 And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?	7 But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you.
4 And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great.	8 And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre; for they trembled and were amazed: neither said they any thing to any <i>man</i> ; for they were afraid.
5 And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side,	

LET us observe, in this passage, *the power of strong love to Christ*. We have a forcible illustration of this in the conduct of Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, which St. Mark here records. He tells us that they had “bought sweet spices” to anoint our Lord, and that “very early in the morning, the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre, at the rising of the sun.”

We may well believe that it required no small courage to do this. To visit a grave in the dim twilight of an eastern day-break, would try most women, under any circumstances. But to visit the grave of one who had been put to death as a common malefactor, and to rise early to show honour to one whom their nation had despised, this was a mighty boldness indeed. Yet these are the kind of acts which show the difference between weak faith and strong faith,—between weak feeling and strong feeling towards Christ. These holy women had tasted of our Lord’s pardoning mercies. Their hearts were full of gratitude to Him for light, and hope, and comfort, and peace. They were willing to risk all consequences in testifying their affection to their Saviour. So true are the words of Canticles: “Love is strong as death,—many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it.” (Cant. viii. 6, 7.)

Why is it that we see so little of this strong love to Jesus among Christians of the present day? How is it that we so seldom meet with saints who will face any danger, and go through fire and water for Christ’s sake? There is only one answer. It is the weak faith, and the low sense of obligation to Christ, which so widely prevail. A low and feeble sense of sin will always produce a low and feeble sense of the value of salvation. A slight sense of our debt to God will always be attended by a slight sense of what we owe for our redemption. It is the man who feels much forgiven who loves much. “To whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.” (Luke vii. 47.)

Let us observe, secondly, in this passage, how *the difficulties which Christians fear, will sometimes disappear as they approach them*. These holy women, as they walked to our Lord's grave, were full of fears about the stone at the door. "They said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?" But their fears were needless. Their expected trouble was found not to exist. "When they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away."

What a striking emblem we have in this simple narrative, of the experience of many Christians! How often believers are oppressed and cast down by anticipation of evils, and yet, in the time of need, find the thing they feared removed, and the "stone rolled away." A large proportion of a saint's anxieties arise from things which never really happen. We look forward to all the possibilities of the journey towards heaven. We conjure up in our imagination all kinds of crosses and obstacles. We carry mentally tomorrow's troubles, as well as today's. And often, very often, we find at the end, that our doubts and alarms were groundless, and that the thing we dreaded most has never come to pass at all. Let us pray for more practical faith. Let us believe that in the path of duty, we shall never be entirely forsaken. Let us go forward boldly, and we shall often find that the lion in the way is chained, and the seeming hedge of thorns is only a shadow.

Let us observe, thirdly, in this passage, *that the friends of Christ have no cause to be afraid of angels*. We are told, that when Mary Magdalene and her companion saw an angel sitting in the sepulchre, "they were affrighted." But they were at once reassured by his words: "Be not affrighted: ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified."

The lesson, at first sight, may seem of little importance. We see no visions of angels in the present day. We do not expect to see them. But the lesson is one which we may find useful at some future time. The day is drawing near when the Lord Jesus shall come again to judge the world, with all the angels round Him. The angels in that day shall gather together His elect from the four winds. The angels shall gather the tares into bundles to burn them. The angels shall gather the wheat of God into His barn. Those whom the angels take they shall carry to glory, honour and immortality. Those whom they leave behind shall be left to shame and everlasting contempt.

Let us strive so to live, that when we die we may be carried by angels into Abraham's bosom. Let us endeavour to be known of angels as those who seek Jesus, and love Him in this world, and so are heirs of salvation. Let us give diligence to make our repentance sure, and so to cause joy in the presence of the angels of God. Then, whether we wake or sleep, when the archangel's voice is heard, we shall have no cause to be

afraid. We shall rise from our grave, and see in the angels our friends and fellow-servants, in whose company we shall spend a blessed eternity.

Let us observe, lastly, in this passage, the *exceeding kindness of God towards His backsliding servants*. The message which the angel conveys is a striking illustration of this truth. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were bid to tell the disciples that “Jesus goeth before them into Galilee,” and that “there they shall see him.” But the message is not directed generally to the eleven apostles. This alone, after their late desertion of their master, would have been a most gracious action. Yet Simon Peter, who had denied his Lord three times, is specially mentioned by name. Peter, who had sinned particularly, is singled out and noticed particularly. There were to be no exceptions in the deed of grace. All were to be pardoned. All were to be restored to favour,—and Simon Peter as well as the rest.

We may well say when we read words like these, “this is not the manner of man.” On no point perhaps are our views of religion so narrow, low, and contracted, as on the point of God’s exceeding willingness to pardon penitent sinners. We think of Him as such an one as ourselves. We forget that “he delighteth in mercy.” (Micah vii. 18.)

Let us leave the passage with a determination to open the door of mercy very wide to sinners, in all our speaking and teaching about religion. Not least, let us leave it with a resolution never to be unforgiving towards our fellow men. If Christ is so ready to forgive us, we ought to be very ready to forgive others.

MARK XVI. 9–14.

9 Now when *Jesus* was risen early the first *day* of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils.

10 *And* she went and told them that had been with him, as they mourned and wept.

11 *And* they, when they had heard that he was alive, and had been seen of her, believed not.

12 After that he appeared in another form unto two of them, as they walked, and went into the country.

13 *And* they went and told *it* unto the residue: neither believed they them.

14 Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen.

LET us mark, in these verses, *what abundant proof we have that our Lord Jesus Christ really rose again from the dead.* In this one passage St. Mark records no less than three distinct occasions on which He was seen after His resurrection. First, he tells us, our Lord appeared to one witness, Mary Magdalene,—then to two witnesses, two disciples walking into the country,—and lastly to eleven witnesses, the eleven apostles all assembled together. Let us remember, in addition to this, that other appearances of our Lord are described by other writers in the New Testament, beside those mentioned by St. Mark. And then let us not hesitate to believe, that of all the facts of our Lord's history, there is none more thoroughly established than the fact, that He rose from the dead.

There is great mercy in this. The resurrection of Christ is one of the foundation-stones of Christianity. It was the seal of the great work that He came on earth to do. It was the crowning proof that the ransom He paid for sinners was accepted, the atonement for sin accomplished, the head of him who had the power of death bruised, and the victory won. It is well to remark how often the resurrection of Christ is referred to by the apostles. "He was delivered for our offences," says Paul, "and was raised again for our justification." (Rom. iv. 25.) "He hath begotten us again to a lively hope," says Peter, "by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." (1 Peter i. 3.)

We ought to thank God that the fact of the resurrection is so clearly established. The Jew, the Gentile, the priests, the Roman guard, the women who went to the tomb, the disciples who were so backward to believe, are all witnesses whose testimony cannot be gainsaid. Christ has not only died for us, but has also risen again. To deny it shows far greater credulity than to believe it. To deny it a man must put credit in monstrous and ridiculous improbabilities. To believe it a man has only to appeal to simple undeniable facts.

Let us mark, secondly, in these verses, *our Lord Jesus Christ's singular kindness to Mary Magdalene.* We are told that "when he was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out

of whom he had cast seven devils.” To her before all others of Adam’s children, was granted the privilege of being first to behold a risen Saviour. Mary, the mother of our Lord, was yet alive. John, the beloved disciple, was yet upon earth. Yet both were passed over on this occasion in favour of Mary Magdalene. A woman who at one time had probably been chief of sinners, a woman who at one time had been possessed by seven devils, was the first to whom Jesus showed Himself alive, when He rose victorious from the tomb. The fact is remarkable, and full of instruction.<sup>1</sup>

We need not doubt, for one thing, that, by appearing “first to Mary Magdalene,” our Lord meant to show us how much He values love and faithfulness. Last at the cross and first at the grave, last to confess her Master while living, and first to honour Him when dead, this warm-hearted disciple was allowed to be the first to see Him, when the victory was won. It was intended to be a perpetual memorial to the Church, that those who honour Christ, He will honour, and that those who do much for Him upon earth, shall find Him even upon earth doing much for them. May we never forget this. May we ever remember that for those who forsake all for Christ’s sake there is “an hundred-fold now in this present time.”

We need not doubt, for another thing, that our Lord’s appearing “first to Mary Magdalene” was intended to comfort all who have become penitent believers, after having run into great excesses of sin. It was meant to show us that, however far we may have fallen, we are raised to entire peace with God, if we repent and believe the Gospel. Though before far off, we are made nigh. Though before enemies, we are made dear children. Old things are passed away, and all things are become new. (1 Cor. v. 17.) The blood of Christ makes us completely clean in God’s sight. We may have begun like Augustine, and John Newton, and been ring-leaders in every kind of iniquity. But once brought to Christ, we need not doubt that all is forgiven. We may draw nigh with boldness, and have access with confidence. Our sins and iniquities, like those of Mary Magdalene, are remembered no more.

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<sup>1</sup> There is nothing in the New Testament to justify the common notion that Mary Magdalene had been a sinner against the seventh commandment more than other commandments. There is no scriptural warrant for calling hospitals and asylums intended for fallen women, “Magdalene Hospitals.” No better authority can be discovered for the common idea on the subject than tradition.

At the same time it is only fair to say, that there seems strong probability for supposing that the sins of Mary Magdalene had been very great. There was probably some grave cause for her being possessed by seven devils, though the nature of it has not been revealed to us.

Let us mark, lastly, in these verses, *how much weakness there is sometimes in the faith of the best Christians*. Three times in this very passage we find St. Mark describing the unbelief of the eleven apostles. Once, when Mary Magdalene told them that our Lord had risen, “they believed not.”—Again, when our Lord had appeared to two of them, as they walked, we read of the residue, “neither believed they them.”—Finally, when our Lord Himself appeared to them as they sat at meat, we are told that “he upbraided them for their unbelief and hardness of heart.” Never perhaps was there so striking an example of man’s unwillingness to believe that which runs counter to his early prejudices. Never was there so remarkable a proof of man’s forgetfulness of plain teaching. These eleven men had been told repeatedly by our Lord that He would rise again. And yet, when the time came, all was forgotten, and they were found unbelieving.

Let us however see in the doubts of these good men the over-ruling hand of an all-wise God. If they were convinced at last, who were so unbelieving at first, how strong is the proof supplied us that Christ rose indeed. It is the glory of God to bring good out of evil. The very doubts of the eleven apostles are the confirmation of our faith in these latter days.

Let us learn from the unbelief of the apostles, a useful practical lesson for ourselves. Let us cease to feel surprise when we find doubts arising in our own heart. Let us cease to expect perfection of faith in other believers. We are yet in the body. We are men of like passions with the apostles. We must count it no strange thing, if our experience is sometimes like theirs, and if our faith, like theirs, sometimes gives way. Let us resist unbelief manfully. Let us watch, and pray, and strive to be delivered from its power. But let us not conclude that we have no grace, because we are sometimes harassed with doubts, nor suppose that we have no part or lot with the apostles, because at seasons we feel unbelieving.

Let us not fail to ask ourselves, as we leave this passage, whether we have risen with Christ, and been made partakers spiritually of His resurrection. This, after all, is the one thing needful. To know the facts of Christianity with the head, and to be able to argue for them with the tongue, will not save our souls. We must yield ourselves to God as those alive from the dead. (Rom. vi. 13.) We must be raised from the death of sin, and walk in newness of life. This and this only is saving Christianity.

MARK XVI. 15–18.

15 And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature.	out devils; they shall speak with new tongues;
16 He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.	18 They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.
17 And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast	

WE ought to notice, firstly, in these verses, *the parting commission which our Lord gives to His apostles*. He is addressing them for the last time. He marks out their work till He comes again, in words of wide and deep significance, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.”

The Lord Jesus would have us know that all the world needs the Gospel. In every quarter of the globe man is the same, sinful, corrupt, and alienated from God. Civilized or uncivilized, in China, or in Africa, he is by nature everywhere the same, without knowledge, without holiness, without faith, and without love. Wherever we see a child of Adam, whatever be his colour, we see one whose heart is wicked, and who needs the blood of Christ, the renewing of the Holy Ghost, and reconciliation with God.

The Lord Jesus would have us know that the salvation of the Gospel is to be offered freely to all mankind. The glad tidings that “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son,” and that “Christ has died for the ungodly,” is to be proclaimed freely “to every creature.” We are not justified in making any exception in the proclamation. We have no warrant for limiting the offer to the elect. We come short of the fulness of Christ’s words, and take away from the breadth of His sayings, if we shrink from telling anyone, “God is full of love to you, Christ is willing to save you.” “Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” (Rev. xx. 17.)

Let us see in these words of Christ, the strongest argument in favour of missionary work, both at home and abroad. Remembering these words, let us be unwearied in trying to do good to the souls of all mankind. If we cannot go to the heathen in China and Hindostan, let us seek to enlighten the darkness which we shall easily find within reach of our own door. Let us labour on, unmoved by the sneers and taunts of those who disapprove missionary operations, and hold them up to scorn. We may well pity such people. They only show their ignorance, both of Scripture and of Christ’s will. They understand neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm.

We ought to notice, secondly, in these verses, *the terms which our Lord tells us should be offered to all who hear the Gospel*. “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” Every word in that sentence is of deep importance. Every expression in it deserves to be carefully weighed.

We are taught here the importance of baptism. It is an ordinance generally necessary to salvation, where it can be had. Not “he that believeth” simply, but “he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” Thousands no doubt receive not the slightest benefit from their baptism. Thousands are washed in sacramental water, who are never washed in the blood of Christ. But it does not follow therefore that baptism is to be despised and neglected. It is an ordinance appointed by Christ Himself, and when used reverently, intelligently, and prayerfully, is doubtless accompanied by a special blessing. The baptismal water itself conveys no grace. We must look far beyond the mere outward element to Him who commanded it to be used. But the public confession of Christ, which is implied in the use of that water, is a sacramental act, which our Master Himself has commanded; and when the ordinance is rightly used, we may confidently believe that He seals it by His blessing.

We are taught here, furthermore, the absolute necessity of faith in Christ to salvation. This is the one thing needful. “He that believeth not” is the man that shall be lost for evermore. He may have been baptized, and made a member of the visible church. He may be a regular communicant at the Lord’s Table. He may even believe intellectually all the leading articles of the creed. But all shall profit him nothing if he lacks saving faith in Christ. Have we this faith? This is the great question that concerns us all. Except we feel our sins, and feeling them flee to Christ by faith, and lay hold on Him, we shall find at length we had better never have been born.

We are taught here, furthermore, the certainty of God’s judgments on those who die unbelieving. “He that believeth not shall be damned.” How awful the words sound! How fearful the thought that they came from the lips of Him who said, “My words shall not pass away.” Let no man deceive us with vain words. There is an eternal hell for all who will persist in their wickedness, and depart out of this world without faith in Christ. The greater the mercy offered to us in the Gospel, the greater will be the guilt of those who obstinately refuse to believe. “Oh! that men were wise. Oh! that they would consider their latter end.” (Deut. xxxii. 29.) He that died upon the cross, has given us plain warning that there is a hell, and that unbelievers shall be damned. Let us take heed that His warning is not given to us in vain!

We ought to notice, lastly, in these verses, *the gracious promises of special help which our Lord holds out in His parting words to His apostles*. He knew well the enormous difficulties of the work which He had just commissioned them to do. He knew the mighty battle they would have to fight with heathenism, the world, and the devil. He therefore cheers them by telling them that miracles shall help forward their work. "Signs shall follow them that believe. In my name they shall cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they shall drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover." The fulfilment of most of these promises is to be found in the Acts of the Apostles.

The age of miracles no doubt is long past. They were never meant to continue beyond the first establishment of the Church. It is only when plants are first planted, that they need daily watering and support. The whole analogy of God's dealings with His church, forbids us to expect that miracles would always continue. In fact, miracles would cease to be miracles, if they happened regularly without cessation or intermission. It is well to remember this. The remembrance may save us much perplexity.

But though the age of physical miracles is past, we may take comfort in the thought that the church of Christ shall never want Christ's special aid in its seasons of special need. The great Head in heaven will never forsake His believing members. His eye is continually upon them. He will always time His help wisely, and come to their succour in the day that He is wanted. "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him." (Isai. lix. 19.)

Finally, let us never forget, that Christ's believing Church in the world is of itself a standing miracle. The conversion and perseverance in grace of every member of that Church, is a sign and wonder, as great as the raising of Lazarus from the dead. The renewal of every saint is as great a marvel as the casting out of a devil, or the healing of a sick man, or the speaking with a new tongue. Let us thank God for this and take courage. The age of spiritual miracles is not yet past. Happy are they who have learned this by experience, and can say, "I was dead, but am alive again: I was blind, but I see."

MARK XVI. 19–20.

19 So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God.

20 And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with *them*, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen.

THESE words form the conclusion of St. Mark's Gospel. Short as the passage is, it is a singularly suitable conclusion to the history of our Lord Jesus Christ's earthly ministry. It tells us where our Lord went, when He left this world, and ascended up on high. It tells us what His disciples experienced after their Master left them, and what all true Christians may expect until He appears again.

Let us mark, in these verses, *the place to which our Lord went when He had finished His work on earth, and the place where He is at this present time.* We are told that "He was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God." He returned to that glory which He had with the Father before He came into the world. He received, as our victorious Mediator and Redeemer, the highest position of dignity and power in heaven which our minds can conceive. There He sits, not idle, but carrying on the same blessed work for which He died on the cross. There He lives, ever making intercession for all who come unto God by Him, and so able to save them to the uttermost. (Heb. vii. 25.)

There is strong consolation here for all true Christians. They live in an evil world. They are often careful and troubled about many things, and are sorely cast down by their own weakness and infirmities.—They live in a dying world. They feel their bodies gradually failing and giving way. They have before them the awful prospect of soon launching forth into a world unknown.—What then shall comfort them? They must lean back on the thought of their Saviour in heaven, never slumbering, and never sleeping, and always ready to help. They must remember that though they sleep, Jesus wakes,—though they faint, Jesus is never weary,—though they are weak, Jesus is Almighty,—and though they die, Jesus lives for evermore. Blessed indeed is this thought! Our Saviour, though unseen, is an actually living person. We travel on towards a dwelling where our best Friend is gone before, to prepare a place for us. (John xiv. 2.) The Forerunner has entered in and made all things ready. No wonder that St. Paul exclaims, "Who is He that condemneth? It is Christ that died; yea, rather that is risen again,—who is even at the right hand of God,—who also maketh intercession for us." (Rom. viii. 34.)

Let us mark, for another thing, in these verses, *the blessing which our Lord Jesus Christ bestows on all who work faithfully for Him.* We are told that, when the disciples went forth and preached, the Lord "worked with them," and "confirmed the word with signs following."

We know well from the Acts of the Apostles, and from the pages of church history, the manner in which these words have been proved true. We know that bonds and afflictions, persecution and opposition, were the first fruits that were reaped by the labourers in Christ's harvest. But we know also that, in spite of every effort of Satan, the word of truth was not preached in vain. Believers from time to time were gathered out of the world. Churches of saints were founded in city after city, and country after country. The little seed of Christianity grew gradually into a great tree. Christ Himself wrought with His own workmen, and, in spite of every obstacle, His work went on. The good seed was never entirely thrown away. Sooner or later there were "signs following."

Let us not doubt that these things were written for our encouragement, on whom the latter ends of the world are come. Let us believe that no one shall ever work faithfully for Christ, and find at last that His work has been altogether without profit. Let us labour on patiently, each in our own position. Let us preach, and teach, and speak, and write, and warn, and testify, and rest assured that our labour is not in vain. We may die ourselves, and see no result from our work. But the last day will assuredly prove that the Lord Jesus always works with those who work for Him, and that there were "signs following," though it was not given to the workmen to see them. Let us then be "steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." We may go on our way heavily, and sow with many tears; but if we sow Christ's precious seed, we shall "come again with joy and bring our sheaves with us." (1 Cor. xv. 58; Psal. cxxvi. 6.)

And now let us close the pages of St. Mark's Gospel with self-inquiry and self-examination. Let it not content us to have seen with our eyes, and heard with our ears, the things here written for our learning about Jesus Christ. Let us ask ourselves whether we know anything of Christ "dwelling in our hearts by faith?" Does the Spirit "witness with our spirit" that Christ is ours and we are His? Can we really say that we are "living the life of faith in the Son of God," and that we have found by experience that Christ is "precious "to our own souls? These are solemn questions. They demand serious consideration. May we never rest till we can give them satisfactory answers! "He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." (1 John v. 12.)