

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS
ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

And many Explanatory Notes.

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MDCCCLIX.

MARK. VI. 1–6.

1 And he went out from thence, and came into his own country; and his disciples follow him.

2 And when the Sabbath day was come, he began to teach in the synagogue: and many hearing *him* were astonished, saying, From whence hath this man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands?

3 Is not this the carpenter, and the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Jude, and Simon? and are not his sisters

here with us? And they were offended at him.

4 But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house.

5 And he could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed *them*.

6 And he marvelled because of their unbelief. And he went round about the villages, teaching.

THIS passage shows us our Lord Jesus Christ in “his own country,” at Nazareth. It is a melancholy illustration of the wickedness of man’s heart, and deserves special attention.

We see, in the first place, *how apt men are to undervalue things with which they are familiar*. The men of Nazareth “were offended” at our Lord. They could not think it possible that one who had lived so many years among themselves, and whose brethren and sisters they knew, could deserve to be followed as a public teacher.

Never had any place on earth such privileges as Nazareth. For thirty years the Son of God resided in this town, and went to and fro in its streets. For thirty years He walked with God before the eyes of its inhabitants, living a blameless, perfect life. But it was all lost upon them. They were not ready to believe the Gospel, when the Lord came among them, and taught in their synagogue. They would not believe that one whose face they knew so well, and who had lived so long, eating, and drinking, and dressing like one of themselves, had any right to claim their attention. They were “offended at Him.”

There is nothing in all this that need surprise us. The same thing is going on around us every day, in our own land. The holy Scriptures, the preaching of the Gospel, the public ordinances of religion, the abundant means of grace that England enjoys, are continually undervalued by English people. They are so accustomed to them, that they do not know their privileges. It is an awful truth, that in religion, more than in anything else, familiarity breeds contempt.

There is comfort in this part of our Lord’s experience, for some of the Lord’s people. There is comfort for faithful ministers of the Gospel, who are cast down by the unbelief of their parishioners or regular hearers. There is comfort for true Christians, who stand alone in their families, and see all around them cleaving to the world. Let both remember that they are drinking the same cup as their beloved Master. Let them re-

member that He too was despised most by those who knew Him best. Let them learn that the utmost consistency of conduct will not make others adopt their views and opinions, any more than it did the people of Nazareth. Let them know that the sorrowful words of their Lord will generally be fulfilled in the experience of His servants, “a prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house.”

We see, in the second place, *how humble was the rank of life which our Lord condescended to occupy, before He began His public ministry.* The people of Nazareth said of Him, in contempt, “Is not this the carpenter?”

This is a remarkable expression, and is only found in the Gospel of St. Mark. It shows us plainly that for the first thirty years of His life, our Lord was not ashamed to work with His own hands. There is something marvellous and overwhelming in the thought! He who made heaven, and earth, and sea, and all that therein is,—He, without whom nothing was made that was made,—the Son of God Himself, took on Him the form of a servant, and “in the sweat of His face ate bread,” as a working man. This is indeed that “love of Christ that passeth knowledge.” Though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor. Both in life and death He humbled Himself, that through Him sinners might live and reign for evermore.

Let us remember when we read this passage, that there is no sin in poverty. We never need be ashamed of poverty, unless our own sins have brought it upon us. We never ought to despise others, because they are poor. It is disgraceful to be a gambler, or a drunkard, or a covetous man, or a liar; but it is no disgrace to work with our own hands, and earn our bread by our own labour. The thought of the carpenter’s shop at Nazareth, should cast down the high thoughts of all who make an idol of riches. It cannot be dishonourable to occupy the same position as the Son of God, and Saviour of the world.

We see, in the last place, *how exceedingly sinful is the sin of unbelief.* Two remarkable expressions are used in teaching this lesson. One is, that our Lord “could do no mighty work” at Nazareth, by reason of the hardness of the people’s hearts. The other is, that “He marvelled because of their unbelief.” The one shows us that unbelief has a power to rob men of the highest blessings. The other shows that it is so suicidal and unreasonable a sin, that even the Son of God regards it with surprise.

We can never be too much on our guard against unbelief. It is the oldest sin in the world. It began in the garden of Eden, when Eve listened to the devil’s promises, instead of believing God’s words, “ye shall die.”—It is the most ruinous of all sins in its consequences. It

brought death into the world. It kept Israel for forty years out of Canaan. It is the sin that specially fills hell. “He that believeth not shall be damned.”—It is the most foolish and inconsistent of all sins. It makes a man refuse the plainest evidence, shut his eyes against the clearest testimony, and yet believe lies.—Worst of all, it is the commonest sin in the world. Thousands are guilty of it on every side. In profession they are Christians. They know nothing of Paine and Voltaire. But in practice they are really unbelievers. They do not implicitly believe the Bible, and receive Christ as their Saviour.

Let us watch our own hearts carefully in the matter of unbelief. The heart, and not the head, is the seat of its mysterious power. It is neither the want of evidence, nor the difficulties of Christian doctrine, that make men unbelievers.—It is want of will to believe. They love sin. They are wedded to the world. In this state of mind they never lack specious reasons to confirm their will. The humble, child-like heart is the heart that believes.

Let us go on watching our hearts, even after we have believed. The root of unbelief is never entirely destroyed. We have only to leave off watching and praying, and a rank crop of unbelief will soon spring up. No prayer is so important as that of the disciples, “Lord, increase our faith.”¹

¹ There is a peculiar expression in this passage, which deserves notice. I refer to the words which say, that our Lord “*could* do no mighty work there, because of their unbelief.”

This expression of course cannot mean, that it was “impossible” for our Lord to do a mighty work there, and that although He had the will to do mighty works, He was stopped and prevented by a power greater than His own. Such a view would be dishonouring to our Lord, and in fact would be a practical denial of His divinity. With Jesus nothing is impossible. If He had willed to do works, He had the power.

The meaning evidently must be, that our Lord “*would*” not do any mighty work there, because of the unbelief that He saw. He was prevented by what He perceived was the state of the people’s hearts. He would not waste signs and wonders on an unbelieving and hardened generation. He “*could not*” do a mighty work, without departing from His rule, “according to your faith be it unto you.” He had the power in His hands, but He did not will to use it.

The distinction I have attempted to draw is doubly useful, because of the light it throws on another Scriptural expression, which is often grievously misunderstood. I refer to the expression, “no man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him.” (John vi. 44.) The words, “no man *can* come,” are often much misapprehended.

The text is a plain declaration of man’s natural corruption and helpless impotence. Men is dead in sin. He cannot come to Christ, except the Father draws him. In a word, he is *unable* to come. But what is the precise nature of his inability? This is the very point on which misapprehension exists.

Once for all, let us clearly understand that man’s inability to come to Christ is not physical. It is utterly untrue to say that a man can have a strong decided will to come to Christ, and yet be stopped by some mysterious physical obstacle,—that he can really

and honestly have a will to come, and yet have no power. Such a doctrine entirely overthrows man's responsibility, and leads, in many cases, to wicked continuance in sin. Thousands of ignorant people will tell you that "they wish to believe, and wish to come to Christ, and wish to be saved,"—and yet say that "though they have the will, they have not the power." It is a fatal delusion, and ruinous to many souls.

The truth is that man's inability to come to Christ, and impotence to that which is good, is *moral*, and not physical. It is not true that he has the will to come to Christ, but is unable. He is unable, doubtless, and has no power; but it is simply *because* he has no will. His will is the principal cause of his unconverted state, and until his will is changed by the Holy Ghost, he will never alter. He may not like this. But it is true. The fault of his condition is his own will. Say what he pleases, the blame lies there. He may pretend to have many good wishes, but in reality he has no honest, sincere WILL to be better. He "will not come to Christ that he may have life."

MARK VI. 7–13.

7 And he called *unto him* the twelve, and began to send them forth by two and two; and gave them power over unclean spirits;

8 And commanded them that they should take nothing for *their* journey, save a staff only; no scrip, no bread, no money in *their* purse:

9 But *be* shod with sandals; and not put on two coats.

10 And he said unto them, In what place soever ye enter into an house, there abide till ye depart from that place.

11 And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear you, when ye depart thence, shake off the dust under your feet for a testimony against them. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city.

12 And they went out, and preached that men should repent.

13 And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed *them*.

THESE verses describe the first sending forth of the apostles to preach. The great Head of the church made proof of His ministers, before He left them alone in the world. He taught them to try their own powers of teaching, and to find out their own weaknesses, while He was yet with them. Thus, on the one hand, He was enabled to correct their mistakes. Thus, on the other, they were trained for the work they were one day to do, and were not novices, when finally left to themselves.—Well would it be for the church, if all ministers of the Gospel were prepared for their duty in like manner, and did not so often take up their office untried, unproved, and inexperienced.

Let us observe in these verses *how our Lord Jesus Christ sent forth His apostles “two and two.”*—St. Mark is the only evangelist who mentions this fact. It is one that deserves special notice.

There can be no doubt that this fact is meant to teach us the advantages of Christian company to all who work for Christ. The wise man had good reason for saying, “Two are better than one.” (Eccles. iv. 9.) Two men together will do more work than two men singly. They will help one another in judgment, and commit fewer mistakes. They will aid one another in difficulties, and less often fail of success. They will stir one another up when tempted to idleness, and less often relapse into indolence and indifference. They will comfort one another in times of trial, and be less often cast down. “Woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up.” (Eccles. iv. 11.)

It is probable that this principle is not sufficiently remembered in the church of Christ in these latter days. The harvest is undoubtedly great all over the world, both at home and abroad. The labourers are unquestionably few, and the supply of faithful men far less than the demand. The arguments for sending out men “one by one,” under existing circumstances, are undeniably strong and weighty. But still the conduct of our Lord in this place is a striking fact. The fact that there is hardly a single case in the Acts, where we find Paul or any other apostle working entire-

ly alone, is another remarkable circumstance. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion, that if the rule of going forth “two and two” had been more strictly observed, the missionary field would have yielded larger results than it has.

One thing at all events is clear, and that is the duty of all workers for Christ to work together and help one another whenever they can. “As iron sharpeneth iron, so doth the countenance of a man his friend.” Ministers and missionaries, and district visitors, and Sunday school teachers, should make opportunities for meeting, and taking sweet counsel together. The words of St. Paul contain a truth which is too much forgotten: “consider one another, to provoke unto love and good works; not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together.” (Heb. x. 24, 25.)

Let us observe, in the second place, *what solemn words our Lord uses about those who will not receive nor hear His ministers*. He says, “it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment than for that city.”

This is a truth which we find very frequently laid down in the Gospels. It is painful to think how entirely it is overlooked by many. Thousands appear to suppose, that so long as they go to church, and do not murder, or steal, or cheat, or openly break any of God’s commandments, they are in no great danger. They forget that it needs something more than mere abstinence from outward irregularities to save a man’s soul. They do not see that one of the greatest sins a man can commit in the sight of God, is to hear the Gospel of Christ and not believe it,—to be invited to repent and believe, and yet remain careless and unbelieving. In short, to reject the Gospel will sink a man to the lowest place in hell.

Let us never turn away from a passage like this without asking ourselves, What are we doing with the Gospel? We live in a Christian land. We have the Bible in our houses. We hear of the salvation of the Gospel frequently every year. But have we received it into our hearts? Have we really obeyed it in our lives? Have we, in short, laid hold on the hope set before us, taken up the cross, and followed Christ?—If not, we are far worse than the heathen, who bow down to stocks and stones. We are far more guilty than the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. They never heard the Gospel, and therefore never rejected it. But as for us, we hear the Gospel, and yet will not believe. May we search our own hearts, and take heed that we do not ruin our own souls!

Let us observe, in the last place, *what was the doctrine which our Lord’s apostles preached*. We read that “they went out and preached that men should repent.”

The necessity of repentance may seem at first sight a very simple and elementary truth. And yet volumes might be written to show the fulness

of the doctrine, and the suitableness of it to every age and time, and to every rank and class of mankind. It is inseparably connected with right views of God, of human nature, of sin, of Christ, of holiness, and of heaven. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. All need to be brought to a sense of their sins,—to a sorrow for them,—to a willingness to give them up,—and to a hunger and thirst after pardon. All, in a word, need to be born again and to flee to Christ. This is repentance unto life. Nothing less than this is required for the salvation of any man. Nothing less than this ought to be pressed on men, by everyone who professes to teach Bible religion. We must bid men repent, if we would walk in the steps of the apostles, and when they have repented, we must bid them repent more and more to their last day.

Have we ourselves repented? This, after all, is the question that concerns us most. It is well to know what the apostles taught. It is well to be familiar with the whole system of Christian doctrine. But it is far better to know repentance by experience and to feel it inwardly in our own hearts. May we never rest till we know and feel that we have repented! There are no impenitent people in the kingdom of heaven. All who enter in there have felt, mourned over, forsaken, and sought pardon for sin. This must be our experience, if we hope to be saved.²

² The concluding verse in this passage, together with one in the Epistle of James. (James v. 14.) is generally quoted by Roman Catholics, in support of their pretended sacrament of extreme unction. A moment's reflection will show that neither this text nor the other referred to, is any proof at all.

In both cases, the anointing with oil is expressly connected with the *healing* of those anointed. 'Extreme unction on the contrary is an anointing administered to a *dying* person, when there is no hope of his recovery.

This discrepancy between the anointing of the apostolic times and the anointing practised by the Church of Rome, is so glaring, that some of the ablest Romish controversialists have been obliged to acknowledge, that "extreme unction" is founded on church authority, and not on the authority of Scripture.—Lombardus, Bonaventura, Bellarmine, Jansenius, and Tirinus, are all mentioned by Calovins as being of this opinion.

MARK VI. 14–29.

14 And king Herod heard *of him*; (for his name was spread abroad:) and he said, That John the Baptist was risen from the dead, and therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him.

15 Others said, That it is Elias. And others said, That it is a prophet, or as one of the prophets.

16 But when Herod heard *thereof*, he said, It is John, whom I beheaded: he is risen from the dead.

17 For Herod himself had sent forth and laid hold upon John, and bound him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife: for he had married her.

18 For John had said unto Herod, It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife.

19 Therefore Herodias had a quarrel against him, and would have killed him; but she could not:

20 For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly.

21 And when a convenient day was come, that Herod on his birthday made a supper to his lords, high captains, and chief *estates* of Galilee;

22 And when the daughter of the said Herodias came in, and danced, and pleased Herod and them that eat with him, the king said unto the damsel, Ask of me whatsoever thou wilt, and I will give *it* thee.

23 And he sware unto her, Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I will give *it* thee, unto the half of my kingdom.

24 And she went forth, and said unto her mother, What shall I ask? And she said, The head of John the Baptist.

25 And she came in straightway with haste unto the king, and asked, saying, I will that thou give me by and by in a charger the head of John the Baptist.

26 And the king was exceeding sorry; *yet* for his oath's sake, and for their sakes which sat with him, he would not reject her.

27 And immediately the king sent an executioner, and commanded his head to be brought: and he went and beheaded him in the prison,

28 And brought his head in a charger, and gave it to the damsel. and the damsel gave it to her mother.

29 And when his disciples heard *of it*, they came and took up his corpse, and laid it in a tomb.

THESE verses describe the death of one of the most eminent saints of God. They relate the murder of John the Baptist. Of all the evangelists none tells this melancholy story so fully as St. Mark. Let us see what practical lessons the passage contains for our own souls.

We see, in the first place, *the amazing power of truth over the conscience*. Herod "fears" John the Baptist while he lives, and is troubled about him after he dies. A friendless, solitary preacher, with no other weapon than God's truth, disturbs and terrifies a king.

Everybody has a conscience. Here lies the secret of a faithful minister's power. This is the reason why Felix "trembled," and Agrippa was "almost persuaded," when Paul the prisoner spoke before them. God has not left Himself without witness in the hearts of unconverted people. Fallen and corrupt as man is, there are thoughts within him accusing or excusing, according as he lives, thoughts that will not be shut out,—thoughts that can make even kings, like Herod, restless and afraid.

None ought to remember this so much as ministers and teachers. If they preach and teach Christ's truth, they may rest assured that their work is not in vain. Children may seem inattentive in schools. Hearers

may seem careless in congregations. But in both cases there is often far more going on in the conscience than our eyes see. Seeds often spring up and bear fruit, when the sower, like John the Baptist, is dead or gone.

We see, in the second place, *how far people may go in religion, and yet miss salvation by yielding to one master-sin.*

King Herod went further than many. He “feared John.” He “knew that he was a just man and a holy.” He “observed” him. He “heard him, and did many things” in consequence. He even “heard him gladly.” But there was one thing Herod would not do. He would not cease from adultery. He would not give up Herodias. And so he ruined his soul for evermore.

Let us take warning from Herod’s case. Let us keep back nothing,—cleave to no favourite vice,—spare nothing that stands between us and salvation. Let us often look within, and make sure that there is no darling lust or pet transgression, which, Herodias-like, is murdering our souls. Let us rather cut off the right hand, and pluck out the right eye, than go into hell-fire. Let us not be content with admiring favourite preachers, and gladly hearing evangelical sermons. Let us not rest till we can say with David, “I esteem all Thy commandments concerning all things to be right, and I hate every false way.” (Psalm. cxix. 128.)

We see, in the third place, *how boldly a faithful minister of God ought to rebuke sin.* John the Baptist spoke plainly to Herod about the wickedness of his life. He did not excuse himself under the plea that it was imprudent, or impolitic, or untimely, or useless to speak out. He did not say smooth things, and palliate the king’s ungodliness by using soft words to describe his offence. He told his royal hearer the plain truth, regardless of all consequences,—“It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother’s wife.”

Here is a pattern that all ministers ought to follow. Publicly and privately, from the pulpit and in private visits, they ought to rebuke all open sin, and deliver a faithful warning to all who are living in it. It may give offence. It may entail immense unpopularity. With all this they have nothing to do. Duties are theirs. Results are God’s.

No doubt it requires great grace and courage to do this. No doubt a reprover, like John the Baptist, must go to work wisely and lovingly in carrying out his master’s commission, and rebuking the wicked. But it is a matter in which his character for faithfulness and charity are manifestly at stake. If he believes a man is injuring his soul, he ought surely to tell him so. If he loves him truly and tenderly, he ought not to let him ruin himself unwarned. Great as the present offence may be, in the long run the faithful reprover will generally be respected. “He that rebuketh a man, afterwards shall find more favour than he that flattereth him with his tongue.” (Prov. xxviii. 23.)

We see, in the fourth place, *how bitterly people hate a reprov-er, when they are determined to keep their sins*. Herodias, the king's unhappy partner in iniquity, seems to have sunk even deeper in sin than Herod. Hardened and seared in conscience by her wickedness, she hated John the Baptist for his faithful testimony, and never rested till she had procured his death.

We need not wonder at this. When men and women have chosen their line, and resolved to have their own wicked way, they dislike anyone who tries to turn them. They would fain be let alone. They are irritated by opposition. They are angry when they are told the truth. The prophet Elijah was called a "man that troubled Israel." The prophet Micaiah was hated by Ahab, "because he never prophesied good of him, but evil." The prophets and faithful preachers of every age have been treated in like manner. They have been hated by some, as well as not believed.

Let it never surprise us when we hear of faithful ministers of the Gos-pel being spoken against, hated, and reviled. Let us rather remember that they are ordained to bear witness against sin, the world, and the devil, and that if they are faithful they cannot help giving offence. It is no dis-grace to a minister's character to be disliked by the wicked and ungodly. It is no real honour to a minister to be thought well of by everybody. Those words of our Lord are not enough considered,—“Woe unto you when all men speak well of you.”

We see, in the fifth place, *how much sin may sometimes follow from feasting and revelling*. Herod keeps his birthday with a splendid banquet. Company, drinking, dancing, fill up the day. In a moment of excitement, he grants a wicked girl's request to have the head of John the Baptist cut off. Next day, in all probability, he repented bitterly of his conduct. But the deed was done. It was too late.

This is a faithful picture of what often results from feasting and mer-ry-making. People do things at such seasons from heated feelings, which they afterwards deeply repent. Happy are they who keep clear of tempta-tions, and avoid giving occasion to the devil! Men never know what they may do, when they once venture off safe ground. Late hours, and crowd-ed rooms, and splendid entertainments, and mixed company, and music, and dancing, may seem harmless to many people. But the Christian should never forget, that to take part in these things is to open a wide door to temptation.

We see, finally, in these verses, *how little reward some of God's best servants receive in this world*. An unjust imprisonment and a violent death, were the last fruit that John the Baptist reaped, in return for his labour. Like Stephen and James and others, of whom the world was not worthy, he was called to seal his testimony with his blood.

Histories like these are meant to remind us, that the true Christian's best things are yet to come. His rest, his crown, his wages, his reward, are all on the other side of the grave. Here, in this world, he must walk by faith and not by sight; and if he looks for the praise of man, he will be disappointed. Here, in this life, he must sow, and labour, and fight, and endure persecution; and if he expects a great earthly reward, he expects what he will not find.—But this life is not all. There is to be a day of retribution. There is a glorious harvest yet to come. Heaven will make amends for all. Eye hath not seen, and ear hath not heard the glorious things that God has laid up for all that love Him. The value of real religion is not to be measured by the things seen, but the things unseen. “The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed.” “Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” (Rom. viii. 18; 2 Cor. iv. 17.)

MARK VI. 30–34.

30 And the apostles gathered themselves together unto Jesus, and told him all things, both what they had done, and what they had taught.

31 And he said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat.

32 And they departed into a desert place by ship privately.

33 And the people saw them departing, and many knew him, and ran afoot thither out of all cities, and out-went them, and came together unto him.

34 And Jesus, when he came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and he began to teach them many things.

LET us mark in this passage, *the conduct of the apostles when they returned from their first mission as preachers*. We read that they “gathered themselves together unto Jesus, and told Him all things, both what they had done, and what they had taught.”

These words are deeply instructive. They are a bright example to all ministers of the Gospel, and to all labourers in the great work of doing good to souls. All such should daily do as the apostles did on this occasion. They should tell all their proceedings to the great Head of the Church. They should spread all their work before Christ, and ask of Him counsel, guidance, strength, and help.

Prayer is the main secret of success in spiritual business. It moves Him who can move heaven and earth. It brings down the promised aid of the Holy Ghost, without whom the finest sermons, the clearest teaching, and the most diligent working, are all alike in vain. It is not always those who have the most eminent gifts who are most successful labourers for God. It is generally those who keep up closest communion with Christ and are most instant in prayer. It is those who cry with the prophet Ezekiel, “Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain that they may live.” (Ezek. xxxvii. 9.) It is those who follow most exactly the apostolic model, and “give themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word.” (Acts vi. 4.) Happy is that church which has a praying as well as a preaching ministry! The question we should ask about a new minister, is not merely “Can he preach well?” but “Does he pray much for his people and his work?”

Let us mark, in the second place, *the words of our Lord to the apostles, when they returned from their first public ministry*. “He said unto them, come ye apart yourselves into a desert place, and rest a while.”

These words are full of tender consideration. Our Lord knows well that His servants are flesh as well as spirit, and have bodies as well as souls. He knows that at best they have a treasure in earthen vessels, and are themselves compassed with many infirmities. He shows them that He does not expect from them more than their bodily strength can do. He

asks for what we *can* do, and not for what we cannot do. “Come ye apart,” He says, “and rest awhile.”

These words are full of deep wisdom. Our Lord knows well that His servants must attend to their own souls as well as the souls of others. He knows that a constant attention to public work is apt to make us forget our own private soul-business, and that while we are keeping the vineyards of others, we are in danger of neglecting our own. (Cant. i. 6.) He reminds us that it is good for ministers to withdraw occasionally from public work, and look within. “Come ye apart,” He says, “into a desert place.”

There are few unhappily in the Church of Christ, who need these admonitions. There are but few in danger of overworking themselves, and injuring their own bodies and souls by excessive attention to others. The vast majority of professing Christians are indolent and slothful, and do nothing for the world around them. There are few comparatively who need the bridle nearly so much as the spur. Yet these few ought to lay to heart the lessons of this passage. They should economize their health as a talent, and not squander it away like gamblers. They should be content with spending their daily income of strength, and should not draw recklessly on their principal. They should remember that to do a little, and do it well, is often the way to do most in the long run. Above all they should never forget to watch their own hearts jealously, and to make time for regular self-examination, and calm meditation. The prosperity of a man’s ministry and public work is intimately bound up with the prosperity of his own soul. Occasional retirement is one of the most useful ordinances.

Finally, let us mark the *feelings of our Lord Jesus Christ towards the people who came together to Him*. We read that He “was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep without a shepherd.” They were destitute of teachers. They had no guides but the blind Scribes and Pharisees. They had no spiritual food but man-made traditions. Thousands of immortal souls stood before our Lord, ignorant, helpless, and on the highroad to ruin. It touched the gracious heart of our Lord Jesus Christ. He was “moved with compassion toward them. He began to teach them many things.”

Let us never forget that our Lord is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He never changes. High in heaven, at God’s right hand, He still looks with compassion on the children of men. He still pities the ignorant, and them that are out of the way. He is still willing to “teach them many things.” Special as His love is towards His own sheep who hear His voice, He still has a mighty general love towards all mankind,—a love of real pity, a love of compassion. We must not overlook this. It is a poor theology which teaches that Christ cares for none except believers.

There is warrant in Scripture for telling the chief of sinners, that Jesus pities them, and cares for their souls, that Jesus is willing to save them, and invites them to believe and be saved.

Let us ask ourselves, as we leave the passage, whether we know anything of the mind of Christ? Are we like Him, tenderly concerned about the souls of the unconverted? Do we, like Him, feel deep compassion for all who are yet as sheep without a shepherd? Do we care about the impenitent and ungodly near our own doors? Do we care about the Heathen, the Jew, the Mahometan, and the Roman Catholic in foreign lands? Do we use every means, and give our money willingly, to spread the Gospel in the world? These are serious questions and demand a serious reply. The man who cares nothing for the souls of other people is not like Jesus Christ. It may well be doubted whether he is converted himself and knows the value of his own soul.

MARK VI. 35–46.

35 And when the day was now far spent, his disciples came unto him, and said, This is a desert place, and now the time *is* far passed:

36 Send them away that they may go into the country round about, and into the villages, and buy themselves bread: for they have nothing to eat.

37 He answered and said unto them, Give ye them to eat. And they say unto him, Shall we go and buy two hundred penny worth of bread, and *give* them to eat?

38 He saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? go and see. And when they knew, they say, Five, and two fishes.

39 And he commanded them to make all sit down by companies upon the green grass.

40 And they sat down in ranks, by hundreds, and by fifties.

41 And when he had taken the five loaves and the two fishes, he looked up to heaven, and blessed, and brake the loaves, and gave *them* to his disciples to set before them; and the two fishes divided he among them all.

42 And they did all eat, and were filled.

43 And they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments, and of the fishes.

44 And they that did eat of the loaves were about five thousand men.

45 And straightway he constrained his disciples to get into the ship, and to go to the other side before unto Bethsaida, while he sent away the people.

46 And when he had sent them away, he departed into a mountain to pray.

OF all our Lord Jesus Christ's miracles, none is so frequently described in the Gospels, as that which we have now read. Each of the four Evangelists was inspired to record it. It is evident that it demands a more than ordinary attention from every reader of God's word.

Let us observe, for one thing, in this passage, *what an example this miracle affords of our Lord Jesus Christ's almighty power*. We are told that He fed five thousand men, with five loaves and two fishes. We are distinctly told that this multitude had nothing to eat. We are no less distinctly told that the whole provision for their sustenance consisted of only five loaves and two fishes. And yet we read that our Lord took these loaves and fishes, blessed, brake, and gave them to His disciples to set before the people. And the conclusion of the narrative tells us, that "they did all eat, and were filled," and that "twelve baskets full of fragments" were taken up.

Here was creative power, beyond all question. Something real, solid, substantial, must manifestly have been called into being, which did not before exist. There is no room left for the theory, that the people were under the influence of an optical delusion, or a heated imagination. Five thousand hungry people would never have been satisfied, if they had not received into their mouths material bread. Twelve baskets full of fragments would never have been taken up, if the five loaves had not been miraculously multiplied. In short, it is plain that the hand of Him who made the world out of nothing was present on this occasion. None but He who at the first created all things, and sent down manna in the desert, could thus have "spread a table in the wilderness."

It becomes all true Christians to store up facts like these in their minds, and to remember them in time of need. We live in the midst of an evil world, and see few with us, and many against us. We carry within us a weak heart, too ready at any moment to turn aside from the right way. We have near us, at every moment, a busy devil, watching continually for our halting, and seeking to lead us into temptation. Where shall we turn for comfort? What shall keep faith alive, and preserve us from sinking in despair?—There is only one answer. We must look to Jesus. We must think on His almighty power, and His wonders of old time. We must call to mind how He can create food for His people out of nothing, and supply the wants of those who follow Him, even in the wilderness.—And as we think these thoughts, we must remember that this Jesus still lives, never changes, and is on our side.

Let us observe, for another thing, in this passage, *our Lord Jesus Christ's conduct, when the miracle of feeding the multitude had been performed*. We read, that “when He had sent them away, He departed into a mountain to pray “

There is something deeply instructive in this circumstance. Our Lord sought not the praise of man. After one of His greatest miracles, we find Him immediately seeking solitude, and spending His time in prayer. He practised what He had taught elsewhere, when He said, “enter into thy closet, and shut thy door, and pray to thy Father which is in secret.” None ever did such mighty works as He did. None ever spake such words. None ever was so instant in prayer.

Let our Lord's conduct in this respect be our example. We cannot work miracles as He did; in this He stands alone. But we can walk in His steps, in the matter of private devotion. If we have the Spirit of adoption, we can pray. Let us resolve to pray more than we have done hitherto. Let us strive to make time, and place, and opportunity for being alone with God. Above all, let us not only pray, before we attempt to work for God, but pray also after our work is done.

It would be well for us all, if we examined ourselves more frequently as to our habits about private prayer. What time do we give to it in the twenty-four hours of the day? What progress can we mark, one year with another, in the fervency, fulness, and earnestness of our prayers? What do we know by experience, of “labouring fervently in prayer?” (Col. iv. 12.) These are humbling inquiries, but they are useful for our souls. There are few things, it may be feared, in which Christians come so far short of Christ's example, as they do in the matter of prayer. Our Master's strong crying and tears,—His continuing all night in prayer to God,—His frequent withdrawal to private places, to hold close communion with the Father, are things more talked of and admired than imi-

tated. We live in an age of hurry, bustle, and so-called activity. Men are tempted continually to cut short their private devotions, and abridge their prayers. When this is the case, we need not wonder that the Church of Christ does little in proportion to its machinery. The Church must learn to copy its Head more closely. Its members must be more in their closets. "We have little," because little is asked. (James iv. 2.)

MARK VI. 47–66.

47 And when even was come, the ship was in the midst of the sea, and he alone on the land.

48 And he saw them toiling in rowing; for the wind was contrary unto them: and about the fourth watch of the night he cometh unto them, walking upon the sea, and would have passed by them.

49 But when they saw him walking upon the sea, they supposed it had been a spirit, and cried out:

50 For they all saw him, and were troubled. And immediately he talked with them, and saith unto them, Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid.

51 And he went up unto them into the ship; and the wind ceased: and they were sore amazed in themselves beyond measure, and wondered.

52 For they considered not *the miracle* of the loaves: for their heart was hardened.

53 And when they had passed over, they came into the land of Gennesaret, and drew to the shore.

54 And when they were come out of the ship, straightway they knew him.

55 And ran through that whole region round about, and began to carry about in beds those that were sick, where they heard he was.

56 And whithersoever he entered, into villages, or cities, or country, they laid the sick in the streets, and besought him that they might touch if it were but the border of his garment: and as many as touched him were made whole.

THE event first recorded in these verses, is a beautiful emblem of the position of all believers, between the first and second advents of Jesus Christ. Like the disciples, we are now tossed to and fro by storms, and do not enjoy the visible presence of our Lord. Like the disciples, we shall see our Lord face to face again, though it may be a time of great extremity when He returns. Like the disciples, we shall see all things changed for the better when our Master comes to us. We shall no longer be buffeted by storms. There will be a great calm.

There is nothing fanciful in such an application of the passage. We need not doubt that there is a deep meaning in every step of His life, who was “God manifest in the flesh.” For the present, however, let us confine ourselves to the plain, practical lessons which these verses contain.

Let us notice, in the first place, how *our Lord sees the troubles of His believing people, and in due time will help them*. We read that when “the ship was in the midst of the sea, and He alone on the land,” He “saw His disciples toiling in rowing,”—came to them walking on the sea,—cheered them with the gracious words, “It is I, be not afraid,”—and changed the storm into a calm.

There are thoughts of comfort here for all true believers. Wherever they may be, or whatsoever their circumstances, the Lord Jesus sees them. Alone, or in company,—in sickness or in health, by sea or by land,—in perils in the city,—in perils in the wilderness,—the same eye which saw the disciples tossed on the lake, is ever looking at us. We are never beyond the reach of His care. Our way is never hid from Him. He knows the path that we take, and is still able to help. He may not come to our aid at the time we like best, but He will never allow us utterly to fail.

He that walked upon the water never changes. He will always come at the right time to uphold His people. Though He tarry, let us wait patiently. Jesus sees us, and will not forsake us.

Let us notice, in the second place, *the fears of the disciples, when they first saw our Lord walking upon the sea*. We are told that “they supposed it had been a spirit, and cried out. For they all saw Him, and were afraid.”

What a faithful picture of human nature we have in these words! How many thousands in the present day, if they had seen what the disciples saw, would have behaved in the same manner! How few, if they were on board a ship, in a storm at midnight, and suddenly saw one walking on the water, and drawing near to the ship, —how few would preserve their composure, and be altogether free from fears! Let men laugh, if they please, at the superstitious fears of these unlearned disciples. Let them boast, if they like, of the march of intellect, and the spread of knowledge, in these latter times. There are few, we may confidently assert, who, placed in the same position as the apostles, would have shown more courage than they. The boldest sceptics have sometimes proved the greatest cowards when appearances have been seen at night, which they could not explain.

The truth is, there is an instinctive feeling in all men, which makes them shrink from anything which seems to belong to another world. There is a consciousness which many try in vain to conceal by affected carelessness, that there are beings unseen, as well as seen, and that the life which we now live in the flesh, is not the only life in which man has a portion. The common stories about ghosts and apparitions, are undoubtedly foolish and superstitious. They are almost always traceable to the fears and imaginations of weak-minded people. Yet the universal currency which such stories obtain, all over the world, is a fact that deserves notice. It is an indirect evidence of latent belief in unseen things, just as counterfeit coin is an evidence that there is true money. It forms a peculiar testimony which the infidel would find it hard to explain away. It proves that there is something within men, which testifies of a world beyond the grave, and that when men feel it, they are afraid.

The plain duty of the true Christian is, to live provided with an antidote against all fears of the great unseen world. That antidote is faith in an unseen Saviour, and constant communion with Him. Armed with that antidote, and seeing Him who is invisible, nothing need make us afraid. We travel on towards a world of spirits. We are surrounded even now by many dangers. But with Jesus for our Shepherd, we have no cause for alarm. With Him for our Shield, we are safe.

Let us notice, in the conclusion of the chapter, *what a bright example we have of our duty to one another*. We are told that when our Lord came into the land of Gennesaret, the people “ran through that whole region,” and brought to Him in beds “those that were sick.” We read that “whithersoever he entered, into villages, or cities, or country, they laid the sick in the streets, and besought him, that they might touch if it were but the border of his garment.”

Let us see here a pattern for ourselves. Let us go and do likewise. Let us strive to bring all around us who are in need of spiritual medicine, to Jesus the great Physician, that they may be healed. Souls are dying every day. Time is short. Opportunities are rapidly passing away. The night cometh when no man can work. Let us spare no pains in labouring to bring men and women to the knowledge of Jesus Christ, that they may be saved. It is a comfortable thought, that “as many as touch him will be made whole.”