

# EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE.

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## MATTHEW XIX. 1–15.

1 And it came to pass, *that* when Jesus had finished these sayings, he departed from Galilee, and came into the coasts of Judæa beyond Jordan;

2 And great multitudes followed him; and he healed them there.

3 The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?

4 And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made *them* at the beginning made them male and female,

5 And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?

6 Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

7 They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?

8 He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so.

9 And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except *it be* for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.

10 His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with *his* wife, it is not good to marry.

11 But he said unto them, All *men* cannot receive this saying, save *they* to whom it is given.

12 For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from *their* mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive *it*, let him receive *it*.

13 Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put *his* hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them.

14 But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.

15 And he laid *his* hands on them, and departed thence.

IN these verses we have the mind of Christ declared on two subjects of great moment. One is the relation of husband and wife: the other is the light in which we should regard little children, in the matter of their souls.

It is difficult to overrate the importance of these two subjects: the well-being of nations, and the happiness of society, are closely connected with right views upon them. Nations are nothing but a collection of families. The good order of families depends entirely on keeping up the highest standard of respect for the marriage tie, and on the right training of children. We ought to be thankful, that on both these points, the great Head of the Church pronounced judgment so clearly.

With respect to marriage, our Lord teaches that *the union of husband and wife ought never to be broken off, except for the greatest of all causes, namely, actual unfaithfulness.*

In the days when our Lord was upon earth divorces were permitted among the Jews for the most trifling and frivolous causes. The practice, though tolerated by Moses, to prevent worse evils,—such as cruelty, or murder, had gradually become an enormous abuse, and no doubt led to

much immorality. (Malachi ii. 14-16.) The remark made by our Lord's disciples shows the deplorably low state of public feeling on the subject. They said, "If the case of the man be so, it is not good to marry." They meant, of course, "if a man may not put away his wife for a slight cause at any time, he had better not marry at all." Such language from the mouths of apostles sounds strange indeed!

Our Lord brings forward a widely different standard for the guidance of His disciples. He first founds His judgment on the original institution of marriage. He quotes the words used in the beginning of Genesis, where the creation of man and the union of Adam and Eve are described, as a proof that no relation should be so highly regarded as that of husband and wife. The relation of parent and child may seem very close, but there is one closer still: "A man shall leave father and mother, and cleave to his wife."—He then backs up the quotation by His own solemn words, "What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."—And finally He brings in the grave charge of breaking the seventh commandment, against marriage contracted after a divorce for light and frivolous causes: "Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery."

It is clear, from the whole tenor of the passage, that the relation of marriage ought to be highly revered and honoured among Christians. It is a relation which was instituted in paradise, in the time of man's innocency, and is a chosen figure of the mystical union between Christ and His Church. It is a relation which nothing but death ought to terminate. It is a relation which is sure to have the greatest influence on those whom it brings together, for happiness or for misery, for good or for evil. Such a relation ought never to be taken in hand unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly, but soberly, discreetly, and with due consideration. It is only too true, that inconsiderate marriages are one of the most fertile causes of unhappiness, and too often, it may be feared, of sin.

With respect to little children, we find our Lord instructing us in these verses, *both by word and deed, both by precept and example*. "Little children were brought to Him, that He should put his hands on them and pray." They were evidently tender infants, too young to receive instruction, but not too young to receive benefit by prayer. The disciples seem to have thought them beneath their Master's notice, and rebuked those that brought them. But this drew forth a solemn declaration from the great Head of the Church: "Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto Me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

There is something deeply interesting both in the language and action of our Lord on this occasion. We know the weakness and feebleness, both in mind and body of a little infant. Of all creatures born into the world none is so helpless and dependent. We know who it was who here took such notice of infants, and found time, in His busy ministry among grown-up men and women, to “put His hands on them and pray.” It was the eternal Son of God, the great High Priest, the King of kings, by whom all things consist, “the brightness of the Father’s glory, and the express image of His person.” (Heb. i. 3.) What an instructive picture the whole transaction places before our eyes! No wonder that the great majority of the Church of Christ have always seen in this passage a strong though indirect argument in favour of infant baptism.

Let us learn, from these verses, that the Lord Jesus cares tenderly for the souls of little children. It is probable that Satan specially hates them. It is certain that Jesus specially loves them. Young as they are, they are not beneath His thoughts and attention. That mighty heart of His has room for the babe in its cradle, as well as for the king on his throne. He regards each infant as possessing within its little body an undying principle, that will outlive the pyramids of Egypt, and see sun and moon quenched at the last day. With such a passage as this before us we may surely hope well about the salvation of all who die in infancy. “Of such is the kingdom of heaven.”

Finally, let us draw from these verses encouragement to attempt great things in the religious instruction of children. Let us begin from their very earliest years to deal with them as having souls to be lost or saved, and let us strive to bring them to Christ. Let us make them acquainted with the Bible, as soon as they can understand anything. Let us pray with them, and pray for them, and teach them to pray for themselves. We may rest assured that Jesus looks with pleasure on such endeavours, and is ready to bless them. We may rest assured that such endeavours are not in vain. The seed sown in infancy, is often found after many days. Happy is that Church whose infant members are cared for as much as the oldest communicants! The blessing of Him that was crucified will surely be on that Church! He “put His hands” on little children: He prayed for them.

MATTHEW XIX. 16–22.

16 And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?

17 And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? *there is* none good but one, *that is*, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.

18 He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness,

19 Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

20 The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?

21 Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go *and* sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come *and* follow me.

22 But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.

THESE verses detail a conversation between our Lord Jesus Christ and a young man, who came to Him to inquire about the way to eternal life. Like every conversation recorded in the Gospels, between our Lord and an individual, it deserves special attention. Salvation is an individual business. Everyone who wishes to be saved, must have private personal dealings with Christ about his own soul.

We see, for one thing, from the case of this young man, *that a person may have desires after salvation, and yet not be saved*. Here is one who in a day of abounding unbelief comes of his own accord to Christ. He comes not to have a sickness healed; he comes not to plead about a child: he comes about his own soul. He opens the conference with the frank question, “Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?” Surely we might have thought, “This is a promising case: this is no prejudiced ruler or Pharisee: this is a hopeful inquirer.” Yet by and by this very young man “goes away sorrowful;”—and we never read a word to show that he was converted!

We must never forget that good feelings alone in religion are not the grace of God. We may know the truth intellectually. We may often feel pricked in conscience. We may have religious affections awakened within us, have many anxieties about our souls, and shed many tears, but all this is not conversion. It is not the genuine saving work of the Holy Ghost.

Unhappily this is not all that must be said on this point. Not only are good feelings alone not grace, but they are even positively dangerous, if we content ourselves with them, and do not *act* as well as *feel*. It is a profound remark of that mighty master on moral questions, Bishop Butler,—that passive impressions, often repeated, gradually lose all their power; actions, often repeated, produce a habit in man’s mind; feelings often indulged in,

without leading to corresponding actions, will finally exercise no influence at all.

Let us apply this lesson to our own state. Perhaps we know what it is to feel religious fears, wishes, and desires. Let us beware that we do not rest in them. Let us never be satisfied till we have the witness of the Spirit in our hearts, that we are actually born again and new creatures. Let us never rest till we know that we have really repented, and laid hold on the hope set before us in the Gospel. It is good to feel, but it is far better to be converted.

We see, for another thing, from this young man's case, *that an unconverted person is often profoundly ignorant on spiritual subjects*. Our Lord refers this inquirer to the eternal standard of right and wrong, the moral law. Seeing that he speaks so boldly about "doing," He tries him by a command well calculated to draw out the real state of his heart: "If thou wilt enter into life keep the commandments." He even repeats to him the second table of the law; and at once the young man confidently replies, "All these have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?" So utterly ignorant is he of the spirituality of God's statutes, that he never doubts that he has perfectly fulfilled them. He seems thoroughly unaware that the commandments apply to the thoughts and words, as well as to the deeds, and that if God were to enter into judgment with him, he could "not answers Him one of a thousand!" (Job. ix. 3.) How dark must his mind have been as to the nature of God's law! How low must his ideas have been as to the holiness which God requires!

It is a melancholy fact that ignorance like that of this young man is only too common in the Church of Christ. There are thousands of baptized people who know no more of the leading doctrines of Christianity than the veriest heathen; tens of thousands fill churches and chapels weekly, who are utterly in the dark as to the full extent of man's sinfulness. They cling obstinately to the old notion, that in some sort or other their own doings can save them; and when ministers visit them on their death-beds, they prove as blind as if they had never heard truth at all. So true is it, that the "natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him." (1 Cor. ii. 14.)

We see, in the last place, from this young man's case, *that one idol cherished in the heart may ruin a soul for ever*. Our Lord, who knew what was in man, at last shows His inquirer his besetting sin. The same searching voice which said to the Samaritan woman, "Go, call thy husband" (John iv. 16), says to the young man, "Go sell that thou hast, and give to the poor." At once the weak point in his character is detected. It turns out that, with all his

wishes and desires after eternal life, there was one thing he loved better than his soul, and that was his money. He cannot stand the test. He is weighed in the balance and found wanting. And the history ends with the melancholy words, "He went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions."

We have in this history one more proof of the truth, "The love of money is the root of all evil." (1 Tim. vi. 10.) We must place this young man in our memories by the side of Judas, Ananias and Sapphira, and learn to beware of covetousness. Alas it is a rock on which thousands are continually making shipwreck. There is hardly a minister of the Gospel who could not point to many in his congregation, who, humanly speaking, are "not far from the kingdom of God:" but they never seem to make progress. They wish, they feel, they mean, they hope, but there they stick fast! And why? Because they are fond of money.

Let us prove our own selves, as we leave the passage. Let us see how it touches our own souls. Are we honest and sincere in our professed desire to be true Christians? Have we cast away all our idols? Is there no secret sin that we are silently clinging to, and refusing to give up? Is there no thing or person that we are privately loving more than Christ and our souls? These are questions that ought to be answered. The true explanation of the unsatisfactory state of many hearers of the Gospel is spiritual idolatry. We need not wonder that St. John says, "Keep yourselves from idols." (1 John v. 21.)

MATTHEW XIX. 23–30.

23 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.

24 And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

25 When his disciples heard *it*, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved?

26 But Jesus beheld *them*, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.

27 Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?

28 And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

29 And everyone that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundred-fold, and shall inherit everlasting life.

30 But many *that are* first shall be last; and the last *shall be* first.

THE first thing that we learn in these verses is *the immense danger which riches bring on the souls of those who possess them*. The Lord Jesus declares, that “a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.” He goes even further. He uses a proverbial saying to strengthen His assertion: “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.”

Few of our Lord's sayings sound more startling than this; few run more counter to the opinions and prejudices of mankind; few are so little believed: yet this saying is true, and worthy of all acceptation. Riches, which all desire to obtain,—riches, for which men labour and toil, and become grey before their time,—riches are the most perilous possession. They often inflict great injury on the soul. They lead men into many temptations. They engross men's thoughts and affections; they bind heavy burdens on the heart, and make the way to heaven even more difficult than it naturally is.

Let us beware of the love of money. It is possible to use it well, and do good with it, but for one who makes a right use of money, there are thousands who make a wrong use of it, and do harm both to themselves and others. Let the worldly man, if he will, make an idol of money, and count him happiest who has most of it; but let the Christian, who professes to have “treasure in heaven,” set his face, like a flint, against the spirit of the world in this matter. Let him not worship gold. He is not the best man in God's eyes who has most money, but he who has most grace.

Let us pray daily for rich men's souls. They are not to be envied: they are deeply to be pitied. They carry heavy weights in the Christian course. They are of all men the least likely "so to run as to obtain." (1 Cor. ix. 24.) Their prosperity in this world is often their destruction in the world to come. Well may the Litany of the Church of England contain the words, "In all time of our wealth, good Lord, deliver us."

The second thing that we learn in this passage is *the almighty power of God's grace in the soul*. The disciples were amazed, when they heard our Lord's language about rich men. It was language so entirely contrary to all their notions about the advantages of wealth, that they cried out with surprise, "Who then can be saved?" They drew from our Lord a gracious answer: "With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible."

The Holy Ghost can incline even the richest of men to seek treasure in heaven. He can dispose even kings to cast their crowns at the feet of Jesus, and to count all things but loss for the sake of the kingdom of God. Proof upon proof of this is given to us in the Bible. Abraham was very rich, yet he was the father of the faithful. Moses might have been a prince or king in Egypt, but he forsook all his brilliant prospects for the sake of Him who is invisible. Job was the wealthiest man in the East, yet he was a chosen servant of God. David, Jehoshaphat, Josiah, Hezekiah, were all wealthy monarchs, but they loved God's favour more than their earthly greatness. They all show us that "nothing is too hard for the Lord," and that faith can grow even in the most unlikely soil.

Let us hold fast this doctrine, and never let it go. No man's place or circumstances shut him out from the kingdom of God. Let us never despair of any one's salvation. No doubt rich people require special grace, and are exposed to special temptations. But the Lord God of Abraham, and Moses, and Job, and David is not changed. He who saved them in spite of their riches, can save others also. When He works, who shall let it? (Isaiah xliii. 13.)

The last thing that we learn in these verses is *the immense encouragement the Gospel offers to those who give up everything for Christ's sake*. We are told that Peter asked our Lord what he and the other apostles, who had forsaken their little all for His sake, should receive in return. He obtained a most gracious reply. A full recompense shall he made to all who make sacrifices for Christ's sake. They "shall receive an hundred fold, and shall inherit everlasting life."

There is something very cheering in this promise. Few in the present day, excepting converts among the heathen, are ever required to forsake homes,

relatives, and lands, on account of their religion; yet there are few true Christians who have not much to go through, in one way or another, if they are really faithful to their Lord. The offence of the cross is not yet ceased: laughter, ridicule, mockery, and family persecution, are often the portion of an English believer. The favour of the world is often forfeited,—places and situations are often perilled, by a conscientious adherence to the demands of the Gospel of Christ. All who are exposed to trials of this kind may take comfort in the promise of these verses. Jesus foresaw their need, and intended these words to be their consolation.

We may rest assured that no man shall ever be a real loser by following Christ. The believer may seem to suffer loss for a time, when he first begins the life of a decided Christian; he may be much cast down by the afflictions that are brought upon him on account of his religion: but let him rest assured that he will never find himself a loser in the long run. Christ can raise up friends for us who shall more than compensate for those we lose. Christ can open hearts and homes to us far more warm and hospitable than those that are closed against us. Above all, Christ can give us peace of conscience, inward joy, bright hopes, and happy feelings, which shall far outweigh every pleasant earthly thing that we have cast away for His sake. He has pledged His royal word that it shall be so. None ever found that word to fail. Let us trust it, and not be afraid.