EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS

ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE.

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MATTHEW XXVIII. 1–10.

1 In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first *day* of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre.

2 And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it.

3 His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow:

4 And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead *men.*

5 And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified.

6 He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.

7 And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead: and behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you.

8 And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to bring his disciples word.

9 And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him.

10 Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.

THEprincipal subject of these verses is the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. It is one of those truths which lie at the very foundation of Christianity, and has therefore received special attention in the four Gospels. All four Evangelists describe minutely how our Lord was crucified: all four relate, with no less clearness, that He rose again.

We need not wonder that so much importance is attached to our Lord’s resurrection: it is the seal and headstone of the great work of redemption, which He came to do. It is the crowning proof that He has paid the debt which He undertook to pay on our behalf, won the battle which He fought to deliver us from hell, and is accepted as our Surety and our Substitute by our Father in heaven. Had He never come forth from the prison of the grave, how could we ever have been sure that our ransom had been fully paid? (1 Cor. xv. 17.) Had He never risen from His conflict with the last enemy, how could we have felt confident that He has overcome death, and him that had the power of death, that is the devil? (Heb. ii. 14.) But thanks be unto God, we are not left in doubt. The Lord Jesus really “rose again for our justification.” True Christians are “begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead;” they may boldly say with Paul, “Who is he that condemneth: it is Christ that died, yea rather that is risen again.” (Rom. viii. 34; Rom. iv. 25; 1 Peter i. 3.)

We have reason to be very thankful that this wonderful truth of our religion is so clearly and fully proved. It is a striking circumstance, that of all the facts of our Lord’s earthly ministry, none are so incontrovertibly established as the fact that He rose again. The wisdom of God, who knows the unbelief of human nature, has provided a great cloud of witnesses on the subject. Never was there a fact which the friends of God were so slow to believe, as the resurrection of Christ. Never was there a fact which the enemies of God were so anxious to disprove: and yet, in spite of the unbelief of friends, and the enmity of foes, the fact was thoroughly established. Its evidences will always appear to a fair and impartial mind unanswerable. It would be impossible to prove anything in the world, if we refuse to believe that Jesus rose again.

Let us notice in these verses, *the glory and majesty with which Christ rose from the dead.* We are told that “there was a great earthquake.” We are told that “the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door of the sepulchre, and sat upon it.” We need not suppose that our blessed Lord needed the help of any angel, when He came forth from the grave. We need not for a moment doubt that He rose again by His own power: but it pleased God that His resurrection should be accompanied and followed by signs and wonders. It seemed good that the earth should shake, and a glorious angel appear, when the Son of God arose from the dead as a conqueror.

Let us not fail to see in the manner of our Lord’s resurrection, a type and pledge of the resurrection of His believing people. The grave could not hold Him beyond the appointed time, and it shall not be able to hold them; a glorious angel was a witness of His rising, and glorious angels shall be the messengers who shall gather believers when they rise again. He rose with a renewed body, and yet a body, real, true, and material, and so also shall His people have a glorious body, and be like their Head. “When we see Him we shall be like Him.” (1 John iii. 2.)

Let us take comfort in this thought. Trial, sorrow, and persecution are often the portion of God’s people; sickness, weakness, and pain often hurt and wear their poor earthly tabernacle: but their good time is yet to come. Let them wait patiently, and they shall have a glorious resurrection. When we die, and where we are buried, and what kind of a funeral we have, matters little: the great question to be asked is this, “How shall we rise again?”

Let us notice, in the next place, *the terror which Christ’s enemies felt at the period of His resurrection*. We are told that, at the sight of the angel, “the keepers did shake, and became as dead men.” Those hardy Roman soldiers, though not unused to dreadful sights, saw a sight which made them quail. Their courage melted at once at the appearance of one angel of God.

Let us again see in this fact, a type and emblem of things yet to come. What will the ungodly and the wicked do at the last day, when the trumpet shall sound, and Christ shall come in glory to judge the world? What will they do, when they see *all* the dead, both small and great coming forth from their graves, and *all* the angels of God assembled round the great white throne? What fears and terrors will possess their souls, when they find they can no longer avoid God’s presence, and must at length meet Him face to face? Oh, that men were wise, and would consider their latter end! Oh, that they would remember that there is a resurrection and a judgment, and that there is such a thing as “the wrath of the Lamb!” (Rev. vi. 16.)

Let us notice, in the next place, *the words of comfort which the angel addressed to the friends of Christ.* We read that he said, “Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified.”

These words were spoken with a deep meaning. They were meant to cheer the hearts of believers in every age, in the prospect of the resurrection. They were intended to remind us, that true Christians have no cause for alarm in the last day, whatever may come on the world. The Lord shall appear in the clouds of heaven and the earth be burned up. The graves shall give up the dead that are in them, and the sea shall give up the dead that are in it. The judgment shall be set, and the books shall be opened. The angels shall sift the wheat from the chaff, and divide between the good fish and the bad: but in all this there is nothing that need make believers afraid. Clothed in the righteousness of Christ, they shall be found without spot and blameless; safe in the one true ark, they shall not be hurt when the flood of God’s wrath breaks on the earth. Then shall the words of the Lord receive their complete fulfilment: “When these things begin to come to pass, lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh.” Then shall the wicked and unbelieving see how true was that word: “Blessed are the people whose God is the Lord.” (Psalm xxxiii. 12.)

Let us notice, finally, *the gracious message which the Lord sent to the disciples after His resurrection.* He appeared in person to the women who had come to do honour to His body. Last at the cross and first at the tomb, they were the first privileged to see Him after He rose; and to them He gives commission to carry tidings to His disciples. His first thought is for His little scattered flock: “Go, tell my brethren.”

There is something deeply touching in those simple words, “My brethren:” they deserve a thousand thoughts. Weak, frail, erring as the disciples were, Jesus still calls them His “brethren.” He comforts them, as Joseph did his brethren who had sold him, saying, “I am your brother Joseph.” Much as they had come short of their profession, sadly as they had yielded to the fear of man, they are still His “brethren.” Glorious as He was in Himself,—a conqueror over death and hell, and the grave, the Son of God is still “meek and lowly of heart.” He calls His disciples “brethren.”

Let us turn from the passage with comfortable thoughts, if we know anything of true religion. Let us see in these words of Christ an encouragement to trust and not be afraid. Our Saviour is one who never forgets His people; He pities their infirmities. He does not despise them. He knows their weakness, and yet does not cast them away. Our great High Priest is also our elder brother.

MATTHEW XXVIII. 11–20.

11 Now when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done.

12 And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers.

13 Saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him *away* while we slept.

14 And if this come to the governor’s ears, we will persuade him, and secure you.

15 So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.

16 Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them.

17 And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted.

18 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen.

THESEverses form the conclusion of the Gospel of St. Matthew. They begin by showing us what absurdities blind prejudice will believe, rather than believe the truth. They go on to show us what weakness there is in the hearts of some disciples, and how slow they are to believe. They finish by telling us some of the last words spoken by our Lord upon earth,—words so remarkable that they demand and deserve all our attention.

Let us observe, in the first place, *the honour which God has put on our Lord Jesus Christ.* Our Lord says, “All power is given unto Me in heaven and earth.”

This is a truth which is declared by St. Paul to the Philippians: “God hath highly exalted Him and given Him a name, which is above every name.” (Phil. ii. 9.) It is a truth which in nowise takes away from the true notion of Christ’s divinity, as some have ignorantly supposed. It is simply a declaration, that, in the counsels of the eternal Trinity, Jesus, as Son of man, is appointed heir of all things, that He is the Mediator between God and man, that the salvation of all who are saved is laid upon Him, and that He is the great fountain of mercy, grace, life, and peace. It was for this “joy set before Him that He endured the cross.” (Heb. xii. 2.)

Let us embrace this truth reverently, and cling to it firmly. Christ is He who has the keys of death and hell. Christ is the anointed Priest, who alone can absolve sinners. Christ is the Fountain of living waters, in whom alone we can be cleansed. Christ is the Prince and Saviour, who alone can give repentance and remission of sins. In Him all fulness dwells. He is the way, the door, the light, the life, the Shepherd, the Altar of Refuge. “He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.” (1 John v. 12.) May we all strive to understand this! No doubt men may easily think too little of God the Father, and God the Spirit; but no man ever thought too much of Christ.

Let us observe, in the second place, *the duty which Jesus lays on His disciples.* He bids them “go and teach all nations.” They were not to confine their knowledge to themselves, but communicate it to others. They were not to suppose that salvation was revealed only to the Jews, but to make it known to all the world. They were to strive to make disciples of all nations, and to tell the whole earth that Christ had died for sinners.

Let us never forget that this solemn injunction is still in full force. It is still the bounden duty of every disciple of Christ to do all he can in person, and by prayer, to make others acquainted with Jesus. Where is our faith, if we neglect this duty? Where is our charity? It may well be questioned whether a man knows the value of the Gospel himself, if he does not desire to make it known to all the world.

Let us observe, in the third place, *the public profession which Jesus requires of those who believe His Gospel.* He tells His apostles to “baptize” those whom they received as disciples.

It is very difficult to conceive, when we read this last command of our Lord’s, how men can avoid the conclusion that baptism is necessary, when it may be had. It seems impossible to explain the word that we have here of any but an outward ordinance, to be administered to all who join His Church.—That outward baptism is not absolutely necessary to salvation, the case of the penitent thief plainly shows. He went to paradise unbaptized. That outward baptism alone often confers no benefit, the case of Simon Magus plainly shows: although baptized he remained “in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity.” (Acts iii. 23.) But that baptism is a matter of entire indifference, and need not be used at all, is an assertion which seems at variance with our Lord’s words in this place.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The plain practical lesson of the words is the necessity of a public confession of faith in Christ. It is not enough to be a secret disciple. We must not be ashamed to let men see whose we are, and whom we serve. We must not behave as if we did not like to be thought Christians, but take up our cross, and confess our Master before the world. His words are very solemn: “Whosoever shall be ashamed of Me, . . . of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when He cometh in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.” (Mark viii. 38.)

Let us observe, in the fourth place, the *obedience which Jesus requires of all who profess themselves His disciples*. He bids the Apostles teach them to observe all things, whatsoever He has commanded them.

This is a searching expression. It shows the uselessness of a mere name and form of Christianity. It shows that they only are to be counted true Christians who live in a practical obedience to His word, and strive to do the things that He has commanded. The water of baptism, and the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper alone will save no man’s soul. It profits nothing that we go to a place of worship and hear Christ’s ministers, and approve of the Gospel, if our religion goes no further than this.—What are our lives? What is our daily conduct at home and abroad? Is the Sermon on the Mount our rule and standard? Do we strive to copy Christ’s example? Do we seek to do the things that He commanded?—These are questions that must be answered in the affirmative, if we would prove ourselves born again, and children of God. Obedience is the only proof of reality. “Faith without works is dead,” being alone. (James ii. 17, 20, 26.) “Ye are my friends,” says Jesus, “if ye do whatsoever I command you.” (John xv. 14.)

Let us observe, in the fifth place, the *solemn mention of the blessed Trinity which our Lord makes in these verses.* He bids the Apostles to baptize “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”

This is one of those great plain texts which directly teach the mighty doctrine of the Trinity. It speaks of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, as Three distinct persons, and speaks of all Three as co-equal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Ghost. And yet these Three are One.

This truth is a great mystery. Let it be enough to receive and believe it, and let us ever abstain from all attempts at explanation. It is childish folly to refuse assent to things that we do not understand. We are poor crawling worms of a day, and know little at our best about God and eternity. Suffice it for us to receive the doctrine of the Trinity in unity, with humility and reverence, and to ask no vain questions. Let us believe that no sinful soul can be saved without the work of all three Persons in the blessed Trinity, and let us rejoice that Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, who co-operated to make man, do also co-operate to save him. Here let us pause: we may receive practically what we cannot explain theoretically.

Finally, let us observe in these verses, *the gracious promise with which Jesus closes His words.* He says to His disciples, “I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.”

It is impossible to conceive words more comforting, strengthening, cheering, and sanctifying than these. Though left alone, like orphan children in a cold, unkind world, the disciples were not to think they were deserted: their Master would be ever “with them.” Though commissioned to do a work as hard as that of Moses when sent to Pharaoh, they were not to be discouraged. Their Master would certainly be “with them.” No words could be more suited to the position of those to whom they were first spoken. No words could be imagined more consolatory to believers in every age of the world.

Let all true Christians lay hold on these words and keep them in mind. Christ is “with us” always. Christ is “with us” wherever we go. He came to be “Emmanuel, God with us,” when He first came into the world. He declares that He is ever Emmanuel, “with us,” when He comes to the end of His earthly ministry and is about to leave the world. He is with us daily to pardon and forgive, with us daily to sanctify and strengthen, with us daily to defend and keep, with us daily to lead and to guide, with us in sorrow and with us in joy, with us in sickness and with us in health, with us in life and with us in death, with us in time and with us in eternity.

What stronger consolation could believers desire than this? Whatever happens, they at least are never completely friendless and alone. Christ is ever with them. They may look into the grave, and say with David, “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me.” They may look forward beyond the grave, and say with Paul, “We shall ever be with the Lord.” (Psalm xxiii. 4; 1 Thess. iv. 17.) He has said it, and He will stand to it: “I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” “I will never leave you and never forsake you.”—We could ask nothing more. Let us go on believing and not be afraid. It is everything to be a real Christian. None have such a King, such a Priest, such a constant Companion, and such an unfailing Friend, as the true servants of Christ.

1. I purposely abstain from saying anything on the subject of infant baptism.

There is nothing in this text which can be fairly used either way in settling this much-vexed controversy.

It is certain that the missionaries of the Church of England carry out the meaning of this text as fully and thoroughly as the missionaries of Baptist Churches.

The point settled by the text is not so much what ought to be done with the *children* of Christians, as what ought to be done with heathens when converted. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)