EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS

ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE.

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ST. MATTHEW.

LONDON:
WILLIAM HUNT AND COMPANY, 23, HOLLES STREET,
CAVENDISH SQUARE.
IPSWICH: WILLIAM HUNT, TAVERN STREET.

[this edition published after 1961AD and before 1880AD.]

first published 1856AD

MATTHEW IV. 1–11.

1 Then was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.

2 And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungered.

3 And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.

4 But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

5 Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple.

6 And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in *their* hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.

7 Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

8 Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them:

9 And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.

10 Then saith Jesus unto him. Get thee hence Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

11 Then the devil leaveth him, and behold, angels came and ministered unto him.

THE first event in our Lord’s ministry which St. Matthew records after His baptism, is His temptation. This is a deep and mysterious subject: there is much in the history of it which we cannot explain; but there lie on the face of the history plain practical lessons, to which we shall do well to take heed.

Let us learn, in the first place, *what a real and mighty enemy we have in the devil.* He is not afraid to assault even the Lord Jesus Himself. Three times over he attacks God’s own Son: our Saviour was “tempted of the devil.”

It was the devil who brought sin into the world at the beginning. This is he who vexed Job, deceived David, and gave Peter a heavy fall: this is he whom the Bible calls a “murderer,” a “liar,” and a “roaring lion” (John viii. 44; 1 Pet v. 8); this is he whose enmity to our souls never slumbers and never sleeps; this is he who for nearly 6000 years has been working at one work, to ruin men and women, and to draw them to hell; this is he whose cunning and subtlety pass man’s understanding, and who often appears “an angel of light.” (1 Cor. xi. 14.)

Let us watch and pray daily against his devices. There is no enemy worse than an enemy who is never seen and never dies, who is near us wherever we live, and goes with us wherever we go. Not least let us beware of that habit of foolish talking and jesting about the devil, which is so unhappily common. Let us remember that if we would be saved we must not only crucify the flesh and overcome the world, but also “resist the devil.”

Let us learn, in the next place, *that we must not count temptation a strange thing.* “The disciple is not greater than his master, nor the servant than his lord.” If Satan came to Christ he will also come to Christians.

It would be well for believers if they would remember this. They are too apt to forget it. They often find evil thoughts arising within their minds, which they can truly say they hate; doubts, questions, and sinful imaginings are suggested to them, against which their whole inward man revolts: but let not these things destroy their peace, and rob them of their comforts. Let them remember there is a devil, and not be surprised to find him near them. To be tempted is in itself no sin: it is the yielding to temptation, and the giving it a place in our hearts, which we must fear.

Let us learn, in the next place, *that the chief weapon we ought to use in resisting Satan, is the Bible.* Three times the great enemy offered temptations to our Lord. Three times his offer was refused, with a text of Scripture as the reason: “It is written.”

Here is one among many reasons why we ought to be diligent readers of our Bibles. The Word is the “sword of the Spirit:” we shall never fight a good fight if we do not use it as our principal weapon.—The Word is the “lamp” for our feet: we shall never keep the king’s highway to heaven if we do not journey by its light. (Eph. vi. 17: Psa. cxix. 105.)—It may well be feared that there is not enough Bible-reading amongst us. It is not sufficient to have the Book We must actually read it, and pray over it ourselves. It will do us no good if it only lies still in our houses. We must be actually familiar with its contents, and have its texts stored in our memories and minds. Knowledge of the Bible never comes by intuition; it can only be got by hard, regular, daily, attentive, wakeful reading. Do we grudge the time and trouble this will cost us? If we do we are not yet fit for the kingdom of God.

Let us learn, in the last place, *what a sympathizing Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ is.* “In that He himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted.” (Heb. ii. 18.)

The sympathy of Jesus is a truth which ought to be peculiarly dear to believers. They will find in it a mine of strong consolation. They should never forget that they have a mighty Friend in heaven, who feels for them in all their temptations, and can enter into all their spiritual anxieties. Are they ever tempted by Satan to distrust God’s care and goodness? So was Jesus.—Are they ever tempted to presume on God’s mercy, and to run into danger without warrant? So also was Jesus.—Are they ever tempted to commit some one private sin for the sake of some great seeming advantage? So also was Jesus.—Are they ever tempted to listen to some misapplication of Scripture, as an excuse for doing wrong? So also was Jesus.—He is just the Saviour that a tempted people require. Let them flee to Him for help, and spread before Him all their troubles; they will find His ear ever ready to hear, and His heart ever ready to feel. He can understand their sorrows.

May we all know the value of a sympathizing Saviour by experience! There is nothing to be compared to it in this cold and deceitful world. Those who seek their happiness in this life only, and despise the religion of the Bible, have no idea what true comfort they are missing.

MATTHEW IV. 12–25.

12 Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee;

13 And leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nepthalim:

14 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying,

15 The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, *by* the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles;

16 The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up.

17 From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

18 And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers.

19 And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.

20 And they straightway left *their* nets, and followed him.

21 And going on from thence, he saw two other brethren, James *the son* of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them.

22 And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him.

23 And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the Gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.

24 And his fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatick, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them.

25 And there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and *from* Decapolis, and *from* Jerusalem, and *from* Judæa, and *from* beyond Jordan.

WE have in these verses the beginning of our Lord’s ministry among men. He enters on His labours among a dark and ignorant people. He chooses men to be His companions and disciples. He confirms His ministry by miracles, which rouse the attention of “all Syria,” and draw multitudes to hear Him.

Let us notice *the way in which our Lord commenced His mighty work.* “He began to preach.”

There is no office so honourable as that of the preacher: there is no work so important to the souls of men. It is an office which the Son of God was not ashamed to take up. It is an office to which He appointed His twelve apostles. It is an office to which St. Paul in his old age specially directs Timothy’s attention. He charges him with almost his last breath to “preach the word.” (2 Tim. iv. 2.) It is the principal means which God has always been pleased to use for the conversion and edification of souls. The brightest days of the Church have been those when preaching has been honoured. The darkest days of the Church have been those when it has been lightly esteemed. Let us honour the sacraments and public prayers of the Church, and reverently use them; but let us beware that we do not place them above preaching.

Let us notice the *first doctrine which the Lord Jesus proclaimed to the world.* He “began to say, Repent.”

The necessity of repentance is one of the great foundation stones which lie at the very bottom of Christianity. It is a truth which needs to be pressed on all mankind without exception. High or low, rich or poor, all have sinned, and are guilty before God; and all must repent and be converted, if they would be saved.—It is a truth which does not receive the attention it deserves. True repentance is no light matter. It is a thorough change of heart about sin, a change showing itself in godly sorrow for sin,—in heart-felt confession of sin,—in a complete breaking off from sinful habits, and an abiding hatred of all sin. Such repentance is the inseparable companion of saving faith in Christ.—Let us prize the doctrine highly. No Christian teaching can be called sound, which does not constantly bring forward “repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Acts xx. 21.)

Let us notice *the class of men whom the Lord Jesus chose to be His disciples.* They were of the poorest and humblest rank in life. Peter, and Andrew, and James, and John, were all “fishermen.”

The religion of our Lord Jesus Christ was not intended for the rich and learned alone. It was intended for all the world; and the majority of all the world will always be the poor. Poverty and ignorance of books, excluded thousands from the notice of the boastful philosophers of the heathen world. They exclude no one from the highest place in the service of Christ. Is a man humble? Does he feel his sins? Is he willing to hear Christ’s voice and follow Him? If this be so, he may be the poorest of the poor, but he shall be found as high as any in the kingdom of heaven. Intellect, and money, and rank, are worth nothing without grace.

The religion of Christ must have been from heaven, or it never could have prospered and overspread the earth as it has done. It is vain for infidels to attempt to answer this argument: it cannot be answered. A religion which did not flatter the rich, the great and the learned,—a religion which offered no license to the carnal inclinations of man’s heart,—a religion whose first teachers were poor fishermen, without wealth, rank, or power,—such a religion could never have turned the world upside down, if it had not been of God. Look at the Roman emperors and the heathen priests with their splendid temples on the one side! Look at a few unlearned working men with the Gospel on the other! Were there ever two parties so unequally matched? Yet the weak proved strong, and the strong proved weak. Heathenism fell, and Christianity took its place. Christianity must have been of God.

Let us notice, in the last place, *the general character of the miracles by which our Lord confirmed His mission.* Here we are told of them in the mass; hereafter we shall find many of them described particularly: and what is their character? They were miracles of mercy and kindness. Our Lord “went about doing good.”

These miracles are meant to teach us our Lord’s power. He that could heal sick people with a touch, and cast out devils with a word, is “able to save all them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him.” He is Almighty.

These miracles are meant to be types and emblems of our Lord’s skill as a spiritual physician. He, before whom no bodily disease proved incurable, is mighty to cure every ailment of our souls. There is no broken heart that He cannot heal; there is no wound of conscience that He cannot cure. Fallen, crushed, bruised, plague-stricken as we all are by sin, Jesus by His blood and Spirit can make us whole. Only let us apply to Him.

These miracles, not least, are intended to show us Christ’s heart. He is a most compassionate Saviour. He rejected no one who came to Him. He refused no one, however loathsome and diseased. He had an ear to hear all, and a hand to help all, and a heart to feel for all. There is no kindness like His. His compassions fail not.

May we all remember that the Lord Jesus is “the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.” (Heb. xiii. 8.) High in heaven at God’s right hand, He is not in the least altered. He is just as able to save, just as willing to receive, just as ready to help, as He was 1800 years ago. Should we have spread out our wants before Him then? Let us do the same now. He can “heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease.”