

“SEEKING THE LORD EARLY:”

A

Sermon for Children,

PREACHED IN HELMINGHAM CHURCH,

AUGUST 2, 1845.

BY THE

REV. JOHN CHARLES RYLE,

RECTOR OF HELMINGHAM, SUFFOLK.

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THIRD THOUSAND.

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The substance of this Sermon was addressed to 350 children, belonging to the Parishes of Helmingham, Otley, Framsdon, Pettaugh, Ashbocking, and Gosbeck, upon the occasion of a Feast, given to the Schools of these Parishes, in Helmingham Park.

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“I LOVE THEM THAT LOVE ME; AND THOSE THAT SEEK ME EARLY SHALL FIND ME.”—PROV. viii. 17.

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DEAR CHILDREN,

I am going to talk to you about Jesus Christ, and your souls.

We want to make this day a very happy day to you all; we should like to see you bright and cheerful and enjoying yourselves. But we know that people are never really happy unless their *souls* are happy; and we are sure that people's souls cannot be happy unless they love Jesus Christ; and that is the reason why we have asked you all to come to Church;—we want to tell you something about Jesus Christ and your souls.

Dear Children, I hope you will all attend, while I talk to you. I pray that the Spirit of God may come into your hearts and make you able to do so. Try to listen to me; try to understand what I say; try to remember and carry away something in your little minds. I wish to do you all a great deal of good. Do not forget I am preaching to you—not to the grown up people—but to you, only to you.

Now just think what a pleasant text we have got here; it is said,—“I love them that love me”; and those that seek me early shall “find me.”

These are sweet words indeed; and who, do you think, says them? They are said by the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Saviour of the world. He is called Wisdom in this chapter, but we know it means Him, for there are things said about Wisdom in this chapter which cannot be said truly about any one but Jesus Christ Himself.

Come now and let us see what Jesus Christ says;—listen, dear Children, for this is very important.

I. He tells us, “I love them that love me.” Now what can we make out of this?

First of all, do you not think it is very pleasant to hear that there are people whom Jesus Christ *loves*? You know we all like to be loved in this world: only think how disagreeable it would be for you and me if there was nobody alive who loved us. Suppose that no man or woman cared a bit for us,—suppose that every body neglected us, and left us alone; what should we do? We should be wretched and miserable and unhappy! I am sure we all like to be loved.

Well then, just consider what a blessed thing it must be to be loved by Jesus Christ, by the Son of God Himself.

You know that sometimes people love us in this world, and yet can do nothing for us. Your dear fathers and mothers love you, but perhaps they are poor, and cannot buy what you want; or, perhaps they are sick and very old, and can do nothing to help you.

But, dear Children, these are things that can never happen to Jesus Christ, and I will tell you why.

Jesus Christ *is very great*; He is King of kings, and Lord of lords; He is maker of all things; He is God Himself. He is almighty; He is able to do anything whatsoever that He likes.

Oh! what a thing it must be to be loved by Jesus Christ!

And again, Jesus Christ *is very rich*. He has got everything to give away which you can want, either for soul or body. He keeps the keys of heaven. He has got an endless store of blessings in his treasure house, far more than I could describe.

Oh! what a thing it must be to be loved by Jesus Christ!

And again, Jesus Christ *is very good*. He never refuses any one who asks Him favours in a proper way. He was never known to say No! to any person who made a prayer to him with a meek and humble heart.

Oh! what a thing it must be to be loved by Jesus Christ!

Dear Children, consider these things. Do you want a *great* friend—Do you want a *rich* friend—Do you want a *kind* friend? Is this the sort of friend you would like? Then be sure there is no friend in all the world like Jesus Christ. There is no love so well worth having as the love of Jesus Christ.

Blessed and happy are those whom Jesus Christ loves. I could not tell you a tenth part of all the great things he does for their souls.

He *pardons all their sins*. He blots out all their transgressions. He washes them in His own blood, and makes them whiter than snow; so that not a spot remains. Dear Children, I think that is just what you and I want. We have all sinned, many, many sins.

Besides, He *gives them power to become good*. He puts His Spirit in their hearts, and makes them love God's ways, and try to walk in them. Dear Children, that too is just the thing you and I want. We have very bad, wicked hearts, by nature—We never love God's ways of ourselves.

Besides this, *He takes care that none whom he loves shall be lost*. He keeps them as a shepherd keeps his sheep. He will not allow either wicked men or the devil to destroy their souls. Dear Children, that too is just what you and I want. We are all very weak foolish creatures; we should never be safe if left to ourselves.

And lastly, *He is getting ready a place in heaven for those whom He loves*. He has a glorious house for them there, far away from sin and sorrow

and trouble. Dear Children, that too is good news for you and me. Is it not pleasant to think He has made such preparation for us, so that whenever we leave this world we shall go to a place of peace and rest?

All these things the Lord Jesus Christ does for those whom He loves. Only look at them! What mighty things, what glorious things they are! He cleanses them from all their sins. He gives them power to be good. He takes care they are not lost. He gets ready a house for them in heaven.

Dear Children, this is love indeed; this is love worth having. Did I not tell you truly there is nothing in all the world to be compared to Christ's love, there is nothing like being loved by Jesus Christ.

II. But let us see next who are those that Jesus Christ loves. He tells us in our text. He says "I love those that love me."

Now how shall we know whether we love Jesus Christ or not? This is indeed an important question. Are there no marks or signs, perhaps you will say, by which those who love Him may be found out? Yes! dear children, I think there are, and what those marks and signs are I shall now try to show you.

Remember then for one thing, *those who love Jesus Christ believe whatever He says.*

The Lord says we are all sinners, lost, perishing sinners; full of wickedness and deceit; deserving of nothing but God's anger. Many people cannot quite believe this: they cannot bring themselves to think they are so bad; they dislike to be told of it. Not so those who love Jesus Christ, they believe it all; they are ready to say, it is true, true, quite true.

Again, the Lord tells us we must come to Him, and trust only in Him, if we would be saved. He says that nothing but His blood can wash away our sins, that it is only for His sake that any one can be forgiven. Many people will not believe this either. They cannot think their own goodness will not help to get them to heaven. But those who love Jesus Christ believe it all. They take the Lord at His word; they leave off trusting in their own goodness, and are ready to say "none but Christ, none but Christ is my hope."

Dear Children, no one can love Jesus Christ who does not believe what He says. Think what a sad thing it would be if you and I could not get our relations to believe us. Only fancy how hard and unkind it would seem if they were to say, "we do not depend at all on what you tell us, we cannot trust your word." I am sure we should suppose they no longer loved us. This, then, is one mark of those who love Jesus Christ, they never doubt what He tells them, they believe every word.

Remember for another thing, *those who love Jesus Christ try to please Him.* You know when you love people in this world, you try to please them. You try to do what they bid you, and to behave as they wish you, and to

remember what they teach you, and to mind what they tell you; and why do you do so? Because you love them.

And besides this, you try and please them, not only before their faces when they can see you, but also when they are gone away and out of sight. True love makes you always think, “What would my dear friends like me to do.” If your father and mother found you doing naughty things, doing what they told you not to do, might they not well say, “Child, Child, I am afraid you do not really love me;” yes, indeed, they might. True love will always cause true obedience, and the Bible says, “even a child may be known by his doings.”

Now, dear children, just as you try to please your friends if you love them, so do those who love Jesus Christ try to please Him. They are always trying to do His will, to keep His laws, to live after His commandments, to obey His precepts. They do not think any of Christ’s commands grievous; they never say that His laws are hard, strict, and disagreeable. It is their delight to walk in His paths.

Dear Children, no man or woman or child can really love Jesus Christ, if they do not try to obey Him. “Ye are my friends He says, if ye do whatsoever I command you.”

This, then, is another sure mark of those who love Jesus Christ, they try in all things to please Him.

Now we have got through one part of our text. Sit still and think for a moment about what you have heard. Each of you ask your own heart this little question—“*Do I love Jesus Christ or not? Do I believe what He says, and do I try to please Him?*” Those who can answer “yes” are the children He especially loves. O! remember what He says, “I love those that love me”

III. But let us look next at the other part of our text, and see what we may learn from it. I really think this part is almost as pleasant as the first, for it contains a sweet promise—“Those that seek me early shall find me.”

Dear Children how are you and I to seek Jesus Christ? He does not live upon earth like one of us; we cannot see Him with our eyes; we cannot reach Him and take hold of Him with our hands; and yet, He says, “those that seek me shall find me.” What can this mean? Let me try to tell you.

First of all *you must seek Jesus Christ in His own book*. The Bible is Jesus Christ’s book, and all who want to know Him must be very diligent in reading their Bibles. He says to every one of you, “Search the Scriptures,” and He will give the Holy Spirit to those who seek Him in the Scriptures, and teach them all about Himself.

Dear Children, be regular readers of the Bible all your lives. Let the word dwell in you richly, and then you will be truly wise. Read it daily, read a great deal of it, try and remember it, learn texts by heart. I remember a little girl in my first parish who could learn seventy verses of the Bible in a week.

How pleasant it is to find the Apostle Paul reminding Timothy, that from a child he had known the Holy Scriptures. Now why should not all of you be like Timothy in this? I should like to hear that you were all Bible-reading children, children who read the Bible at home as well as at school.

This, then, is one way to seek Jesus Christ. You must seek Him in the Bible.

Secondly: *you must seek Jesus Christ in His own house.* Jesus Christ has many houses in this country, where people meet together to pray to Him, and to hear about Him. This Church is one of them; and wherever two or three are gathered together in Jesus Christ's name, the Lord Himself is really present, though we cannot see Him with our eyes.

Dear children, I hope you will all regularly go to Jesus Christ's house as long as you live. I hope you will never do like those foolish people who keep away from it. Oh! what sad harm they are doing to their poor souls!

And when you go, try to attend to all you hear, and to get good from it. Do not stare about, and make a noise, or talk to other children, but listen well to all that is read or preached. Jesus Christ is there and sees how you behave. He loves to see little children coming to His house and behaving well, and if you persevere in so doing, you may be sure He will put His Spirit in you and fill you with all knowledge.

This, then, is another way to seek Jesus Christ; you must seek Him in His house.

Thirdly: *you must seek Jesus Christ on your knees in prayer.* You must ask Him with your own little mouth to give you everything that your soul wants. You must ask Him to cleanse you from all your sins in His blood, to give you His Spirit, to make you good, obedient, gentle, kind, truth-speaking children; to keep you from being selfish, idle, greedy, passionate, cunning, or ill-tempered. You must tell him all you are afraid of, and all you feel, and all you wish to have for your soul. This is prayer.

And you need not be afraid of Him at all when you pray. He would like you to tell Him all in your own simple way, just as you tell your own mothers when you want anything. He loves children very much. He was once much displeased with His disciples, because they prevented people bringing their children to Him, and He said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not." And He is just the same now that He was then.

Dear Children, I should like you all to be praying children, children who tell the Lord all your wants, and are not afraid to speak to Him. Prayer is the surest way to seek Him, and without prayer your souls will never prosper.

Never mind if your prayers seem very poor and weak. Only let them come from your hearts, and the Lord hears them.

The Lord Jesus hears every prayer that is prayed to Him in earnest. The least prayer of a little child on earth is loud enough to be heard plainly in

heaven above. Heaven seems to be a long way off, but you may be sure the very moment the prayer is spoken it is heard there. A little key will often open a great door. Prayer is a little key of that sort. It can open the door of heaven and take you up to the very throne of God Himself. Blessed are they who delight in prayer and call much upon God.

This, then, is the third way to seek the Lord Jesus Christ, you must seek Him in prayer.

Dear Children, I have told you how to seek the Lord. Ask yourselves, each one of you, before you go any further, do I really seek Him?

IV. But our text tells us something about those who seek Jesus Christ, and what is it? It says they “shall find Him.”

The Lord promises “they that seek me shall find me.” How sweet it is to hear that. Think how disagreeable it would be to seek and seek all our lives and have our trouble for nothing and never find Him. But the Lord says, “*they shall find me.*”

Now I want to tell you what this “finding” means. We shall not see him with our eyes, for He is sitting at God’s right hand in heaven, and not on earth, and yet we are told we shall find Him. How can this be? Let me tell you.

*You will find the Lord’s presence in your own hearts and minds.* You will feel something within you, as if the Lord Jesus Christ was sitting by you, and taking care of you, and putting His arm round you, and smiling upon you, and speaking kindly to you. Just as a blind person feels brighter and happier when the sun is shining pleasantly upon him, though he cannot see it, so you and I, if we seek Jesus Christ in earnest, shall soon feel our hearts lighter and happier, and something within us will make us know that we have found Him.

Dear Children, it is sweet and comfortable indeed when we feel that we have really found Jesus Christ. Oh! that you may never give up seeking till you have found Him, and you will find Him, I know, if you seek on, for He is not far off, He is very near every one of us, He is waiting for us to call upon Him.

When you have found Him you will feel as if you had got a sure friend in whom you can trust. A friend who will always love you, always watch over you, always take care of you, always be good to you, never fail you.

When you have found Him, you will feel as if you had got strength and power to walk in God’s ways; strength to keep yourself from bad words and bad company; strength to do things which please God.

When you have found Him, you will feel as if you had got a pleasant comforter living in your heart. You will be far more happy, and cheerful, and content than you were before. Little things will not put you out as they used to do. You will not be afraid of sickness, or pain, or death.

Dear Children, how delightful it will be to feel all this. Try all of you, do try to find Jesus Christ.

V. And now there is only one thing more in our text that I want to talk to you about. Only one little word. But that little word is so very important, that I dare not pass it over. It is the word “*early*”. “They that seek me early,” the Lord Jesus Christ says, “They are those that shall find me.”

Dear Children, that word “*early*” was meant particularly for yourselves. Seeking Jesus Christ early means seeking Jesus Christ when you are quite young, and that is just what I want you all to do.

Little Children, the Lord sends a message to you this very day by my mouth. He says He should like you to begin seeking Him at once.

Now do remember all of you, you cannot begin seeking Jesus too soon.

Seeking early is the *safest way*. Children may be young and healthy; but no children are too young and healthy to die. For death is very strong—he can soon make the healthiest of you pine away, and make your rosy cheeks pale and sickly. And death is very cruel—he does not mind whom he takes away out of families, and he will not wait for any one to get ready; he will take you just when he pleases. I think quite as many young persons die as old ones. I see the names of quite as many young people as old on the grave stones. Children, you would not like to die without having sought the Lord at all. Oh! remember, seeking early is the safest way.

And then, besides this, seeking early is the *happiest way*. Surely if it is so pleasant to have Jesus Christ for a friend, the sooner you have Him for a friend the better. You cannot think how happily a child’s life goes on when his ways please the Lord. Everything seems bright and cheerful; lessons seem more easy, and play seems more pleasant; friends seem more kind, and trouble seems less troublesome; and every thing in life seems more smooth. Dear Children, I want you to enjoy all this.—Then make haste and delay not to seek the Lord.

And last of all, seeking early is the *easiest way*. When you and I have got a great deal of work to do, you know there is nothing like beginning in good time. Now this is just what you should do about your souls; you should begin in good time to seek Him who alone can save them. People that have got work to do that must be finished before dark, take care to get up early in the morning. So should you do, dear children, in working about your souls. You should seek the Lord in the morning of life, and get your work done before the night of death cometh, when none can work. Every year you put it off you will find it harder work, more to be done, and less time to do it. Every year you will find your hearts more stubborn,—more unwilling to do what is right. Now they are like young trees, so soft and tender, that by the Lord’s help you may bend them any way. In a few years they will be like strong thick trees, so tough and well-rooted, that nothing but a mighty wind can



shake them. Dear children, begin to seek the Lord at once. I want you to have as few difficulties as possible in your journey to heaven.

Consider these things—consider these things well; and begin early to seek the Lord. It is the safest way, the happiest way, the easiest way. Try to be like Obadiah, who feared the Lord from his youth. Try to be like our blessed Lord Jesus Christ Himself, who grew up “in favour with God and man.”

*Think of the day when Jesus Christ shall come again to this world.* He means to come again in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. He will come very suddenly, in an hour when no man thinketh; like a thief in the night. He will gather together all who love Him, and take them home to His Father’s house, to be for ever happy. He will leave behind all the idle and wicked, and unbelieving persons, who have not sought Him, to be wretched and miserable forever. Dear children Jesus Christ might come very soon. We do not know how soon. How sad it would then be to see others taken up to heaven, and ourselves left behind! How dreadful to feel “I might have been taken too, but I would not seek the Lord!”

*Think too of the great day of judgment;* when all of us shall stand before God, and give account of our works. Some of the people who are saved, will say then, “I never began to seek Jesus Christ till I was forty years old, and I wasted away more than half my life:” others will say, “I never began to seek Him till I was twenty, and I wasted many years of my life.” But some will be able to say, “I sought the Lord when I was quite young—I can hardly remember the time when I did not try to love Him.”

Dear Children, how pleasant it will be for those people to think this! How sweet to feel that they gave the first days of their lives as well as the last to Jesus Christ! How glorious they will appear who have loved their Saviour in the beginning of their time, as well as in the end. The Lord grant that many of you may be found among them. Oh! seek the Lord early, seek Him while He may be found.

And now, dear children, it is time for me to leave off and let you go. Perhaps I shall never see you all together again in this world; indeed I am almost sure I shall not—but we shall all meet at the last day. I do hope you will think of what I have told you about Jesus Christ and your souls. Remember I want you all to be happy children, and in order to be happy you must love Jesus Christ.

Let me tell you before you go, who was the happiest child I ever saw.

She was a little girl whom I once met travelling in a coach. We were both going on a journey to London, and we travelled a great many miles together. She was only eight years old, and she was quite blind. She had never been able to see at all. She had never seen the sun, and the stars, and the sky, and

the grass and the flowers and the trees, and the birds—and all those pleasant things which you see every day of your lives,—but still she was quite happy. She was by herself, poor little thing. She had no friends or relations to take care of her on the journey, and be good to her; but she was quite happy and content. She said when she got into the coach, “Tell me how many people there are in the coach, I am quite blind and “can see nothing?” A gentleman asked her “If she was not afraid?” “No” she said, “I am not frightened; I have travelled before, and “I trust in God, and people are always very “good to me.”

But I soon found out the reason why she was so happy; and what do you think it was? She loved Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ loved her;—she had sought Jesus Christ, and she had found Him.

I began to talk to her about the Bible, and I soon saw she knew a great deal of it. She went to a school where the mistress used to read the Bible to her; and she was a good girl, and had remembered what her mistress had read.

Dear children, you cannot think how many things in the Bible this poor little blind girl knew. I only wish that every grown up person in England knew as much as she did. But I must try and tell you some of them.

She talked to me about sin; how it first came into the world, when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, and how it was to be seen everywhere now. “Oh!” she said, “there are no really good people. The very best people in the world have many sins every day, and I am sure we all of us waste a great deal of time, if we do nothing else wrong.—Oh! we are all such sinners! there is nobody who has not sinned a great many sins.”

And then she talked about Jesus Christ. She told me about the agony in the garden of Gethsemane—about His sweating drops of blood—about the soldiers nailing Him to the cross—about the spear piercing His side, and blood and water coming out. “Oh!” she said, “how very good it was of Him to die for us, and such a cruel death; how good He was to suffer so for our sins.”

And then she talked about wicked people. She told me she was afraid there were a great many in the world, and it made her very unhappy to see how many of her schoolfellows and acquaintances went on. “But,” she said “I know the reason why they are so wicked; it is because they do not try to be good—they do not wish to be good—they do not ask Jesus to make them good.”

I asked her what part of the Bible she liked best. She told me she liked all the history of Jesus Christ, but the chapters she was most fond of were the three last chapters of the book of Revelations. I had got a Bible with me, and I took it out and read these chapters to her as we went along.

When I had done she began to talk about heaven. "Think," she said, "how nice it will be to be there.—There will be no more sorrow, nor crying, nor tears. And then Jesus Christ will be there, for it says, "The Lamb is the light thereof," "and we shall always be with Him; and beside this, there shall be no night there; "they will need no candle nor light of the sun."

Dear Children, just think of this poor little blind girl. Think of her taking pleasure in talking of Jesus Christ. Think of her rejoicing in the account of heaven, where there shall be no sorrow nor night.

I have never seen her since. She went to her own home in London, and I do not know whether she is alive or not; but I hope she is, and I have no doubt Jesus Christ has taken good care of her.

Dear Children, are you as happy and as cheerful as she was?

You are not blind, you have eyes and can run about and see everything, and go where you like, and read as much as you please to yourselves. But are you as happy as this poor little blind girl?

Oh! if you wish to be happy in this world, remember my advice today,—do as the little blind girl did,—"Love Jesus Christ, and He will love you—seek Him early and you shall find Him."

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