

Expository Tracts, No. 39.

SELF-IGNORANCE.

BEING

THOUGHTS ON MARK X. 17-27.

BY THE LATE RIGHT REV.

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MARK X. 17–27.

17 And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?

18 And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? *there is* none good but one, *that is*, God.

19 Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother.

20 And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth.

21 Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me.

22 And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions.

23 And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God *I*

24 And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!

25 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.

26 And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved?

27 And Jesus looking upon them saith, With men *it is* impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible.

THE story we have now read is recorded no less than three times in the New Testament. Matthew, Mark, and Luke were all inspired by one Spirit to write it for our learning. There is no doubt a wise purpose in this three-fold repetition of the same simple facts. It is intended to show us that the lessons of the passage deserve particular notice from the Church of Christ.

Let us learn, for one thing, from this passage, *the self-ignorance of man*.

We are told of one who “came running” to our Lord, and kneeled to Him, and asked the solemn question, “What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” At first sight there was much that was promising in this man’s case. He showed anxiety about spiritual things, while most around him were careless and indifferent. He showed a disposition to reverence our Lord, by kneeling to Him, while scribes and Pharisees despised Him. Yet all this time this man was profoundly ignorant of his own heart. He hears our Lord recite those commandments which make up our duty to our neighbour, and at once declares, “All these have I observed from my youth.” The searching nature of the moral law, its application to our thoughts, and words, as well as actions, are matters with which he is utterly unacquainted.

The spiritual blindness here exhibited is unhappily most common. Myriads of professing Christians at the present day have not an idea of their

own sinfulness and guilt in the sight of God. They flatter themselves that they have never done anything very wicked.—“They have never murdered, or stolen, or committed adultery, or borne false witness. They cannot surely be in much danger of missing heaven.”—They forget the holy nature of that God with whom they have to do. They forget how often they break His law in temper, or imagination, even when their outward conduct is correct. They never study such portions of Scripture as the fifth chapter of St. Matthew, or at any rate they study it with a thick veil over their hearts, and do not apply it to themselves. The result is that they are wrapped up in self-righteousness. Like the Church of Laodicea, they are “rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing.” (Rev. iii. 17.) Self-satisfied they live, and self-satisfied too often they die.

Let us beware of this state of mind. So long as we think that we can keep the law of God, Christ profits us nothing. Let us pray for self-knowledge. Let us ask for the Holy Spirit to convince us of sin, to show us our own hearts, to show us God’s holiness, and so to show us our need of Christ. Happy is he who has learned by experience the meaning of St. Paul’s words: “I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.” (Rom. vii. 9.) Ignorance of the law and ignorance of the Gospel will generally be found together.

Let us learn, for another thing, from this passage, *the love of Christ towards sinners*.

This is a truth which is brought out in the expression used by St. Mark, when he says, that “Jesus beholding him, loved him.” That love beyond doubt was a love of pity and compassion. Our Lord beheld with pity the strange mixture of earnestness and ignorance which the case before Him presented. He saw with compassion a soul struggling with all the weakness and infirmity entailed by the fall,—the conscience ill at ease, and sensible that it wanted relief,—the understanding sunk in darkness, and blinded as to the first principles of spiritual religion. Just as we look with sorrow at some noble ruin, roofless, and unfit for man’s use, yet showing many a mark of the skill with which it was designed at first, so may we suppose that Jesus looked with tender concern at this man’s soul.

We must never forget that Jesus feels love and compassion for the souls of the ungodly. Without controversy He feels a peculiar love for those who hear His voice and follow Him. They are His sheep, given to Him by the Father, and watched with a special care. They are His bride, joined to Him in an everlasting covenant, and dear to Him as part of Himself. But the heart of Jesus is a wide heart. He has abundance of pity, compassion, and tender concern even for those who are following sin and the world. He who wept over unbelieving Jerusalem is still the same. He would still gather into His bosom the ignorant and self-righteous, the faithless and impenitent, if

they were only willing to be gathered. (Matt, xxiii. 37.) We may boldly tell the chief of sinners that Christ loves him. Salvation is ready for the worst of men, if they will only come to Christ. If men are lost, it is not because Jesus does not love them, and is not ready to save. His own solemn words unravel the mystery: "Men love darkness rather than light." "Ye will not come unto Me that ye might have life." (John iii. 19; v. 40.)

Let us learn, in the last place, from this passage, *the immense danger of the love of money*. This is a lesson which is twice enforced on our notice. Once it comes out in the conduct of the man whose history is here related. With all his professed desire after eternal life, he loved his money better than his soul. "He went away grieved."—Once it comes out in the solemn words of our Lord to His disciples: "How hard is it for them that have riches to enter into the kingdom of God!" "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." The last day alone will fully prove how true those words are.

Let us watch against the love of money. It is a snare to the poor as well as to the rich. It is not so much the having money as the trusting in it which ruins the soul. Let us pray for contentment with such things as we have. The highest wisdom is to be of one mind with St. Paul: "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." (Phil. iv. 11.)